

# Wild Times: From the 1917 Russian Revolution to the Revolution of Our Times

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**Abstract:** The present work is an attempt to locate the relevance of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. It takes as a premise the thesis that the previous century was announced by this event, which indeed brought the idea of Communism from the marginal debates into the center of political action. It then goes on to debate revolutions as a plebeian moment, all the way to the possibility and the nature of socialism today, by taking a detour through the meaning of the Bolshevik Revolution. The paper concludes with affirming the necessity of revolutions, as something which dignifies the human beings.

**Keywords:** Russian Revolution, Lenin, plebeian, Revolution, Gramsci, Soviet Union

We are living in wild times. It's difficult for our generation to adapt to the new situation. But through this revolution, our lives will be purified and things will get better for the youth. S. Semyonov, spring of 1917<sup>1</sup>

## I.- The Revelation

The revolutionary outburst split the world in two; moreover, it split the social imaginary of the world in two. On the one hand, the existing world with its inequalities, exploitations and injustices; on the other hand, a possible world of equality, without exploitation, without injustice: socialism. However, the result was not the creation of a new alternative world to the capitalist one, but the emergence -in the collective expectation of the world's subordinates- of the mobilizing belief that this could be achieved.

The Soviet revolution of 1917 is the most important political event in the twentieth century since it changed the modern history of states, divided the dominant political ideas in two, transformed the social imaginaries of peoples -giving them back their role as subjects of history-, and innovated the scenarios of war introducing the idea of another possible option (world) in the course of humanity.

With the revolution of 1917, what until then was only a marginal idea - a political slogan, an academic proposal or an expectation kept in the intimacy of the working class- became matter, visible reality, and palpable existence. The impact of the October Revolution on world beliefs - which are ultimately the result of political action - was similar to that of a religious revelation among believers, that is, capitalism was finite and could be replaced by another better society. That means that there was a different alternative to the dominant world and, therefore, there

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<sup>1</sup> Figes 1990.

was hope; in other words, there was that Archimedean point with which revolutionaries felt capable of changing the course of history.

The Russian Revolution announced the birth of the twentieth century<sup>2</sup>, not only because of the planetary political division it engendered, but above all because of the imaginary constitution of a meaning of history, that is, of socialism as the moral reference of the modern plebe in action. Thus the spirit of the twentieth century was revealed to all; and, from that moment, supporters, opponents and bystanders had a place in the destiny of history.

But as with all "revelation", the cognitive disclosure of socialism as an actual possibility came with an agent of the channeling entity of this un-covering: the revolution.

Revolution became the most vindicated and demonized word of the twentieth century. Its defenders raised it to refer to the imminent compensation of the poor against the excessive oppression in effect; detractors disqualified it for being the symbol of the destruction of Western civilization; workers movements invoked it to announce the solution to the social catastrophes engendered by the bourgeoisie and, in anticipation of its arrival, they used it - at least as a threat - to struggle the economy of concessions and tolerances with the bosses, which will lead to Welfare state. On the other hand, the ideologues of the old regime attributed to it the cause of all evils, from the confrontation between States and the dissolution of the family, to the deviation of the youth.

In philosophical and theoretical debates, the revolution was for some the anteroom of a new humanity to come, the roar that unleashes the self-conscious and self-determined creativity of society. On the other hand, for the curia of the old regime, it represented the annulment of democracy and the diabolical incarnation of dark forces that attempt to destroy individual freedom. Far from envisioning a degeneration of the debate, this religious derivation of the arguments for or against the revolution reflects the deep social rootedness unleashed by the antagonism of revolution / counterrevolution, which even mobilized the most intimate moral fiber of the society.

In short, revolution (the political-military event of the masses who seize political power, the armed insurrection that demolishes the old state and gives birth to the new political order), was the privileged mediator and carrier of a realizable option of a world. And around this event a whole narrative of production of future history was built; with

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2 Eric Hobsbawm argues that the "short twentieth century" would have begun with World War I and ended with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989. We prefer to speak of the Russian Revolution as a point of the beginning of the century because, unlike World War I, which meant a new phase of the uninterrupted mutation of continental state geography, the effects of the revolution polarized, as never before, the political struggle on a world scale. See Hobsbawm 1995.

such strength that it was able to mobilize the passions, sacrifices and illusions of more than half of the inhabitants of all continents.

Since 1917 the struggle for revolution, its preparation, realization and defense, captured not only the interest and diligence of millions, but the willingness and predisposition to efforts and sacrifices seldom seen in the history of humanity. Clandestinity, material deprivation, torture, imprisonment, exile, disappearances, mutilations and murders were the high price that thousands and thousands of militants were willing to pay to achieve it. Such was their ability to surrender to the revolutionary cause, that most of them endured each of the seasons of the torment even knowingly that, most likely, they were not be able to enjoy its victory. And this devotion to historical sacrifice -with the confidence that the next or subsequent generation may witness the dawn of the imminent revolution- refers us to the presence of a type of Batailleian "heroic expenditure"<sup>3</sup> with regards to the revolution and the revolutionaries; in fact, this is about the most planetary (geographically) and most universal (morally) investment and generosity of human effort in social history.

In the last 100 years more people died in the name of the revolution than in the name of any religion, with the difference that in the case of religious sacrifice, surrender is given in favor of the spirit of the sacrificed; while in the revolution, immolation is given in favor of the material liberation of all human beings, which makes the revolutionary event a kind of community production that episodically advances the desired universal community.

## II: - The Revolution as a Plebeian Moment

To a certain extent, the history of societies resembles the movement of the continents' tectonic layers. Internally, below them, there are powerful incandescent lava flows that put them in slow but continuous movement. Where one continental mass pushes another it's possible to see fissures and earthquakes, but in general the continental physiognomy and predominant stability of the surface is maintained. However, there are moments in terrestrial life in which the powerful internal forces of incandescent lava explode and break the external layer of the earth, instantaneously releasing molten rock and minerals that sweep everything in their way. This matter, in its igneous, fiery state, overflows the Terran surface like an uncontrollable horse of pure fire. But as its volcanic force cools, the lava solidifies and thereby drastically alters the physiognomy of the earth, the characteristics of the continents, and the

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3 Bataille 1992.

topography of the earth's surface.

Societies are like this too. Most of the time they appear as relatively quiet, albeit complex surfaces, regulated by certain relations of domination. There are conflicts, continuous tensions and movement, but these are regularized and subsumed by the prevailing power relations. Then, underneath these pre-dominant relations, there are intense flows of forces, class struggles, internal cultural accumulations that give life to society but which are not visible. They remain submerged in the depth of national and class collective structures.

However, there are precise moments in history in which the external surface of society, the upper layer of relations of domination, cracks and shakes. Occasionally, this layer not only cracks but breaks, releasing the inner forces like volcanic lava. These forces are the social struggles and emancipatory social movements that, breaking decades or centuries of silence, organize themselves underground, overcoming difficulties, fears, reprisals and prejudices to rise against the existing order. It is this creative fire of volcanic lava, the creative capacity of the multitude *in action* that overflows the devices built over decades and centuries of domination. This movement dismantles existing mechanisms of control and imposes the trace of their collective presence - as a nation, a class and a *social collectivity* - in the state of fusion (in a state of absolute democracy).

These explosions of social lava are revolutions which emerge from intimate forces and capacities woven over many years, confronting the layers of submission accumulated over time, layers which are suddenly incapable of stopping the social insurgency and are therefore overwhelmed by a flow of initiatives, voices and collective actions. It is the fluid moment of collective action, the moment when society is not surface nor institution nor norm but a collective flow expressing the unlimited creativity of people, the moment when society builds itself without external coercion. Revolution is the plebeian moment of history, the autopoietic moment, in which society feels itself capable of self-creation and self-determination.

As long as the revolution lasts, society is in an igneous state - as soon as its decisions begin to be reified or institutionalized, new collective initiatives are superimposed to keep the collective flow in action. This movement is similar to that of the volcanic lava that, when it cools, begins to solidify, although the impetus of more lava flow can refuse it. The dominant institutions and relations are precisely this result of old struggles in an igneous state (Marx calls this "living labour"), which over time stabilizes (cools) into the shape of social relations, institutions, judgments, and socially prevailing prejudices. That is the moment of the

solidification of the social flow (which Marx calls "dead labour"). *The state form* is the result of old struggles, capacities and limitations in the fluid state of society that, when "cooled", are institutionalized and leave behind, as the living historical trace of their power and limits, the (state and economic) structures that will govern and regulate society in the following decades, until a new outbreak takes place.

While the revolution stands, it is as if everything solid becomes liquid. As soon as any social relationship becomes institutionalised, it is immediately overtaken by a new collective action in flux, which again superimposes "living labour" over "dead labour", (the solidified social relations) and, in the long run, becomes alienated power relations. Only those who have lived a revolution can understand the human overflows it involves: thousands of collective actions that overlap in a creative chaos, giving rise to a torrent that, as soon as it seems to be leading to a single destination, is interrupted again to break into a thousand opposing directions; human creativity that surpasses any previous expectations; political conjunctures which are modified from one minute to another; association and social fragmentation that combine in a way which was previously impossible. It is as if space-time becomes compressed and what previously requires decades is now condensed in a single day and place; as if the universe itself could be born in every moment and in every place of the country. Then, at the risk of being devoured by this swirling, we must establish a direction and guide these collective forces in their igneous state.

The plebeian moment of a society, namely, the revolution, is therefore a society in a state of *fluid, self-organizing multitude* that comes to see itself as the subject of its own destiny. It is the moment of *self-knowledge*, of becoming aware of its own capabilities, possibilities and its own limits; and, from this, projecting its own destiny in a collective project. In the end, after revolution makes the previously contained vital energy of society emerge and gives way to the institutionalization and regularity of social relationships, what remains of this revolutionary process are laws and collective rights. That is why, although revolutions last only a short time in comparison to the rest of the institutional life of society, they in fact shape the social structures and institutional topographies.

Just as volcanic explosions cool and solidify, thereby sculpting mountain ranges and valleys which characterizes the surface for a long time; *the plebeian, revolutionary moment* overflows the established order, dissolving the laws and norms of the old regime with the force of the *multitude in action*, and then, after passing the crest of the revolutionary wave, it begins to crystallize into relations between forces

that are manifested during the process, giving place to a new dominant social order and social structures. The audacities and setbacks, the agreements and initiatives deployed in the revolutionary moment are now institutionalized, legalized, materialized and objectified as norms, procedures, habits, judgments and collective common sense that will regulate the life of society for a *longue dureé* (a long time), until a new revolutionary explosion destroys what had previously been built. These constituted social structures no longer have the speed and volatility of the igneous moment of the revolution. They are relationships with a *variable fluidity*, in a constant process of solidification.

Whether as fiery fluidity or institutional solidification, revolutions mark the lasting architecture of societies. If they succeed and manage to maintain themselves for a long time, or even if they are half-beaten or defeated, what remains as a visible, stable and dominant social relation is what the revolution has been able to achieve, to yield or to abdicate. That is, par excellence, the creative role that all revolutions have in society. Therefore, it is not wrong to point to them as the founding moments of society.

### The Meaning of the Russian Revolution

What was this revolution that captured the collective imagination of the poor and showed that there are no limits when people sacrifice themselves for their beliefs?

Generally, and incorrectly, the revolution is reduced to the taking of government buildings - not even the State itself. Evidently, that is the most visible moment, but it's neither the most important nor the most characteristic one in a revolution. In the case of October 1917, the Russian Revolution is condensed into the taking of the Winter Palace of Tsar Nicholas II by workers, peasants and armed soldiers. Certainly, the fact that the people occupied military installations that were secularly closed to the presence of the workers of the country was an epic moment, but it is clear that this image, immortalized by the filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein<sup>4</sup>, is not the revolution but only one of its infinitesimal effects.

A second reduction of the revolution, in more political terms, refers to the insurrectionary event, the military-political moment of mass action that culminates in the establishment of a new government and new institutions of state decision. In the case of 1917, this event begins with Lenin's masterly decision to unleash the insurrection amidst the debate between opposing currents, and continues with the military preparations

4 Eisenstein directed the film "Oktyabr" (October) in 1928 where the events from February to October of 1917 are narrated, with it he was consecrated as an important director of cinema at worldwide level.

to deploy the revolutionary act<sup>5</sup>. Here we find intense correlations of social forces, rearrangements of social classes and profound theoretical debates on power, the state, the roads of revolution, and so on. However, the fact that a political party seriously considers the seizure of power by insurrection is not itself an unexpected occurrence. In the Russian case, we could ask: why the Bolsheviks and no other party? Why in October and not in another month or year? Why through an armed uprising and not through elections? Because, previously, it took an unprecedented display of class struggle to bring to light "contradictions that have matured over decades and even centuries"<sup>6</sup>; it required the emergence of a social predisposition, a collective radicalization of subaltern classes that flooded<sup>7</sup> the streets, and the appearance of assemblies and public debates about the common destiny of society. It required society itself, through its own experience, to create territorial organizational forms, the soviets, which could co-opt the deliberation and control of common affairs. The formation of soviets in fact, created an effective duality of powers, leaving the Bolsheviks only to propose its implementation at a national level. And, of course, there was a long and patient previous work of influence, presence and political and moral leadership of the Bolsheviks over the working classes (specifically, over the labourers) which was necessary to allow their slogans and actions to not only find support from the already insurgent working classes, but, above all, to be assumed, executed and enriched by them<sup>8</sup>. All this is what this revolution in progress represented.

This revolution, therefore, does not constitute a precise moment, dated and photographable, but a long process of months and years, in which the ossified structures of society, social classes and institutions are liquefied and everything - absolutely everything that was solid, normal, defined, predictable and orderly before - is diluted into a chaotic and creative "revolutionary whirlwind"<sup>9</sup>.

In fact, the Soviet revolution of October began earlier in February when, to the already widespread discontent over the shortage of bread in Petrograd were added the great marches of the "common people" of

5 Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/by-date.htm>

6 Lenin 1905a

7 Lenin 1920a

8 "For a revolution to take place, it is essential, first, that a majority of the workers (or at least a majority of the class-conscious, thinking, and politically active workers) should fully realise that revolution is necessary, and that they should be prepared to die for it" *Ibid.*

9 Lenin 1906

the city<sup>10</sup>, the strikes of workers and, in a decisive way, the rebellion of new soldiers who had been recruited to swell an army that was beaten and demoralized by military defeats in the war against Germany<sup>11</sup>. The refusal of the soldiers to repress the population and their incorporation into the mobilization helped build the confidence of the masses in the effectiveness of their mobilization, which was a decisive point to link disparate groups that, after many years, had begun to experience again the effectiveness of collective action<sup>12</sup>. Suddenly, the streets are filled with people of different social classes participating in marches and protests: students, merchants, public officials, taxi drivers, children, ladies, workers, soldiers, in a festive mix of crowds occupying the geographical emblems of the city : the avenues, the streets and the monuments.

Shopkeepers turned their shops into bases for the soldiers, and into shelters for the people when the police were firing in the streets. Cabmen declared that they would take 'only the leaders of the revolution'. Students and children ran about with errands — and veteran soldiers obeyed their commands. All sorts of people volunteered to help the doctors deal with the wounded. It was as if the people on the streets had suddenly become united by a vast network of invisible threads; and it was this that secured their victory<sup>13</sup>.

The Winter Palace fell, the Tsar abdicated and the Councils of workers', peasants' and soldiers' deputies began to be organised as the Soviets, who expanded territorially throughout the country as organs of deliberation and political execution of the working masses (as organs of power). It was the first of what Marx called the "waves" of every revolution<sup>14</sup>.

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10 Orlando 1990.

11 See: Pipes 1991; Bettelheim 1976.

12 Ibid.

13 Orlando 1990, p. 312.

14 But England, the country that turns whole nations into her proletarians, that spans the whole world with her enormous arms, that has already once defrayed the cost of a European Restoration, the country in which class contradictions have reached their most acute and shameless form – England seems to be the rock which breaks the revolutionary waves, the country where the new society is stifled before it is born. Marx 1848. Paralyzed for a moment by the agony that followed the June days, the French republic had lived through a continuous series of feverish excitements since the raising of the state of siege, since October 14. First the struggle for the presidency, then the struggle between the President and the Constituent Assembly; the struggle for the clubs; the trial of Bourges which, in contrast with the petty figures of the President, the coalesced royalists, the respectable republicans, the democratic Montagne, and the socialist doctrines of the proletariat, caused the proletariat's real revolutionists to

Although Lenin and the Bolsheviks had thought and theorized about the emergence of a "revolutionary situation" and a "national political crisis" in Russia<sup>15</sup> since 1913, the revolution broke out by an exceptional combination of events that took all Russian revolutionaries by surprise. Even Lenin, a month before the outbreak of February, said: "We, the old generation, may not get to see the decisive battles of that future revolution."<sup>16</sup> From this it is clear that no true revolution is scheduled in advance, nor is it a calculated result, even if it comes from the most efficient, insightful or intelligent revolutionary party or theoretician.

Revolutions are exceptional and peculiar events which combine, in a way that could have never been conceived before, dissimilar and contradictory currents that thrust a previously indifferent and apathetic society into autonomous political action. Lenin himself surprisingly admitted: "That the revolution succeeded so quickly and—seemingly, at the first superficial glance—so radically, is only due to the fact that, as a result of an extremely unique historical situation, absolutely dissimilar currents, absolutely heterogeneous class interests, absolutely contrary political and social strivings have merged, and in a strikingly "harmonious" manner"<sup>17</sup>. Certainly it is possible that the multitude of circumstances became intertwined as the result of the work of organization, propaganda, dissemination and debate deployed by the revolutionaries. But once revolution broke out, all that patient and laborious previous work of revolutionary organizations (Marx's old mole<sup>18</sup>) became only a small,

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appear as primordial monsters such as only a deluge leaves behind on the surface of society, or such as could only precede a social deluge; the election agitation; the execution of the Bréa murderers;[95] the continual proceedings against the press; the violent interference of the government with the banquets by police action; the insolent royalist provocations; the exhibition of the portraits of Louis Blanc and Caussidière on the pillory; the unbroken struggle between the constituted republic and the Constituent Assembly, which each moment drove the revolution back to its starting point, which each moment made the victors the vanquished and the vanquished the victors and in an instant changed around the positions of the parties and the classes, their separations and connections; the rapid march of the European counterrevolution; the glorious Hungarian fight; the armed uprisings in Germany;[96] the Roman expedition; the ignominious defeat of the French army before Rome – in this vortex of the movement, in this torment of historical unrest, in this dramatic ebb and flow of revolutionary passions, hopes, and disappointments, the different classes of French society had to count their epochs of development in weeks when they had previously counted them in half-centuries. Marx 1950. In all three crises manifested some form of demonstration that is new in the history of our revolution, a demonstration of a more complicated type in which the movement proceeds in waves, a sudden drop following a rapid rise, revolution and counter-revolution becoming more acute, and the middle elements being eliminated for a more or less extensive period. Lenin, 1917a

15 Lenin 1920b

16 Lenin 1925

17 Lenin 1917b

18 Marx 1852

internal current within the impetuous revolutionary flux; and the reinforcement or weakening of that flow and, finally, its emergence as a politically leading and morally accepted force depended on many different political and intellectual organizations.

In 1921, Lenin claimed: "We were victorious in Russia, and with such ease, because we prepared for our revolution during the imperialist war. That was the first condition."<sup>19</sup> And he was right, for during the First World War (which burst on July 28, 1914), the Bolsheviks, already consolidated in the tsarist exile and in the revolution of 1905, displayed an intense activity of propaganda, agitation and clandestine organization inside the Russian Army<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, when these troops, whether in retreat to rural communities or distributed in the cities, began to have a decisive participation in the mobilizations and mutinies against their officers, they channeled the Bolshevik influence and increased the influence of the communists in the active forces of society. But the definitive political art and ingenuity of revolutionaries was put to the test once the revolution broke out.

Within the plebeians masses, the workers, the peasants and the politicized neighborhoods boast multiple political-ideological tendencies. On the one hand, there are the conservative currents that, after applauding the overthrow of tsarist despotism, watch with great concern as the stability and predictability of the world they are accustomed to begins to dissolve. For that reason they demand a "hard hand" to end the reigning "anarchy". On the other hand, there are the moderate revolutionaries who focus their attention on the redistributive order of large agrarian property and who expect to accommodate and limit the revolution to this democratization of small urban rural property; these are the artisans, the workers and the soldiers who were beaten by hunger and unemployment, who hoped that the new state could guarantee food and a decent pay for their work. Then there is the current of revolutionary workers and radical intellectuals who see the opportunity to take control of the country themselves and solve the problems of war and hunger, displacing the great capitalists from power. Finally, there is a tendency of ultra-revolutionaries who believe it is possible to abolish, from one day to the next, the market, the wage labor, the state and its authority, to establish a local, popular form of self-government<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, tendencies, class factions, and political parties (which may represent a part of these tendencies) refer to many revolutions unfolding inside

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19 Lenin 1921a

20 See: Lenin 1919a

21 See third part Orlando 1990

"the revolution"; for that reason the influence of each tactical movement, slogan, call or proposal from the action of the soviets, the orientations and the actions of these mobilized people, depends on the echo that they may have in the wider multitude.

Not only is it not possible to predict the outbreak of a revolution; once it breaks out, its course also depends on tactical actions, initiatives and slogans that have an unpredictable capacity to trigger social potentials and latent moods in the now mobilized society. Hence, it can be argued that a revolution is, by definition, an intense war of positions and a concentrated ideological-political war of movements<sup>22</sup> where day by day the course, orientation and outcome of the insurgent process is defined.

Lenin states that "The Bolsheviks were victorious, first of all, because they had behind them the vast majority of the proletariat."<sup>23</sup> It is not a rhetorical phrase, but a whole program of work in favor of building national political hegemony, which defines the socialist course of the revolution. The soviets - authentic organs of political power of the plebeian classes - emerged in February 1917 and rapidly expanded to all of Russia, from a few dozen at the end of April to 900 in October of that year<sup>24</sup>. Also, factory committees (defense and management bodies of companies affected by management abandonment) were initially based in state factories, and then expanded to the main private companies in cities<sup>25</sup>. The most significant point was the vital force of society, mainly urban but also rural, that was channeled through those structures created autonomously "by direct initiative of the masses from below", bypassing unions and parties.

The provisional government (which arose after the fall of the Tsar) has no real power of any kind, and its orders apply only to the extent permitted by the Soviet of workers 'and soldiers' deputies. They control the most essential force of power because troops, railroads, postal and telegraph services are in their hands. It can be stated frankly that the provisional government exists only as the Soviet allows it<sup>26</sup>.

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22 In political art the same thing happens in military art: the war of movement becomes more and more war, as it prepares it thoroughly and technically in times of peace. The solid structures of modern democracies, considered either as state organizations or as a complex of associations operating in civil life, represent in the domain of political the same as the 'trenches' and the permanent fortifications in the position war : they make only 'partial' the element of the movement that previously constituted 'everything' in war, etc. Gramsci 1971.

23 See Lenin 1919a

24 See: Bettelheim 1976, p. 59-60 (Spanish translation)

25 Pipes 1991, p. 442 (Spanish translation)

26 Letter from A. Guchkov, Minister of Defense of the Provisional Government, to M. Alexeev,

This means that the fate of the revolution depended on the soviets, the purest and most representative creature of the movement. When in his famous "Theses of April" Lenin advocates "that all the power of the state pass to the Soviets"<sup>27</sup> he does so knowing that the Bolsheviks constitute the minority: they had less than 4 percent of the delegates in the Soviets of Petrograd and Moscow<sup>28</sup>. But everything that he proposes to the party from that moment on (the slogans, initiatives and organizational guidelines) is destined to turn them into the driving force of the soviets and, in general, of the laborious social classes throughout the country.

The slogans of ending the war, redistributing land among peasants and occupying factories (April); the ideas of pressing the provisional government to resist internal repression (June and July), the decision to withdraw the slogan of "all power to the soviets" (submitted, by that time, to the provisional government); the mobilization from the factories and soviets against the reactionary coup attempts (August), the return of the slogan "all power to the soviets" when the Bolsheviks became the majority in them (September); the adoption by the Bolsheviks of the agrarian program proposed by the "revolutionary socialist" party weeks before the insurrection<sup>29</sup>; all these disputes show an intense struggle of political hegemony inside the subaltern classes.

By October 1917, the Bolsheviks are the ideological-political power of the revolutionary process. In May, they run most of the Factory Committees in the main industries<sup>30</sup>; by August its influence on the distributed troops in the cities is enough to prevent the obedience of those troops to the provisional government and the official military command<sup>31</sup>. At the end of July, after having no mass media at the beginning of the revolution, they reach a circulation of more than 350,000 copies per day in different newspapers<sup>32</sup> distributed in factories and barracks. In September they take control of the Petrograd Soviet, while their slogans were already espoused by the majority of the other Soviets - even those that were still under the influence of the centrist parties; the councils of soldiers have them at the head in the main military regiments, and the main garrisons respond technically to the Bolshevik

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Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army, March 9, 1917. Orlando 1990.. Available also in: Pipes 1991

27 Lenin 1917c

28 See: Bettelheim 1976.

29 Lenin 1921

30 Pipes, 1991, p. 442 (Spanish translation)

31 Ibid. p. 443

32 Ibid. p. 444

party<sup>33</sup>. The factories are stormed because the Bolsheviks consider that as a necessary act to guarantee the work of the workers. Thus, with the adoption of the agrarian program of the peasant party - which refuses to implement its own program, which has full acceptance in rural areas - the Bolsheviks had already built an ideological power, a moral leadership and a political command to the vast majority of society. Figes argues:

The social polarization of the summer gave the Bolsheviks their first real mass following as a party which based its main appeal on the plebeian rejection of all superordinate authority (...) The larger factories in the major cities, where the workers' sense of class solidarity was most developed, were the first to go over in large numbers to the Bolsheviks. By the end of May, the party had already gained control of the Central Bureau of the Factory Committees and, although the Menshevik trade unionists remained in the ascendancy until 1918, it also began to get its resolutions passed at important trade union assemblies (...) The Bolsheviks made dramatic gains in the city Duma elections of August and September. In Petrograd they increased their share of the popular vote from 20 per cent in May to 33 percent on 20 August. In Moscow, where the Bolsheviks had polled a mere 11 percent in June, they swept to victory on 24 September with 51 percent of the votes<sup>34</sup>

In fact, the October insurrection just consecrated the real power previously achieved by the Bolsheviks in all active nets of laboring society. Rather than conquering power - which they had already done in the reticular structure of Russian subaltern society - the insurrection annulled the zombie body of the old bourgeois power that was ingrained in the old state institutions. The insurrection culminated a long process of ideological-political construction of power from society, through a negation and substitution of the old State power; and began the monopolistic concentration of that power built from society into a new institutionalized State power. Given the plebeian character of the Russian Revolution, and in general of any revolution, this social construction of power from below necessarily presents itself only as a "duality of powers"<sup>35</sup>, or as "a multitude of local powers"<sup>36</sup>. In 1918, V. Tijomirnov comments:

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33 Orlando, 1990.

34 Ibid.

35 See: Trotsky 1932, Chapter 11

36 Orlando 1990, pp. 407, 408, 516, 746 (Spanish translation).

There were city soviets, village soviets, stamp soviets and suburban soviets. Those entities recognized no one but themselves, and if they came to recognize someone, it was only up to "the degree" that it might be casually advantageous to them. Each Soviet lived and fought according to what the surrounding conditions permitted, as it could and wanted.<sup>37</sup>

In the following months, the centralization of those multiple plebeian powers represents a process of statization.

### The Apparent Antinomies of the Revolution

In summary, revolutions are long historical processes which liquefy the prevailing power relations in order to establish a new economic order. Within the movement and internal history of social classes, a revolution drastically modifies the architecture of relations between them by expropriating the goods and influence of one class and redistributing them among other classes.

In addition, a revolution is the collapse of the moral-ideological power of the ruling classes, a dissolution of the dominant ideals and political categories that consecrate the submission of the subaltern classes<sup>38</sup>. The moral relations between rulers and governed are liquefied, giving rise to direct political initiatives of the laborious classes that are producing, arming or accepting new ideological structures which reorder the role of individuals in society. This struggle over moral and ideological hegemony is the motor of every revolution, and from this emerges an institutional structure capable of objectifying the social magma, that is to say, capable of organizing and regularizing those modified influences. This means that revolutions first happen within society under the active political and organizational leadership of the subaltern classes, and only through a consolidation of these different tendencies can a new state structure emerge. All the histories of the political and social revolutions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have, and will inevitably have, these characteristics.

In summary, a revolution is composed of contradictory revolutions happening in parallel, containing multiple initiatives deployed by the various classes and factions that concur with one another. Revolution

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<sup>37</sup> Pipes 1991, p. 555 (Spanish translation). According to this author, out of every 5 nationalized companies, only one is the result of the decision of the central government, while the rest, 80 percent, is the result of the decision of the soviets and local authorities. p. 750.

<sup>38</sup> "The revolution of 1917 should really be conceived of as a general crisis of authority. There was a rejection of not just the state but of all figures of authority: judges, policemen, Civil Servants, army and navy officers, priests, teachers, employers, foremen, landowners, village elders, patriarchal fathers and husbands." Orlando 1990 p. 346.

destroys old relations of ownership and influence and gives rise to new relations. It is the fierce struggle of for a new monopoly of ideological-political influences of society, for new long-term hegemonies. Hence, every revolution is also a new way of nationalizing society<sup>39</sup>.

### 1. Revolutionary Armed Participation or Democratic Electoral Participation

For this reason, the contradiction between revolution and democracy is a false debate. It is stated that democracy is a regime of peaceful participation of society in political affairs which guarantees the rights of people, while the revolution is a violent act that ignores those rights<sup>40</sup>. As it can be seen in the study of any revolution, if anything characterizes the revolutionary process, it is the rapid incorporation of people from different social classes into the participation of the public affairs of a society. Apathetic people, who were previously called to choose representatives every 4 or 5 years to make decisions in their name, break that complacency in front of the ruling elites and engage, discuss and participate in the definition of common issues of society. Suddenly everyone becomes a specialist in everything; everyone believes they have the right to speak and decide on the matters that affect them.

An American journalist who was in Russia during the initial months of the revolution made the following comments:

The servants and house porters demand advice as to which party they should vote for in the ward elections. Every wall in the town is placarded with notices of meetings, lectures, congresses, electoral appeals, and announcements, not only in Russian, but in Polish, Lithuanian, Yiddish, and Hebrew . . . Two men argue at a street corner and are at once surrounded by an excited crowd. Even at concerts now the music is diluted with political speeches by well-known orators. The Nevsky Prospekt has become a kind of Quartier Latin. Book hawkers line the pavement and cry sensational pamphlets about Rasputin and Nicholas, and who is Lenin, and how much land will the peasants get.<sup>41</sup>

In the words of Rancière, a revolution is a "viralization" of "parts that

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<sup>39</sup> See: Linera 2014

<sup>40</sup> See: Aron 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Harold Williams, quoted by Figes 1990. p. 354-5

have no part"<sup>42</sup>, of political subjects constituted by the activity of asserting their needs, deficiencies or rights and that directly assume responsibility for the solution of those "parts" of society. Indeed, a revolution is the absolute realization of democracy because the people of the society, who previously delegated to "specialists" the management of their common needs, now assume that direct involvement in common affairs as a necessity of their own. Suddenly the common needs become a matter for everyone; each of them feel him or herself deputies and ministers, they are morally urged to speak for themselves, to define the things that affect them. It is absolute democracy in action that elevates the participation by society in political affairs to levels never reached by any electoral process.

In a certain way, a revolution - with its assemblies multiplied everywhere discussing issues of public interest, with its deliberative councils in centers of work, neighborhoods, offices or communities, defining the reasons for conducting their shared ties - is the limit horizon implied by those proposals about "deliberative democracy"<sup>43</sup>; with the proviso that, in the case of the revolutionary process, the inequality in deliberative influence, emerging from the inequality of access to cultural, academic or informational goods that leads to the "elitisation" of deliberation, is neutralized in the very execution of the deliberate tasks. In other words, if the deliberation is always a joint venture by different governing bodies, "to be carried out" means to first neutralize any communicative inequalities which have been previously produced in order to guarantee the comprehensive fidelity of its practical effects. In this sense, deliberation becomes a social activity without the limits of local micro-territoriality to which the philosophers refer.

On the other hand, while revolutions are constitutive moments of hegemony, that is to say, of leadership and domination<sup>44</sup>, these struggles are resolved fundamentally in the dominant ideas, preconceptions and moral inclinations of people. For this reason revolutions are, par excellence, struggles and upheavals in the order and mental frames

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42 "The notion of 'no part' [...] is the figure of a political subject, and a political subject can never identify himself with a social group. For this reason, the political people is the subject that embodies the part of the non-part - which does not mean 'the part of the excluded', nor that politics is the irruption of the excluded, but politics is [...] the action of subjects that occur independently of the distribution of social parts. ['The part of the no part'] defines the relation between an exclusion and an inclusion [that is ...] designates those who have no part and at the same time designates, politically, those who are not only living beings who produce, but also subjects capable of discussing and deciding the affairs of the community ... The heart of the historical subjectivation [of the 'without part'] ... has been the capacity, not to represent collective power, productive, workers, but to represent the capacity of anyone. Rancière 2011, pp. 233-4.

43 See: Habermas 1996.

44 Lenin 1921b

within which people interpret, know and act in the world. Hence its democratic and deliberative quality, but also its fundamentally peaceful character. If revolution breaks the ideological order between rulers and ruled to replace it with a new structure of relations and cognitive schemas of reality, this transformation of the symbolic world of people is realized mainly through knowledge, deterrence, logical conviction, moral adherence and practical example; that is, through peaceful methods of persuasion.

When in revolutionary Russia, the soldiers turned against the old military hierarchy; when women on the streets choose to wear military pants and boots turning the old social and sexual order around; when the waiters protest rejecting tips and demanding decent working conditions; when the domestic workers demand to be addressed formally (as misses) and no longer in the informal way used previously with servants; in short, when the peasants burn the houses of the landowners who had ruled their lives for centuries, or when the workers occupy the factories and take charge of them, all the logical order of the old society is literally inverted by the force of a moral decision of the subordinates, who by making that decision, automatically cease to be subordinates. Thus, the revolution is displayed fundamentally as a cultural revolution, a cognitive revolution that turns the impossible and the unthought into reality. The logical precepts, moral norms, knowledge, and traditions that previously bound all forms of domination together, exploded into a thousand pieces and enabled other moral criteria and other ways of knowing, other logical reasons that place the dominated - that is, the vast majority of the people - within an order in which they command, decide and dominate.

In all this, the plurality of ideas, plural means of communication, freedom of association - that is, the set of democratic rights typical of modern societies - plays a decisive and irreplaceable role. Without freedom of association, what kind of assemblies or councils could we talk about? Without pluralism, what is the type of deliberation, intellectual and moral leadership which can be built? None! Hence, democratic freedoms and guarantees are the only fertile ground on which any revolutionary process can grow; and sometimes the starting point of revolutions is the conquest of those rights.

This makes all revolutions - and Latin American revolutions from the beginning of the twenty-first century are no exception - a democratic fact par excellence and peaceful by nature. Only in exceptional circumstances where counter-revolutionary armed violence blocks the conversion of a socially constituted conviction into a regularized state institution, is there a need for an armed force to unblock the revolutionary flow. In the the Soviet revolution, the violent actions of the conservative

government that in July 1917 outlawed the Bolshevik party, sought to repress it violently and then physically eliminate it by a coup, led Lenin to abandon the conviction that the revolution was going to succeed peacefully: "A peaceful course of development has become impossible... All hopes for a peaceful development of the Russian revolution have vanished for good"<sup>45</sup> he states, forced to take refuge in Finland and to prepare from then on the path for insurrection.

Therefore, as long as the revolutionary path is blocked (i.e. a process of constitution of a new revolutionary cultural hegemony besieged or cornered by counter-revolutionary violent methods that cut off the organizational and deliberative capacity of society, which forces the emerging classes to defend and liberate the emancipatory torrent that has emerged previously), the methods of armed struggle, guerrilla war, insurrection or prolonged war can be considered. Thus, armed struggle may present itself as enabling the deployment of the democratic capacities of society itself, and only under these terms, will it appear as revolutionary fact.

## 2. War of Movement or War of Positions

A second mistaken interpretation of the Soviet revolution, linked to the previous one, is that revolutions are a type of "war of movement", a strategy of rapid assault capable of being carried out only in countries with a weak civil society, "gelatinous", typical of "Asian" societies characterized by states that absorb everything, but with weak political hegemonies; while in Western societies - with a State held together by a sturdy civil society with innumerable trenches and fortifications, built by the power of the State itself that supports the class power in spite of the weakening of the state apparatus - it is necessary to employ a long "war of position" strategy, of patient sieges to that fortress of civil society. Gramsci introduces this differentiation to explain the concept of the "united front" proposed by Lenin in the debates of the Communist International.

In the East the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks: more or less numerous from one State to the next, it goes without saying - but this precisely necessitated an accurate reconnaissance of each individual country<sup>46</sup>.

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45 Lenin 1917c and Lenin 1917d

46 Gramsci 1999, p. 494

Throughout modern history, it may be more difficult to find in European states actions aimed at "suffocating" the popular aspirations because they are countries "where the most fundamental laws of the state are not seen to be trampled on, and the will of the few does not carry the day"<sup>47</sup>, which would lead, according to Gramsci, to a weakening of the class struggle within these states. However, the phenomenon of European fascism of the mid-twentieth century shows that the imposition, the trampling of laws, arbitrariness and unbridled state violence are not alien to Western political culture. Why these circumstances do not lead to a victorious revolutionary movement is an issue for a different debate. Nevertheless, there is an irrefutable truth in this: for a foreign observer visiting Europe or the United States, one of the first shocking experiences is that, along with the regular functioning of government institutions and the conditions for meeting the basic needs of the majority of the population, citizens have an apodictic internalization of the precepts of social order; as if the state logic was under the people's skin, in a kind of individual State that does not require the visible state apparatuses for its reproduction. Thus, when someone breaks the norm, the quick, timely, prompt and brutal presence of the security forces inspires a greater indifference towards the destiny of others. As Gramsci says, where there is an order that works, it becomes more difficult to fight and replace it with a new one. Rather than a solid and "balanced" civil society vis-à-vis the State, it is a very strong State which has seeped into the most intimate pores of civil society - something like a national-statist civil society - which enables the government apparatus, despite the cracks that may appear, to find an infinity of trenches, supplies, replacements and support from civil society, making it resistant and much more solid than the States that are less adhered to civil society. Perhaps the obsession of the American academy with the study of "identities"<sup>48</sup> is a consequence of this reticular omnipresence of the state order in the individual order of citizens.

Viewed in this way, Gramscian logic could be turned around: "Eastern" societies have a more vigorous and active civil society and a more gelatinous and fragile state, despite their arbitrariness - in fact, their arbitrariness replaces the lack of social adhesion or structural support; while "Western" societies have an omnipresent state because they are deeply rooted in civil society itself and, at the same time, their civil societies are more pluralistic and diverse, although less active politically and characterized by a kind of generalized civilian conformity.

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47 Gramsci 1994, p. 24

48 Cf. Goffman 1961; also Linton 1936.

### 3. Historical Exceptionality or Universal Social Availability

But regardless of the form of political composition of contemporary society<sup>49</sup>, the universality of the Soviet revolution lies precisely in the cultural, ideological, political, and moral victory of Bolshevik factions in civil society, in its more active plebeian organizations, both before and as a condition of the insurrection itself. Lenin refers to this when he categorically asserts that the Bolsheviks succeeded because they are "supported by the vast majority of the proletariat." And that support, influence and leadership in the mobilized sectors of the plebeian classes, to the extent that they "are willing to die" for the revolution, reflects the deep moral and ideological transformation that had taken place between April and October 1917 in the mentality of the subaltern classes; in Gramsci's terms, it shows the successful deployment of a fulminating "war of positions" against the earthworks and trenches of the old civil society. In short, the battle for leadership and political direction of the mobilized, popular classes is the key to the revolution; while the insurrectionary audacity that permanently collapses the old state power is ultimately a contingency emerging from previous struggles for hegemony.

Every revolution is fundamentally a radical transformation of society's common sense preconceptions, of the moral and logical order that monopolizes centralized political power. The armed assault on the Winter Palace represents the eventuality of a process of profound ideological-political transformations that generate Soviet political power, before it is officially endorsed by an act of institutional occupation of the symbols of power. In this sense, it is possible to speak of a "Gramscian Lenin" that places in the cultural and political hegemony the key of the revolutionary moment.

However, what can be assumed as a Russian rather than an "Eastern" exceptionality is the understanding of the timing of this "war of positions". Normally, the emergence of a new common sense<sup>50</sup> and the monopolization of preconceptions of order that guide people's daily behaviors are long term processes of hegemonic construction. There can be decades, even centuries, during which the morality and logic conforming with domination is engraved in the mental structures of people, classes and subalterns<sup>51</sup>. Generally, breaking down these mental

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49 About the form of of political composition of society, Cf. Linera 6 August 2016.

50 "Popular beliefs" are understood as convictions and, in general, culture, through which people "know" and act in the world without needing to reflect on it. Gramsci 1971, p. 775-776.

51 "If, at every moment, men did not agree on these fundamental ideas, if they did not have a homogeneous conception of time, space, cause, number, and so on. All the consensus among minds, and thus all common life, would become impossible.

walls is a titanic task which requires, as Gramsci says, "more complex tactics" and "exceptional qualities of patience and inventive spirit"<sup>52</sup>. In Russia, this happens extraordinarily faster. But it should not be ignored that during this time there was a world war that took the life of millions of young people from the Russian empire; that there was an economically broken country that had dragged its population into inferior conditions of consumption; that there was an imperial world structure in crisis and in transformation, and so on.

These exceptional circumstances, unrepeatable for any other country at any other time, shorten time periods and bring Russian society to a crisis of hegemony, to a general social availability to new certainties and to a predisposition of the popular classes to receive new discourses capable of settling the world by incorporating them as active and influential subjects of that new world to be erected. What would have required decades and even centuries, can be accomplished in months, and it is clear that something like this will rarely happen again in a long time. Exceptions like these, singular in history, often happen in all nations and are usually recorded in history as temporary, confusing and turbulent periods. But when this tumultuous exceptionality of history meets with a strong political will, organized to trigger all the creative potentials contained therein, revolutions that change the history of the world emerge. That happened with the Russian Revolution: exception became rule, power turned into creative flow and the struggle for a new common sense came to be institution.

The convergence of contradictions and social possibilities that paralyze state institutions, as in the case of Russia in 1917, constitutes a historical exception. However, the fact that at some point along its history a country will present a crack or a break in its reinforced state armor, a flaw in its perfect social machinery of collective lethargy that enables a system of new discursive desires to appear, is a universal fact. It is a historical exception for a state hegemony to collapse that quickly. But the existence of emancipatory potentialities, able to democratize the power in the organizational forms typical of the subaltern classes, is a universal fact. Hence, the role of revolutionary associations, leagues, or parties lies in burrowing, with patience - like the old mole - the state and cultural strength of the ruling regime. And if the unforeseeable historical exception knocks on the door when one is alive, one must take

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Hence society cannot leave the categories up to the free choice of individuals without abandoning itself. To live, it requires not only a minimum moral consensus but also a minimum logical consensus that it cannot do without either. Thus, in order to prevent dissidence, society weighs on its members with all its authority." Durkheim 1995, p. 16.

52 Gramsci 1971, p. 495.

advantage with unwavering will power each gap, fissure or opportunity in order to fortify the democratizing potential accumulated and invented by the plebeian classes. This is how we must understand the work of the revolutionary communists who, according to the young Marx:

(...) have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole (...) [and ]in the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4. Jacobin Leninist Moment or Hegemonic Gramscian Moment

There is a precise but crucial moment that any revolution in progress cannot ignore. Depending on the attitude that is taken towards it, the course of the revolution will either continue or end, giving rise to the terrible counter-revolutionary stage. We are talking about the Jacobin moment or bifurcation point of the revolution<sup>54</sup>, which has nothing to do with the occupation of old power institutions and symbols that must be replaced in their functions and in the class condition of their occupants. Nor with the ousting and replacement of the governmental, legislative and executive authorities of the old state. Revolutions from the twenty-first century show that the latter takes place through democratic elections. Both are moments that come from the political-cultural power previously acquired by the insurgent forces and, depending on the circumstances, can be carried out by peaceful, electoral or, as in the exceptional case of the Russian Revolution, by armed means.

Nevertheless, what inevitably requires use of force, a display of coercion, is defeating the power project of the displaced classes of the government. The old ruling classes may lose the cultural direction of society for a time and lie in wait to take up the initiative once the "social whirlwind" has passed, through ownership of the media, universities and the weight of beliefs engraved for decades in the minds of people; they may lose control of the government, Parliament and some of their properties, but they preserve financial resources, administrative knowledge, access to markets, properties in other areas of the economy, external influences and affairs that temporarily allow them to maintain

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53 Marx & Engels 1969

54 Cf. Linera 2011.

an economic power rooted in the society. The Bolsheviks took power in October 1917, but the Central Bank continued to hand over money to representatives of the former provisional government even through the end of November. In January 1918, officials of the ministries were still on strike in disregard of the new ministers<sup>55</sup>; while administrative workers of local governments were still not obeying the new government even after the first months of 1919.

Therefore, what the old ruling class never accepts consensually is the annulment of their power project, that is, the system of influences, actions and means by which they articulate their historical identity as the ruling class. In the Russian Revolution, neither the provisional government nor the constitutional assembly, nor even the takeover of state facilities by the Bolsheviks, were the scene of the defeat of the conservative political project; it was the civil war. The greatest number of deaths, the greatest horrors of class struggle, the most extensive mobilization of internal and foreign counter-revolutionary forces, the most anti-communist discourses and the real armed confrontation between the two power projects occurred during the civil war<sup>56</sup>, and that was also where the victory of the revolution, as well as the characteristics of the new state, became definitive. Lenin will describe this decisive moment in a very precise way:

At that time the bourgeoisie retaliated with a strategy that was quite correct from its point of view. What it said was, "First of all we shall fight over the fundamental issue of whether you are really the state power or only think you are; and this question will not be decided by decrees, of course, but by war, by force"<sup>57</sup>

The bifurcation point or Jacobin moment is the epitome of class struggles unleashed by a revolution. And since every class or block of classes with will to power has to claim the monopoly of state power as a whole, the state body in conflict emerges in its desolate and archaic reality: as "organized violence"<sup>58</sup>. It is there that the nature of the new or old state is defined, the monopoly of political power and the general direction of society for a long state cycle. Usually this happens after the

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55 Pipes 1991, pp. 569-572 (Spanish translation)

56 Cf. Part Four: The civil war and the making of the soviet system (1918-24), Figes, O., op.cit

57 Lenin 1921c

58 Marx Engels 1969

government shifts from conservative forces without losing the real power. In an extraordinary text, Marx describes this moment when he states that after the conquest of governmental power by the proletariat "its enemies and the old organization of society have not yet vanished" and therefore, "it must employ forcible means, hence governmental means"<sup>59</sup>. Therefore, the Jacobin moment is a time where discourses are muted, diplomatic skills are withdrawn and the quarrel over the unifying symbols becomes blurred. The only thing left on the battlefield is the naked display of force to settle once and for all the territorial monopoly of coercion and the national monopoly of legitimacy.

The Jacobin moment in the Cuban revolution was the battle of Giron (invasion of the Bay of Pigs); in the government of Salvador Allende, Pinochet's coup d'état; in the Bolivarian revolution of Venezuela, the strike of activities of PDVSA and the coup d'etat in 2002; and in the case of Bolivia, the civic-prefectural coup in September 2008. In all these revolutions, the government was already in the hands of the revolutionaries and there were different types of "divided government"<sup>60</sup>, with some of the legislative chambers or regional governments in the hands of the conservative bloc. But more importantly, the belligerent force still had a power project, a will to dominate and reticular structures of political power, from which it sought to reorganize a social base of support, the defense of its structures of economic property and armed means (legal or illegal, internal or external) to resume as soon as possible the struggle for state power. Then, inevitably, a bare clash of forces emerges, or at least a measurement of forces of coercion, which can only result in military defeat or the abdication of one of the belligerent social forces, that is, the final monopoly of State coercion.

The Jacobin or "Leninist" moment - because Lenin was a master in this type of political operation - is, ultimately, the defining moment of the uniqueness of the state power. From then on there will be, in the minds of the people, in the institutions of government and in the defeated classes themselves, a single state project. Therefore, the defeated force enters into a situation of disbanding, and the worst part is that it loses faith in itself. It is not as if the defeated social classes disappeared; what disappears, for a good time, is its organization, its moral force, its project of country for the society. Materially they are classes in the process of domination, but fundamentally they cease to be a political subject. Consolidating this defeat requires the victorious social forces to make punctual blows to the regime of ownership of the

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59 Marx 1874

60 Cf. Carey 1995

great means of production, weakening their organizational structures in civil society, incorporating their flags in the victorious project, recruiting administrative cadres, promoting the various types of political transformation<sup>61</sup> of the old intelligentsia, etc., giving rise to a new phase of the hegemony corresponding to the period of stabilization of the new power.

The importance of this "Jacobin-Leninist" moment lies in instituting, in a lasting way, the monopoly of coercion, taxes, public education - the liturgy of power and political-cultural legitimacy. The other side of this victory over the conservative forces is the concentration of power that, if not continuously regulated, affects the plebeian social structures of power that had initially begun the revolutionary process. The concentration and real uniqueness of power means that the political power of the old wealthy classes has been defeated. However, the counter-finality of all this is that the democratization of power in the popular, labor, rural, youth or regional structures that give rise to the revolutionary process are also affected by this mechanical destiny of the State (of any State) to concentrate and impose its uniqueness. The importance of concentrating power in the presence of the old ruling classes, and simultaneously de-concentrating it for the working classes, ultimately defines the course of the revolution.

In any case, after the Gramscian moment of the construction of political and cultural hegemony that consolidates the political power of the insurgent classes of the revolution -once the government was conquered by democratic means - a bare battle of forces ensues, the Jacobin-Leninist moment, to permanently resolve the uniqueness of State power. Without this essential moment, the Gramscian strategy may be internally surrounded and, sooner rather than later, expelled from political power in the form of a successful counter-revolution that will despotically sweep away all the organizational and democratizing advance achieved by the plebeian social classes. Hence any revolution with a Gramscian moment without a Leninist moment is a shattered, failed revolution. There is no real revolution without a Gramscian moment of political, cultural and moral triumph prior to the seizure of state power. But there is no transfer of state power or dissolution of the old ruling classes and their project of belligerent power, without a Leninist moment.

The Soviet revolution is the most extraordinary and dramatic laboratory of this living contradiction between centralization and democratization that defines the fate of this and any other contemporary revolution.

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61 Cf. Gramsci 1999, .

## 5. Local Democracy or General Democracy.

### Democratization or Monopolization of Decisions

The outbreak of the revolution blows up the hierarchies of the old social system, including the military one. The soviets of soldiers and peasants and the military committees in the barracks, who do not recognize the old military authority in order to replace it with assemblies, display the radicalness and extent of the collapse of the old state power, becoming the point of support for the strengthening of strikes and councils of workers in the factories. Each headquarters, region and city are developed as a mini-state with its own independent force of coercion. Despite this, during the civil war that was immediately unleashed, against the disciplined and hierarchical regiments of the counter-revolution supported by invading foreign troops, the revolutionary troops are tactically inferior, weak against the antagonistic force and easily fall prey to disbandment after the first defeats<sup>62</sup>. Excessive democracy within the instrument of armed coercion, initially necessary to crumble the authority of the old state, now brings it to defeat against the counterrevolution. The need to command military discipline and to restore hierarchies (together, of course, with political commissioners leading the political training of the troop), cause the Red Army to retake the initiative and defeat the foreign invasion and the counterrevolutionary armies. The defense of the revolution triumphs, but at the cost of reducing democracy in the barracks. Something similar happens in the rural soviets, soviets and labor unions. The core of the revolution takes place when the direct producers, workers and peasants, begin dismantling the old relations of productive power. This happens when the landowners are displaced and the soviets of peasants occupy the land and distribute it internally among the members of the agrarian community. In the same way, the working quality of the revolution emerges when the Factory Committees assume control of the companies to prevent the dismissal of workers, the closure of the company or the loss of labor rights.

However, the moment each factory begins to act on its own, to focus only on the well-being of its workers without considering the welfare of the rest of the workers of other factories and of the inhabitants of the cities or the peasants; the moment when the soviets of peasants only care about the supply of their members, leaving aside the workers of cities that are out of food; that is to say, the moment in which each democratic working institution only focuses on itself without taking into account all the workers and citizens of the country, there is an economic disaster which paralyzes the exchange of products and encourages

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62 Figes, O., op. cit.

selfishness among sectors, thereby disengaging these sectors from others, leading immediately to a decline in production, closure of enterprises, loss of labor, scarcity, hunger and malaise against their own revolutionary course.

So, in the short term, local democracy, disregarding global (general) democracy throughout the country, leads to a paralysis of production that pushes workers to see revolution as an enemy that they all, as a whole, helped create. More than excess of democracy in each community or factory, it is the absence of a general democracy, that articulates all the centers of work, capable of combining the initiatives and needs of each one of them, of each agrarian community or factory, with the needs and initiatives of the rest of the work centers throughout the country. This disagreement between territorial dimensions of labor democracy is what, among the workers themselves at the local level, causes discomfort, annoyance and enmity against the revolution itself. To what extent should local democracy be expanded or restricted? How to create forms of general democratic participation that allow workers and peasants to experience an articulation of initiatives of all factories, rural communities and neighborhoods? Therein lies the core of the continuity of revolution and socialism. In fact, communism represents the possibility of a general articulation from the local communities without any type of mediation; the extinction of the state, in the long run, is only the final realization of the revolution.

The temporary impossibility or slowness of a nation, and general, quick articulation between all centers of labor and rural communities, exists in all revolutions without exception. It is as if, in the initial moments of the revolution, the ability for the direct self-organization of workers only reaches the centers of work and the communities separately, isolated and even antagonistic to each other, thus revealing the limits of social experience and the weight of the localist past in the revolutionary action of the workers. Apparently the material conditions for a direct self-unification of the workers - without mediation -, capable of enabling general and direct planning between them, still do not exist. Therefore, at the risk of their own revolutionary work devouring them or leading them to a chained confrontation of self-destructive selfishness and localism, closing the doors of a victorious, military and moral entrance, the constitution of an organization that assumes the management of the general, that unifies the local actions towards a way that prompts factories and communities to help one another, becomes necessary.

The presence of this organization specialized in the universal, in the administration of the general, is the State. And in the case of the organization that administers the common and general affairs of workers'

actions, it is the revolutionary state which, through its centralization, protects the revolution from economic collapse and local selfishness. To replace the self-unification of workers by the monopolistic administration of the latter, which although it consists of the same workers is born of their own struggles and has the aim of defending them, also constitutes a specialized body of concentrated decisions.

The paradox of every revolution is that it exists because the workers break hierarchies, controls and take charge of their life; but they fail to do so at the national, general level. And a revolution is defended only if it can act at a national level, both against the internal conspiracy of the old ruling classes and the external war of world powers. But that is only achieved through an organization that begins to monopolize decisions (the state), at the expense of the local democracy of the revolution itself. This fetishism of the revolutionary state and, in general, of every state, is not overcome by just proclaiming its "suppression", the kingdom of anarchy or whatever. The force of the facts imposes a defeat of the revolution due to the internal factionalisms of the workers and the unified siege of the counterrevolution, or the constitution of a revolutionary state that monopolizes the decisions at the expense of the unfocused and weakening local "democratism".

If the defense of the revolution undermines local democracy, its inner energy is lost by the excessive centralization; and if it weakens national centralization, the centralized siege of the counter-revolution stifles it. Therefore, the administration of this paradoxical logic must be reinforced by depending on the correlation of forces, supporting one pole without canceling the other, because that is the only way to keep the revolution alive in face of the counterrevolutionary siege, but also in the face of the self-centered fragmentation of local pluralism. As long as the material conditions of production of the political bond between people are not changed, as participants in a real community who directly take charge of the common affairs for the entire society, state mediation will be necessary. However, the constitution of that general real community, replacing the state "illusory communal life"<sup>63</sup>, depends on the construction of a real community of freely associated producers who take charge of their material livelihoods on a universal social scale, that is, depends on the overcoming of the law of value that unifies the producers not directly, but abstractly, through abstract human labor. In the end, the

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63 "And out of this very contradiction between the interest of the individual and that of the community the latter takes an independent form as the State, divorced from the real interests of individual and community, and at the same time as an illusory communal life, always based, however, on the real ties existing in every family and tribal conglomeration -- such as flesh and blood, language, division of labour on a larger scale, and other interests-and especially, as we shall enlarge upon later ". Marx & Engels 1845

temporary need of a revolutionary state is anchored in the persistence of the logic of the value of change in the economic life of people. And the existence of a revolutionary state, which in itself is an antinomy, is both the necessary and obligatory way to start the revolution, until the contradiction dissolves in a new society.

## 6. Money Form and State Form

The money form has the same constitutive logic as the state form, and historically both run parallel to each other. Both money and the state reproduce spaces of universality and of human sociability. In the case of money, this allows the exchange of products on a universal scale and, thereby, it facilitates the realization of use value of the concrete products of human labor, which is reflected in the consumption (satisfaction of needs) of other human beings. This is certainly a function of the community. However, it is based on an abstraction of the concrete action of the producers, validating and enshrining the separation between them, who act as private producers. The function of money surfaces from this material fragmentation between producers and consumers - money re-articulates this fragmentation, putting itself above both sides and, in the long run, dominates both in their own atomization as private producers and consumers; but money only manages to reproduce this fetishism because it simultaneously recreates sociability and consolidates community, even when it is an abstract sociability, a failed "illusory community" that works in the material and mental action of each member of society. In the same way, the State unites the members of a society, re-articulates a common sense of belonging and possession in all of them, but it does so through a monopolization (privatization) of the use, management and usufruct of these common goods.

In the case of money, this process happens because the producers are not participants in a direct social production that would allow them to access the products of social work without its mediation, but as a simple satisfaction of human needs. In the case of the State, it is because citizens are not members of a real community of producers who produce their means of existence and coexistence in an associated way, linking each other directly, but through the State. For this reason it is possible to state that the logic of the forms of value and fetishism of the commodity, masterfully described by Marx in the first volume of Capital<sup>64</sup>, is undoubtedly the deep logic that also gives rise to the state form and its fetishization<sup>65</sup>.

.....  
64 Cf. Chapter I: Commodities, in Marx, K. Capital Vol. 1(different editions)

In short, the protection of the revolution against the siege of the wealthy classes needs the revolutionary State to assume, temporarily and only temporarily, this national articulation, this general unification and this joint view of the movement between the different social sectors; to guarantee the functioning of the sources of labor, the circulation of material goods and, with it, the protection and defense of the revolution against its detractors - fundamentally, to protect against the past which creeps into the head of revolutionaries who "remember" that before they used to live better. What the Bolsheviks did when they took control of the soviets after October 1917, when they began to merge into the state, by shifting "the centre of industrial power from the factory committees and the trade unions to the managerial apparatus of the party-state"<sup>66</sup>, was just that. Lenin's frenzied preoccupation, in his debate with Stalin and Trosky, about the limits of state centralization at the expense of local democracy, in the case of nationalities<sup>67</sup>, of the federation or of trade unions<sup>68</sup> in enterprises, will define the future of the Soviet revolution and what will be understood as socialism as a result of the practical experience of the working classes.

In the end, it seems to be a universal rule that revolutionary processes are exceptions in the long history of all modern nations. And this forces a patient and imaginative work of ideological-cultural "war of positions" in order to create cracks in the assembly of State and Society that can contribute to the exceptional uprising of a revolutionary era. It is also a universal law that ideological-political leadership should be constituted initially and fundamentally in the revolutionary process before the "seizure of power", which is precisely what gives it the quality of being a construction from the bottom up. Therein is Gramsci and the scope of his thought. However, once the state institutional structure has been democratically conquered, it will be fleeting and materially powerless to the despotic counterrevolution if it does not guarantee the uniqueness of the new power and the complete defeat of the conservative power. That is Lenin and the influence of his thought. From there rises the necessity of again building, spreading, refreshing and consolidating the new mental structures of the rising society of the revolution. But this, more than Gramsci again, is Durkheim.

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of Value developed in the first chapter of Capital.

66 Figes, O., op. cit., p. 596.

67 Lenin 1922a Also, Pipes, R., op.cit., p. 554 (Spanish translation).

68 Lenin 1920c

### III.- Revolution and Socialism

Was the soviet revolution a socialist revolution? What is a socialist revolution, and, ultimately, what is socialism? This last question leads us to an old debate that goes back to the beginning of the first socialist currents of the nineteenth century. The Communist Manifesto itself has a section devoted to the critique of several of the socialist tendencies that prevailed in its time<sup>69</sup>, from feudal and clerical to petty bourgeois, and even bourgeois. For his part, in a later prologue, Engels points out that in 1847 socialism designates a bourgeois movement, while communism refers to a "proletarian movement."<sup>70</sup> Hence Marx and Engels prefer to refer to the current as simply "communist"<sup>71</sup> and sometimes as "revolutionary socialism"<sup>72</sup> or "critical socialism"<sup>73</sup>. In his most important texts published in his lifetime, Marx refers exclusively to communism as a society of "freely associated producers"<sup>74</sup>, which overcomes the contradictions and injustices of capitalist society.

The idea of socialism as a social period prior to communism is spread mainly by Engels<sup>75</sup>, supported by the differentiation Marx makes between social revolution and political revolution<sup>76</sup> and his reflections on the "first phase of communist society, as it springs from capitalist society ... [and] the upper phase of communist society".<sup>77</sup>

The formation of the social-democratic party in Germany and the rest of the European countries gives relevance to the concept of socialism as an intermediate social system between capitalism and

69 Marx & Engels 1969.

70 Engels in 1969,.

71 See Marx and Engels 1956 & 1845

72 Marx 1850.

73 See Marx 1847.

74 "The figure of the social process of life, that is, of the material process of production, will only lose its mystical veil when, as a product of freely associated men, they have submitted to their planned and conscious control." Also in his description of the Commune, Marx claims that with it "class property which makes the work of many into the wealth of a few would be abolished", that the "Commune aspired to the expropriation of expropriators. He wanted to make individual ownership a reality, transforming the means of production, land and capital, which today are fundamentally means of enslavement and exploitation of labor, in simple instruments of free and associated labor", Marx 1859.

75 Engels 1878, Section Third Socialism

76 See Marx 1847.

77 Marx 1875.

communism<sup>78</sup>. Lenin, a member of the Russian Social-Democratic Party, takes this conceptual heritage and develops it<sup>79</sup>. Today, in a mourning for the collapse of the Berlin Wall, there are those who propose abandoning the concept of socialism as a way to overcome precisely the failure of a revolution that concentrated powers in the state, imposed a centralization of capital and reduced the freedom of society<sup>80</sup>.

Certainly, the concept of socialism is now discredited not only because of the effects of the collapse of the so-called "real socialism" but also because of the political scam of the so-called "socialist" parties which, both in Europe and in some countries of Latin America simply legitimized and managed with extraordinary efficiency the policies of social deprivation of neoliberalism. Hence, lately the concept of communism has become more visible as a radical alternative horizon to capitalism.<sup>81</sup>

It is well known that capitalism engenders infinite inequalities, injustices and contradictions, although none of them automatically leads to its end; on the contrary, it has shown an unusual capacity to subsume -formally and concretely- the conditions of life of societies<sup>82</sup> to its logic, turning its contradictions and temporal limits into the fuel of its expanded reproduction. In spite of all this, undoubtedly, injustices and collective readiness are not received homogeneously in all countries. Some have greater capacity for economic compensation than others in the face of recurrent crises; some nations have accumulated greater organizational experiences and autonomous cultural capacities than others. Therefore, struggles, resistance, social initiatives and revolutions happen - and will continue to happen - in an exceptional and dispersed way in some countries and not in others.

To this day, real and verified history -not the one that comes out of the well-intended wishes of some ideal reformer of the world- shows that these contradictions, injustices, and frustrations are condensed at a given moment, in a given territory, until they explode in a surprising and exceptional way in the "weakest link" of the chain of world capitalism, giving rise to a revolutionary event. This link is usually broken in a country or, sometimes, in a group of countries, but never in a globally in all the

78 See Kautsky 1902 & 1909; Bebel 1910; Luxembourg 1900,; Korsch 1975

79 See Lenin 1903) and 1902.

80 See Negri 2008.

81 See Badiou 2010; Ali 2009; Dean 2012; Bosteels 2011.

82 On the importance of the concept of subsumption in the critical understanding of capitalism, see chapter XIII: Machinery and Big Industry, in Marx See; Book I, Chapter VI (Unpublished); "Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63".

countries; and this often happens in the "extremities of the bourgeois body"<sup>83</sup> which are places where, more slowly, the global body of capital can react and compensate for the imbalances and contradictions continually generated by its logic of accumulation.

The forms of these historical ruptures of the world order are very diverse and never repeated. They may arise due to economic reasons, such as hunger, unemployment, contraction of the population spending capacity, blocking of social re-enrollment processes; or for political reasons, like a state crisis, a war, a repression that breaks the moral tolerance of the governed, injustice, etc.

Certainly, whatever the revolutionary process, if in the long run this does not spread to other countries and continents, it ends up exhausting its mass impetus, surrounded internationally, enduring enormous economic sacrifices on the part of its population and, finally and inevitably, perishing. Forced to defend itself at all costs - as Rosa Luxemburg had warned - the Russian revolution did this by paying the price of centralizing decisions and sacrificing the free flow of the revolutionary creativity of the people<sup>84</sup>. Thus, the revolutionary energy was again subsumed to the logic of the capitalist accumulation. But if nothing is done, if all the social energies, all the human capacities and all the community creativity are not devoted to achieve, consolidate and expand the revolution, the accumulation of capital is rapidly materialized in the suffering of millions of people; and event worse, under the contemplative and complicit gaze of the social deserters who will continue to be engulfed in their idle speculations about a "true world revolution", and whose efficacy will barely be enough to remove the coffee mug in front of them.

One would want to do many things in life, but life just enables us to do some of them. One would want revolution to be as open, pure, heroic, planetary, and successful as possible - and it is very good to work for it - but historical events face us with more complicated, convoluted and risky revolutions. One cannot adapt reality to illusions, but quite the opposite; one must adapt illusions and hopes to reality, in order to get as close to them as possible, by dipping and enriching those illusions from what real life gives us and teaches.

We have to find a name for this historical period of inevitable and

83 "Therefore, even when crises first engender revolutions on the continent, the cause of these crises is always in England, it is natural that the extremities of the bourgeois body produce violent outbursts rather than in the heart, because here the possibility of compensation is higher. On the other hand, the degree to which continental revolutions affect England is at the same time the thermometer by which it is measured to what extent these revolutions really endanger the bourgeois life regime or to what extent they affect only their formations policies." Marx 1850.

84 Luxemburg 1918

sporadic revolutionary social outbreaks, capable of conceiving, in one way or another, the overcoming of some or all of the injustices engendered by capitalism; for these historical moments that trigger -in the action of the working class- forms of political participation called to absorb the monopolistic functions of the state within the civil society; moments that engender initiatives capable of suppressing the logic of exchange value as a way of accessing material wealth; we have to find a name, which is not properly communism, since we are talking about social islands that give way to a new planetary social economic order, as objectively will be the case of communism. These are fragmented struggles, national or regional revolutions in progress, which seek to underpin communism, but which are not yet communism. It is the social fluidity that "springs from capitalist society itself", which contains within itself capitalism itself, but also the economic and political struggles that deny it in a practical way, at local, national or regional level. To this "first phase" - according to Marx - that it is not capitalism or communism at all, but the open and stark struggle between capitalism and communism, we can give a provisional but necessarily distinguishable name: socialism, communitarian socialism, etc.

However, how can we distinguish revolutions, uprisings and revolts that challenge capitalism from those who seek to reform it? The line that separates them is actually non-existent. The Soviet revolution demonstrated that the struggle against capitalism began as a struggle for reform. The slogans mobilizing "Peace, Bread, and Land"<sup>85</sup> did not speak of communism or socialism. In May 1917, when the Russian Army Commander-in-Chief Brusilov visited the Division of Soldiers who had expelled the officers, he asked them: "What do you want? ... Land and freedom, they all shouted. And what else? The answer was simple: Nothing else!!<sup>86</sup>". Even the famous slogan "all power to the Soviets" was a democratic slogan. What happens is that the population never struggles or is mobilized by abstractions. From centuries ago to the present day, people gather, debate, devote their time, efforts and commitment, mobilize, struggle, etc., for practical things that affect them, that make them become indignant: bread, work, basic needs, abuse, repression, recognition, participation, etc.; all of them democratic needs. But it is precisely in the conquest of these demands or modes of collective action that the population itself not only becomes mobilized subjects: proletarians, peasants, plebeians, crowds, people, etc.; but also builds, on the way, the means to do so: assemblies, councils, soviets, communes.

.....  
85 Lenin 1917b

86 Orlando, O., op. cit

Based on that experience, a series of gradually more radical conditions are proposed, which modify the social nature of the popular uprising to the point of considering issues such as state power, ownership of wealth, or ways of managing wealth. This creative potentiality of collective action is what is symbolized in the phrase: "every strike hides the hydra of the revolution"<sup>87</sup>. But that does not mean that from every strike we can move on immediately to the revolution - Lenin himself warns us against this phraseology<sup>88</sup> - but, under certain circumstances of exceptional condensation of contradictions, the great objectives and the great class struggles arise from small and relatively simple collective demands.

According to Figes, in mid-June 1917, only in Petrograd, more than half a million workers went on strike:

*"Most of the strikers' demands were economic. They wanted higher wages to withstand inflation and a more reliable food supply. They wanted better working conditions (...). However, in the context of 1917, when the whole structure of the state and capitalism was being redefined, economic demands were inevitably politicized. The vicious circle of strike and inflation, of higher wages pursuing higher prices, led many workers to demand more state control of the market. The struggle of the workers to control their own working environment, especially to prevent their employers from sinking production to maintain their profits, led them to increasingly demand the state to take charge of the management of the factories."<sup>89</sup>*

The old Leninist concepts of class content ("social forces" of revolution), class organization ("subjective condition")<sup>90</sup> and class objectives ("economic-social content" or "objective condition") would describe the nature social development of the Soviet revolution which, by the way, was not defined beforehand and was being made and reshaped in the course of its action. This means that no revolution has a predetermined content; the content emerges and unveils itself; it is transformed by the actual deployment of antagonistic social forces, because its nature depends not only on constituted popular subjects, but on the actions of the dominant

.....  
87 Lenin 1918a

88 Ibid.

89 Orlando, O., op. cit.

90 Lenin 1905b

classes themselves called into question<sup>91</sup>. The whole debate between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks on the character of the revolution of 1905; the complicated theoretical constructions on the "bourgeois revolution" led by the proletariat; the "democratic revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" which does not complete the democratic revolution in agriculture<sup>92</sup>; the "proletarian revolution" which gives power to the bourgeoisie<sup>93</sup>; the first stage of the proletarian revolution<sup>94</sup>; the proletarian revolution that gives "steps towards socialism"<sup>95</sup> or the impossibility of conquering the Republic and democracy "without marching towards socialism"<sup>96</sup>; all these things show the complexity of the October Revolution and of all revolutions which are actually social relations in an boiling and fluid state. That why it is impossible to establish the moment when a class content is solidly consolidated. The revolution as liquefaction of social relations intermingles, overlaps, confronts, articulates and groups objective and structured social classes. Only the organized will of one of the social agents can overlap certain collective interests over others, highlighting some social aspects of the revolution over others. In the end, as a result of the quality of the mobilization structures (the soviets), of the frustrations produced by the decisions of the provisional government against the working masses, and of all the work to modify the dominant mentality, the relation between democratic revolution and socialist revolution is that:

*"... the former becomes the latter. The latter resolves the problems of the former, the latter consolidates the work of the former. The struggle, and only the struggle, determines to what extent the latter manages to go beyond the former."*<sup>97</sup>

In the midst of this "creative chaos," one cannot act blindly or led by conceptual impulses to define the quality of the revolution in progress. There are universal references that reveal the social nature of the ongoing revolutionary process: The mode of constitution of political

.....  
91 "The coincidence of this incapacity of the ruling classes to administer the state the old fashion way, and of this increased reluctance of 'those below' to compromise with such State administration is what is called a political crisis on a national scale." Lenin 1913

92 Lenin 1917e

93 Lenin 1917f

94 Lenin 1917c

95 Lenin 1918b

96 Lenin 1917g

97 Lenin 1921d,

subjects, the mode of organization of collective action and the mode of projection of the acting community. The first one establishes the class content or the way of merging of the plebian classes as acting political subjects; in the second case, it establishes how to participate and democratize decisions for collective action; and, in the third case, it establishes the goals and objectives that the action of the masses poses, from its own experience of struggle, to achieve what is considered a right, a need or a moral remedy. From this, there are possibilities of rebellion against capitalism if the subjects constituted as a mobilized group are the workers, the producers of material and immaterial wealth, the poor, peasant communities and, in general, the masses subsumed by the expanded accumulation of capital. While the "living labor", in its infinite modalities, is what constitutes itself as a political subject, there is an anti-capitalist potential in motion.

Likewise, there is the possibility of a social revolution in progress if the organizational modes of the action of the masses surpass the fossilized shell of representative democracy and invent new and more widespread modes of full participation of the people in the decision making on the common issues. There are socialist tendencies if the revolution generates mechanisms that exponentially increase the participation of the society in the debate, in the decisions that affect it; and, moreover, if these decisions are made in the collective, universal benefit of the society as a whole and not for individual or corporate revenue. Finally, there is anti-capitalism in action if the decisions taken in the sphere of the material basis of society and the economy seek to open up cracks on the logic of "exchange value" as a planetary order and introduce, with practical measures -again and again, with failures and setbacks- the "use value" as a way of relating people to things (wealth) and people to people through things.

Class, group in fusion<sup>98</sup>, and use value are therefore the structural cleavages that open up the historical opportunities of a new society.

.....  
98 See Sartre 1984

## Socialism is Not the Statization of the Means of Production

the Soviet revolution is exceptional in this dramatic learning process of socialism, not as a mode of production or as a regime, but as a contradictory and condensed field of struggle in which the revolutionary state plays a leading, more decisive role in the whole movement.

After the October insurrection, the first thing the Bolsheviks did after taking state power was nationalizing the lands of the large landowners, dissolving the large estates to distribute them among small peasant plots<sup>99</sup>, nationalizing some industries, establishing the state monopoly of cereals and nationalizing the banks<sup>100</sup>. It is the fulfillment of the measures that had been announced by the Bolsheviks and debated in the soviets. With this, the access to the means of production in the field is democratized, while in the field of industry and banking, ownership and management are centralized. Lenin was aware that although nationalization did not directly represent the socialization of production, which in any case required a social articulation with the other companies in the country and the direct control of this form of articulation<sup>101</sup> by the workers, it did constitute a means of expropriation of part of the economic power of the bourgeoisie and its concentration in the administration of the state.

In 1918, amid the harassment of civil war, the siege of foreign armies, and the economic sabotage of the bourgeoisie, but also with the conviction that in this way the socialist measures<sup>102</sup> would be intensified, the "communism of war" was adopted. According to Trotsky,

*... (the communism of war) in its original conception pursued wider purposes. The Soviet government relied on efforts to directly transform these methods of regulation into an economy of planned distribution and production. In other words, he relied more and more on this communism of war, even if not taking down the system, as the means to establishing a true communism.<sup>103</sup>*

In order to guarantee food provisioning in the cities under a state control system, all agricultural surpluses left after providing the indispensable

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99 Pipes, R., op. cit.

100 Bofa, G., The Russian Revolution

101 Lenin 1918c

102 See Bukharin 1967.

103 Trotsky, quoted in Pipes, R., op. cit.

for the peasant families are requisitioned for planned distribution. And when seizing the surplus, there is nothing left to commercialize, with which simultaneously the agricultural trade is suppressed; rural markets are banned; money is suppressed as a mode of exchange and a state-regulated bartering<sup>104</sup> is implemented. Preventing peasant resistance to this expropriation and, with the prospect of promoting the associated work, the creation of collective farms -on lands assigned by the state- is promoted from the state. In the industrial-urban sphere, trade unions are militarized in order to guarantee a strong labor discipline against the external siege; at the same time, the purchase and sale of products between state enterprises is eliminated; and the exchange of raw materials is managed by the government. At the same time, it encourages the taking of small enterprises by the workers in the different municipalities and the salary is defined equitably for all people<sup>105</sup>. And in what will be a direct attack on private property, the inheritance of property is outlawed<sup>106</sup>. In fact, the expropriation of ownership of land and business by the state, leads to attempts to partially suppress the market and even money as a means of exchange between producers and companies. We are talking about a measure imposed from the state, which appears not only as the great owner but as the means of exchange and circulation of products. Let us examine this more closely in order to unveil the strengths and limitations of such a bold measure.

Clearly, this decision represents an effort to replace the law of value and abstract labor-time (exchange value) as a measure and means of access to other labor products considered useful for other people (use value); however, it does not constitute an economic surplus of exchange value -as Marx imagined it<sup>107</sup>- but an extra-economic coercion

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104 Pipes, R., op.cit.

105 See Serge, 1930

106 Pipes, R., op. cit.

107 "But to the degree that large industry develops, the creation of real wealth comes to depend less on labour time and on the amount of labour employed than on the power of the agencies set in motion during labour time, whose 'powerful effectiveness' is itself in turn out of all proportion to the direct labour time spent on their production, but depends rather on the general state of science and on the progress of technology, or the application of this science to production. [...] In this transformation, it is neither the direct human labour he himself performs, nor the time during which he works, but rather the appropriation of his own general productive power, his understanding of nature and his mastery over it by virtue of his presence as a social body – it is, in a word, the development of the social individual which appears as the great foundation-stone of production and of wealth. The theft of alien labour time, on which the present wealth is based, appears a miserable foundation in face of this new one, created by large-scale industry itself. As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value. The surplus labour of the mass has ceased to be the condition for the development of general wealth, just as the non-labour of the few, for the development of the general powers of the human head. With that, production based on

meant to nullify it. This is not about the state acting as the subject of general and universal decisions, but rather about some public officials defining, at each moment and in a personal way, the way of suppressing the logic of exchange value by a subjective way of understanding "use value". Of course, when "measuring" what company "X" had to give to another company "Y" in order to access to their respective products, the calculation and subjective criterion of the state official determines the magnitude of the use value exchanged. Therefore, this preponderance of use value over exchange value does not function as a universal rule applied under universal criteria, but as a universal norm applied under personal criteria. That is, use-value is here basically a subjective will and not a general social relation. Then, use value is superimposed on the exchange value in the measurement of exchangeable wealth, as a result of a decision, of a personalized power, that is, as a way of privatization not of the property but of the management of the mode of exchange of wealth. Consequently, the "overcoming" of the law of value actually represents a gradually private coercion, privatized in the decisions made by the "part" of society in charge of the administration of the state. And while these personal decisions delegated by the power of the state do not increase the personal wealth of the decision maker (exchange value that increases the exchange value of its holder) and are executed with the aim of seeking the general welfare of society, they will increase the political power accumulated by the decision maker and by that group ("part") of state administrators. In Bourdieusian<sup>108</sup> terms, we are facing a reconversion of "economic capital" into a form of "political capital" held by the state bureaucracy and not an actual suppression or overcoming of the law of value, which is the core of modern capitalism. Ultimately, this is what is at stake in the different modalities of state capitalism, with the difference that in some cases, the aim is to regulate the expanded reproduction of private capital from the state, in order to reduce the social costs of the anarchy of market capitalism; while in some others, as in the case of Soviet Russia, it is required transition to quickly expropriate economic power ("economic capital") to the bourgeoisie and convert it into a "political capital" and, immediately and gradually, democratize it or devalue it incrementally so that it finally ceases to be an accumulable "political capital".

All the polemics and the Leninist conception of "state capitalism"

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exchange value breaks down, and the direct, material production process is stripped of the form of penury and antithesis" Marx 1993

108 See Bourdieu 2000

and its relation to "socialism"<sup>109</sup> come down to the political complexity of this forced reconversion of economic power (economic capital) held by the proprietary classes - including the peasantry - , into political power of state administrators (political capital) and the search for ways and, above all, alliances required to achieve the extinction of this capital and its reintegration into society as one of the functions of administration. In Leninist terms, "socialism is nothing more than the capitalist monopoly of the state put to the service of the whole people and, therefore, *ceasing to be* a capitalist monopoly"<sup>110</sup>. But this route of great expropriation and centralization of property and economic accounting, which should then lead to its dissolution in society, has the effect of uniting the proletariat and the state in front of the capitalists, and also against the peasants, who own and use the market to realize their surplus. It therefore confronts "the petty bourgeoisie plus private capitalism, who fight both against state capitalism and against socialism"<sup>111</sup>.

Three years later, the Soviet revolution resulted in a growing fracture between workers and peasants and an economic disaster that led to the 20 percent production decrease of heavy industry in 1913; the malfunctioning of 75 percent of the locomotives; the imposition of black markets over the prohibition of commerce; and a 50 decrease of population of the largest cities<sup>112</sup>. In less than three years, inflation reaches 10,000 percent, the Gross Domestic Product of 1920 reaches barely 40 percent of its level in 1913; industrial production drops to 18 percent and productivity to 23 percent, while agricultural production reaches 60 percent in the same period. Petrograd loses two thirds of its inhabitants who prefer to go to the countryside in search of food sources. But worst of all, despite all the radicalization of measures against the market, the use of money and exchange value as a measure of wealth, capitalist relations had not in fact been altered. Hence Lenin, in evaluating the results of so-called "communism of war" (which sought to accelerate the construction of socialist relations in the economy) admits the failure of that attempt and the inevitability of remaining "in the realm of existing capitalist relations"<sup>113</sup>. Moving ahead of Gramsci in the use of categories of military strategy, "war of positions" and "war of movements", to the sphere of the social struggle, he maintains that the

.....  
109 See Lenin 1919b

110 See Lenin 1917g

111 See Lenin 1918c

112 Werth 2013.

113 See Lenin 1921c

mistake to pretend to take the immediate step to the communist production and distribution :

In the spring of 1921 it became clear that we had suffered a defeat in our attempt to implement the socialist principles of production and distribution through "direct assault" ... The political situation ... showed us that ... it was inevitable ... to move from the tactics of "direct assault" to the "siege ".

But what did this "direct assault" mean? state expropriations of large industrial enterprises and surplus agricultural production; the suppression of the market by state coercion; the uniformity of salaries. "We assumed that by introducing state production and state distribution, we had created an economic system of production and distribution different from the previous one," but we failed, Lenin argues; in the end, the result was new "capitalist relations". In 1921, Lenin's self-criticism was lapidary but very precise when reversing these measures: despite all the statizations, the suppression of money and markets, capitalism remains and "the truth is that the expression of Union of Socialist Republics represents the will of Soviet power to make the transition to socialism, and in no way that the new economic forms can be considered socialist"<sup>114</sup>.

This Leninist reflection is decisive in evaluating the programmatic imagery of the left of the last 100 years. Until 1921, for the leftists - and probably for Lenin - the nationalization of the means of production was the main measure separating capitalism from socialism. Hence there was no program, for any socialist or communist political party, that did not consider this as the main task: the nationalization of industry, banking, foreign trade, etc. However, Lenin's argument from the experience of the ongoing revolution is that no matter how much nationalization can be done, this does not imply a new "system of production and distribution"; moreover, these nationalizations continue to unfold within the "existing capitalist relations".

Of course, nationalization concentrates and monopolizes the ownership of factories, money and material goods of the possessing classes. By nationalizing these resources, the state removes the material basis from the previous proprietary classes, who not only lose resources, money and savings, but also lose power of decision, social influence and probably political power. This weakens the old bourgeoisie as a class and extinguishes its demographic, statistical condition<sup>115</sup>. Politically, it is a measure that undermines the power of the ruling bourgeoisies and opens a space of action of the insurrect classes to consolidate its power and its

.....  
114 Lenin 1921b

115 See chapters 20 and 21, in Lewin 2005

historical initiatives. In spite of all this, the accounting of abstract working time continues to regulate the exchange of goods in the internal and external market, via exports and imports of inputs, machinery, etc.

The manager and administrator of the factory can be evicted and the workers discuss in assemblies the decision-making in the production process - certainly, a great revolutionary step in the proletarian consciousness because it questions the workers' belief that the owners and managers are the only ones who "know" how to carry out the productive activity - but then products need to be commercialized in order to access raw materials, pay the debts and guarantee the wages of the workers who feed and consume what is produced in other factories and in agriculture. This forces us to return to the measure of exchange value, the time of abstract capitalist work as a measure of exchange of products between factories, with suppliers and with the workers themselves who have taken power in the workplace. Banks can be expropriated to take ownership and power away from bankers, but money will continue to be the general equivalent of abstract labor time that guides people's behavior and thoughts in their daily lives, transactions, and economies.

The intervention of state power, based on coercion, can replace abstract labor time, money for the exchange of products from one factory to another without passing through the market; it can also regulate, based on a criteria of needs, the exchange between industrial and agricultural products; it can replace salaries with allocation of family incomes. With all that, there is simply an apparent suspension of the law of value, the founding logic of capitalism. state administrators, supported by the monopoly of coercion, legitimize and replace here the function of money, the market, and the exchange value. However, it is merely an apparent suppression of the law of value and the market. It is only apparent because in its place there is no new economic relationship replacing it, but an extra-economic constraint that preventing it. In addition, because a political relationship that replaces an economic relationship, its limitation resides in the fact that it is only implemented within one country and not in its relationship with the rest of the countries that continue to regulate their exchanges and production on a basis to the law of exchange value. And even within the country in question, the political relationship is only effective where political power comes, via officials, and where they have not been expelled and killed by the insurgent peasants.<sup>116</sup>

Moreover, since the state bureaucracy can not be present in every aspect of social life, the economic logic of things, wired on the brains of the people -on their personal and family economic habits- ends up revealing

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116 See 'Kulaks', Bagmen and Cigarette Lighters in Figes, O., op. cit.

itself, turning the public and legal spaces in which the state imposes its criteria into scattered islands besieged by a sea of clandestine real economic relations. Thus, the black market arises in rural communities and neighborhoods, not only for the exchange of agricultural products, but also for industrial raw materials<sup>117</sup>; privileges for those who are close to the structure of the state are also manifested<sup>118</sup>. According to Pipes, from the 21 million ration cards in the cities only 12 corresponded to the population, while the rest (9 million people) had access to higher consumption goods. Besides, a large part of the products available on the black market were those that the state was supposed to freely deliver to the people. Bartering returns as an informal, generalized and clandestine measure of exchange value; Industries start to report two different accounting statements, one for the state administration, and another one to establish the real sustainability of companies. And if we add the fact that all the exchanges of products with other countries (raw materials, technology, machinery, spare parts, processed products, clothing, food, etc.), increasingly intensified by the globalization of production itself, have to be done with money, under the rules of the market and the rule of law of exchange value, an extra national economic force creates pressure on families and companies put under revolutionary control. This is the beginning of the trafficking of products for family economies and state-owned industries, along with some sort of social schizophrenia: the logic of use value in regulated and state-controlled activities; the logic of the exchange value in underground and daily activities, internal and external exchanges. Lenin refers to this when he speaks of the failure of the implementation of communism of war:

*We regarded the organisational, economic work, which we put in the forefront at that time, from a single angle. We assumed that we could proceed straight to socialism without a preliminary period in which the old economy would be adapted to socialist economy. We assumed that by introducing state production and state distribution we had established an economic system of production and distribution that differed from the previous one. [...] We said this in March and April 1918; but we did not ask ourselves in what relation our economy would stand to the market, to trade.*<sup>119</sup>

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117 Carr 1969

118 See "Comrades and Commissars," in Figes, O., op. cit.,

119 See Lenin 1921c

In summary, because of the historical force of its previous existence and its external world existence in the midst of which compulsory and necessary exchanges are developed, the economic logic of abstract labor is imposed over political coercion. And, in the long run, the suspension of capitalism is revealed as facade since there is no new economic relationship to replace it; there's only imposed political will, the weaker the more coercion it requires; the more useless the more bureaucratic vigilance it needs<sup>120</sup>; the more unjust the more privileges a small political elite admits. If we add to this the fact that the primordial living conditions that are governed by the state are inferior to those established by the old regime, the whole force of the past comes to the memory of the citizens in search of a reconstruction of the old economic logic of the market, wage and accumulation in everyday habits. Certainly, socialism can never be the socialization or democratization of poverty, because fundamentally it is the growing socialization of material wealth.

As seen from within, non-economic state coercion does not implement a universalizable system either. The exchanges between companies that replace the market depend on the personal appreciation of the officials who define, based on subjective criteria, what a company must receive in exchange for the delivery of a given product. Likewise, the requisitions to the agricultural surpluses are imposed assuming conditions of average consumption; since the replacement of wages by an allocation of average family consumption goods presupposes a level of living conditions that has nothing to do with labor performance (manual labor, intellectual work, intensive labor, unhealthy conditions, etc.), nor with a socially agreed level of needs. By assuming the responsibility of deciding the "necessary" amount of exchanges in order to replace money and exchange value, the state is not only forced to commit abuses and extortions, and even to confiscate its own minimum conditions of subsistence of workers and peasants<sup>121</sup>, but also, it concentrates in a group of people, in a "part" of society (the administrators of the state), what corresponds to the whole society. That's why this decisional "part" becomes a private body superposed to the general body. Thus, the substitution of money and the market which supposedly ought to suppress the power of a few (the holders of economic capital) by the power of the whole of society only reinserts the power of the few (the holders of political capital) over the whole society. With this - and if this division of functions is maintained for a long time - the political logic

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120 There were extremes in which the obsession to bureaucratically control economic management led to more than 50 officials controlling the performance of 150 workers in an overlapping surveillance to monitor those who watch. Pipes, R., op. cit

121 Figes, O., op. cit.

of capitalism is simply reinstated but no longer in terms of ownership over the means of production and concentrated economic power, but in terms of a monopoly of the administration of the means of production and concentrated political power. In Marxist terms, when the state acts as a "sovereign landowner" - we could also say as "sovereign entrepreneur" - the expropriation of "surplus labor" by means of extra-economic means implies some kind of servitude and "loss of personal freedom"<sup>122</sup>. The whole debate on the "militarization of labor" and "compulsory labor" in fact reissues, under a marxian disguise, this tendency to the rebirth of servile relations.<sup>123</sup>

Contrary to what the left believed throughout the twentieth century, the nationalization of the great means of production, of banking and commerce, does not establish a new mode of production nor institutes a new economic logic - let alone socialism - , because it is not the socialization of production. This requires another type of economic relations in the production and social relations in the exchange, which are very different to the mere intrusion of the state. In other words, one of the fetishes of the failed left of the twentieth century: "state ownership is synonymous with socialism" is a mistake and an imposture. Even today there is a loose leftism that, from comfortable cafeterias where terrible revolutions are planned inside the foamed milk of a cappuccino, demands from the progressive governments more statization in order to immediately establish socialism.

In fact, the Soviet revolution proved that this radical position is just an illusion. Statizations undermine the power of the bourgeoisie, yes, but within the framework of the domination of capitalist relations of production. Statizations create conditions for a greater political capacity of the initiatives of the revolutionary forces, yes, but they don't alter the logic of exchange value in the exchanges and the commerce of products of social work. No matter how many decrees are issued combining the words nationalization and socialism. The only things that can create the conditions of a new society are a politics of alliances between the plebeian classes to manage the common issues of the whole society at the national level; the impulse towards new voluntary forms of association of workers in the centers of production and the increasing articulation with other centers of production; the constant democratization of the state structures that support these collective processes; the economic stability that guarantees the basic conditions of life, but more importantly: time for collective learning; and the

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122 Marx 1993

123 Pipes, R., op. cit.

dissemination of the revolution to other countries. Moreover, socialism is a process of contradictory struggles, alliances and learning.

In revolutionary Russia, nationalization -not as a synonym of the construction of socialism, but as a flexible and temporary means to create the conditions that help the initiatives of the working society- emerges from the debates and actions that replace the failure of the "communism of war" and the implementation of the so-called New Economic Policy (NEP), forcing, according to Lenin, to "admit [...] a radical modification in our whole outlook on socialism".<sup>124</sup>

### **The Material Basis of Revolutionary Continuity: The Economy**

The NEP dismantles the mechanisms of apparent socialization introduced by "communism of war" - which, in the end, had nothing to do with communism; it questions the over-sizing that had been granted to the revolutionary state as the decisive constructor of socialism; and it restores economics and economic relations (starting with the welfare of the population) as the decisive scenario where, once political power is achieved, the fundamental struggles for the construction of socialism are concentrated.<sup>125</sup>

Already in 1918 the salary system is modified, differentiating the salary of the specialists "according to scales that correspond to business relations". The practice shows that administrative and technical functions in state-owned factories and institutions require specialized knowledge, and that those who possess such skills essential to start the industry do not belong to the working classes nor are willing to work for the low remuneration offered by the state: same for all, specialists and non-specialists. The paralysis of the productive centers forces the Bolsheviks to modify their single salary scale and to pay much higher salaries to the experts, in order to guarantee the operation of the production. With this, it is clear that the communist ideal of income leveling can not be imposed or done immediately, much less as a leveling down.

The reintroduction of differentiated scales into wage remuneration is the first conceptual "blow" that the Bolsheviks have to take in order to guarantee the continuity of material production and, with it, the continuity of the revolutionary process capable of modifying material production in the long run. The thing is that, with the exception of the proprietary classes of the great means of production that must be expropriated to

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124 Lenin 1923

125 See Lenin 1921c

dilute their economic-political power, the revolution plays its hegemony only if it is capable of improving - not worsening - the living conditions of the working classes. The basic rule of Marxism that says that the material basis influences the other spheres of society is not always taken into account by revolutionaries, who can overstate the will and political action as engines of change. While the latter are dynamic factors that build collective identity, conduct actions, articulate and foster hopes; they emerge randomly from a material base, open a range of options for change, and are efficient to the extent that they constantly feedback changes in that material basis. Without material basis there are no revolutionary potentialities to be triggered and, therefore, they become discursive impotence.

The NEP eradicates much of the illusory pre-constituted conceptions about the construction of socialism, helps to specify what socialism really is, and clearly establishes the priorities that an ongoing revolution must set.

Since 1921, the confiscation of grain from peasant families has been replaced by tax in commodities, releasing surplus production for agricultural trade<sup>126</sup>. And the collective farms (sovjovi) created during the first years of the revolution, started to be leased to private persons who had to pay a rent to the state. The operation of the old rural community (mir) with its periodic distribution of land is guaranteed, but also the possibility, if the peasant wants, to stay with the land, to rent it and to hire agricultural laborers. In order to give peasants greater stability, although the land belongs to the state, the right to usufruct is guaranteed to him indefinitely, as it also is the right to offer of the surplus of their products in the free market.<sup>127</sup>

Complementarily, in order to support the peasant economy, a series of measures are taken to encourage the reestablishment of small private industries linked to the supply of their basic materials. Industries with no more than 20 workers are left out of the nationalizations, and the leasing of small and medium enterprises of the state to private and cooperative persons is authorized in order to save them from stagnation. As for the large state industries, it is established that exchanges with other industries no longer depend on the state bureaucracy, but each of them has direct financial and material resources. By 1923, according to E. H. Carr, 85 percent of industries become privately owned, but 84 percent of industrial workers are located in large state-owned enterprises.

By eliminating uniform remuneration and the obligation of

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126 Lenin 1921g

127 Carr 1985

each state enterprise to ensure its operation from its own resources, commercial principles are restored in the management of enterprises, which leads to consider the remuneration of workers as salary in the balance sheets, subject to the law of exchange value.

Since then, each state and private industry had begun to depend officially on the market for the provision of its basic materials (including fuel) and the realization of its products, forcing them to strive in their cost and productivity structures to ensure its operation, since access to state credits was obligatorily subordinated to its profitability. The subsidies for state-owned enterprises disappeared, and thus also the technical and productive stagnation that tends to characterize this type of subsidized state management when, instead of a temporary redistributive measure, it is assumed as a permanent mode of economic management.

In 1922 a decree prohibits all forms of forced recruitment of labor and reinstates hiring and termination procedures as regular modes of access to labor force. As early as 1921 wages had been linked to productivity. A mandatory minimum wage is established, while the unions are again the mediating structures between the worker and the business management to establish the conditions of employment. In 1922, under the new contracting relations, about 40 percent of the workers in the railway industry were terminated, while in the textile industry, the number of workers per 1,000 looms went from 30 during "communism of war" to less than half, 14. Since then, union affiliation is voluntary; state subsidies to unions are eliminated, and the latter are removed from the control of social security, which end up being managed by a state instance.

While the mechanisms of private trade are restored in both cities and in the countryside, restrictions on the disposition of money by private individuals are eliminated as well as any risk of confiscation of bank savings in cooperatives and municipal banks that are beginning to emerge. A state bank is also created as a regulator of the national economy and numerous state savings banks for the promotion of citizen savings. Complementarily, new tax rates are established on the sale of products, and even on high salaries.

On the whole, the NEP reestablishes the regular forms of market economy and capitalist economy which, as Lenin rightly points out, continue to exist despite the radical nature of the measures adopted during "communism of war". The suppression of requisitions and the reestablishment of trade in agricultural products reorganize, on new foundations, the political relationship between the workers of the city and the countryside. In a society with a majority or peasants, no state power - let alone the one that is established in the name of the popular social majorities - can be exercised coercively against this social majority. In

the short term, this causes not only peasant uprisings and even worker protests against the revolutionary state. And it is clearly a contradiction because a new "minority", now "revolutionary", formerly bourgeois, imposes its will on the majority of the population. This is precisely what begins to happen in revolutionary Russia, as the result of widespread famine and abuses in rural areas. There are even moments when troops loyal to the government revolt against it, and the main cities are sieged with strikes and mobilizations of workers (some of which demand the return of the free market).<sup>128</sup>

Then any possibility of dissolution of state power in society - which is in reality the horizon and the purpose of any social revolution - becomes a political, economic and demographic impossibility. Socialism, as the construction of new economic relations, cannot be a state construction or an administrative decision; it must be, above all, a creative and voluntary work of the working classes who take in their own hands the experience of new ways of producing and managing wealth.

In fact, the restoration of market relations between producers and companies provides a legal background to something that has never ceased to exist either in the real economic activity or in the minds of the people. What government officials did during the years of "communism of war" was like walking in the dark with a flashlight. Wherever the light was shining, state control prevailed, but in the infinite surroundings where this light did not reach, the surreptitious relations of the market continued to regulate the economic reality of the people, so that the possibility of overcoming the laws of the market, - the law of exchange-value- by other economic relations and not political/coercive short term relations, didn't even have a chance. Lenin's own reflections mention that these could only arise after a long process of creation of new associative forms of production and of cultural revolutions<sup>129</sup> capable of finding a correlate on a world scale.

On the other hand, the establishment of state-regulated rules of profitability reinstates the optimal function of state enterprises, withdrawing economic and political power from the bourgeoisie and redirecting it to the society as the direct beneficiary of the nationalization; that is, it allows the whole society (not just the state administrator or the workers of the company) to enjoy the wealth generated. However, there are two degenerations of this nationalization strategy. The first one is that the economic benefits generated by these companies go only to their workers via wages, bonuses, redistribution of

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128 See "Bolshevism in Retreat: The Russian Civil War" in Figes, O., op. cit.

129 Lenin 1923

profits, guaranteed employment, etc. In that case, nationalized companies change ownership, but in the end they continue to benefit only a "part" of the society, namely the workers of those companies, who become private owners of a property that should be common to the whole society. This "de facto" nationalization is an ambiguous form of privatization, which again cancels out ways of socializing the means of production and social wealth. In general, experiences of isolated self-management are moving on the threshold of this form of corporate privatization of wealth.

This degeneration of nationalization may be further distorted to the extent that state enterprise workers not only privately appropriate the resources they generate as a public enterprise, but also require and absorb the resources of the rest of society, wealth generated in other centers of work, through permanent subsidies of the state. In this case, the corporate privatization of productive wealth also becomes a private expropriation of social wealth, which sucks resources from the society to maintain the privileges of a small part of it.

The second degeneration of nationalization is that the managers of the companies, the public officials in charge of their management, use their position to substitute the decisions of collective workers' with administrative monopolies. It is an accumulation of bureaucratic political power that expropriates the political power of the workers. In addition, depending on the circumstances, this position of power may be used by officials to access privileges in terms of remuneration, personal benefits, property, etc. In case these individual powers and benefits are institutionalized and settled in time in a stable group of public officials, we are witnessing the formation of a bourgeoisie within the state.<sup>130</sup>

A decision of great importance assumed by the Soviet government, although barely discussed later by the left, is the concessions to foreign companies in certain areas of work such as oil, mining, logging, and other sectors<sup>131</sup>. We mention it here, because the debate around this topic manages to summarize the deep meaning of what was initially considered "retreats" from the NEP, but what in reality allows to delineate, on the march of collective action, a strategic path to the construction of modern socialism.

What were these concessions about? They had to do with granting to foreign concessionaire the right to develop certain economic activity where the revolutionary state did not have the resources to do it on its own. The concessionaire invested in technology, industry, infrastructure, roads, etc. and received a part of the production as a payment. The other

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130 See Chavance, B., The Soviet Economic System

131 Lenin 1921h

part remained in the hands of the state, for its use, sale, etc. In order to guarantee to the concessionaire the full compensation for the risk and the recovery of the inverted technology, long concession periods were granted and, after a mutually agreed time, these investments were transferred to the state. The USSR guaranteed "that the assets of the concessionaire, invested in the enterprise" were not to be "subject to nationalization, confiscation or requisition".<sup>132</sup>

In that sense, the justifications were clear: the need for money to purchase technology to implement social plans, such as electrification of the entire population; the need for financial resources to create infrastructure to integrate the entire territory; the need for technology and resources to develop the great state industry; the know how to start new businesses. The revolutionary state did not have the financial resources or the knowledge of technology required for all of this; obtaining this was presented not as a possibility of growth, but fundamentally as a condition to satisfy the basic needs of the people and, through this, guarantee the very continuity of the revolutionary process. Such is the importance that will be given to improving the economic conditions of the population, and the country as a whole, that Lenin will almost sentence the Communists to learn to manage the economy, otherwise the Soviet power would not to exist.<sup>133</sup>

In fact, the salary drop of the Soviet workers to less than 10 percent with respect to 1913, the long lines to get bread, and the nomadism of the workers that forced them to be temporarily peasants to be able to alleviate the generalized famine of those years not only lead to a growing separation between the Soviet government and large portions of the population, but to uprisings of workers and peasants which put at risk the continuity of the Bolshevik government which was forced to establish martial law in the cities that had previously been its bastions. The assault on the Kronstadt fortress<sup>134</sup> represents the epitome of this risky modification of the correlation of forces within the popular basis, provoked by the economic crisis and the reduction of political freedom by the "communism of war".

Therefore, economic stability, economic growth and world revolution are, at this new point of the revolution that had already seized political power, the central themes in which its destiny is fulfilled:

*In the sea of people we are after all but a drop in the ocean, and we can administer only when we express correctly what the people are conscious*

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132 Lenin, V. I. "Meeting with the militants of the organization of the PC (b) of Moscow"

133 Lenin 1922b

134 See Avrich 2014 and Berkman 2010

*of. Unless we do this the Communist Party will not lead the proletariat, the proletariat will not lead the masses, and the whole machine will collapse. The chief thing the people, all the working people, want today is nothing but help in their desperate hunger and need; they want to be shown that the improvement needed by the peasants is really taking place in the form they are accustomed to. The peasant knows and is accustomed to the market and trade. We were unable to introduce direct communist distribution. We lacked the factories and their equipment for this. That being the case, we must provide the peasants with what they need through the medium of trade, and provide it as well as the capitalist did, otherwise the people will not tolerate such an administration. This is the key to the situation.*<sup>135</sup>

In his debate against ultra-leftist deviations that criticizes him for making too many concessions to the capitalists to the detriment of expropriations, Lenin argues that given the circumstances of state power in the hands of the working classes, focusing on improving the development of industry and agriculture -"even without the cooperatives or without directly transforming this capitalism into state capitalism"- will contribute infinitely more to the socialist construction, than to wander about "the purity of communism"<sup>136</sup>.

Of course! Before any revolution, the task of revolutionaries is to focus on the construction of ideas capable of synthesizing social trends and mobilizing the self-organizing capacities of society. The struggle for a new common sense and new organizational structures of the working classes are the fundamental tasks in the revolutionary process; that is, the impulse to convert the autonomous mobilizing force of society into political power capable of dismantling the power structures of the ancient ruling classes. But once we arrive at the crossroads of the Jacobin phase, the order of priorities changes: the economy, the improvement of the living conditions of the majority of the working population, and the creation of strictly economic conditions of regulation and planning now occupy the command post to guarantee the continuity of the revolutionary process and the political power of the working classes. Once this continuity is guaranteed, it is possible to move immediately to the construction of new forms of community production and to continuous cultural revolutions that will change the individual habits and behaviors of society and reinforce these forms of community; until the time arrives when new revolutionary experiences at world level allow the creation of material conditions for the construction of a planetary communism.

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135 Lenin 1922b

136 Lenin 1921b

The economy and the world revolution thus represent post-insurrectionary concerns. Referring again to the concessions, Lenin points out:

*Every concession will undoubtedly be a new type of war - an economic war -, the struggle taken to a different level ... [but] we cannot seriously conceive the idea of an immediate improvement of the economic situation without applying a policy of concessions ... we must be prepared to accept sacrifices, deprivations and inconveniences, we must be prepared to break with our habits, possibly also with our vagaries, for the sole purpose of making a remarkable change and improving the economic situation in the main branches of industry. That has to be achieved at all costs.*<sup>137</sup>

And with respect to the dangers that these concessions might represent to foreign capital, he answers:

*But is it not dangerous to invite the capitalists? Does it not imply a development of capitalism? Yes, it does imply a development of capitalism, but this is not dangerous, because power will still be in the hands of the workers and peasants, and the landowners and capitalists will not be getting back their property. [...] The Soviet government will see to it that the capitalist lessee abides by the terms of the contract, that the contract is to our advantage, and that, as a result, the condition of the workers and peasants is improved. On these terms the development of capitalism is not dangerous, and the workers and peasants stand to gain by obtaining a larger quantity of products.*<sup>138</sup>

A few days before the October insurrection, Lenin writes: "The fundamental problem of any revolution is power"<sup>139</sup>. He maintains this thesis and reinforces it at the time of the economic development of the revolution. The tolerance of certain secondary economic activities in the hands of the business sectors can be adopted to guarantee the supply of inputs for industry and small-scale agriculture. The presence of foreign capitalists can be accepted in order to obtain the necessary financing and technology for the country. It is possible to live with market relations as long as economic conditions are prepared for other forms of exchange. It is possible to accept all this, forced by the circumstances of the foreign siege, the technological backwardness of the country, the need to guarantee favorable conditions of life for the workers. It is possible only if it helps us to maintain political power in the hands of the revolutionary power. Because it gives permanence and stability to revolutionary power, time is gained to create the material and cultural circumstances that in

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<sup>137</sup> Lenin 1921j

<sup>138</sup> Lenin 1921k

<sup>139</sup> Lenin 1917j

the end will make possible the continuity of the revolutionary socialist process: associative and community forms of production that must spring from voluntary experience from the workers; increasing modes of democratization of public affairs; cultural and cognitive transformation of the working classes that surpass the individualistic mental structures inherited from the old regime and that even help to restore the mutually vivifying metabolism between human being and nature.<sup>140</sup>

Time, then, is constituted as the most precious good that a revolution needs to carry on, again and again, the practical learning of the working classes in the effort to create new conditions of community work which, by definition, have to arise from the workers' own experiences and not from the administrative decisions of the State, however revolutionary it may be. After all, communism is a society built in common by the working class itself and not an administrative decision.

Time is needed to open up loopholes of communism through the practical activity of workers in the field of production and consumption; to learn the experiences of the errors of other previous collective experiences and to start again with more vigor in the construction of this network of work and common conduction of the economy; to transform the mentalities of the people and to raise up new human beings carrying new cultural aptitudes towards communism; to overcome the apathy of the plebeian classes that appears when the first achievements are made and the revolutionary waves calm down<sup>141</sup>; to reassemble, with a new wave of social mobilizations, corporativisms and the deviations of a part of the labor elites that seek to usufruct, individually or sectorally, the positions of power they occupy in the new State; in short, to seek the deployment of revolutions in other parts of the world, without whose presence, any attempt at revolution in any country, in the long run, is impotent and doomed to failure; to support the changes in the other states and other economies of the world with which, inevitably, a revolutionary state maintains links of purchase of technology, of exports, of financial transactions, of cultural exchanges, of which it is impossible to escape,

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<sup>140</sup> On the relationship between man and nature, which runs through Marx's preoccupations throughout his life, see Marx, "Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844"; "Forms which precede capitalist production", in Grundrisse 1857-1858; Capital, T. 1; Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx

<sup>141</sup> "By July 1917, in Petrograd, only 400 or 500 of more than 1000 delegates of Soviets attended their meetings. By October many of them no longer existed or only existed on paper. Reports from the provinces indicated that the Soviets were losing prestige and influence [...] and in Petrograd and Moscow, they no longer represented 'democracy', because many intellectuals and workers had moved away from them. [...] Early in 1918, the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly was received with surprising indifference; there was nothing like the fury that in 1789 had led to rumors that Louis XVI intended to dissolve the national assembly, precipitating the storming of the Bastille. After a year of anarchy, Russia was exhausted; everyone longed for peace and order, no matter how they were achieved". Pipes, R., op. cit.

including determinations of international division of labor.

For this reason, the criticism of ideologues whose learning of the history of revolutions is nourished solely by The History Channel -demanding to revolutionary experiences the disconnection from the world market or the rupture with the international division of labor- is ridiculous and demagogic.

Where is the technology for the mining or hydrocarbon industry? Where are raw materials, foodstuffs and processed products exported by a country, if not in foreign markets? Where do you get the communication technology or scientific knowledge that the country needs, if not from the world market? Where is access to financial resources to create infrastructure or new industries? Where are the products of the nationalized companies themselves sold when not consumed internally? Today, no economy is autarchic nor can it ever be, unless one wants to return to the conditions of life of the sixteenth century. No country is on the margins of the world market, that is, the network of human labor exchanges that the world has with countless financial, technical, cognitive, cultural, linguistic, communicational and consumptive links. A machine, a microphone, a television, a car, asphalt, a lamp, a cell phone, computers, programs, science, mathematics, culture, cinema, the Internet, literature, a book, a suit, a drink, history, everything, absolutely everything we use every day, is interconnected with what we produce here and with what is produced in the United States, China, Japan, India, Brazil, Argentina, Germany, etc. The world is intertwined. Today, the world is a product of the same world and no country can be left out of this collective work.

This material fact will not disappear, however much we mix words like "sovereignty," "revolution," "anarchy," or whatever. That is precisely why it is impossible for communism to succeed in one country - it is a contradiction - because it is a universal community that can only exist and triumph in a global, planetary, universal way. But just as communism is either global or nothing, there is no revolution that can "get out" of that world market, the relations and flows of the international division of labor. While informing the Soviets Congress of the need to obtain technology and resources from the world market, in order to guarantee the improvement of the living conditions of the workers, Lenin states: "The Socialist Republic ... cannot exist without having ties with the rest of the world"<sup>142</sup>. The place that a nation occupies in the network of the international division of labor can be modified, but never abandoned. A new international division of labor, or perhaps its extinction as a division,

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142 Lenin 1921

can only be the result of a world revolution, which is precisely what each local revolution must underpin.

In short, once it breaks out due to exceptional circumstances in some country, what a social revolution needs is time, time and more time. Time to await the outbreak of other revolutions in other countries, in order not to be isolated and powerless against the demands of a new economy and a new society that can only be built on a global scale. Time to convert cultural power, political hegemony and the capacity for popular mobilization, which led to the taking of state power, in community and cooperative organizational forms in production and trade. "For us the simple development of cooperation ... is identified with the development of socialism"<sup>143</sup>, Lenin obsessively reiterates in the last writings before his death. The revolutionary state can impose things or prohibit them; this is part of the political power it monopolizes. You can even modify the ownership of the means of production and concentrate the ownership of the money. These are political actions that influence economic actions. But what it can not do is build lasting economic relations; and even less communal economic relations capable of surpassing the logic of exchange value. This can only be a social creation, a collective creation of the producers themselves.

The state is by definition a monopoly; communism is by definition common creation of common wealth: the antithesis of the state. Therefore, the associated, cooperative, common work can only be a gradual, complex creation and with continuous rises and falls achieved directly by the workers of many centers of work. That takes time. Time to gradually deploy the modes of democratic occupation of the workers, of the whole society, of the great decisions of the State and, above all, of the fundamental centers of production. Time to overcome bourgeois individualism, but mainly labor corporativism that reintroduces class individualism and privatization in state and labor decisions. Time to transform the logical and moral schemas of the working classes - inherited from the old bourgeois society - and to construct collectively, with numerous cultural revolutions, a new common sense and mental outlook that restructures the values of everyday life and the whole society. Time to dismantle the powers monopolized by the State in order to dilute it in society. All this requires that society itself experiences the construction of common decisions about their common life, the invention of social technologies that articulate the whole of society in the decisions

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143 Lenin 1923. On the importance given by Marx to cooperatives, see Marx, "Co-operative labour" The International Workingmen's Association, 1866 - Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council  
The Different Questions. Also Marx, K., "Resolution of Gratitude to the Delegates of the Central (General) Council to the Geneva Congress" (September 1866)

on these common issues, and most importantly, that all these new social practices unfold not as extraordinary insurrectional events, but as routine facts, like the need to feed or to rest.

From this point of view, the revolution appears as the conquest of time for the universal synchrony of the emancipation of the plebeian classes and the peoples of the world. The function of the "revolutionary" state is not to create socialism, let alone communism. That simply can not do it. That escapes the founding object of its existence as a State. The only thing the state can do, however revolutionary, is to dilate, empower and protect time so that society -in a state of self-determination, in struggle, in the middle, above, below and between the interstices of prevailing capitalism- displays multiple forms of emancipatory historical creativity and builds spaces of community in production, in knowledge, in exchange, in culture, in daily life; to fail and try again many times, in a wider and better way; to invent, from the cracks of capitalism, generating spaces of community and voluntary cooperation in all spheres of life; to dismantle them in its process; to do all this over and over and over again, until, in a moment, the synchronies of multiple communities rising everywhere, in all countries, exceeded the threshold of order, and what were spaces born in the cracks of the dominant society, take place in full, universal spaces, generating a new society, a new civilization that reproduces new forms of community, but no longer as a capitalist death struggle, but as the free and normal deployment of human initiative . That is communism.

The state can not create community, because it is the perfect antithesis of the community. The state can not invent communist economic relations, because they only arise as autonomous social initiatives. The State can not institute cooperation, because it only springs up as free social action of production of the commons. The state itself is incapable of restoring the mutually vivifying metabolism between human beings and nature. If someone has to build communism, it is society itself in self-development, from its experience, its failures and its struggles. And it will have to do so in the adverse environment of aggressive predominance of capitalist society. Unlike previous bourgeois revolutions, which had much more favorable conditions as bourgeois economic relations flourished within the old traditional society for several centuries before<sup>144</sup>, social revolutions face a universalized capitalist structure; and the new communist political and economic relations will only be developed, starting from the revolutionary outbreak, in the fight to the death with the dominant capitalist relations. In fact, the social revolution actually opens up the temporary space for the interstitial,

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144 Lenin 1918a

fragmented, difficult, permanently harassed deployment of the growth of new communist relations in politics, economy and culture, in the midst of a generalized, debilitated and decadent but persistent dominance of capitalist relations of production. Summing up the experience of the Soviet revolution on this debate, Lenin argues:

*Theoretically, there can be no doubt that between capitalism and communism there lies a definite transition period which must combine the features and properties of both these forms of social economy. This transition period has to be a period of struggle between dying capitalism and nascent communism—or, in other words, between capitalism which has been defeated but not destroyed and communism which has been born but is still very feeble.*<sup>145</sup>

In short, socialism is this historical contradiction and sparked antagonism between dominant capitalist relations in all spheres of life, and emerging social relations in communism, that working classes rehearse and try to deploy again and again, interstitially, fragmented and intermittent, in various ways, in all areas of life. In all this, the only thing the revolutionary state does is to protect these anti-state, communitarian, cooperative initiatives; support them and give them time by improving the living conditions of the working classes, so that they can develop and develop until they cross the threshold in order to synchronize with multiple communist constructions from other countries and other continents, in an irreversible universal movement. The central concept of "dictatorship of the proletariat"<sup>146</sup> must be understood as follows: as the coercive use of state power of the working class against bourgeois classes to protect, give time and support the community initiatives working classes are able to experience and create.

To sum up, socialism is a very long historical period of intense social antagonism, in which, in economic terms, capitalist relations of production and the logic of exchange-value are still in force, but which, in its interior, the local, national level, incipient, interstitial and fragmented forms of community work raise, struggling to expand at regional and national scales. In political terms, the working classes take / construct state power, which means that they promote, in successive bursts, multiple forms of absolute democratization of management, of the administration of common affairs; and all this to support, protect and spread those communitarian / communist experiences in the economy that, with repeated failures and new resurgences, drive the working classes. Socialism is therefore neither a mode of production nor a

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145 Lenin 1919b

146 Marx 1875.

destination. It is a historic space of intense class struggles in which workers use state power to protect and generate communist / community economic initiatives that they themselves are able to build through free and associated initiatives. The victory of socialism is its extinction to give rise to communist society. And if this happens, it must inevitably be a worldwide event.

What happened with the Soviet revolution? Why did it fail? In general, any social revolution that does not join with other social revolutions on a world scale, sooner or later fails and will inevitably fail. On its own, it will inevitably be driven to failure in its attempt to build communism; although certainly during all the time of its development great and irreversible social, labor and material achievements can be made for the working population not only in the insurgent country, but in all the countries of the world, motivated by the presence - threatening to the bourgeoisie or stimulating for the working classes - of the socialist revolution in progress. In the absence of a worldwide spread, the emergent social revolutions prolong their permanence depending on the attitude to the factors of revolutionary content.

If the state assumes the leading role of social changes and decisions, failure is more imminent and rapid. If the working society gradually and intermittently assumes democratic protagonism in the daily decision-making of the country, failure might be postponed. If the state coercively takes command in the construction of associative relations in production, failure knocks the door. If the working classes build and deconstruct to re-construct new and growing expansive forms of community, associative work, failure is delayed for a long time. If the state can not guarantee improvements in living conditions or promote continuous cultural revolutions that revitalize revolutionary waves, the end of the revolution is coming. If the state power is maintained in the hands of the working classes, of their vital organizations that help to clear the way of the free initiative of the working people, the possibilities of the revolutionary continuity are extended much more.

Once the first 10 years have passed, the course of the Soviet revolution was inclined towards each of the negative dualities mentioned above: concentration of state power in the hands of the party and gradual expropriation of power from the hands of social organizations; bureaucratic impulse of associative forms of work that invalidates the creative capacity of the own society in the construction of new economic relations. Unfortunately, at the beginning of the 1930s, the October Revolution became an imperial constitution, at first, and a state-national

constitution afterwards.<sup>147</sup>

What is left of this revolution now? The longest experience in contemporary history of a social revolution, its organizational potentialities, its practical initiatives, its social achievements, its internal characteristics and general dynamics that can be repeated in any new revolutionary outburst. But also its difficulties in the construction of alliances are part of its legacy; their corporate, bureaucratic, privative deviations; its limits that finally led to defeat. There is, then, the failure of the revolution, its defeat.

Today we remember the Soviet revolution because it existed, because for a second it aroused in the commoners of the world the hope that it was possible to build another society, different from the capitalist one, based on the struggle and the community in march of the working class. But we also remember it because of its loud failure, devouring the hopes of a whole generation of subaltern classes. And today we dissect the conditions of that failure because we just want the next revolutions, which will inevitably explode and explode, to not fail or make the same mistakes; that is, to advance one, ten or a thousand steps beyond that, what the Soviet Revolution, with its naive audacity, managed to advance.

100 years after the Soviet revolution, we continue to talk about it because we long for and need new revolutions; because new revolutions that dignify the human being as a universal, common, communitarian being will come. And those coming revolutions that touch the creative soul of the workers can not and should not be a repetition of what happened a century ago; they will have to be better than this, they will have to advance much more and exceed the limits that it faced, precisely because it failed and, in so doing, provided the next generations the intellectual and practical tools for not failing again, or, at least, not to do so by the same circumstances.

Translated by:  
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Ramiro Parodi  
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<sup>147</sup> On the course of Soviet Russia, see Chavance, B., op. cit. ; Bettelheim 1983; Chamberlin 2014; Sorlin, P., La Société Soviétique, 1917-1964. And, of course, the 7 books by E. H. Carr on the history of the Russian revolution.

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