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**No.7**

**Darko Suvin**

LESSONS FROM THE  
RUSSIAN REVOLUTION  
AND ITS FALLOUT:  
AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL  
APPROACH



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## LESSONS FROM THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND ITS FALLOUT: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACH <sup>★</sup>

- ★ Thanks are due in Uppsala to the university libraries' system and my assistant Ms Disa Hasselberg, as well as to the friends to whom the essay is dedicated. Also to Victor Stazzeri and many others, in particular on the "transnational capitalist class" to discussions with Prof. Jerry Harris. Last not least to the artist Emily Willoughby for allowing me to use her drawing of archaeopteryx.  
I write State always in caps and utopia without them. Unacknowledged translations are mine.  
A note on my term «Russian Revolution»: neither this term nor that of «October Revolution» are fully adequate. «October» suggests that there is a continuity to the revolutionary changes and events from that month in 1917 on, while my central point is that there are two foci and periods, Lenin's and Stalin's, between whom there is a radical discontinuity, although Stalinism attempts to deny this by a discourse using some aspects of Leninism. «Russian» backgrounds that this revolution happened also in the non-Russian parts of what became the USSR, and of course not all revolutionaries were Russian. Still, without the Russians and Russia this revolution would not have come about, while without the others it would have been much poorer but in my opinion centrally equivalent to the one that did come about. Therefore, I adopt the designation of Russian Revolution, while alerting the reader to the limits of this imperfect term.

- To Johan and Linnéa Anglemark in Uppsala, *sine quibus non*,  
and to Michael Löwy, a pioneer of rethinking -

«Only he who builds the future has a right to judge the past.»

Friedrich Nietzsche

«Les choses pourraient être autrement» [Things could be otherwise]

Raymond Ruyer

««We communists» [...]. Or, in other words: we, faithful to the event of October 1917.»

«If the failure does not entail the abandonment of the underlying hypothesis, it is simply the history of its justification.»

both by Alain Badiou



## PART 1: GUIDELINES FROM WALTER BENJAMIN

«Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it (the way it really was). It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger [...]. The danger threatens both the content [*Bestand*] of tradition and those who inherit it. For both, it is the self-same thing: the danger of turning into a tool of the ruling classes»

(Benjamin 1991<sup>1</sup>, *Thesis VI*, 695)

For the centenary of the Great October Revolution, I propose to examine some of its epistemological-cum-political implications and lessons for us today. I shall start from the lessons of the first, and probably still the most stimulating examination on how to understand and react to painful history: some relevant aspects of Walter Benjamin's so-called *Theses on the Concept of History*.<sup>2</sup> They will be, if need be, wrenched out of the author's 1939 preoccupations or idiosyncrasies

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1 I cite it from the original, the most accessible English version is «*Theses on the Philosophy of History*», in: Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books, 2007, 253-264.

2 This not quite finished work (possibly intended by Benjamin as his provisional testament, certainly taken as such) was left by him without a final title; the present one, to my mind unsatisfying, was suggested by Adorno, who is well known for being at important points unable or unwilling to honour his friend's horizon.

My treatment here neglects Benjamin's whole historiosophic obsession with the past and the claims it has upon us (the complex of *Eingedenken*, *tikkun* or righting of past wrongs). It is impressive and necessary but to my mind just as one-sided as Marx's exclusive orientation to the future. Our orientation should be to a present that constantly looks both to the past and to the future (cf. Löwy 2005, 78-79). I have approached this work for rather different ends in «Benjamins sogenannte Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen und der Stillstand der Geschichte: Epistemologie vs. Politik, Bild vs. Erzählung», in: *KultuRRevolution* no. 55/56 (2009), 73-87, with a much shorter English version as «The Arrested Moment in Benjamin's «Theses»: Epistemology vs. Politics, Image vs. Story», in: *Neohelicon* 28.1 (2001), 177-194. That essay makes a number of valid points but is today insufficient.

and into a new horizon of our needs. True, Benjamin is quite right in insisting that understanding past oppressions and defeats adds «hatred and the readiness for sacrifice» (ibid. *Thesis XII*, 700) to our movement. He is also right that we have to seize the opportunity as it «flits by» (ibid. *Thesis V*, 695); however, I would expand this from his focus on the true image of the past to seizing the day, that is taking by the forelock Kairos, the little god of the moment, in order to do today what the lessons, positive as well as negative, of the October Revolution may teach us. In this our more and more dire «moment of danger», which is also one of hope, I am more interested in his existential politics than in his critique of historiography.

## **1. On Redemption and Class Struggle**

At the root of Benjamin is the experience of life under the bourgeoisie as a Hell of stunted fulfilment and ongoing, wrenching psychophysical lesion. Hell is not only a repetition of everlasting senseless drudgery, he explains in his *Arcades Project* (Benjamin 2005, 106).<sup>3</sup> Material misery (often) and psychic misery and oppression (always) is the lot of people under the domination of commodities; even innovations are as a rule more of the same, hyped up as novelty for sale. At the historical moment of the *Theses* this was sharply intensified by the defeats of 1933-40: the lack of German working-class resistance to Nazism, the collapse of social-democracy and democratic liberalism (for ex., the Popular Front in France), the failure of official communist parties and pseudo-Leninist theory, and finally the Nazi-Soviet Pact were particularly clear instances and emblems for the general failure of 20th-Century anti-bourgeois and Modernist utopian projects – say, for Benjamin, from Surrealism to Lenin: «The experience of our gen-

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<sup>3</sup> Benjamin is citing Engels on the fate of worker under capitalism as Sisyphus.

eration: capitalism will die no natural death» (Benjamin 1972ff, vol. 5, 819). Today, after the collapse of State socialism – however partially socialist that was – this is also intensified by the oppressively closed horizons of inescapability, worsening within the speed-of-light transactions of financial capitalism, and buttressed by «a meticulous organisation of ideological stupidity» (Badiou 2009, 63). As Marlowe put it, «Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it» [*Doctor Faustus*]. Where people are wolves to people, often alas «Hell is other people» (Sartre): the rulers or those corrupted under their rule.

Benjamin's orientation for a way out of a hell getting increasingly hotter is centered on the category of *redemption* [*Erlösung*] that appears in Thesis II as «indissolubly bound with [the idea of happiness]». Quite rightly, he starts – as Marx did! – from persons (people) and their need for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (as the US Declaration of Independence put it). That is, he starts from the great eudemonic promises, first, of the bourgeois revolutions such as the US and French ones; and second, of the communist/socialist movements which proposed to pick up the fallen flag for the new historical subject of the proletariat, that would avoid the compromises and betrayals of the bourgeoisie. For Benjamin, happiness implied also reparation for the omnipresent desolation or bleakness at the outcome of history and dereliction [*Trostlosigkeit*] or abandonment determining the great majority of us.

The term of redemption was traditionally usurped by Judeo-Christian theology, but the concept came from the freeing of slaves and war prisoners, and Benjamin returns it to the secular horizon. What he keeps from the theological mode of arguing is its claim to absolute necessity and validity.<sup>4</sup> Redemption means in the later The-

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4 Benjamin asks that «nothing theological remains» [see the parable of the blotting paper that wishes there were no ink outside of it] (Benjamin 1972ff, vol. 1, 1235, also Benjamin 2002, 471). The text does not explicate what is then for him the obviously important use of theology. But from the context and his other writing, we

ses (most clearly in Benjamin 1991, *Thesis IV*, 694) the liberation of the oppressed: equally of the defeated insurrectionaries throughout the ages – say, from Spartacus to 1848 and to his day – and of the huge masses suffering through untold generations from the consequences of the defeat: «So long as the sufferings of a single human being are forgotten there can be no deliverance» (Löwy 2005, 34). This liberation is consubstantial with a historical revolution (leaving aside here the means by which it is achieved and the violence accompanying it, to begin with dictated by the ruling enemy): a radical transformation of material life and moral relationships between people.

How could this absolute necessity become also realistically possible? Because each generation has, in Benjamin's Thesis II, «a weak messianic power [*Kraft*, better: force] [...]». However, the Messiah is here neither an individual Superman nor sent by God: as in Marx, it is *we*, the oppressed humanity, who are potentially our own liberators – if we understand why our lives are going so badly and band together to act upon it. The Messiah is a figural abbreviation for the *subject-force* bringing about the end of the old world of class

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can conclude that the theological concentration on God, in particular on God as the key to human history, is given up. Thus what remains usable seems to necessarily contain the following aspects:

- ★ The absoluteness & imperturbability of claims upon the Subject's experiential and historical orientation, analogous to the messianic horizon as a radical refusal of existing relations.
- ★ The Jewish insistence on seizing the moment of the Messiah's arrival as interruption & end of all history of sufferings so far – though I much doubt that this can be, as Benjamin implies, coupled with some kind of redemption of all those wrongs and sufferings (as did Horkheimer, cf. Benjamin 1972ff, vol. 2, 1331-1340);
- ★ A close alliance with lay thinking & revolutionary action, the «translation [Überführung] of [...] theological ways of thinking [...] into Marxist perspectives» (Scholem 1975, 259).

Benjamin's fertile use of theological categories allows him to speak about the absolutely necessary salvation, including the apocalyptic «destructive forces» it may awaken (Benjamin 1972ff, 1246). The «estrangement» by way of partly theological semantics was especially useful in the period of strong dogmatic rigidity within Stalinist Marxism.

history and the instauration of a classless society (see Benjamin's preparatory notes on the «messianic world» in Benjamin 1972ff, vol. 1, 1232-1245). With the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*, and with all consistent Marxians, Benjamin calls such action *class struggle* (*from below*, we should add, since class struggle from above happens unceasingly). The Messiah story was in the Jewish version thoroughly thisworldly, and even the Christian kidnapped version formulates this possibility of a utopian future as the victory over Antichrist (Benjamin 1991, *Thesis VI*, 695). As he knew, the dice of power are loaded against liberation, but the October Revolution and its aftermath show us, despite all, that in particular circumstances it was possible. Who would have in 1750 thought the French Revolution was possible, or in 1900 that Fascism was possible?! And yet they were.

Within Marx's arsenal, class struggle was coupled with and limited by the development of productive forces of any particular society. Both are in constant feedback, yet as of the Second Industrial Revolution (electricity and Fordism), which has lifted the level of productive forces so that potentially every person on Earth could have enough to decently survive, class struggle – including wars – has grown into the *strategic dominant* for understanding history. For Benjamin, here strongly influenced by Brecht, the plebeian rebels have allies in emotional-cum-cognitive secret resources:

«Class struggle, which for a historian schooled in Marx is always in evidence, is a fight for the crude and material things without which there are no refined and spiritual things. But these latter things are not present in class struggle as a vision of spoils that fall to the victor. They are alive in this struggle as confidence, courage, humour, cunning, and steadfastness [...]. They always call into question every victory, past and present, of the rulers [...].» (Benjamin 1991, *Thesis IV*, 694).

What can we draw from this first section for understanding the October Revolution today? My first Benjaminian guidelines are:

1. The imperative of capitalism is «get a profit and enrich yourself.» The imperative of communism is «practice solidarity and emancipate yourself.»
2. Redemption or salvation of the great majority of exploited, oppressed, and suffering people is absolutely necessary and (with difficulty) possible.
3. It can come about by organised class struggle from below, based on not only indignation but also much study and organising, not only of courage and cunning but also of confidence, humour, and fortitude. Paradoxically, they may win over explosives (by placing their explosives better): «In other words, hardness must lose the day» (Brecht 1976, 314-316).

## 2. On the State of Emergency and Fascism



Benjamin is not only at his most clairvoyant but also nearest to us today (alas) when he anchors his concern in the need to know how to counteract fascism, the overriding need of a stance and epistemological approach from which fascism can be comprehended and practically fought:

«The traditions of the oppressed teach us that the «state of emergency» [*Ausnahmezustand*] in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that accords with this insight. Then we will clearly see that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against fascism.» (Benjamin 1991, *Thesis VIII*, 697).

This means that today we must learn how to cope with both the present financial capitalism gone mad and its not so slow involution toward fascism (cf. Suvin 2017, 259-302). We are witnessing in fact a worldwide process of *creeping fascism*, made possible and abetted by the crisis of financial capitalism. The question is, as Rastko Močnik told us, not whether fascism is on the agenda, but «how much fascism» (openly admitted or hypocritically masked) in any particular time and place will be welcome to the rulers and not opposed strongly enough by the oppressed.

The depth economic reason for this is that capitalism must, on penalty of disappearing, practise an unceasing «primitive accumulation» by dispossessing and plundering other places, times, human groups and ecological environments. Today this means trumping economic competition through the market by more and more overtly violent competition through military destruction, a corollary to this being replacement of the already toothless and façade parliamentarism with more and more dictatorial measures, such as the «war against terrorism» in USA and France. The common denominator of both is overt warfare and official murderous violence on a mass scale, in which both these countries are prominently engaged. Even in regions where war is carefully kept out of sight, there is obvious and gnawing insecurity, with erupting hotbeds of violence, particularly in the gun-crazy USA. Similarly militaristic and inimical to civil coexistence is the «defence against migrants» in USA and Europe. The Nazi project was an untranscended machine for enforcing a new primitive accumulation for German capital and State and necessarily remains its paragon, so that the depth economic aims remain unchanged, though in a different (non-Fascist and gradual) mode.

We must conclude with our great ancestors from the antifascist times (Benjamin, Brecht, Marcuse, Bloch and many more) that a tendency to fascism flows out of the very centre of capitalism: whenever its contradictions ripen, it is a possible and proven way out. Cap-

italism, we now see, will *always and necessarily resort to war* when its economy is in insoluble trouble (cf. Suvin 2006, 115-145). This turn entails rampant militarisation of everyday life, hugely strengthening ruling class command as well as increasing anxiety and intolerance. War as the father of all things in the South and East of the globe means in the richer North and West the hollowing out of *citizenship*. The unceasing, capillary, and brutal plundering of people and habitats, mind whorls, and whole countries if not continents, by means of terrorist warfare bolstered by efficient perpetual emotional machines (Boal et al. 2005, chapter «Permanent War», 78-107), brings about a very serious corruption of civic life. It results from of the economic and psychological onslaught of the death-oriented military-financial complex, fully integrated with mass communications (Dean 2012, 122-133) and increasingly with the academy. *Violence* enters into the pores of everyday life and the whole *Lebenswelt*.

This cancer works at erasing the great bourgeois revolutionary concept and practice of citizenship, the *citoyen*. This was a horizon of friendly relations between State and democracy from below, without which there is no possibility of developing socialism, communism or any other movement towards social justice. The economic master of the State today (capitalism) needs «weak citizenship», a nation without the *citoyen*, a «social texture [...] of loosely attached consumer subjects» constantly bombarded by «idiot fashions and panics and image motifs» (Boal et al. 2005, 21 and passim). On the Nazi model, the State grows into «a gigantic monopolistic combine» (ibid. 225), today synchronised with other capitalist international and power combines, in relation to all of which the individual is pushed into the position of an atomised member of the mass, reduced to self-interest, and thus easily manipulated and disciplined by quasi-legal terror and by indoctrination of his superiority to other groups of individuals – say immigrants.

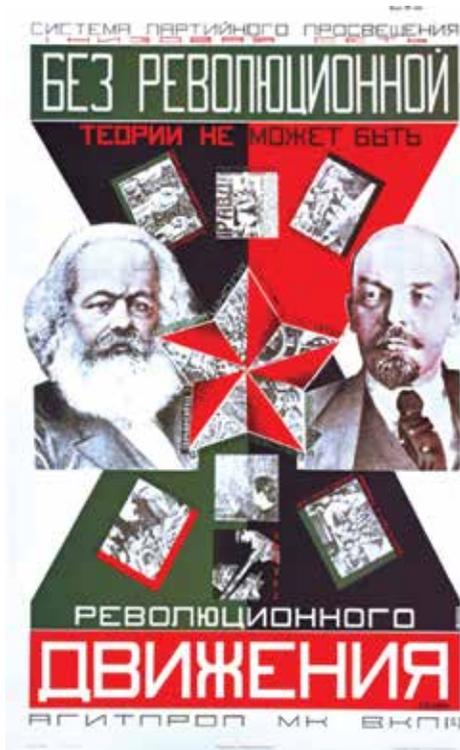
We should be quite clear about the stark dilemma posed to any life worth living by the growing domination of warfare and fascistisation. It was formulated (not by chance, on the lesson of the First World War) by Luxemburg's slogan «socialism or barbarism». In a radically Benjaminian fashion, it is the suspicion that perhaps the defeat of Lenin's emancipatory and plebeian anti-war endeavour does mean a century or more of the Iron Heel, leaving an impoverished planet and impoverished human horizons to all that may come after it. That would finally mean that Marx's spectrum of class social formations would not only have a non-progressivist beginning in the «Asian mode» but also a very non-progressivist ending in the presently returning fascist-type of production relationships melding and exasperating many of the worst traits of all previous societies. Freud's death instinct, formulated by him in 1920 in good part because of World War traumas, is perhaps stronger than many of us suspected. Death, the Thanatos option, is the ultimate object and hidden purpose (*telos*) of alienated human subjects in capitalist individualism, in both war and fascism: the Left has much underestimated the hyena-like, savage ferocity of the imperialist ruling classes. Marx told us so, almost two centuries ago: self-renunciation, «the renunciation of life and of all human needs, is its principal thesis» [of such political economy, the science of wealth] (Marx/Engels 1975-1978, vol. 3, 309).

So what are the obstacles that prevent the working people – after all, a 90%-plus majority in all nations of the world – from counteracting this strong drift of our masters towards violently enforced intensification of exploitation and oppression? Probably many, but beside our ideological blinkers Benjamin speaks at that particular moment about one of the weightiest: the conformism and plain betrayal, “the servile alignment into an uncontrollable [power] machine” of the political parties supposed to represent them (Benjamin 1991, *Thesis X-XI*, 698-699). A third obstacle is today the widespread disillusionment engendered both by capitalist propaganda and the real errors of

the socialist/communist parties that led to the downfall of USSR and Yugoslavia (and in China or Vietnam to the compromise of leaving political power to such parties as long as they carry out the capitalist program in their own dictatorial way).

My final Benjaminian guidelines are then:

- 4.** We have to read and apply properly one of richest among his puns, *Ausnahmezustand*, in the above citation. For it means both an «exceptional» (not normal) state of affairs and, more restrictedly, the «state of emergency» proclaimed in a society that suspends ordinary laws and jurisprudence in favour of its survival. He pleads for turning the exceptional exploitation and oppression that has for decades grown into a seamless norm into an emergency from below. This emergency would be antifascist but also anti-capitalist. A strategic rule: you cannot have one without the other.
- 5.** Ways have to be found to reprimatinate political movements and parties that would be both efficient and incorruptible. There is no alternative.
- 6.** As Adorno somewhere put it, pessimistically varying Marx, the absence of theory is also a material force when it grips the masses. Since in however modified and wide a sense we still need a radical change of political power and mode of production, which used to be called revolution, therefore we have to revive the classical Marxian realisation, in the paraphrase that «without a radical theory there can be no radical movement».



Soviet poster  
«Without a revolutionary  
theory there can be no  
revolutionary movement»  
(Lenin)

Let us remember these guidelines for the task at hand, to grasp how we should be considering the October, or better the huge Russian Revolution after 1917.



«Sapere aude!» (Dare to know!)

Immanuel Kant

«In truth, history does not belong to us, we belong to it.»

Hans Georg Gadamer

«The beginnings are measured by the later ensuing beginnings (*re-commencements*) they allow.»

Alain Badiou

## **0. Approach**

What is or are the essential things to learn today, 100 years after it started, from the Russian Revolution? Yes, it was then betrayed, and eventually imploded. Yet how are we to identify for a reconsideration here and now of its import and importance Hegel's «what is essential» (Hegel 1959, section 3.0) or Wittgenstein essential rule/s of any linguistic or other game (Wittgenstein 1988, 450)?

First, *what is a revolution?* Theda Skocpol defines revolutions as a radical and rapid transformation of «a society's State and class structures accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below [...]. [In it] societal structural change [coincides] with class upheaval; and [...] political with social transformation» (Skocpol 2007 [1979] 4-5).

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5 My approach to the Russian Revolution is guided, first, by the older writings by E.H. Carr, Isaac Deutscher, Victor Serge, Charles Bettelheim, Moshe Lewin, Robert C. Tucker, and Stephen F. Cohen, then in *Russia* by Roy Medvedev; and second, by the newer sources cited.

I have also used insights arrived at in my essays (Suvin 2013), much informed by the writers cited in it. Though I dislike god-like capital letters and nominations, I could not escape using «Party» for the Russian communist party (bolsheviks), and its mutation, real or imagined, later.

This is for me too narrow. I would like my ideal definition to include at least four more matters:

- ★ to begin with, the cultural-cum-symbolic factor of lived existence, comporting a horizon of radical change in human relationships to each other and to the world;
- ★ second, some specification of situational prerequisites, such as Lenin's pithy summary that it occurs when the ruling classes *cannot* go on «in the old way» and the ruled classes *do not want to* (Lenin 1974 [1964], vol. 21, 213);
- ★ third, that since the 1790s, revolutions are exportable and international, and so is (in spades) their putting down;
- ★ and fourth, an argument why a class-based revolt *from above*, mobilising certain classes from below but reinforcing existing relationships of production – such as the Nazi power – does not qualify for a revolution.

This final matter would lead us to consider as a key the central mode of production, that is, capitalism (which fascist revolutions reinforce and communist ones at least attempt to do away with). However, Skocpol might be a useful beginning; and we should use this inquiry to see how to redefine the Russian Revolution at the end.

Further, how do we delimit the duration of this Russian revolution? As Steinberg notes, researchers use most disparate limits for given purposes. My purpose is to find the «essence» of the ensuing socio-political change in USSR before it jelled into final stasis, and its fallout for us today. Therefore, we cannot be confined either to February to October 1917 (the Bolsheviks' coming to power) or any such brief span. Other historiographic favourites all begin in 1917 and then last: a) to 1921, but I would think this was the military phase only; b) to 1928-29: this includes NEP and the struggle for power in the State, up to the onset of full Stalinism; or c) to 1938: this includes industri-

alisation, rural collectivisation, and the big waves of Stalinist terror. Clearly, we need this longest alternative, and then to add World War 2 as the capstone where a certain kind of truth came out.

## 1. Hypothesis: The Discontinuity



My initial thesis is that Lenin's strategy in 1917-18 was to combine full centralisation and discipline in the Party and its leadership with full democracy from below for the soldiers, workers, and peasants, also with the equality and sovereignty of all peoples in the Russian empire, organised in their own direct-democracy «councils» [soviets], uniting executive, legislative, and judicial power. To further and channel plebeian democracy, the Bolsheviks favoured workers' control, confiscation of non-peasant land, soldier election of officers, national self-determination up to the possibility of separation, and of course a legal system of radical citizen equality (on its strength they could, to my mind, well argue that the Constituent Assembly was, after its long process of election, unrepresentative when it convened). This parallelism of interacting forces, *with Bolsheviks ruling but responsive to and representative of the plebeian upsurge*, would give a both very efficient and very democratic result, and would provide a solid basis for rapid development of woefully backward productive forces. This is what Lenin meant by «revolutionary organisation» and encapsulated in his famous formula «Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country», where the components stand for a full panoply of political and economic agencies in order that a highly developed industrial democracy might be set up, in ten years or more (Lenin 1974 [1966], vol. 31, 419). He then committed, I believe, a bad mistake by prising unity above democracy and persuading the 1921 Party Congress to ban factions, which logically led a few years later (after the Left SRs reverted to terror assassinations against Bolshevik

rule) to banning all other parties. Lenin's original, sincerely democratic centralism became in practice simply centralism, finally issuing after 1928 in a full autocracy of Stalin and his top circle.

Lenin's Marxism was «Fordist», that is constructivist, on the model of a huge factory or construction site in which the show can be run only by the supervisory engineer – who knows best, because s/he has been trained for it, how to put into effect a blueprint, correcting it whenever needed. However, his «democratic centralism» does add a plan, brought about by means of an open debate from below and changeable through that debate (cf. Bourdet 1970), to the self-will of a leadership from above. Lenin himself, having revisited dialectics during World War 1, corrected his early phase of rigid positivism by creating heretical theories on the possibility and necessity of a proletarian revolution in Russia. Furthermore, he adopted a long-range horizon identical to the anarchist refusal of the State. His unsurpassed *State and Revolution* posits, in strict accordance with the Marx after 1871, a full structuration from below upwards – a republic of federated soviets (councils) and a universal civic militia instead of the army and police. This is predicated upon a future proletarian society, when a giant development of productivity and a «tremendous abundance and variety of political forms» (Lenin 1974 [1964], vol. 25, 418) will flower, with a State that is not a dominant apparatus, and – importantly – the subordination of the party as educator to such historical class aims. It remained an «untried communism, [...] envisaging not only the liberation of the worker from the boss and of the subaltern from the system's fetishes, but the liberation of people from the State» (Cortesi 2010, 224-225, 227, and 235). Amid savage warfare and economic chaos, this program was torpedoed, and Lenin had to insist on full discipline and terror. However, he changed to full advocacy of NEP as soon as it ended.



Boris M. Kustodiev, *The Bolshevik* (1920)

All of this changed in and after the cruel, bitter, and destructive all-out Civil War of almost three years, where utopia met the final reason of the rulers, naked violence. To the ca. 2.7 million dead in the World War 3 million were added in the Civil War, untold more millions were left with lifelong physical and psychical scars, homeless, and impoverished. Russia was, said Lenin, like a man «beaten to within an inch of his life; the beating had gone on for seven years, and it's a mercy she can hobble about on crutches!» (Lenin 1973 [1965], vol. 32, 224). Civil industrial production was 20% of the pre-war level, that is, near zero. In the fury of a bloody and exhausting war for survival, the working class and much of the intelligentsia were in good part destroyed physically or by dispersion, and a smaller part of both was absorbed into various levels of the new rulers; the whole democratic component had been shunted aside for immediate brutal measures of defence and warfare. In the «vicious affair [of Civil War, b]oth sides

practiced mass incarceration, summary executions, hostage taking, and other forms of «mass terror» against suspected enemies.» But the upshot within the victors, both for Trotsky and Stalin, was «a willing embrace of violence and coercion as a means to remake the world» (Steinberg 2017, 98-99) – an eschatological cruelty, akin to deep religious currents and resentments within the people (cf. the first-hand testimony of Rakovsky 1928, also Tucker 1974, 55-63). Trotsky later changed, Stalin did not.

In sum, as Robert Tucker has convincingly argued in the 1970s, the Civil War «militarised the revolutionary political culture of the Bolshevik political movement», favouring «readiness to resort to coercion, rule by administrative fiat, centralised administration, [and] summary justice», and leading to an ethos of «cruelty, fanaticism, and absolute intolerance of those who thought differently» (Tucker 1977, 91-92, and cf. Fitzpatrick 1985, 67-70 and 73). Freedom of the press and information, envisaged by Lenin in 1917 (Lenin 1977 [1964], vol. 26, 285), would be suicide in a civil war, he realised (cf. Lih 2011, 171), but the tradition of muzzling it continued in peacetime. The war victors had to rule firmly, whatever the discontent from below, when the only alternative was total chaos, hunger, and further warfare. Many sincerely believed the violence was to end all violence. Many more, in the top echelons of «Stalin’s team» (cf. Fitzpatrick 2015) and especially in the rapidly rising empire of the secret police replacing Lenin’s Cheka, came to like and indeed revel in such «bone-breaking» behaviour (Stalin’s term). In practice, this meant a sea-change in the Bolshevik movement and party: its full-scale *etatisation*, with an eventually central role for coercion and bureaucratic oligarchy.<sup>6</sup> Coming on top of drastic regimentation and penury used by all European States since 1914 to mobilise their economies for a total warfare – most notably Ludendorff’s «war socialism» – this Russian «war communism»

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<sup>6</sup> I have surveyed the debates inside Russia, without Trotsky (Suvin 2014), and later in Yugoslavia, concluding the term of bureaucracy obfuscates more than it enlightens.

left a permanent imprint on future Soviet politics, from the «dekulakisation» to the cyclical orgies of mega-liquidations, and cancelled out Lenin's initial horizon.

Thus, as against Western Kremlinology (and Stalinist hagiography) I agree with the growing conviction from Tucker to Lih that there is a *discontinuity* between the horizons of Lenin and Stalin. Both were subjected to relentless assaults from the capitalist world, with maximal violence and ruthlessness. Lenin was prepared to use violent dictatorship when indispensable to save revolutionary rule but expected plebeian classes to ally and use direct democracy through the soviets, so that the State apparatus could wither (see his *State* as discussed above). Stalin revelled in violence and opined the «class» struggle is intensifying, so that the State apparatus must also grow. Lenin favoured open discussions in the Party (except in what he, probably with exaggeration, felt was the emergency of 1921) and fully democratic elections from below to all governing bodies; Stalin both falsified information and restricted it on a «need to know basis», bringing back vast zones of State secrets and opacity, and *de facto* replaced elections by nomination from above (that is, by his own organisational apparatus).

## 2. Upshot; and a Dilemma



In the USSR from 1917 to 1929, as well as in key periods of other revolutions, the communist party was a two-headed Janus, which performed some extremely significant acts of emancipation and then of enslavement (a general argument is in Suvin 2015, 147-155). The black face of Janus is mostly represented by Stalin, whose absolute power can be traced back to 1928/29. Very soon, at the center of power was no longer any party but the secret police and the high nuclei of State administration, united in and under the authority of Stalin.

The Stalinist waves of village collectivisation, Party and then general population purges led to millions of arrested and displaced as well as to wholesale assassination of the whole Old Bolshevik generation, except for the ruling team, and to permanent paranoia against anybody who could become a potential opponent. In this period the feedback between leaders and plebeian democracy of original Leninism turned into the Stalinist oligarchic oppression of the people, supported by harsh tactical maneuvers devoid of any principle (what Marx called *begriffslos*) except keeping State power. At the end of his life, Lenin in part sensed this but could do little about it (cf. Lewin 1970, Ali 2017, 152 and 312-324).

The collectivisation of village production resulted in a stalemate: on the one hand, the cities were fed, on the other, given insufficient mechanisation, the production was low and inefficient, so that it needed permanent imports of food. However, the price of breaking the peasants as a class with own interests was heavy: it was a new serfdom for the majority who did not manage to escape into cities, and it underlay a return to conservative order. The workers who survived the Civil War were dispossessed of political power and subject to growing exploitation and pressures, while maybe 10-15% of them were assumed into the lower and middle ranks of the oligarchy (cf. Filtzer ch. 1, 4, and *passim*). Since real wage fell between 1928 and 1932 to below half and then crept up a bit so that it was in 1940 estimated to be about half of the 1928 one (*ibid.* 7 and 91), the rate of exploitation was roughly doubled. Added to this was a huge slave labour sector run by the secret police, mostly in horrendous concentration camps.

What kind of social system actually came about under his rule is not fully clear: it was an improvised, historically unique monster melding disparate strands from Tsarism to Fordism, revolutionary dynamics and reactionary patriarchalism, within a politics of fear and anxiety, in fact of State terror.<sup>7</sup> It was clearly based on violent

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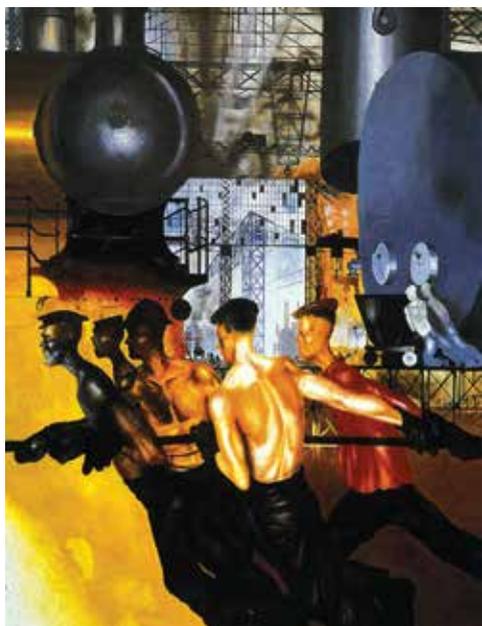
<sup>7</sup> To understand this deep-sea monster, it would to my mind be mandatory to elaborate upon Trotsky's «law of combined development» after a revolution in backward countries; see my section 3.

primitive accumulation of capital through exploitation of the working population, and especially of the peasantry, by a relatively small oligarchy: «Stalinism as revolution from above was a State-building process, the construction of a powerful, highly centralised, bureaucratic, military-industrial Soviet Russian State» (Tucker 1977, 95). It ruled within a permanent, if hypocritically undeclared, martial law.

But for all the huge waste of people and materials (cf. Rakovsky 1981 and Filtzer 1986) the achievements were also gigantic, as suggested by 9 million people swarming between 1926 and 1939 from the villages to cities and industrial labour: the social support for Stalinism came from their upwardly mobile strata, with fringes from the petty bourgeoisie and some newly arrived workers (out of an upper class of perhaps slightly more than 1 million people, ca. one-fifth had in 1928 been workers – Fitzpatrick 1928, 128 and 133). The regime's «social mandate» or legitimation was – as later in Yugoslavia and China – the guarantee of a secure working place and basic social services for the masses of urbanised peasants, including education as the main road to social advancement. Yet its rigid forms of production relations could finally not compete with the development of the production forces in capitalism, especially after the 1950s, and they perished in that duel.

Nonetheless: the stubborn fact remains that – primarily because everybody in the USSR expected a bad war sooner or later – Tsar Koba the Terrible managed to build a quite non-socialist collectivist industrialism within the huge country, centred on heavy industry and railways, without which Hitler would have taken Europe (Ali 2017, 238): a world-historical accomplishment. There is no question today but that Stalinism was a highly odious system, but was it unavoidable then? Was there *an alternative way* of industrialising that would have been equally or indeed more effective, but would not have led from Lenin's master plan of an alliance between city workers and peasantry – however reluctant on the latter side – to

a police State with millions of victims after 1928? Lenin had believed that any massive use of violence to impose collective production quickly on the peasantry was «a *bezobrazie*, a ridiculous outrage» (Lih 2011, 203), and proposed exemplary cooperatives, cultural education especially of women, and more industrial goods to lure peasants. Bukharin was in favour of this way, but he was also ready for a «tor-toise pace» of industrialisation based on rising living standard (see his biographer Stephen Cohen 2009, xxii and passim, and Tucker 1974, 398-399). If ruling firmly [*tvërdaiia vlast'*] – and especially if a new qualitative leap in productive organisation is envisaged, as Stalin did – is necessarily backed up by violence as the final instance of power, how much violence was needed and justified? Surely, qualitatively less than Stalin needed and liked. Would that have accomplished sufficient heavy industrialisation by 1941? We do not know.



Yury I. Pimenov, *Go with Heavy Industry!* (1928)

The first conclusion from the Russian Revolution is then that it was an event of major importance that fashioned the whole «short 20th Century», on a par with the World Wars, the burgeoning of technology, and the rise of fascism. It created an extreme aporia of achievements vs. costs: both were titanic. To my mind, its central world-political significance and importance was the defeat of Nazism.

### **3. Evaluation; The Archaeopteryx**



Both pragmatically and ideologically, the immediate context of the Russian Revolution is over. However, its implications and lessons are not. How can we envisage them?

#### **3.0. Axiom, and Three Presuppositions**

Each and every position or stance in life, thus in history and historiography, has a string or nest of presuppositions. The general and central, not further argued presuppositions are called axioms. What could be our axioms as we survey the fall-out of the great Russian Revolution? A diagnosis is always in feedback with a prognosis; the necessary permanence of hope is shot through with smaller or huger disappointments. The «factual truths» are subject to the veto-power of our sources as we come to digest them and to our interpretation and reconstruction: not only is any fact defined only from a certain point of view (which therefore ought to be clearly stated), but the «fact's» frozen objectness is returned to its original nature as event with every addition of new «facts». As far back as Droysen, historiography understood that «facts ought to be conceived in the light of the significance that they acquire through their effects» (Droysen 1967, 133-134).

My axiom stems from Hegel: «Without judgment [*Urteil*] history loses interest [...]. Any proper historiography must know what is essential; it takes a position [*ergreift Partei*] in favour of the essential and holds on to [*hält fest*] what relates to that» (Hegel 1959, 135, 282). Thus: what is *das Wesentliche*, the essential here for us? Or more modestly, some first presuppositions to envisage lessons for us today?

First, we must re-emphasise *teleology* or *finality*, what is a process tending to, the reintroduction of which seems characteristic for the modern concept of nature (cf. Collingwood 1945, 13 and passim). It is no longer a theist teleology, with Aristotle's conscious purpose somehow infused from above, but one based on analogy with evolutionary historical processes; that is, the new cognitive paradigm is based on the time of long-duration history. As opposed to Aristotle's final cause in his finished world that excluded radical novelty, the potential may often elicit existence from the actual. Processual potentiality is ontologically before actuality, which remains as its *historical condition* (Grene 1966, 250). Thus time entails also negativity, what is not yet AND what may or may not be: being is born out of Nietzsche's ocean of non-being. Teleological concepts, say of germination in plants, «regulate the biologist's choice of data and of problems» and permit full, always finalised description; insofar as taxonomy depends on recognition of types, teleological concepts are also *operational* and they may be explanatory (ibid. 236-238). Past and present in a way depend on future, A. N. Whitehead's «the lure of form as yet unrealized», and lived time is a pull between protension and facticity (ibid. 245; see much more in Bloch 1975, 345-349 and passim, and Suvin 2012, 261-307); matter is then both the last resistance to and the necessary support for form (Grene 1966, 247-249). To give an example: the telos or end of *flying* in birds includes the development of wings and refashioning of the entire body (muscles, nerves, circulation), it shapes the whole physiology. Its lower level specifies conditions of possibility towards a more highly organized level of events, while the

higher ends or reasons – here of flying – are principles of organization or a norm for the lower. However, if the lower level conditions grow restrictive, the end may be aborted (cf. *ibid.* 233-234). In sum, the use of wings conquered for life a new range of ecological niches into which it became possible to expand.

Therefore, second, history is *feasible* [*machbar*], it can be radically and at times quickly remade by huge collective forces stemming from people and their organisations. The flip side of this is that the two overwhelming factors of technological power and mass organisation have made history *totalising* – the principal new influence determining our lay horoscope, a superpower or new divinity, today's face of Destiny. As in all previous epochs, it exalts many millions of individuals and rides roughshod over and through at least as many. There are long periods of stagnation, but there are also sudden *accelerations* and dynamic breaks or jumps (see Adams 2008). The generation of the Russian revolution – and my generation of World War 2 – lived through half a dozen politico-existential epochs each. The young communist put it brilliantly:

«Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind» (Marx/Engels 1975-1978, vol. 6, 487).

Third, feasibility does not at all mean carrying anything out with blueprint precision. Mass human affairs are messy parallelograms of forces, not fully calculable and without a sure result. Human affairs pos-

sess a certain degree of *freedom*, their certainties are at best probable and statistical. They do have long-term economic and psychological constants that as a rule win out – such as the «cultural», that is, political and ideological backwardness of Russia – but also minority, even single actors that can prevail in a shorter run (had Lenin been imprisoned or killed in 1917, there would have certainly been no October Revolution). One attempts to take into account the best probability, and then commits oneself: *on s'engage, et puis on voit*, said Napoleon of his battles (though he made sure his artillery was on the highest hill). The present may be very dark, but the future is open.

In short, this new deity is not omnipotent. It depends on or emanates from all of us. At some privileged points (Prigoginian cusps) a few of us – if strenuously prepared throughout the stagnant epoch – can have a disproportionate weight. Again, I do not know of any better formulation than Marx's: «People make their own history but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past» (Marx 1975-1978, vol. 11, 103).

### **3.1. The USSR as Archaeopteryx**

The archaeopteryx was a raven-sized transition between small dinosaur and bird whose fossil was found in the 1860s in Germany and brilliantly confirmed Darwin, though at the cost of some rethinking about transitions between animal realms. It had feathers, wings, hollow bones, a wishbone, and reduced fingers as modern birds do, yet it was a carnivore. From the ferocious dinosaurs, it retained sharp teeth, a long bony tail, belly ribs, and not least clawed fingers with a curved killing-claw on the second toe of each foot, which could be held high off the ground to keep the tips sharp and ready for action. It is likely that it could fly; probably, it flapped over

a short distance, but it may well have ran, leaped, glided, and flapped all in the same day. It might have had a primitive metabolism generating body heat on its own, but its metabolic system probably was not as fine-tuned as warm-blooded animals later, so it had a slower growth rate than most birds. There is a category quarrel in archeo-zoology whether it wasn't after all still a small dinosaur, but the most recent study has restored its status as a «basal bird»; further species of this transitional nature have been found since in China.<sup>8</sup>



Archaeopteryx (drawn by Emily A. Willoughby)<sup>9</sup>

To anybody who knows Trotsky's hypothesis, as expanded by Moshe Lewin (Lewin 1985) and later by Michael Löwy (Löwy 1981), of a «combined and uneven development» of backward countries in a socialist revolution, this is an almost perfect analogy for the USSR.

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8 <https://www.livescience.com/24745-archaeopteryx.html>; <http://ucmp.berkeley.edu/diapsids/birds/archaeopteryx.html>; <http://www.newdinosaurs.com/archaeopteryx/>

9 <https://emilywilloughby.com/gallery/paleoart/archaeopteryx>

In this approach, the revolution leads to a coexistence and reciprocal maiming between the most advanced communist forms and the huge queue of vastly backward patriarchal, petty-capitalist, and autocratic relationships between people. While the latter get pulled vertiginously forward, they lead to the most disparate contaminations that pull backwards the socialist relations of equality and fraternity, not to mention liberty. My main conclusion from studying the milder case of Yugoslavia (Suvin 2014) is that using the State as a direct administrator of economy, as well as militarist command circumventing written law as a general method, ensures the victory of the backwards pull by stifling self-government and democratic initiative from below. A struggle for liberating relationships within the industrial and other direct production cannot properly develop without a discussion that would be at least as free as in once true parliamentary capitalism – or in USSR 1920-26, or in Yugoslavia 1955-65, or in Cuba 1961-64.

Thus, was the USSR oligarchic rule a collective State capitalism, a budding socialism (communism) bent by security needs, or a third, yet unknown mixture or species? As Lenin told us, various economic bases for such identifications were present in 1921 Russia.<sup>10</sup> The most reasonable conclusion is that it was a shifting jostle and contamination of all these possibilities; still, the «dominants» (Mao's «dominant contradiction», Mao 1968, 51-59, see also on «contradiction within the people», 79-133) allow us to differentiate it into periods or phases. Roughly, for my present purposes, they would be:

- ★ 1918-21, «War Communism», rule of Party, victory in Civil War, total devastation of country;
- ★ 1921-28, NEP, slow economic recovery, intra-Party fights

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10 In this remarkable speech, Lenin posited that in 1918 Russia the following «socio-economic structures» existed: 1. patriarchal, i.e., to a considerable extent natural, peasant farming; 2. small commodity production (this includes the majority of those peasants who sell their grain); 3. private capitalism; 4. state capitalism; 5. socialism (Lenin 1973 [1965], vol. 32, 214-228). To his mind, this was also a progression in usefulness, so that he favoured more State capitalism as against the hunger-producing small commodity production.

with steady rise of Stalin, the «original sin» (Moshe Lewin) of 1921 ban on factions, nobody fully dominant;

★ 1928-32, Stalin dominant, rams through village collectivisation with iron hand and unnecessary magnification of violence, rise of secret police;

★ 1934-41, full Stalinism, industrialisation, destruction of 1917-28 Bolshevik top, domination of secret police.

Let us use the cognitive potentials of the analogy between archaeopteryx (incipient flight that could overcome gravity) and the Russian Revolution and its upshot (incipient leap to the realm of freedom that could overcome class society). The analogies have a limit, but go far enough to make us realise that evolution lasts long, that «leaps» between central categories or realms of being – as we understand it and them – can be abortive and monstrous, and last not least that nature (and society as a part of nature) is prodigal with lives and failures, and that nevertheless its process is ongoing and open-ended.

Whatever the USSR might have been, surely it was an early and in an evolutionary sense unsatisfactory entity. However, it remains in many ways hugely suggestive regarding both what to inherit (the October Revolution itself and the original plebeian democracy) and what to avoid (the violent methods and autocracy of Stalinism).

## **4. A Few Consequences Here and Now**



### **4.1. In Theory**

It follows from all above that our horizon, a movement toward which is more and more imperative, remains a frontal enmity against capitalist immiseration and violence – where the invisible hand of the market is accompanied by a very visible fist – which was usually called

a revolution. What do the lessons of the «long» Russian Revolution add to this? I shall here only briefly summarise arguments and desiderata I earlier contributed to this matter (Suvin 2013, Suvin 2016(a), Suvin 2016(b)) and envisage a vector to approach and advance from it. For, as this essay also shows, we are today in a deep defeat. The breakdown of the radical Left around 1990 was not only a politico-economical but also an ideological and philosophical breakdown: the entire «scientific paradigm» of Marxism from Engels to the New Left stood convicted of having wrongly understood what it thought it understood. This was not fully fair but it did fit the politically most relevant, dominant beliefs of that paradigm, bound up with the existence and value of the USSR. Now *the horizon too needs reformulation*: this is our first task. First of all, we need to clean our eyeglasses.

This can be done under two conditions. *In theory*, this means first of all we must relinquish neither Marx nor the lessons – for better or worse – from the history of Marxism and socialism/communism. This includes both the final goal (as the *Communist Manifesto* has it, «an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all» – and vice versa) and the main mediation, that is, the role and profile of the avant-garde party. Let us rephrase his perhaps somewhat too famous *11th Thesis on Feuerbach* as «the Marxists have interpreted Marx; the point is to change him» – while preserving his constant emancipatory and epistemological horizon. The time has passed for what Freud elegantly called *Trauerarbeit*, a psychological working-through and working-out of the mourning after the death of a person important and dear to us, so that we could bear the loss.

Marx drew the lesson of the failed French 1848-50 revolution as follows:

«The revolution, which finds here not its end, but its organisational beginning, is no short-lived revolution. The present

generation is like the Jews whom Moses led through the wilderness. It not only has a new world to conquer, it must go under in order to make room for the men who are able to cope with a new world» (Marx, 1975-1978, vol. 10, 117).

«The present generation» – there is the romantic optimist for you! Six generations so far, and counting...

Second, we must complement our epistemology (philosophy of cognition) with insights that are not only adequate to the age of the theory of relativity and cybernetics, internet and genetic manipulation, but also adequate to the dying, and extremely dangerous, beast of financial capitalism, of its global terrorism, warfare, and break-up of humanity's metabolism with nature. Marx's constitutive epistemological rule may be phrased as: *the object of knowledge is judged by looking backward from the future possibilities, which in feedback with the object provide the normative criteria for judgment.*



Tatlin, Vladimir E.  
*Monument of a Building for  
the 3d International, 1919)*

## 4.2. In Practice

Politically, the above means insisting on three foci. As I have argued at length, the subject of all this is the huge majority subsisting on its own work which we can again call the *proletariat* in the wider sense or the *plebeians*.

The first two foci are more or less universally acknowledged on the thinking Left. They are a *full and mainly direct organised democracy* and *eco-socialism*. A wise use of all three forms of democracy – associative, direct, and electoral – has to be found, holding fast to central class interests, but integrating them with all the other (gender, ethnic, etc.) interests of individual self-determination and living labour. The fall of the completely corrupt Soviet bloc means «another communism might also be possible» (Harvey 2010, 227). What Leninism did not have, nor could it historically have had it, was a theoretical framework for what happens after the revolution comes to power – militarily, economically, organisationally, and in the final instance psychologically. By this last aspect I mean the operative consciousness of both the working masses and of the political vanguard/s, for whom Marx's great principle that «theory also becomes a material force as soon as it takes hold of the masses [which it can do] as soon as it becomes radical» (Marx 1975-1978, vol.3, 3-129) must be extrapolated to encompass all operative consciousness. In brief, Leninism did not have a theory of politics after the revolution, when international class struggles meld with the necessarily conflictual decision-making of a national society on all the levels (Lazarus 2013, 181-190. In that situating, as Lazarus argues, the only revolution fully comparable to the Russian one was the French one after 1789; particularly noteworthy are his sketches of Saint-Just's new politics).

For one example, it can now be seen that the bottleneck determining the mode of social production – the production of a livable society – is no longer the Production Forces, which in a developed

capitalism already potentially surpass the needs of humanity (and are today largely abused for fashionable crap plus war materials), but the Production Relations, namely the relationships among people that are specific of a particular phase of the production possibilities. This shift is of a piece with the shift of central class antagonism from being based mainly on productive property (capital vs. exploited labour) to being based on many interlocked power relations. Structures and institutions shaping people's minds are important but so is their consciousness – which also means culture, on which Lenin insisted toward the end of his life – that changes such structures in shifting situations (The category of «situation» [as well as of «task» in it] is characteristic of Lenin as it perspicaciously remarks Lazarus 2013, 198). Most urgent is to awaken fully both to war dangers (cf. Suvin 2012, Boal et al. 2005) and to capitalist ecocide, proceeding rapidly and changing all cards on the table (cf. Klein 2014). Therefore, we need planned, democratic, and enlightened social command over production and distribution of goods, including the abolition of pernicious agri-business in place of farming, or hundreds of millions shall experience centuries of sharp misery, slavery, and mass killings; and our species might well perish.

But crucial for all our work and future is the *organisational mediation*. My axiom here is that after the failure both of the Stalinist Party and the anarchist «movement of movements» since (say) the 1950-60s, *we need a refurbished Party in tandem with movements accompanying it*. True, «any effective organisation in modern industrial society tends to be bureaucratised in some degree»: its poles are ineffective unlimited freedom and ossification (Hobsbawm 2008, 54-55). However, as Bensaïd felicitously put it: «politics without the organisational form of the Party is politics without politics»: or, to put it more clearly, it is a politics guaranteed to be ineffective:

«[In capitalism], relations of exploitation and class conflict constitute an overarching framework which cuts across and

unifies the other contradictions. Capital itself is the great unifier which subordinates every aspect of social production and reproduction, remodelling the function of the family, determining the social division of labour and submitting humanity's conditions of social reproduction to the law of value. If that is indeed the case, a party, and not simply the sum of social movements, is the best agent of conscious unification» (Bensaïd 2001).

In other words, the collective translation with modification from a far-off horizon and theory to here and now can only come about by means of «an earlier unknown discipline [...] the practical discipline of thinking» (Badiou 2009, 177). I would claim this is identical to Lenin's original idea of a militant and disciplined *party* leading a *movement* of the entire people – minus the ruling classes – as documented by Tucker (Tucker 1987, 39) and Lih (Lih 2011, 14-15, 94, and passim). However, we would have to learn from the Russian revolution that etatisation of the party in power is a permanent mortal danger, to be permanently fought against, and that a form of vigorous plebeian democracy at all levels, allowing for changes of leading political cadre is indispensable. Whether it then proceeds as factions inside one party or as formally more parties, is a matter of contingent situation

Such a renovated Party model and stance would certainly fight for access to command based on State force and violence, but must use it only on two conditions. *First*, if and when it has – as the Bolsheviks had in 1917-21 – the consensus, active or passive, of a clear majority of workers or plebeians in the wide sense. Unless we get to a full abrogation of citizen rights in – declared or undeclared – civil warfare and/or Fascism 2.0 (see much more in Suvin 2017), the proletarian party's Gramscian hegemony must go hand in hand with a democracy going from the ranks upwards. And to begin with, in the Party itself: a radical party must prefigure in its internal workings the

plebeian democracy it would preach. *Second*, this means that the Party must dialectically both be acceding to command of the State and yet keep a critical distance to its necessary tendency to pragmatic and usually violent decisions of coercion (Gramsci understood this so well in good part because he had vividly present the example of the Catholic Church, that ranged from caesaropapism – eventually reconstructed by Stalin – to the post-feudal «dual power» politics, flowing out of both mass organisations and the Church’s remaining power structure.<sup>11</sup>

The Russian Revolution soon bogged down in a plain absence and suppression of such democratic rule from bottom up, crucially including its leading institutions – which is what Marx (as well as Balibar and Badiou) means by dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>12</sup> Even Marx’s identification of all politics with fully antagonistic class struggle, from which he deduced that a society will need politics the less the more such struggles subside, has after the Russian Revolution and the experiences of its successors – such as Mao, Tito, Castro, and Ho – become obsolete. The problem of political power in socialism or communism has to be rethought; for, even without antagonistic classes, allocations of social labour will be unavoidable, essential, and in a way conflictual (cf. Wood 1986, 155-159). We should also take

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11 I was much interested in Badiou’s accounts (Badiou 2009, 145-47, 154-55, and 189) that jibe with what I found in «15 Theses» and the whole of *Splendours*, though I dissent from some of his conclusions and terms. My work would have been easier had I known his pioneering writings from the 1980s-90s. The Catholic Church’s experiences (and some parallels in Asian Buddhism) is much richer than what I here signal, it embraces the whole tension between the *ecclesia militans* and *ecclesia triumphans* necessarily inherent in any movement for the historical salvation of the whole humanity – visible for example in the most important «orders».

12 The complex Roman term of dictatorship, beloved by Marx the classicist and still useful to Lenin (for one central matter, it meant a strictly limited duration), has since 1917 become so corrupted by both Stalinist and capitalist use that I would not employ it in practical agitation any more.

heed of the experiences of the worldwide youth revolt building up from the 1950s and culminating in 1968 to 1971, those of the Chiapas venture, the Chinese Cultural Revolution (well approached in Badiou 2009, 89-133), and many others I know too little about. As Kouvelakis concludes his book: «communism [is] the never-ending, self-critical return of the democratic revolution» (Kouvelakis 2003, 352). It is the organised collective emancipation of historical humanity.

My argument about the inheritance of the Left in view of the Russian Revolution can be summarised as: we need both Marxism and Leninism as non-exclusive fundamentals from which to advance, but we certainly do not need Stalin's Marxism-Leninism.

Last but not at all least, we have to return to a political vision as global as Lenin's. To begin with, two major developments have to be factored in. First, tempestuous world financial capitalism has superadded to the immemorial «peacetime» destruction of people through exploitation and its lesions of the human body a direct assassination of hundreds of thousands, maybe soon millions, of people by State terrorism (see Suvin 2011, 263-306) through high explosives. Permanent undeclared warfare has for it become a normal way of doing business. Second, there is now a «transnational» class fraction of world capitalism, solidly anchored in the triad World Bank – International Monetary Fund – World Trade Organisation, with a coordinating meeting at the Davos World Economic Forum. For all such reasons, the communist movement obviously must create an equally efficient worldwide coordination and defense. The model of the three Internationals has to be corrected in the sense explained above. Probably another full essay should be devoted to the military lessons of the 1917-45 Russian Revolution, and to the need of and strenuous fight for international peace and a full ban on ABC weapons.

Citing Lenin's definition of a revolutionary situation that I also used in the «Approach» above, Jodi Dean comments that in it the ruled classes «have to want in a communist way [...]. Without collec-

tive, communist desire revolutionary upheaval moves in counterrevolutionary direction» (Dean 2012, 198) Which is exactly what has been happening in Europe and USA since 2008 or so in the rise of Fascism 2.0, exploiting the «middle» classes' revulsion against huge societal corruption and the lower classes' demand for survival and respect. *Without anti-capitalism, there is no effective anti-fascism*; thus, I cannot imagine higher stakes.



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However, we would have to learn from the Russian revolution that etatisation of the party in power is a permanent mortal danger, to be permanently fought against, and that a form of vigorous plebeian democracy at all levels, allowing for changes of leading political cadre is indispensable.