



Revolutionary Marxism 2022

A JOURNAL OF THEORY AND POLITICS



Rakovsky Center&RedMed

Sungur Savran

Levent Dölek

RM Editorial Board

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Özgür Öztürk

Hasan Refik

Savas Matsas

Anti-Imperialist and Anti-War Declaration

Ukraine: NATO's proxy war

The myth of Russian imperialism

Issue 50, our very special issue

The age of egoism

The closing of the age of Post-Marxism

Stalinism as the meek enemy of the bourgeoisie

Trotsky as philosopher

Without revolutionary theory
there can be no revolutionary movement.

V. I. Lenin, *What is to be done?*

Revolutionary Marxism 2022

Special annual English edition

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Devrimci Marksizm
Üç aylık Teorik / Politik dergi
(Yerel, süreli yayın)
İngilizce yıllık özel sayı

Sahibi ve Sorumlu Yazı İşleri Müdürü: Şiar Rişvanoğlu

Yönetim Yeri: Adliye Arkası 3. Sokak Tüzün İşhanı No: 22/2 ADANA

Baskı: Net Copy Center, Özel Baskı Çözümleri, Ömer Avni Mh., İnönü
Cad./ Beytül Malcı Sok. 23/A, 34427
Beyoğlu/İSTANBUL
Tel: +90-4440708

Yurtdışı Fiyatı: 10 Avro Kıbrıs Fiyatı: 45 TL

Fiyatı: 35 TL (KDV Dâhil)

Cover image

Detail from the mural entitled 'The History of Mexico' featuring Karl Marx acting as a guide to Mexican revolutionary workers. The work, exhibited at the Palacio Nacional, was completed in 1935 by the communist painter Diego Rivera about whom Trotsky once wrote, "in the field of painting, the October revolution has found her greatest interpreter not in the USSR but in faraway Mexico".

Revolutionary Marxism

A journal of theory and politics
2022

Contents

In this issue 5

Imperialism and war

Rakovsky Center and Redmed	International Anti-Imperialist and Anti-War Declaration	9
Sungur Savran	Ukraine: NATO's proxy war	17
Levent Dölek	The myth of Russian imperialism: Why neutrality on the Ukraine war is wrong	41

Marxism against postmodernism

RM Editorial Board	Issue 50, our very special issue	47
Sungur Savran	The age of egoism	55
Özgür Öztürk	The closing of the age of Post-Marxism	91
Hasan Refik	Stalinism as the meek enemy of the bourgeoisie	113

The legacy of Marxism: Trotsky

Savas Mikhail-Matsas	Trotsky as philosopher	139
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In this issue

In the last forty years, left liberalism and postmodernism have stamped their marks both on the intellectual milieu and on the workers movement.. Those currents, including post-Marxism, post-structuralism, post-Fordism, and globalization theory, albeit being predicated on the separate theoretical bases, have common characteristics. Exponents, overwhelmingly ex-Marxists, of those currents argue that the global-scale “information revolution” dislodged the working class as the agent of change, and that the nation-states lost their privileged position in organizing and maintaining the world market. In a fully-integrated world, they preach, imperialism is to be replaced by inter-dependency, and thus no more wars.

The main problem according to that optimistic perspective is then how to realize “radical democracy”, which is said to confer equal rights on different identities, in the face of neoliberal policies that strengthen the “magnates” and dismantle the networks of social solidarity. However a conspicuous agnosticism is noticed in the statements by the postmodernist luminaries, from Žižek to Negri, when it comes to on what common ground those different identities can be gathered and how they can achieve a more democratic society.

In a speech supportive of the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations, Žižek was supposedly encouraging as follows: “We are not dreamers. We are ones being awoken from a dream-turned-into-nightmare”. We are not sure if the Žižekians are awoken from their dreams, but it is clear that *the real* world is a true nightmare shattering the postmodernist optimism. The third great depression of the world economy going on since the 70s and being deepened by the financial collapse of 2008 has debunked all postmodernist arguments and foresights, whether they be related to economy or politics.

New technologies expected and touted by postmodernism to be harbinger of the end of inequalities have even exacerbated them; space rivalry among the billionaires versus forty one million people facing starvation. Oxfam recently released a report

stating that 3.3 billion people of the world population to reach 8 billion in near future will be earning less than 5.5 dollars on daily basis. The assertion that we live in a global world based on inter-dependency, which has diminished the importance of the nation states, has been rebutted by the protectionist policies and tariff wars in the post-2008 crisis period. The state interventions, which are accompanied by the international economic and military blocs taking different forms, have reached an unprecedented level. It has also been peddled that war is no longer a possibility in a globalized world. We witness, on the contrary, that imperialist states wage local and regional proxy wars against the unyielding regimes. Furthermore, as is seen in the case of the Ukrainian war, the risk of nuclear war threatens the world. Many have harped on the “farewell to the working-class”. The last pandemic crystal-clearly showed, however, that the production and reproduction processes and international supply chains would come to a halt without the working-class. Last but not least, the dark clouds of racism, misogyny and fascism loom ominously over the fancy projection of a “global and more democratic society” built on equality among different identities. In the U.S, for example, the anti-abortion laws are passed; the racist attacks on black people escalate; genocide-prone anti-Semitic sentiments become rampant among the supporters of Trump.

On the other hand, class struggles intensify and spread from one country to another. A wave of unionization has taken place in the U.S. The United Kingdom witnesses a string of strikes in many sectors, especially in the transportation services after a forty year long lull. European people, from the U.K. to the Czech Republic, takes to the streets against the rise in the cost of living induced by Russia cutting off gas supply to the continent as a retaliation against the military aid to the Ukrainian regime. The slogan “we can’t afford” is also echoed in the streets, factories and workplaces of Latin America, Southeast Asia, Middle East and Africa, and of Turkey as well.

We start this issue and the first dossier “Imperialism and War”, with the final statement of the *Emergency International Anti-War Conference against NATO’s proxy war in Ukraine* (25-26 June 2022), which was called by the International Socialist Center Christian Rakovsky and the RedMed web network. This political event, attended by a large number of participants from all continents, aimed to urgently call the international working class to action on the basis of an anti-war, anti-imperialist revolutionary policy against the aggression of imperialism and to organize a line of struggle step by step. In this direction, at the conference, participants from many countries of the world exchanged views on the character of the Ukrainian war, the direction of imperialism and what kind of an anti-imperialist struggle should be waged against it. We can say that the basic determinations and predictions of the final declaration published at the end of the conference have already been confirmed by the steps taken by NATO within the framework of the new strategic concept announced at the Madrid summit at the end of June, and by the USA’s provocation of China on Taiwan in this direction.

In the second article of this dossier, Sungur Savran provides an in-depth study of the Ukraine war, which he sees as the harbinger of a new world war. Having characterised the Ukraine war from day one a NATO-Russia war with Ukraine as

a proxy for imperialism, Sungur Savran tests this through a meticulous scrutiny of the evidence that has been accumulating since the beginning of the war and finds that the hypothesis derived from the pre-history of the war proves to fit the characteristics of the war in perfect manner. Savran then moves over to an analysis of the *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept* document adopted at the Madrid Summit and finds the same tendency towards a new world war inscribed in that document. He castigates the majority of the international left for siding with imperialism and predicts a radical restructuring of the international left, in which process the position taken on the Ukraine war will be a major criterion.

Savran's analysis is followed by Levent Dölek's article, written in the first months of the war in Ukraine. In a moment when a tendency of neutrality became apparent among the left in Turkey and around the world, Dölek's article puts forward that this war is a war between NATO and Russia in itself. Dölek's analysis confutes the "Russian imperialism" thesis, which is the main justification for a neutral position regarding the war.

The second dossier of *Revolutionary Marxism 2022*, is on the fierce battle between Marxism and post-modernism. An introductory text on the leading motives for preparing such a dossier from the issue No.50 of our Turkish edition is the first article of this dossier also here.

The second article of the dossier is a piece by Sungur Savran. His article on postmodernism is not really a philosophical/theoretical critique of this school of thought, but rather a critical history. Savran rejects out of hand the major claim of this current to the effect that we have entered the age of postmodernity as opposed to the modern age. Rather than this fashionable fiction, the article looks at the much more palpable question of the material-practical preconditions of the rise of postmodernism as an ideological construct. It looks for answers to questions of the following kind: The article seeks answers to the following questions about postmodernism: What do postmodernists and the spokespersons of related movements say and represent, not in terms of philosophical arguments, but in terms of a concrete approach to the problems of the world we live in? In what ways and through what stages did the dissemination and popularization of these ideas take place as a concrete process? Why did this development occur precisely after 1968, when there was a great revolutionary upsurge? Why did these thoughts not remain specific to a limited period of time after 1968, but on the contrary, left their mark on an entire era, a whole half century for the time being? What kind of developments in the political field accompanied this earthquake in the field of thought? At the opposite end of the impact of political life on the ideological sphere, what kind of effect did this development in the ideological field have on politics? More generally, it can be said that with the materialist method, Savran examines the socio-economic and political foundations and class character of the currents of thought criticized in this issue and the identity politics rising on them.

In the third article of the dossier titled "The closing of the age of Post-Marxism", Özgür Öztürk argues that the material conditions for socialism to make a new breakthrough are maturing, but the dominance of the political-ideological patterns specific to the neoliberal period still continues. He discusses the necessity of a

class-centered hegemony strategy against the forms of “identity politics” that have become prevalent on the left over the past decades. In this respect, he criticizes the theory of Post-Marxism put forward by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in detail. According to Öztürk, this approach, which calls itself “Post-Marxist”, argues that politics (conflict and antagonism processes) is ontologically primary, and turns to the idea of “the impossibility of society”. It goes beyond denying the thesis of the decisiveness of the economic infrastructure and advances to the claim that there is no economic “instance” as a separate level. From this point of view, Post-Marxism rejects the “exclusive” role of the working class in the anti-capitalist struggle. Öztürk shows that this theory cannot suggest a “socialist strategy” at all, but can only reflect a state of lack of strategy. He argues that today’s enlarged working class will provide the most natural and logical starting point for a new project of socialism that will go beyond capitalism.

Hasan Refik’s article, the fourth text in this dossier, “Stalinism as the meek enemy of the bourgeoisie,” draws attention to the miserable track record of Stalinism in the field of class struggle through four topics and four case studies. It warns against the prospect of giving this zombie of an ideology a second lease on life by recalling how it stood as an obstacle, time and again, to workers’ quest to topple capitalism. Highlighting the fact that stymying revolutionary surges was not a bug but a feature of Stalinism, this article should be read as a plea for embracing Revolutionary Marxism to lead the revolutions of the 21st century.

The last article of the issue is Savas Matsas’ analysis of Trotsky as philosopher. According to Matsas, a close examination of every step of Trotsky’s long, epic and tragic itinerary demonstrates his constant attention to philosophy at the service of revolution: from the years of his youth in struggle against Czarism, in prisons and in exile, to his involvement in the 1905 Russian Revolution as Chairman of the first Soviet in history to his leading role in the October 1917 Revolution, in the Red Army, in the first period of the Communist Third International, as well, later, at the head of the Left Bolshevik Opposition and at the founding of the Fourth International up to his assassination in Mexico in 1940. In his article, Matsas, focuses on some of the major turning points of this remarkable trajectory, where crucial philosophical issues were raised to guide historical-political orientation, perspective, and strategy. This article is presented in a “flowing dossier” on “The Legacy of Marxism” that we started in our previous issue, *Revolutionary Marxism 2021*, with articles on Engels (including one by Matsas himself), Lenin, and Rosa Luxemburg. We intend to continue publishing articles under this title in our future issues.

International Anti-Imperialist and Anti-War Declaration

International Socialist Center Christian
Rakovsky and Redmed

The Emergency Anti-War International Conference against the NATO proxy war in Ukraine called by the International Socialist Center “Christian Rakovsky” and RedMed.org web network on June 25-26, 2022 was undoubtedly an important international political event.

The decision for the Conference was taken in the Preparatory Meeting of the Rakovsky Center on May 22, 2022, and consequently, the Invitation issued by the Rakovsky Center on June the 1st addressed a large spectrum of the revolutionary left and communist Parties, organizations, movements, Marxist theoretical journals and independent militants from different traditions from all over the world found an impressive response. It is reflected in the large number of dozens of participants from all the Continents (Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia) and from 26 countries that joined the Conference in two days of intensive work.

*First of all, those Marxist parties, organizations and militants in countries involved or affected directly in the current war front of the international conflagration dramatically changed the political configuration scene of the world: **from Ukraine and the Russian Federation**, as well as **Belarus** and countries of the former Soviet space and bloc, from Central/Eastern Europe **Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria**, to the Caucasus and Central Asia, **Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan**.*

*From **Europe** as a whole, **Finland, Italy, France, the Spanish State, Britain,***

and Greece.

From the Americas: the United States, Cuba, Venezuela, Brazil, and Argentina.

From Africa, the Middle East and Asia: South Africa, Algeria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iran, and Turkey.

From the Antipodes: Australia.

A great variety of views were represented freely, in the best traditions of workers' democracy. With the same spirit, all written documents submitted to the Conference will be published, and a video with the recording of the two days of the Conference will be available.

A Declaration of the Conference was decided to be published, based on the initial Political Report presented to the Conference on behalf of "Christian Rakovsky" Center's policy on the NATO proxy war in Ukraine. An overwhelming majority supported the Draft Declaration. A number of amendments were included. Others need further discussion in the following period, in the context of the preparation of another International Conference on the war decided to take place later. Below, we share the declaration of this very conference with our readers.

International Anti-Imperialist and Anti-War Declaration

1. The devastation of the war in Ukraine has continued for more than four months with no visible signs of ending. Millions of innocent people in Ukraine and all over the world are paying a huge price. The end of the tragedy is prevented by the main instigators of the war, US imperialism and NATO.

Calls for a ceasefire and efforts for diplomatic negotiations are sabotaged by the principal culprits. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has called against "Ukraine fatigue" and for "a war lasting for years". The British PM Boris Johnson visiting Kiev the same weekend made a similar statement for "a long war". The declared aim of US, Britain and NATO is prolonging the war "to see the Russian military weakened", as US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said during his visit to Kiev on April 25, 2022, and imposing a regime change in Moscow, as US President Joe Biden let escape, during his infamous public speech in Poland when he said "for God's sake, this man cannot stay in power".

Prolongation of the war does not mean simply a long war of attrition or a protracted stalemate. It means, above all, an increasingly brutal process of escalation, of further international expansion of the war, leading finally to a thermonuclear catastrophe of life on Earth.

The war in Ukraine marks a dramatic inflection point of history, driven by the escalating global crisis of decaying imperialist capitalism, and is changing the political and social configuration of the world. It has brought humanity to the brink of the abyss, opening the gates to a Third World War and a nuclear Armageddon. The first and urgent task of the international working class and of the oppressed is ***to stop the imperialist war drive to global annihilation, turning it into a revolutionary struggle for universal emancipation, world Socialism.***

2. It is well known that the first casualty of war is the truth. But rarely the **Big Lie**

of the principal culprit of the war has taken such monstrous dimensions as today.

a-*This is not a “local” war between a “Great Power”, Putin’s Russia, and a “small sovereign State”, Ukraine, which it is invading*, as the US/NATO/EU imperialists, their willing allies and the mainstream bourgeois mass media present it. Actually, the military conflagration has *global* causes, dynamics, dimensions and implications, involving, in an uneven but *combined* development, the entire capitalist world, from Europe and Asia to the Americas, Africa and Australia. Ukraine is the *epicenter* now but the *centre* itself of the crisis is situated at the centre of global capitalism, the US and its declining world hegemony.

b-*It is not a military conflict about the national self-determination of Ukraine*, as a big part of the international Left claims, thus justifying NATO’s aggression, the arming of a Ukrainian army controlled by Nazis and trained by NATO, and imposing sanctions to destroy the Russian economy, and, thereby, the poorest populations in the world.

The truth is that it is a NATO provoked, proxy war, where the Ukrainian people is used as cannon fodder for US imperialism’s goal to fragment and colonize the former Soviet space and subjugate the countries that it officially considers as its main international “strategic antagonists”, Russia and China.

Post-Soviet Ukraine has been reduced by its oligarchs and foreign capital into a poor, financially bankrupt, fractured, *semi-colonial dependency of the Western capital and the IMF* and an advanced springboard for war in the service of the NATO aggression against Russia. It is run by Quislings, corrupt oligarchs and Neo-Nazis, linking their own comprador interests to the interests of the US, Britain and the EU, cruelly robbing the working population of Ukraine of all its social and national rights.

c-*It is not an “unprovoked” war* as the mainstream imperialist discourse claims, one that started out of the blue with a Russian invasion in Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The result cannot be separated from the process leading to it: the 2014 Maidan coup, the 8 year-long “hybrid” war in Donbas killing 14 thousand people, and obviously the non-stop expansion of NATO to the borders of Russia. As a matter of fact, the historic origins of the war should be located in the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, in February 1992, Pentagon’s Defence Planning Guidance document, drawn up by Paul Wolfowitz, formulated as the main US strategic aim the prevention of any possibility for post-Soviet Russia to rise again. *The Grand Chessboard* by Zbigniew Brzezinski, published in 1997, implied in essence that the US should adopt the strategic goal of *fragmenting Russia* and *colonizing* the entire post-Soviet space with the help of pro-Western stooge regimes. Ukraine was supposed to play a prominent role in this scheme.

The expansion of NATO to the East pursues this goal. In 1999, the NATO war in former Yugoslavia and the fragmentation of the country coincided with the expansion of the imperialist Atlantic alliance to Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. The Bucharest 2008 NATO Summit clearly put on the agenda the NATO membership of Ukraine and Moldova. The “colour” counter-revolution and the

2014 Euro-Maidan events were instrumental to serve the advance of NATO, which now includes 14 former Eastern European states as members. NATO has thus approached the Russian border, becoming able to hit Moscow in a few minutes by missiles from Ukraine.

d- It is *not a conflict of “inter-imperialist” or “Great Power” rivalry*, as another part of the international Left claims, thus taking an “equidistant” position, based on a false, ahistorical approach running counter to the historical specificity of the conflict and of the social nature of the clashing forces. Its apparent “neutrality” is, actually, a crude adaptation to the pressures of world imperialism in its war campaign and hence accommodation to bourgeois public “opinion”.

3. The explosion of war in Ukraine in 2022 is the latest barbaric manifestation of the spiral of the insoluble global crisis of capitalism unfolding from the 2008 world financial crash onward, followed by a depression in the world economy and then the 2020 global pandemic shock, another kind of warning for the advancing climate catastrophe. Even before the war, it was clear that there was a rapid worsening of the crisis combining the return of a global inflationary tsunami with a further fall into a worldwide depression, exacerbation of debt crises and new defaults, more financial volatility and crashes. We are just at the beginning of a dramatic degradation of an already destabilized world situation generating a new wave of social upheavals, political disorder, popular rebellions, liberation struggles and social revolutions both in the Global South and the Global North.

The global capitalist crisis is both the *driving* force of the imperialist war and at the same time, the force *undermining* the imperialist metropolitan centres and their war campaign.

Biden’s imperialist **America**, the centre of the global capitalist crisis and the protagonist of the war, is trying to overcome the political and economic decline of its world hegemony through the use of its dominant military might. But its military capabilities have not prevented dramatic reverses such as the debacle in Iraq and the Vietnam-type humiliating defeat in Afghanistan after a 20-year disastrous war.

The attempts by the Biden Administration to renew the US alliances and leadership in Asia and Latin America against China and Russia, with the recent ASEAN Summit and the Summit of the Americas, have failed miserably.

The official discourse to misrepresent the war against Russia, and eventually China, as “*a clash between democracy against autocracy*” collapses as a farce. Not only because of the past record of brutality, repression and aggression of US imperialism all over the planet, but also again now, for example with its alliance with Saudi Arabia ruled by Mohammed Bin Salman’s murderers of dissidents and perpetrators of genocide in Yemen. Last but not least, there is a devastating verdict: January 6, 2021, fascist coup on Capitol Hill, Washington DC, looms large at the political center of the dying US-American liberal democracy.

America is plunging into an economic crisis, deeply divided socially and politically. The popularity of Biden and his Administration is rapidly shrinking, despite the war jingoism, foreshadowing that the mid-term November 2022 elections will be a Waterloo for the Democratic Party and a new revanchist upsurge for the fascistoid pro-Trump Republicans. But neither the Democrats nor the Republicans can

establish a solid social majority to overcome a regime crisis, which goes along the twilight of the post-World War II *Pax Americana*. The neocon Robert D. Kaplan, who, at the dawn of the 21st century had hailed the imperial hegemony of “Hobbesian America” against the irreversible decline of “Kantian Europe”, now, facing the historic decline of US world hegemony, sees “*after Pax Americana the Global Chaos*”.

Europe in general, as the direct war battlefield, and the imperialist **European Union**, in particular, has received the biggest immediate blows from the effects of the war and the worsening economic crisis. The backlash of the imposed sanctions, the stopping of Russian gas provision to many European countries and the obstacles to grain and edible oil trade created by the war itself have escalated the energy and food crisis destabilizing the political and social situation in every European country, hitting particularly harshly the EU’s industrial heartlands, Germany, France, and over-indebted Italy. At the same time, at a time when the working population is facing the disastrous impact of the rising inflation and deepening recession on living conditions, military budgets are rising to astronomic heights. **Germany** is extensively militarized, with a military budget of 100 billion euros per year, for the first time after its defeat in the Second World War. Similarly, **Japan**, with the war in Ukraine, broke the post-Hiroshima nuclear “taboo” and is getting ready for nuclear arms targeting China and North Korea.

By accepting the US orders, the EU imperialists – as well as Japan, Canada and Australia - have demonstrated again their own weakness and relative subordination to the declining American world superpower. But the fragility of the alliances and growing divisions among the Western metropolitan capitalist centres are already visible and will be brought out forcefully in the near future.

A divided Global North has become now even more vulnerable to the rising upheavals in the Global South. Nobody should forget that not only putative strategic allies of the US such as India, a member of the Quad alliance against China and Russia but also the representatives of the vast majority of the human population in the Global South abstained from or voted “no” during the anti-Russian vote at the General Assembly of the UN.

4. In the context of the historic impasse in which imperialism finds itself, with the ever-expanding spiral of its global systemic crisis, after the implosion of finance capital globalization, it is accelerating its war drive to fully re-absorb the two countries where the world socialist revolution had broken out in the past in its weakest links, but where the revolution turned later to the road of capitalist restoration: **Russia and China**.

The defeat of the US/NATO led imperialist war is the primary, necessary and urgent task for all forces fighting for emancipation from capitalist slavery and imperialist bondage, first of all the international working class and its revolutionary vanguard. No communist, no socialist, no fighter of the anti-imperialist struggle can be “neutral” or “equidistant” in the ongoing military conflagration that started in Ukraine.

Superficial references to “Russian” (or “Chinese”) “imperialism”, often embellished by formal Leninist quotations taken out of context, lack any scientific, dia-

lectical Marxist analysis. The central nucleus of Lenin's insight is this: ***imperialism is not a policy or simply national-military expansionism but the latest historical stage in the development of world capitalism, the epoch of its imperialist decay.*** Claims about "Russian imperialism" in 2022 not only are empty but also echo the war propaganda of the actually existing Western imperialism.

Our anti-imperialist line does not mean that we abandon our firm opposition to the capitalist restorationists, the Russian oligarchs and to Putin's Bonapartism.

It is the collapse of the Soviet Union and the turn to capitalist restoration that has opened the gates to imperialism's offensive and a war of fragmentation and colonization of the former Soviet space, as well as of China.

The process of capitalist restoration, in an epoch of global decline and a crisis of the capitalist system itself, clashed constantly with its own internal and external contradictions: from the mass theft of the Soviet public wealth by a bureaucratic *nomenclatura* turned into oligarchs and the chaos of the 1990s under Yeltsin, leading to Russia's default in 1998 to a very relative fragile stabilization in the early 21st century based on the re-nationalization of strategic sectors of the economy and the growth of the state ending in a protracted economic stagnation after the 2008 world crisis. This Long Stagnation made Russia and its hybrid economy extremely vulnerable to Western imperialist pressures and today's "*economic-technological Iron Curtain*" imposed by the West – more effective than the sanctions, themselves amounting to a double-edged sword hurting deeply the world capitalist economy.

The overgrowth of an absolutist state apparatus, its repressive measures against popular freedoms, and the repetitive attacks against communists, Lenin and Bolshevism are the product both of the increasing pressures from a more advanced, aggressive capitalist West and of insoluble inner social contradictions blocking an incomplete transition. The only way out of this blind alley, for renewed, vigorous social development has to break these internal and external obstacles. ***A radical change*** of orientation is needed involving the active participation of the masses themselves: ***a new revolutionary turn away from capitalist restoration to the path of Socialism.***

Restorationist regimes and oligarchs are neither able nor even willing to defeat the imperialist offensive. They seek an improbable compromise and an impossible accommodation with the aggressor enemy of their peoples, in the name of "international cooperation", "multipolarity", a "win-win agreement" etc., all avatars of the old failed formulas of "peaceful coexistence" and of the bureaucratic "socialism in a single country".

Without any support for restorationist regimes, oligarchs or Bonapartes, the international working class and its vanguard should not remain neutral in the face of imperialist aggression but to fight to defeat it. A military victory by US/NATO-led imperialism against Russia today (and China tomorrow) will be a catastrophe, not solely for the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and of the entire Eurasian region, reduced into fragmented semi-colonies, but for humanity as a whole. ***A decisive strategic defeat of world imperialism, on the contrary, not only will advance the world struggle against capitalism and imperialism but will create the best conditions for defeating capitalist restoration as well.***

This is the anti-war, anti-imperialist revolutionary policy of the International Socialist Center “Christian Rakovsky”, which calls the international working class to act urgently on this general line.

It has to manifest solidarity in action supporting *an independent political mobilization of the masses of Russia and Ukraine themselves to secure their future.*

We are not pacifists. We should declare and wage by all means *war against the imperialist war.* But imperialism cannot be defeated only by the military means of a Bonapartist state. Despite huge problems, after the October Revolution, the Red Army defeated the invasion of 14 foreign imperialist armies and the White counter-revolution thanks to the revolutionary mobilization of the masses. And, despite the bureaucracy and its crimes, in the Great Anti-Nazi War, it was the initiative, courage, mobilization and enormous sacrifices of millions of Soviet people, inspired by the defense of the Land of Red October that gave the victory to the Red Soviet Army over Nazism and imperialism.

It is the intervention of the masses that makes the anti-imperialist struggle victorious. It is necessary to not be trapped in a blind nationalism serving the ruling elites, the Bandera fascists and the Great Russian chauvinists, both in Ukraine and Russia. The road to victory lies in *socialist proletarian internationalism in action.* The revolutionary mass struggle has to acquire a *permanent* character. In the same way, in which capitalist restoration has opened the road to imperialist aggression, the defeat of imperialist aggression could and should open the road to the defeat of the capitalist restoration process itself, for the expropriation of oligarchs, and socialist reconstruction of the economy under workers’ control.

All power to genuine soviets without bureaucrats! Full workers’ democracy, for Socialism, and an active internationalist policy of support to all revolutionary and liberation movements in the world!

5. In this revolutionary internationalist spirit, our battle cry is:

Not a single penny, bullet or soldier for NATO’s war!

War on imperialist war! The enemy is at home!

Stop making the Ukrainian people cannon fodder for the interests of imperialism!

Fight the policy of imperialist countries to prolong the war for their own benefit!

No sanctions against Russia! No to armaments! No to occupation!

Stop NATO expansion in Eastern, Northern and Southern Europe!

Workers of NATO countries, exit NATO, but also fight for the dissolution of NATO and the dismantling of US bases all over the world!

Down with the imperialist European Union, for the socialist unification of the European Continent, for a new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics without oligarchs, capitalists and bureaucrats, from Lisbon to Vladivostok!

Recognise the right to self-determination for the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics!

Down with capitalist restoration that opened the door to imperialism, war, and prospective colonization of the former Soviet space!

Fight the rise of fascism wherever it rears its head!

For a new anti-war Zimmerwald Conference!

For the refoundation of the revolutionary International of Lenin and his comrades!

For the world socialist revolution!

The Emergency International Anti-War Conference of the “Christian Rakovsky” International Socialist Center and RedMed, June 25-26, 2022

Ukraine: NATO's Proxy war

Sungur Savran

The war in Ukraine has become a catastrophe for the international left.¹ We are of course talking about left-wing movements that call themselves “socialist” or “communist”. Although this war is in every way a child of imperialism, instigated, caused, perpetuated by imperialism and used for its future purposes, a great part of the international left discusses the war either pushing the issue of imperialism to the back stage or completely ignoring it. The same is true for the left in Turkey, where a very radical anti-imperialist tradition had taken root in the 1960s and the 1970s, many revolutionary cadres losing their lives fighting for the ouster of NATO from the country.

What we wish to do in this article is to lay bare the true nature of the war in Ukraine, or more specifically, expose the part played by imperialism in this war, a role that has largely remained hidden from the view. This we will try to do by adding new links to a series of articles we have already written on the topic. Before moving to the new material, it would be in order to introduce the reader to the overall assessment we have so far made on this war.

1. The Ukraine war: a general assessment

We have already said that behind this war stands imperialism. In our previous writings, we explained and provided the evidence for this plain truth rejected or ignored by an overwhelming part of the international left, going to the roots of the war. There is of course no need to repeat those arguments. On the contrary,

¹ This article was first published in Turkish in the journal *Teori ve Politika*, No. 86-87, Spring-Summer 2022. It has been translated into English by the author himself, with only slight changes in the text for adaptation to an international audience. Some footnotes have also been omitted as too many references to articles in Turkish would be pointless.

the purpose of this article is to deepen the analysis so far provided by testing the previous propositions we put forth earlier on the basis of new evidence and reach certain conclusions regarding the attitude adopted by the left in general.

However, not repeating what we have already said on the topic may leave some of the readers of this article in the dark about our overall analysis of the Ukraine war if they are not familiar with our previous work on the issue. That is why we think it appropriate to start out with a summary of our views. In order not to repeat what has already been said, we will keep the summary limited to the main points.²

- One cannot and should not take a myopic view of this kind of earth-shattering development in international affairs. The real dynamics of the war in Ukraine can only be grasped by adopting a broad viewpoint and taking into consideration the totality of the historic tendencies at play. The road that led to the Ukraine war was paved by the aggressive enlargement of NATO since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, first in Eastern Europe and the Balkans and subsequently in the former Soviet republics. Ukraine was the straw that broke the camel's back since it confronts Russia with a mortal threat of a nuclear attack.
- Behind this aggressive expansion of NATO lies the threat perceived by imperialism, in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin wall, due to the existence of Russia and China as major players in the international arena for its future hegemony over the world and this despite the blatant fact of the restoration of capitalism. Regarding China, it is clear that the question is an economic, and increasingly military, one. Russia, on the other hand, is, for the moment at least, dangerous first because of its military power and secondarily because it is one of the major players in the world energy market. But that is not the whole story regarding Russia. Because of the melting of the glaciers in the North Pole Region due to climate change, a landslide transformation in the configuration of the world economy is a highly likely scenario. The fact that this would present Russia with extremely favourable possibilities of economic growth aggravates the problem that Russia poses for imperialism. (The accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO is directly a product of this scenario.³) These two gigantic countries, Russia and China, starting from a peasant economy, has each reached, at different times, a level that has made technological leaps possible, thanks to the central planning of the economy on the basis of public property in large means of production. Imperialism therefore pursues the aim of bringing these countries down on their knees, dividing them up if possible or, if not, turning them into semi-colonies.
- The preparations for this strategic orientation on the part of imperialism started

2 The reader will find a more detailed analysis in our three-part article written before the war started: "Russia's Riposte to NATO's Encirclement", <http://redmed.org/article/russias-riposte-natos-encirclement>.

3 We have taken up this question in greater detail in an article in Turkish. Sungur Savran, "İsveç ve Finlandiya Konusunda Büyük Yalan: (1) Dünyanın Çatısında Kılıç Şakırtıları", <https://gercek-gazetesil.net/politika/isvec-ve-finlandiya-konusunda-buyuk-yalan-1-dunyanin-catisinda-kilic-sakirtilari>.

immediately after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 or, in the case of China, at the turn of the century, when the country irreversibly entered the process of the restoration of capitalism, albeit under the political continuity of the rule of the Chinese Communist Party. The civil war in Yugoslavia, instigated first by the EU and subsequently by the US,⁴ did not only aim for the assimilation of the Balkans, a region with its high level of historical specificity, under the newly imposed appellation of “Southeast Europe”, into the European Union through the destruction of a powerful South Slav state traditionally allied to Russia. It was also a dress rehearsal of a political and military strategy to be implemented in the former Soviet space when the time was ripe for that.⁵

- The foundations of the war in Ukraine were laid during the Maidan events of 2014. That sizable sectors of Ukrainian society had developed a strong infatuation for future accession to the EU and NATO had already become clear during the counter revolutionary event of 2005, which almost aped a similar event in Georgia in 2004, both to be named “colour revolutions”. But the 2014 events were much more meticulously planned and reactionary, almost under the direct guidance of the US. This movement became the bedrock upon which rose a regime committed to accession to NATO and the EU, but also marked by a rabid nationalism hostile to Russia. This was patently a coup d’Etat that relied disproportionately on the military power of neo-Nazi gangs of different appellations. The population of the Crimean peninsula decided, in a referendum whose result can with only great difficulty be questioned, to join the Russian Federation (it had already been Russian territory up until the 1950s). More importantly, the people of the Donbass region, a region dominated by a Russophone population of proletarian nature, established two statelets that called themselves “people’s republics” and donned Soviet-era symbols, including flags with the hammer and the sickle (the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics). Their struggle for independence from Ukraine cost 14 thousand people on all sides their lives between 2014 and 2022, even before this recent war started.
- This strategic orientation of imperialism may well have existed for the three decades since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, but it has gained a renewed urgency since 2008. The collapse of the Wall Street bank Lehman Brothers that year first triggered a financial crash of epic proportions, which then paved the way to the onset of the Third Great Depression of the imperialist epoch.⁶ To summarise briefly, great depressions are profound economic crises of a special character, peculiar to the period of historic decline of the

4 On the Yugoslav civil war see (in Turkish) Sungur Savran, “İkinci Kosova Savaşı”, *Sınıf Bilinci*, sayı 23-24, Bahar-Yaz 1999, <http://www.devrimcimarksizm.net/sites/default/files/sinif-bilinci-23-24.pdf>.

5 On this see our “Globalisation and the New World Order: The New Dynamics of Imperialism and War”, in Alan Freeman & Boris Kagarlitsky (eds), *The Politics of Empire. Globalisation in Crisis*, London: Pluto Press, 2004.

6 The first, originally called the Long Depression, extended from 1873 to 1896. The second is the famous Great Depression of the 1930s and 1940s.

capitalist mode of production, a decline that is the result of the fact that, with its characteristic private methods of appropriation that create a fragmented process of economic decision-making, capitalism is fundamentally ill-adapted to the management of a productive system based on the socialisation of the means of production and of labour. Market adjustments cannot provide a solution to this profound economic crisis. Great depressions can only be overcome after great tremors and upheavals in the political, ideological and military spheres. Fascism and world wars are the most barbaric forms taken by these upheavals. Capitalism has brought humanity once again to the threshold of the alternative "socialism or barbarism".⁷ The Ukraine war was born as a synthesis of such contradictions. It is the preparatory stage of the future attack on one of the two rivals to the domination of imperialism shaken as it is by deep spasms due to its senility.

- This then implies that, difficult as it may be to determine the exact timing, a new world war has become a palpable prospect. From now on Marxists need to proceed with their political preparations under the shadow of this prospect.
- Under these circumstances, Marxists, socialists, communists, revolutionaries, and anti-imperialist fighters of all countries are dutybound to stand up to the efforts of imperialism in Ukraine, i.e. the defeat and weakening of Russia, which will make it vulnerable to the attacks of imperialism. The way to push back the threat of world war, endangering not only humanity but all organic nature, passes through the defeat of imperialism in Ukraine. There should not be the slightest prevarication on this score. We should condemn unambiguously the policy of those currents on the left that attempt to take an equidistant position towards NATO and Russia or even totally disregard the part played by NATO, going so far as to parrot its favourite propaganda themes. (We will return to this question at the end of the article.)
- This by no means implies supporting the Putin regime or the oligarchic capitalist social system that it strives to protect. Work towards the defeat of imperialism should be carried out without any support extended to Putin and company outside the military sphere. There are countless instances of this kind of war policy in the history of Marxism. In any case, the prospect of world war, itself the product of deep-seated contradictions of capitalism, can hardly be expected to be overcome by a capitalist regime such as that of Putin. The panacea of the threat of world war is class struggle.

These, then, were the conclusions that we reached on the eve of the war in the period of the standoff between NATO and Russia and later in the initial stage of the war, all this in the light of our study of the economic foundations and the political-diplomatic-military configurations of the world situation in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Now we can pass on to discovering the possibilities that this general framework

⁷ We have examined the Third Great Depression in a book-length study in Turkish: *Üçüncü Büyük Depresyon. Kapitalizmin Alacakaranlığı*, 2nd Edition, Istanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2022.

provides us with in analysing the Ukraine war. If this article has any new contributions to make, that starts from this point onwards.

2. A proxy war

Since day one of this war, we have refused to call it a Russia-Ukraine war. The war started on 24 February. A statement by our party DIP (Revolutionary Workers Party) carried the title “The way to peace is through the military defeat of NATO and its proxies!” This is the conclusion reached at the end of the first paragraph: “In this war Ukraine is fighting a proxy war.”⁸

This judgment passed during the first days of the war to the effect that the war in Ukraine was really between NATO and Russia and that Ukraine was a proxy for NATO was based, in this first phase, on the analysis of the road that led to the war. The lived experience of the war itself was not yet there. It is incumbent upon us to examine *whether this judgment was concretely verified* in the course of the war. Let us now turn to the study of this question.

The arming of Ukraine

The Ukraine war is not being waged simply between two countries. Among the decisive factors in the development of a war are intelligence and reconnaissance technologies and weapons systems. This is all the more valid in the 21st century, when technology has become incomparably more advanced in these areas thanks to the great steps forward in the domains of digitalisation, space technology and telecommunications. Ukraine is fighting against Russia not with weapons of its own, but with those of NATO. Even leaving other NATO countries aside, the United States, having initially promised an aid of 3.7 billion dollars-worth of military support, adopted a military assistance budget of 40 billion dollars in May 2022. Let us make two different comparisons in order to see what this figure really stands for.

This amount is *twice* the annual military expenditure of a country like Turkey, which is a country with far-reaching ambitions in the military domain. On the other hand, among the countries that the United States extends military assistance to each year, in 2020, (leaving aside Afghanistan which was fighting alongside its own army in that period), America granted the following amounts to *the first five countries* on its list: Israel 3.3 billion dollars; Egypt 1.3 billion dollars; Iraq 550

⁸ This statement was also translated into English and published on RedMed, our international web site: <http://redmed.org/article/statement-dip-way-peace-through-military-defeat-nato-and-its-proxies>. See also the statements by the Christian Rakovsky International Socialist Center, one before the war: <http://redmed.org/article/statement-christianrakovsky-internationalist-socialist-center-nato-russia-ukraine-crisis> and one on May Day 2022: <http://redmed.org/article/may-day-statement-rakovsky-center-peoples-eurasia-mediterranean-and-world-mobilize-stop>. Finally, see also the final declaration issued by the Emergency International Anti-War Conference convened at the end of June 2022 organised by the Rakovsky Center and RedMed published in this issue of *Revolutionary Marxism* and also at: <http://redmed.org/article/emergency-international-anti-war-conference>

million dollars; Jordan 500 million dollars; Ukraine 300 million dollars.⁹ The aid extended during the first five months of the war is **150 times** more than the entire assistance to Ukraine in the year 2020!

To see how extraordinary this aid is let us add a third point to the above two. Up until the present time [writing in July 2022], the United States has sent Ukraine 7 thousand Javelin anti-tank rockets in the course of this war.¹⁰ A lot of propaganda was carried out around the many Russian tanks that were destroyed by the Ukrainian army. Some estimations have the share of tanks that have been eliminated from the battle field within the inventory of the Russian army at one-fourth. If true, this would imply that what really eliminated those Russian tanks is not the Ukrainian army but the state-of-the-art technological capacity of the American anti-tank rockets! Furthermore, to understand what 7 thousand Javelins means, we should add that the US produces only 2,100 Javelins each year!¹¹ There is no way this could be simply considered military assistance. No, America is fighting Russia in a roundabout way, with Ukraine interposed on its side.

To put it another way, the United States is **not assisting** Ukraine, it is **investing** in the Ukraine war! This is precisely the situation: the war against Russia in the Ukraine war is being waged with NATO arms and Ukrainian human power. If we were to liken the war to a production process, the constant invariable capital (i.e. plant, machinery and equipment) is NATO property and the variable capital (i.e. labour power) is Ukrainian. And as we will see in a moment, continuing the analogy further, the organic composition of capital is tremendously high!

An endless list of weapons coming in as aid from different NATO countries is readily available for scrutiny in order to see how NATO feeds Ukraine with weapons systems (and, to top it all, this is a list that was drawn up quite early in the war, concretely speaking at the beginning of April!)¹²

State-of-the-art technology

NATO countries do not only content themselves with providing Ukraine with machine guns, tanks, armoured vehicles etc. left over from Soviet times inventory (for instance Germany from the former East Germany stocks and countries such as Poland or the Baltic countries from their own). They raise the stakes more and more, providing weapons of high calibre and even weapons that embody the state-of-the-art technologies used by the US army itself, such as the M777 howitzers, Javelin missiles, the 40-mile range HIMARS (High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems), which can launch multiple missiles simultaneously from the same platform based on a standard truck frame.

The Ukrainian economy had been in debt up to its neck even before the war.

⁹ <https://www.statista.com/chart/26641/us-military-aid-obligations-by-country/>.

¹⁰ "Briefing: The Long War", *The Economist*, 2 July 2022, p. 17.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2022/04/answering-call-heavy-weaponry-supplied.html>.

The country has survived on the basis of IMF stand-by programs for years. At the present time, experts predict that this year the economy will undergo a contraction of over 30 per cent. The public budget, on the other hand, suffers a monthly deficit of 5 billion US dollars.¹³ The economic administration has recourse to the printing press and has bordered on exhausting central bank reserves in order to protect the national currency, the *grivna*.¹⁴ In the end, it had to devalue its national currency 25 per cent vis-à-vis the dollar. In late July the economy closely escaped default thanks to a political decision on the part of the creditors whereby the country's debt payment was deferred until the end of this year.¹⁵

What this means is that very ironically, despite this horrible economic picture, Ukraine fights with cutting-edge weapons technologies! How can one call this a Russia-Ukraine war?

A united imperialist front

It is no secret that the most trigger-happy instigators of the Ukraine war are the United States and Britain. It is also common knowledge that among the countries of the European Union, it is fundamentally the countries of Eastern Europe that support the war and that the determining large Western European countries such as Germany, France and Italy extend a much more contradictory, hesitant support to Ukraine full of inner contradictions. However, despite all these differences, imperialism is for the moment completely and integrally behind Ukraine.

The military aid to Ukraine is being coordinated by 40 different countries from a base near Stuttgart in Germany. This group is named the Ukraine Contact Group.¹⁶ One can easily understand that the Contact Group has spilled beyond NATO. The Atlantic alliance had 30 members up until this year, when with the accession of Sweden and Finland this number went up to 32. The Contact Group, on the other hand, is made up of 40 countries. Among these are Japan and Australia, members of the alliance named QUAD against China that the United States has established in the Indo-Pacific region (the fourth member being India). This means that imperialism has gathered all its strength worldwide in order to defeat Russia in this war. Of course, the usual suspect, Israel, is also a member of the group. Israel is already a beachhead of US imperialism in the Middle East, but now it is making new headway in its overall relations with other imperialist countries by providing its cutting-edge technology in various domains from spying all the way to quantum computing to the common cause.

65 countries were involved in the Syrian "civil" war in one way or another (most saliently through the alliance against the ISIS). Now, at least 42 countries

13 "As Prices Soar in Ukraine, War Adds Economic Havoc to Human Toll", *New York Times*, 25 July 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/4nnkmep9>.

14 "Briefing", op. cit., *The Economist*, p. 18.

15 "International Creditors Give Ukraine More Time To Make Debt Repayments", *New York Times*, 20 July 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/mr2cau4c>.

16 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/26/world/europe/lloyd-austin-ukraine-contact-group.html>.

are part of this new war, which is packaged as a war between Russia and Ukraine. Evidently, in this age of imperialism, capitalism leads to the socialisation not only of the productive forces but also of the destructive forces of war!

NATO military training

The United States and other NATO members carefully refrain (for the moment, at least!) from participating in the war effort with their own troops. The official reason cited is to avoid a confrontation between two nuclear powers by escalating the war into a potential world war. However, the deeper motive is no doubt the care taken not to declare to the world that this is a NATO war, since the participation of American, British, Polish etc. troops in the war would simply be a confession of the true nature of the war. It is this worry that leads to an overall syndrome of shameless hypocritical posing. For instance, US Special Forces trainers are training Ukrainian soldiers within the borders of Ukraine or even “helping plan combat missions”.¹⁷ But here is the trick: These trainers are not in the pay of the US army. These are retired soldiers “volunteering” to extend a helping hand to a “democratic nation”, who meet their expenses through crowd-funding (presumably through the generous donations of freedom-loving Americans).

We said earlier that the equipment of the Ukrainian army comes from NATO and the labour force from the citizens of the country itself. We now see that there is even more involved here. “Helping plan combat missions” is no longer training. It is part and parcel of the act of waging war, even a decisive act. At this point, proxy war slowly fades into a relationship of comrades-in-arms.

The network of NATO commandoes

Over time more and more news has leaked, whether intentionally or not we do not of course know, to the American media regarding the shouldering of combat missions by soldiers of NATO countries alongside Ukrainian troops. Without speculating on why, let us simply assess the meaning of all this. The story of the “volunteers” that we have just discussed was published on 5 July. This time we are taking up a news article dated 25 June.¹⁸

This article provides such vital information that we will have to quote extensively, sometimes a fragment, sometimes full paragraphs for the benefit of the reader (all emphasis is ours):

“... a *stealthy* network of commandos and spies rushing to provide weapons, *intelligence* and training...”

“Much of this work happens outside Ukraine, at bases in Germany, France and Britain, for example. But even as the Biden administration has declared it will

¹⁷ “In Ukraine, U.S. Veterans Step in Where the Military Will Not”, *New York Times*, 5 July 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/26z3ajws>.

¹⁸ “Commando Network Coordinates Flow of Weapons in Ukraine, Officials Say”, *New York Times*, 25 June 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/2p88ncjb>.

not deploy American troops to Ukraine, some C.I.A. personnel have continued to operate in the country secretly, mostly in the capital, Kyiv, *directing much of the vast amounts of intelligence* the United States is sharing with Ukrainian forces, according to current and former officials.

At the same time, *a few dozen commandos* from other NATO countries, including Britain, France, Canada and Lithuania, also *have been working inside Ukraine...* training and advising Ukrainian troops and providing an on-the-ground conduit for weapons and other aid..."

"... training and advising Ukrainian troops and providing an on-the-ground conduit for weapons and other aid..."

"At Ramstein Air Base in Germany, for example, a U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard team called Grey Wolf provides support, *including on tactics and techniques*, to the Ukrainian air force, a military spokesman said."

"Several lower-level Ukrainian commanders recently expressed appreciation to the United States for intelligence gleaned from satellite imagery, which they can call up on tablet computers provided by the allies. The tablets run a battlefield mapping app that the Ukrainians use to target and attack Russian troops."

"'What is an *untold story* is the international partnership with the special operations forces of a multitude of different countries,' Lt. Gen. Jonathan P. Braga, the commander of U.S. Army Special Operations Command, told senators in April in describing the planning cell. 'They have absolutely banded together in a much outsized impact' to support Ukraine's military and special forces."

As can be seen, here it is no longer a question of providing weapons or even training troops to teach them the methods of utilisation of these weapons. What is now at play is the *execution* of intelligence and reconnaissance missions inside the country, the supply of inputs to the same intelligence and reconnaissance activities through satellites, "advising" military units, and supporting the air force at even the tactical and technical levels, albeit from a distance. The intelligence, reconnaissance and tactical levels are *indispensable inputs* for combat missions. If combat forces were deprived of intelligence and reconnaissance, this would be like having a blind person sit at the steering wheel of a motor vehicle. Advice at the tactical and technical level, on the other hand, is to share in the mental processes of the commanders of combat forces, processes without which combat would be helpless. In short, all of this implies that NATO countries do not only provide Ukraine with weapons and equipment, but also supply the *most highly-skilled, well-trained combat-duty labour force* as well.

An eight-year preparation

The rulers of the imperialist countries, the spokespeople for NATO and the imperialist media are trying to present the Ukraine war as a lightning in the blue sky. They even go so far as to say that Russia started the war without the "slightest provocation". Yet they themselves have been preparing Ukraine for war during the last eight years, a reality that cannot be suppressed.

The Special Forces cooperation between the United States and Ukraine in recent years has prepared both sides for the complexity of the war before the war itself started. We are again quoting from the *New York Times*:

“From 2015 to early this year, American Special Forces and National Guard instructors trained more than 27,000 Ukrainian soldiers at the Yavoriv Combat Training Center in western Ukraine near the city of Lviv, Pentagon officials said.”

One must add to this the fact that some other NATO allies also trained Ukrainian soldiers, reaching the thousands.¹⁹ This past June, even as the war was raging furiously, Boris Johnson, still at that time prime minister, committed his armed forces to training 10 thousand Ukrainian soldiers each quarterly period.²⁰

Given these facts, freely admitted by US and British officials, is it possible to continue claiming that the Ukraine war simply came out of the blue?

NATO prevents the cessation of hostilities

Of course, the Ukraine war presents a lot of complexities. Although the determining issue is the prospective membership of Ukraine in NATO and the subsequent deployment of nuclear arsenal in that country, there are other matters that await solution through the war, most importantly the question of the independence of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics from Ukraine.

Despite these complexities, Russia and Ukraine almost reached an accord on a peace agreement very early on, only a month after the war had started. In meetings organised through the intermediation of Turkey, the first in early March in Antalya and the second at the end of that same month in Istanbul, there was such clear rapprochement between the sides that Zelensky personally declared, right before the Istanbul meeting started, that Ukraine agreed to the status of “neutrality”, that it was committed to refraining from joining NATO and that, in return, it demanded a system of guarantor states in order to assure the security of the country. Since Russia's demands focused on the first two points (the commitment not to join NATO and neutrality), it was evident that an agreement was clearly in sight.

However, immediately afterwards Ukraine was to abandon the negotiation table. When one looks into the reasons for this, the evidence is unmistakable. Only a week after the Istanbul meeting, a NATO Meeting of Foreign Ministers was held in Brussels, at the end of which NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said, at a press meeting, that this would be a war “for the long haul”. Even the Western media received this with amazement, since only a week had gone by when, in Istanbul, the two sides had come so close to an agreement. In the meanwhile, the day after the foreign ministers' meeting Boris Johnson, chief provocateur for the war, made a surprise visit to Kiev and met Zelensky. That Johnson tried to dissuade Zelensky from signing the peace agreement and said “hold tight, we're behind you” or even pressed him to continue the war was later leaked to many media organs.

Around ten days later, on 20 April, the Turkish foreign minister, Mevlüt

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *The Economist*, op. cit., p. 17.

Çavuşoğlu, during an interview on television, admitted that “certain NATO countries” want to prolong the war, “with the purpose of weakening Russia and even hope that perhaps Putin will fall”. This, he said, had been explicitly discussed during the NATO Foreign Ministers’ Meeting on 6-7 April. This could have had the effect of a bomb, but the imperialist media simply ignored it.

However, only several days later, on 25 April, during his visit to Kiev, the US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin disclosed that it was the intention of the United States to see to it that Russia was weakened in the Ukraine war.²¹ This was an admission coming from a very authoritative source. It was imperialism that wanted the war to go on! A month later, Julianne Smith, the Ambassador of the United States to NATO, did not mince her words at all: the aim of the Ukraine war was *the strategic defeat of Russia!*²² _

War is the continuation of politics through other means. It is now clear what the politics behind the Ukraine war is: At least the United States and Britain, from among the NATO countries, *wanted the war*, with the express purpose of eroding the military power of Russia, to weaken it substantially, and if possible, to bring about a regime change in that country.

Imperialism is responsible for the destruction suffered by Ukraine

We need to underline very clearly the meaning of the effort of the imperialist cohort to prolong the war. This matter has brought out how false to its very core the propaganda instrument used most commonly by imperialist governments as well as the media is: especially in the initial stages of the war, the international media made the suffering of the Ukrainian population (scenes of separation of families as millions of Ukrainian women and children moved west as refugees, the destruction of bombs and the deaths, attacks on hospitals, schools or homes for the aged etc.) the major axis of anti-Russian propaganda. The aim was simply to say that by starting an unprovoked and unnecessary war, Russia was inflicting a severe massacre and destruction on the Ukrainian people. By being exposed as the ones who really wished to prolong the war and then assuming this stance themselves, the Western imperialist countries have now admitted that it is they and not Russia who are the main culprits in the suffering of the Ukrainian people.

On the other hand, with regard to the bombing of what are superficially regarded as civilian targets, Ukraine has been caught red-handed. The Ukrainian army or the so-called “volunteers” of the Azov Battalion, in effect the neo-Nazi militia, have time and again committed the crime of turning these civilian buildings into hide-outs for troops or into ammunition depots. On this, there have been news articles even in the Western media²³ based on a report prepared by the United Nations

21 “How Does It End? Fissures Emerge Over What Constitutes Victory in Ukraine?” *New York Times*, 26 May 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/3y6a43ee>.

22 <https://www.politico.eu/article/western-allies-nato-us-uk-eu-against-russia-want-to-see-defeat-moscow/>.

23 <https://www.yahoo.com/news/un-says-ukraine-bears-share-041554667.html>.

Human Rights Committee.²⁴

Admissions from within the imperialist camp

Finally, it may be worth our while to touch upon the observations of certain very important personalities of the imperialist world regarding the fact that this is in reality NATO's war, although standing on its own this obviously is no definitive proof. Henry Kissinger, a former Secretary of State of the United States, famed as the greatest strategist of the country in the second half of the 20th century, a historical figure who concocted a Sino-American alliance of former enemies out of the manifold contradictions of world politics, thereby isolating the Soviet Union, has openly criticised the pressuring of Ukraine into abandoning the table of negotiations, even going so far as to contend that there is no way out except if Ukraine surrenders some territory to Russia.²⁵

(Only two months after this, the same Kissinger said in an interview on the German television channel ZDF that it would be a mistake on the part of Ukraine to concede territory to Russia. This was characterised by the international media as a "change of heart" on the part of Kissinger. The reality is entirely different. The responsible servant of the United States establishment that he is, Kissinger did not choose to resist the pressure upon him coming from a whole spectrum of actors, starting from Zelensky and reaching all the way to the hawks within the Biden administration and thus made a concession to the warmongers. Those who talk of a "change of heart" do not pay any attention to the next sentence that Kissinger pronounced: "Kissinger pointed out that the West should make it clear which issues are open to discussion and which are not and that it should do this in consultation with the people of Ukraine."²⁶ Which means that, in his eyes, some issues are "open to discussion". This shows that Kissinger has only conceded on the question of surrendering territory to Russia and is refusing to call Zelensky to stay away from the negotiations table as are doing the current rulers of US and British imperialism.)

A prominent figure within the American community of International Relations specialists, John Mearsheimer of Chicago University, has insisted during the war on the line of reasoning that he has defended since the Maidan events of 2014. Mearsheimer is of the opinion that the extreme deterioration of US-Russia relations is down to the aggressive policy of the United States and that this is a thoroughly erroneous foreign policy orientation.²⁷

Both Kissinger and Mearsheimer are without doubt specialists who act as advisors to US imperialism. Their intention is not to stand up to the interests of

²⁴ *Situation of Human Rights in Ukraine in the Context of the Armed Attack by the Russian Federation*, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/ua/2022-06-29/2022-06-UkraineArmedAttack-EN.pdf>.

²⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/25/world/europe/henry-kissinger-ukraine-russia-davos.html>.

²⁶ https://t24.com.tr/haber/eski-abd-disisleri-bakani-kissinger-geri-adim-atti-ukrayna-rusya-yatoprak-vermemeli,1048448_.

²⁷ <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/why-john-mearsheimer-blames-the-us-for-the-crisis-in-ukraine>.

imperialism. On the contrary, they defend their viewpoint so that while the United States is dealing with what is the real threat to the United States, i.e. China, it can perhaps assimilate Russia into a European alliance or, at the least, neutralise it, just as Kissinger did when he played the Chinese against the Soviets. What is important for us is that while defending this line they lay bare the truth that it is not Russia but the United States that is responsible for the state of the world nowadays.

Another agent of imperialism who has spoken frankly is a former Secretary General of NATO, the Belgian Willy Claes. This is word for word what Claes said on Belgian television:

If I may say it a little boldly, *it is about a confrontation now between Russia and America*. With all due respect and sympathy for the Ukrainians, and by the way, Europe is not playing along. ... In conclusion, the Americans will not object it taking a while. ... It's a golden age for the war industry, which is by definition American.²⁸

As may easily be seen, Claes is very well aware ("if I may say it a little boldly") that he is saying something that should not be uttered in public: "it is about a confrontation now between Russia and America". In other words, this is precisely a proxy war waged on behalf of America! Who would know better than a former secretary general of NATO? The current secretary general also knows it, but since he is not a senior citizen yet, his duty is to conceal the truth!

A warning to the liberal left from within its own universe: Jürgen Habermas

One of the striking aspects of this war is the fact that a certain sensibility that sees itself on the "left" but has totally capitulated to the hegemony of liberalism should attack Russia even more vehemently than the genuine agents of imperialism itself and never even mention the part played by NATO. Well aware that this kind of left-wing intellectual under the spell of liberalism would be responsive to the thinking of Jürgen Habermas, let us dwell for a moment on the position of the latter on the war.

We will take up the ideas that Habermas expresses in his newspaper article one by one, in laid-back fashion, without hurry, for the delight of our readers. Habermas first utters the following clause: "The West, which, with the drastic sanctions it imposed early on, has already left no doubt about its *de facto participation* in this conflict" (all emphasis in this section is ours). Habermas obviously entertains no doubt as to the fact that the West is part and parcel of this war. Then he continues: "The West... must therefore carefully weigh each additional degree of military support to determine whether it might cross the indeterminate boundary of formal entry into the war..." Let us pause here as well: "the indeterminate boundary of *formal* entry into the war". The speaker speaks with the precision of a philosopher

²⁸ <https://www.globalresearch.ca/habermas-war-ukraine-conversion-former-pacifists-leads-mistakes-misunderstandings/5783010>. Our emphasis.

so that is how we ought to understand him. Habermas says the West has not yet formally entered the war, but that it is *de facto* a part of that war. However, the point of transition from one to the other is unsteady and uncertain, each marginal step may result in the crossing of the boundary. If that is the case, then we are *not* talking about a *qualitative* transition, but one that is only *quantitative*. Everything we have been speaking of from the beginning of this part two of the article (weapons, ammunition, equipment, intelligence, reconnaissance, advice, tactical support, “volunteer” trainers, commandoes) are in fact a part of this quantitative development. Moreover, “this boundary [is] indeterminate because it depends on Putin’s own definition.”²⁹ With this third proposition what our philosopher intends to say is that whether the West is formally part of the war or not is in fact not a theoretical question but a practical one. Why? Because once Putin decides that the West is formally part of the war, he will declare war on the West as well. It is as if it is not Habermas talking but Marx!³⁰

It would be very useful to understand the political context of why Habermas intervenes in this manner. In Germany, the hegemonic field of the liberal left includes, alongside former Marxists, the Greens as well. At the moment a tripartite government coalition holds power in the country. The Social Democrats govern the country together with the traditional liberals of the Free Democrats and the latter-day liberals, the Greens. One would be forgiven if one thought that, with the historical origins of their programme based on “peace” as well as “ecology”, the Greens would be more cautious about the war and would engage in much less warmongering than the other two. Well, that is not the case. The Social Democratic chancellor Olaf Scholz is much more ambivalent about the war, approaching it with caution, and even prevaricates in his policies, while the co-chair of the Green Party, Annalena Baerbock, who is serving as the Foreign Minister in the cabinet, is a foremost hawk! In an address to parliament, Baerbock apparently also tried to settle accounts with her past. So *this* is what worries Habermas. He says, in sheer irony, that the Russian policy “ripped the young away from their pacifist illusions”.³¹ His real purpose is to defend the cautious politics of Chancellor Olaf Scholz from the crusading spirit of the likes of Annalena Baerbock. We saw the most sensitive and nuanced ideas above: what Habermas is telling the hawks is “watch out or you will summon a world war!”

These developments may rightly surprise the younger generations. But it was not overnight that the international left arrived at this point. A decades-long process has shaped the present configuration. Let us remind the reader that in her promotion

29 For the entire quotation see “Italy’s crisis redoubles European foreboding”, *New York Times*, 16 July 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/2ejffmde>. All emphasis ours.

30 Let us remember Marx’s Thesis Two on Feuerbach: “The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth — i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.”

31 <https://www.globalresearch.ca/habermas-war-ukraine-conversion-former-pacifists-leads-mistakes-misunderstandings/5783010>.

(!) from Green pacifism to a hawkish defence of a NATO war, Baerbock may very well have drawn lessons from a precedent case of a quarter of a century before her present foray into this sphere. We have always held that the civil war in Yugoslavia was a dress rehearsal for what is now occurring in the former Soviet space and drew the reader's attention to that point earlier in this article as well. It turns out that this was true for the historical development of the German Green Party as well. On this score, too, that is the case!

The Kosovo War of 1999 was a war of the Social Democrats of Europe in every way. In the big four of the European Union, the Social Democrats were in power, either on their own or in coalition governments but wielding the prime minister's office. Tony Blair in Britain, Lionel Jospin in France, Gerhard Schröder in Germany, and in Italy, the leader of what is today called the Democrats. But what made the situation even more ludicrous in Germany was that the coalition government was a "left" coalition and that the Foreign Minister was, exactly as today, the leader of the Green Party! Joschka Fischer was born a butcher's son, a son of the people, and moreover was a child of 1968. In his revolutionary period, he became famous for insulting the speaker of parliament when speaking face-to-face with him with a curse word that is impossible to repeat in good company. He was a student of Habermas, who himself was much more to the left at that time. It was this repentant revolutionary of 1968 turned a pacifist Green who, in 1999, shamelessly assumed the task of leading the forces that dropped NATO bombs on the people of Belgrade. You will never walk alone, Annalena Baerbock!

Sometime later, Fischer withdrew from politics and, cashing in on his devotion to the imperialist system, rose rapidly in his business life. His first job was in the counselling firm of Madeleine Albright, who had served as Secretary of State of the United States between 1997-2001 under Clinton, and thus should be considered as a "comrade-in-arms" to Fischer during the Kosovo war. His job definition was to serve as counsellor to German companies, which means, in a world of revolving doors in which people move back and forth between government posts and corporate jobs, a trading of influence, serving as a "middle man" between companies and governments to curry the favour of the latter. (Let us add that while she was still Secretary of State, Albright went down in history when answering a question by a journalist who reminded her that the US embargo on Iraq had killed hundreds of thousands of children and asked whether it was worth it, to which Albright responded: "yes, it was"!)

The next job Fischer took was iconoclastic! He joined as an advisor to the corporation that was building the oil pipeline Nabucco. Very becoming for the leader of the German Greens to pontificate on the fortunes of a company engaged in profiting from fossil fuels and this after serving as a major minister in a war cabinet! All this should remind us that a bright future is probably also awaiting Annalena Baerbock!

We absolve former Marxists of humble standing who have become confused and are trying to find a progressive way out of the disillusionment of yesterday all the while trying to survive on meagre resources. But the new generation ought to scrutinise very carefully the "careers" and future plans of certain "personalities",

former revolutionaries and now left-wing liberals, prominent politicians who have somehow risen to positions they by no means deserve, and intellectuals who have become celebrities. It might be that, after rising so high on the shoulders of the masses who supported them for their revolutionary word and deed, they are now spitting on their past ideas and ideals precisely because those ideas and ideals are barriers in the way of their future career plans. At first impression, it may sound as if they are talking to you of novel ideas. But if you listen carefully, they are not talking to you. They are really making job applications for the appropriate positions the bourgeoisie might offer them precisely because they will mislead the masses into submission to the interests of the ruling classes.

An interim conclusion

Although no one but two dinosaurs, one who is now 98 years of age on the right wing of the political spectrum (Kissinger), the other, 92, on the left (Habermas) have said it, the truth is plain to see: it is NATO's strategic orientation that has led to the Ukraine war. Even if it was not the intention of NATO leaders and in particular of the United States and Britain to start a war particularly, consciously and deliberately (we believe that it was and this in order to weaken, isolate and erode the military power of Russia), even if this was not the case, they are now content that the war has broken out. What is more, they do not want it to come to an end and are doing their best for it to continue.

Ukraine has become a tool of NATO imperialism in a proxy war. This is exactly how we can describe the situation: NATO has made an entire country and its people its army of mercenaries. And it has brought a former actor who played the part of the president of the country in a television series to play the same role in real life!

One of the foremost voices that represent international finance capital and of the City of London is the weekly *The Economist*. This newspaper (that is what it calls itself) existed at the time of Marx, who, in fact, at times polemicised with it on current economic and political affairs. It is this newspaper, an almost two-century old institution of capitalism, that poses the question "How to Win the Long War?" in its editorial of early July in an issue whose main dossier is devoted to that war. Here is how it answers that question: Ukraine has a very high number of highly motivated fighters. It is up to the "defence industry" of the West to support it. Is what is being said here not clear enough? NATO's weapons plus Ukrainian lives equals "victory in the long war".³²

3. Preparatory meeting for the Third World War: The Madrid Summit of NATO

The threat that NATO poses to the peoples of the world does not only manifest itself in the strategy pursued in Ukraine. The NATO summit that met in Madrid on

³² <https://www.lemonde.fr/international/live/2022/07/18/guerre-en-ukraine-en-direct-volodymyr-zelensky-limoge-des-hauts-dirigeants-apres-des-soupcons-de-trahison->.

28-30 June 2022 was not simply one of those summits held routinely every other year. The Madrid Summit designated for the first time since the end of the Cold War the countries that NATO considers enemies by name, extended the area of interest of NATO to the entire northern hemisphere, and, most important of all, by determining the conditions under which NATO will engage in war with other nuclear powers, implicitly declared the threat of a world war to the entire world. And, as we shall see below, some of those conditions are meagre excuses, to say the least.

We are not going to try to assess the decisions of the Madrid Summit in their entirety. We will only touch upon those aspects that will help us grasp the nature and the prospects of the war in Ukraine and thus the threat of world war. Let us simply point out that a fuller assessment of the Madrid Summit is necessary for determining the tasks of the international socialist movement.

Let us start out by indicating that one of the most significant aspects of the Madrid Summit is the accession of Sweden and Finland to the alliance, once the veto threat by the Turkish government was lifted. This significance does not derive solely from the fact that two very rich Nordic countries are adding their economic and military power to the imperialist military apparatus. It is also not only the fact that Finland, which has a 1,200 kilometre-long-border with Russia and stands at a distance of only 200 kilometres from St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad), the second largest city of the Russian Federation and has an outsized military force relative to the population of the country, either. Beyond all of this, the most important aspect of this round of NATO enlargement is the fact that the five NATO members littoral to the Arctic Ocean (United States, Britain, Denmark, Iceland and Norway) are now being buttressed by two Nordic countries that stand immediately behind the front line so to speak, which shows that the competition over the North Pole Region has the potential of taking military forms in the near future. We already hear in the distance the first skirmishes on the roof of the earth.

Beyond this, what we will focus on will be certain specific aspects of the decisions of the NATO 2022 Strategy Document adopted at the Madrid Summit.

Naming the enemy

Although NATO convenes a summit every other year, this does not mean that it works on a strategy document on the occasion of each of these summits. For instance, the most recent strategy documents before that adopted at the Madrid Summit date from 1991, 1999, and 2010. The last document before the Madrid one was adopted at the 2010 Lisbon Summit. No enemies were specifically named in that document.

In the Madrid document the Russian Federation is declared to be “the most significant and direct threat” (# 8, p. 4).³³ Enemy number two is the People’s Republic of China (# 13, p. 5). The paragraph that names China also adds that there is a “deepening strategic partnership” between the two countries in question (# 13,

³³ *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*, 29 June 2022. Whenever we quote from the text or mention a decision, we will provide the paragraph and page number in parentheses within the text.

p. 5). Finally, several countries are mentioned as threats, particularly due to their possession of mass weapons of destruction: Iran, Syria and North Korea (# 18, p. 5)

Though it is outside the topic of this article, let us point to a certain particularity of this enemy profile with regard to Turkey's geographic position. Three of these "threats" are neighbours of Turkey, from the north, the east, and the south. This alone shows how serious a mistake it is on the part of the left in Turkey to have shown little interest so far in the recent wars that have involved NATO.

The extension of NATO's remit to the entire northern hemisphere

As the name North Atlantic Treaty Organisation implies, NATO is an alliance that is centred on the northern regions of the two continents that border the Atlantic Ocean. Three years after its establishment in 1949, it was enlarged in a manner in which it could threaten the Soviet Union directly from its frontiers (and the low-cost troops of Turkey played a role as well): Greece and Turkey were made members in 1952. However, the real centre of gravity lies on the two coasts of the Atlantic. Of course, after 9/11 when the United States had recourse to article five of the treaty, which stipulates that an attack on any member is considered as an attack on all, and thus had NATO operations spread to Afghanistan, this broadened NATO's geographic remit *de facto*. But legally speaking, because the 9/11 attack was assumed to be an attack on America, legally speaking there was an explanation for this.

The Madrid strategic concept brings the novelty of attributing to NATO the responsibility of fighting a war with China when the conditions are gathered. The new geographic space in which NATO will be active is first extended to the MENA region (the Middle East and North Africa) and the Sahel region of five West African countries, by declaring these two regions as dangerous and unstable due mostly to "destabilising and coercive interference by strategic competitors" (# 11, p. 4), i.e. Russia and China. Then comes in the Indo-Pacific region (practically the entire coastline of Asia), the Western Balkans, and the Black Sea region (# 45, p. 11). In other words, NATO is tasked with the "security" of an entire zone that starts from the east coast of the United States, roams across the entire globe to finish on the west coast of the same country. This is for good reason. As we shall see in a moment, the same document includes China and North Korea within the threat of world war. The geographic redefinition of NATO's scope of operations is thus directly related to its preparation for world war.

Outer space and cyber space become *casus belli*

The Madrid strategic concept, using the term 360 degrees, includes within the theatres of war the outer space and cyberspace as well as the classical theatres of land, sea and air (# 17, p. 5). This new addition also provides grounds for stressing the importance of technology. We will see in a moment that this is not all, that when outer space and cyberspace are considered as spheres of combat, this also makes them grounds for *casus belli*.

The threat of world war

Now we come to the most important aspect. This aspect is never mentioned by the bourgeois media. The Madrid 2022 strategic concept hurls the threat of a world war and of nuclear war at the entire population of the world, but of course first and foremost to Russia and China.

The document declares that NATO is ready to engage in war with “peer-competitors”, i.e. countries that wield a level of military power that is comparable to that of NATO (# 22, p. 6). There are quite a number of nuclear powers in the world: India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea also possess nuclear arsenals. However, there are only two countries that may be called “peer-competitors” of the imperialist alliance: China and Russia. A war between one of these and NATO will almost inevitably trigger a world war. The NATO strategy document threatens to engage in this kind of war under three different conditions:

- The necessity of supporting any ally (NATO member country) under article 5 responsibilities (# 21, p. 6).
- “A single or cumulative set of malicious cyber activities or hostile operations to, from, or within space may trigger the use of article 5 (# 25, p. 7).
- “Hybrid operations against allies” may also lead to recourse to article 5 (# 27, p. 7).

As can be seen, the bar of conditions that would result in the outbreak of world war has been held extremely low. Just to cite an example: a cyberattack on the water or electricity networks of any NATO member can, in this formulation, provide the grounds for the collective declaration of war on China or Russia. And if we remember that the culprit of a cyberattack is very difficult to determine in the short run, this will not be like Pearl Harbor. It may very well resemble much more the Tonkin Bay affair, a feigned excuse used by the United States in order to escalate the war on Vietnam. Thus, having organised a sham cyberattack on itself, America may then have recourse to article 5 and start a world war. Another example would be the destruction of an American satellite or space station by Russian or Chinese spaceships.

Finally, the concept of hybrid war is used very loosely and with a very broad scope. According to the Government Accountability Office (GOA),³⁴ an official agency of the US government, the US armed forces do not have a single common definition of “hybrid war”. Moreover, the Special Forces Command questions even the necessity of resorting to such a concept and argues for the sufficiency of the concept “full spectrum”. Among the methods of war that can come into the scope of the two concepts, one can enumerate the following: attacks on computer networks or satellites, portable surface-to-air missiles, improvised explosive devices, manipulation of information and of the media, chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high-yield explosive devices. It is tempting to say that the “spectrum”

34 <https://tinyurl.com/2p9za9hu>.

is full to the brim!

It would not be an exaggeration to say, then, that on the basis of this “full spectrum”, NATO is aiming to hold the world to ransom on the basis of threats and in case this proves unpracticable, to turn and resort to world war.

Promises to the “left wing” of imperialist democracy

Now we are entering a sphere that is, *from the point of view of the aims of this article*, at least as important as what has already been said so far on the NATO 2022 strategic concept. The strategic concept puts on a show of *progressive politics* that permeates the entire document, something hardly normal for a military alliance. We say this motif “permeates” the document for the following sections and paragraphs all partake of this approach, in whole or in part: a short part of the “Preface” (p. 1), # 5 (p. 3), # 12 (p. 4), # 19 (p. 6), # 39 (p. 9), and # 46 (p. 11).

Leaving a fuller analysis to another occasion, we will simply touch upon the main themes taken up, which will convey to the reader what we mean:

- NATO claims that the military apparatus of imperialism is a partisan of eliminating nuclear weapons from the face of the earth! The opportunity of supporting NATO is thus extended to *pacifists and/or critics of nuclear weapons*.
- NATO contends that climate change is extremely important. This way it harps on the sensibilities of *European and partially North American* youth. Calculating the probable opposition of youth to war at least because of its deleterious impact on climate change (simply considering the carbon emission due to warplane or tank sorties would be enough!), which would make a military apparatus such as NATO unpopular, the document says that military activities will henceforth be carried out in ways that would avoid aggravating climate change. Since the aim is not to prevent climate change but to “sell” NATO to the young people who pay great attention to this, no one will bother to talk about how this would be possible. It is just that NATO “new look” is environment-friendly!
- The concept “human security” has become an important issue in *the NGO community* within the last decade or so. It is claimed that rather than military-security focussed approaches that open the door to militarism, it is necessary to adopt more “civic” approaches that aim to provide for the security of humans in every sphere of life. The United Nations is in fact routinely the origin of such operations. It is now becoming clear that “human security” is an umbrella concept that is pushed through in order to legitimise the discussion of “security” in “progressive” circles. Once you start from “human security”, defence, security, and military activities will become legitimate when it is a question of threats posed by forces that are “alien to Western values”.
- The concept “Women, Peace and Security agenda” is also an ideological slogan “made in the UN”, supposedly to spread gender equality and for women’s empowerment. But the way it has been formulated, that is to say the fact that it includes the concept of security, makes it possible to say that it is simply a

gendered variation of the concept “human security”, in order to absorb the energy of *women*.

- “We will continue to advance gender equality as a reflection of our values.” This oath by NATO is a blatant invitation to *feminists*. We are free to believe this, of course, if we forget for a moment how in the armed forces of the United States, the real boss of NATO, retired generals acting as teachers constantly exercise sexual harassment on the female and male students of military schools, how male military personnel of all ranks sexually assault and rape female military personnel at every opportunity and how the top ranks of the armed forces have become masters in covering up for their fellow male officers.
- NATO also pretends to take up what it believes defines the world situation, “pervasive instability”, not from the angle of the interests of imperialist states and their ruling classes (the bourgeoisie), but through the prism of a series of progressive, humanistic concerns. The *consequences* of “pervasive instability” (# 12, p. 4) are manifold: the prevalence of sexual violence in conflicts, the undermining of “human and state security” (beware NGOs the combined use of the two concepts!), the harmful impact on “women, children and minority groups”, the damage done to cultural property and the environment, the forcible displacement of people, the fuelling of human trafficking and irregular migration etc. etc. All this, if we are permitted to be a little sarcastic, “is worrying NATO profoundly”. For some reason the *causes*, as opposed to the consequences, of “pervasive instability” are never discussed. Perhaps this is because, whatever the proximate causes for each of these, the ultimate cause of all the ills that beset humanity is the ruthless exploitation and oppression of an overwhelming majority of humanity by a tiny minority class of capitalists and the authors of the document are cynically aware of this!

Liberals, postmodernists, defenders of identity politics, Greens, even pacifists, NATO is calling out to you. Uncle Sam wants you!

4. Capitulation

It is now very easy to write a conclusion to this article.

The international left has simply capitulated to imperialism. This is really the result of a slow-motion decline and retreat that has lasted at least for the last three decades, if not even longer. But with the war in Ukraine the Rubicon has been crossed.

We saw while examining NATO strategy that, concerning the home front, the military apparatus of imperialism is precisely aiming for this. Among all the forces that have been to this or that extent influenced by the progressive values of humanity, it is calling all under the NATO umbrella, all *except* those who take an intransigent anti-imperialist position. The fact that the left has taken shelter in “democratic values” since the collapse and dissolution of the Soviet Union accords it great opportunities.

There is a constant buzz on the left over the question of whether Russia and/or

China are imperialist powers or not. Many currents believe that if they can declare Russia an imperialist power, then they can take shelter in an equidistant or neutral position regarding the Ukraine war. All the while trying to make believe that they are doing this in the name of the Leninist policy of war. An absurd move. If there is a war between two imperialist camps, the duty Leninist politics posits for socialists of both sides is to struggle for the defeat of their own country and, if possible, turn the war into a civil war! In other words, if the socialists who defend the thesis of "imperialist Russia" are socialists of NATO countries, which is usually the case, they are dutybound to work for the defeat of their own country and for the eventual conversion of international war into a civil war!³⁵ ***Otherwise, they will have sided with NATO!***

We thus see that for those who have chosen the path of not standing up to NATO on the left, the thesis of "imperialist Russia" is of no avail. Nothing can save them! It is in vain to hope that anything will save them from the iron duty of fighting against their own bourgeoisie. Let us speak plainly: The reason for the overwhelming majority of the left to avoid confronting NATO is totally different. ***The reason is that within the last three decades these people have totally adapted to bourgeois democracy.***

Because those countries where bourgeois democracy is most advanced are imperialist countries that can afford this thanks to the possibilities of super-exploitation provided by their imperialist domination of the world economy, these currents and ideologues of the socialist left turn against Russia and target those socialists who point to the responsibility of the imperialists and fight to defeat NATO. In a show of unprecedented imbecility, they accuse the war policy of Marxists of being "Putinist" or "nostalgic". They thus take the side of NATO.

A new period is opening in the history of the international left. In the process of restructuring of the international left, one's position on the Ukraine war will henceforth be of capital importance, though of course not the only criterion.

And why? Why attribute such great importance to this war? What is it that makes it so fundamental to socialist policy? This war is, after all, a war between states that are all bourgeois states. Why then is it that a conflict where the working class does not play an independent role is considered so important?

Reasonable questions. For socialists the real acid test is class struggle, revolution, the construction of socialism, and internationalism, so inherent in the concept socialism. Why then? This way of looking at the question would be missing something extremely important. In this war an overwhelming majority of the socialist movement has taken the side of imperialism or at least proved that it is under the spell of imperialism. This is why we named this concluding part of the article "Capitulation". ***What remains from 20th century socialism has now capitulated to imperialism.*** 21st century socialism needs to reconstitute a socialist/communist movement in each country and internationally taking as its central concern a consistent anti-imperialism.

Those who capitulate to imperialism cannot push class struggle to its logical

35 See our comrade Levent Dölek's article in this issue.

conclusion. All revolutions of the future will have to fight imperialism if they are to win. NATO will probably only collapse as a result of a defeat suffered at the hands of a wave of socialist revolutions. The camps will then become clearly visible. Those who have capitulated to imperialism, those who idly ponder on the rule of law and human rights and the rhetoric of democracy will be confronting us and will side with imperialism.

But in order to get to that point, we first need to explain to those within and near socialism who have not completely adapted to imperialist democracy why this is an imperialist war and not simply one between Russia and Ukraine. This ideological-political-theoretical war has not yet been won. Only if we can explain this on a solid basis can we lay the groundwork for a new socialist movement and really draw clear boundaries between those on the side of imperialism and those who are its implacable enemies.

RedMed

www.RedMed.org

RedMed and Christian Rakovsky Centre on the move!

RedMed (short for Red Mediterranean) was, until recently, a web site that published news, opinion, commentary and political declarations from around the Mediterranean Sea, the Balkans, the Middle East, the Black Sea region, Transcaucasia, and the broader Eurasian region. It has now been transformed, as of the beginning of 2020, into a centre for propagating socialist thinking, carrying commentary and political statements and publishing various journals from the Mediterranean region all the way to Russia and the former Soviet Union.

RedMed used to work hand in hand with the Balkan Socialist Centre Christian Rakovsky to establish links between socialists and revolutionaries from these regions. However, parallel to the expansion of RedMed, the Christian Rakovsky Centre also broadened its remit. Over time three Russian organisations became members of the Christian Rakovsky Centre: the OKP (United Communist Party), the RPK (Russian Party of Communists), and the Association "Soviet Union", in addition to the original members, two political parties of two Mediterranean countries, EEK (Workers Revolutionary Party) of Greece and DIP (Revolutionary Workers Party) of Turkey. Thereupon the centre changed its name to the International Socialist Centre Christian Rakovsky.

RedMed is now publishing on a bimonthly basis both the Communist of Leningrad, a journal brought out for quite some time in Russian by the RPK, and Soviet Renaissance, a new online journal in Russian prepared by the Association "Soviet Union". This is in addition to its already established commentary and political statements on world affairs in many different languages, first and foremost in English but also in French, Italian, Greek, Turkish, Russian, Farsi and Arabic.

RedMed welcomes letters, comments, and news about struggles, debates and materials in different languages. We would appreciate it very much if people would volunteer to translate the different articles and declarations that we publish on the web site into their native tongue.

Let us join hands to bring down the yoke of imperialism and capitalism in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, and across the world.



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The myth of Russian imperialism: Why neutrality on the Ukraine war is wrong

Levent Dölek

With the onset of the war between Russia and Ukraine, a politics of “neutrality” has been commonly defended by the left, justified by a reference to Lenin and the politics of the Bolsheviks during the First World War. These references are mistaken. Russia cannot possibly be taken as an “imperialist” state on the basis of any Marxist framework and certainly not based on the perspective put forth by Lenin on imperialism. On the other hand, let us for a moment grant, for argument’s sake, that Russia is imperialist, the politics of “neutrality” would still be an erroneous course of action from the Leninist perspective. Revolutionary Marxism (a.k.a. Bolshevik-Leninism) analyzes each and every war by the principles based on the interests of the local and international working class, and not by abstract dogmatic criteria.

Leninism rejects the politics of neutrality in war

First and foremost, when Lenin and the Bolsheviks identify both warring blocs as “wrongful” and “predatory” in a war between two imperialist blocs, they do not conclude with a policy of neutrality for the working class. Lenin states that in the First World War, it is difficult to ascertain whether the victory of any one of the leading states of imperialist blocs, the British or Germans, is better for the proletariat. The interest of the working class is in revolution. The war will transform into re-

volutions naturally on a national scale. The working class faces its own plundering bourgeois government within the nation. Therefore, Lenin contends that the proletariat should not be neutral in its nation's unjust war but actively desire the defeat of its bourgeois government and fight for it. Hence, Lenin proposes a "lesser of two evils" policy and that for the proletariat of each state this lesser evil is the defeat of its own bourgeois government. Hence, the essential issue for Lenin is to be able to use the conditions created by the existing war in the best manner for a proletarian revolution. The slogan is not "take no sides in an imperialist war" or "there's no lesser evil in this war", definitely not a pacifist wish like "we side with peace" but "turn the imperialist war into a civil war".

Neutrality in a NATO member state amounts to being on the side of NATO

The meaning of this political stance for Turkey, a member of NATO, is clear. We must seek the defeat of NATO, which is undeniably using Ukraine as a proxy in this war, and fight for this defeat. We repeat, even if Russia were an imperialist power, it is mistaken to hold a neutral stance in this war with a reference to Lenin. At best, this is a misreading of Lenin, not as a result of being unable to understand what is being read but as a result of looking at the world not from the perspective of Marxism but from the perspective of bourgeois academia under the hegemony of Western Imperialism. And this is at best. Taking into account the fact that the politics of neutrality in the NATO member Turkey objectively means the support of NATO, we must not underestimate the activities and the prevalence of EU-funded NATO propaganda.

Was Russia imperialist back then?

How are we to look at this war from the perspective of the interests of the world proletariat? Here, the analysis to determine whether Russia is imperialist is very important. Those who claim that since Lenin described Russia as imperialist even back in the First World War, it must be even more so today, are misreading him and distorting his arguments. Because Lenin described Russia then as a backward economy with lingering feudal relations, a warehouse providing soldiers to the imperialist bloc under the hegemony of Britain and France, and not as an independent imperialist state. In this sense, Russia was not equivalent to Germany but to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Ottomans occupied an even lower status as a semi-colony. Yet the Ottomans were also a side to an unjust war hand in hand with the Germans. Indeed, the war policy of the Bolsheviks changed after the 1917 February revolution. Russia's war together with British imperialism remains unjust but the policy of fighting for the defeat of Tsardom and turning the war into a civil war is different from the policy followed after the February revolution that sparked the civil war, and it focused on winning the civil war itself. We studied these subjects in greater detail in our article ["The Character of War in 21st Century: Are China and Rus-](#)

sia a target or a side of the war?”, also published in the same source in Spanish under the title “El carácter de la guerra en el siglo XXI: ¿Rusia y China son un objetivo o un bando de la guerra?”

Is Russia an imperialist country today?

Now let us discuss the question of whether Russia is an imperialist power today. As is well known, Lenin defines imperialism as a worldwide system. The distinctive feature of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism is the dominance of the export of industrial capital and finance capital (over the export of commodities!). These features enter all the domains where capitalism has developed. For example, as a young country developing capitalism Turkey skipped the era of competitive capitalism and moved directly to the stage of monopoly capitalism, immediately with the foundation of Isbank as a finance capital organization that combined banking and industrial capital. Likewise, South Africa and Nigeria are the countries with the highest capital export in Africa.

No corner of the world is free from capital circulation under the imperialist system. The bourgeoisie of all countries export capital to a certain extent. What matters is not quantity but quality. Therefore monopoly, finance capital, export of capital, etc. are not indicators of an imperialist power by themselves. What it means for a nation to be an imperialist power is the finance capital owners of that country to enter the fight for the global control of markets and resources and the state to fight for colonies and zones of influence worldwide. Worldwide! Not regional! Not across borders! Not even continent-wide!

Imperialism is the worldwide struggle for partition

In other words, if the monopolies, finance-capital organizations, and the quality and quantity of the capital exports of a country are not sufficient for it to enter a fight for inter-imperialist partition of the world, that country cannot be called imperialist. Of course, armies and military power are also important factors. It is well known that Russia is the second largest- military power in the world following the US. But since Russia is not imperialist, meaning that the opportunity to obtain exorbitant profits by exploiting the world is foreclosed to it due to domination of the US and its allies, its military expenditure is one tenth of US expenditures and its 61 billion-dollar military budget is even smaller than those of Britain and France. And it is merely 15 billion dollars larger than those of Germany and Japan, which are both under de facto military dominions of the US as a result of losing World War II. Finally, the only Russian military base outside of the former Soviet states is in Syria, whereas the US has about 800 bases of various sizes in 172 countries and has 320 thousand troops stationed outside its borders.

Nuclear weapons? Yes, Russia’s nuclear inventory can match that of the US. But this only acts as nuclear deterrence against NATO. Zones of influence, market conquests must be supported by navies and armies, not nuclear missiles. On this score, the farthest range Russia can aim for is Africa! Even there Russia is unable to attain

an independent zone of influence without a pragmatic alliance with the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It has already lost half of its zone of influence in Syria, the east of the Euphrates, to the US. Ukraine is a matter of resistance to its domination by NATO, it is not about expanding Russia's own influence.

The myth of Russian imperialism from an economic perspective

When it comes to economics, the situation gets even more dramatic. Those who claim Russia is imperialist prate about its national income, hydrocarbon reserves, its balance of payments surplus and large amounts of foreign currency reserves. We also see those trying to invoke Lenin by stating Russia's considerable export of capital. If we take these arguments more seriously for a moment, we see they are not only wrong but also ridiculous.

A symptom of poverty as evidence for imperialism

National income is primarily an indicator of the size of a state and not its economic power. A densely populated but poor country may seem big in light of its national income despite its poverty. Therefore, it is a misleading indicator. You can better see the league of wealthy nations of the world by national income per capita. Russia is the 11th largest economy in the world in terms of national income but it falls to approximately 50th rung in national income per capita. In the same way, Turkey falls from 21st to 76th place. It is all crystal clear! But since the intention of some is not to see reality as it is but to justify their neutrality stance, they now resort to using purchasing power parity (PPP) to shove Russia into the imperialist basket. In this calculation, which is indexed to the local prices of a list (or "basket") of reference goods and services, Russia is now in the 6th position, whereas Turkey is 11th. The leading position belongs to China.

This statistic is even more misleading. Because even though it has "purchasing power" in its name, getting higher on this list actually implies poverty rather than high purchasing power. The reason is clear. Goods and services are together in the list of reference commodities used in the calculation. Most industrial goods have their prices determined internationally but the prices of services that are local in nature are cheaper in poorer countries. For example, a smart phone costs more or less the same in Britain and in Turkey; but going to a barber shop to get a haircut or getting your house painted is cheaper in Turkey. The reason for this is not because the labour of barbers and painters is more efficient in Turkey, but because their labour is cheaper and the purchasing power of the people is lower in Turkey. Thus, it is laughable to do global power analysis based on purchasing power parity statistic.

In the age of imperialism underground wealth is not conducive to control but being controlled. The whole history of imperialism has taught us that abundance of underground resources do not result in a global hegemonic position, but, on the contrary, it makes one an object to be fought over and controlled. Indeed, this is

most apparent today when we see the petroleum and gas reserves of Russia cannot make it a hegemonic power but merely provides some leverage against sanctions. Dramatically, those who claim that Russia is engaging in imperialism with its hydrocarbon resources do not once mention that 20% of the shares of the Russian oil monopoly Rosneft is owned by British Petroleum, and likewise 16.7% of the shares of the natural gas monopoly Gazprom is owned by American capital through the Bank of New York Mellon. The oft-mentioned dollar reserves of Russia proved not that Russia is an imperialist country but its submission to it. Russia has been keeping a big part of these reserves in Western imperialist centers as a pledge for remaining in the global imperialist system, and as a result lost access to 400 billion dollars of its 634 billion-dollar reserves in the immediate aftermath of war. Just look at this Russian imperialism!

The Russian economy is characterized by commodity exports not capital exports

When it comes to capital export, Russia also exports capital just like other countries, but what dominates the Russian economy is commodity export. This is a distinguishing factor for pre-imperialist and imperialist eras. Russia is a net capital importer. So Russia is not in a position to exploit the world but instead it is exploited by imperialist capital. And there is even more to this. Russia's current capital export figures are inflated. About 20 billion of Russian capital exports (two thirds of the total amount) are the so-called "round tripping" investments into tax havens (Cyprus alone standing for 30% of this amount!) that go right back into Russia. Just like the Isle of Man investments which used to be talk of the town for a while in Turkey... When we look at real capital exports, we observe that Russian oligarchs must always be accompanied by US, British or Italian imperialist partners (investments of the private oil monopoly Lukoil is typical in this regard). Imperialist capital shapes the economic and even the political landscape in the places it goes to. Yet in the current situation, the imperialist monopolies showed the Russian capital who the real masters are immediately after the war. Those oligarchs who lost their bank accounts and shares as well as their luxury yachts had to go straight back to Russia.

The political implications of the non-imperialist character of Russia

We started this article by asking what if Russia were an imperialist power. But at this point we see that Russia is not an imperialist power from a Marxist and scientific perspective. The political outcomes of the war further affirm the theory in practice. It means that we need to go further than the absolute essential tasks required by being citizens of a NATO member country like Turkey. In this war between imperialist NATO forces and Russia, the defeat of NATO is not only in the interests of the proletariat in NATO member countries but the entire world. The reason is obvious. War is the domain in which politics takes its sharpest expression and where

in which instruments of violence come into play. The side that loses in a war cannot just go home, as a football team consoling itself that it will win the next game. It faces dire consequences. It has to foot the political bill, involving consequences of various dimensions and layers. The relationship between Germany losing the First World War and the 1918 November revolution is clear. The same relationship holds between the Chinese revolution in 1949 and Japan losing the war. Speaking about examples closer to Balkan peoples, the failure of the Ottoman state against the guerilla war waged by the Macedonian revolutionaries led the way to the so-called "Freedom Revolution" of 1908. What is more, the military success of the National Struggle in Anatolia resulted in the resignation of the Lloyd George government in Britain in 1922, the main organizer of this war, and led to the fall of the monarchy and the creation of a republic in Greece that waged the proxy war in the name of Britain!

Now if we discuss turning the war into a civil war or, in other words, turning it into a revolution, we need to look at the different outcomes of this war in the war-front by anticipating their political implications based primarily upon the interests of the working class. The military defeat of NATO will be a huge blow to the bourgeoisie all over the world, and will lead to positive conditions for the working class not only in the countries subjected to imperialism but even in the imperialist centers. Today the forces of the proletariat are weak in Russia. There is no strong left party other than the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF). For its part, this party is merely the party of the old state bureaucracy pandering to Putin. Therefore, Russia's defeat will not even yield positive results in Russia and will most likely lead to the oligarchic regime turning itself to a semi-colony resembling the Yeltsin era, instead of moving in the direction of socialism.

For these reasons we can say that in this war the defeat of the only imperialist power, NATO, is to the benefit of the world proletariat; unlike in the First World War where both sides were imperialists. Even though Russia's, or Putin's, victory will be a defeat for the imperialists, this will not be its ultimate defeat as a global order. The road to this finality is the world revolution. Therefore, we do not support the capitalist restorationist oligarchic regime of Putin when we call for the military defeat of NATO. The world revolution cannot be relayed to any party other than the national and international revolutionary parties of the proletariat. That said, for those who fight for the world revolution, or those that claim to, to not understand the reality of imperialism in its scientific and political basis, to follow a politics of neutrality towards NATO, to call for hollow and meaningless peace demands, and in doing so to support imperialist propaganda from within the ranks of the left is either complacency or treason. And we should not forget that complacency may eventually lead to treason.

Issue 50, our very special issue

Revolutionary Marxism Editorial Board

Our issue No. 50 is a milestone in the 16-year journey of the journal. To learn about its birth story, let's see the first paragraphs of the piece written by the Editorial Board to mark the 10th anniversary of *Devrimci Marksizm*:

Devrimci Marksizm is 10 years old now. It met the masses on May Day in 2006. As a journal of militant theory it first saw the light of day on the streets, so to speak. Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach is its core tenet: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it". The consciousness that Marxism is a guide for the working class and all other social classes and strata to annihilate capitalism has always been its leading principle.

The journal of *Devrimci Marksizm* embarked upon its journey with a small Editorial Board, alongside an advisory board which has later loosened and become unfunctional. That small Board, which has shouldered the Journal perseverantly for so long, later expanded and became institutionalized. We are now about to take a second leap forward. The journal is once again wrapped in a large discussion and advisory network. Fresh blood pumped into its veins reinvigorates the Journal. We believe that it will draw even more intellectuals, especially young ones, into its ranks.¹

That expectation has been realized since then, with the Editorial Board doubling its capacity by including new comrades of younger generations. Our expansion,

¹ Editorial Board, "Devrimci Marksizm'in 10 Yılı—devrimci Marksist teorinin 30 yılı", *Devrimci Marksizm*, No: 28-29, Fall-Winter 2016, p. 14-15.

however, has gone far beyond that. We formed a committee called *Devrimci Marksizm* Collective through which we collaborate with our friends of various generations in the planning and evaluation of the Journal. It means that our editorial capacity has quadrupled since 2016, and thus having more authors writing articles regularly for the Journal. Theoretical contributions made by young comrades among those writers are also something needed to be stressed. Then we would say that *Devrimci Marksizm* had a successful journey so far. If a journal publishes 50 issues in 16 years without any serious setbacks and expands its editorial staff to such an extent, it is something to be proud of.

The Anatomy of issue No. 50

Our issue No. 50 is set out to clarify in what respects our approach, method and basic theses diverge from those embraced by the other tendencies in the left. In other words, it responds to the following questions: Why do we try to understand and explain the world and contemporary thoughts, using the Marxist method? Why Marxism instead of the trendy currents on the left? Hence our new issue marks the methodological and political boundaries between the journal *Devrimci Marksizm* and the other left tendencies as well as establishing the superiority of Marxism over them.

Such efforts have undoubtedly been expended in the 19th and 20th centuries. Marx and Engels devoted the third section of the *Communist Manifesto* to criticizing the non-communist socialist movements. Engels' classical work on the comparison between utopian socialism and scientific socialism is of the same kind. Lenin's *What is to be Done?* and other works were to highlight the differences between his perspective and non-Bolshevik socialist and revolutionary currents, including once-a-chief-ally Kautsky's revisionist Marxism (*The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*). Trotsky had to fight not only against social democracy and Stalinism, but also against anarchism in Russia and Spain, and the various shades of centrism in the struggle for the re-construction of Marxist movement.

That effort is indeed a must in any era for any current of thought. It is however much more important for a current such as Marxism, which defines theory and practice as prerequisite of each other, and is predicated on their dialectical unity, because some theories lead humanity to emancipation whilst some knock on the gates of hell!

That is an indispensable duty because, at least in the last 40 years, new currents of thought, from postmodernism and left liberalism to post-Marxism, post-Fordism and post-colonialism, which belong to the tradition of those knocking on the gates of hell, declared Marxism as the arch-enemy. Accordingly they have mobilized their all forces to undermine its long-lasting and worldwide hegemony and reputation, extending from the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* to anti-colonial struggles after the October Revolution.

While class struggle and imperialism are ignored as old-fashioned concepts, revolution is stigmatized as a form of "social engineering" disrupting the natural course of history. To seek solutions for the oppressed and exploited masses who

are condemned to poverty and misery is underestimated by the discourse of “poor-mouthing”. Many have joined that anti-Marxist crusade; postmodernists such as Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Spivak, Butler, Rorty, Hardt or once-Marxist intellectuals like Antonio Negri, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Stuart Hall, Stanley Aronowitz etc. Innumerable Turkish Marxist theoreticians and political leaders and parties, including those aligned with the Kurdish liberation movement, have also embraced an ideological-political direction, which is a hybrid of postmodernism and left liberalism.

This new conjuncture of the last 40-50 years was brought about in parallel with and in relation to the 20th socialist construction attempts and their respective crisis culminating in collapse. And it puts new and demanding tasks before the late 20th and early 21st century Marxists.

Genealogy of Devrimci Marksizm

Because Turkey has been convulsed by gigantic class struggles and social turmoils between 1960 and 1980, the conjuncture, a world-historical development, aforementioned above was yet to manifest itself locally. Its introduction into the country, in the form of “left liberalism”, became possible only after the military coup of 12th September 1980 and onward, during which revolutionary, socialist and communist movements have been persecuted under the military yoke.

Turkish left and Marxist intellectuals have a dignified place in the ranks of the international Marxism for being among those who had defined characteristics of the infiltration accurately and counter-attacked it early. In its first issue published in 1985, the journal of *11. Tez* (Eleventh Thesis), after addressing the striking transformation in the international leftist intellectual milieu, depicted its reflections on the Turkish left in the introductory piece titled “As We Begin” as follows:

...The post-coup period witnessed a crisis in the Turkish left in which a left-liberal and individualist approach was born and then became widespread. It has, intentionally or unintentionally, been aligned with an anti-historical-materialism line by denying the revolutionary achievements of the past thoroughly on the pretext of criticizing the old wrongdoings. That approach substitutes the class-based contradictions and relations with the liberal dichotomy of state and civil society. Democratization is conflated with “the constitution of civil society”, and thus equating democracy to “market economy” or capitalism. Classes and socialism are, in short, conspicuous by their absence in that perspective.²

It was the first time that “left liberalism” was conceptualized in Turkey and, as far as we know, in the World as well. Lagging behind Turkey with respect to agility and preparedness against this new orientation caused left liberalism not to be defined and then classified on a solid basis for long. French left, for example, had named it “second left” for decades. Latin American Marxists still call such tendencies “democracy-prone left”.

2 “Başlarken”, *11. Tez*, No: 1, November 1985, p. 6-7.

11. Tez had gathered Marxists affiliated with various political movements and tendencies alongside independent academics. As the bastion of Marxism in Turkey, it has played a crucial role during a specific period. Notwithstanding its merits, even such a journal could not escape the internationally deleterious effects of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Many members of the Editorial Board were stricken profoundly by that event. The journal eventually had to terminate its publication.

The Revolutionary Marxists, who had assumed a leading position in founding the *11. Tez*, have maintained their fight first in the *Sınıf Bilinci* (1988-1999) and then in *Devrimci Marksizm* (since 2006) against left liberalism and similar tendencies. What we say is not that none of the other Marxist currents have challenged them. We would rather say that the two journals have carried on the fight based on the perspective outlined in the “As We Begin” of the *11. Tez*. The perspective was to be recapitulated in the first issue of the *Devrimci Marksizm*:

Notwithstanding being built on different theoretical and philosophical premises, left liberalism, post-Marxism, postmodernism, post-Fordism, globalism and etc. have two common characteristics. Firstly, they are the quasi-left version of Fukuyama's theory declaring the end of history after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Their perspective is confined to the bourgeois liberal international order claimed to be the least evil among the alternatives. That the countries like Turkey integrate into that global order, for example, via the EU membership, is peddled to be a great achievement and harbinger of democracy. Secondly, those theories are predicated on the rejection of the conflicts and struggles stemming from society's being divided based on class.³

Our issue No. 50 is a synthesis of the struggle against those tendencies: The first dossier scrutinizes postmodernism, post-Marxism and Murray Bookchin, whose theoretical approach is a liberal and postmodernist form of anarchism. Some articles, for example, about the postcolonial theory, and the influence of the non-material labor on the labor theory of value, which are planned for this issue but yet to be completed, will be published in our next issue.

Not all fashionable theories are addressed in the issue. The most important one among those is, of course, left-liberalism, which it is fair to say that it is the most influential variant in Turkey. The absence of such an account is that both the *Sınıf Bilinci* and the *Devrimci Marksizm* have dealt comprehensively with it before.

The fate of anti-Marxist tendencies in the face of practice

In this piece we do not intend to discuss the fashionable theories. They are already addressed in separate articles in this issue, and will be in the next issue. We would like to touch briefly on a relevant issue, though. The measure of accuracy for any theory is practice. It is clear that theories proven wrong by concrete realities and facts can not extend beyond being fantasies. Then the question is; have those fashionable theories passed the test successfully?

3 Editorial Board, “Başlarken”, *Devrimci Marksizm*, No: 1, May 2006, p. 8-9.

Since we took up the question comprehensively in our previous issues, there is no need to deliver a full balance-sheet, but our answer is unequivocal: Political projections of anti-Marxist tendencies have ended up in a fiasco worldwide.

The financial catastrophe of 2008 exposed the feebleness of the left liberal and postmodernist fetishism of globalization (“global village”!): Trump’s fascistic nationalist policies which have later been carried on by Biden hammered the last nail in the coffin of the fantasy of “globalization” alongside crumbling the ludicrous vanity of the assertion that “the nation-state is dead”. Even classical fascism (of course in new forms) is back from the grave, as the most dangerous outcome of the contradiction between the nation-states and capitalist integration of the world.

“Imperialism is replaced by interdependency” was another fancy premise articulated by those who have turned a blind eye to massive poverty, misery and imperialist wars. It faded into oblivion as did “globalization”.

It has also been preached that capitalist states have learned how to contain economic crisis. When a great depression began after the financial collapse in 2008, that argument was falsified instantly and swiftly. As a new world war appears to be a tangible threat on the grounds that NATO and the USA have launched an attack on Russia and China, the myth “in a fully-integrated globe, a new world war is impossible” is being shattered.

The next to be debunked will be the motto “class is dead, long live identity”, no doubt! This myth will for sure be wiped out by proletarian revolutions, which is the only solution to the contradictions capitalism has dragged mankind into. Popular uprising waves spanning from 2011 to nowadays, covering a large geography from the Middle East to Asia and South America, are so important that they can be considered to be the harbinger of those revolutions.

Stalinism and Maoism to be addressed in our next issue

We have so far dealt with the intellectual tendencies to have launched a grand mobilization against Marxism in the last 40-50 years. We stated that the main aim of that issue is to introduce those tendencies to our readers; to criticize them; and thus showing why we still insist on Marxism. Our next issue, however, will give a place to the critiques of two tendencies which call themselves Marxist. Why? What is the irony here?

The reason behind why we address those tendencies in a separate dossier in the next issue is that they had played a vital role in the collapse of the socialist construction attempts of the 20th century. Postmodernism, left liberalism and others have infiltrated into the international left through the fissures on the Berlin Wall. The historical rupture by those tendencies from the core principles of Marxism had decisive effects which caused both the collapse of the Wall and the people to desperately revolt at the T’ien-an Men.

That story can be told in a different way, too. If Stalinism and Maoism (and its Albanian version, that is, Enver Hoxha) are really what Marxism argues for, the degeneration of the 20th socialisms and their collapse en masse are then logical consequences of Marxism. That the international left refrained from reckoning

with that question and its root causes, namely, the programme of “socialism in one country” and the break with internationalism, paved the way for postmodernism, left liberalism and others to infiltrate into the ranks of the left, and for their ideas to be disseminated easily among young intellectuals.

Taking a critical stance against Stalinism and Maoism also reveals why the Journal is not simply titled as *Marxism*, but is as *Revolutionary Marxism*. Not all tendencies wearing the badge ‘Marxist’ are able to solve the problems humanity has been facing. Only can a revolutionary Marxism, which remains allegiant to the authentic or undistorted-by-bureaucracy form of the programme of the world revolution, offer a true remedy to our wounds. Some ask why do you call yourself a “revolutionary Marxist”? It is so by nature, isn’t it? We are not the ones to coin the term. The term “Revolutionary Marxism” is used frequently by Lenin in his works. He employed it to distinguish the authentic and veritable Marxism from those degenerated by reformism, opportunism, nationalism; namely, against Bernstein, Kautsky, Mensheviks and social democrats. We use it also against Stalinism and Maoism, both of which sold out the cause of the world revolution by reconciling with the world bourgeois.

A militant theory

As a closing remark, let us underline a point we have ever emphasized. That is a journal of “theory *and* politics”, meaning that its theoretical efforts are inextricably intertwined with the target of changing the world. The journal *Devrimci Marksizm* is an outcome created by a cadre of people who use theory and science not for the sake of pedantic and academic pretensions, but as a guide to advance the revolutionary cause. It therefore represents the tradition of militant theory. That is why it features Lenin’s following succinct phrase on the first page of each issue: “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement”.

The paragraph below, extracted from a piece written collectively by the Editorial Board which argued that the world had entered into a new Great Depression in 2008, and which has since been, so to speak, our journal’s manifesto, is the best expression of our goal:

Devrimci Marksizm presented its main objective in its first issue as follows: “Our journal is aimed at fighting an ideological war against the pro-imperialist and pro-capitalist luminaries who, in the pages of newspapers such as *The Economist*, mention an ‘intellectual war’ that the international bourgeois has to win. We, as the journal *Devrimci Marksizm*, declare that we join that war for the victory of the working class”.⁴

4 Editorial Board, “Yeni Bir Dönem Açılıyor: Mali Çöküş, Depresyon, Sınıf Mücadelesi”, *Devrimci Marksizm*, No: 8, p. 12.

The age of egoism

Sungur Savran

Introduction: Fifty years of solitude¹

In the last half-century the intellectual universe of the international left has undergone a tremendous process of change. In place of the progressively increasing domination of Marxism over the left and even over intellectual life in general for longer than a period of 120 years, that is to say from 1848 to 1968, if we take the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* as our point of departure, postmodernism has now taken front stage, with its peculiar idiom, its muddle of disjointed ideas, its unmistakable type of narrative, and its idiosyncratic style in the arts, literature, film, and architecture.

The intellectual life of the left-wing movement in each country was subjected to the assault of postmodernism at a different moment and through a different trajectory. France experienced this wave in the wake of 1968. The general public in other European countries and the United States had to wait for the 1980s to get a taste of the new *lingua franca* of the universe of left-wing thinking. As for countries subordinated to imperialism, including our own country Turkey, these were first intro-

¹ This article was originally written in Turkish for Special Issue No. 50 of our Turkish-language journal, *Devrimci Marksizm*, focusing on the confrontation between Marxism and postmodernism. It has been translated into English by the author himself. Apart from the omission of details that would be of no interest to an international audience, only stylistic changes have been made to the text. As for footnotes we omitted many of them, especially those that made side remarks and those that referred to Turkish-language sources, for an economy of time. We would like to thank at the outset the members of the Editorial Board of *Revolutionary Marxism* for having made very useful comments on a first draft of this article. Thanks to them we have, we believe, ameliorated some of the sections of this article considerably.

duced to left-wing liberalism in the 1980s, postmodernism following suit a bit later.

The impact was earth-shaking. In every country where postmodernism made its appearance, Marxism may be said to have survived at a dose that may befit an aperitif taken at a cocktail party and even that was a quasi-Marxism that proudly wore the insignia of anti-Leninism as a trade mark. But *revolutionary* Marxism became utterly marginal in the world of the intelligentsia. Marxism has been wading across the intellectual world in profound solitude for decades now. In Turkey this was felt for the first time after the military coup of 1980. However, as we and the socialists/communists of other countries were still talking in the idiom of Marxism that befitted the furious class struggles of the 1970s, the jargon of postmodernism had already taken over in France and, somewhat later, elsewhere. That is why the solitude adds up to half a century.

The purpose of this article is not to provide a theoretical/philosophical critique of postmodernism and schools of thought that are, in one way or another, affiliated to it, such as left-wing liberalism, post-Marxism, post-Fordism, globalism and others. Our aim here is to try to understand how it came about that postmodernism and company have replaced Marxism as the dominant mode of thinking in the world of the left intelligentsia. Nothing that goes on in the world of ideas is the product exclusively of that world itself. Each current of thought, literature or art, each theory, each philosophical school is a response to practical developments in the material world. Not only a response, in fact, but also a product of those developments grasped through the ideological filter of certain classes, strata, groups, political currents etc. When one is discussing postmodernism and currents affiliated to it, it would be folly to attribute their domination over the intellectual life of the left to the genius of the main representatives of this thinking (Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Gayatri Spivak, Judith Butler, Richard Rorty, Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray among many others). Some of these, for instance Foucault, Deleuze, Negri or Laclau, may be considered to be truly profound thinkers even if entirely misguided in their outlook. Some, on the contrary, are straightforward *charlatans*. It would be undeserved praise for people like Baudrillard or Lyotard or their lesser co-thinkers in other countries and unjustified disdain for the intelligence of humanity at large to contend that these thinkers are the real *moving force* behind the intellectual spasms, convulsions and pangs experienced by the international intelligentsia within the last half-century. They should only be treated as *symptoms*. The real historical factors that have thrown even these charlatans to the front stage should be sought in the practical developments in the material world.²

² Our characterisation of some postmodernists as “charlatans”, a term that has become specialised in the history of science and ideas precisely for people who deliberately try to benefit from muddling issues for the purpose of gaining an audience and becoming famous, may disturb some of our friends who have been to a certain extent influenced by postmodernism. We would like to mention a small episode in this context. Louis Althusser, who was an admirer of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan for decades, attacked him and called him a “magnificent clown” late in his life. See Taner Timur, *Marksizm, İnsan ve Toplum. Balibar, Sève, Althusser, Bourdieu*, İstanbul: Yordam, 2015, s. 162.

What we will be looking into in this article are the socio-economic and political developments that lie behind this enormous landslide. While trying to explain the background of the tremor that has shaken the world of the left intelligentsia, we will have to answer many different questions. It would be useful to mention some of these at the outset lest we lose our path when confronted with such a labyrinthine question.

In the course of discussing the phenomenon of postmodernism, the present article will attempt to answer the following questions: (1) What do the spokespeople for postmodernism and affiliated schools of thinking say and represent, not from the point of view of philosophical arguments, but that of their concrete approach to the problems of the world we live in? (2) What routes have the spreading and popularisation of these ideas taken and what stages did these processes go through? (3) Why is it that this development occurred in the aftermath of 1968, seemingly a period of momentous revolutionary ascendancy? (4) Why did these ideas not remain peculiar to that specific period but, on the contrary, characterised an entire historical period, a whole half-century so far? (5) What kind of political developments accompanied this tremor in the sphere of ideas? At the opposite end of the effects of political life on ideological trends, how did this radical turn in ideology affect political life itself?

Finally, we would like to underline at the outset with utmost care the following point: most of our readers are aware that postmodern thought stands in a one-to-one relationship with so-called identity politics. Behind currents such as multiculturalism, feminism, LGBTQI+ stand postmodernist and similar thinking and the former receive their intellectual nourishment from the latter. The critique we will level at identity politics below *by no means* implies a refusal to admit the crucial nature of the social and political questions that form the material background to these (the oppression of nations and religious minorities, the manifold forms of inequality and humiliation created in the imperialist epoch, in particular by colonialism, forms that still haunt even what today are formally independent entities, the oppression of women, the multiplicity of forms in which those whose sexual orientation departs from heterosexual norms etc.). The revolutionary Marxist tradition that we come from has in general been careful when dealing with such oppression, albeit not always equally consistent on every question. The world has not had to wait for postmodernism in order to wage a fight around at least some of these questions (the most important instances being the struggle for the self-determination of nations and the emancipation of women). Our difference regarding these forms of oppression and the struggle to eliminate them lies only in the method to be used.

1. Postmodernism: the opium of the intellectuals

Raymond Aron, perhaps the doyen of bourgeois liberal thinking in France's intellectual life of the 20th century, published a much-discussed book in 1955 on the influence of Marxism on the French intelligentsia, titled *L'opium des intellectuels*, "the opium of the intellectuals". A title no doubt conceived intelligently, turning Marx's famous dictum "religion is the opium of the people" against Marxism itself. Yet it has now become clear, though Aron did not live to see it, that the opium of the

intellectuals is not Marxism but postmodernism, especially in France, where it was born, but also around the world. With its language that renders life an incomprehensible enigma, obscurantist to the core, postmodernism is *truly an obstacle* in the way of the intellectual in his or her effort to understand society or indeed the entire universe. It also acts as a thick curtain that hampers the light shed on the world by Marxism. Perhaps the last great representative of the *lumières* in its home country France, Aron, we think, would simply concede this point, despite his bourgeois prejudices against Marxism, easily comprehensible in a most hysteric period of the Cold War.

As we said in the introductory section, we are not going to undertake a theoretical critique of postmodernism and other currents affiliated to it. Our aim is different: it is to explain the success this school of thought has had through historical materialist analysis. But in order to make this explanation more readily comprehensible, we need to briefly take up the fundamental characteristics of this school in a critical manner. We cannot expect all of our readers to be comfortably familiar with these traits; moreover, not everything we will take up here is treated in such a stark manner in works that strive to present postmodernist thinking critically. What we wish to do is in a certain manner to present the reader with the *outward surface* of postmodernism, the manner in which it intervenes in the material world, the way in which it functions as the “opium of the intellectuals”.

Let us then present in summary form the main characteristics of the school from this point of view:

- Postmodernism is a crusade against reason and science. The relativism of Nietzsche, one of the main sources of inspiration of postmodernism, which in its turn flows from his extreme scepticism,³ leads to a sharp critique of what the postmodernists themselves call the “instrumentalist reason” of the Enlightenment and of the scientific establishment, which bears its mark.⁴
- As a consequence and facilitator of this, postmodernism writes and speaks in an idiom that is extremely convoluted and even incomprehensible to mortals who are not its adepts. Aphorisms, play on words, vivisection and transplantation of concepts, and other literary tricks are legion, especially in Jacques Lacan,⁵ a psychoanalyst who is one of the sources of inspiration of the school, but from Derrida to Baudrillard and Lyotard “language games” are a basic element of

3 This is what is called “perspectivism” in Nietzschean philosophy. Nietzsche held that it would be wrong to assume the existence of an objective truth and that ideas should be assessed by taking into consideration varying circumstances and the position of those who emit them as a fundamental philosophical principle.

4 Two physicists, Alan Sokal, an American, and Jean Bricmont, a Belgian, submitted an article that was full of nonsensical formulations and had it successfully admitted and published in a well-established postmodern journal, *Social Text*, and later publicised this whole episode in book form. See their *Fashionable Nonsense. Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science*, Pittsburgh: Picador, 1999.

5 The most important ideas of Lacan are often expressed in terms of play on words. They are really even impossible to make intelligible to those who do not speak French because they are variations created by cutting words halfway and adding them onto others. Elizabeth Roudinesco, writing with sympathy on Lacan's work, admits so much. Elizabeth Roudinesco, *Her Şeye ve Herkese Karşı Lacan*, translated [into Turkish] by Nami Başer, İstanbul: Metis, 2012, p. 21.

the intellectual universe of postmodernism. Sokal and Bricmont, two critics of postmodernism say, “if they sound incomprehensible to you, it is for the good reason that there is no sense in what they are saying”.⁶ To those who complain that the language she uses in *Gender Trouble* (1990), the book where she puts forward the fundamentals of “queer theory”, probably her most original intellectual feat, Judith Butler has no qualms in replying that they speak this way because they are not aware how grave are the lived experiences of queers.⁷ It might be in order to point out that intellectual work is done precisely to enlighten the uninitiated and to transmit the knowledge necessary to make it possible for others to understand what they have not had a chance to learn earlier. In addition, it would not be out of place to point out that Butler’s reply creates the impression that she believes only queers are ferociously oppressed in this world, which is a direct confirmation of the title given to this article (“The age of egoism”)!

- Although postmodernism, as a current of thought born in the aftermath of 1968, does talk of revolution quite frequently in the initial stages of its development, the concept of revolution is in fact converted into an impossibility. Both Foucault and the pair Deleuze-Guattari contend that expecting total emancipation is itself a kind of capitulation to the system and demanding power in the post-revolutionary phase ends up destroying the revolution.⁸ In subsequent generations of postmodernist thinkers, the very concept of revolution undergoes erosion to gradually evaporate fully.
- Postmodernism involves a stand against taking society as a totality and trying to change it in wholesale manner. It refuses completely systems of thought such as the Enlightenment, Hegelianism and of course Marxism, all of which it designates as “grand narratives” or “meta narratives”. For postmodern thinkers, “difference” is the key concept. Society is always taken up from the point of view of groups that are in a specific position. Whereas in the 1970s the centre of attention was marginalised groups such as psychiatric patients, prisoners, high school students under repression etc., the current turned its face from the 1980s on towards the movements of women, the LGBTQI+, ethnic and nationalist groups under the appellation of “New Social Movements”.
- Postmodernism is unflinchingly hostile to Marxism and communism. At the beginning, this took an insidious form of a war of attrition, since Marxism enjoyed great prestige thanks to the revolutionary wave that existed not only in France but around the world. However, the banner of opposition to Marxism was raised unmistakably in the second half of the 1970s. (The form that this

6 Quoted by François Cusset, *French Theory. Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze et Cie. et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux Etats-Unis*, Paris: La Découverte, 2005, s. 13. Our translation from the French.

7 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York/London: Routledge, Second Edition, 1999, “Preface”, p. 20-22.

8 *Aspettando la rivoluzione*, Milano: Res Gestae, 2015, section containing interview with Michel Foucault, p. 34-35; op. cit. and section containing interview with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, p. 121; Ian Buchanan, *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus*, London/New York: Continuum, 2008, p. 21.

change took place and the dynamics behind such developments will be taken up in section 6 below.)

- At least at the beginning, postmodernism focused on the relations of “micro power” in the different institutions of society (the lunatic asylum, the prison, the clinic, the school, the factory etc.) Foucault’s work is the decisive source of the postmodern approach in this area. In our opinion, this approach of Foucault’s was conceived as a strategy of struggle against the emphasis Marxism lays on the conquest of state power by the proletariat. In other words, Foucault and others are fighting the influence of *The State and Revolution*. (We will return to this point further on in the relevant context.)
- Postmodern theory is nourished substantially by psychoanalysis and in particular by Jacques Lacan’s interpretation of Freudian theory. There is also an alternative approach, that of Deleuze and Guattari. Their two-volume *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* develops an alternative method to Freud’s that tries to explain capitalism through “schizo-analysis”. Within this context, under the influence of Deleuze and Guattari’s work, concepts such as “desire”, “pleasure”, “libido”, and “sublimation” play a great part in the postmodern discourse. This results in the prominence of the world of the individual in the study and comprehension of the social. Besides controversial yet serious works in which this method is used, this has been a source of abuse in the case of clownish figures such as Lyotard, who cracks a completely unsubtle joke about Marx in the form of “what did he do with his left hand while writing *Capital*?”⁹
- As is well-known, the series of traits that we have been talking about are usually grounded, at least for the hard-core postmodernists, in a proposition to the effect that a new stage of history has opened up called the “postmodern” age. The social and cultural characteristics of “postmodernity”, in their turn, are attributed to certain economic novelties that may be observed in capitalism. In other words, postmodernism is really grasped as the social and cultural expression of what alternative theories have characterised as the transition to “postmodernity” or “post-industrial society” or “flexibilisation” or the growing over into a “post-Fordist” stage and of “globalisation.” We will come back to this briefly in the concluding section.
- To sum up, as one can see from what has been said, all the gains that Marxism had been accumulating as a guide to changing the world for the 120 years until 1968 have come under the blows of postmodernism and its affiliates over the last half-century. What we are going through should, without a shred of doubt, be characterised as an *ideological counter revolution*.

2. The trajectory of postmodernism

If we are to delve into this ideological counter revolution not only in its theoretical ramifications or, more broadly, in terms of its manifestation in the arts, literature,

⁹ Jules Ferry/Alain Renaut, *La pensée 68. Essai sur l’anti-humanisme contemporain*, Paris: Gallimard, 1988, p. 57-58. Our translation from the French original.

architecture, academia etc., but also from the point of view of its material socio-economic and political dynamics, tracing the early concrete trajectory through which it spread around the world will give us important hints.

The structuralist school of thinking that marked the post-World War II period seems to be the right point to start the story. The source of structuralism is the *Cours de linguistique générale* of Ferdinand de Saussure, who should be considered to be a 19th century thinker. The book was prepared on the basis of the course notes compiled by two students of Saussure in 1916 and although it did attract attention in the first half of the 20th century, it left its mark on philosophy and other disciplines of the social sciences (anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis etc.) only after World War II.¹⁰ Saussure makes a distinction between language and speech, stresses the social character of language and points out that the relationship between signifiers and the signified is completely arbitrary. To put this last point differently, there is no necessary connection between a word and the object or the concept that that word signifies.

In this analysis of language, the structure is everything. Conversely, there is no **subject**, no active agency. The success this approach enjoyed in linguistics resulted in the spread of the approach based on “process without a subject” to other scientific fields of inquiry. In anthropology, a whole school of thinking was built around the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss in different areas such as kinship relations and myths. Georges Dumézil, a mentor of Foucault, was a prominent figure of this school. In psychoanalysis, Lacan with his special interpretation of Freud’s thinking and, in Marxist philosophy, Althusser with his conception of history as “a process without a subject” were other important figures. Although they were all French, they all had worldwide impact with their peculiar method of thinking.

So, it was structuralism that marked the 1950s and the 1960s. However, from the 1960s on came along several thinkers who were considered to be **post**-structuralists, first and foremost Foucault, Derrida and the pair Deleuze and Guattari. In contrast to the structuralists, who worked within the overall framework of the Enlightenment (and of Marxism in the case of Althusser and his co-thinkers), the newcomers took another road under the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche (sometimes seen as a source of inspiration for Nazism) and Martin Heidegger (who was practically involved in Nazi activities). However, despite this radical difference, they were called post-structuralists because they shared the predilection of the structuralists for processes without subjects. In our opinion, the decisive aspect of the new school being a revolt against the Enlightenment, a refusal of totality and dialectics, and their anti-Marxism, to characterise them as somehow a continuation of structuralism is, to take just one example, an injustice done to Althusser (although we are of the opinion that the latter’s Marxism is entirely misguided).

This was the dawn of postmodernism. We see, then, that postmodernism was born in France in the 1960s. ***One of the basic theses of this article is that postmod-***

¹⁰ The *Cours* was translated into English for the first time in 1959, in other words 43 years after it came out in French. This is an indication that Saussure’s impact really took off in the second half the 20th century.

ernism is the product of the contradictory nature of the French 1968. This point will be taken up in detail in the next section. Postmodernism left its mark on French intellectual life throughout the 1970s, most of all in the form of the works of the authors called post-structuralists. In the memorable words of Perry Anderson, who has offered the most complete Marxist critique of postmodernism, “Paris today [in 1983-ss] is the capital of European intellectual reaction.”¹¹ That the impact of this school on the intellectual life of other countries in the same period should not be neglected is attested to by the flow of books and articles written in the Anglo-saxon world that criticised and rebutted postmodernism.¹²

However, the real leap towards the internationalisation of the impact of postmodernism came in the 1980s, when all the favoured thinkers of this school were received with great attention, even fanfare, in the United States and the main bulk of their work was swiftly translated into English. The first step forward came very early on, in 1966, at a colloquium on post-structuralism at one of the foremost universities of the United States, Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, to which many of the French “celebrities” were invited. This was followed by the establishment of visiting positions for these French thinkers not only at Johns Hopkins but at Cornell and Yale as well, followed by a general tendency at American universities to show closer interest to this school of thinking. In time, each university instituted a “Cultural Studies” department and later these departments became the breeding ground for new departments, first of “Women’s Studies” and later of “Gender Studies”, and eventually departments that focussed on race and ethnic studies and “Post-Colonial Studies”. The name of the postmodernist school thus became “French Theory” in the United States.¹³

The reason why the United States was the second country postmodernism conquered after France we will explore in the next section, when we delve into the relationship between postmodernism and 1968. Let us simply say this much at this stage: thanks to its hegemonic position in the capitalist world in the post-World War II period, the United States had in time become the centre of intellectual life in the same capitalist world as well. One significant example is the shift in the visual arts. Whereas Paris was the cultural centre for painting and sculpture from the dawn of the capitalist era until the 1950s, the city to which the talent of all other countries went on pilgrimage, from that turning point on New York gradually took over the place of Paris as the new centre. The same may be said to have gradually happened

11 Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 32.

12 Most importantly: Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration. Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*, London: Verso, 1979; Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism, A Marxist Critique*, London: Polity Press, 1981; Perry Anderson. op. cit., 1984. As for other countries, Italy seems to have some priority. In the preface he wrote for a book that brings together the interviews conducted by the Italian journalist Duccio Trombadori, R.J. Goldstein notes that Foucault’s books were translated into Italian as soon as they came out in France. See Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx. Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1991, p. 7.

13 We owe our knowledge regarding the adventures of postmodernism in America during the last four decades to the extremely comprehensive study by François Cusset. See *French Theory: Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux Etats-Unis*, op. cit.

not only in fields such as medicine, physics, chemistry, economics, in which areas, the United States, together with Britain, almost has a monopoly of innovation and discovery, but also in the social sciences and even in philosophy, which was traditionally considered an intellectual domain of European culture. It was for this reason that once postmodernism captured the US “market”, so to speak, it was but a short step toward its spread to and conquest of the international sphere.

3. 1968: A historical turning point of hybrid character

*When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning,
he found himself transformed into a gigantic insect.*
Franz Kafka, “Metamorphosis”

It is now time for us to discuss the part played by 1968 in the flourishing of postmodernism. We were in fact aiming for some time now to take up the question of 1968 on its own merits, so this question of its relationship to postmodernism provides at least a point of entry for us into this topic.

Let us admit at the outset that the lines that follow should be considered a partial self-criticism with respect to our earlier assessment of 1968. In an article (in Turkish) that we had written earlier in which we provided a detailed account of this historic turning point, we had contended that 1968 was an “international revolutionary wave”.¹⁴ The reader will see in a moment that today we approach this characterisation with certain caveats. In effect, we really should have made these caveats explicit quite some time earlier. Narrating the story of this reassessment is, we think, worth our while.

When the Arab revolution broke out in 2011 and this was echoed by the people’s rebellions in other countries of the Mediterranean basin and beyond, we approached this phenomenon with great care, penning several major articles and many short pieces on the different episodes of this wave. From 2013 on, as we were looking for an answer to the question of how to situate this wave of revolutions and rebellions in the overall history of the modern age, we reached the conclusion that in our modern epoch, revolutions advance in **waves of world revolution**. Even bourgeois revolutions had emerged at least as regional waves, but the pattern was much more clear-cut when we came to socialist revolutions or revolutions that bore this kind of potential but failed or proved abortive. As we were testing this theoretical framework for the different clusters of socialist revolutions, we naturally hit, first and foremost, the first wave that started with the October revolution in Russia and its sequel in Europe and Asia and the second wave of revolutions that started in the midst of World War II and achieved victory in the aftermath of the war (or, in certain cases, were lost) as the most unmistakable cases of world revolution. The difficulty lay elsewhere: how was one supposed to approach 1968?

If 1968 was to be considered a new wave of revolutions just like the first two,

¹⁴ Sungur Savran, “1968: Bir Devrimci Dalganın Adı”, *Devrimci Marksizm*, No. 9, March 2009.

then obviously it had to be considered “the third wave of world revolution” because of its unquestionably international nature. However, from the vantage point of 2013, besides conceding an indubitable revolutionary aspect to the phenomenon in its entirety, we felt a certain malaise regarding certain other aspects. We will go into these in a moment. But let us pose our original question again: if the present upheaval is itself such a worldwide revolutionary wave, which we insist it is, then was it the third or the fourth wave of world revolution? Not having found the necessary leisure to look into the matter more carefully on the basis of fresh research, we came to the decision that it would be wrong to situate 1968 on the same plane as the other waves. As we set out to write the present article, we found that this has been confirmed to be the correct assessment to make.

According to our present evaluation, 1968 is of the character of a *hybrid wave*. From a certain angle, it is the history of the emergence of a tremendous festival of mass struggles all around the earth. A partial balance sheet of those struggles was provided in the article that we have just referred to. But from another angle, it carries within itself the seeds of the wave of reaction that was to follow it soon afterwards. This is certainly not a trait that was to be observed necessarily in every country with a 1968 uprising. From Vietnam to Latin America, from Sri Lanka to Turkey, and even in some imperialist countries (Italy, Portugal, Spain etc.) 1968 wields exclusively the character of a revolution or, depending on the case, a rebellion. But in several imperialist countries (the United States, France, England, Germany etc.), although the revolutionary character is vividly present, the movement engendered the seeds of its own dissolution within its very nature. We would like to underline the merciless dialectic in question here: we are *not* talking of a reaction that sets in once the revolutionary movement fails in its enterprise. We are speaking of a reaction that is born of the very essence of the movement *itself*.

These seeds of reaction were effective both in countries where the revolution or popular revolt did not include the working class as an agency (America, Germany) and in those where the working class carried out powerful class struggles (France, Britain). This is not the distinguishing factor. The distinguishing factor is the power of the student movement. In those countries where the student movement played a major role (even in the case of France, where simultaneously with the student movement close to 10 million workers staged a strike and occupation movement that lasted almost for a full month), the movement did not recede under the overwhelming power of a force outside of it, but rather gave birth to a dynamic of dissolution *from within itself*. There were basically three elements at play: the *use of drugs* as a pervasive practice within the movement even during the phase of revolutionary ascendancy; the *setting up of communes* as the movement retreated from the streets, harbouring fantasies of breaking from bourgeois society immediately, rather than the movement looking for ways to sustain the revolution or the rebellion, as the case may be, by forming new mass organisations; and the substitution of *a striving for the emancipation of certain social groups in isolation from the rest of society* in place of an effort to build a united movement for total emancipation.

Some may display scepticism regarding the use of drugs: they might grant that this might be wrong when the movement is on the barricades, but nonetheless de-

fend their use afterwards. Our reply to them is that the struggle against capitalism has to aim for the defeat of a state apparatus that is under the control of a class fully conscious of its interests (the international bourgeoisie and its national fractions) and is a highly organised and disciplined class that is ruthless when the need to defend its rule arises. This is incomparably more difficult than driving and cannot be done “while intoxicated”. That is why the use of all kinds of drugs are prohibited in a Leninist organisation. Some others may retort, asking why communes are targeted since they embody a way of life based on shared property and thus go beyond the limits of bourgeois society. On the one hand, communes are precisely a return from scientific socialism to utopian socialism. The entire historic experience of the latter should have taught us that it is impossible to cast away the ills of a capitalist society marked by the law of value and a voracious appetite for surplus value by building small havens of that kind within those given conditions. On the other hand, to retreat to a life in communes implies abandoning the larger struggle. Communal life drains all the energy of the participants with a fixation on problems of private life, in particular those that derive from the communalistic practices of “free love” and leaves no space for other social and political matters. And when this comes together with the use of drugs and alcoholic drinks, it results in deeply hurtful experiences for groups that are in a weaker position (women and more seriously young girls, or even children of both sexes). Furthermore, the participation of people from different class backgrounds in the same commune and the institution of intimate relations between them creates serious risks of deep spiritual and mental convulsions. The ill-famed Charles Manson killing spree is simply one of the most grieving instances of such cases. Thirdly, the pursuit of the emancipation of different social groups *on their own* implies, by definition, the abandonment of the striving for social revolution.

Postmodernism rose on the basis of precisely these blind sides of 1968, first in France and later in the United States. In a certain sense, this current is the expression not of the revolutionary side of 1968, but of these aspects that form its Achilles’ heel. In an interview conducted in the wake of 1968, Foucault lists the necessary steps in order to remove the barriers that stand in the way of a complete change of society in the cultural sphere (alongside, it must be noted, class struggle, since at this early stage the prestige of Marxism is so high that to ignore the importance of class struggle would have been impossible for a thinker who is intent on changing social relations): “the suppression of taboos and limitations on and divisions in sexuality; practicing commune-type existence; disinhibition face to drugs; rupture from all inhibition and closures through which are reconstituted and reproduced normative individuality”¹⁵

He also enumerates the groups on which work has to be conducted: “We wish to work with high school students, university students, those studying in the supervised school, those who are held under psychological or psychiatric repression on what they wish to study or their relations with their families or in sexuality or

¹⁵ *Aspettando la rivoluzione*, op. cit, p. 25. Our translation from Italian.

concerning drugs...”¹⁶

François Cusset, author of *French Theory*, sums up the picture in America in the following terms:

In ten years of activism, from the first marches of 1962 for civil rights to libertarian sleep-ins of the early 1970s, the vast American student movement was gradually transformed from an organised political opposition to a spontaneous movement with an overwhelmingly existential scope – from militant anticapitalism to a mystique of “free” bodies and hallucinogens. Just like Bob Dylan’s songs, which, around the same time, pass over from anti-imperialist folk to psychedelic spiritualism. This metamorphosis of the student rebellion, under the impact of the brutal suppression of 1970 as well,¹⁷ is *one of the sociological determinants* of the reception and later the repackaging of French theory.¹⁸

Let us pay close attention to what the author is saying: He claims that one of the decisive factors in the adoption of postmodernism by the American academia is the transformation of the student movement from an anti-capitalist revolutionism to a Dionysiac cultural movement on the basis of a celebration of “free love” and drugs. We share the observation whole-heartedly.

It is quite telling, although we cannot go into this here, that an overwhelming majority of Marxists have missed the dialectics behind this hybrid character of 1968. A very interesting symbolic instance of this cecity is the following cute formulation by the late Chris Harman, one of the leading theoreticians of the Socialist Workers Party, the British one, describing the reabsorption of the revolutionaries of 1968 into the capitalist social order in the late 1970s: “If the fashion in 1968 was to drop out and drop acid, now, apparently, it is to drop in and drop socialism.”¹⁹ It seems neither the late Harman nor Alex Callinicos, who quotes him approvingly, asked themselves the following simple question: in what sense is “dropping acid” the *opposite* of “dropping socialism”? What, in other words, is the relationship of socialism with LSD?

4. The rise of the modern petty-bourgeoisie and the educated (semi-) proletariat

Now we have to pose ourselves another question. A school of thought we have characterised as counter revolutionary may have been born from the bosom of 1968, recognised in history for its revolutionary character; unusual though this may be, it may be understood as a result of the dialectic of the internally contradictory character of that movement. However, the influence of the 1968 movement could not reasonably be expected to last longer than a decade or two. Half a century? How

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 33. *Ditto*.

¹⁷ The allusion is to the killing of six students and the wounding of dozens at many universities, first and foremost Kent State (Ohio) and Jackson State (a black college in Mississippi), with police fire during student demonstrations on the Vietnam war.

¹⁸ Cusset, op. cit., p. 65. Our translation from the French original. Our emphasis.

¹⁹ Quoted by Callinicos, p. 165.

to explain the conquest of the intellectual world by postmodernism and its affiliates for half a century already?

There lie three different factors behind the longevity of postmodernism. One is the significant change of the class structure first in the imperialist countries and later in others. Another is the loss of prestige of the various experiences of socialist construction of the 20th century initially and later their collapse. Finally, there is the solution found in the late 1970s and early 1980s by the international bourgeoisie to the crisis of world capitalism that set in in the mid-1970s, that solution taking the form of the neoliberal class assault of the bourgeoisie on the working classes of all countries (which was later consolidated by the adoption of globalism.) We will take up the first point in this section and the other two in the two sections that follow. Later we will unite these as a synthetic whole in Section 7. We will carry out this discussion necessarily in summary form, making references to earlier works of ours whenever possible.

The class basis of the hegemonic influence of postmodernism is the extreme importance gained by two distinct, albeit closely associated, social groups in the social structure of all countries from the mid-20th century on: the modern petty-bourgeoisie and the educated (semi-) proletariat. We have written on these social strata in detail earlier (in Turkish) and here, given the wide scope of this article, we will present only a summary of our views on this question.²⁰

The modern petty-bourgeoisie, widely called the “professionals” in the social jargon of the Western countries, is part of the petty-bourgeoisie in that this class both owns its means of production but also expends labour in order to produce commodities (usually services) itself, but is a special layer of this class because it is not, as its namesake the traditional petty-bourgeoisie, such as artisans, small tradespeople, or the small-holder peasants, a social category that has its roots in the pre-capitalist stage, but on the contrary is a product of modern capitalist society and its productive forces. This is a layer that is specialised in areas of production (mostly of services) that require higher education (medicine, law, finance, technology, including digital technology, architecture, tourism etc.) and uses this skilled labour in workplaces (doctor’s cabinet, pharmacy, veterinarian clinic, lawyer’s office, small-scale architecture, engineering, or design agency, accounting or financial consultation office, post-production studio, software preparation company etc.) that belong to itself and earns usually high or very high income relative to the general mass of the labouring population.

There are two very important differences between the two wings of the petty-bourgeoisie, the traditional and the modern. On the one hand, the material basis of the traditional wing of the petty-bourgeoisie is on the decline, with large-scale means of production constantly, albeit in contradictory movement, sapping the fundamentals of its existence. Proletarianization is a serious risk for the traditional petty-bourgeois. The modern wing has a much more durable material basis precisely because it is the product of modern conditions, although, here too, the development

20 Sungur Savran, “Sınıfları Haritalamak: Sınıflar Birbirinden Nasıl Ayrılır?”, *Devrimci Marksizm*, No. 6, Spring-Summer 2008.

is sometimes contradictory, at least in the short term. Secondly, because the modern layer has received higher education or even beyond, it is different from the traditional stratum not only culturally for obvious reasons but also economically.

The second social group that we wish to dwell upon is not a stratum of the petty-bourgeoisie but of the proletariat: the educated (semi-) proletariat. These are the same kind of people as the modern petty-bourgeoisie except that they are employed as wage-earners, either by capitalists, by the government, or by non-profit entities. Let us explain the qualificative “semi” here. The upper strata of this class fraction come from wealthy families. In such families, intergenerational wealth transfer is very common, especially at the stage when the parents are between the ages of 45 and 55.²¹ Later, with the death of the parents, a sizeable amount of wealth, mostly in the form of real estate, is transferred to the new generation. Under such circumstances, the proletarian cannot be considered to be fully proletarian. For only those workers are real proletarians who are *forced* (for economic reasons) to sell their labour power. In the same way as the poor peasant who, because he or she cannot subsist on the products of the land owned alone, needs to work also as wage-labourer, this layer is also semi-proletarian. He or she may very well leave her job in an advertising agency or at a university as a teacher and open a café, a boutique or a workplace in the area in which he or she has been educated. On the other hand, even if “semi”, this person is proletarian nonetheless since he or she is exposed to the same pressures (especially the prospect of layoff) as other proletarians.

Although this class stratum leads a life based on wage labour in the sphere of production (and thus shares some important interests with the proletariat at large), from the point of view of its *origins*, its formation corresponds almost exactly to that of the modern petty-bourgeoisie in terms of the conditions and the trajectory of this formation. The medical doctor who owns a cabinet and the university teacher who teaches at a medical school or the architect who owns a design studio and the one that works for a big construction company etc. are exposed to different pressures in their work life, but are very close in terms of their socio-economic roots and educational background. Moreover, and more importantly, viewed dynamically, that is to say throughout their entire work life, as a result of either their own choice or some unforeseen circumstance, they may even reverse their respective positions in life. These two strata are also very similar culturally and in terms of their political orientation. That is why, for the purposes of this article, it will not pose a problem to treat them together and bring them under the rubric of the “modern petty-bourgeoisie” for the sake of convenience, with the proviso that their differences may bring up certain divergences in their class attitudes or their political orientation under certain conditions that can be taken up elsewhere.

A crucial institution in the class formation of these two strata is *the university*. The part the university played up until the beginning of the 20th century was restricted to the uppermost thin crust of capitalist society. In 1901 in the United Kingdom (it should be remembered that this country was still the hegemonic imperialist power and set the tone of development) only one out of one hundred youth (as a

²¹ Mike Savage, *Social Class in the 21st Century*, Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 2015, p. 75.

rule, only men) went to university. When we come to 1962 this figure had risen to four in one hundred. Currently (the figure is from 2015), almost 50 out of one hundred youth in some way try their hand at higher education.²²

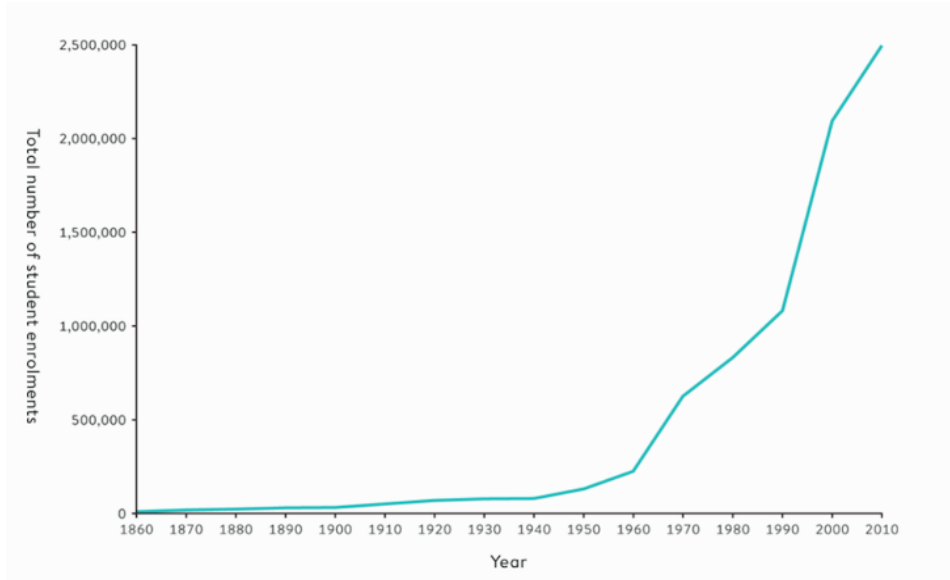


Figure 1: Number of young people of university age attending an institution of higher education, the United Kingdom, 1860-2010

The same tendency is valid for all countries, albeit at differing tempos over time.²³ There is thus an almost perfect empirical overlap between what can be called the “mass university” and the hegemony of postmodernism.

Of course, from the methodological point of view, the empirical observation of correlation does not, on its own, imply sound causality. However, an expanding literature has recently shown in quite a convincing manner that university education acts as the grounds for the expanded reproduction of certain privileged classes or rather class strata. Comprehensive work on class analysis²⁴ and the most advanced representatives of the so-called “meritocracy” literature²⁵ have provided data that do not leave any doubt as to the vital importance of higher education in the new class formation of capitalist society since the 1970s.

²² Ibid, Chapter 7, passim. The graph is on p. 225.

²³ For the US, the pace-setter of present-day capitalism, see Cusset, op. cit., p. 54 ve Michael Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit, What's Become of the Common Good*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2020, p. 18.

²⁴ The book written by Mike Savage and his colleagues, published in 2015 (see footnote 20), is, according to the characterisation of the author, was built on the Great British Class Survey, organised by the BBC in 2013, the largest-based survey ever made in Britain (161 thousand responses).

²⁵ Michael Sandel's book (see footnote 22 above) is celebrated as the *chef d'oeuvre* of this literature. A discussion of the concept “meritocracy” is of no interest to us, at least in this article.

What, then, is the decisive element in this new class structure of capitalism? In both literatures in question the answer to this question is unambiguously the “professionals”! More succinctly, it is the modern petty-bourgeoisie and its not very distant cousin, the educated (semi-) proletariat. University education functions as a mechanism that separates the modern petty-bourgeoisie (including in our usage the educated (semi-) proletariat) from the proletariat, as well as the traditional petty-bourgeoisie, as a privileged layer of society almost as a *caste*.

Why do we say a “caste”? The reason is that, under the deceptive slogan of “equal opportunity”, a competitive system that is rigged through and through is in place. Whatever the differences of the university entrance systems of the different countries, the reader will be familiar with the truth of what we are writing through their own personal experience. Whether it is a university entrance exam that is used or an admissions system that relies on the credentials of the youth that apply for admission, the undeniable fact that the offspring of wealthy and highly educated families have an immense head start for winning the competition shows us that the institution of the university really functions as the hotbed of the reproduction of the social position of the wealthy and the privileged.

Of course, in an age when university education has become such a mass phenomenon (fifty per cent of the relevant population in the United Kingdom!), not every youth who has, one way or another, succeeded in setting foot on the soil of an institution of higher education can have received a passport to enter the privileged minority of the modern petty-bourgeoisie. Here, the stratification of various universities becomes the breeding ground for a rigorous process of sorting out of the privileged from the ordinary and, thus, for the reproduction of the caste-like structure of the modern petty-bourgeoisie. In the United Kingdom, Oxford, Cambridge, and certain London universities and in the United States, a small number of other universities in addition to those called the “Ivy League” universities educate the *crème de la crème*. For those who are curious to know the statistics, let us cite some figures. Two thirds of the students of Ivy League universities come from families that belong to the wealthiest 20 per cent of American society. In some select universities such as Princeton and Yale, which provide highest quality education at the BA level (while some others such as Harvard concentrate more on the postgraduate level), the offspring of families who belong to the top 1 per cent of income distribution number higher than the children of those that belong to the lowest 60 per cent income group.²⁶

Given all this, it is no wonder that a family paid **1.2 million dollars in bribes** in order to have their daughter (who had never even played football) to be admitted to Yale by presenting her as a football star! This is extremely good investment if you have the money. Yale graduates are almost certain to make it to the top one per cent of the income bracket. The **minimum** annual income of the top one per cent is 630 thousand dollars.²⁷ The sum of 1.2 million dollars will be amortised in a matter of two years!

²⁶ Sandel, s. 16. For detailed information on Britain see Savage, p. 240-47.

²⁷ Sandel, op. cit., p. 27.

If it is true that the class formation of the modern petty-bourgeoisie is displaying a dynamic in the direction of turning into a caste-like structure, this social group (in both its components) has nothing to expect from the working class or other toiling sectors of the population, whatever its attitude may have been towards them in the earlier period of its formation. Its main aim, in fact, should be expected to be to emphasize its difference and to deepen the chasm that separates it from those social groups in order to strengthen the process of itself becoming a caste-like formation. It will also try to sever whatever ties may have been established in the past. In this phase of capitalist society, the working classes are suffering from a swamp-like stagnant poverty. According to the mind-blowing estimations of Thomas Piketty and his colleagues, the average income of a working-age member of the working class was 35 thousand dollars in 1964 and has stayed at the same real (i.e. purchasing-power) level ever since! For half a century (precisely the half-century that we are trying to understand) the average wage level has remained the same!²⁸ Why would the modern petty-bourgeoisie wish to tie up with this class? This picture also explains why the overwhelming majority of the student body at universities have become to a great extent depoliticised and broken away from the socialism that students were attracted to in the past. Our first proposition regarding postmodernism derives from these observations: ***postmodernism is the ideology of the modern petty-bourgeoisie and the educated (semi-) proletariat (plus the student youth who are aspiring to join those strata) to segregate itself from the proletariat and the poor.*** Postmodernism is the ideological counterpart of the so-called gated communities, housing estates that are guarded against the poor.

This proposition is true in its fullest sense only for the imperialist countries. Other countries (whether semi-industrialised of the BRICS type or outright poor countries or the former workers' states) are bound to display differences to various degrees from this overall verdict. But the essence of the proposition holds in those countries as well, however modified by other tendencies vying with this fundamental one. The validity of this tendency depends on a host of economic, political, cultural, historical factors, among which the relationship of the country with imperialism plays a special part.

5. The crisis of the bureaucratic workers' states

The second material condition of the historic rise of postmodernism is the collapse in the prestige of Marxism and communism as a result of the crisis of the workers' states. Having come out of World War II with great prestige since it was the Red Army and the revolutionary partisans (guerrillas) from France all the way to China and Korea that defeated Nazism and its allies, socialism started to lose its allure first with the revolution in Hungary in 1956, then with the Prague Spring of 1968, to finally collapse as a result of the downfall of the bureaucratic workers' states one after the other in 1989, in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Since this is a rather familiar aspect of turn-of-the-century history, we will not

²⁸ Ibid, p. 214.

go into detail, but simply draw conclusions for our purposes in this article.

We have persistently emphasised all throughout our writings a widely neglected point regarding the history of the 20th century. This history cannot be written without close attention paid to the part played by the October revolution of 1917 and the Soviet state, the first durable workers' state in history. On the other side of the medallion, we find this verity: it is impossible, as the post-Leninists have been trying to do, to explain the situation in which Marxism, socialism, the workers' movement, and class struggles around the world find themselves in at this beginning of the 21st century simply by looking at the changes that have come over capitalist society. The assessment of the present-day world situation cannot be made without bringing in the collapse of the experience of 20th century socialist construction. This goes for understanding the half-century hegemony of postmodernism as it does for other major events.

In this article we will not dwell on the story of the collapse of the 20th century experience of socialist construction nor of the so-called "communist" (i.e. Stalinist) movement, the bearer of that experience. We will go directly into a discussion of how these resulted in the rise and long-lasting hegemony of postmodernism. Had the working class been led by a revolutionary Marxist leadership, the Parisian events of 1968 could easily have been converted into a revolution whose chances for success would have been very high. Beyond that, what transpired in three countries of Western Europe around that time (the May events in France, the "hot autumn" of 1969 in Italy, and the 1974 Portuguese revolution) became so many missed revolutionary possibilities in the hands of the Stalinist "communist" parties that had already completed their transformation into national reformist parties. This inadequacy, or rather absence, of proletarian leadership cost the working class highly, in that 1968 turned against it or, in other words, the counter revolutionary aspect of 1968 became dominant.

1968 was also a period when the experience of socialist construction played a role from another angle that again worked against Marxism and communism. This was the entry of Soviet (or Warsaw Pact) tanks into another country, Czechoslovakia, a country in which the Czechs and the Slovaks lived together at that time. This was presented to the world as the "defence of socialism". The intervention crushed the so-called Prague Spring and this even before the trauma created by a similar move during the Hungarian revolution of 1956 had been healed.

When, a decade later, the gigantic working-class struggle of Solidarnosc, a trade-union movement in Poland, was suppressed by a military coup in 1981, the coffin would be sealed definitively for the 20th century experience. The reactionary movement led by Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in America in the 1980s, which spread around the world in subsequent years and decades, received a great boost from these successive events in the workers' states. The collapse of all the workers' states in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 was almost a confirmation of a fate already sealed.

One way or another, this collapse, followed almost immediately by the collapse and dissolution of the Soviet Union and the elemental process of the restoration of capitalism in China and Vietnam somewhat later, led to an immense loss of prestige

for Marxism. In a certain sense, Marxism was buried under the rubble when Stalinism collapsed.

It is not true that postmodernism obtained an intellectual victory vis-à-vis what truly had been the most powerful socio-economic system of thought ever seen in history. In its struggle against Marxism, the dice were fixed in its favour: Stalinism tied the hands of Marxism and postmodernism won a one-sided war.

Further on we shall see how this easy victory, in conjunction with the new class composition of capitalist society, created a new political matrix that would lead a happy marriage with postmodernism.

But since we have now reached the late 1970s and early 1980s, it becomes necessary to include a new factor, one that has *marked our history of the last half-century*, into our analysis. This new factor is neoliberalism.

6. The standard-bearers of neoliberalism: von Hayek, Friedman, Becker... and Foucault

The second half of the 1970s saw, on the one hand, the adoption by the international bourgeoisie of the neoliberal strategy as a solution to the economic crisis that was then called the “oil crisis”, and, on the other, a sharp turn in the political orientation of Michel Foucault, undeniably the most important thinker of postmodernism, in that he now abandoned his furtive war of attrition against Marxism in favour of the raising of the banner of reactionary politics. This process unfolded in three different stages.

As is quite commonly discussed, with the blow to the Bretton Woods system as a result of the cutting off of the link between the dollar and gold, followed by the 1973-74 crisis, the international bourgeoisie grasped the long-term nature of the crisis that had set in and changed its overall strategic orientation sharply. The old Keynesian framework of economic policy and the measures brought together under the general heading of the “welfare state”, adopted in the post-war period as a political-ideological line of defence against the Soviet Union were abandoned and neoliberalism was embraced as the strategic orientation with the purpose of changing the balance of forces in favour of the bourgeoisie through the atomisation of the working class and the toiling masses. After the Soviet Union stopped posing a threat for the capitalist world, most definitively in the 1990s, this was bolstered by the adoption of the globalist policy perspective of the same international bourgeoisie, thus contributing to the consolidation of the neoliberal strategy.

In almost every country, this new orientation resulted in the birth of liberal tendencies within the left itself. For instance, in Britain, in the land of Margaret Thatcher to add insult to injury, *Marxism Today*, the theoretical organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain, became a completely liberal publication, all the while claiming that capitalism had entered a new stage. Stuart Hall, the editor of the journal, became a symbolic name as the defender of views mingling left-wing liberalism with postmodernism.

In France, a parallel tendency was born within the CFDT, the second largest

trade-union confederation then and the largest nowadays, led at that time by a certain Edmond Maire. This new liberal tendency, all the more striking in a country where the liberal tradition had been weak even in the ranks of the bourgeoisie (compare Gaullism), led to the appellation “Second Left” or even more scathingly the “American left” by the more traditional left. The main intellectual figure within this tendency was Pierre Rosanvallon and the main political leader Michel Rocard, a politician who initially pursued a career in a small left-wing party, but then joined the main social democratic party of the country, the Parti Socialiste and was to even hold the office of prime minister at a certain stage. Michel Foucault’s flirtation with liberalism first started in his relation with this circle.

Yet this is nothing when compared to what was to come later. The second stage of Foucault’s declaration of war on Marxism is much more tumultuous. In the aftermath of the so-called Chinese Great Cultural Revolution, in Western Europe, some very fiery Maoist intellectuals of an earlier period, as is common in such turbulent periods, swiftly moved towards rabidly anti-communist positions from the mid-1970s onwards. Of these renegades, turned into “celebrities” on television screens through the cunning policies of the bourgeoisie and called the “New Philosophers”, two were brought spectacularly under the limelight: Bernard-Henri Lévy and André Glucksmann. The balance sheet of the swift change that came about in this period, one that may easily be characterised as an “intellectual counter revolution”, has been admirably drawn by Cusset, the author of *French Theory*, in terms of publishing houses, journals and the main figures.²⁹ Communism was not the only target of this wave. In its overall assault on the “totalitarian state”, it targeted not only Marxism but the entire left, not only socialist revolutions, but also the French revolution of 1789, ordinarily considered to be the paradigmatic instance of a bourgeois revolution.

It was in this general commotion that Foucault decided to own up the “New Philosophers” when his former student André Glucksmann brought out a book titled *Les maîtres à penser* (The Masterminds) in 1977. The book advanced the idea that those who bear the true responsibility for the forced labour camps, widely known as the Gulag Archipelago, in the Soviet Union under Stalin are Hegel, Marx, and all the other masterminds who defend the reshaping of the world on the basis of reason. In the weekly *Nouvel Observateur*, a magazine widely read by the entire left, Foucault wrote a panegyric of the book, without the slightest reservation or caveat. For the benefit of the reader, let us add that Glucksmann held the masters responsible not only for the Gulag but also for Auschwitz. In his first book, published in 1975, Glucksmann referred to Foucault’s 1961 *Madness and Civilization* in order to stress the importance of centres of “micro power”. In his 1977 book, on the other hand, he referred to Foucault’s recent book of 1975, *Discipline and Punish*, and brought to the fore the “panopticon ideal”, symbolising ever-present control over everything. To Glucksmann’s mind, Foucault was “the first thinker since Marx who carries out systematic work on the origins of the Modern age”.³⁰

²⁹ Cusset, pp. 324–26.

³⁰ Michael-Scott Christofferson, “Foucault and New Philosophy: Why Foucault Endorsed André

Let us take this opportunity to draw the reader's attention to another judgment of Foucault's. In writing on Glucksmann's book, Foucault claims that at the basis of the massacres committed lies the "vision of state-revolution with all the final solutions", put forth by the master thinkers.³¹ He repeats the same formula elsewhere, talking of the "vacuity of a politics formed around the state/revolution duality".³² We are of the opinion that these formulae that connect the state and revolution are the product, as we already pointed out in section one above, of the fact that Foucault's entire analysis on "micro power" is the ploy of a strategy that aims to refute Lenin's *The State and Revolution*.

Foucault can no longer hide his detestation of Marxism and communism. Didier Eribon, an assistant of his, in his biography of Foucault, cites many instances of this.³³ It is this detestation that came out openly for the first time thanks to the new wave that the New Philosophers started. The significance of the idea advanced by Foucault in his 1978 Tokyo Lecture to the effect that "the revolution has outlived its days" is clear. And nothing can bring out Foucault's intention than the title of that Lecture: "How to Get Rid of Marxism?"³⁴

Yet not even this is that important. It looks almost insignificant when compared to the third stage of Foucault's transformation. Let us start discussing this stage by pointing out that certain changes in Foucault's *philosophical* outlook also came about in this process of transformation.

As has already been indicated, the signature approach in Foucault's treatment of the modern world is his emphasis on centres of "micro power". He was frequently taken to task for this, too. The most commonly mentioned criticism in this respect is the one levelled at Foucault by the American thinker Michael Walzer, who chided him for ignoring reactionary political regimes in his quest to make the "micro-fascism of everyday life" his real scapegoat.³⁵

It is self-evident that in his *theoretical* trajectory, Foucault almost totally disregarded the power embodied in the central government.³⁶ However, there is a point that was overlooked by Walzer and others of his predisposition: from 1976 onwards, in his Collège de France lectures, Foucault changed this attitude and started to show a special interest in central government. Paul Patton, an Australian Foucault scholar,

Glucksmann's *The Master Thinkers*", in Daniel Zamora & Michael Behrent (eds.), *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016. Christofferson has also written a book on the topic of the New Philosophers: *French Intellectuals Against the Left. An Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s*, New York/Oxford: Bergahn Books, 2004.

31 Quoted by Christofferson, op. cit.

32 Quoted by Mitchell Dean, "Foucault, Ewald, Neoliberalism, and the Left", in Zamora-Behrent, op.cit..

33 Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, translated from French [into Turkish] by Şule Çiltaş, Istanbul: Ayrıntı, 1989.

34 Quoted by Zamora, "Foucault, The Left, and the 1980s", in Zamora/Behrent. The exact French title is this: "Méthodologie pour la connaissance du monde: comment se débarrasser du marxisme".

35 Michael Walzer, "The Politics of Michel Foucault", David Couzens Hoy (der.), *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

36 We say "in his *theoretical* trajectory", for in the wake of 1968 he frequently crossed swords with state power in *practical* struggles, in company with Maoists or committed intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre. See Eribon, op. cit., p. 218 ff., 233 ff., 258, 266 ff., 286-87, 326 ff.

has commented that the reason for this neglect in the English-speaking world is the delay in translation of the Collège de France conferences into English. In the 1978 and 1979 lectures in particular, Foucault developed a new concept (“governmentality”) in order to take up wholesale the question of power at the central government level.³⁷

The sense Foucault attributes to the concept governmentality is of vital importance. In his 1978-1979 Conference published under the title *The Birth of Biopolitics*, he contends that from mid-eighteenth century on, the state went over to a new mode of governmentality, or the art of governing, that is different from both the Middle Ages and the era of Absolutism (or of Mercantilism).³⁸ In this new stage, rather than taking the most important decisions itself, the state leaves them to economic actors who pursue their own self-interest. True to the method peculiar to postmodernism, rather than studying the historical conditions and the dynamics of this, Foucault investigates which intellectual current represents the method of governing through the market on the part of the state. The school he puts under the limelight is the science of political economy or economic liberalism, whose most salient representative is Adam Smith.

Throughout the school year, outside the original historical representatives of economic liberalism, Foucault also looks carefully into the forms this school later took in Germany (“Ordoliberalism”), in Austria (von Mises, von Hayek and others), and in America (in particular at Chicago University, with Milton Friedman and Gary Becker taking the front stage), thus bringing the debate up to the contemporary world.

In his treatment of this entire problematic in the *Birth of Biopolitics*, there are some very significant aspects of which we must not lose sight:

- 1) Foucault *naturalises* market relations, which Marx had already shown to be the result of socio-economic relations peculiar to a historic era, in other words to the capitalist mode of production. The idea that the predominance of the market is natural is something that Foucault returns to over and over again. On a single page there are five different allusions to the idea that the market is “natural” in essence.³⁹ Thus, Foucault goes back to the pre-Marxian illusions of classical political economy.
- 2) Behind this lies the idea that, to Foucault’s mind, the internal limitation exercised on the government is imposed not by *subjects* but by *things*.⁴⁰ Here we see that Marx’s observation that classical political economy is subject to commodity fetishism, to a conception in which human relations appear as relations between commodities (“things”) proves also valid in the case of Foucault.
- 3) The market is, in this society, the place where everything is verified. Foucault does not use the concept “verified” but creates a neologism: “*véridiction*” or “*veridiction*”. This term signifies a truth that comes out not in an objective sense but one that is subjectively valid or rather valid from the point of view of the

37 Paul R. Patton, “The Reception and Evolution of Foucault’s Political Philosophy”, *Kritike*, vol. 12, No. 2, December 2018.

38 Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique, Cours au Collège de France, 1978-1979*, Paris: Gallimard Seuil, 2004.

39 Ibid, p. 33.

40 Ibid, p. 13.

inner functioning of the system. Thus, by characterising the market as the locus of the veridiction of all things, Foucault shares the perspective of the market as a “process of discovery” in von Hayek’s terms, except of course in postmodern idiom. It is at the end of the discovery process that truth comes out even if this is a truth that is relative or conditional. The market has become the sphere that imposes the truth of social life.⁴¹

4) We now come to the *most important* point. The *general conclusion* that Foucault draws from his 1978-1979 Conferences is this: “There is no sovereign in the economy.”⁴² This should be understood in all its ramifications: what Foucault is saying here is that the state cannot keep the economy under its control, that it is a slave unto the economy. In other words, *planning is impossible!*

5) In effect, the thinker will complement this concluding sentence with the following idea: “In the final analysis, it is this problem that is going to be posed across Europe and the entire modern world through government practice, economic problems, socialism, planning, welfare economics.... And, on the obverse side, everything that looks like planning, an administered economy [the famous French *économie dirigée*], socialism, state socialism will become the problem of whether one can somehow overcome this curse formulated by political economy from its very beginnings, against the economic sovereign, which is, at the same time, the very condition of existence of a political economy.”⁴³ Together with political economy Foucault has stressed that curse, emphasizing that the state cannot become master of the economy. Closer attention will show that this is not simply a position that declares socialism and classless society impossible. “Welfare economics”, that is to say “the welfare state” itself is also impossible.

Given all this, the naturalisation of the market, the fetishism of commodities, the claim that the market is the indispensable form of the modern economy, Foucault is really advancing the idea that only a liberal economy can survive in this day and age. This is the “theory” that von Mises and von Hayek and Milton Friedman and Gary Becker all defend, cast in philosophical garb.

Beyond the 1978-1979 lectures, which is the fundamental text by Foucault on governmentality, his approach to the economy and to economic policy is but a confirmation, on more concrete questions, of what has already been said. The common approach shared with Hayek extends to areas other than what has been indicated above: Foucault is against social services in general and *public* health care services in particular. This is an opinion that Hayek shares, asserting that health care is no different from any other consumption expenditure (e.g. vacationing) and should be treated accordingly.⁴⁴ In addition, Foucault equates the so-called welfare state (the concept he has recourse to is “*sécurité sociale*”, all-important in France) with “bio-power”, which in his thinking is the source of domination over human bodies. Hayek is in agreement with Foucault on the repressive character of the welfare state.⁴⁵ Foucault also agrees with Friedman’s objection to state subsidy for public

41 On this cf. Mitchell Dean, op. cit., p. 147.

42 *Naissance*, p. 287.

43 Idem.

44 Zamora, “Foucault, the Excluded, and the Neoliberal Erosion of the State”, in Zamora/Behrent, p. 107.

45 Zamora, “Introduction”, in Zamora/Behrent.

services, claiming that this will only benefit the rich.⁴⁶

But nothing so far written can compete with Foucault's reverence for the other major figure of the Chicago School, Gary Becker. In order to have an idea what kind of figure Becker is, one need only realise that he was characterised as the greatest social scientist of the second half of the 20th century by none other than Milton Friedman. It must be admitted that Becker is an original thinker: he has analysed many issues never before treated in economic analytical terms such as crime, the family, racial discrimination etc. according to the logic of mainstream economics.

François Ewald, Foucault's assistant, biographer, editor of his collected works, claims that Foucault was truly an admirer of Gary Becker. Ewald also declared this in public at a Chicago conference, held when Foucault was no longer alive, where Becker was also among those present. The reason for this admiration is particularly significant: according to Ewald, Foucault discovered in Becker the "possibility of conceiving power without discipline". His (Becker's) theory of regulation "makes it possible to conduct the behaviour of the other without coercion, through incitation".⁴⁷ We would like to draw the reader's attention to the fact that Foucault himself has characterised this man as "the most radical of the American neoliberals".⁴⁸

A great many followers of Foucault have disregarded this clear capitulation of their idol to neoliberalism, behaved as if they were captive to an *omertá*, an oath to remain silent, or have even gone further by trying to dress him up as a thinker hostile to neoliberalism. This is no doubt an interesting case in the history of ideas.

As a significant example, let us see the case of the illustrious Italian author, the former revolutionary Antonio Negri. Since it is impossible to deny that Ewald is Foucauldian, Negri takes refuge in the argument that he is a "right-wing Foucauldian" and alleges that the real Foucault follows Marx in "saying that the free market has never existed".⁴⁹ In what does Foucault "follow" Marx? Did Marx ever say that planning was impossible? How do we disregard the fact that, precisely around the same time (1978), Foucault was giving conferences to explain "How to get rid of Marx"? In his betrayal to his own past, Negri persists and signs!

7. "Identity politics" in the age of egoism

We started out with a "fifty-year solitude" for Marxism. At the point we have reached, we have seen that this half-century really overlaps with three other half-century-long world-historical developments: the rise of the modern petty-bourgeoisie as a class fraction and its quasi-transformation into a caste, the collapse of the bureaucratic workers' states, and the longest-lasting class assault by the international bourgeoisie on the working class and the toilers of the world as a solution to the crisis of world capitalism. Now it is time to rise towards a synthesis of these four

46 Zamora, "Foucault..." *ibid*, p. 108.

47 Mitchell Dean, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

48 *Ibid*, p. 130.

49 Quoted by Mitchell Dean.

grand historic tendencies.

Naturally, we will first reach a synthesis of the change that has occurred in the material world and then move on to the consequences observable in the ideological and political spheres. Neoliberalism and globalism fundamentally aim to bring about the atomisation of all the classes and strata that are opponents of the bourgeoisie, but first and foremost the working class.

On the ideological plane, the basic tenet of this assault is “everyone for themselves and the devil take the hindmost”. Each individual, at best each family, must have been thrown into a universe where only they must be responsible for their future and no help from any others must be expected. (This is of course only the target to be reached. In real life this state is never achieved, but that is the kind of universe aimed for.) In such a society, it is impossible for any individual (or any family) to adopt any other strategy for survival apart from the pursuit of their self-interest. It is not possible for the individual to expect solutions to their problems from society at large or from certain social institutions. In such a society, egoism is a path onto which people are forcibly pushed. It is not a moral choice; it is an iron necessity.

The collapse of the 20th century experience of socialist construction, on the other hand, has played directly into the hands of neoliberalism *cum* globalism. What distinguished the societies in transition from capitalism to socialism from capitalist societies was not only the abolition of private property in the large-scale means of production and distribution. The overall situation in which health and education were rights for all individuals, where housing, transportation, books, the arts (including the opera and ballet) were offered to the people at quite low cost thanks to government subsidies had created a social environment in which individualism and egoism as categories of social psychology had been pushed to the back burner. Most importantly, there was no unemployment! No one could be laid off from their job (except for very serious discipline infraction) and even if they were, they could have found another job easily. This was a collectivist society where no one had to “run for their lives”. Communism, even at this primitive stage, is the exact opposite of egoism!

The collapse of these states one after the other or their gradual return to capitalism (the cases of China or Vietnam) created immense mistrust among the masses living in capitalist societies toward collective solutions to social ills. The weakening of socialist and communist parties of capitalist countries has its roots in the collapse of the bureaucratic workers’ states.

What we have said so far turns around a concept each human being can understand easily: egoism or selfishness, in the sense of an inordinate love and adoration of the self, paying attention to only self-interest and behaving accordingly, and remaining oblivious to the needs of other individuals and even going so far as to exploit them in the full knowledge of what one is doing. But now we are passing onto another plane. In our opinion, the epoch we are living in also displays a state that may be called ***organised egoism***. The coalescing of the modern petty-bourgeoisie with the wealthier and powerful classes and strata and disregarding the fate of all the “plebeian” classes of society, that is to say workers, peasants, toilers of all sorts, ordinary public employees, the jobless, the urban poor, those at the very bottom

of the social hierarchy, the “underclass” as it is sometimes called, in other words the great majority is what we mean by this. This is what is original in the egoism of our epoch. The bourgeoisie and its guardians (politicians, generals, high-level bureaucrats, the intellectual mercenaries of the bourgeoisie and its more mundane propagandists etc.) have always acted with sheer egoism. That is the normal state of capitalist society. What is specific to our epoch is the fact that the upper crust of some strata of the petty-bourgeoisie (and at times the lower strata as well) join these usual suspects in order to form gated communities and segregated school systems and an imaginary Wall of China between its own universe and the world of the plebeians. This was not always so. It is to be hoped that it will not be so in the future.

This, then, is the *synthesis*. The modern petty-bourgeoisie, precisely at a time when its ranks were swelling rapidly thanks to the rapid growth of the mass university, has grasped the chance of turning itself into a caste, by benefitting from the crisis of socialism and Marxism and from the weaknesses of the trade union and political leaderships of the working class, finding itself in an overall situation in which its privileges are not being questioned by any powerful social force. It thus separated itself from the proletariat and the large masses of toilers to a degree not seen in the past. The weakening of the communist movement (we use communism here in the broadest possible sense) has been both precondition of the rise of the modern petty-bourgeoisie and also contributed to its expanded reproduction. The neoliberal and globalist overall environment, with its aspect of unbridled competition, formed the stage on which this entire game was being enacted.

However, as it was forcefully stressed in the last paragraph of the introductory section of this article, the different components of the petty-bourgeoisie also suffer from certain serious social problems. The oppression of women, of gays and trans people, of races and nations and believers in minority religions that find themselves subordinated even when they live as part of the wealthier classes, all this is not only a relic of past historic ages, but also a result of the “divide and rule” policies of the bourgeoisie as the ruling class. Added to this is the question of the destruction of nature as capital accumulates in ruthlessly voracious fashion. The modern petty-bourgeoisie is not happy because this deterioration of the natural environment also harms its own pristine environment, bringing down the market value of its property, including the second houses it owns in the most intact spaces of the natural environment. It therefore organises “Green” parties as a class weapon.

Thus emerge movements that pretend to bring together women or gays and trans people or people from oppressed races, nations or faiths or those that suffer from the destruction of nature etc. In abstract terms these various movements claim to organise all members of the oppressed category in question, *irrespective of social class and standing*. But strangely enough, the numbers of proletarians and members of other plebeian classes and strata that participate in these movements are negligible at best. Since the members of the *haute bourgeoisie* prefer to keep themselves busy in the domains of charity and investment in art works in the guise of support for cultural activities and unwilling to participate in such activities that may at moments get out of hand, these movements of “civil society” remain the *chasse gardée* of the modern petty-bourgeoisie.

It is as if postmodernist thought had been tailor-made for these movements. “Difference” is the fundamental philosophical concept. Everyone faces a *different problem*, everyone will experience their *difference* from others. It is impossible to change society as a whole. What attention should focus on are the centres of “micro-power”. Foucault speaks thus in an interview:

You are asking if a “society as a whole” can function, based on such divergent and dispersed experiences, deprived of a general discourse behind it. I, on the contrary, believe that the very idea of a “society as a whole” lies at the heart of utopia. This idea was born in the Western world within the very specific historical line that had capitalism as its outcome. ... “Society as a whole” is precisely what should not be taken into consideration, except as the object that one has to destroy.⁵⁰

One has to work on singular experiences. The state, classes, class struggles – all these remain outside the horizon of struggle, just as “society as a whole”. Alain Touraine, a thinker close to these views but not himself a postmodernist has theorised the “New Social Movements”. Thus, everyone has their own movement. Political parties that can intervene in the overall functioning of society and change society radically are left outside the radar. “Identity politics”, that is to say organising and struggling around the narrow interests of a singular social position, spreads within the ranks of the modern petty-bourgeoisie and then attracts individuals from other quarters who see themselves in close proximity to one or another of these movements.

It will not please the partisans of the new social movements, but this needs to be observed in all frankness. The bourgeoisie is not really disturbed by these new social movements. As long as the women’s movement leaves aside questions that are of primary interest for working-class women, such as day-care centres, equal pay for equal work, women’s and children’s health and others, bosses are very much inclined to keep up the dialogue with the women’s movement. The European Union is extremely generous in supplying funds to all NGOs, another handy name for “new social movements”.

This gains on additional significance when one remembers that working-class problems remain totally outside the radar. A single example should suffice since it is so very much to the point: The United Nations Human Rights Council organises every year meetings called “Universal Periodic Reviews” of human rights violations for all countries one by one, where representatives from other countries can take the floor and level criticism at the violations of human rights by the country under review in turn. In these meetings, all violations are brought on the table but not questions pertaining to the violation of rights of the working class, neither the barring of trade union organising activities, nor the banning of strikes etc.

From the very beginning of this article, we have stressed the importance of the oppressed groups in question. We repeat this at this point. However, we find the present mode of organising of these groups harmful. We think they bear a class mark that capitulates before capitalist society. We do not only think so, we are cer-

⁵⁰ *Aspettando*, op. cit., p. 37. Our translation from Italian.

tain they do. We nonetheless say that, in its essence, struggle against these types of oppression is rightful. But the representatives of these movements and more generally those who defend the theme of “human rights” without putting the problems to which workers and toilers suffer from on the agenda keep silent despite all criticism. Even if they do not ask themselves the question, the reader may very well wish to know why the problems suffered by workers and the poor are never brought on the agenda and why “new social movements” display symptoms of organised egoism.

Marx characterised the proletariat as the “universal class” that would save humanity from the alienation of the last class society in history. Lenin advanced the idea, in the most emphatic fashion, that if this “universal class” organises and struggles exclusively on the basis of its own class interests, it can save neither society at large nor even itself. He called the policy of concentrating exclusively on the interests of the proletariat “corporatism”. He placed the idea that the proletarian party must fight for political power on the basis of gathering around itself all classes, strata, social groups and layers oppressed and exploited by capitalism and later also imperialism at the centre of its strategy.⁵¹ Together with other Russian Marxists and with the contribution of talented students of his like Gramsci, he used the concept “hegemony” for the act of winning over all the classes and other social groups that may reasonably be expected to take the side of the proletariat against capitalism without the use of coercion, without recourse to force.

This method achieved a resounding victory during the October revolution. This revolution was a gigantic step forward for the emancipation not only of the working class but also of oppressed nations and peoples, of women, and of oppressed religious faiths.⁵²

By no means have the “new social movements” taken this policy into consideration, thoroughly hostile as they are to Leninism.

8. Postmodernism conquers the “new social movements”

Postmodernism has not only contributed to the questioning of the central position of the proletariat in a general sense. We say “contributed” since the real factor in the loss of this central position of the proletariat had to do with the developments within the material-practical world: the decisive element was the fact that the workers’ states had fallen prey to capitalist restoration, thereby shattering the collectivist aspirations of the masses. Postmodernism strengthened this impact in the ranks of the intelligentsia by providing an alternative to Marxism.

However, its impact was not limited to this alone. Postmodernism conquered the so-called “new social movements” from the inside. The movement that suffered most from this was the century-old women’s liberation movement, in its feminist form. (We will briefly touch upon the same kind of influence for the movements of

51 See, among others, our *Marksistler*, vol. 1: *Teori-Pratik Birliğine Doğru*, Chapter 8.

52 For women see Armağan Tulunay, “The Land of the October Revolution: a country of women walking on the road to emancipation”, *Revolutionary Marxism 2018*; for oppressed nations see Sungur Savran, “The Muslim October”, *Revolutionary Marxism 2018*.

gays and trans people.) It is a widespread mistake to think that the “second wave” of the feminist movement born in the 1960s after a period of relative quietude following the “first wave” of feminism set in motion by the “suffragette” movement of late 19th and early 20th centuries is still with us. Those who think so are deeply mistaken. It is the “third wave” that rules now.⁵³ And this new wave started precisely at the same historical moment in which postmodernism became a hegemonic force over the feminist movement. Ideas that percolated in the 1980s resulted in the winning over of the dominant wing of feminism by postmodernism starting with the year 1990 in what may be characterised as an explosive development. We see that not only postmodernism in general but the ideas of its most influential thinker Michel Foucault gained around that turning point a wide influence within the feminist movement.⁵⁴

Let us first determine the turning point in concrete terms. The year 1990 is the moment when the book that formed the most advanced instance of the influence of postmodernism and of Foucault on feminism saw the light of day: Judith Butler’s volume *Gender Trouble* laid the ground for a framework to be called “queer theory”, thereby moving the entire discussion on gender to another level. Alongside this, Susan Hekman’s *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* and *Feminism/Postmodernism*, a reader edited by Linda Nicholson were brought out in that same fateful year. That very same year a symposium was organised where Judith Butler, on the one hand, and Seyla Benhabib, a student of Jürgen Habermas, the most influential critic of postmodernism in the bourgeois academia, debated one another, joined by two other authors. This debate was published in the journal *Praxis International* the following year. A subsequent edition of the same book was published in German with new articles by the same authors, which was then translated into English and published in 1995 in a volume edited with an introduction by Linda Nicholson, whom we have met earlier.⁵⁵

Immediately before and more so after the turning point of 1990, many other books and anthologies were also published pointing in the same direction. Let us simply mention a few of these since they are emblematic of the deep influence Foucault had on this new literature: Jana Sawicki’s *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body* (1991), Lois McNay’s *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self* (1992), Susan Bordo’s *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (1993) and an anthology compiled by Susan Hekman, *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault* (1996).

An important book in the literature relating to gays and trans people in this vein

53 Among many sources here is a comprehensive one: Susan Archer Mann, “Third Wave Feminism’s Unhappy Marriage of Poststructuralism and Intersectionality Theory”, *Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, No. 4, Spring 2013.

54 Actually, French postmodernist feminism emerged earlier, understandably given the primacy of French culture on the question of postmodernism. Julia Kristeva’s influential work in this area may be dated to 1977-1982. “The Laugh of the Medusa” by Hélène Cixous goes back as far as 1976. Luce Irigaray also started to produce her work in the 1970s. See Raman Selden/Peter Widdowson/Peter Brooker, *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, Harlow: Pearson Longman, 5th Edition, 2005, s. 129-137.

55 *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, New York/London: Routledge, 1995.

is by David M. Halperin, important theoretician of queer theory: *Saint-Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (1995). Need we add that Judith Butler, the creator of “queer theory” is a thinker who closely follows the thinking of Foucault?

If we go back to feminism, we must point out that the 1990s created such an upheaval in feminist theory that Seyla Benhabib, an opponent (albeit with certain concessions) of postmodernism, felt the need to say, in agreement with another feminist writer, Linda Alcoff, that “feminist theory is undergoing a profound identity crisis at the moment”.⁵⁶ At around the same time, two authors of Marxist origin, Michèle Barrett and Ann Philips, wrote, for their part:

The founding principles of contemporary western feminism have been dramatically challenged with previous shared assumptions and unquestioned orthodoxies *relegated almost to history*. These changes have been of the order of a “paradigm shift,” in which assumptions rather than conclusions are radically overturned.⁵⁷

Some may still have doubts as to what direction this upheaval pointed to. Let us then cite the unimpeachable judgment of two of the most authoritative feminist authors of the time: “The ultimate stake of an encounter between feminism and postmodernism ... is the prospect of a postmodernist feminism.”⁵⁸

For those readers who wish to see for themselves what acrimonious controversies this transformation led to and how the representatives of the second wave approached and reproached the new generation, we would recommend an article by Martha Nussbaum, a philosopher of the older generation, in which she ferociously attacks Judith Butler.⁵⁹

Now it is time to look at how and in what manner postmodernism influenced feminism. Up until this point in the present section we only presented the reader some empirical information in order to bring out the unexceptionable truth of a new, postmodernist wave of feminism. From this moment on, as the relations of interaction and hegemony between two currents of thought or rather a current of thought and a social emancipation movement are being taken up, we will inevitably bring into the discussion our own assessment of the issues raised. We are no expert in feminism and we would rather leave judgments on this movement to Marxist women, so it is natural that our views will be expressed as they ought to be in humble fashion. On the other hand, because we believe that our grasp of postmodernism is much deeper than those who have lost their way in its maze, we will nonetheless draw some conclusions from our discussion.

Let us then turn to the debate itself. The point of departure of authors who claim that postmodernism and particularly Foucault are natural allies of feminism is the

⁵⁶ *Feminist Contentions*, op. cit., p. 20.

⁵⁷ Quoted by Susan Archer Mann, op. cit, p. 55, from the authors’ 1992 book, *Destabilizing Theory*, our emphasis.

⁵⁸ Nancy Fraser/Linda Nicholson, “Social Criticism Without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism”, in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, Linda J. Nicholson (ed.), New York/London: Routledge, 1990, p. 20.

⁵⁹ Martha C. Nussbaum, “The Professor of Parody. The Hip Defeatism of Judith Butler”, *The New Republic*, 22 February 1999.

allegation that the postmodern critique of reason and science, on the one hand, and the discovery by feminism that all the philosophical and scientific ideas developed so far are products of the mind of men, and not women, on the other, overlap. According to this view, postmodernism contends that science and the academia are neither impartial nor objective. Feminists, as well as other currents of thinking that owe their existence to taking the side of the oppressed, have become aware of this fact on their own.⁶⁰ Up until this point, there seems to be some shared ground.

However, the critique postmodernism levels at science and the academia goes much farther than this. Taking their cue from Nietzsche and Heidegger, postmodernists claim that science is an impossibility, that it belongs to the category of meta narrative, that the reason that has become dominant in the spheres of philosophy and science ever since the age of Enlightenment has turned truth which is concrete, local, specific, piecemeal, and most importantly necessarily intertwined with a power struggle into one that pretends to be the unquestionable truth of the universe. In other words, they do not only question the procedures and protocols of philosophical and scientific reason as it has developed so far, as the feminists do. They put reason itself in parentheses. Postmodernism is an ideology of scepticism, of relativism, indeed of obscurantism.

It is here that we find the source of the great tremor in feminism. It is because of this that from within the feminist movement that was based, in the past, on perfectly comprehensible and clear ideas, whether one agrees with them or not, a series of currents and authors have separated themselves by writing in terms of a discourse hardly comprehensible to mortals and started to produce texts that are so intricate that they cannot be understood by others.

Of course, the only problem is not the fact of abandoning reason, which is indispensable for every movement fighting for liberation or emancipation. As important is the question of the possibility of the struggle for emancipation itself. In postmodern feminist theory, and particularly in Butler's work, emancipation almost becomes a dream. In the words of Seyla Benhabib, with postmodernism, a tendency towards an "escape from utopia" has flourished.⁶¹ This is no coincidence. In a Foucauldian or Derridean philosophy based on the Nietzsche/Heidegger tradition, the "death" of the subject renders great emancipation struggles an impossibility. That is because emancipation necessarily is always and everywhere the emancipation of a subject.

The obverse side of the medallion is that all of this is supported by an incredibly low quality of criticism directed to Marxism. Jane Flax, a prominent name in postmodernist feminism, "consolidates" her position on the basis of the errors of Marxism, which is the major target of her opposition to meta narratives. According to Flax, the central importance of Marx's categories, in particular of labour, is derived from the generalisation of the specific form of the production of commodities.⁶²

The criticism of a theory can be only so wide off the mark! Marx does not derive

⁶⁰ Fraser/Nicholson, op. cit., *passim*.

⁶¹ Benhabib, op. cit., p. 29.

⁶² Jane Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory", in Linda J. Nicholson, op. cit., p. 46-47.

the central importance of labour from the production of commodities that is the necessary form of the product under capitalism. On the exact contrary, it is thanks to the central role played by labour in distinguishing the human from all other organisms in all times that he can correctly recognise what is specific about commodity production. Marx had put Hegel back on his feet. Flax turns Marx upside down and places him on his head!

The other element that complements this criticism of Marx is the reduction of dialectical reason to Enlightenment thinking by postmodernist feminists and postmodernists at large. Once again, the lead role goes to Jane Flax. We bring Seyla Benhabib to the witness box: "Western reason posits itself as the discourse of the one self-identical subject, ... the story of the male subject of reason". Then Benhabib adds the following, not even realising what she is saying: "If the subject of the western intellectual tradition has usually been the white, propertied, Christian, male head of household, ..." ⁶³Propertied? Marx's subject? No one aware of the fact that for Marx there is never a single subject, but since the beginning of written history there has been a struggle between the exploiters and the exploited, the oppressors and the oppressed, can write this sentence about Marx, whoever else they may wish to include within the authors of this idea. Here it is clear that in order to get rid of Marx (remember Foucault, "How to get rid of Marx?"), one needs to abstract from the decisive difference between Marx and the philosophers of the ruling classes.

Let us conclude with a quip by Sheila Benhabib. She reminds us that the 1980s had opened up with the discovery of the "Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism". ⁶⁴ At the end of the decade, she concludes, one realises that behind the restlessness lay a more seductive courter. ⁶⁵

Unless feminism itself overcomes the damage done by postmodernism in its bosom, it will not be able to establish an alliance for real emancipation with other social struggles (the exception is the movement of gays and trans people, which seems to have become one with feminism under the umbrella of queer theory). All around the world, the women's movement is one of the most robust and lively sectors within the masses, be it the struggle against violence or for the right to abortion or still other areas. But as long as the outer frame of this struggle is maintained within the straitjacket of postmodernism, the mainstream of the women's movement will remain captive to the ideology of the wealthy strata of the modern petty-bourgeoisie.

9. Towards the end of the age of egoism

At this stage we have to pose the following question: is the age of egoism here to stay? Are postmodernism and left-wing liberalism as the ideological expressions of this age philosophies of the future? Certainly not! History moves in accordance

⁶³ Benhabib, "Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance", in Nicholson (ed.), *Feminist Contentions*, op. cit. p. 19.

⁶⁴ Heidi Hartmann, 1981. "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union." In *Women and Revolution*, edited by Lydia Sargent, Boston: South End Press, 1981.

⁶⁵ Benhabib, op. cit., p. 17.

with the laws of the dialectic, which implies constant change. Postmodernism as an ideology will lose its allure when the material conditions of the age of egoism are eliminated and its prestige within the intelligentsia will dwindle as its weight within social movements and struggles declines.

Certain symptoms already suggest that the process of the disappearance of the age of egoism is about to begin. We first observe the deterioration of the conditions of the reproduction of the modern petty-bourgeoisie as a caste. The part the university plays in the reproduction of this caste-like structure is weakening perceptibly especially for the educated layers of the (semi-) proletarian layers (which we have mostly treated as a part of the overall phenomenon of the rise of the modern petty-bourgeoisie for the purposes of convenience). The Third Great Depression that started in 2008, after hitting the poorest sections of the population, has already started to dim the future prospects of this relatively more well-to-do part of the class hierarchy as well. As a result of this, apart from the offspring of the most prosperous families (who attend the most prestigious universities), graduates are more and more facing the prospect of unemployment and, concomitantly, increasing difficulty to pay back the student debt they contracted while going to college.

We should add to this a contradiction created by the very success of the university as a mechanism for the formation of a caste-like structure. Whereas initially a university degree was a key to distinguish oneself from the lower classes, the very fact of this success started to attract these lower classes to the university at whatever cost. As the children of the members of the working class also became enrolled at universities, new problems were bound to emerge. The most salient among these is that the working-class or oppressed minority youth (the two categories overlapping in many cases) with scant economic means, poorly educated in decrepit high schools, and poorly equipped in cultural terms because of the parents' low level of education, have to go for student debt in order to meet the ever-increasing tuition and fees of college education as demand increases, but will have to drop out after a certain point and thus leave the whole family face to face with a quagmire of debt.⁶⁶ This is why in the United States, for instance, student debt had reached the astronomical sum of 1.7 trillion dollars and the Biden administration has now decided to cancel some of this debt under great pressure. The formation of the caste-like structure has become so vulnerable as a result that the number of students who apply for college admission has even started to decline.⁶⁷ In a certain sense, then, the trend that emerged half a century ago is finally going into reverse gear.

This multi-faceted process does not only push graduates to share the same common fate with the main body of the proletariat. In one of those mischievous reversals of the dialectic, it pushes these same people to the forefront of the class struggle. The increasing numbers of the educated workforce who, because of the decreasing opportunities of privileged jobs, head towards physical labour (particularly in the services sector), play an undeniable part in the palpable increase in the unionisa-

66 "They Got the Debt but Not the Degree", *New York Times*, <http://alturl.com/oqm85>.

67 "College Enrollment Drops, Even as the Pandemic's Effect Ebbs", *New York Times*, <http://alturl.com/g59s3>.

tion drive in these industries, perhaps also because of the wide chasm between their earlier expectations and their present plight.⁶⁸ In other words, the new members of the strata of the educated workforce that had become accustomed to existing as a labour aristocracy are now starting to lose their aristocratic privileges and coming forth with their unalloyed proletarian attributes. The children of the strata who, in the past, imbibed “fair trade” coffee at Starbucks, pontificating on the pollution of the environment or questions pertaining to feminism or to LGBTQI+ now take the lead in the unionisation drive at the same Starbucks chain.

Secondly, neoliberalism suffered a grave debacle in 2008. Now it has become the topic of a fiery debate within the ranks of the ruling classes of all countries. Globalism, the international dimension of neoliberalism, and its twin the mythical theory of globalisation acting as its ideological handmaid, have already gone bankrupt. On the one hand, governments of different political persuasion turn their faces more and more to protectionism and all flows within the international economy (foreign capital, foreign trade, credit flows, technological cooperation etc.) have slowed down if they have not suffered an absolute decline. On the other hand, the rise of proto-fascism or outright fascist movements fan the flames of nationalism and protectionism deliberately. In fact, this tendency is becoming hegemonic and governments that do not share any of the other characteristics of proto-fascism (and most clearly the Biden administration in the United States) adopt the same kind of nationalist and protectionist economic policies. Finally, the Ukraine war leads to a further fragmentation of the world economy, under the impact of both sanctions and the cessation of trade in certain sectors due to hostilities.

The same will occur somewhat later within the domestic aspect of neoliberalism. The depression that started in 2008, as we have discussed in greater detail elsewhere, displays certain specificities relative to the previous two. It is a depressive crisis that is deepening only gradually. The most important factor here is China, with a special dynamic of its own, whose extremely high level of economic growth even in the morose environment of the Third Great Depression has acted to rejuvenate, so to speak, the agonising world capitalist economy. But China itself is now slowing down, as was to be expected in a world environment of paltry economic growth. It is impossible for an economy that has laid its stakes on the role of the “workshop of the world” not to be negatively influenced from the meagre forces of that world. Growth based on over-credit is becoming ever more problematic in that country, in a process where the construction industry and local government loom forth as the weak links. The big risk is that the banking industry might join those weak links. On the other hand, first the pandemic and now the Ukraine war have caused great blows to the world economy. This coming winter is bound to create great social unrest, especially in European countries. Neoliberalism cannot act as the basis of state policy under such dire conditions. The nationalisation of the natural gas industry both in France and Germany are only the first signs of the incongruity of market methods and the coming profound crisis.

68 “The Revolt of the College-Educated Working Class”, *New York Times*, 28 Nisan 2022, <http://alturl.com/2uu8g>.

We thus see that of the three material conditions of postmodernism two are in the process of losing their validity. However, the third condition, the crisis of Marxism seems to have a long life. Despite the turbulent period of popular uprisings, people's rebellions and revolutions that has set in since the Arab revolutions of 2011, this crisis is far from its denouement. Many of these popular uprisings were directly an outcome of class struggle dynamics. But socialist/communist movements, sunk deep into a malaise of which they cannot recover, are no longer capable, neither theoretically, politically, and morally, nor organisationally of leading such powerful popular movements. Hence, the different episodes of the revolutionary wave that shook the world first between 2011 and 2013 and then in 2019 ended all in a frustrating return to the *status quo ante* (no doubt under the impact of other important factors as well)⁶⁹.

That is why the supremacy of postmodernism and of left-wing liberalism in the theoretical and ideological domains is well and alive, without any major inroads. This is indeed extremely ironic, since as opposed to genuine Marxism, postmodernism has not only not foreseen where the world is going, but is even responsible in the first degree of all the catastrophe that is descending on our future. Moreover, humanity has now come on the threshold of fascism and of a new world war and postmodernism has nothing to propose to fight these ills.

This renders our task doubly challenging: if we are not going to sit by idly while the world is being destroyed by the powerful and the greedy, we will have to, on the one hand, work with all our might to create revolutionary parties and a revolutionary International, and, on the other, continue our work ceaselessly in the field of the "battle of ideas".

Conclusion

In this article, we looked for an answer to the following question: what are the driving forces behind the "fifty years of solitude" that has befallen Marxism or, what is but the same thing in obverse facet, behind the supremacy of postmodernism over the intellectual universe of the left in the last half-century?

There are two very widespread answers to this question. The first is of course the answer provided by the partisans of postmodernism itself. To their mind, Marxism was either wrong from the beginning or has lost its validity since we entered the postmodern age and thus ceded the ground to postmodernism. The other is the answer given by a set of Marxist theoreticians: as capitalism has entered an entirely new stage, a new school of thought (or a family of such schools) have replaced Marxism as the dominant intellectual current. Manifestly, this seems to be a materialist explanation. However, by granting that, whatever it is called, "postmodernity" or whatever else, these Marxists are in effect ceding the ground to the postmodernist

69 We tried to analyse these factors in the light of both 2011-2013 and 2019, in Turkish. See our "Arap Devriminin Sorunları", *Devrimci Marksizm*, No. 17-18, Winter-Spring 2013 and "Arap Devriminin Dirilişi: Türkiye İçin Dersler", *Devrimci Marksizm*, No. 39-40, Summer-Fall 2019.

school.⁷⁰

If this article has anything novel to offer, it is the idea that the rise of postmodernism and the eclipse of Marxism are two sides of the same coin and are the synthetic result of three phenomena contemporaneous with this decline and rise, three phenomena that have come about in the material-practical world, i.e. the rise and transformation of the modern petty-bourgeoisie into a caste-like social structure, the crisis and ultimately collapse of the bureaucratic workers states, and the rise of neoliberalism as a crisis-resolution strategy of international capital. These are all **transitory phenomena**. Otherwise, one cannot, by any means, talk about a new stage of history, postmodernity or whatever else.

All the errors, contradictions, at times fantastic dimensions, of the family of schools of thinking affiliated to postmodernism have been taken up in the various pieces published in this issue of our journal. The most reliable criterion of the truth or falsity of a theory is the judgment passed by practice over time on the “knowledge” provided by that theory. The falseness of the predictions made by these theories over a time span of 16 years have been exposed constantly in the 50 issues of *Devrimci Marksizm* (our Turkish mother publication) and the six annual issues of *Revolutionary Marxism*.

All the predictions of Marxism have turned out to be correct. All the predictions of postmodernism and its cousin (through Foucault, it has been shown in this article) left-wing liberalism, both on the world scale and within Turkey itself, have been refuted by practical life. Let us content ourselves with a single example. When Lehman Brothers went bankrupt in 2008, in an assessment published immediately after the event, the Editorial Board of this journal predicted developments that have all been borne out: the entry of the world economy in a phase of great depression, the rise of fascism internationally, the emergence of the threat of a world war in the horizon, revolutionary upheavals etc.⁷¹ The utmost value of this journal lies in those predictions since Marxism is not an acrobatics of the mind but a guide for action for the revolutionary proletarian movement that aspires to a classless society.

In what sense, then, is the discussion laid out in this article a guide for action? To the extent that revolutionary Marxism as a political current has always defended the establishment of an alliance between the oppressed masses and the proletariat, to the extent that it has always claimed that total emancipation for the oppressed can only come about under the political rule of the working class, the adepts of identity politics have accused it of postponing the struggle of the oppressed until after the revolution. However, we can now clearly see that the currents of identity politics in our day and age do not only refrain from collaborating with the proletariat. They refuse to have even **the slightest link** with it. Of course, there are those who still

⁷⁰ We hope to show, on a future occasion, that this attitude is in effect a kind of capitulation to postmodernism. Three prominent instances: David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, London: SAGE, 1989; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992; Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism, A Marxist Critique*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989.

⁷¹ Devrimci Marksizm Yayın Kurulu, “Yeni Bir Dönem Açılıyor: Mali Çöküş, Depresyon, Sınıf Mücadelesi”, *Devrimci Marksizm*, No. 8, Winter 2008-2009.

consider themselves socialists within these identity politics movements. Some of them may even still consider that proletarian socialism is important for the future of humanity. However, this only remains a thought process, never being translated into action. The socialism of the socialists within such movements exists as a faith that belongs to the sphere of private life.

Faced with this reality, what is to be done should be clear: the consolidation and strengthening of a revolutionary proletarian party that absorbs into the programme for the political power of the proletariat, the winning over of the class to Lenin's conceptions; the persuasion of certain currents within the oppressed masses and layers by the party that the proletarian programme for power will bring in its wake their emancipation; the move by these currents to then convince the masses of the oppressed to make the choice between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; the raising of the struggle against the bourgeoisie together on the part of the proletariat and the oppressed masses who regroup around it; with the seizure of power by the proletariat the termination of all the different forms of oppression that come from the depths of history and have served in modern times the bourgeoisie to divide and all the more firmly rule over the masses.

Such is the alternative method of approaching the question. This is the establishment of proletarian hegemony. Not by force, not through coercion. The Leninist definition of hegemony implies the taking over of leadership without the use of force. Everything will depend on persuasion, propaganda, agitation and, of course, organising.

Some might ask: why is a sort of priority accorded to the working class? Why do you speak of "hegemony" and not simply an alliance or cooperation? If we speak of hegemony, that is because only two forces can possess the position of ruling class in modern society: the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. Whoever refuses to stand by the proletariat, whoever wishes to stay away from its quest for power, that class, that stratum, that group or that person will be buttressing the current ruling class, the bourgeoisie.

The proletariat is not only the object of the gravest cruelties of capitalism. It is the only force that can lead the fight to destroy the monster. That is why all the oppressed of the world need to gather around the proletariat. The proletariat is the subject of history. Postmodernism declared the death of the subject. It is our wager to bring it alive in the person of the proletariat.



The closing of the age of Post-Marxism¹

Özgür Öztürk

The material conditions are getting better for a new leap forward of the socialist movement. In many countries, the working class now constitutes the majority of the population. With capitalism moving from one crisis to another, the discontent of this class is growing. However, the dominance of the political-ideological patterns peculiar to the neoliberal period is continuing. For example, forms of identity politics, in which everyone fights for their demands within their own autonomous field, have long been the “new normal.” Political practice has become synonymous with spontaneous protest and resistance acts.² Plurality is considered a virtue in itself, yet, magical moments of joint action between these plural identities (like the Gezi protests in Turkey) quickly wane. Without a concrete political goal, an explicit program, an organization to embrace this, and staff to implement it, what remains is just good memories.

1 This is a slightly revised translation of my paper published in Turkish: “Post-Marksizm Çağı Kapanırken”, *Devrimci Marksizm*, no 50, Spring-Summer 2022.

2 Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams use the term “folk politics” to characterize the understanding prevalent on the left in recent decades. According to the authors, this understanding, which has now become our “political common sense”, is a politics of defense focused on “building bunkers to resist the encroachments of global neoliberalism”. “The dominant tactics – protesting, marching, occupying, and various other forms of direct action – have become part of a well-established narrative, with the people and the police each playing their assigned roles”. Such protests have moved away from the goal of changing social structures, and politics has been reduced to an “ethical and individual struggle”. These are very striking and correct observations. But these two writers, who underestimate Leninist strategy, do not really offer an alternative to folk politics. (They also show their lack of interest in the issue by claiming that the vanguard party consists of “elite intellectuals” and citing Lars Lih as a reference – who, in fact, proves the opposite.) See, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*, London, New York: Verso, 2015, p. 3, 6, 15, 236 n. 58.

The “What is to be done?” question remains on the agenda as always with all its weight. No doubt, everyone has ready-made answers to this. Yet judging by the results so far, such rote answers are obviously insufficient.

The last forty years have shown that capitalism has no significant economic, political, or social promises to offer to humanity. In the past, when the labor movement and socialism were strong, large masses of people had managed to make some gains with great struggles. However, especially in the post-Soviet decades, these gains were substantially liquidated. We faced crucial setbacks in working conditions, employment opportunities, wages, retirement rights, housing, education, health services, and union rights. The devastating consequences of the unlimited expansion of the logic of capital became evident in almost every field. For example, we have seen that politics has degenerated completely, even democratic mechanisms consisting of voting every few years have weakened, and authoritarian-fascist governments have become widespread. Capital dominates social life, art, culture, and science to a large extent, and nature is destroyed brutally by the greed for profit.

This attack of capital which encompasses every area cannot be countered by an understanding that limits politics to protest and resistance. If those who hold political power can easily cancel the “gains” you have made with great effort over the decades, there is something wrong with this. Anything reversible when a change of government occurs does not count as an achievement. The only way for the working class and the oppressed to achieve permanent gains is to proceed with a “strategical” (that is, power-targeting) view and seize political power. The 20th century has proved that it will not be enough to do this in a single country or a group of countries. In short, the socialist movement cannot have a horizon other than revolution and world revolution.

However, in the last decades, we have witnessed the oblivion of that horizon even by the socialists. This development resulted from the worldwide defeat of the workers’ states and the workers’ movement. In a period of decreasing attraction to socialism and the decline of class-centered politics, we saw that the revolutionary line, now considered something outdated, was put on the shelf and even systematically despised by “socialists”.

We can call as Post-Marxism those “socialist” approaches that reject class politics and claim to have surpassed Marxism. To my knowledge, the term was first used in the 1980s by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to describe their own work. There may not be many who remember it today, but *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, published in 1985 (1992 in Turkey), was an ambitious book that introduced this movement to the whole world.³ During the collapse process of the Soviet Union, socialists had for a while discussed Post-Marxism and its proposal, the “radical democracy project” (which demands the left to defend liberal democracy). Contrary to what its title might suggest, the book actually didn’t say much about the strategy socialists should follow. It described the process of hegemony but did

³ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso, 2001 (2nd edition, hereafter referred to as HSS in the footnotes).

not clarify which political subject would establish it since the subject would also emerge from this hegemonic practice. Moreover, every attempt at hegemony was ultimately doomed to failure. For such reasons, the “radical democracy” project remained a weak formula, basically affirming the plurality of social movements and promising only temporary hegemonic alliances to political actors. It came off the stage in the new century by leaving its place to the discussions on *Empire*.

However, many of the theses and themes of Post-Marxism survived. Ideas that dominated the left during the dissolution process were actually in circulation before Post-Marxist theory (for example, André Gorz’s *Farewell to the Working Class*). In a sense, Laclau and Mouffe became influential because they brought together within a new theoretical synthesis the ideas that were already gaining wide currency. Although *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* was forgotten eventually, the theses remained. In short, Post-Marxism in the narrow sense is long gone, but the Post-Marxist approach in a broad sense is still alive.

The crisis conjuncture that started in 2008 marks the rise of class politics and the end of the Post-Marxism era, but the curtain has not come down yet. It takes time for habits to change and the spirit of the age to form. In this paper, I hope to contribute to the acceleration of this process. I will discuss via Laclau and Mouffe, the most well-known representatives of this movement, some of the main arguments of Post-Marxist approaches that reject all kinds of “essentialism”, categorically oppose class reductionism, and act on the basis of plurality, multitude, discourse analysis, and identity politics. Though I will discuss and criticize Post-Marxism in the narrow sense (the Laclau-Mouffe version), I will try to question the intellectual ground of Post-Marxism in a broad sense.

On *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*

Ellen Wood had given the title *The Retreat From Class* to her book criticizing the theses that were prevalent on the left in the early neoliberal era. Like many influential works of those years, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is also unsympathetic to the concept of class in general and the working class in particular. Marxist theory places class at the center of its analysis of society and its understanding of social transformation, but Post-Marxism opposes this “ontological” privilege. It also objects to the idea that society and history have a rational structure. In other words, it does not propose another concept instead of “class”; it questions the idea of a basic social unit that will always be valid: Classes were the main actors of social transformation during the 19th century Europe in which Marx lived, but as we approach today, different types of actors appear on the scene due to the deepening of social differentiation. It is worth quoting at length from the Introduction to the book:

What is now in crisis is a whole conception of socialism which rests upon the ontological centrality of the working class, upon the role of Revolution, with a capital “r”, as the founding moment in the transition from one type of society to

another, and upon the illusory prospect of a perfectly unitary and homogeneous collective will that will render pointless the moment of politics. The plural and multifarious character of contemporary social struggles has finally dissolved the last foundation for that political imaginary. Peopled with “universal” subjects and conceptually built around History in the singular, it has postulated “society” as an intelligible structure that could be intellectually mastered on the basis of certain class positions and reconstituted, as a rational, transparent order, through a founding act of a political character. Today, the Left is witnessing the final act of the dissolution of that Jacobin imaginary.⁴

In short, Marxism has conceived society as a rational structure, predicting the transformation of this structure through class-based action but has faced a crisis because it could not respond to the plural character of contemporary social struggles. According to the epistemological framework Laclau put forward in his previous work, the crisis of a theory will first be met by efforts to expand this theory (with new concepts), but at a certain phase it will be necessary to move on to a new theory by abandoning the old one: “From the theoretical system to the theoretical problems and from them to a new theoretical system: that is the course of the process of knowledge”.⁵ According to this template, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* has to be seen as the work that presents the new theoretical system to replace Marxism, that is, Post-Marxism.

In preparation for the discussion of the main theses of Post-Marxism, let’s look briefly at the structure of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. The interpretation (“deconstruction”) of the history of Marxism in terms of the necessity-contingency tension takes up about half of the four-chapter book. This is followed by another discussion targeting the theoretical foundations of Marxism (at the end of the second chapter and the whole third chapter). The theses developed here prepare the ground for the political proposal in the fourth and final chapter, namely the radical democracy project.

Perhaps the most fundamental move of Post-Marxism is the attempt to place Marxism in a historically relative position. According to this, at the beginning of the modern period, during the era that opened with the French Revolution and lasted until the middle of the 19th century, the main political polarization was between the people and the ancient regime. With the coming of industrial society, this opposition lost its political effect, and Marx (and other socialists) reformulated the social division around a new principle, in the form of class antagonism.⁶ But this new formula could not cover all social contradictions, and the inadequacy of the class principle was also felt by Marxists who needed recourse to the theory and practice of “hegemony” in the first half of the 20th century.

According to Laclau and Mouffe, though Marxism based itself on a strict conception of historical necessity, it was forced to increase the share of contingency since real life did not fit the theory. “In so far as the paradigmatic sequence of its

⁴ HSS, p. 2.

⁵ Ernesto Laclau, “The Specificity of the Political”, in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism-Fascism-Populism*, London: New Left Books, 1977, p. 61.

⁶ HSS, p. 149–152.

categories was subjected to the ‘structural pressure’ of increasingly atypical situations, it became ever more difficult to reduce social relations to structural moments internal to those categories”.⁷ As a matter of fact, the notion of hegemony has been developed to fill the theoretical gap that arose because history did not develop as expected. However, this concept has made the theoretical problems of Marxism more visible because it became clear that it is not enough to define social actors mainly in the field of relations of production.⁸

Though Marxists have been forced in practice to go beyond class, the central position of class was not questioned in theory. The “people”, the main actor of pre-Marxist era social struggles, was included within Marxist political categories during the Popular Fronts of the 1930s, but it was difficult to attribute a clear class identity to it. It has become increasingly visible that political actors do not necessarily coincide with economic subjects (classes) or that hegemony is established by basic classes. In short, the conditions that forced the introduction of the notion of hegemony and the very logic of hegemony make the *identity between political actors and classes* problematic.⁹

Hegemony and Socialist Strategy criticizes the “dogmatic” classist understanding of Marxism, and has received many solid responses from Marxists. Many writers have emphasized that Laclau and Mouffe have created a simplified version of Marxism to direct their criticism, reached very comprehensive conclusions from superficial and controversial premises, and failed to offer a meaningful political perspective.¹⁰ I think these counter-criticisms are generally correct but also incomplete. Because the theoretical part of the book (roughly the third chapter), which establishes the connection between the interpretation of Marxism and the proposal for radical democracy, is often neglected. The weakness of the radical democracy project may have created the impression that the philosophical propositions that provide a basis for this project are unimportant. However, these propositions appear explicitly or implicitly in political projects other than Post-Marxism. In other words, the intellectual ground on which Post-Marxism rests continues to produce its effects. Thus the discussion needs to be conducted at a more fundamental level.

From antagonisms to the impossibility of society

⁷ *HSS*, p. 18.

⁸ *HSS*, p. 13; also see Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, London, New York: Verso, 2005, p. 125-6.

⁹ *HSS*, p. 37.

¹⁰ Gülnur Savran, “‘Öz’lerin Reddinden Sınıf Politikasının Reddine” [“From the Rejection of ‘Essences’ to the Rejection of Class Politics”], *Onbirinci Tez*, no 10, 1990; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New “True” Socialism*, London, New York: Verso, 1998 [1986]; Gülseren Adaklı, “Post-Marksızmin Kuramsal ve Siyasal Açmazları” [“The Theoretical and Political Dilemmas of Post-Marxism”], *Praksis*, no 1, 2001; Sevilay Kaygalak, “Post-Marksist Siyasetin Sefaleti: Radikal Demokrasi” [“The Poverty of Post-Marxist Politics: Radical Democracy”], *Praksis*, no 1, 2001; Norman Geras, “Post-Marxism?”, *New Left Review* I, no 163, May-June 1987; “Ex-Marxism Without Substance: Being a Real Reply to Laclau and Mouffe”, *New Left Review* I, no 169, May-June 1988.

Behind the political project of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* lies the view that society is *not* a rational unity: When referring to society, we need to think of structural failures rather than a structure. The reason for this is antagonisms (conflicts, irreconcilable oppositions). There is no “complete” society that has been able to end conflicts within itself, integrated in a closed and transparent manner: “Society never manages fully to be society”.¹¹ The title of one of Laclau’s articles mentions “the impossibility of society”. This expression does not mean that societies do not exist but that they exist in the form of partial and unstable attempts at structuring, to deal with the antagonisms that make them impossible. Thus, “If society is not totally possible, neither is it totally impossible”.¹²

According to Post-Marxism, the antagonisms that permeate society disrupt its structurality and objectivity. In a sense, antagonisms deconstruct its “foundation”. From this, the claim about the determinacy of the economic base (foundation) is questioned. In short, at the beginning of the road to the rejection of class politics stands a “metaphysics of antagonism” based on the “ontological” primacy of antagonisms and conflicts.

Taking struggle, conflict, and antagonism as ontologically primary is certainly correct; but if such an understanding is brought forward to the denial of social objectivity, this makes a strategic political orientation impossible and ultimately turns into a self-defeating project. Post-Marxism, which advocates the “primacy of the political”, can be regarded as a basically reformist initiative that seeks to resolve the tensions between the two terms of the dichotomies like determinism-voluntarism or necessity-contingency by emphasizing the second pole, and trying to combine an understanding of politics close to anarchism with liberal goals.¹³ The price of such an attempt has been the complete abandonment of the revolutionary potential of class politics, set aside in the name of rejecting all essentialism.

Antagonism is usually translated into Turkish as “irreconcilable contradiction”. In Marxist literature, the irreconcilable nature of the opposition is emphasized by speaking of antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat but of “non-antagonistic contradictions” between, for example, commercial and industrial bourgeoisie. Contradictions of the second kind are reconcilable, unlike the first. However, in the Laclau–Mouffe usage of the term, antagonism is different from contradiction. Contradiction means a logical conflict, while antagonism expresses a situation of actual conflict. Two social actors not contradicting each other may engage in an antagonistic struggle. Or conversely, a contradictory position may not create an antagonism.

¹¹ *HSS*, s. p. 127.

¹² *HSS*, p. 129. At a time when Margaret Thatcher was declaring the neoliberal program in England by claiming that “There is no such thing as society, there are only individuals”, Laclau was defending his thesis about “the impossibility of society” – an interesting coincidence.

¹³ Post-Marxism is not directly anarchist since it proposes a politics of hegemony and thus rejects the idea of decentralized resistance. However, because it also rejects the strategic perspective in practice, it approaches what Todd May calls “tactical political philosophy”. See *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994, p. 11-2, 54.

Three other notions complement this concept of antagonism. For Laclau and Mouffe, any “relation of subordination” does not necessarily involve resistance; the resistance of the oppressed can only take place under the influence of an outside element, a “constitutive outside”; and if resistance begins as a result of such an effect, the relationship in question will now be experienced as a “relationship of oppression”.¹⁴ For example, a woman who has obeyed her husband for years in a conservative family may begin to view the situation as an oppressive relationship when confronted with liberating ideas or practices. An antagonism can arise from this.

The claim that makes the Post-Marxist understanding of antagonism truly unique is that antagonisms do not take place between two positive and “full” identities but between two adversaries who mutually negate each other’s identities. “The presence of the ‘Other’ prevents me from being totally myself. The relation arises not from full totalities, but from the impossibility of their constitution”.¹⁵ In other words, those in conflict are not “A and B” but “non-A and non-B”. During the antagonism, identities and differences are suspended and existing identities become invalid. Thus arises a naming problem, and language is disrupted. The division of society by antagonisms makes its “objective” character problematic.

Insofar as there is antagonism, I cannot be a full presence for myself. But nor is the force that antagonizes me such a presence ... If language is a system of differences, antagonism is the failure of difference: in that sense, it situates itself within the limits of language and can only exist as the disruption of it - that is, as metaphor ... every language and every society are constituted as a repression of the consciousness of the impossibility that penetrates them. Antagonism escapes the possibility of being apprehended through language, since language only exists as an attempt to fix that which antagonism subverts.

Antagonism, far from being an objective relation, is a relation wherein the limits of every objectivity are *shown* ... Strictly speaking, antagonisms are not internal but external to society; or rather, they constitute the limits of society, the latter’s impossibility of fully constituting itself.¹⁶

Questioning the structurality of a structure is one of the favorite themes of 20th century thought. For example, Derrida shows that the notion of structure always includes the idea of a center, but the center is not subject to the logic of the structure, and hence it actually stands *outside* the structure.¹⁷ The notion of structure prevailing in linguistics, semiotics, psychoanalysis, and ethnology both requires a center and tries to confront the fact that it does not exist. The structure is based on, structured around a center, or rather a constitutive void, which is both inside and outside. This idea of a founding void, or lack can be extended to all structures, from

¹⁴ HSS, p. 153.

¹⁵ HSS, p. 125.

¹⁶ HSS, p. 125. Also see Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on The Revolution of Our Time*, trans. Jon Barnes, London, New York: Verso, 1990, p. 17–8.

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”, in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 351–4.

social structures to individual formations.

In the Marxist understanding of antagonism, society is thought to be structured around a central antagonism, a fundamental division: The labor-capital contradiction constitutes the basic matrix that provides the meaning of all other social conflicts. As Laclau once wrote (in his Marxist period), “not every contradiction is a class contradiction, but every contradiction is overdetermined by the class struggle”.¹⁸ For this understanding, the “central” antagonism, though always tried to be suppressed, is at the same time the element that establishes the objectivity, the “structurality” of the society.

Marxists emphasize the “irreconcilable” nature of the antagonism. Post-Marxism, on the other hand, emphasizes unpredictability (the notion of “constitutive outside” is used to show that antagonism cannot be derived from the logic of the “inside”). While Marxist antagonism is the constitutive element of objectivity, Post-Marxist antagonism is something that distorts language and meaning, and shows the limit of objectivity. There is a central antagonism in Marxism, while Post-Marxism suggests the plurality of antagonisms: Many antagonisms arise from the interaction of many logics operating within the social field. The transition of any of these to the “central” position depends on unforeseen contingent conditions.

Thus two different conceptions of antagonism correspond to two different conceptions of “society”. In the Marxist understanding, because of the antagonisms involved (first and foremost the labor-capital contradiction), society never forms a “closed” system in a functionalist sense; yet it exhibits a historically consistent, rationally intelligible structurality, objectivity. In the Post-Marxist understanding, however, antagonisms cancel the rationality and predictability of society. In this universe dominated by contingency, necessity exists only as temporary, partial attempts. In such an approach, which denies fundamental transformations, the possibility of determining a concrete political strategy disappears.¹⁹

Problems of the Post-Marxist conception of antagonism

There are several problems with the Post-Marxist conceptualization of antagonism. First, it cannot be said that the identity of both parties is denied in the antagonistic relationship. It is no accident that the antagonism examples given by Laclau and Mouffe always fail in this respect. For example, they write that “it is because a peasant *cannot be* a peasant that an antagonism exists with the landowner expelling him from his land”.²⁰ Here, the “peasant” identity of the peasant is indeed under threat. But the other pole of the relationship (the landowner) does not have such a problem. Extending the example, workers who resist lay-offs do not negate (actu-

¹⁸ Ernesto Laclau, “Fascism and Ideology”, in *Politics and Ideology*, p. 106.

¹⁹ Mouffe’s writings in the period after *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* are examples of this. In general, Mouffe calls for “transforming antagonisms into agonisms”, that is, for hostilities to be replaced by arguments between opponents. But there are no concrete suggestions as to how this will happen. Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, London, New York: Verso, 2000, p. 14, 74, 102-3; *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*, London, New York: Verso, 2013, p. xii, 7.

²⁰ HSS, p. 125.

ally affirm) the capitalist's "capitalist" identity either. The identity of the capitalist can only become problematic if the workers oppose the wage relation and capitalist exploitation. If an identity describes a position of structural difference, for a general "identity crisis" to emerge, this relational structure must be questioned as a whole. If such a revolutionary situation does not occur, then we are dealing with ordinary everyday conflicts that can be expressed quite easily within the given social objectivity.

The second problem is related to the notion of "constitutive outside". The main concern in the Post-Marxist use of this term (which is attributed to Derrida) is to suggest that antagonisms do not arise spontaneously from contradictory positions. Laclau argues, for example, that it is not logically necessary for the working class to resist a wage cut. According to him, in Marxist theory concrete agents embody economic categories; the worker is categorically a "seller of labor power", and the ability to resist wage cuts is not logically included in such a category. If the worker resists it is because her consumer identity *outside* the relations of production is damaged or denied; that is, the intervention of an "outside" is necessary.²¹

In the first example, the peasant could not become a "peasant" because of antagonism. Now it is said that the worker cannot become a "consumer" because of antagonism. In both cases, the identity of the other pole of the relationship (landowner, capitalist) remains unaffected (not negated). Moreover, the premise of Laclau's argument is flawed. Because the category of "seller of labor power" *logically* includes that the worker, like every seller, resists, as much as possible, the reductions in the price of the commodity sold.²² (Laclau thinks that this is not logical, and requires additional assumptions such as "homo economicus"; but what is at stake here is the *logic of exchange*.) The same applies to the extension of working hours. Whether the protest of the workers will take the form of silent grunts or, for example, factory occupations is another matter that depends on the concrete power relations. The capitalist-worker relationship is antagonistic and irreconcilable whether or not workers openly resist (the actual compromises between the two classes do not affect this "ontological" opposition; in fact, what governs partial compromises is the labor-capital contradiction itself). If Laclau's approach is accepted, then it will also be necessary to determine the exact beginning point of the worker resistance.

There is another dimension to the notion of "constitutive outside". If the "outside" is really constitutive, the other is not only the element that prevents me from being fully myself, but also, in a sense, what makes me who I am. Thus, antagonism involves not only the negation but also the affirmation of identities.²³ It is well known that social actors often become subjects and gain their identities through

21 Laclau, *New Reflections*, p. 9; *On Populist Reason*, p. 150. "There is no logical connection whatsoever between positions in the relations of production and the mentality of the producers. The workers' resistance to certain forms of domination will depend upon the position they occupy within the ensemble of social relations, and not only in those of production" (*HSS*, p. 84-5).

22 In fact, the central role of the consumer identity of the working class *within* the capitalist relations of production is examined in detail in the reproduction schemas of the second volume of *Capital*, or Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital*. But, even if we lay aside this fact, the premise is flawed.

23 Laclau mentions this in his later work, but does not elaborate much (*New Reflections*, p. 21).

conflicts or struggles with other actors. This “identity-forming” property of antagonisms means that they are also a constitutive element of social objectivity. As a result, the processes of contradiction, conflict, and antagonism are precisely what characterize objectivity.

Another problem in the Post-Marxist understanding of antagonism is as follows: We experience the disruption of language not only in the case of antagonism but in all kinds of change processes. When an object is changing from A to B, it is neither A nor B at the time of transformation (it is also both A and B), its identity is yet to be determined. For example, part of the capitalist class regularly loses its “capitalist” identity through bankruptcies, etc. (without antagonism). Social entities go through lots of qualitative changes without conflict – firms are restructured, some artisans turn into workers, institutions change their positions. According to Post-Marxist assumptions, it would be necessary to say that such changes also disrupt language and limit objectivity. In fact, if this kind of reasoning is consistently followed, there will be no objectivity: everything is always in flux, changing. A disciple of Heraclitus did not find it sufficient to say “One cannot bathe in the same river twice”, and “corrected” his master by saying “No one can do this even once!” The point that Post-Marxism will reach will be close to that of the impatient disciple.

In general, the problems in the Post-Marxist notion of antagonism stem from the attempt to reconceptualize antagonisms as actual conflicts by limiting contradictions to the realm of logic (propositions). The thesis that “an antagonism does not necessarily arise from a contradiction, and an antagonistic relationship does not have to be contradictory” is in fact questionable in terms of Laclau and Mouffe’s own understanding of discourse, which advocates the unity of language and action. The claim that there are full identities in dialectical contradictions, and identities are negated in antagonism is also a controversial starting point. As we saw above, if identities are also affirmed (as well as negated) in antagonisms, it is not clear why this should not be considered a “contradiction”. The problem is conceiving conflict or antagonism as something limiting objectivity. From this point, it is concluded that social conflicts are unpredictable (because “there is no logical connection” between the contradictory positions in the relations of production and the mentality of the actors occupying these positions) and that there is no central antagonism. Such a theory, which tries to trivialize the labor-capital contradiction, will never be able to propose a meaningful “socialist strategy”, but will reflect a lack of strategy.

Critique of economic determinism

If the first step on the way to the rejection of class politics is to question social objectivity starting from a metaphysics of antagonism, the second step is to reject the idea of the “base” of society and determination by the economic structure (base). Now let us look at these moves. At the end of the second chapter of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, we encounter the following lines in a subsection titled “The Last Redoubt of Essentialism: the Economy”:

The economic level ... must satisfy three very precise conditions in order to play

this role of constituting the subjects of hegemonic practices. *Firstly*, its laws of motion must be strictly endogenous and exclude all indeterminacy resulting from political or other external interventions ... *Secondly*, the unity and homogeneity of social agents, constituted at the economic level, must result from the very laws of motion of this level ... *Thirdly*, the position of these agents in the relations of production must endow them with “historical interests”, so that the presence of such agents at other social levels -through mechanisms of “representation” or “articulation”- must ultimately be explained on the basis of economic interests.²⁴

The exaggerated nature of the language is striking: Expressions demanding “completeness” such as three “very precise” conditions, “strictly endogenous” laws of motion, or the exclusion of “all indeterminacy” seem symptomatic. Since such a pure “economic level” has never existed anywhere in history, either Marxists must have exaggerated the importance of the economy, or Laclau and Mouffe are suggesting some arbitrary criteria.

The first move, which detaches politics from the economy, is followed by the second, which reverses the relationship that Marxism establishes between the economy and politics: “We will attempt to demonstrate that the space of the economy is itself structured as a political space, and that in it, as in any other ‘level’ of society, those practices we characterized as hegemonic are fully operative”.²⁵ To prove this, an explanation is given based on the claim that the commodity character of labor power is a fiction of Marxism. According to this claim, it cannot be said that labor power is a commodity, since “if it were merely a commodity like the others, its use-value could obviously be made automatically effective from the very moment of its purchase”.²⁶

No doubt, every Marxist knows that use value is actualized, realized, not when the commodity changes hands, but with actual use. In the fourth paragraph of the first volume of *Capital* Marx writes that “Use values become a reality only by use or consumption”.²⁷ It is clear that this also applies to the commodity of labor power. But no worries. Laclau and Mouffe write, as if having made a very original invention, that the capitalist buying labor power will try to extract the largest possible amount of labor from it. “The labor process cannot exist without a series of relations of domination”.²⁸ Therefore, the labor process is “not merely the place where capital exerts its domination, but the ground of a struggle”.²⁹ In other words, the economy itself is a political terrain, and thus the myth of determination by the economy falls to the ground. And not only that: “The thesis that the productive forces are neutral, and that their development can be conceived as natural and unilinear, is entirely unfounded. This also removes the only ground on which the economy could be understood as an autonomous and self-regulated universe”.³⁰

²⁴ HSS, p. 76.

²⁵ HSS, p. 76-7.

²⁶ HSS, p. 78.

²⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital vol. I, Marx & Engels Collected Works*, vol. 35, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 46.

²⁸ HSS, p. 79.

²⁹ HSS, p. 79.

³⁰ HSS, p. 80.

It is easy to refute these explanations, which should come as a surprise to anyone who knows a little about *Capital*. Marx states, for example, that it is possible to write “quite a history of inventions, made since 1830, for the sole purpose of supplying capital with weapons against the revolts of the working class”.³¹ The analysis of the labor process in *Capital* is not the story of naturally developing productive forces, but the exposition of a development whose direction and pace are determined by the class struggle. Moreover, contrary to what Laclau and Mouffe think, it is precisely the distinction between labor and labor power that enables us to grasp the struggle between workers and capitalists in the labor process. Because what the worker sells (labor power) is a capacity, an ability, a potential. The capitalist makes pressure to use this potential to the fullest. If it were otherwise, there would be no need for dispute. The seller of any commodity, once disposed of it, no longer cares about how the buyer uses it. But labor power is a different, special commodity. It is embodied in the worker’s body. The “fiction” of labor power as a commodity does not originate from Marx, but from the capitalist process itself.

The insight that the labor process is the basis of an ongoing struggle between the worker and the capitalist permeates perhaps every sentence of Marx, thus it is strange that Laclau and Mouffe embrace the perspective brought by Marx and try to use it as something that *refutes* the thesis of determination by the economic base. Elsewhere, Laclau argues that there is no mention of class struggle in the dialectic of relations of production/productive forces discussed in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, and that such a dialectic of relations-forces is absent in the perspective of the *Communist Manifesto*, which declares all history to consist of class struggles. He presents the first text as a logical contradiction without antagonism, and the second text as an example of antagonism without contradiction.³² But it is not Marx who fails to consider these two dimensions, the class struggle and the productive forces, together, because many chapters in *Capital* display precisely this intertwining. The “either contradiction or antagonism” dilemma is a problem specific to Post-Marxism rather than Marx.

The effort to refute the thesis that the economic base determines the political, legal, ideological, etc. superstructure aims to clear the way for the “primacy of politics” thesis. According to Post-Marxism, the base-superstructure metaphor is misleading, because, the economy, which is supposed to “lie below”, is itself a political terrain full of conflicts. We encounter politics, antagonisms at the root of all social relations. In their preface to the second edition of the book in 2000, Laclau and Mouffe state that “This privileging of the political moment in the structuration of society is an essential aspect of our approach ... we conceive of the political not as a superstructure but as having the status of an *ontology of the social*”.³³ Politics, not the economy, comes first in the structuring of the social sphere, and this makes the idea of a “base” (or “foundation”) of society problematic. There are only antago-

31 Marx, *Capital*. I, p. 439.

32 Laclau, *New Reflections*, p. 16; “Structure, History, and the Political” in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, London, New York: Verso, 2000, p. 202.

33 HSS, p. xii, xiv.

nisms in the “foundation”, and such a foundation cancels itself.

The “primacy of politics” thesis was later extended, and made way for the questioning of the existence of the economic level. One of the characteristic features of capitalism is the existence of an economic level *separate* from other social spheres, but Laclau denies this: “The myth of a separate and definable ‘economic instance’ must be abandoned”.³⁴ He even sees terms such as class, class struggle, capitalism as “fetishes” that are devoid of precise meanings.³⁵ In the end, “there is no room for the distinction, as in classical socialism, between economic struggle and political struggle; economic struggles are as political as those taking place at the level of the state conceived in its restrictive sense”.³⁶

Ironically, an approach that denies economic determination comes to the view that Lenin criticizes as “economism”. Everyone accepts the political nature of economic struggles, but there is a difference between the political character of struggles limited to the economic sphere and the revolutionary policy towards state power. Lenin emphasizes this difference by saying, “There is politics, and there is politics”. Laclau and Mouffe (and many others), who dissolve all struggles in a general notion of the “political”, seem to be in a bit of a hurry to bury up the economy, and thus the classes.

The explanation of the relationship between the economy and politics in Post-Marxism seems to have moved from the primacy of politics thesis to the claim that the economy as a separate “instance” does not even exist. Of course, Post-Marxism does not deny the existence of economic facts, but it seems to have a clear difficulty in conceptualizing the economic level. It is time, then, to focus on the relations between the economy and politics.

Economy and politics

Are all social relations political? Laclau discusses this issue in his 1990 book *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, using Husserl’s notions of “sedimentation” and “reactivation”. According to Laclau, social practices derive from political origins, but this is not apparent at first glance. Even the simplest habits in daily life (going to the movies, taking the train, drinking coffee in the morning...) are initially shaped by certain interventions, formed by the exclusion of certain alternatives, and gained permanence over time, thus hiding their original political stamp. Laclau calls this “sedimentation”. The social sphere consists of political practices that have become sedimented and have gained a certain objectivity. But if objectivity itself is based on certain exclusions, traces of these exclusions will somehow be present. Here, “reactivation” is the making visible of the political origin, the revealing of the contingent character of objectivity.³⁷

The appropriateness of the concept of “reactivation” to express the political dimension can be questioned. However, we can unequivocally accept the political

34 Laclau, *New Reflections*, p. 25.

35 Laclau, “Structure, History, and the Political”, p. 201.

36 Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, p. 154.

37 Laclau, *New Reflections*, p. 33–5.

(antagonistic) character of social phenomena: ***Social relations are always political.*** There is a certain component of power in all social relations.³⁸ (The goal of socialism is not a utopian thing such as putting an end to all power relations altogether, but to reorganize the distribution of social power.) Therefore, as a rule, economic relations that form part of social relations are also political.

However, there is also a “political” sphere that is the institutionalized form of politics and includes the state, political parties, bureaucracy, etc. The main terrain of social change, of politics, is this macro-political sphere. To say that social relations are political relations does not mean that all social relations are determined by the state. Yet those who want radical changes in social relations must confront state power.

What is said about politics also applies to the “economic” sphere as relations of production. Social relations are always political relations and ***at the same time*** class relations. For example, parent-child relationships, leisure time, love relationships, neighborhood, culture, sports, nutrition, etc. every social phenomenon we can think of has a class dimension, and is indelibly imprinted with the relations of production.

“Politics” is peculiar to class societies in general; it includes the state as the main institution and has gained autonomy from social relations over time. The novelty added by capitalism is the autonomization of the “economy” (against politics and society), the basic elements of which are firms and markets. ***Autonomy*** should not be thought of as an absolute break or independence, but means that a relational system becomes a whole capable of reproducing itself, begins to set its own rules, and the boundary that separates the inside and the outside gains a certain permanence. This does not mean that the relational whole has gained complete independence, but it has begun to provide its own conditions of existence to a large extent. We are not dealing with Spinozan-style absolute substances which “cause themselves”, but with systematic structures that, once arising, begin to produce their own inputs (feedback circuits are the simplest example). Indeed, Marx’s theory also asserts that at a certain stage capital begins to set its own presuppositions.

The economy-politics-society triad constitutes the three basic ***social*** spheres in capitalism. These three domains form a dialectical unity, they ***reproduce themselves and the society by mediating each other in mutual interaction.***

It is of course possible to analyze the triad in different ways. For example, Mark Neocleous, working on the Marxist theory of the state, writes (without explaining why) that it is necessary to use both the base-superstructure distinction and the state-civil society distinction. He rightly states that civil society cannot be reduced to the economic base but does not explain the ***internal*** link between the base-superstructure and state-civil society distinctions.³⁹ But these two distinctions reflect

38 While using the concepts of politics and power synonymously, it is necessary not to forget Cemal Bâli Akal’s remark: “Those who take relations of power as an inevitable result of all kinds of socialness, meaning the establishment of any order, have difficulty in determining the difference between power and political power”. İktidarın Üç Yüzü [*The Three Faces of Power*] Ankara: Dost, 1998, p. 347.

39 Mark Neocleous, *Administering Civil Society: Towards a Theory of State Power*, London: Macmillan Press, 1996, p. 16-7, 38-40.

two different divisions of the same totality, which consists of three basic spheres (or levels) of capitalist society. Because of this, using one and not the other will not be enough. In the distinction between the state and civil society, “civil society” covers both economic relations in the narrow sense and other relations in the sphere of society. (The liberal left in Turkey takes the state-civil society distinction as more or less synonymous with the state-society opposition; this nice trick helps to exclude economic exploitation from civil society.) On the other hand, the base-superstructure distinction is the classical Marxist formulation in which the political, legal, ideological, etc. forms, that is, forms peculiar to “politics” and society are conditioned by the economic base.

The relations between the three mutually mediating spheres are not “symmetrical”, but unequal and combined. A dialectical relationship does not mean reciprocal balance. Post-Marxists are correct in emphasizing the political nature of the economy, but they somehow forget the economic character of politics. The problem is how to envision the relationship between the two. Historical materialism argues that transformations in the structure of relations of production (transition from agriculture to industry, commodification, the expansion of wage labor, etc.) condition changes in the “superstructure”. The reverse is not seen in history. A mere change of political power does not lead to radical changes in the relations of production. The only exception is the change of political power *between classes*, which confirms the determination by the economic base thesis.

When Lenin criticized economism, he emphasized that it included an understanding of politics that is limited to the *economic sphere*; and argued that it could not make permanent gains for the working class because it did not orient itself to transform state power and did not face the problem of macro-power. Today’s social movements are similarly positioned only in the *sphere of society* and direct their demands to the state by acting as a pressure group. Certain “gains” can be achieved with this type of identity politics, but there is no guarantee that these will be permanent.

If we want a genuine, lasting, fundamental social transformation, there is no alternative but to wage a total anti-capitalist struggle. For this, it is necessary to conceive capitalism as an objective-structural system. Melting all social struggles into a general notion of the “political” as Laclau does may seem like a very “political” approach at first glance, but in reality it means abandoning the claim of structural social transformation.

Anti-capitalist struggle

According to Post-Marxism, since the economy is not the basic sphere that determines the others, the classes formed in this sphere cannot be the privileged elements of social transformation. The “ontological” privilege that Marxism grants to classes and specifically to the working class is because classes have come to the fore in a certain period of history. But this period was short-lived:

Initially “democracy”, conceived as a field of popular action, is the great protagonist in the historic confrontations which dominate the life of Europe between 1789 and 1848 ... Later comes the major break constituted by the long reaction of the 1850s; and when this comes to an end and popular protest is renewed, the protagonists have changed ... the unions or nascent social-democratic parties ... which establish themselves with increasing solidity.

(...)

Marx’s ... reflection took place in a moment at which the division of the political space in terms of the dichotomy people/ancien régime seemed to have exhausted its productivity, and was in any case incapable of constructing a vision of the political which would recapture the complexity and the plurality peculiar to the social in industrial societies. Marx seeks, then, to think the primary fact of social division on the basis of a new principle: the confrontation between classes. The new principle, however, is undermined from the start by a radical insufficiency, arising from the fact that class opposition is incapable of dividing the totality of the social body into two antagonistic camps, of reproducing itself automatically as a line of demarcation in the political sphere. It is for this reason that the affirmation of the class struggle as the fundamental principle of political division always had to be accompanied by supplementary hypotheses which relegated its full applicability to the future.⁴⁰

According to the Post-Marxist interpretation of history, the introduction of the notion of hegemony was a response to the inability of the class principle to reflect the complexities of the political sphere. This inadequacy arose from the fact that classes are economic agents defined in the field of relations of production; their presence at the political level can only take the form of a kind of reflection or “representation of interests”. The specific logic of politics has led to permanent failures of this understanding in practice. But if we try to rectify this by taking class formation more broadly to include the political level (as Balibar or Poulantzas did, for example), in this case, there is no guarantee that the emerging agents will necessarily be class subjects. Consequently, social conflicts do not necessarily take the form of “class struggle”.⁴¹

Another consequence of this reasoning is that a socialist project not based on the working class is possible. According to Post-Marxists, like the idea of “revolution” based on the total transformation of society, the view of the historical proletariat that will realize this transformation is also wrong; because the working class, like all other identities, is a particular group that pursues its own interests. Under certain circumstances, it might go beyond this particular identity and gather other groups around its political project, but this would be an exceptional case. The rule is temporary and unstable alliances, or rather chains of equivalence, established between different identities. Within such a chain, the working class will have no privilege: “A variety of other points of rupture and democratic antagonisms can be articulated to a socialist ‘collective will’ on an *equal* footing with workers’ demands. The era of the ‘privileged subjects’ -in the ontological, not practical sense- of the anti-capitalist

⁴⁰ HSS, p. 149, 151.

⁴¹ HSS, p. 20, 100; Laclau, *New Reflections*, p. 37.

struggle has been definitively superseded”.⁴²

Why can't there be privileged subjects in the anti-capitalist struggle? According to Laclau and Mouffe this is because capitalism threatens many different areas. In their response to Norman Geras' critique they write that “there are many points of antagonism between capitalism and various sections of the population (environmental pollution, property development in certain areas, the arms race, the flow of capital from one region to another, etc.), and this means that we will have a variety of anti-capitalist struggles”.⁴³ The result, of course, is the inadequacy of the class struggle:

many sectors are threatened by the capitalist logic, and ... the resulting antagonisms are not necessarily related to particular locations in the relations of production. As a result, the notion of class struggle is totally insufficient to explain the identity of the agents involved in anti-capitalist struggles. It is simply the remainder of an old-fashioned conception which saw in an assumed general proletarianization of society the emergence of the future burier of capitalism.⁴⁴

We see that Post-Marxism, which declares that the era of class struggle is over, makes a very simple mistake and equates the anti-capitalist (socialist) struggle with social struggles against the logic of capital. But this identification is misleading. Not all struggles against the logic of capital are “anti-capitalist”. Many social segments take the blow of capital and start resistance, but most of these are “particularist” struggles; they tend to be confined to a particular problem area. Anti-capitalist struggle, on the other hand, is only possible by targeting capitalist relations of production and confronting the central antagonism of society (the labor-capital contradiction).

The “plural and diverse” character of social struggles should be obvious to everyone in today's world. There are many forms of struggle such as the women's movement, the ecology movement, national movements, the student movement, the struggles of sexual minorities, human rights activism, the anti-nuclear movement, the anti-globalization movement, the anti-war movement, and there is an endless variety within them. However, *in the context of the anti-capitalist struggle*, there is an asymmetry between all these different movements and the workers' struggle. While the contradiction of capital with labor has an antagonistic (irreconcilable) character, this quality is not seen in other forms of struggle. For example, the end of capitalism is a necessary condition for the prevention of ecological destruction or the real emancipation of women, but the working logic of the capitalist system does not create from within the socio-political subjects to fight in this direction. The working class, on the other hand, achieves social and political existence by being formed within the capitalist relations of production itself. Its struggle is necessarily fought not only against the negative consequences of the logic of capital but against capital itself. In this sense, it occupies an “ontologically privileged” position in the

⁴² HSS, p. 87.

⁴³ “Post-Marxism Without Apologies”, in *New Reflections*, p. 127.

⁴⁴ Laclau, “Structure, History, and the Political”, p. 203.

anti-capitalist struggle.

From the particular to the universal

Besides the “ontological” reasons discussed above, Post-Marxism’s objection to class politics is based also on factual reasons. One reason is that the working class is also a segment that has not gone beyond its own “particular” demands. The second is the decline of the working class as a socio-political actor. In short, “class struggle is just one species of identity politics, and one which is becoming less and less important in the world in which we live”.⁴⁵

According to Laclau and Mouffe, the democratic revolution has been deepening in modern societies since the 18th century. The critique of political inequalities that began with the French Revolution has expanded from the political sphere to economic inequalities and other social relations (e.g., gender inequality). In this respect, socialism is just a moment in the development of the democratic revolution. The labor movement in Western countries has displayed a “particularist” character that focuses on the problems within the field of production rather than questioning the capitalist relations of production as a whole. The struggles that Marxists sneer at as “reformist” actually correspond more to the demands of the working class than radical rhetoric.⁴⁶

We saw above that while Marx gave central importance to struggles in the labor process in his theory, Post-Marxism tried to refute Marx on the basis of the very existence of such struggles. Here we encounter a similar situation. Lenin’s thesis that the working class will only reach trade union consciousness by itself means that the struggles of this class will remain in a “particularist” mode unless it meets with the socialist movement. This is precisely a state of immaturity that the workers’ movement must overcome. As long as the working class cannot leave its “particular” character behind and move to the “universal” position (which requires political mediation), it will not be able to find a permanent solution to its problems. The solution is not simply higher wages or shorter working hours; the solution to the antagonism between labor and capital is to put an end to capitalist relations of production and therefore to the worker identity itself.

The central question of politics, as Laclau rightly and repeatedly emphasizes, is the move from the particular to the universal. Pure particularity (identity politics today) is in itself a very weak conception of politics. The important thing is to occupy the position of the universal, and since only a concrete particular element can undertake this, there is a question of hegemony.⁴⁷ Thus, our question becomes whether working-class hegemony is possible and meaningful.

Laclau has on several occasions cited the emergence of a general equivalent and the money form in the context of the transition from the particular to the universal. As is known, Marx’s analysis of the value form in *Capital* shows that as commodity

⁴⁵ Laclau, “Structure, History, and the Political”, p. 203.

⁴⁶ HSS, p. 157.

⁴⁷ Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, London: Verso, 2007, p. 26, 51-3, 61; *On Populist Reason*, p. 115.

exchange becomes generalized, a particular commodity begins to represent all other commodities, eventually becoming money. A particular element fills a universal position, hegemonizes it. Similarly, the basic political issue is how a particular group will begin to represent the demands of the “people” and become the universal class. Gramsci’s analyses of the transition from the corporatist class to the hegemonic class are examples of a similar logic. Laclau has pursued this question perhaps his entire intellectual life: How is a “people” built, how does a social group begin to represent the whole people?⁴⁸ It is really remarkable that he has captured the formal similarity with Marx’s analysis of the value form. But Laclau has never asked the question: Why gold? Of all the commodities, why just this particular object has been the most stable form of money?

The answer to the question is of course related to the properties of gold and the structural requirements of the exchange process. Gold is hard to corrode, can be easily split and combined, transported, etc. In short, there are *historical and logical* reasons for gold to play this role, compared to all other commodities. So we are, in effect, concerned with whether the working class is historically and logically fit to take on such a universal role.

Laclau and Mouffe’s view on this is, of course, negative. They argue that the working class is unfit for such a role. However, they do not have any concrete suggestions as to who or which social subject is appropriate, because they think that the subject will also be formed within the hegemonic construction process. “There is no struggle which has inscribed in itself the guarantee of being the privileged locus of universalistic political effects. Workers’ demands - higher wages, shorter working hours, better conditions in the workplace, and so on - can, given the appropriate circumstances, be as easily integrated into the system as those of any other group”.⁴⁹ In short, the working class is just a particular group, not much different from the others. In this respect, for example, the term “class struggle” is misleading. Because the struggle does not take place only between classes. A genuine political struggle, though waged by the workers, will have dimensions that transcend the working class. After all, the working class in the developed capitalist world has regressed both quantitatively and qualitatively in the last thirty or forty years.⁵⁰ Moreover, the notion of class has little relevance in social practices:

The classical Marxist concept of “class” derived its verisimilitude from the fact that it established a correspondence between two levels: a formal structural analysis of the tendencies of capitalist society and of the social agents resulting from them, and an intuitive identification of those agents. Everybody knew *who* the workers, or the peasants, or the bourgeoisie were. And - Marxists, at least - knew what it meant for the working class to become a “universal class”. But the very fact that the “enlarged conception of the working class” discusses *who* the workers are means that the correspondence between the intuitive level and structural analysis

48 *Emancipation(s)* and *On Populist Reason* directly focus on this question. For the previous periods, see Laclau, “Fascism and Ideology”, p. 109-110, 141; “Towards a Theory of Populism”, in *Politics and Ideology*, p. 174-5, 195-7.

49 Ernesto Laclau, “Constructing Universality”, in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, p. 292.

50 Laclau, “Structure, History, and the Political”, p. 210; “Constructing Universality”, p. 298-99.

no longer obtains. Most damaging: even if the enlarged conception of the working class were correct - which it is not - it would be impossible to derive from it any conclusion concerning "class politics", for it speaks only about a *virtual* working class, corresponding to no specifiable group.⁵¹

If despite all this evidence, one is still not convinced that the time of the working class, and the classes in general, is long gone, there must be emotional reasons for this: "One could ask oneself why all these intellectual contortions to keep the notion of the centrality of the working class at any cost. It does not require a trained psychoanalyst to discover that the reason is mainly emotional, as the notion of the working class as the emancipatory subject is so deeply rooted in the political imaginary of the Left".⁵²

Pointing out that your opponent is behaving emotionally can be an effective rhetorical move, but in reality it is a weak argument. If an anti-capitalist (socialist) strategic political account is on the agenda, that is, if a line of struggle is to be formulated that covers not only struggles against the logic of capital but directly the labor-capital relationship, it will be strange if the working class does not occupy a central position in it. The fact that, while Post-Marxists such as Laclau and Mouffe were struggling to prove the irrationality of class politics on all grounds, the Thatcher government in England attacked the working class with a clear class strategy is, in Wood's words, "the supreme irony".⁵³

Results and beyond

We may still be living in a Post-Marxist era, but it is crucial not to forget that this is an era of defeat, and its end has come with the new conditions after 2008. Throughout this period we saw that it was possible to achieve some gains through particular struggles, but these were not permanent. A kind of Sisyphus effort indeed. Particularist identity politics is not only inefficient in the long run, but also serves the legitimacy and reproduction of capitalism itself. If we are going to wage an "anti-capitalist struggle", which we should, we may have a chance only if we change the political ground. Interestingly, Laclau himself states that while particular struggles proliferate, the universal discourses to articulate them have declined; but he does not link this to the worldwide defeat of the working class and the contributions of Post-Marxism to this process.⁵⁴

No one can deny the plural character of social struggles. Many forms of struggle called "particularist" have in practice enabled a significant part of the population to gain political experience in one way or another. These struggles, which vary widely in themselves, do exist. They do not have to disappear or to unite in a single movement. However, to achieve effective results, anti-capitalist hegemony politics is necessary. The destructive and irrational nature of capitalism, which has become

51 Laclau, "Constructing Universality", p. 298.

52 Laclau, "Constructing Universality", p. 307, n. 5.

53 Wood, *Retreat from Class*, p. 182.

54 Laclau, "Structure, History, and the Political", p. 209.

increasingly evident in the neoliberal era, forces different movements such as the ecology movement or the women's movement to an anti-capitalist orientation. And to formulate a genuine anti-capitalist strategy, it is necessary to take into account the "ontologically privileged" position of the working class in the capitalist relations of production.

The most basic socio-economic-political phenomenon of today is the dominance of capitalism around the world. As a result, wage labor has become the dominant form all over the world. In the 21st century, wage workers make up around 80-90 percent of the working population in the developed capitalist world. In countries like Turkey, this rate reaches 70 percent. We live in societies where the majority work for wages.

Contrary to Laclau's claim, the enlarged conception of the working class does not correspond to a virtual working class. Even the demands that can be seen as the demands of the working class in the narrow sense (a certain purchasing power, short working hours, humane working conditions, as well as democratic rights such as freedom of expression and the right to organize to express these demands, etc.), in fact, directly concern large sections of the people. However, a constructive strategy and effort are required to create a collective will.

Since the experiences of Marx and Engels in the 1848 revolutions, it is known that the hegemonic alliances to be established between the working class, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry are essential in the democratic revolution.⁵⁵ In the process, which gained the character of "permanent revolution" in Russia, a "worker-peasant alliance" was established under the leadership of the working class. At that time, the industrial working class was about five percent of the general population, by the most optimistic estimate.

In the hundred years since then, the peasant population has shrunk in many countries, while the working class has expanded, and the labor aristocracy and urban petty bourgeoisie have grown proportionally. We can say that the approach expressed as "identity politics" mainly reflects the needs and politics of these last two sections (the petty bourgeoisie and the labor aristocracy). This approach needs to be replaced by a working class-centered politics of hegemony. Today's enlarged working class is the most natural, logical *starting point* for an anti-capitalist hegemonic project.

If we take the "universal" literally in the particular-universal relation, no politics other than socialism can be suitable for this role. Nationalism, religious ideologies, conservatism (which can be considered a combination of the former two), and liberalism (positioned almost everywhere as the world view of the elite class), etc., no ideology, no politics has the potential to be as universal as socialism. On the contrary, these are elements that divide humanity within itself and make the parts hostile to each other. On the other hand, the human rights discourse, which is generally included in liberal politics, is not very suitable because it does not exclude anyone. Universality in politics does not mean covering everybody without exception. It

⁵⁵ August H. Nimtz, *Marx and Engels: Their Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2000, p. x, 51, 288, 297.

seems that the only way for a large mass to unite is to unite against a particular adversary. The slogans of the Occupy protests in the USA such as “We are the 99 percent” were accurate in this respect. The fact that the overwhelming majority of this 99 percent is worker-laborers (the ratio of wage-earners in total employment in the USA exceeds 90 percent) shows that the “worker” identity can be a practical and natural pillar in the construction of a common identity of “us”.

The fact that the vast majority of the population is proletarian does not mean that the working class automatically becomes the “people”. Working-class organizations, content with expressing the interests of the class in the narrow sense, do not *thus* become the representatives of the people. Many social movements were forced into an anti-capitalist orientation due to the negative effects of the logic of capital, but on the other hand, because of their specific problem areas and the fact that socialism was far from being a center of attraction, they continued their traditions of organizing and acting separately. A genuine politics of hegemony requires working-class organizations to be able to go beyond their narrow perspectives.

When we look at the structure of the working class today, we see that the heterogeneity within it has increased as a result of its expansion. On the other hand, as a result of neoliberal policies, an opposite dynamic has started and heterogeneity has begun to decrease both within countries and throughout the world. Claims that a new era, a “precariat” era has begun, in which the majority meets in the lower strata of the working class, reflect an important truth (provided we agree that the precariat is part of the “proletariat”). This indicates that a project of hegemony based on the unprivileged layers of workers has a high chance of success.

We can expect a partial decline in cultural identity demands, and an increase in class-based projects and demands in the upcoming period. If the arguments here are correct, it turns out that Post-Marxism was wrong on another issue: The theory that belongs to a certain period of history and that seems to be valid only for a while was not Marxism. On the contrary, Post-Marxism turns out to be a theory peculiar to the era of defeat. We are in a period where the inefficiency and deadlock of identity politics are becoming increasingly visible. Class politics has a bright future ahead.

Stalinism as the meek enemy of the bourgeoisie

Hasan Refik

Stalinist parties and organizations held a hegemonic place within the world left for most of the 20th century. Even if we leave aside the parties that were in power in the bureaucratic workers' states, the official communist parties that had adopted one form or another of Stalinism all over the world, from France to Indonesia, from Italy to Iraq, were rallying millions behind their banners. Under these conditions, at least a strand of revolutionary Marxists often shaped their positions, both nationally and internationally, as a negation of Stalinism and the Stalinist parties.

But the balance of power shifted drastically. Official communist parties of Stalinist origins relented the revolutionary cause in many countries. These parties bid goodbye to communism as soon as the bureaucratic workers' states collapsed. In some countries, such as Italy, they changed their names and found a cushy spot within bourgeois politics. In France, where the form, if not the essence, of the communist party is preserved like a shell, the French Communist Party took the sickle hammer off its flag a few years ago. Although Stalinist parties and organizations constitute an important power within the global left, their omnipotence is long gone. Moreover, for better or for worse, parties and organizations coming from the revolutionary Marxist tradition have significant power within the left in many countries. In fact, it is now arguably the main force of the revolutionary left in certain coun-

tries, from Argentina to France.

In other words, at this point, the conditions that led revolutionary Marxists to be understood as the negation of Stalinism have ceased to exist. Moreover, conceiving and explaining revolutionary Marxism not through its relationship with Stalinism but as a continuation of Leninism has become an urgent task. But it would be a stretch to conclude that a discussion on the issue of Stalinism would be a mere sectarian reflex. Although they have lost their hegemonic power, organizations that openly embrace Stalinism still have a significant weight in the socialist movement. Moreover, as an indirect result of their long-lasting hegemony, Stalinist distortions – from Popular Front strategy to socialism in one country – are conflated with Leninism, even by those who would have no sympathy for Stalinism per se. For this reason, in this article, we aim to show how Stalinism was an obstacle to those who struggled for revolution, not only in the theoretical field but also with its very concrete ramifications. The discussion of Stalinism is, of course, important in terms of drawing the lessons we will need when we enter the construction of socialism in the future. But this is only part of the story. It is equally essential to get rid of the obstacles that Stalinism will put in front of us, *within the struggle for the revolution*, that is, in order to overthrow the bourgeoisie.

The historical development that led to the emergence of the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union as an obstacle to world revolutions was also related to the course of the world revolution. In the period following the October Revolution and the First World War, revolutions broke out left and right, but with the betrayal of social democracy, the workers' revolution could not triumph anywhere except in the old Tsarist lands. However, as Marx and Engels affirmed, the spread of the revolution on a world scale, especially in developed economies, is not just an optimistic wish, but an economic necessity for the very survival of the revolution. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, found itself facing the daunting task of establishing socialist relations of production in a peasant society, as a direct result of the defeat of other revolutions. Under these conditions, the bureaucracy rose as a privileged stratum above society. The position of the bureaucracy was contradictory. On the one hand, if the workers' state were to be destroyed, it would lose its privileged position, so at least in the initial stages, the interests of the bureaucracy lay in opposing the capitalist restoration. But on the other hand, the spread of the revolution to new countries and the revolutionary turmoil that would occur around the world might have also posed dangers to the power of the bureaucracy. Every revolutionary shock would bring with it the possibility of conflict with imperialism. Moreover, a victorious revolution in other countries might have created a new revolutionary leadership that could challenge the leadership role of the Soviet bureaucracy worldwide, and with this newly-found enthusiasm, even the Soviet working class might have mobilized and clashed with the power of the bureaucracy. It was precisely this contradictory material position that determined the relationship of the bureaucracy – and Stalinism as the ideology of this bureaucracy – with world revolutions. Due to its material interests, the bureaucracy had to, on the one hand, oppose the complete elimination of the gains of the workers' state in the country, and on the other hand, disarm other revolutions that might have prevented it from peacefully existing with world impe-

rialism. All in all, Stalinism as an ideology is not simply a mistake or a deviation stemming from Stalin's personality.¹ On the contrary, it is the result emerging from the material ground created by the rise of bureaucracy in the Soviet Union.

This article builds on this argument. On this basis, it aims to show how the end product of this historical process, namely Stalinism, was an obstacle for the revolutionary fighters in the struggles around the world. So, the main focus will be on the impact of the Stalinist stance on the struggles outside the Soviet Union, rather than on the rise of Stalinism within the Soviet Union. There is a simple reason for this authorial choice. As I noted above, Stalinism was a product of bureaucratic corruption and an expression of the bureaucracy's interests in the Soviet Union. Today, this material basis has vanished, as bureaucratic workers' states outside Cuba and North Korea have collapsed. But as an ideology, *Stalinism persists in the program of a number of organizations and in the minds of intellectuals, like a shell or rather a zombie, notwithstanding the absence of the conditions that led to its genesis*. Under these circumstances, and as long as the organizations advocating this program exercise some clout, the bureaucracy's program can play a role in the field of class struggles *even when the bureaucracy has withdrawn from the scene of history*. Put differently, Stalinism has the potential to be an obstacle to the class struggle even in the absence of the material foundations that created it. The presence of communist parties in power in China and Cuba also contributes to the survival of Stalinist political patterns (although the restoration of capitalism has taken place in China). By focusing on this part of the issue, I will attempt to show why Stalinism, which exists like a zombie, is the wrong tool for those who want to defeat capitalism today.

Let me emphasize the purpose of this article on three axes to avoid any confusion. First and foremost: I would like to underline that the reckoning of the revolutionary Marxists with Stalinism, the weak link of the working-class movement, cannot bear any parallels with the capitalist pundits attacking Marxism and Leninism by means of an easy enemy, Stalinism. Therefore, this article should be considered as part of an effort to present revolutionary Marxism as a real alternative to face the anti-communist assaults. Stalinism was a meek enemy to them, and they shall confront revolutionary Marxism, which is determined to carry the banner of Leninism and Marxism, both in the intellectual and practical spheres. Our message is to those who take part in or want to take part in the revolutionary struggle: Stalinism has either hindered the revolutionary forces for nearly a century or provided itself as a useless tool. Let us take up revolutionary Marxism, a suitable instrument for the victory of socialism.

Second, the position of revolutionary Marxism vis-à-vis Stalinism is often reduced to a caricature. In this version, the party that emerged defeated from the struggle within the Soviet Union and the Comintern, namely revolutionary Marxism, is supposed to be accusing the winner of this struggle, namely Stalinism, of using force or being anti-democratic. This is an absolute distortion – which some strands of the revolutionary Marxist tradition strangely inherited – and misses the

¹ Sungur Savran, "Sovyetler Birliği'ni Kim Yıktı?", *Devrimci Marksizm*, vol: 28-29, Fall-Winter 2016.

crux of the matter. According to this scheme, while one side makes real politics and gets its hands dirty, the other side, with the historical comfort of being an opposition, moves to an ethical ground and points fingers at realistic politicians. I am simplifying it, but this is the gist of the distortion.

I completely oppose this caricature and propose to reframe the discussion. Our *main accusation* against Stalinism is *not that it triumphed over the opposition by immoral means*, but *that it proved incapable of triumphing against world capitalism*, or in other words that it proved to be an “ideology of defeat” in the long run. To be sure, Stalinism’s violation of working-class democracy and its shattering of Leninism’s democratic centralism is an important part of our accusation against Stalinism. But this problem might have become secondary had Stalinism defeated capitalism using its hegemonic role within the global revolutionary movement. But on the contrary, it led the communists and the working class to defeat time and again. Hence, the oft-repeated trope that the position of Stalinism is realistic but necessary, while the position of revolutionary Marxism is a naive or idealistic critique of it, could not be farther away from the truth. My argument is clear: Stalinism, which was a direct result of the retreat of the world revolution and took the form of distortion of Leninism, an implicit rejection of Leninism, is *an ideology of defeat* that corresponds to a historical period marked by the retreat of the revolution. For a century, the working class paid the price of this ideology of defeat with recurrent debacles. Leninism and its successor, revolutionary Marxism, are, on the contrary, the products of a historical period of offensive and hence an ideology of victory. The long decades that this political current spent with organizational weakness in the face of Stalinism narrows down the historical example that can be used to demonstrate this. But even the fact that Leninism – of which revolutionary Marxism is the continuation – was triumphant in the October Revolution and carried the day in a gigantic civil war against the odds is an important proof in and of itself.

I started by saying that Stalinism was an ideology of defeat. This affirmation holds true in two respects. First, the very existence of this ideology is directly linked to the retreat of the world revolution, that is, of a historical defeat of the working class. Secondly, and as the main point, I will emphasize in this article that for decades under Stalinist leadership, revolutionary struggles suffered defeats again and again. Even though Stalinism prevailed within the workers’ state as a result of the rise of the bureaucracy, it proved utterly incapable of bringing about victory in a world-historical sense. In other words, the fact that Stalinism was the winning side in the intra-party struggle should not hide the fact that it was Stalinism that led to the defeat of the working class on a historical scale. I will present several examples to make my case in the article.

Let me conclude by locating the article’s intended purpose on the third and final axis. I do not simply intend to make a case for revolutionary Marxism’s correct stance in some age-old debates. I will return to historical discussions and examples, but I will do so to draw conclusions about the present. I will return to these examples because I want to show that it is not a coincidence that defeats were a dime a dozen, despite the heroic struggles of revolutionaries and workers who rushed to the barricades. But most importantly and collectively speaking, as today’s revolutionar-

ies, we want to persuade today's revolutionaries to employ the right instruments. The betrayals and ineptitudes of Stalinism resulted in defeat, dungeon, and gallows for generations of revolutionaries in China and Spain, Greece and Iraq. While the revolutions of the 21st century have raised their heads with all their majesty from Chile to Sudan, I want to tackle the issue of Stalinism, the weak link of the revolutionary struggles, which time and again stood as an obstacle before revolutions. In other words, the polemic of revolutionary Marxists against Stalinism is not a repetition of a debate that has become meaningless with the collapse of the Soviet Union, contrary to what is sometimes recited. On the contrary, the revolutionary Marxist critique of Stalinism is a burning need for today's struggles.

A methodological note is in order. The hegemonic role of Stalinism in the 20th century brings with it some methodological imperatives for such a paper. If I were writing about, say, anarchism or smaller currents within Marxism, which may rarely or never emerge as a force to be reckoned with in class struggles of worldwide importance, focusing on the writings produced by these groups might have been an option. Stalinism, on the other hand, had the opportunity to be tested many times throughout the 20th century. Therefore, I cannot write this article as an intertextual polemic. I will rather turn my attention to the performance of Stalinism in the field of class struggle under various topics, show the concrete performance of this movement, and illustrate why it is not a suitable tool for those who want to fight the good fight today.

To do this, I will focus on four topics (permanent revolution, anti-fascist struggle, Popular Front, and world revolution) in turn and discuss each of them on a case-by-case basis (China, Germany, Spain, and Italy, respectively). I selected all four examples not from the struggles against the rise of bureaucracy within the Soviet Union, but from the revolutionary fights in different parts of the world. Thus, I hope to show that getting rid of the toxic legacy of Stalinism is important not only when we embark on the construction of a workers' state but also in the struggle to crush the rising fascism and bring about the victory of the revolution, that is, for today. Even though I will examine the four topics through four separate cases, this does not mean that the topic discussed in one example, namely the issue of the world revolution, is not important for the other examples. The only reason for this preference is to make it easier for the reader to follow the article and to reveal the problems of different elements of the ideological legacy of Stalinism one by one. As Sungur Savran did in the above-mentioned article, I will limit my examples to the Stalin era. In this way, I hope that those who adhere to different versions of Stalinism will not be able to shrug off their responsibility, as might be done if I were discussing, say, Indonesia in 1965 or Nepal ten years ago.

1. Two-stage theory and the baptism of fire in China

Let us start with one of the earliest and clearest examples of Stalinism's ideological break from Leninism. The theory of permanent revolution started to receive flak from Stalinism and was rejected by this current, as the rapidly-strengthening

bureaucracy lashed out at Trotsky. However, for the Bolshevik Party after 1917 and the Communist International in its early years, the defense of permanent revolution against the Menshevik theory of revolution in two stages was a given.

A distinction must be made here. Drawing from the lessons of the 1905 Revolution, Trotsky reached the conclusions central to the theory of permanent revolution at a fairly early stage. At this early stage, he determined that the revolutionary power of the bourgeoisie was exhausted after 1848 and that the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the tasks of the socialist revolution would be intertwined in a revolution that would take place under the leadership of the working class. Later, the revolution that began in 1917 confirmed Trotsky's analysis. Lenin's arrival at the same conclusion occurred with the eruption of the February Revolution and the "Letters from Afar" he penned. But once he reached that point, the permanent revolution came to constitute an essential element of Lenin's theory. Lenin expressed this strategy succinctly in an article he wrote in 1921 on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the October Revolution:

Incidentally, the Kautskys, Hilferdings, Martovs, Chernovs, Hillquits, Longuets, MacDonalds, Turatis and other heroes of "Two-and-a-Half" Marxism were incapable of understanding this relation between the bourgeois-democratic and the proletarian-socialist revolutions. The first develops into the second. The second, in passing, solves the problems of the first. The second consolidates the work of the first. Struggle, and struggle alone, decides how far the second succeeds in outgrowing the first.²

But even the understanding of the "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants", which Lenin advocated before reaching the conclusion that the democratic revolution would be intertwined with the socialist revolution, is completely different from the Menshevik theory of two stages. During the 1905 Revolution, both Lenin and the Menshevik theorists Plekhanov and Axelrod predicted a bourgeois revolution for Russia. But for the Mensheviks, this meant putting aside the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the working class in the first stage, handing over the leadership of the revolution to the bourgeoisie, and giving the working class a meek role as the bourgeoisie's auxiliary forces. Lenin, on the other hand, put the land issue at the center of the revolution and rightly affirmed that the working class could not triumph in Russia without the peasantry on its side. The bourgeois character of the revolution in Lenin is, above all, related to his seeing the solution of land reform as a matter of bourgeois revolution. It presupposes the alliance of the working class with the peasantry, not with the bourgeoisie. What the Mensheviks foresee is the alliance of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie at the stage of the bourgeois revolution, that is, overt class betrayal.³ Let me underline that *the line that Stalinism took over was the Menshevik two-stage theory*, which would turn the working class into an auxiliary force of the bourgeoisie. We will see how Stalinism puts this Menshevik theory into practice. But let us mention in passing

2 V. I. Lenin "Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution", <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/oct/14.htm>.

3 For an overview of this distinction, see Léon Trotsky, "Trois conceptions de la révolution russe", <https://www.marxists.org/francais/trotsky/oeuvres/1939/08/trois.pdf>.

that the theorist of the two-stage conception of both pre-revolutionary Mensheviks and post-revolutionary Stalinism, is the same person, Alexandr Martynov, which gives a sense of the extent of the continuity from the Menshevik two-stages theory to Stalinism.⁴

So far, I have only pointed out the rupture created by the departure of Stalinism from Leninism in the intellectual field. Once again, it is worth reminding that the break was not about a mere misinterpretation or a wrong tactic. Rather, it was the logical conclusion of the rise of the bureaucracy within the Soviet Union and the interests of this stratum. But here, more than anything, I want to show the concrete political ramifications of this rupture.

The 1925-27 Chinese Revolution was to be the first testing ground where the Leninist strategy advocated by revolutionary Marxists and the two-stage theory of Stalinism were tested. Let us briefly recall the context. During its establishment, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) worked within the Guomindang (the party of the national bourgeoisie in China) while maintaining its own independent organization. On the one hand, the Guomindang symbolized national liberation in China, which was a semi-colonial country at that point.⁵ On the other hand, the same party struggled to establish a central government against the warlords who controlled a significant part of the country. At the head of the Guomindang stood Sun Yat-Sen, the historical leader of the Chinese bourgeois revolution since at least the 1911 Revolution. Under these conditions, a profound bourgeois revolution in the form of civil war broke out in 1925, and the Guomindang party, allied with the communists, initiated the famous Northern Expedition in 1926 to end the power of the warlords, some of whom were in collaboration with Japanese imperialism, and to restore a centralized administration in China. With the rise of the working class in Shanghai in 1926-1927 with its own demands, the dynamic of the permanent revolution was most clearly revealed.⁶

There is a common misconception about the stance of Trotsky on the Chinese Revolution that we should do away with. Indeed, Trotsky waged a fierce war on

4 Let me afford a brief digression to avoid a possible misunderstanding. My point is not that the former Mensheviks' coming to the Bolshevik Party was in itself problematic. Not only in the October Revolution, but in all great victorious revolutions, there has been a transition from the defeated forces to the winning side. As a matter of fact, Georgy Chicherin, one of the first Foreign Commissars of the Soviet state, or the famous Alexandra Kollontai were also former Mensheviks. What matters in the Martynov case is that a Menshevik theorist could become one of Stalin's chief theoreticians, preserving the program used against Bolshevism. For a source summarizing the post-revolutionary careers of three important Menshevik leaders, one of whom was a later Bolshevik; André Liebich, "Diverging Paths: Menshevik Itineraries in the Aftermath of Revolution", *Revolutionary Russia*, no: 4:1, June 1991, p. 28-37.

5 This situation was intertwined with conditions of outright colonization. In addition to the cities such as Hong Kong, which were turned into "treaty ports" and opened to the control of imperialism, parts of Shanghai in this period were under the control of a multinational imperialist coalition.

6 In this section, my main source for the Chinese Revolution is Alexander Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution, 1919-1927*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000. I will only cite it when I directly quote the book or emphasize a piece of punctual information.

the policy of class cooperation and surrender to the Guomindang during the revolution but was not opposed to the Chinese Communist Party's working inside the Guomindang during its period of growth. His opposition was against the deprivation of the CCP's organizational and political independence so as not to alienate the Guomindang leadership. He demonstrated this in a letter to Karl Radek in June 1926, saying that "the organizational cohabitation of the Guomindang and the Communist party was correct and progressive for a certain epoch."⁷ For Stalin, that was not the case. Stalin showed his readiness to renounce the organizational independence of the CCP in order to keep this "ally" on its side. According to a letter by Voitinsky, one of the leading figures in Soviet Far East policy, Stalin considered it "historically inevitable" that the CCP would not have an independent organization and would remain within the Guomindang.⁸ The huge difference between these two understandings should be obvious. It is one thing for the communist party to cocoon initially within a broad anti-imperialist organization *as a tactical move*, and another thing to say that the working class has no chance to organize independently of the bourgeoisie due to the historical stage. When Stalin discovered that the CCP had already attained significant power, he used it to carry out various maneuvers to turn the Guomindang into a fully pro-Soviet organization. But he insisted on considering the independent organization of the working class as an impossible bid because of the historical stage. This is a case in point of the Menshevik two-stage theory that Lenin opposed. It could even be said that Stalinism achieved the dubious honour of going well beyond the Menshevik position since the Mensheviks did not reject the independent party of the working class but only their independent role in the revolution!

It is impossible for us to summarize the entire revolutionary process within the framework of this brief article. But in a nutshell, it unfolds in the following manner: In the first months of 1926, as the Guomindang leadership participated in the 6th plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, Stalin and the Comintern came to the conclusion that the balance of power within the Guomindang had shifted in favor of the communists. With the demise of Sun Yat-Sen in 1925, a towering figure and the historical leader of the Guomindang, relative uncertainty arose within the organization. Under these circumstances, the Comintern concocted a plan to liquidate the right-wing elements and take the leadership of the Guomindang. As a side note, I do not argue that this plan, namely, the effort to seize the leadership of the Guomindang, which was at the helm of the national liberation movement, would be wrong in and of itself. But under the influence of this very public plan, the new leader of the Guomindang, Chang Kai-Shek, attempted to break the communist influence in the Guomindang with an intra-organizational coup in March 1926, a few days after the above-mentioned decision. He disbanded the League of Chinese Military Youth led by the CCP and disarmed the peasant unions, arguably the two main bulwarks of communists within the Guomindang. Moreover, he moved to curb the organizational independence the CCP had hitherto

⁷ Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution*, p. 105.

⁸ Idem., p. 84.

enjoyed within the Guomindang. And he commenced the famous Northern Expedition almost immediately thereafter, in which the Guomindang army was to march against the warlords of northern China.

At this point, communists faced a momentous choice. Either they would move to emerge on the stage of revolution as an independent organization using the military and political power they have acquired within the Guomindang as a result of several years of activity, or they would accept these concessions and let the Guomindang's whims determine Chinese communism's lot. The fate of the Chinese Revolution largely depended on this choice. Trotsky and the left opposition argued that the CCP should quickly obtain its organizational independence, all the while accepting to form a bloc or to forge a military alliance with the Guomindang *as an independent power* when necessary and not miss the window to prepare itself for the decisive battles of the revolution. Stalin and his minions, on the other hand, accepted the terms of surrender in order not to lose the cherished ally that was the Guomindang. The former Menshevik Martynov, whom we met above and who was at that point one of the top theorists of Stalinism, argued that the surrender to the Guomindang administration was a step backwards to prepare for a leap forward.

From this point on, the Menshevik line of appeasing the bourgeoisie adopted by Stalinism (and re-emerging throughout the 20th century) comes to the fore of Stalinist strategy. In October 1926, on Voroshilov's suggestion, the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) sent an order to the Comintern's Far East Bureau in Shanghai, demanding they impede the Chinese Communist Party from working against "the Chinese bourgeoisie and the feudal intelligentsia."⁹ Moreover, the same directive, while recognizing that the support of the peasantry was essential for the revolution, implicitly opposes land occupation actions, saying that they do not want a civil war in the countryside so as not to undermine the Guomindang's war capacity. In other words, during a revolution that was fast advancing with all its might, the communist party was prevented from organizing the revolutionary action of the workers in the cities and the peasants in the countryside, which amounted to nothing less than politically disarming the party. While the civil war was reaching its climax, the communist party was instructed not to put its most important forces on the field but rather was practically instructed to leave itself to the Guomindang's mercy.

While Chiang Kai-Shek's troops were victorious in the Northern Expedition, the working class, on which the communists had a great influence, rose up in Shanghai, took control of the city, and established the so-called "Shanghai Commune". Once again, on Moscow's instructions and despite all the objections of the left opposition, the communists (still working in the Guomindang) were prevented from arming the Shanghai workers. Under these conditions, Chiang Kai-Shek and the Guomindang, who entered the city in April 1927, brutally murdered communists and striking workers (who were unarmed due to Stalin's decision) all over China, especially Shanghai. Although different historians give different numbers, it is an indisputable fact that thousands of communists were killed by brutal methods – including

⁹ Quoted part in *idem.*, p. 94.

beheading – after this defeat. Moreover, right after this incident, Stalin's decisions pushed the Chinese communists to tailback the leftist Guomintang government in Wuhan. As a result, only a few months after the Shanghai massacre, thousands of communists were murdered, this time at the hands of the Wuhan government.¹⁰ The Chinese Revolution and the alliance of Stalinism with the Guomintang would come to an inglorious end only after the massacre of tens of thousands of communist workers.

The role of the above-mentioned decision that tied the hands of the communist party in the defeat of the revolution and the resulting massacre of communists and workers is so obvious that even Stalin would downplay this decision as an “unfortunate misunderstanding” after the defeat and say that it did not reflect the general line of the Comintern against the Chinese Revolution.¹¹ It should be underlined that what was at stake was not a mere correspondence between two militants, a meeting of a provincial committee, or a discussion in the pages of a theoretical journal but an instruction by the Politburo, the highest organ of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It is difficult to imagine a more glaring proverbial smoking gun.

The case of China, one of the most painful pages of revolutionary history, was no exception. What we saw was a prelude to an overall Stalinist strategy. Class cooperation with the bourgeoisie will become a strategy not only in the East but also in the West, and the socialist revolution will become taboo in the future for the Stalinist bureaucracy. Before we move on to that, let us now fast forward a few years and turn our attention to Europe.

2. Anti-fascism and Germany

In this article, it is not my intention to follow the historical development of Stalinism step by step chronologically. But before moving on to the policies of the Popular Front, I cannot pass without mentioning the five-year “Third Period” parenthesis of Stalinism and its consequences, especially the surrender in 1933 without firing a shot in the face of rising Nazism in Germany.¹² This topic is worthy of interest because the policies of the Third Period and its defeat in 1933 were of world-historical significance as they paved the way for the horrors of Nazi rule, but also because it was arguably the greatest bankruptcy of the Stalinist leadership. Not incidentally, Trotsky himself drew the conclusions of this terrible defeat and argued that the Communist International was politically bankrupt beyond salvage after 1933.

Some context first. What did the Third Period politics mean? After counting

¹⁰ The memories of a militant who first experienced this betrayal as a CCP militant in Beijing and then in Wuhan and became a revolutionary Marxist during his KUTV days in Moscow are available in English; Wang Fan-Hsi, *Chinese Revolutionary*, trans. Gregor Benton, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980, especially p. 25-43.

¹¹ *Idem.*, p. 94.

¹² While I already underlined that I am talking about 1933, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, let me further emphasize that while talking about surrender to Nazism, what I am discussing is not the world war, the defeat inflicted on Nazi armies by the workers' state and the Red Army – themselves products of the October Revolution – but the NSDAP's rise to power in Germany.

the period between 1917 and 1923 as the First Period when the world revolution was on the offensive and the period from 1923 to 1928 as the Second Period in which capitalism was relatively stabilized,¹³ the Comintern argued that after 1928 a Third Period was underway in which the contradictions of capitalism intensified which in turn created the conditions for revolutions. In fact, Bukharin was the one who minted the term “Third Period” in 1926.¹⁴ But with the 6th Congress of the Comintern in 1928, this theory became the official stance of Stalinism and formed the basis of a new strategy. According to this new strategy, class struggles would intensify as the economic crisis deepened. Thus, communist parties were dutybound to avoid forming alliances with any political force “from above”, especially with social democracy and reformist unions. But alliances could be made “from below” that expose the social democratic leaders.

What did this mean concretely? According to the decision of the Comintern, the social democratic workers (remember, in this period, especially in Germany, social democracy was a working-class movement with millions of adherents) could only form an alliance with the communist workers on the condition that this alliance attempts to expose the social democratic leaders. What is at stake is not the freedom of communists to agitate against social democratic leaders and expose them within a nationwide or local front. This is the sine qua non of all fronts and alliances for communists. What the Comintern wants is for the social democratic workers to come to the united front on the condition of exposing the social democratic leaders. A very simple assertion would reveal the internal inconsistency of this strategy. A worker who is aware that social democratic leaders are nothing but traitors would not be in the social democratic party, to begin with. What Stalinism and the Comintern required as *the pre-condition* of this united front, in reality, could only be *the outcome* of the said front. This is precisely what the successful experience of the Bolshevik Party against the Kornilov coup illustrates. At that juncture, the German working class desperately needed the working-class parties to fight together against the threat of fascism without forsaking their organizational independence. It was only within this sort of united front that the communist party could have earned the trust of social-democratic workers and exposed their inconsistent leadership to the base of social democracy in this struggle. Stalinism, on the other hand, dictated the unreasonable condition that first the social democratic workers break with their party, then the alliance. In other words, at the threshold of one of the most important struggles in the history of humanity, Stalinism – while determining the strategy of

13 It should be underlined that this periodization, especially the parts of the First and Second Periods, was not clearly delineated during these periods, but rather, it became part of the Comintern orthodoxy after 1928. For example, at the 3rd Congress of the Comintern in 1921, Trotsky and the future official economist of the Comintern, Varga, argued that there could be cyclical improvements in capitalism, and moreover, they occasionally pointed to the year 1921 in the Comintern as the beginning of the recovery period of capitalism. The acceptance of the defeat of the German and Bulgarian revolutions in 1923 as the breaking point became the official position after the 6th Congress in 1928.

14 Nicholas N. Kozlov and Eric D. Weitz, “Reflections on the Origins of the ‘Third Period’: Bukharin, the Comintern, and the Political Economy of Weimar Germany”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol: 24, no: 3, July 1989, p. 395.

the Communist International, that is, the World Communist Party – was putting the cart before the horse!

Now back to Germany. I will briefly discuss a five-year episode in Germany, but the reader should not read this simply as an interesting and dramatic period in the history of class struggles. Instead, it shall serve as a reminder today, as fascism shows its hideous face once again on the stage of history, that those who have been tied up by the wrong strategy (even if it is the legendary Communist Party of Germany with millions in its ranks!) might be doomed to disaster. Keeping in mind that historical analogy always has limits, this is also food for thought to reconsider current political actors unable to recognize the rising fascism when they see it, and those who take refuge in the radicality of calling every bourgeois party fascist instead of stepping up to fulfill their genuine anti-fascist tasks.

In 1928, as the policies of the Third Period were proclaimed by the Comintern, Germany was fast approaching a critical threshold. The Communist Party of Germany (KPD) was a massive force with unparalleled clout among unemployed workers. The Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), however, firmly held the leadership of qualified workers, especially in the metal sector. Under these conditions, the local elections in the last months of 1929 gave the first sign of developments that would leave their mark on the following years. In these elections, the KPD retained its roughly 10 per cent votes in the 1928 parliamentary elections, while Hitler's party, the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party), which had its roots in the post-First World War period but had constituted a minor force up until that point, made a significant breakthrough. In the local elections held consecutively, it received 7 per cent of the vote in Baden in October, 8,1 per cent in Lübeck in November, and 11,3 per cent in Thuringia in December. Moreover, in Thuringia, the Nazis succeeded in entering the regional government for the first time.¹⁵ Regional differences must have also played a role in the results, of course, but still, these tiny snapshots hint at a Nazi party rising by the day. In other words, for a leadership that carefully reads the signs, the first warning signs should have appeared at this point. In 1930, when the parliamentary elections were held, it all became crystal clear. NSDAP, which was in ninth place with 2,6 per cent of the vote in 1928, increased its vote to 18,3 per cent in 1930 and became the second-biggest party after the SPD. In the same interval, the votes of the communists increased from 10,6 to 13,1.¹⁶ To look at it differently, while the communists' vote was four times the fascists in 1928, the fascists had one and a half times the communists' vote in 1930. Clearly, politics is not just about elections. But seeing this radical change in two years and not drawing the political consequences of it amounts to fatal political blindness for a communist party leadership. Moreover, during the same period, the number of members of the communist party tended to decline, albeit relatively, from 130,000 in 1928 to

¹⁵ Norman LaPorte, "Presenting a Crisis as an Opportunity: The KPD and the Third Period, 1929-1933", (ed.) Matthew Worley, in *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2004, p. 44.

¹⁶ "Election Results in Germany 1924-1933", <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/elect.htm>.

115,000 in 1929.¹⁷ So, while the communist party was at best a slow-growing force, fascism was growing exponentially. In Trotsky's succinct expression, the situation in Germany was like a ball on top of a pyramid. The ball could not stay still for a long time; it would roll down either to the right or to the left. But the forces that wanted to pull to the right, namely the NSDAP, were growing much faster than those who wanted to pull to the left, that is, the communists. This indicates a great danger.¹⁸ In this case, a vital question arises: what is to be done?

To avoid a longer digression, I will not discuss this matter in detail. But it should be recalled that Trotsky's answer to that question was a Workers' United Front that would bring together working-class organizations to repel the fascist onslaught. Moreover, with the initiative of local organizations, there were signs that a fighting unity of working-class parties and trade unions in the fight against fascism was actually becoming a reality. For example, in Leipzig in 1931, on an initiative led by the local SPD organization, various workers' organizations, including the communists, regularly raided the petty-bourgeois neighbourhoods, which were the strongholds of the Nazis, and using anti-Nazi slogans. The local SA (Nazi militia) complained that they could not be active in Leipzig because of this "iron front" organization and its mobilization of young workers.¹⁹

Here comes the crux of the matter. So, what was the KPD's course of action, which at that point marshalled over a hundred thousand militants and gathered four and a half million votes in 1930? Or, let us ask, how did the Comintern, now under the control of Stalinism, manage this battlefield of class struggle, where one of the most decisive combats of the 20th century was underway? The political line adopted at the 6th Congress has tied the hands of the KPD in this struggle. Moreover, although the expression was not yet in use in the Comintern congress, at the 10th CPSU plenum convened a few months after the Congress, the ominous expression "social fascism", which would be used to characterize social democracy until 1933, was officially adopted.²⁰ Thus, under conditions where fascism was rising at a mind-boggling rate, the Comintern and, accordingly the KPD decided that struggle against the SPD was the main task.

It seems that it was not easy for the KPD to convince its own base of this strange policy. In this period, those who broke away from the party or were liquidated formed the KPO (Communist Party-Opposition)²¹, which would soon reach six thousand members. Moreover, historian Norman LaPorte, whom I often quote in this section, states that the NKVD, the Soviet secret police, also played a role in breaking the resistance against the policies of the Third Period within the KPD by preceding on a smaller scale what they would do during the Spanish Revolu-

17 LaPorte, "Presenting a Crisis as an Opportunity", p. 45.

18 Leon Trotsky, "For a Workers' United Front Against Fascism", <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1931/311208.htm>.

19 LaPorte, "Presenting a Crisis as an Opportunity", p. 52.

20 Kozlov and Weitz, "Reflections on the Origins of the 'Third Period'", p. 402.

21 Although I do not have enough information on this subject, my understanding is that the issue of fascism was not the sole reason of this rupture.

tion.²² One of the most concrete and tragic examples of the results of this policy is the infamous “Red Referendum” case. The main subject of this referendum, which the KPD called red, was the fall of the SPD, then in the government of the Prussian region – which notably includes Berlin. In other words, this was a vote of no confidence. The KPD spearheaded the organization of this referendum alongside the Nazis and another right-wing party. As Trotsky put it, if the KPD was growing rapidly, and Germany was marching towards a revolution, and if the communists were expected to come to power after the SPD fell in Prussia, then the shared political stance between the NSDAP and the KPD would have been nothing more than a minor detail.²³ But as I discussed, the NSDAP was growing by leaps and bounds while the KPD was growing step by step. In other words, if the SPD were to fall, it was clear that fascists would replace it. In this case, the KPD’s red referendum could only pave the way for fascism. In any case, the KPD’s own audience was apparently aware of this strangeness, as it showed very little eagerness to support this move in the ballot box, and the SPD remained in power.

But how could the KPD not be aware of the consequences of this catastrophic policy? Based on the minutes of the KPD Central Committee, LaPorte concludes that this position was imposed by the Comintern against the will of the KPD. His own analysis is that this murderous policy was implemented for the diplomatic purposes of the bureaucracy in the hope that the weakening of the SPD could prevent a German-French rapprochement.²⁴ But the main factor here, in my opinion, was the move made by Stalinism to strike a blow to the right opposition and to disarm the left opposition politically in the Soviet Union and in world politics through the Comintern. The new turn meant rapid industrialization within the Soviet Union and the rejection of alliances by the communist parties with the forces on their right. This would at least ostensibly gather some elements of the left opposition’s program in the hands of Stalinism, thereby facilitating the surrender of some elements of the left opposition to the bureaucracy. Moreover, with this new line, an offensive would begin against the right-wing opposition, which has gathered around Bukharin and advocated the transition to socialism at a “tortoise pace”, and Stalinism would eliminate the last organized opposition force within the party and the state. The impact of this abrupt left turn in world politics was the hopelessly sectarian politics we see in this episode. The outcome of this policy, even if viewed solely from the point of view of the Soviets’ interests, would become clear ten years later when the Nazis launched a military assault against the Soviet Union and with the infamous “Barbarossa” offensive!

I am trying to be skimpy with the historical details here to make sure that my point is clear to everyone. But let me give one last example to show how Stalinism disarmed the KPD with the policy of the Third Period, with this left maneuver and then close this section. First of all, the KPD completely lost the opportunity to

22 LaPorte, “Presenting a Crisis as an Opportunity”, p. 41-2.

23 Leon Trotsky, “Against National Communism! Lessons of the ‘Red’ Referendum”, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1931/310825.htm>.

24 LaPorte, “Presenting a Crisis as an Opportunity”, p. 48-9.

analyze what happened in Germany and to come up with an appropriate riposte by arguing that social democrats and Nazis were almost interchangeably fascist. From this perspective, the SPD government of 1928-29, the coalition governments of 1930-32, and finally, Hitler becoming chancellor became simply stages of fascism for the KPD.²⁵ Moreover, since the Third Period was identified by Stalinism as a period of rapid progress and the KPD was supposed to be moving in this direction, it would become common practice in the KPD to repeat that with each move, victory was becoming ever closer. I have just mentioned the changing balance of power between communists and fascists from 1928 to 1930. But the KPD, sticking with the Third Period's framework, considered this an important achievement on the path to revolution, as its votes had increased in total! But there is more. As Hitler drew ever closer to power, the KPD coined that ominous slogan, "first Hitler, then our turn".²⁶ This purportedly "left" slogan, which may sound like a sign of the determination to seize power, would have the very concrete result of watching Hitler's march to power, considering it as just another phase of fascism, without firing a single bullet. In other words, this is what the so-called left-wing era of Stalinism meant for the bourgeoisie: A communist party of millions, with its own militia, watching the coming of Nazism to power without a centrally organized resistance, hiding behind leftist slogans! By this point, it should be clear why I called Stalinism the meek enemy of the bourgeoisie.

3. Popular Front and Spain

The Third Period policy of Stalinism stripped the workers from any chance of preventing the Nazis' rise to power, which would become the strongest representative of fascist barbarism. But as the world war became a tangible reality by the day, the working class faced fascism in other countries of Europe. Fascist barbarism has indeed captured Europe's largest industrial power, Germany, and formed a bloc with Mussolini's Italy. But the revolutionary upsurge that started in France and Spain in 1933/1934, even if it could not prevent the war, could create a chance to fundamentally alter the balance of power in the upcoming war. During this period, the working class in France and the working class and the peasantry in Spain came to the brink of power. Potential victories of revolution in these two countries and the establishment of workers' states could have been game changers. *Even if we reduce the issue only to the threat of war and the security of the Soviet Union*, in this case, the fascist bloc would have been besieged from both the east and the west, with the socialist powers of France and Spain joining hands with the Soviet Union. In this case, even if the war broke out, Nazi Germany would have faced the daunting task of starting the war on two fronts simultaneously. When this opportunity was missed and the Second World War began, France suffered a very quick defeat against the Nazi armies. But this French defeat came in conditions where Germany was waging a large-scale war on a single front. Even if we leave aside the social power that

²⁵ Idem., p. 43-4.

²⁶ Idem., p. 53.

would emerge in the scenario I propose²⁷, i.e., in a France where the working class would be in power and organize the country in its own image, it would not be a stretch to imagine that the outcome could have been different under conditions in which Germany would have to divide its armies into two fronts. Now let us close the parenthesis of historical speculation and see how Stalinism as a political leadership came out of the historic test that was the Spanish Revolution.

Let us return to Spain, the dress rehearsal of the Second World War, just as the 1905 Revolution was the dress rehearsal of the October Revolution.²⁸ Ebullition in Spain started in the early 1930s. Primo de Rivera, who came to power in 1923 with a *pronunciamiento*, that is, a military coup, was removed from power at the beginning of 1930. Moreover, starting in 1930, the weakness of the Spanish monarchy was gradually revealed. The first indication of this was the *pronunciamiento* of two officers, Galán and García Hernández, in December 1930, announcing that in the northern city of Jaca promulgation of the republic and the end of the monarchy. This first attempt failed, and these two officers were executed by firing squad at the special insistence of King Alfonso XIII of Spain. But this event was the first sign that the monarchy had lost some of its grip on both the people and the state. Not incidentally, the 1931 elections for the Constituent Cortes, which the king called as a show of strength, resulted in a miserable defeat for the monarchy, and the republican parties gathered around the “Pact of San Sebastián” won by a landslide. It turned out that the monarchy was fast becoming a burden for the Spanish bourgeoisie, and Alfonso abdicated after some pressure; the republic was established.

It is beyond my purpose to provide a complete summary of these eventful years. But the period that opened with the abdication of the king would be marked by the spasmodic attacks of the revolution and the counter-revolution, and in general, by great political shocks. In 1932, anarchists, who represented an important power in the working class in Spain, unlike in other European countries, tried to organize an uprising but failed. The counter-revolution reacted promptly: Although General Sanjurjo attempted a *pronunciamiento* against the republic, this attempt was nixed by the struggle of workers from the CNT (National Confederation of Labor). The tremors came one after the other from the left and right. By 1933, Trotsky’s metaphor was also a good fit for Spain: The ball would roll down either to the right or to the left.

What about the communist party, one might ask? Unlike its counterparts in China, France and Germany, the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) was a small party by any account. More importantly, the Third Period was still operational at this point. Accordingly, the communist party received the instruction to work with the slogan “down with the bourgeois republic, power to the Soviets,” while the Soviets (or *Juntas*) were nowhere to be seen in Spain and even before the republic was es-

²⁷ Historical experience shows us that the social power unleashed by the revolution also made a significant difference in the military field, the simplest examples being the armies of Napoleon after the French Revolution and the Red Army, which had successes in the civil war following the October Revolution against all odds.

²⁸ I use the following book as my main source for the Spanish Revolution here; Pierre Broué, *La Révolution Espagnole, 1931-1939*, no publisher information, 1971.

established! The “social fascism” policy that we saw in Germany was implemented in Spain in its most outlandish form. Not only did the Communist Party of Spain attack the socialist party, the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party), as social fascists, but also vilified the anarchist CNT as anarcho-fascist!

But with Spain, the whole political scene in Europe was poised to change. After the fascists came to power in Germany in 1933, they revolted in France in 1934 and were only defeated by the force of the de facto Workers’ United Front that ensued the day-long street clashes on February 6. The contrast between the concrete reality on the ground and the Third Period politics of Stalinism was ever more obvious, although the official political stance remained unchanged. The mighty French Communist Party (PCF) began to move away from the Third Period policy in 1934, and in 1935, the new orientation was officially accepted by the 7th Congress of the Comintern. But the response of Stalinism to the German defeat and the de facto Workers’ United Front in France would be the Popular Front. While revolutionary Marxists advocate the joining of forces of both the political and economic organizations of the working class, Stalinism which hitherto refused any front categorically, made a volte-face to create a front which would count bourgeois political parties with its ranks. Dimitrov’s famous definition of fascism is the ideological reflection of this effort. According to the definition that will be used for the first time at the 13th enlarged session of the Comintern Executive Committee and adopted at the 7th Congress, fascism was “the open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital.” In other words, the Comintern was laying the groundwork for opening the front to the somewhat less reactionary, somewhat less chauvinistic and somewhat less imperialist elements of the bourgeoisie. For revolutionary Marxists, this is but a farce. The existence of bourgeois organizations in the united front against fascism can only be a burden on the working class. A united front that carries this burden, that is, the bourgeois organizations, will be deprived of class-based weapons that can be used to defeat fascism, namely land reform, factory occupations and strikes, and workers’ militias, and will enter the decisive struggle with fascism lacking its most potent instruments. Put differently, the front established with the bourgeoisie will not only not strengthen the anti-fascist struggle but actively undermine it. In this context, basing one’s strategy on mere arithmetic calculations is a fool’s errand. On that score, what happened in both Spain and France confirmed the revolutionary Marxists and proved Stalinism wrong. Let us go back to Spain to demonstrate its nitty-gritty.

As the Communist Party of Spain changed course and turned from the Third Period politics to the Popular Front strategy in accordance with the general line of Stalinism, the counter-tendencies emerged from within the revolution. The Spanish Revolution exhibited a dynamic that would emerge again and again throughout the 20th century. As the revolutionary process unfolds, a trend emerges even within leaderships that have nothing to do with communism, realizing that furthering and deepening the revolution (and spreading the revolution abroad in the next stage, although it does not directly concern us here), is the only way to defend the revolution. That is to say, a not yet crystallized permanent revolution emerges from the bosom of revolution. The same dynamic would emerge in Cuba, in one of its most

glorious examples, and would enable Cuba to become a workers' state by going beyond the immediate anti-imperialist tasks that its leadership put upon itself at the beginning. The most concrete example of this dynamic in Spain is Largo Caballero. The "right socialist" Caballero, who for many years led the class collaborationist wing in the PSOE and worked with the aforementioned Primo de Rivera, would conclude from 1933 onwards (possibly under the direct influence of the German defeat) that the dictatorship of the proletariat was a necessity even to defend the republic and would begin to represent the left-wing of the same party. At this point, it does not matter what kind of politician Caballero was or how consistent his leadership could be. The point is that as the revolution progresses, even the most unexpected elements realize that the revolution cannot win without exceeding the limits of bourgeois politics. The ball would roll down either to the right or to the left.

Now we once again face the same question. What about the communist party? The communist party, under the control of Stalinism, concluded that the current stage in Spain was the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Moreover, it strove to quickly form a Popular Front that would include the "republican" bourgeoisie. More dramatically, since 1933, the Workers' United Front has emerged as a nucleus around *Alianza Obrera*, the Workers' Alliance based in Barcelona, which has gathered various workers' organizations in its ranks. At that point, in 1933, the same PCE, adherent of the Third Period politics, was attacking the Workers' Alliance as social fascists. A year later, this time it would move to bring the bourgeois parties to the front of the workers' organizations, to blur the political lines and to strip the working class of its political weapons.

By 1936, for all intents and purposes, the Popular Front was fully operational. With the elections held the same year, the as-yet-unnamed Popular Front, which included a number of parties from the communist party to the republican bourgeoisie (and the POUM, formed by elements that were close to revolutionary Marxism!), won the elections by a small margin. Electoral victory triggered both street actions in the cities and land occupations in the countryside. The people released the prisoners of the Asturias rebellion without waiting for the decision of amnesty. The reaction of the counter-revolution came rapidly. After the elections in February, on July 17, a counter-revolutionary uprising based in the Moroccan Army of Spain (at that point, Northern Morocco was a Spanish colony) took place. Results differed from one city to the next, depending, for the most part depending on the reaction of the workers' organizations to the coup. In Andalusia, in the CNT-stronghold Zaragoza, or in the miner-bastion Oviedo, the workers' organizations took the declaration of loyalty to the republic made by the generals commanding the barracks at their face value and paid a terrible price for this faux-pas. In Barcelona and Madrid, where the workers took up arms instead of relying on the Popular Front, the counter-revolutionary uprising was defeated. The counter-revolution, which expected prompt victory, came short of its goals but was nonetheless in control of about one-third of the country.

This was the decisive moment for the strategy of the Popular Front. The attack of the counter-revolution also triggered the revolution. The workers' committees, armed to crush the counter-revolution, took power in many cities, especially in Bar-

celona and Madrid. In the most classical sense, a dual power situation has emerged between the *Comité-gobierno*, that is, the committee-governments and the Popular Front. The workers who took action to protect the revolution faced the necessity of following the path of the proletarian revolution in order to crush the counter-revolution for good. In other words, it was clear that Spain could no longer return to the day before the coup, to July 16. But this was precisely the utopian goal that Stalinism would pursue throughout the civil war: to rewind the clock and turn Spain back to July 16, that is, the day before the coup, to reach an intermediate stage where the armies of Francisco Franco would be defeated but the socialist revolution would not win. At this critical juncture, Stalinism and the Popular Front were unable to offer the working class any other program than to try to keep the ball on top of the pyramid. However, the ball would roll down either to the right or to the left.

While Stalinism considered excessive the demand for a “socialist republic” in Spain, trying to limit land occupations and prevent expropriations, the bourgeoisie left the ranks of the republic and joined Franco en masse. In other words, while Stalinism was trying to keep the revolution within the limits that would not harm the interests of the bourgeoisie and made the Popular Front the standard-bearer of the bourgeois-democratic program, the same bourgeoisie had already moved to the front of the counter-revolution. But, in Trotsky’s words, Stalinism would ally with the bourgeoisie’s shadow, even if it could not find the bourgeoisie.²⁹ The eloquence of Trotsky’s metaphor should not obscure the tragedy that Stalinism caused for the Spanish Revolution. At this point, Stalinism placed all its hopes on an alliance with British and French imperialism in the impending world war. The Stalinist bureaucracy wanted to convince these forces of its moderation, to prove that the revolutionary days of the post-October Revolution years were long gone. For that purpose, it forced the Spanish Revolution to the impasse of limiting itself to the program of the bourgeoisie, even without a modicum of actual support from the bourgeoisie. In short, in Spain but also in France, the socialist revolution was to be sacrificed on the altar of diplomatic calculations. Stalinism extended an olive branch not only to the Spanish bourgeoisie but, more importantly, to the world bourgeoisie.

I mentioned the international context above. With the coming to power of the Popular Front in France the same year, the context seemingly boded well for Republican Spain. But France’s Popular Front, *Front Populaire*, far from supporting Spain’s *Frente Popular*, closed the border to arms shipments. So not only did it refrain from supporting in any meaningful way the republican government in duress in Spain, but it also impeded others who could have sent shipments across French borders. But it would be incomplete, if not utterly wrong, to see here only the betrayal of Léon Blum, who was at the head of the Front Populaire government. Stalinism had dissolved the de facto Workers’ United Front, which crushed the fascist uprising in France in 1934, into a Popular Front. Now, under pressure from Britain, the bourgeoisie and its allies, which were now part of the Popular Front government in France thanks to the good offices of Stalinism, were able to block any aid to Spain.

²⁹ Leon Trotsky, “The Lessons of Spain:

The Last Warning”, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1937/xx/spain01.htm>.

In other words, the difference between governing France as a “Popular Front” instead of a “Workers’ Front” was not mere semantics but an active impediment to defending the revolution in Europe. And the contrast between Spain’s relations with Portugal, the only other country with whom it shares a land border, could not be more striking. While the Popular Front was in power in one neighboring country, in the other neighbor, Portugal, António Salazar and the counter-revolution were in power. Inside Spain, the Popular Front and the counter-revolution fought a bloody war. In this case, while the two Popular Fronts were incapable of helping each other, Salazar’s Portugal would act as the headquarters for Franco’s armies, participating militarily in some of the first skirmishes of the civil war. The Popular Front, which Stalinism dragged the communists into on these two fronts of the European revolution, would become such a shackle for the revolution.

Under these conditions, the Spanish Revolution, which lost its political weapons one by one, would quickly regress militarily in the face of the support of Germany and Italy to Franco. History bears witness to the fact (take the Russian Civil War after the October Revolution, for instance) that politics are as instrumental in determining the outcome of civil wars as much as armies, if not more so. With rapid political moves, the Spanish Revolution could have had the chance to undermine the counter-revolution, which relied on strong armies. Let me give just one example. As I mentioned above, the starting point of the counter-revolution was Spain’s Moroccan army. The main body of this army consisted of Moroccan soldiers gathered around a legionnaire core. Therefore, the ranks of the counter-revolutionary armies were mainly composed of Moroccan soldiers, especially in the first stage of the war. Not incidentally, a line from the song “Ay Carmela”, that emblematic song of the Spanish Revolution, goes “*luchamos contra los moros*”, that is, “We are fighting against the Moors,” or the Moroccans. Under these conditions, the leadership of the revolution could have largely prevented the counter-revolution from using Moroccan soldiers by declaring its recognition of the independence of Morocco, the northern part of which was a Spanish colony, and by announcing it massively. This way, it could even turn the tables on Franco and rally the Moroccan masses under the revolution’s banner.³⁰ However, as I wrote above, for Stalinism, the fate of the Spanish Revolution was secondary to the goal of pleasing British and French imperialism. Recognizing the independence of Morocco would have offended not only France, which had colonized the main body of the same country, but also British imperialism, which feared that the wave of independence would spill over to the colonies it controlled. Therefore, Stalinism would take this powerful weapon from the hands of the Spanish Revolution.

Finally, despite all these diplomatic maneuvers, the French and British imperialisms, as expected, were at no point persuaded to defend the republic in Spain. Because for these two imperialist states a workers’ revolution that would take place

³⁰ Let us remind you that a war of independence took place in the Berber-populated northern regions of Morocco approximately ten years before the counter-revolution, and it defeated Spanish colonialism at one point, but only to be subdued by a Franco-Spanish coalition. In other words, an exceptionally fertile ground existed for the proclamation of independence in Morocco, by a revolutionary government in Spain.

in the western part of Europe poses an infinitely greater threat than fascism. Britain and France, with the “non-intervention agreement”, took a stance that seemed to oppose the supply of arms to Spain but paved the way for the unilateral strengthening of Franco’s armies with weapons flooding into Spain from Germany and Italy. While world fascism was arming the counter-revolution in Spain at full throttle, it was no mystery that this sort of treaty could only work against the revolution. This was the result of the so-called realistic policy of Stalinism. All in all, the Spanish Revolution, which rekindled the hopes of the workers of the whole world around it for a time, was doomed to defeat. The brave fighters of the revolution found exile in Mexico or France, while Franco, the leader of the counter-revolution, ruled Spain for four decades until his death.

4. World Revolution and Italy

The tension between the Stalinist strategy of socialism in one country and the perspective of world revolution was already there to see for the attentive reader in the first three chapters. I have pointed out, albeit in passing and relatively indirectly in the first part and openly in the other two parts, how the diplomatic or so-called realistic policy of the Stalinist bureaucracy harmed the interests of the workers’ state itself. That is, the topic of the world revolution was already connecting all the chapters together as a running theme. But I chose to focus on the question of world revolution through the wave of revolutions that started during the Second World War and continued thereafter. The Italian case will serve us almost as a laboratory. Let me start by briefly explaining the reason for this authorial choice.

Each of the cases mentioned in the first three chapters, namely China 1925-1927, Germany 1933 and Spain 1931-39, was of great historical significance. Even a single victory obtained by the working class and communists in one of these instances, which all ended in defeat, could have regional, perhaps even global ramifications. But at the time they happened, Germany was almost insulated³¹, while Spain, at least at one point, had the revolutionary upsurge in France on its side, but absent was a sizeable regional or global revolutionary wave flanking it. The Chinese Revolution was part of a great ten-year-long revolutionary wave following the October Revolution but came at the tail-end of this revolutionary process. The wave to which Italy belonged, on the other hand, was a Global Revolutionary Wave in the most direct and immediate sense. With the victory of the Red Army, private property was abolished in all of Eastern Europe and a significant part of Central Europe. After Bulgaria and Romania came under socialist control with the help of the Soviet Red Army, the communists were in the midst of armed struggles in Yugoslavia, Greece and Albania and were on the cusp of victory. If these revolutions were to be victorious, capitalism would all but disappear from the Balkans as well. Asia, too, followed suit, with China, Vietnam, and Korea fighting their own revolutions.

³¹ As a matter of fact, this was more of a defensive fight against rising fascism, rather than a revolutionary onslaught. But still, with the right strategy, it would not be surprising if the defeat of fascism triggered the revolution.

In the years following 1945, the revolution was victorious in all these three countries (although in Vietnam and Korea at this stage, only in the north of the country). Under these conditions, while the end of the Second World War drew near, the communist parties in Italy and France were military forces to be reckoned with and enjoyed vast popular support due to the prestige of carrying out armed resistance against fascism. For all intents and purposes, the victory of the revolution in these two giants of Europe would be the beginning of the end for capitalism in continental Europe. With all the major states of Continental Europe in the hands of the working class, it would probably be a matter of time before the working class in other small states took the same path. It is hard to even predict where the onslaught of revolution would stop – if at all – with the red flag unfurled from Western Europe to East Asia! But even if the revolution stops right there without moving an inch beyond these borders, the sustained struggle between capitalism and the workers' states – or the so-called Cold War – would start under drastically different circumstances. Let alone being on the backfoot, socialism, controlling uninterrupted swathes of land across the world, would probably become the main political, military and economic power, possibly rallying around colonial and semi-colonial peoples from Africa to Latin America, while the imperialist bloc formed around the United States, Britain and Japan forced into a strategic defensive position.

But it was emphatically not the case in the end. In a bit, I shall discuss the underlying reasons. At this stage, this picture is meant to recall the high and concrete stakes around the Italian Revolution and the revolutionary wave surrounding it. I went with the Italian Revolution as the case to discuss for the following reason. I certainly do not claim that Italy was more important at this point than, say, France. The reason for my choice is very simple. As the end of the war approached, the internal balance of power in Italy was lopsided in favour of the communist party. In France, the communist party was arguably the most important force in the resistance against fascism. But still, the forces led by General Charles de Gaulle also commanded a significant partisan force within the country. Moreover, the regular army forces stationed in the colonies, known as the "Free French", were also largely loyal to the government-in-exile of Gaulle. These two factors gave de Gaulle an edge. In other words, when France came out of the Nazi occupation, it had two serious contenders for power, just like in Yugoslavia. In Italy, however, there was no Italian force that could even begin to compete with the communist party within the armed resistance movement! The fate of the revolution depended almost solely on the decisions of the communist party leadership and Moscow. In short, the Italian example is a case in point for the (sometimes misused) proposition of the 1938 Transitional Program that "the historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership."

Let us take a look at the alignment of competing forces at the most critical juncture. In March 1943, 150,000 workers in the north of Italy and in Tuscany, especially at the FIAT factory in Turin (Italy's Putilov, if you will), went on a strike that was clandestinely organized by the communist party, and thwarted the suppression attempts of the fascist party and the police with street fights. Mussolini was forced to replace the head of the local organization of the fascist party and accept

the economic demands of the workers.³² The contradictions within the Italian state also reached their climax as the war took a turn for the worse. On September 8, Marshal Pietro Badoglio, who was at the head of the Italian army, read on the radio a statement announcing that Italy had signed a ceasefire with the Allied powers, and a significant part of the state and the upper echelons of the army, including Badoglio and the king, fled to the south, controlled by American and British forces. A huge power vacuum has emerged. While some of the state's rulers went south, Mussolini found himself incredibly alone and in need of allies within the state apparatus. With the support of the German army, the "Duce" tried to establish the "Repubblica Sociale Italiana", the Italian Social Republic, in the far north of Italy, but the venture would not last long. The working class of the North showed its strength and readiness for struggle just a few months ago. Moreover, land occupations were erupting in the rural south, and local "Red" or "Soviet" republics were emerging to fill the power vacuum in many villages.³³ In other words, the alliance of the working-class north and the peasant south, which Antonio Gramsci asserted was the key to the revolution in Italy, was taking form in the midst of the revolution. Moreover, based on the partisan forces battle-hardened in the guerrilla struggle, the armed force that could carry this worker-peasant alliance to power, or the future Italian Red Army was emergent and had begun to become a tangible reality. All the factors for a full-blown social revolution were present in Italy, save for the revolutionary leadership that would act upon them.

Now, let me afford a brief digression from the class struggles in Italy and turn to Stalinism. In a sense, I will try to see world politics back then from the standpoint of the bureaucracy. The workers' state and the Red Army, which were the products of the October Revolution, overthrew Nazi barbarism and reached Berlin. Based on this military success, the Soviet Union would certainly hold a prominent in the negotiations following the war. In this case, the bureaucracy could have two options. It would either use its military might and international reputation to help revolutions in France, Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece, or at least to deter an imperialist intervention against these revolutions and if necessary, to defend the revolutions. But this would have led to a period of social and political instability around the world, perhaps even to the establishment of a European-wide socialist power. On the one hand, this situation would bring about the risk of the emergence of new leadership, an alternative to the hegemony of the Soviet bureaucracy over the world communist movement, at the head of the European workers' state or states. I wrote above that "it is hard to even predict where the onslaught of revolution would stop." This might also mean that the Soviet working class, heartened by the examples of the European and Asian revolutions, will at least have the possibility of standing against the Stalinist bureaucracy. So this first possibility, the use of the might of the Soviets and the Red Army as an element to support the European revolution, is off

32 Giulio Romano, "L'Italie en 1943: Entre Guerre et Révolution", *Cahiers Léon Trotsky*, vol: 77, April 2002, p. 77.

33 Rosario Forlenza, "Europe's Forgotten Unfinished Revolution: Peasant Power, Social Mobilization, and Communism in the Southern Italian Countryside, 1943-45", *American Historical Review*, vol: 126:2, June 2021, p. 504.

the table, not because Stalinism did not understand the stakes, but because this turn of events would not be in the bureaucracy's interests.

This is where the second option becomes part of the discussion. The bureaucracy, unable to rely on the world revolution for its interests, has no option but to try and maximize what it can get from the imperialists at the bargaining table and to prove to the imperialists that it is a reliable and respectable partner. To achieve that, Stalinism did not hesitate to extend an olive branch to the imperialists by liquidating the Communist International in 1943, which was founded by Lenin as the vanguard party of the world revolution. As a result, after various negotiations, especially in the 1943 Tehran and 1945 Yalta Conferences, Stalin obtained his own spheres of influence and left the rest under the control of imperialism. The most striking example of this is the "Percentages Agreement" of 1944. According to this agreement, while the Soviets were to take control of Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, Greece would be left to "Western powers", and influence would be split into equal portions in Yugoslavia.

But it just so happens that revolutions have the bad habit of not disappearing into thin air because this bureaucrat or that general promulgated so. This is exactly what happened in Italy, France, Yugoslavia and Greece. Although Stalin sold them to Churchill, the workers and peasants of these countries insisted on fighting first against the fascists and then against their own bourgeoisie under the leadership of the communists. It will be up to the Stalinist communist parties themselves to find a solution to this awkward situation for the bureaucracy. This brings us back to Italy.

Claudio Pavone, himself a former "partigiano" who would later write one of the fundamental books on the history of the Italian resistance, sums up the war waged by the Italian partisans very well. According to Pavone, three wars were intertwined in the struggle of the partisans. The partisans were waging a patriotic war against Nazi troops on Italian soil, a civil war against Mussolini's fascists, and a class war against the capital.³⁴ The leadership of the communist party stepped in at this stage, trying to limit the struggle into a patriotic war against the Nazis. Convincing the partisans fighting with sickle-hammer badges and red flags to put these insignia aside to use the tricolour Italian flag in their stead and finally to lay down their arms was only possible because this demand came from the communist party itself, that is, one could disarm world communism only thanks to the reputation of communism.

The Italian Communist Party (PCI)³⁵ did not just consent to the withering away of the revolution; it had to actively intervene to stop the revolution. The best-known aspect of this is the disarmament of the partisans, as I have just mentioned. After the return of the top leader of the party, Palmiro Togliatti, it became clear that the

³⁴ Claudio Pavone, *Una Guerra Civile: Saggio Storico sulla Moralità nella Resistenza*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991.

³⁵ The party was called the Partito Comunista d'Italia, or the Communist party of Italy, until it got rechristened as the Partito Comunista Italiano, or the Italian Communist Party in 1943. The discussion in this section straddles the pre- and post-1943 years, but I use the latter name indiscriminately as a shorthand.

PCI had decided to reconcile with Italian capitalism, which went down in history as the “Salerno turn” (Svolta di Salerno). According to the resolutions announced in Salerno, among many other things, the PCI announced that it had even given up its opposition to the monarchy. According to Rosaria Forlenza, upon Togliatti’s return, the PCI channeled the radical demands of peasant actions into a reformist program in accordance with the agreement between Stalin and Togliatti.³⁶

The communist party was successful in preventing the revolution, albeit with difficulty, and in return, it would obtain important ministries in the new Italian government. The revolution was defeated in France, Italy and Greece, where the communist parties accepted the line imposed by the Stalinist bureaucracy and were successful in making their rank-and-file accept it. The ministries that the communist party leadership received as rewards in Italy would also be short-lived. Contrary to the Stalinists, the world bourgeoisie was only too aware that peaceful coexistence between communism and capitalism by sharing seats could not be a long-term solution. As the dust of the revolution settled, the Italian bourgeoisie threw the communist party out of the cabinet with a palace coup, laying bare the flimsy return the PCI got for selling out the revolution.

This was what Stalinism could offer to the partisans who fought simultaneously with two fascist armies, to the workers whose strikes made Mussolini tremble, to the peasants that unfurled red flags over their villages: sold-out revolutions and a few dirty seats on the bourgeoisie’s council of ministers! Even today, socialism in one country defended under the guise of realism is nothing but a programmatic version of this strategy of defeat and betrayal.

Conclusion

I have discussed Stalinism and the toxic legacy it left to the communists through four historical cases focusing on its four different (but interrelated) aspects. As I mentioned at the beginning of the article, the decisions leading to defeat were not the result of momentary mistakes or erroneous analyzes of Stalinism. Rather, this was a direct result of the interests of the bureaucracy, which increasingly brought the Soviet Union under its control from the second half of the 1920s onwards. That bureaucracy is no more, but while it imploded, it also brought down the red flag, which was raised by the October Revolution and triumphant over one-third of the world at one point. Even though the bureaucracy has disappeared from the stage of history, at least for the time being, exhuming the program of that deceased bureaucracy and putting it before the working class is the hallmark of modern-day Stalinism.

That mighty communist parties who voiced the interests of the bureaucracy without a modicum of shame up until yesteryear may have repented, lowered their

36 Rosaria Forlenza, “Europe’s Forgotten Unfinished Revolution”, p. 524.

flags, and even sided with the enemy. We remain undeterred to wave the red flag that they have lowered and to establish the power of the working class all over the world, starting from Turkey. We are aware that we need the right instruments in order to properly undertake this difficult task. We invite revolutionaries who share the same sensibility to free themselves from the political shackles of Stalinism.

Trotsky as philosopher

Savas Mikhail-Matsas

The place and role of Lev Davidovich Trotsky in history, in the Russian Revolution and in the international Marxist movement could not be seriously ignored or erased, despite all the controversies or falsifications and slanders by his worst enemies. But, at the same time, it is very often overlooked, even among his most dedicated followers, the *centrality* of the *philosophy of history* of Marxism, particularly of *materialist dialectics* in his thought and action throughout his entire revolutionary life, especially in its most critical moments.

A close examination of every step of his long, epic, and tragic itinerary demonstrates Trotsky's constant attention to philosophy at the service of revolution: from the years of his youth in the struggle against Czarism, in prisons and exile, to his involvement in the 1905 Russian Revolution as Chairman of the first Soviet in history to his leading role in the October 1917 Revolution, in the Red Army, in the first period of the Communist Third International, as well, later, at the head of the Left Bolshevik Opposition and the founding of the Fourth International up to his assassination in Mexico in 1940.

Here, we will focus on some of the major turning points of this remarkable trajectory, where crucial philosophical issues were raised to guide historical-political orientation, perspective, and strategy.

In the laboratory of Revolution

The intense attention on philosophical issues, and the fiery debates and

controversies among intellectuals, workers, and dedicated revolutionaries in Czarist Russia, in its cities, prisons, or exiles in early 20th century, cannot be separated from the specific historical social development of the country. In a changed world-historical context, the social soil became volcanic by a constellation formed by an obsolete absolutism, a decaying aristocracy, a huge agrarian problem, a weak bourgeoisie and liberalism, the relative growth and specific weight of the intelligentsia, and the emergence of a revolutionary industrial proletariat. “*In the early years of this century, Russia was a vast laboratory of social thinking*”, Trotsky remarks in his autobiography.¹

The young Trotsky himself had his first and determining encounter with Marxism and dialectics in prison thanks to two essays by the brilliant Italian Marxist Antonio Labriola:

Unlike most Latin writers, Labriola had mastered the materialist dialectics, if not in politics – in which he was helpless – at least in the philosophy of history. The brilliant dilettantism of his exposition actually concealed a very profound insight. He made short work, and in marvelous style, of the theory of multiple factors which were supposed to dwell on the Olympus of history and rule our fates from there.²

This early acquaintance with Marx, Hegel and dialectics will have important consequences in the intellectual and political development of Trotsky as well as in his revolutionary activities. First, it led him in a decisive break and constant offensive *against positivism*, which in the form of the “*theory of multiple factors*” was dominant then in populist circles, through its Russian proponents Lavrov, Mikhaylovsky, Kareyev, and others, as well as *against the idealist trend of a “return to Kant”*, to his categorical imperative and to a normative philosophy.

Then, already in his first exile in eastern Siberia, the intellectual strength and vast cultural horizons of the young revolutionary were manifested in a series of articles for an Irkutsk newspaper, the *Vostochnoye Obozreniye* (The Eastern Review). Based on historical materialist dialectics, the young Trotsky’s critical articles dealt with a broad spectrum of topics, not only about political and social issues, but, very often, about literature and philosophy, on the Russian classic authors, as well as on Ibsen, Maupassant, Andreyev, or Nietzsche, “*the poet in philosophy and philosopher in poetry*”, as he called the German thinker. The axis of all these writings was the investigation of the contradictory relations between the individual and society. Later, in early Soviet Russia, they will be republished in a volume, and their author remarked: “*...although I might have written them differently to-day, I should not have had to change the substance of them.*”³

Undoubtedly, the writing of these articles represents not only the broad cultural interests of their author but also that they were part of his constant training in

1 Leon Trotsky, *My Life*, Chapter IX, *My First Exile*, www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/my-life/ch09.htm.

2 Ibid., Chapter VIII, *My First Prisons*.

3 Ibid., Chapter IX, *My First Exile*.

dialectical thought. Much later, on the eve of his violent death, Trotsky would write the famous lines: “*Dialectic training of the mind [is] as necessary to a revolutionary fighter as finger exercises to a pianist...*”⁴

The dress rehearsal of Permanent Revolution

Abrupt changes in the objective situation, especially great historical upheavals, challenge all the long-established ways of thinking, all fixed ideas and preconceptions, producing immense confusion and disorientation. The importance of dialectics at such turning points in history becomes a life-and-death question.

The first such great challenge for Trotsky and the entire workers’ movement in Russia and all over the world was the 1905 Revolution, the revolutionary mobilization of large masses, the emergence, for the first time, of the Soviets as organs of workers’ struggle and power, with Trotsky becoming the chairman of the St Petersburg Soviet. Quite correctly, the 1905 Revolution, despite its ferocious repression and defeat, is considered as the legendary “dress rehearsal” of the 1917 revolutionary overthrow of Czarism and the Great October Socialist Revolution.

It is in the fire of the revolutionary year 1905 that Lev Trotsky could re-elaborate, reformulate and check in the practice of the class struggle in the conditions of early 20th century the **theory of Permanent Revolution**, first expounded by Marx and Engels in their *Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League* in March 1850.

The dynamics of Permanent Revolution was presented by Trotsky in a series of articles during the upheavals in 1905⁵ and found a definite form, in 1906, in his book *Results and Prospects*. Trotsky’s perspective opposed the “two stages” theory of the Mensheviks as well as the line supported then by the Bolsheviks for a “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry”. Finally, in 1917, it coincided with the strategic turn introduced by Lenin in his *April Theses* and it was historically confirmed and fully vindicated in the October victory.

Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution was based on the **world-historic conditions** produced by the world-wide expansion of capitalism⁶ and on what he calls “**the revolutionary logic of class relations**”⁷ in Russia. This combination gives the Russian Revolution, starting from unresolved bourgeois democratic tasks, led by the proletariat leaning on the peasantry, **a permanent, socialist, and international character**:

Imposing its own type of economy and its own relations on all countries, capitalism has transformed the entire world into a single economic and political

4 Leon Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*, New Park Publications, 1975, p. 70.

5 See particularly Leon Trotsky, “Up to the Ninth of January (1905)”, “Introduction to Ferdinand Lassalle’s Speech to the Jury (July 1905)”, “Foreword to Karl Marx, *Parizhskaya Kommuna* (December 1905)” in *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution: The Documentary Record*, edited and translated by Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido, Brill, 2009.

6 Trotsky, “Introduction to Ferdinand Lassalle’s Speech to the Jury”, op. cit., p. 444.

7 Trotsky, “Foreword to Karl Marx, *Parizhskaya Kommuna*”, op. cit., p. 509.

organism [...] From the very outset, this fact gives currently unfolding events an international character and opens majestic prospects. Political emancipation led by the Russian working class is raising the latter to heights that are historically unprecedented, providing it with colossal means and resources, and making it the initiator of capitalism's worldwide liquidation, for which history has prepared all the objective preconditions.⁸

The theory of Permanent Revolution is not limited to Russia's national peculiarities. By analyzing them in their originality and their inner connection and interaction with the changed world historic conditions created by capitalism in our epoch, Trotsky develops them into an integrated Marxist theory, perspective, and strategy of the *world* socialist revolution.

Permanent Revolution actually becomes the conscious, dialectical self-reflection of the epoch itself, the invisible but central axis of all social and national emancipatory struggles.

This bold, gigantic leap in theory should be impossible without a break by Trotsky with the dominant bourgeois ideas for historical development, and, particularly, without a break with the prevalent Social Democratic "orthodoxy" of the Second International, permeated by empiricism, linear evolutionism, and economic reductionism. In other words, as Lenin himself would demonstrate in 1914 with his *Philosophical Notebooks*, this break and leap forward were impossible without an actual deepening of *materialist dialectics*.

Criticizing the enemies of the Permanence of the Revolution, Trotsky writes in December 1905: "*When they appeal to 'objective social development' in response to the idea of uninterrupted revolution, which for us, is a conclusion following from social-political relations, they forget that this same development includes not merely economic evolution, which they so superficially understand, but also, the revolutionary logic of class relations...*"⁹

Opposition to economic reductionism and social-political gradualism does *not* mean dismissal of the Marxist study of the sphere of economy. Against its "superficial understanding", he will propose later, in 1909, in a letter to Gorky for the education program in the Party school in Capri, Trotsky insists on the necessity of the study of *Capital* by Karl Marx: "***Capital***", he writes, "*is not simply 'a course of political economy', but a philosophy of the history of capitalist society.*"¹⁰

Trotsky's approach to the philosophical nature of *Das Kapital* converges with Lenin's crucial note in his *Philosophical Notebooks*: "*If Marx did not leave behind him a 'Logic' (with a capital letter) he did leave the logic of Capital, and this ought to be utilized to the full in this question. In Capital, Marx applied to a single science logic, dialectics and the theory of knowledge of materialism [three words are not needed: it is one and the same thing] which has taken everything valuable in Hegel*

8 Trotsky, "Introduction to Ferdinand Lassalle's Speech to the Jury", op. cit., pp. 444-445.

9 Trotsky, "Foreword to Karl Marx, *Parizhskaya Kommuna*", op. cit., p. 509.

10 Leon Trotsky, *On Party Education in The Ideas of Leon Trotsky* edited by Hillel Ticktin and Michael Cox, Porcupine Press, 1995, p. 373 (emphasis in the original).

and developed it further.”¹¹

This is not an idle game with abstractions, a sterile academic exercise. Lenin and Trotsky follow, consciously and faithfully the direction given by Alexander Herzen’s famous formulation: “*Dialectics is the algebra of the revolution*”. And, as later Trotsky reminded the positive confirmation of this direction: “*It is historical experience that the greatest revolution in all history was not led by the party which started out with bombs but by the party which started out with dialectical materialism.*”¹²

The power of Marxism, the masses in power

Not accidentally, Trotsky, in his autobiography *My Life*, in the chapter “*In Power*” dedicated to the revolutionary seizure of power by the Soviets led by the Bolshevik Party in October 1917, begins by profoundly rethinking what Marxism is and what it actually is in relation to the revolutionary masses. He writes:

Marxism considers itself the conscious expression of the unconscious historical process. But the ‘unconscious’ process, in the historic–philosophical sense of the term not in the psychological, coincides with its conscious expression only at its highest point, when the masses, by sheer elemental pressure, break through the social routine and give victorious expression to the deepest needs of historical development. And at such moments the highest theoretical consciousness of the epoch merges with the immediate action of those oppressed masses who are farthest away from theory. The creative union of the conscious with the unconscious is what one usually calls ‘inspiration’. The Revolution is the inspired frenzy of history.

Every real writer knows creative moments, when something stronger than himself is guiding his hand; every real orator experiences moments when someone stronger than the self of his every-day existence speaks through him. This is “inspiration”. It derives from the highest creative effort of all one’s forces. The unconscious rises from its deep well and bends the conscious mind to its will, merging it with itself in some greater synthesis.

The utmost spiritual vigor likewise infuses at times all personal activity connected with the movement of the masses. This was true for the leaders in the October days. The hidden strength of the organism, its most deeply rooted instincts, and its power of scent inherited from animal forebears all these rose and broke through the psychic routine to join forces with the higher historico-philosophical abstractions in the service of the revolution. Both these processes, affecting the individual and the mass, were based on the union of the conscious with the unconscious: the union of instinct the mainspring of the will with the higher theories of thought.¹³

In this dense, rich in determinations, self-reflection of Marxism by a Marxist and

11 V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works Vol. 38: Philosophical Notebooks*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976, p. 317.

12 Leon Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*, op. cit., p. 100.

13 Leon Trotsky, *My Life, chapter XXIX, In Power*, www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/my-life/ch29.htm.

Bolshevik leader, grasped at the victorious moment of “*the greatest revolution in all history*” its most essential elements should be brought to focus.

First, its *materialist* character: Marxism does not exist as a body of independent abstractions freely floating in a realm of incorporeal ideas; it is *based on and determined, in the last instance, by the unconscious historical material process*, which exists objectively, primarily, and independently from any individual of social consciousness.

Second, its *dialectical* i.e., *contradictory* character: the conscious is the *opposite* of the unconscious. It arises out of the inherent contradictions of the unconscious historical material base, not automatically, mechanically, in a rectilinear way but through contradictions, dialectically. The opposition between the unconscious and the conscious, developing into an ever-sharpening contradiction can be superseded (*Aufhebung*). The unconscious historical process coincides with its conscious expression at the highest point of tension, when the barriers of social routine break down and are expressed “the deepest needs of historical development”:

At those crucial moments when the old order becomes no longer endurable to the masses, they break over the barriers excluding them from the political arena, sweep aside their traditional representatives, and create by their own interference the initial groundwork for a new régime [...] The history of a revolution is for us first of all a history of the forcible entrance of the masses into the realm of rulership over their own destiny.¹⁴

The “union of the unconscious and the conscious”, their interpenetration has to be “*creative*” transforming the opposites. Creative, non-dogmatic, revolutionary Marxism transforms itself into an all-powerful *material* force by penetrating the masses, by intervening *creatively* in the class struggle through a revolutionary organization, a revolutionary party of the working class armed with theory, strategy, tactics, and program, arming politically the masses in the struggle for their power. The masses are not passive objects but active subjects creating their own independent organs of self-organization, of struggle, of power, of *self-emancipation*.

Third, Marxism, to be creative and able to penetrate and win the confidence of the masses, has to fight to be, first of all, at the level of the demands of historical development. In other words, it has to be, through its own permanent development, “*the highest theoretical consciousness of the epoch*” - throughout all the changes, fluctuations, breaks, zigzags of an “*epoch of wars and revolutions*”, the “*epoch of imperialist decline of capitalism*”, a “*transitional epoch towards world Socialism*”, according to multiple definitions given by Lenin and Trotsky.

Transition is not linear but driven by contradictions. This objective reality makes it indispensable for revolutionaries to grasp them by *the logic of contradictions, dialectics*. It is the only way to overcome confusion and avoid impressionism and disorientation, particularly as appearances do not coincide but hide the deeper, essential driving forces of the epoch.

¹⁴ Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, Preface, www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/hrr/ch00.htm.

At the beginning of the imperialist epoch, the question and theory of Permanent Revolution emerged in 1905 and were confirmed in 1917, internally related to the epochal change, determined by the same law of uneven and combined development, and opening the perspective of the world socialist revolution.

This is the material basis and reason why the controversy over the Permanent Revolution dominates the struggle, from 1924 onwards, under the impact of strategic defeats of the world revolution, particularly in Germany, against bureaucracy and its doctrine of self-legitimization of “socialism in a single country”, raised to a dogma by Bukharin and Stalin.

From this vantage point of our epoch, it can become clear that the struggle for the Permanent Revolution was and is *to complete on a world scale the revolutionary transformation that started in October 1917*. It was and is incompatible with any attempt to subordinate this task to national limitations or to the nationalist conservatism of any State bureaucracy. But it is not limited or exhausted in the life and death struggle between Trotskyism and Stalinism. For this reason, it did not finish in 1989-91.

Although isolated for long periods, under adverse conditions of defeats and retreats of the international revolutionary movement, the struggle for the Permanent Revolution remains actual because it expresses the deeper *objective* needs of the transitional epoch, and not any adventurist, voluntarist, or *subjectivist* attempt to continue the revolution by ignoring the existing conditions, in a rectilinear way.

It arises under the invincible pressure and impulse of a discontinued historical process, from its *incompleteness*. To use the terms of the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, it arises from the *Noch Nicht*, the Not Yet: “*The Not is lack of Something and also escape from this lack: thus it is a driving towards what is missing.*”¹⁵

From this broader view point, it can be correctly examined and grasped the necessity and actuality of the struggle of Trotsky, of the Left Opposition of the Bolshevik-Leninists, and later of the fighters for a Fourth International.

Back to dialectics, back to the future

What was for the revolutionary wing of the Second International, particularly for Lenin, the shock from the capitulation of the majority of social democracy at the irruption of the world imperialist war in 1914, it was for Trotsky and the vanguard revolutionary fighters around him the year 1933, the ascent to power in Germany of Hitler and Nazism, and the political bankruptcy, in front of this catastrophe, of the bureaucratized, Stalinized Comintern, its real collapse even before its formal dissolution by Stalin ten years later.

Trotsky did not limit himself to political polemics. To analyze and understand the violent convulsions of the epoch –the defeats in Europe and China, the bureaucratization of the first workers’ state born by the October Revolution, the rise of fascism and Nazism, the new forms of class collaboration under the name of “antifascist peoples fronts”, the Spanish revolution and its defeat, the imperialist

¹⁵ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986, p. 307.

drive towards the abyss of a new more devastating world war— he had to turn back to the fundamentals. He followed the steps of Lenin in 1914-15,¹⁶ and he started to study again Hegel's *Science of Logic* writing his own *Philosophical Notebooks of 1933-35*.¹⁷

His Notes on Hegel, written under the worst conditions of exile and persecution on “*a planet without a visa*”, are much shorter than the extensive philosophical notes taken by Lenin in the Zurich Library. But as Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* were crucial to grasping the methodological roots of the collapse of the Second International, for his orientation towards a Third International, as well as for his works on *Imperialism*, the *April Theses* and the *State and Revolution*, Trotsky's re-working of materialist dialectics was essential for his orientation towards a Fourth International as well as for his major work in *Revolution Betrayed*, the 1938 Transitional Program and the texts of *In Defense of Marxism*, at the beginning of the Second World War defending both the USSR and dialectical materialism within the newly founded Fourth International.

Trotsky concentrates his attention on the Book I of *Science of Logic*, particularly on the transitions from *quantitative changes* to a new *quality*. It is obvious that his effort is focused on determining if there are changes in *quality* in the role of the Third International, and above all in the Soviet Union, to draw the necessary political and organizational conclusions for the international workers' movement and its revolutionary vanguard.

For the bureaucratized Comintern, the conclusion was that a qualitative change was clear after the German debacle, and it was beyond repair, without any possibility of being reformed by opposition criticism and pressure from the masses. A new International was necessary. For the USSR, the conclusion was very different and nuanced. Despite the usurpation of workers' power by a hypertrophied bureaucratic cast, its foundations established by the October Socialist Revolution were not destroyed and had to be defended against imperialism, capitalist restoration, and the bureaucracy itself. He opposed the supporters of the superficial theories of “Russian State Capitalism” or “bureaucratic collectivism” etc. In *The Revolution Betrayed*, he analyzed the contradictions of the Soviet Union rejecting any attempt to give “*a finished definition into an unfinished process*”, a *transitional* society whose future, a regression to capitalism or an advance to world Socialism will depend on “*the living struggle of living forces, on a national and international scale*”. Again, *the transitional nature* not only of the Soviet Union but *of the epoch* itself comes to the forefront together with the importance of clarifying in Marxist philosophy the central category of *dialectical transition*.

Working in this direction, Trotsky, in his *Philosophical Notebooks*, elaborates on two important concepts:

16 See Lenin *Philosophical Notebooks*, op. cit., and, among others, Savas Michael-Matsas, “Lenin and the Path of Dialectics” in *Lenin Reloaded: Toward a Politics of Truth*, edited by Sebastian Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Žižek, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007, pp. 101-119.

17 Published more than a half century later (after the opening of the Trotsky Archives at Harvard in 1980) by Columbia University Press, 1986, edited by Philip Pomper.

- the concept of *Catastrophe*,¹⁸ for a theory of Revolutions, against the liberal-gradual conception of history, and
- the concept of *Hybrids*,¹⁹ for natural and social phenomena and formations escaping any formal classification and demanding an investigation by the method of materialist dialectics.

These two concepts of *Catastrophe* and *Hybrids* are vital to developing *a theory of knowledge of the transitional epoch*, understanding its open dialectic, and probing into its logic of contradictions.

For a theory of knowledge of the transitional epoch

Lenin loved to repeat Pushkin's lyrics from *Eugene Onegin*:

Happy are those who lived in this world in the moments when its fate changed...

It is in these moments that the true nature of things is revealed: nothing is fixed, everything changes, everything flows and collapses into the abyss, to reemerge changed again. But then the knowledge of this changing world, the truth itself, is put to the test. In times of transition, when the old dies and the new finds it difficult to be born, when every fixed perception is shaken, and every certainty is dragged into the generalized stream of collapse, how can you catch the elusive water, from where to hold on, in the dissolution of everything?

Where, how does it stand and what is the truth in a world at a time when its destiny is changing, when everything we knew takes the path of destruction?

At such times, formal thought that defines everything with static categories is paralyzed by seeing its shapes shattered and its pieces dragged powerlessly into the vortex. The paradox, however, is that formal thought, within its destruction, is regenerated. It reassembles its debris into new combinations, which will collapse again. It strengthens itself just when its limits prove to be suffocating, exacerbating asphyxiation.

The conservative tendencies of thought, enshrined in a prolonged historical practice, are in constant shock but constantly resist them by trying to close the rifts in every way and means. But the wreck remains inevitable. The only way out is the exit from the very confined ground of formal logic and the bold entry into the very eye of the whirlpool of History with the compass of dialectics, the logic of movement.

Lenin, at the crucial moment of 1914, stressed: "*The question is not whether there is movement but how to express it in the logic of concepts.*"²⁰

Trotsky also focused his attention at the crucial time of 1933, on the problem of formal thinking with its static categories and classifications.

18 Leon Trotsky, *Philosophical Notebooks, 1933-1935: Writings on Lenin, Dialectics, and Evolutionism*, translated, annotated, and with introductory essays by Philip Pomper, Russian text annotated by Yuri Felshtinsky, New York: Columbia University, 1986, pp. 133-134.

19 Ibid., p. 118.

20 Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*, p. 256.

Both Lenin and Trotsky turned to Hegel precisely because it was Hegel who exercised the deepest and sharpest criticism of Logic, as developed from Aristotle to Kant, pointing out its main weakness: the separation of the movement of thought from that of its object and its transformation into a subjective activity external to the object that imposes its static abstractions on it. Conversely, dialectical subtractions are moments of the very self-movement of their objective content.

*“Hegel himself spoke many times”, Trotsky notes, “about the necessary Concrete emerging from the immanent movement of ‘moments’ - a movement that represents the direct opposite of an analytical approach (Verfahrens), i.e., of an activity external to the object itself (Sache) and inherent in the subject.”*²¹

In the “analytical approach”, life freezes in the external forms that isolate individual aspects of it. On the contrary, in the dialectical transition from the Abstract, poor in determinations (in this respect the empirical ‘concrete’ is abstract), to the Concrete, which combines multiple and opposite determinations in their necessary interconnection and sequence, life itself reveals itself pulsating in thought.

“Hegel himself,” writes Trotsky,

examines dialectics precisely as logic, as the science of the forms of the process of human knowledge. But in Hegel through these ‘forms’ the world develops... For Hegel dialectics is a logic of larger dimensions - in space and in time – a universal logic, the objective logic of the universe.²²

Following Marx and Lenin, Trotsky reads Hegel materialistically:

The identity of Being and of thought in Hegel means the identity of objective and subjective logic, their ultimate coincidence. Materialism accepts the correspondence of subjective and objective, their unity but not their identity, in other words it does not release matter from its materiality in order to keep alone the logical skeleton of its law governed character, the expression and appearance of which is scientific thought (consciousness).²³

If idealism removes materiality from matter and material flesh from its logical skeleton, vulgar materialism, especially in the Stalinist form of “*Diamat*”, attempts to impose from the outside a dead skeleton of logical schemata on the living flesh of matter, killing it, turning it into an inert, quality-free mechanical mass.

Actually, “*materialistic dialectics (or dialectical materialism)*”, Trotsky stresses, “*is not the arbitrary welding of two independent terms but a differentiated unity.*”²⁴ Unity that is not an abstract identity it contains the difference – exactly what disappears both in idealism and vulgar materialism (which also ends in the subjective idealism of the worst kind).

²¹ Trotsky, *Philosophical Notebooks*, p. 146.

²² Ibid., p. 117.

²³ Ibid., p. 118.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 140-141.

Trotsky pays the greatest attention to the difference, because he always consciously has as a target reductionism, the curse of established “left-wing” (and not only) thinking, in its many forms.

It is in this spirit that his observation is made on the dialectics of Nature, which has been so distorted in official Stalinist textbooks that it is contemptuously and easily rejected by all kinds of idealists of Marxist or anti-Marxist reference. Trotsky, not only in his *Notebooks* but in many of his texts,²⁵ argued that the material foundations of dialectics lie in nature’s own dialectics. But he denies the dangerous devastating reductionism that turned it into the hands of every Zhdanov and Lysenko into a strangling straitjacket for every scientific research. Trotsky writes:

Just as knowledge is not identical to the world (despite Hegel’s idealistic axiom), the dialectic of knowledge is not identical to the dialectic of Nature. Consciousness is presented as a completely special part of Nature, which has its own peculiarities and prerogatives, which are completely absent from the rest of Nature. Subjective dialectics must therefore also be presented as a particular part of objective dialectics – with its own particular forms and laws. (The danger lies in the reduction – in the form of ‘objectivism’ – of suffering, convulsions of consciousness in the objective nature).²⁶

The whole conception of the subject in history is methodologically founded by Trotsky in his rupture with reductionism on the basis of a materialist reversal of Hegel’s idealist dialectic. He writes:

What does logic express? The law of the external world or the law of consciousness? The question is introduced as a mutually excluding duality and therefore erroneously. The laws of logic express the laws (regularities, modes) of consciousness in its active relationship with the external world. The relation of consciousness to the external world is the relation of the (particular, specific) part to the whole.²⁷

It is the correspondence of interconnected different fields within the same “differentiated unity” (Trotsky) – and not an abstract identity, a reduction of objective and subjective dialectics to some common rules. Each retains its own particularity and transcends it to its other.

This clarification is crucial when it comes to our primary question: *what is the path that leads to truth in times when all certainty collapses?* What is the theory of knowledge of the transitional epoch that avoids sinking into relativism and skepticism?

According to Trotsky’s approach, a single reference to dialectics is not enough. The latter must be seen in its materialistic texture as a differentiated unity: the

²⁵ See, for example, *Dialectical Materialism and Science*, 1925 or *In Defense of Marxism*, 1938.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 145.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 129.

dialectical theory of the historic Being of the transitional epoch of imperialist decline of capitalism, coincides but it is not identical or a substitute of dialectics as a theory of knowledge. Each moment of the differentiated unity has its own peculiarities and laws, its own cognitive requirements. It is through the dialectical unfolding of *all* the moments of the process that the fundamental historical-philosophical concept of our transitional epoch rises: the Permanent Revolution.

Without its philosophical structure and function, the theory of the Permanent Revolution is transformed into a closed formula, into a mechanical repetition of some formulations, into an a priori static category that moves outside its object – radically altered to its opposite. Unfortunately, this was done by a large number of groups, which are referring to Trotsky's tradition.

The impasses of metaphysical-formal thinking become evident in every attempt to approach the great and unexpected issues posed by our time. Particularly the October Revolution, its fate, the nature of the Soviet Union, the attitude towards it, became the center of the fiercest ideological conflicts but also the reef where every classification-formalist logic collided and sank. It is no coincidence that the controversy over precisely these central issues of our times, Trotsky, unlike his opponents and many of his descendants, broadened and deepened it into a *γυγαντομαχία περί της ουσίας* [a battle of Giants over Essence]²⁸, a confrontation over method and philosophy, in the foundations of theory and practice.

He particularly clashed with those on the lines of the anti-Stalinist Left who wanted to interpret the transitional phenomena and formations of the time, such as the USSR under Stalinism, by applying a priori Kantian categories and abstract static norms for the “ideal workers’ state”. Here, Trotsky introduces his concept of the *Hybrids*, particularly important to understand an epoch of transition

According to the logical classification some species (phenomena) are placed within the boundaries easily, but others they present difficulties: they can be placed here and there and with some stricter correlation – nowhere. While causing indignation in classifying formalists, similar transitional forms are of great interest to dialecticians, because they break down the organic boundaries of classification by revealing active real interconnections and the sequence of the living process.²⁹

Every transitional era gives birth to hybrids – that the “classifying formalists” hate what causes the great interest of dialecticians. The Hybrid, the Unclassified demonstrates in its own way the non-linear character of living historical development in Nature and Society. That is why it is at the heart of the theory of the Permanent Revolution and of its law of combined and uneven development.

Trotsky called it the basic law of motion of the living historical process. Against the linear “stages theory” of Menshevism and Stalinism, he stressed that “*leaping stages (or prolonged stay in one of them) is exactly what uneven development*

28 Plato, *The Sophist*.

29 Trotsky, *Philosophical Notebooks*, op. cit., p. 118.

consist.”³⁰ Combined development, again, is not some arbitrary mixing of different socio-historical levels of development but their *organic* combination into a living formation of a natural-historical process,³¹ the “*unity of diverse*” in Marx’s formulation in the *Manuscript of 1857-58 (Grundrisse)*.³²

Trotsky, speaking about the uneven and combined development, identifies the first as the centrifugal and the second as the centripetal force, the opposing tendencies of unification and separation, crystallization and dissolution, birth and decay of socio-economic formations of history.

They recall, in some way, Φιλότης [Love] and Νείκος [Hostility], the two “demons” of the pre-Socratic thinker Empedocles, the two opposite forces of cosmogony that in their eternal struggle shape everything, while giving birth to the course of this natural – historical process, to many Hybrids and Monsters.

*but as the demons kept coming together,
these were mixed, as they happened to meet
and many more were born all the time.*

*Many were born with two faces and breasts,
and vice versa, they emerged
human genders with the head of an ox...*³³

The Bizarre, the Hybrid, the Unclassified, the Monstrous, all kinds of deformation possibly emerge in the process of transformation, as some “stages” become protracted and others compressed to the point of annihilation and, some of them are skipped.

“*The Pathological is the obstructed Normal*”, said Virchow, the father of Pathological Anatomy, a great dialectician, revolutionary and a friend of Marx and Engels. This truth is inconceivable not only in formal thinking, in empiricism, in rationalism, which is nothing more than “*the attempt to construct an integrated system on the basis of vulgar logic*”³⁴ but also in irrationalism, which is only the same vulgar logic overturned by the obstacles it encounters. Monsters are not born merely “*from the sleep of reason*”, according to Goya’s saying, but from the material contradictions of life, especially when their solution is prevented.

The above verses of Empedocles could depict the strange hybrids that appeared after the collapse of the Soviet Union and were called “Novyi Rusky” - (New – Russians). “The former Party bureaucrats with the Rolex and the Mercedes recall those monstrous beings that Empedocles describes, as the offspring of oxen with a human face, or as the offspring of ox-headed humans.” “*What else are the Stalinist*

30 Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, New Park Publications, London, 1975, p. 117.

31 Ibid., p. 115.

32 K. Marx, *Grundrisse: Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, translated by Martin Nicolaus, Pelican, 1973, p. 101.

33 Empedocles, *On Nature*, Fragments 53, 54-59, 61, Diels-Kranz.

34 Trotsky, *Philosophical Notebooks*, p. 143.

offsprings with Rockefeller's head or newborn capitalists with Stalin's moustache?"³⁵

Trotsky had warned that it was a fatal methodological error to give finished definitions to unfinished processes or to impose dead formulas on a living organism in a process of transition – or rather in *a crisis of transition*.³⁶

These post-Soviet hybrids that "*in logical classification can be placed here and there and with a stricter correlation nowhere*" are clearly unprecedented in History. When Marxists refrain from providing a finished definition to an unfinished process, it does not mean that they declare their agnosticism in front of the unclassified and the monstrous, born in an unfinished process. They examine with the utmost care and study every event and moment of this process having as a compass materialist dialectics. "*Dialectics*", Trotsky warns, "*does not absolve the researcher from persistently investigating the facts; on the contrary, it demands it. In turn, it gives research thinking flexibility, helps it to confront ossified prejudices, equips it with invaluable analogies, and trains it in a bold spirit founded on prudence.*"³⁷

When a materialist dialectical investigation of a Hybrid in the epoch of transition and of the crisis of transition studies how this entity "*breaks down the organic boundaries of classification*" it does not end in hopeless confusion, in an impossibility to define and therefore into an abstract chaos. It seeks and can discover "*the active real interconnections and sequence of the living process.*"³⁸ How can this be achieved?

The key lies in the crucial sentence Trotsky is copying from Hegel right at the very beginning of his Notebooks: "*The negation of the concept within itself, in sich selbst, in itself.*"³⁹ Trotsky comments:

If we take the fabric of life as a complex knit, then the concept can be compared to individual loops of the knit. Each concept seems independent and complete (this is how formal logic works with them) whereas in reality each loop has two ends that connect it to the side loops. If you pull one end, the noose is untied – it is the dialectical negation of a concept in its limits, in its quasi-independence... The concept is not a closed circle but a noose, one end of which moves towards the past – the other towards the future. If you pull one end you can untie the noose but you can also tie it in a dead knot.⁴⁰

Trotsky starts from the web of *life*, natural-social life, not from some abstract Being. What interests him is the texture and plot of the tissue, the interconnection and sequence of the woven loops. These are the ones that isolate "*the focal points in the web*" of phenomena, distinguishing them and "*which assist in cognising*

35 S. Michael-Matsas, *Restoration or Revolution?*, Leon Publications, 1992 (in Greek), p. 238.

36 Ibid.

37 Trotsky, *Philosophical Notebooks*, p. 135.

38 Ibid., p. 138.

39 Ibid., p. 118.

40 Ibid., pp. 118-119.

and mastering it”, as Lenin describes the logical categories.⁴¹ Formal logic treats them and acts with them as if they are independent and complete, static, external to each other, without negativity, dead knots in the web. Dialectics captures their self-negation through the historical dynamics of the whole developing web of life.

Precisely for this reason, Trotsky pays particular attention to the approach and distinction made by Hegel between Understanding (*Verstand*) and Reason (*Vernunft*). Understanding separates the object of knowledge into its distinct determinations. Then, if it is not superseded by Reason, it fails to discover the unity of the individual determinations through their negative relations and regresses to their formalistic treatment, seeking their coherence in empirical data and failing in its goal. Negative dialectical Reason, on the other hand, manages to see the interconnectedness of determinations precisely in their contradiction, dissolving their static character.

Trotsky comments on the respective passages of the Hegelian “*Science of Logic*”:

Thinking in the process of cognition begins with differentiation, with instant photography, with the definition of boundaries-concepts, where the separate moments of the process are posed but from where the process itself escapes. These boundaries and concepts created in the process of cognition are then transformed into barriers to knowledge. Dialectics removes these barriers, revealing the relativity of immovable concepts, the transition to each other.⁴²

The transition of concepts from one to another is performed by negation. “But this negation,” Trotsky explains,

does not mean returning to a tabula rasa. The Reason already holds a) the concept and b) the recognition of it as unfounded. This recognition is tantamount to the necessity to construct a new concept... So in the field of thought (cognition) quantitative changes lead to qualitative and these transformations are not even evolutionary in nature but are accompanied by breaks of the gradual, that is, small or large mental catastrophes. To sum up, this means that the development of knowledge has also a dialectical character.⁴³

Elaborating on the Hegelian notion of a “*negation of the Concept within itself*”, Trotsky introduces the concept of catastrophe within the concept itself. The development of knowledge passes through ruptures, explosions, even catastrophes within concepts. In other words, it has a dialectical or, what Walter Benjamin had described as a “*destructive*” character. It opens roads where appears by destroying obstacles and overcoming deadlocks.

The concept in Trotsky is a noose in the net intertwined with the web of life – a noose whose one end moves to the past and the other to the future. To tie the noose to a knot or to untie it, its negation, depends on which end you pull. In this analogy the essential difference between Hegel and Trotsky can be seen.

41 Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*, p. 93.

42 Trotsky, *Philosophical Notebooks*, op. cit., p. 141.

43 Ibid., p. 144.

In Hegel, the *Logical* is the timeless within time, in the *Historical*.⁴⁴ In Trotsky, historical time is the weft of concepts, the Logical is the evolving plot of Historical time.

In Hegel, the thought of time transcends time. In Trotsky, historical time weaves thought.

In Hegel, the timeless determines the succession in time. In Trotsky, historical time dissolves, binds, supersedes concepts, it determines their logical sequence in succession.

The negation of the concept in Trotsky takes place towards the future. That is why the Logical is not *post festum*, it is the Historical *sub specie futuri*.

At this point we can point out Trotsky's unexpected encounter with a thinker of the second half of the 20th century who has also been misunderstood by friends and enemies: *Gilles Deleuze*. The loop concept with its edge in the future, which Trotsky sees, refers to the concept that according to Deleuze is "*the outline, formation, constellation of an upcoming event*."⁴⁵

From this vantage point, the development of the highest historical philosophical concept of the transitional epoch is "bound" or "unbound" by its end to be decided by the struggle of living forces during this transition: ***Barbarism or World Socialism***, the upcoming event of a future, classless, communist humanity prepared and self-emancipated by the Permanent Revolution.

Or, to put it in the words of Deleuze: "*The creation of concepts calls within itself to a future form, it calls for a new land and for a people that does not yet exist*."⁴⁶

The algebra of Revolution can guide us to solve the riddle of History.

Athens, March 5, 2021

150 years from the birth of Rosa Luxemburg

44 See Hegel, *Encyclopedia* #258.

45 G. Deleuze-F. Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, Minuit, 1991, p. 36.

46 Ibid., p. 104.



Revolutionary Marxism 2022

The doctrine which the [Communist] League represented from 1847 to 1852, and which at that time could be treated by the wise Philistines with a shrug of the shoulders as the hallucinations of the utter madcaps, as the secret doctrine of a few scattered sectarians, has now innumerable adherents in all civilised countries of the world, among those condemned to the Siberian mines as much as the gold diggers of California; and the founder of this doctrine, the most hated, most slandered man of his time, *Karl Marx*, was, when he died, the ever-sought-for, and ever-willing counsellor of the proletariat of both the old and the new world.

Friedrich Engels, "On the History of the Communist League", 1885

The dialectics of history were such that the theoretical victory of Marxism compelled its enemies to disguise *themselves* as Marxists. Liberalism, rotten within, tried to revive itself in the form of socialist *opportunism*.

V. I. Lenin, *The Historical Destiny of the Doctrine of Karl Marx*, 1913

We never had any such plans or intentions... This is the result of a tragi-comic misunderstanding... The idea of exporting a revolution is nonsense. Every country if it wants one will produce its own revolution, and if it doesn't, there will be no revolution.

Joseph V. Stalin, statement made to journalist Roy Howard, 1936

Those who cannot defend old positions will never conquer new ones.

Leon Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, 1939-1940

I consider Marxism the one philosophy of our time which we cannot go beyond... I have often remarked on the fact that an "anti-Marxist" argument is only the apparent rejuvenation of a pre-Marxist idea. A so-called "going beyond" Marxism will be at worst only a return to pre-Marxism; at best, only the rediscovery of a thought already contained in the philosophy which one believes he has gone beyond.

Jean Paul-Sartre, *Search for a Method*, 1960

Don't talk to me about Marx any more! I never want to hear anything about that man again. Ask someone whose job it is. Someone paid to do it. Ask the Marxist functionaries. Me, I've had enough of Marx.

Michel Foucault, statement made upon a request to talk about Marx, 1973