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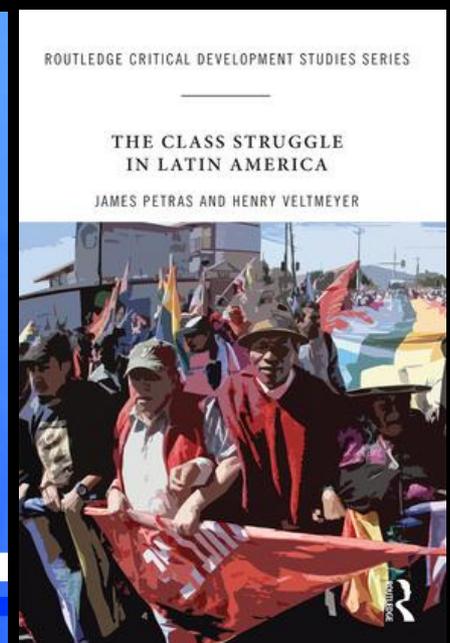
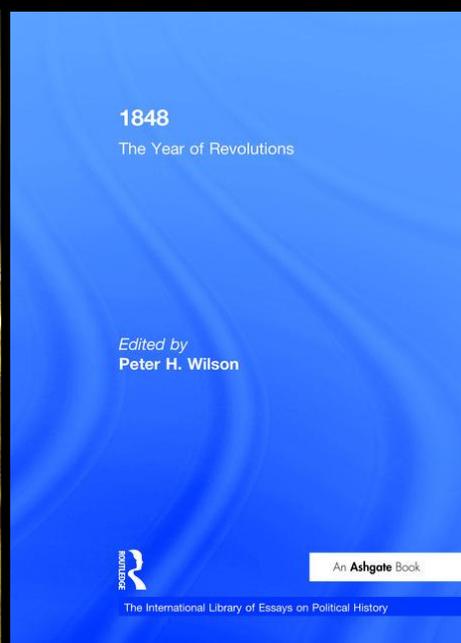
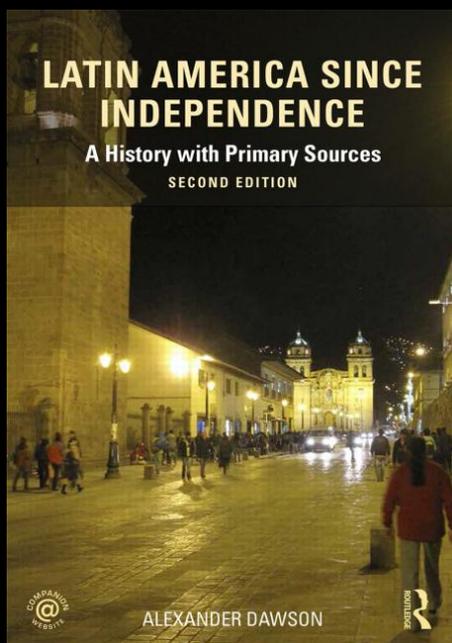
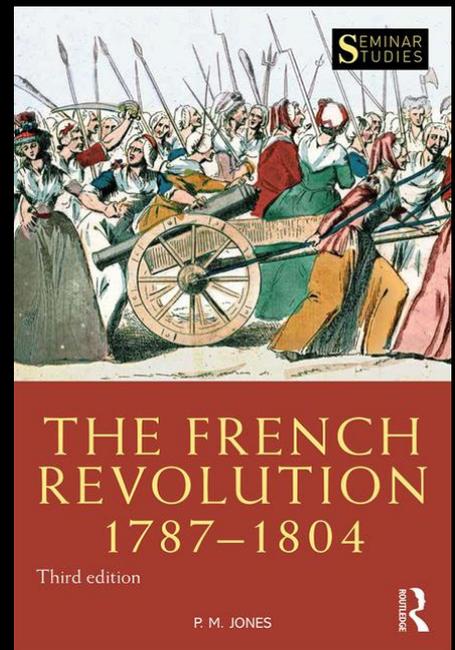
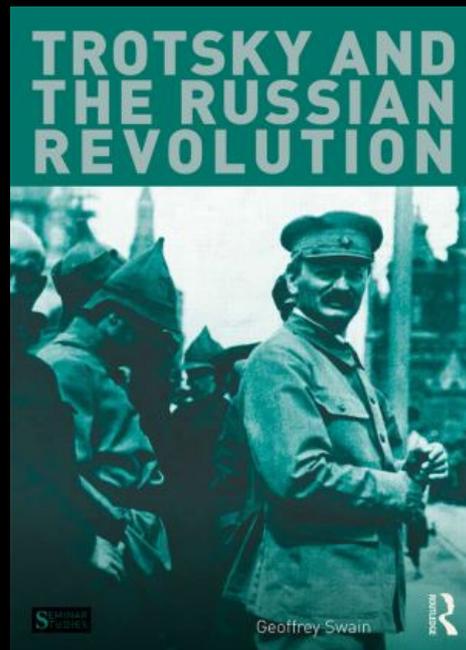
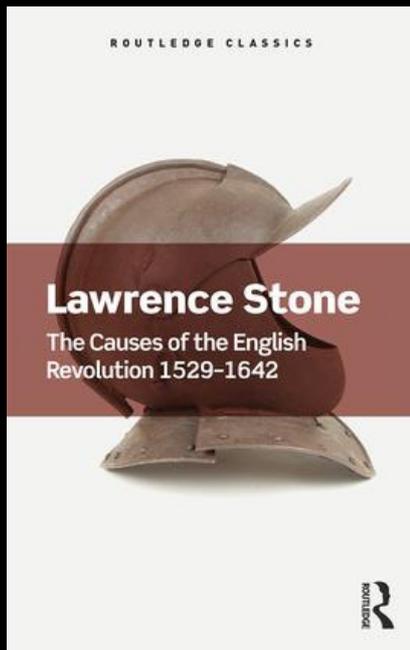
From *The Class Struggle in Latin America*
by James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer

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THEORIES OF REVOLUTION

In attacking the problem of revolution, as most others of major significance in history, we historians should think twice before we spurn the help offered by our colleagues in the social sciences, who have, as it happens, been particularly active in the last few years in theorizing about the typology, causes, and evolutionary patterns of this particular phenomenon. The purpose of this chapter is not to advance any new hypothesis, but to provide a summary view and critical examination of the work that has been going on.

The first necessity in any inquiry is a careful definition of terms: what is, and what is not, a revolution? According to one view, it is change effected by the use of violence in government, and/or regime, and/or society.¹ By *society* is meant the consciousness and the mechanics of communal solidarity, which may be tribal, peasant, kinship, national, and so on; by *regime* is meant the constitutional structure – democracy, oligarchy, monarchy; and by *government* is meant specific political and administrative institutions. Violence, it should be noted,

is not the same as force; it is force used with unnecessary intensity, unpredictably, and usually destructively.² This definition of revolution is a very broad one, and two historians of the French Revolution, Crane Brinton and Louis Gottschalk, would prefer to restrict the use of the word to the major political and social upheavals with which they are familiar, the 'Great Revolutions', as George S. Petee calls them.³

Even the wider definition allows the historian to distinguish between, on the one hand, the seizure of power that leads to a major restructuring of government or society, the establishment of a new set of values for distributive justice, and the replacement of the former élite by a new one, and on the other hand, the *coup d'état* involving no more than a change of ruling personnel by violence or threat of violence. This latter is the norm in Latin America, where it occurred thirty-one times in the ten years 1945–55. Merle Kling has arrived at a suggestive explanation of this Latin American phenomenon of chronic political instability, limited but frequent use of violence, and almost complete lack of social or institutional change. He argues that ownership of the principal economic resources, both agricultural and mineral, is concentrated in the hands of a tiny, very stable, élite of enormously wealthy monoculture landlords and mining capitalists. This élite is all-powerful and cannot be attacked by opposition groups within the country; externally, however, it is dependent on foreign interests for its markets and its capital. In this colonial situation of a foreign-supported, closed plutocracy, the main avenue of rapid upward social mobility for non-members of the élite leads, via the army, to the capture of the government machine, which is the only accessible source of wealth and power. This political instability is permitted by the élite on the condition that its own interests are undisturbed. Instability, limited violence, and the absence of social or institutional change are therefore all the product of the contradiction between the realities of a colonial economy run by a plutocracy and the façade of political sovereignty – between the real, stable power of the economic élite and the nominal, unstable control of politicians and generals.⁴

The looser definition of revolution thus suits both historians of major social change and historians of the palace *coup*. It does, however, raise certain difficulties. First, there is a wide range of changes of government by violence which are neither a mere substitution of personalities in positions of power nor a prelude to the restructuring of society; second, conservative counter-revolutions become almost impossible to fit into the model; and last, it remains hard to distinguish between colonial wars, civil wars, and social revolution.

To avoid these difficulties, an alternative formulation has recently been put forward by a group of social scientists working mainly at Princeton. They have dropped the word 'revolution' altogether and put 'internal war' in its place.⁵ This is defined as any attempt to alter state policy, rulers, or institutions by the use of violence in societies where violent competition is not the norm and where well-defined institutional patterns exist.⁶ This concept seems to be a logical consequence of the preoccupation of sociologists in recent years with a model of society in a stable, self-regulating state of perpetual equipoise. In this utopian world of universal harmony all forms of violent conflict are anomalies, to be treated alike as pathological disorders of a similar species. This is a model which, although it has its uses for analytical purposes, bears little relation to the reality familiar to the historian. It looks to a society without change, with universal consensus on values, with complete social harmony, and isolated from external threats; no approximation to such a society has ever been seen.

The crude opposite model is based on pure interest theory and postulates that the social order rests on physical coercion of the majority by a minority in order to distribute material rewards and power in an inequitable way. The state claims a monopoly of violence, and the consequent suppression of internal disorder is its *raison d'être*. Societies become unstable only because the relation between authority and force becomes unstable. It is obvious that this model bears no more relation to reality than its opposite, since society is in fact both a moral community held together by shared values, which give the state legitimacy, and also a system of control, employing in the last resort the

force necessary to prevent deviance and disorder. A more reasonable model is one which accepts that all societies are in a condition of uneasy equilibrium, whose stability is always threatened by a host of political conflicts, but which is usually held in balance partly by social norms and ideological beliefs and partly by physical sanctions.⁷ Instability may arise from material conflicts over the distribution of scarce economic resources or political power; or from a breakdown of values due to inadequate socialization of the young, exacerbated conflict between mutually incompatible roles, or group dissensus over norms. Such conflicts are usually settled by suitable adjustment mechanisms, and it is only in rare moments that a society is sufficiently shaken to undertake major structural alterations.

The first objection to the all-embracing formula of internal war is that, by covering all forms of physical conflict from strikes and terrorism to civil war, it isolates the use of violence from the normal process of societal adjustment. Though some of the users of the term express their awareness that the use of violence for political ends is a fairly common occurrence, the definition they have established in fact excludes all times and places where it is common. It thus cuts out most societies the world has ever known, including Western Europe in the middle ages and Latin America today. Second, it isolates one particular means, physical violence, from the political ends that it is designed to serve. Clausewitz's famous definition of external war is equally applicable to internal war, civil war, or revolution: 'War is not only a political act, but a real political instrument; a continuation of political transactions, an accomplishment of them by different means. That which remains peculiar to war relates only to the peculiar nature of its means.'⁸

It is perfectly true that any means by which society exercises pressure or control, whether it is administrative organization, constitutional law, economic interest or physical force, can be a fruitful field of study in its own right, so long as its students remain aware that they are looking at only one part of a larger whole. It is also true that there is something peculiar about violence, if only because of man's highly ambivalent attitude towards the killing of his own species.

Somehow he regards physical force as different in kind from, say, economic exploitation or psychological manipulation as a means of exercising power over others. But this distinction is not one of much concern to the historian of revolution, in which violence is a normal and natural occurrence. The concept of internal war is too broad in its comprehension of all types of violence from civil wars to strikes, too narrow in its restriction to normally non-violent societies, too limited in its concern with one of many means, too arbitrary in its separation of this means from the ends in view, and too little concerned with the complex roots of social unrest to be of much practical value to him.

The most fruitful typology of revolution is that of Chalmers Johnson, set out in a pamphlet that deserves to be widely read.⁹ He sees six types, identified by the targets selected for attack, whether the government personnel, the political regime, or the community as a social unit; by the nature of the carriers of revolution, whether a mass or an élite; and particularly by the goals and the ideologies, whether reformist, eschatological, nostalgic, nation-forming, élitist or nationalist. The first type, the *jacquerie*, is a spontaneous mass peasant rising, usually carried out in the name of the traditional authorities, Church and King, and with the limited aims of purging the local or national élites. Examples are the English Peasant Revolt of 1381, Kett's Rebellion in Norfolk of 1549, and the Pugachev Rebellion in Russia in 1773–5. The second type, the *millenarian rebellion*, is similar to the first but with the added feature of a utopian dream, inspired by a living messiah. This type can be found at all times, in all parts of the world, from the Florentine Revolution led by Savonarola in 1494, to the Anabaptist rebellion in Munster led by John Mathijs and John Beukels in 1533–1535, to the Sioux Ghost-Dance Rebellion inspired by the Paiute prophet, Wovoka, in 1890. It has attracted a good deal of attention from historians in recent years, partly because the career of Hitler offered overwhelming proof of the enormous historical significance of a charismatic leader, and partly because of a growing interest in the ideas of Max Weber.¹⁰ The third type is the *anarchistic rebellion*, the nostalgic reaction to progressive change, involving a romantic

idealization of the old order; the Pilgrimage of Grace and the Vendée are examples of this.

The fourth is that very rare phenomenon, the *Jacobin Communist revolution*. This type of revolution can occur only in a highly centralized state with good communications and a large capital city, and its target is government, regime, and society – the lot. The result is likely to be the creation of a new national consciousness under centralized, military authority, a re-distribution of property and authority, and the erection of a more rational, and hence more efficient, social and bureaucratic order on the ruins of the old ramshackle structure of privilege, nepotism, and corruption.

The fifth type is the *conspiratorial coup d'état*, the planned work of a tiny élite fired by an oligarchic, sectarian ideology. This qualifies as a revolutionary type only if it in fact anticipates a mass movement and inaugurates social change – for example, the Nasser Revolution in Egypt or the Castro Revolution in Cuba; it is thus clearly distinguished from the palace revolt, assassination, dynastic succession-conflict, strike, banditry, and other forms of violence, which are all subsumed under the 'internal war' rubric.

Finally, there is the *militarized mass insurrection*, a new phenomenon of the twentieth century in that it is a deliberately planned mass revolutionary war, guided by a dedicated élite. The outcome of guerilla warfare is determined by political attitudes, not military strategy or material, for the rebels are wholly dependent on broad popular support. In all cases on record the ideology that attracts the mass following has been a combination of xenophobic nationalism and Marxism, with by far the greater stress on the former. This type of struggle has occurred in Yugoslavia, China, Algeria, and Vietnam.

Although, like any schematization of the historical process, this six-fold typology is concerned with ideal types, and although in practice individual revolutions may sometimes display characteristics of several different types, the fact remains that this is much the most satisfactory classification we have so far; it is one that working historians can recognize and use with profit. The one obvious criticism is semantic, an objection to the use of the phrase 'Jacobin Communist revolution'.¹¹ Some of Johnson's examples are Communist, such as

the Russian or Chinese Revolutions; others are Jacobin but not Communist, such as the French Revolution or the Turkish Revolution of 1908–22. It would be better to revert to Pettee's category of 'Great Revolutions', and treat Communist revolutions as a sub-category, one type, but not the only type, of the modernizing revolutionary process.

Given this classification and definition of revolution, what are its root causes? Here everyone is agreed in making a sharp distinction between long-run, underlying causes – the preconditions, which create a potentially explosive situation and can be analysed on a comparative basis – and immediate, incidental factors – the precipitants, which trigger the outbreak and which may be nonrecurrent, personal, and fortuitous. This effectively disposes of the objections of those historians whose antipathy to conceptual schematization takes the naïve form of asserting the uniqueness of each historical event.

One of the first in the field of model-building was Crane Brinton, who as long ago as 1938 put forward a series of uniformities common to the four great Western revolutions: English, French, American, and Russian. These included an economically advancing society, growing class and status antagonisms, an alienated intelligentsia, a psychologically insecure and politically inept ruling class, and a governmental financial crisis.¹²

The subjectivity, ambiguity, and partial self-contradiction of this and other analyses of the causes of specific revolutions – for example the French Revolution – have been cruelly shown up by Harry Eckstein.¹³ He has pointed out that commonly adduced hypotheses run the spectrum of particular conditions, moving from the intellectual (inadequate political socialization, conflicting social myths, a corrosive social philosophy, alienation of the intellectuals) to the economic (increasing poverty, rapid growth, imbalance between production and distribution, long-term growth plus short-term recession) to the social (resentment due to restricted élite circulation, confusion due to excessive élite recruitment, anomie due to excessive social mobility, conflict due to the rise of new social classes) to the political (bad government, divided government, weak government, oppressive

government). Finally there are explanations on the level of general process, such as rapid social change, erratic social change, or a lack of harmony between the state structure and society, the rulers and the ruled. None of these explanations are invalid in themselves, but they are often difficult or impossible to reconcile one with the other, and are so diverse in their range and variety as to be virtually impossible to fit into an ordered, analytical framework. What, then, is to be done?

Fundamental to all analyses, whether by historians like Brinton and Gottschalk or by political scientists like Johnson and Eckstein, is the recognition of a lack of harmony between the social system on the one hand and the political system on the other. This situation Johnson calls *dysfunction*, a word derived from the structural-functional equilibrium model of the sociologists. This dysfunction may have many causes, some of which are merely random or cyclical, such as may develop because of personal weaknesses in hereditary kingships or single-party regimes. In these cases, the revolution will not take on serious proportions, and will limit itself to attacks on the governing élite, or at most the governing institutions, leaving regime and society intact. In most cases, however, including all those of real importance, the dysfunction is the result of some new and developing process, as a result of which certain social sub-systems find themselves in a condition of relative deprivation. Rapid economic growth, imperial conquest, new metaphysical beliefs, and important technological changes are the four commonest factors involved, in that order. If the process of change is sufficiently slow and sufficiently moderate, the dysfunction may not arise to dangerous levels. Alternatively, the élite may adjust to the new situation with sufficient rapidity and skill to ride out the storm and retain popular confidence. But if the change is rapid and profound, it may cause the sense of deprivation, alienation and anomie and spread into many sectors of society at once, causing what Johnson calls *multiple dysfunction*, which may be all but incurable within the existing political system.

In either case the second vital element in creating a revolutionary situation is the condition and attitude of the entrenched élite, a

factor on which Eckstein rightly lays great stress. The élite may lose its manipulative skill, or its military superiority, or its self-confidence, or its cohesion; it may become estranged from the non-élite, or overwhelmed by a financial crisis; it may be incompetent, or weak or brutal. Any combination of two or more of these features will be dangerous. What is ultimately fatal, however, is the compounding of its errors by intransigence. If it fails to anticipate the need for reform, if it blocks all peaceful, constitutional means of social adjustment, then it unites the various deprived elements in single-minded opposition to it, and drives them down the narrow road to violence. It is this process of polarization into two coherent groups or alliances of what are naturally and normally a series of fractional and shifting tensions and conflicts within a society that both Peter Amman and Wilbert Moore see as the essential preliminary to the outbreak of a Jacobin revolution.¹⁴ To conclude, therefore, revolution becomes possible when a condition of multiple dysfunction meets an intransigent élite: just such a conjunction occurred in the decades immediately before the English, the French, and the Russian Revolutions.

Revolution only becomes probable (Johnson might say 'certain'), however, if certain special factors intervene: the 'precipitants' or 'accelerators'. Of these, the three most common are the emergence of an inspired leader or prophet; the formation of a secret, military, revolutionary organization; and the crushing defeat of the armed forces in foreign war. This last is of critical importance since it not only shatters the prestige of the ruling élite, but also undermines the morale and discipline of the soldiers and thus opens the way to the violent overthrow of the existing government.

The defects of Johnson's 1964 model were partly overcome by his revision of 1966. The main defect was that it concentrated too much on objective structural conditions, and attempted to relate these conditions directly to political actions. In the new version far greater scope is allowed for ideas and values as the mediating factor between the conditions and the response. Johnson now recognizes that a social system may be upset just as much by changes in values – for example, the spread of new ideas either coming from 'marginal men' or from

innovating élites – as by changes in the environment – for example, changes in industrial techniques and organization, modern medicine or foreign trade. He unnecessarily complicates his categories by sub-dividing them into exogenous and indogenous, which is largely meaningless. For what does it matter whether the technology or the idea is home grown or imported? All the same, this new emphasis on both environment and values makes it possible to explain why in the past similar political activity has occurred in different environmental conditions, and different activity in similar conditions. An approach which lays equal stress on such things as anomie, alienation of the intellectuals, frustrated popular aspirations, élite estrangement, and loss of élite self-confidence, is more likely to produce a satisfactory historical explanation than is one that sticks to the objective social situation.

In his later book Johnson goes far to remedy the second major defect of his 1964 model, namely its determinist neglect of the role of the unique and the personal. He seemed to regard his accelerators as automatic triggers, ignoring the area of unpredictable personal choice that is always left to the ruling élite and to the revolutionary leaders, even in a situation of multiple dysfunction exacerbated by an accelerator. Revolution is never inevitable – or rather the only evidence of its inevitability is that it actually happens. Consequently the only way to prove this point is to indulge in just the kind of hypothetical argument that historians prudently try to avoid. Thus it is still just possible that modernization may take place in Morocco and India without revolution. The modernization and industrialization of Germany and Britain took place without revolution in the nineteenth century (though it can be argued that in the latter case the process was slow by twentieth-century standards, and that, as is now becoming all too apparent, the modernization was far from complete). Some think that a potentially revolutionary situation in the United States in the 1930s was avoided by shrewd political action. In his 1966 model Johnson recognized the role of the personality as a semi-independent variable in the social system, free to operate within the limits roped off and labelled ‘crime’ or ‘mental sickness’.

One of the unresolved difficulties of the Johnson model is that it makes no allowance for the fact that political actions taken to remedy dysfunction often precipitate change themselves. This produces the paradoxical hypothesis that measures designed to restore equilibrium in fact upset equilibrium. Because he begins with his structural-functional equilibrium model, Johnson is a victim of the fallacy of intended consequences. As often as not in history it is the *unintended* consequences that really matter: to mention but one example, it was Louis XVI's belated and half-hearted attempts at reform that provoked the aristocratic reaction, which in turn opened the way to the bourgeois, the peasant, and the sans-culotte revolutions. Finally the dysfunction concept is not altogether easy to handle in a concrete historical case. If societies are regarded as being in a constant state of multiple tension, then some degree of dysfunction is always present. Some group is always in a state of relative deprivation due to the inevitable process of social change.

Recognition of this fact leads Eckstein to point out the importance of forces working *against* revolution. Historians, particularly those formed in the Western liberal tradition, are reluctant to admit that ruthless efficient repression – as opposed to bumbling, half-hearted repression – involving the physical destruction of leading revolutionaries and effective control of the media of communication, can crush incipient revolutionary movements. Repression is particularly effective when governments know what to look for, when they have before their eyes the unfortunate example of other governments overthrown by revolutionaries elsewhere. Reaction, in fact, is just as infectious as revolution. Moreover, diversion of energy and attention to successful – as opposed to unsuccessful – foreign war can ward off serious internal trouble. Quietist – as opposed to activist – religious movements may serve as the opiate of the people, as Halévy suggested about Methodism in England. Bread and circuses may distract popular attention. Timely – as opposed to untimely – political concessions may win over moderate opinion and isolate the extremists.

Basing himself on this suggestive analysis, Eckstein produces a paradigm for universal application. He sees four positive variables – élite

inefficiency, disorienting social process, subversion, and available rebel facilities – and four negative variables – diversionary mechanisms, available incumbent facilities, adjustive mechanisms, and effective repression. Each type of internal war, and each step of each type, can, he suggests, be explained in terms of these eight variables. While this may be true, it is fair to point out that some of the variables are themselves the product of more deep-seated factors, others mere questions of executive action that may be determined by the accidents of personality. Disruptive social process is a profound cause; élite inefficiency a behaviour pattern; effective repression a function of will; facilities the by-product of geography. One objection to the Eckstein paradigm is therefore that it embraces different levels of explanation and fails to maintain the fundamental distinction between preconditions and precipitants. Second, it concentrates on the factors working for or against the successful manipulation of violence rather than on the underlying factors working to produce a revolutionary potential. This is because the paradigm is intended to apply to all forms of internal war rather than to revolution proper, and because all that the various forms of internal war have in common is the use of violence. It is impossible to tell how serious these criticisms are until the paradigm has been applied to a particular historical revolution. Only then will its value become apparent.

If we take the behaviourist approach, then a primary cause of revolutions is the emergence of an obsessive revolutionary mentality. But how closely does the subjective mentality relate to the objective material circumstances? In every revolutionary situation one finds a group of men – fanatics, extremists, zealots – so convinced of their own righteousness and of the urgent need to create a new Jerusalem on earth (whether formally religious or secular in inspiration is irrelevant) that they are prepared to smash through the normal restraint of habit, custom, and convention. Such men were the seventeenth-century English Puritans, the eighteenth-century French Jacobins, the early twentieth-century Russian Bolsheviks, and the late twentieth-century Maoists in Peking, Paris and New York. But what makes such men is far from certain. What generates such ruthlessness

in curbing evil, such passion for discipline and order? Rapid social mobility, both horizontal and vertical, and particularly urbanization, certainly produces a sense of rootlessness and anxiety. In highly stratified societies even some of the newly-risen elements may find themselves under stress.¹⁵ While some of the *arrivistes* are happily absorbed in their new strata, others remain uneasy and resentful. If they are snubbed and rebuffed by the older members of the status group to which they aspire by reason of their new wealth and position, they are likely to become acutely conscious of their social inferiority, and may be driven either to adopt a pose *plus royaliste que le roi* or to dream of destroying the whole social order. In the latter case they may try to allay their sense of insecurity by imposing their norms and values by force upon society at large. This is especially the case if there is available a moralistic ideology like Puritanism or Marxism to which they can attach themselves, and which provides them with unshakable confidence in their own rectitude.

But why does the individual react in one particular way rather than another? Some would argue that the character of the revolutionary is formed by sudden ideological conversion in adolescence or early adult life (to Puritanism, Jacobinism, or Bolshevism) as a refuge from this anxiety state.¹⁶ What is not acceptable is the fashionable conservative cliché that the revolutionary and the reformer are merely the chance product of unfortunate psychological difficulties in childhood. It is possible that this is the mechanism by which such feelings are generated, though there is increasing evidence of the continued plasticity of human character, until at any rate post-adolescence, and of the happy and well-adjusted childhood of most of the modern radicals. In any case, this crude psychological reductionism cannot explain why some individuals respond to stress by adopting radical ideas and others live blamelessly conformist lives. The other main objection to this theory is that it fails to explain why these particular attitudes become common only in certain classes and age groups at certain times and in certain places. This failure strongly suggests that the cause of this state of mind lies not in the personal maladjustment of the individuals or their parents, but in the social conditions that created that maladjustment.

Talcott Parsons treats disaffection or 'alienation' as a generalized phenomenon that may manifest itself in crime, alcoholism, drug addiction, daytime fantasies, religious enthusiasm, or serious political agitation. To use Robert Merton's formulation, ritualism and retreatism are two possible psychological escape-routes; innovation and rebellion two others.¹⁷ Gripped by frustration generated by environmental circumstances, the individual may get drunk, beat his wife, retire to a monastery, write a book, throw a bomb, or start a revolution.

Even if we accept a generally behaviourist approach (which I do), the fact remains that many of the underlying causes both of the alienation of the revolutionaries and of the weakness of the incumbent élite are economic in origin; and it is in this area that some interesting work has centred. In particular a fresh look has been taken at the contradictory models of Marx and de Tocqueville, the one claiming that popular revolution is a product of increasing misery, the other that it is a product of increasing prosperity. Two economists, Sir Arthur Lewis and Mancur Olson, have pointed out that because of their basic social stability, both pre-industrial and highly industrialized societies are relatively free from revolutionary disturbance.¹⁸ In the former societies people accept with little question the accepted rights and obligations of family, class, and caste. Misery, oppression, and social injustice are passively endured as inevitable features of life on earth. It is in societies experiencing rapid economic growth that the trouble usually occurs. Lewis, who is thinking mostly about the newly emerging countries, primarily of Africa, regards the sense of frustration that leads to revolution as a consequence first of the dislocation of the old status patterns by the emergence of four new classes – the proletariat, the capitalist employers, the urban commercial and professional middle class, and the professional politicians; and second of the disturbance of the old income patterns by the sporadic and patchy impact of economic growth, which creates new wealth and new poverty in close and conspicuous juxtaposition. Both phenomena he regards as merely transitional, since in a country fully developed economically there are strong tendencies toward the reduction of inequalities of opportunity, income, and status.

This model matches fairly well the only detailed analysis of a historical revolution in which a conscious effort has been made to apply modern sociological methods. In his recent study of the Vendée, Charles Tilly argues that a counter-revolutionary situation was the consequence of special tensions created by the immediate juxtaposition of, on one hand, parish clergy closely identified with the local communities, great absentee landlords and old-fashioned subsistence farming; and, on the other, a large-scale textile industry on the putting-out system and increasing bourgeois competition.¹⁹ Though the book is flawed by a tendency to take a ponderous sociological hammer to crack a simple little historical nut, it is none the less a suggestive and successful pioneering example of the application of new hypotheses and techniques to historical material.

Olson has independently developed a more elaborate version of the Lewis theory. He argues that revolutionaries are *déclassé* and freed from the social bonds of family, profession, village or manor; and that these individuals are the product of rapid economic growth, which creates both *nouveaux riches* and *nouveaux pauvres*. The former, usually middle-class and urban artisans, are better off economically, but are disoriented, rootless, and restless; the latter may be workers whose wages have failed to keep pace with inflation, workers in technologically outdated and therefore declining industries, or the unemployed in a society in which the old cushions of the extended family and the village have gone, and in which the new cushion of social security has not yet been created. The initial growth phase may well cause a decline in the standard of living of the majority because of the need for relatively enormous forced savings for reinvestment. The result is a revolution caused by the widening gap between expectations – social and political for the new rich, economic for the new poor – and the realities of everyday life.

A sociologist, James C. Davis, agrees with Olson that the fundamental impetus towards a revolutionary situation is generated by rapid economic growth but he associates such growth with a generally rising rather than a generally falling standard of living, and argues that the moment of potential revolution is reached only when the

long-term phase of growth is followed by a short-term phase of economic stagnation or decline.²⁰ The result of this 'J-curve', as he calls it, is that steadily soaring expectations, newly created by the period of growth, shoot further and further ahead of actual satisfaction of needs. Successful revolution is the work neither of the destitute nor of the well-satisfied, but of those whose actual situation is improving less rapidly than they expect.

These economic models have much in common, and their differences can be explained by the fact that Lewis and Olson are primarily concerned with the long-term economic forces creating instability, and Davis with the short-term economic factors that may precipitate a crisis. Moreover their analyses apply to different kinds of economic growth, of which three have recently been identified by W. W. Rostow and Barry Supple: there is the expansion of production in a pre-industrial society, which may not cause any important technological, ideological, social, or political change; there is the phase of rapid growth, involving major changes of every kind; and there is the sustained trend towards technological maturity.²¹ Historians have been quick to see that these models, particularly that of Rostow, can be applied only to a limited number of historical cases. The trouble is not so much that in any specific case the phases – particularly the last two – tend to merge into one another, but that changes in the various sectors occur at irregular and unexpected places on the time-scale in different societies. In so far as there is any validity in the division of the stages of growth into these three basic types, the revolutionary model of Olson and Lewis is confined to the second; that of Davis is applicable to all three.

The Davis model fits the history of Western Europe quite well, for it looks as if in conditions of extreme institutional and ideological rigidity the first type of economic growth may produce frustrations of a very serious kind. Revolutions broke out all over Europe in the 1640s, twenty years after a secular growth phase had come to an end.²² C. E. Labrousse has demonstrated the existence of a similar economic recession in France from 1778,²³ and from 1914 the Russian economy was dislocated by the war effort after many years of rapid growth.

Whatever its limitations in any particular situation, the J-curve of actual satisfaction of needs is an analytical tool that historians can usefully bear in mind as they probe the violent social upheavals of the past.

As de Tocqueville pointed out, this formula of advance followed by retreat is equally applicable to other sectors. Trouble arises if a phase of liberal governmental concessions is followed by a phase of political repression; a phase of fairly open recruitment channels into the élite followed by a phase of aristocratic reaction and a closing of ranks; a phase of weakening status barriers by a phase of reassertion of privilege. The J-curve is applicable to other than purely economic satisfactions, and the apex of the curve is the point at which underlying causes, the preconditions, merge with immediate factors, the precipitants. The recipe for revolution is thus the creation of new expectations by economic improvement and some social and political reforms, followed by economic recession, governmental reaction, and aristocratic resurgence, which widen the gap between expectations and reality.

All these attempts to relate dysfunction to relative changes in economic prosperity and aspirations are hampered by two things, of which the first is the extreme difficulty in ascertaining the facts. It is never easy to discover precisely what is happening to the distribution of wealth in a given society. Even now, even in highly developed Western societies with massive bureaucratic controls and quantities of statistical data, there is no agreement about the facts. Some years ago it was confidently believed that in both Britain and the United States incomes were being levelled, and that extremes of both wealth and poverty were being steadily eliminated. Today, no one quite knows what is happening in either country.²⁴ And if this is true now, still more is it true of societies in the past about which the information is fragmentary and unreliable.

Second, even if they can be clearly demonstrated, economic trends are only one part of the problem. Historians are increasingly realizing that the psychological responses to changes in wealth and power are not only not precisely related to, but are politically more significant

than, the material changes themselves. As Marx himself realized at one stage, dissatisfaction with the *status quo* is not determined by absolute realities but by relative expectations. 'Our desires and pleasures spring from society; we measure them, therefore, by society, and not by the objects which serve for their satisfaction. Because they are of a social nature, they are of a relative nature.'²⁵ Frustration may possibly result from a rise and subsequent relapse in real income. But it is perhaps more likely to be caused by a rise in aspirations that outstrips the rise in real income; or by a rise in the *relative* economic position in society of the group in question, followed by a period in which its real income continues to grow, but less fast than that of other groups around it. Alternatively it may represent a rise and then decline of status, largely unrelated to real income; or if there is a relationship between status and real income, it may be an inverse one. For example, social scientists seeking to explain the rise of the radical right in the United States in the early 1950s and again in the early 1960s attribute it to a combination of great economic prosperity and an aggravated sense of insecurity of status.²⁶ Whether or not this is a general formula for right-wing rather than left-wing revolutionary movements is not yet clear.

Moreover the problem is further complicated by an extension of reference-group theory.²⁷ Human satisfaction is related not to existing conditions but to the condition of a social group against which the individual measures his situation. In an age of mass communications and the wide distribution of cheap radio receivers, even among the impoverished illiterate of the world, knowledge of high consumption standards elsewhere spreads rapidly, and as a result the reference group may be in another, more highly developed, country or even continent. Under these circumstances revolutionary conditions may be created before industrialization has got properly under way.

All modern theories of revolutionary behaviour are based on the 'relative deprivation' hypothesis that it is generated by the gap between expectations and the perceptions of reality. The psychological chain of causation links the gap to frustration, and frustration to aggression. This is the central theme of Professor Gurr's study of revolutions.²⁸

Although darkened by obfuscating jargon, much of which conceals solemn statements of the obvious, although peppered with a maddening array of numbered hypotheses and corollaries, and although disfigured with bewildering charts full of boxes and arrows running every way, the book nevertheless has interesting things to say. Relative deprivation may take the form of a gap between expectations and perceived capabilities over three general sets of values: 'welfare', meaning economic conditions; political power; and social status – the three old Weberian categories. The gap may open up through *decremental deprivation*, involving stable expectations and a decline of capabilities. This may be caused by a general economic depression, or more likely by selective economic impoverishment of a specific group, for example, English hand-loom weavers in the early nineteenth century, or parish clergy in the twentieth. Or it may be caused by political repression and the exclusion of a certain group from political participation; or it may be caused by a relative status decline due to the rise of competing groups. The second type is *progressive deprivation*, in which a long period of improvement is followed by a sudden downward turn in capabilities, while expectations go on rising because of past experience. This is Davis's 'J-curve', now extended to more than merely material circumstances. The third is *aspirational deprivation*, in which expectations rise while capabilities remain the same. This is fairly rare in the past, although the Reformation may be looked at in this light, in the terms of rising lay expectations of spiritual zeal from the clergy, which the latter could not satisfy. Today it is common among under-developed countries, as populations learn about the benefits of modernization elsewhere. The intensity of the deprivation varies with the size of the gap; with the importance the group ascribes to the value affected – the poor attach most value to economic conditions, the rich to political participation; with the extent that alternative satisfactions are available; and with the duration of the existence of the gap.

The factors causing a rise of expectations are identified as urbanization, literacy, the demonstration effect of striking improvement elsewhere, new ideologies, especially of a chiliastic character, and an inconsistency between the three variables of wealth, power and status.

G. Lenski has laid great emphasis on this last factor, itself a product of social mobility.²⁹ The upwardly mobile tend to find that their status and power are not commensurate with their wealth, since the old élites will not accept them as social equals or share power with them. The downwardly mobile retain their status for a while, but lose wealth and power. In either case the discrepancy breeds anxiety, the anxiety resentment, and the resentment aggression which may find an outlet in radical ideologies and actions. Gurr points to the 'zero-sum' aspect of the distribution of all goods. Even economic resources are valued largely in relative terms, compared with the wealth of close reference groups, and power and status are relative by definition; the more of them obtained by one person or group, the less of them is available for others. On the other hand moderation in the appetite of the élite, some modesty in the display of affluence, some restraint in its assertions of social superiority, some tolerance of élite circulation from below, all help to dampen the fires of resentment.

All this is quite helpful as far as it goes, in identifying the causes of resentment in a social system and in devising ways of assessing its intensity and spread. But Gurr is not particularly helpful on the coercive balance of physical force between élite and dissidents, or on the role of ideology, or on the complex interaction of all these factors to generate a revolution. In particular he ignores the 'X factor' of personality and choice, and his model is so mechanical and schematized as to be hard to apply to any given situation. His main contribution is his analysis of the types and causes of relative deprivation.

Another recent theory regards the 'Great Revolutions' as stages in the modernization of under-developed societies.³⁰ The central feature of a pre-revolutionary situation is the unwillingness or incapacity of the ruling élite to carry out the transformation needed to raise productivity, increase trade, expand education, redistribute and exploit capital resources. The principal consequence of the revolution is to strengthen the governmental machinery to carry out these tasks. The modernization theory of revolution looks suspiciously like the Marxist bourgeois revolution in a new guise. It is a theory which fits late twentieth-century revolutions in backward countries well enough,

but it is difficult to accommodate the older revolutions to the model. In what ways were the pre-revolutionary governments of Charles I and Louis XVI failing in their modernization functions? In what ways were the Parliamentary leaders of 1640 or 1789 trying to innovate with this purpose in mind? The recent stress on the political and modernizing aspects of the causes and consequences of revolution is a healthy antidote to the excessive social and economic determinism of some earlier theorists, but it under-plays the very important components of social change and ideological innovation.³¹ Nor does it explain the strong egalitarian component in past 'Great Revolutions', including the Bolshevik, with insistent demands for greater participation in decision-making, which is hardly the way to stream-line the state bureaucracy for decisive, modernizing action. One-party dictatorship is a surer way to achieve results than the fumbblings of democracy in its infancy.

The last area in which some new theoretical work has been done is in the formulation of hypotheses about the social stages of a 'Great Revolution'. One of the best attacks on this problem was made by Crane Brinton, who was thinking primarily about the French Revolution, but who extended his comparisons to the three other major Western revolutionary movements. He saw the first phase as dominated by moderate bourgeois elements; their supersession by the radicals; a reign of terror; a Thermidorian reaction; and the establishment of strong central authority under military rule to consolidate the limited gains of the revolution. In terms of mass psychology he compared revolution with a fever that rises in intensity, affecting nearly all parts of the body politic, and then dies away.

A much cruder and more elementary model has been advanced by an historian of the revolutions of 1848, Peter Amman.³² He sees the modern state as an institution holding a monopoly of physical force, administration, and justice over a wide area, a monopoly dependent more on habits of obedience than on powers of coercion. Revolution may therefore be defined as a breakdown of the monopoly due to a failure of these habits of obedience. It begins with the emergence of two or more foci of power, and ends with the elimination of all but

one. Amman includes the possibility of 'suspended revolution', with the existence of two or more foci not yet in violent conflict.

This model admittedly avoids some of the difficulties raised by more elaborate classifications of revolution: how to distinguish a *coup d'état* from a revolution; how to define the degrees of social change; how to accommodate the conservative counter-revolution, and so on. It certainly offers some explanation of the progress of revolution from stage to stage as the various power blocks that emerge on the overthrow of the incumbent regime are progressively eliminated; and it explains why the greater the public participation in the revolution, the wider the break with the habits of obedience, and therefore the slower the restoration of order and centralized authority. But it throws the baby out with the bathwater. It is impossible to fit any decentralized traditional society, or any modern federal society, into the model. Moreover, even where it might be applicable, it offers no framework for analysing the roots of revolution, no pointers for identifying the foci of power, no means of distinguishing between the various revolutionary types, and its notion of 'suspended revolution' is little more than verbal evasion.

Though it is set out in a somewhat confused, over-elaborate, and unnecessarily abstract form, the most convincing description of the social stages of revolution is that outlined by Rex D. Hopper.³³ He sees four stages. The first is characterized by indiscriminate, uncoordinated mass unrest and dissatisfaction, the result of dim recognition that traditional values no longer satisfy current aspirations. The next stage sees this vague unease beginning to coalesce into organized opposition with defined goals, an important characteristic being a shift of allegiance by the intellectuals from the incumbents to the dissidents, the advancement of an 'evil men' theory, and its abandonment in favour of an 'evil institutions' theory. At this stage there emerge two types of leaders: the prophet, who sketches the shape of the new utopia upon which men's hopes can focus, and the reformer, working methodically toward specific goals. The third, the formal stage, sees the beginning of the revolution proper. Motives and objectives are clarified, organization is built up, a statesman-leader emerges. Then

conflicts between the left and the right of the revolutionary movement become acute, and the radicals take over from the moderates. The fourth and last stage sees the legalization of the revolution. It is a product of psychological exhaustion as the reforming drive burns itself out, moral enthusiasm wanes, and economic distress increases. The administrators take over, strong central government is established, and society is reconstructed on lines that embody substantial elements of the old system. The result falls far short of the utopian aspirations of the early leaders, but it succeeds in meshing aspirations with values by partly modifying both, and so allows the reconstruction of a firm social order.

Some of the writing of contemporary social scientists are ingenious feats of verbal juggling in an esoteric language, performed around the totem pole of an abstract model, surrounded as far as the eye can see by the arid wastes of terminological definitions and mathematical formulae. Small wonder the historian finds it hard to digest the gritty diet of this neo-scholasticism, as it has been aptly called. The more historically-minded of the social scientists, however, have a good deal to offer. The history of history, as well as of science, shows that advances depend partly on the accumulation of factual information, but rather more on the formulation of hypotheses that reveal the hidden relationships and common properties of apparently distinct phenomena. For, all their faults, social scientists can supply a corrective to the antiquarian fact-grubbing to which historians are so prone; they can direct attention to problems of general relevance, and away from the sterile triviality of so much historical research; they can ask new questions and suggest new ways of looking at old ones; they can supply new categories, and as a result may suggest new ideas.

NOTES

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3

Living the revolution

ENDING THE QUARREL WITH LENIN

Trotsky arrived in Petrograd on 4 May 1917 and made straight for the Smolny Institute, the home of the Petrograd Soviet. For Trotsky, the prospects for the revolution were quite straightforward: workers should take up where they had left off in 1905 and use the power they exercised via the Soviet to establish a working-class government. As he understood it, during February it had been the workers who had ensured the success of the revolution by seizing control of the postal and telegraph services, the wireless office, all the railway stations and the printing works; if they were prepared to act in this way again, political power could be theirs. He was therefore delighted to discover that Lenin also favoured the principle of the Soviet taking power, and had abandoned the wariness that had marred their co-operation in 1905.

Trotsky's late arrival in Petrograd meant he had a poor understanding of events within the Bolshevik Party during March and April 1917, when the issue of Soviet power had first been raised. When the Tsar was overthrown, the first Bolsheviks to emerge from underground to establish a temporary Bureau of the Central Committee opposed the Provisional Government then being established by the liberals and demanded 'a revolutionary provisional government'. When Kamenev and Stalin returned from exile in Siberia in mid-March they pulled the Central Committee away from this radical stance and called for a dual strategy of close supervision of the Provisional Government combined with moves gradually to develop the Petrograd Soviet into 'the beginnings of a revolutionary power'. When Lenin returned to Petrograd on 3 April, he condemned this caution and called for all Bolsheviks to campaign for a Soviet government. However, events soon convinced him that it was premature to launch such a programme. In mid-April the Provisional Government and the Soviet clashed over the liberal Foreign Minister's determination to continue pursuing the war aims of the Tsar.

Soviet protest demonstrations were called, and the Bolshevik Petrograd Committee, echoing Lenin's radicalism, issued leaflets calling for the overthrow of the Provisional Government and the immediate establishment of Soviet power. On 24 April, during the Seventh Party Conference, Lenin condemned this as 'adventurist': 'we cannot now overthrow the government', he stressed. Thus, just as Stalin had moved to discipline those Bolsheviks keen to seize power in March, Lenin criticised those calling for insurrection in April.¹

Trotsky's reception on his arrival was rather lukewarm. The leadership of the Soviet had fallen into the hands of pro-war Mensheviks who, far from urging the Soviet to seize power, were negotiating with the liberals about forming a coalition government. Because of his role in 1905, Trotsky was given a non-voting seat on the Soviet Executive, but his views were completely out of tune with the rest of the Soviet leadership. Thus his first political act of 1917, on 5 May, was to join with the Bolsheviks and vote in the Soviet against the formation of a coalition government. His message was simple: do not trust the bourgeoisie, control your own leaders and rely on your own force. This stance did not go down well. To quote his own *History of the Russian Revolution*, he 'left the hall amid far less applause than had greeted [his] entrance' and for the next few weeks Trotsky showed little interest in attending the Soviet Executive.

Trotsky believed that the anti-war opposition in the Soviet was the home of the worker intellectuals, whose revolutionary consciousness was now such that factional disagreements with Lenin over the organisational principles of the underground struggle were firmly in the past. Trotsky immediately re-established contact with the Interdistrict Group, which had survived its wartime persecution more or less intact and retained a good following in the factories, and urged them to consider uniting with the Bolsheviks.² Talks between the two groups about a possible merger began almost at once. On 7 May they hosted a joint meeting to mark Trotsky's return and the talks proper began three days later. Trotsky found himself face to face with his old protagonist and was wrong-footed by Lenin's determination to be conciliatory: Lenin had wanted to make Trotsky editor of *Pravda*, but his Central Committee colleagues vetoed this; nevertheless, Trotsky and his supporters were offered seats on the paper's editorial board as well as on the Central Committee. However, the talks stalled because of fears that, despite Lenin's apparent generosity, the Interdistrict Group was being taken over rather than offered a genuine merger. For a while, therefore, the merger was put on hold.

Trotsky had always argued that Bolshevik sectarianism was a product of the backwardness of the Russian working-class movement; practical activity among the grassroots by worker intellectuals would end this backwardness.

Events of May–June 1917 seemed to bear this out, for increasingly, irrespective of the issues that still divided them, the Interdistrict Group and the Bolsheviks co-operated closely in co-ordinating their opposition to the Provisional Government and its policy of supporting the war. Moreover, when the First Congress of Soviets assembled at the start of June, this co-operation increased. On 4 June the Bolshevik faction at the congress read out a statement on the Provisional Government's planned military offensive which had been written by Trotsky. When called upon to speak, he took the same line as Lenin, predicting that the offensive would end in disaster and urging the Soviet to establish a government that was able and willing to spread revolution to Europe. As the congress proceeded so did the Interdistrict Group–Bolshevik co-operation. Although Lenin faced opposition from within his own Central Committee and Trotsky faced opposition from more cautious colleagues, the two organisations agreed to organise a massive demonstration on 10 June under the slogan 'Down with the ten capitalist ministers'. However, the Provisional Government banned this demonstration and both organisations accepted that they had no choice but to cancel it, which left them with the problem of trying to explain this retreat to their supporters without losing face. Lenin drafted a statement, but both he and the other Bolshevik leaders were unhappy with it. Trotsky, who had delivered a similar speech in 1905, submitted an alternative which the Bolsheviks accepted and this was read out in the name of the whole opposition.³

Very little now separated Lenin and Trotsky, but nuances could still be detected. During the First Congress of Soviets, stung by a Menshevik challenge that no socialist party was ready to assume power, Lenin had asserted that the Bolsheviks were just such a party. Trotsky's emphasis was different: he always referred to a 'Soviet government', with the implication that this might have a non-Bolshevik composition; and, given the composition of the Soviet at the time, he seemed to accept that the formation of such a government was some way off.

Such differences would be important in the future, but the rank and file of the Interdistrict Group were already ignoring them and calling for a full merger with the Bolsheviks. On 2 July a special conference of the Interdistrict Group took place and the result was a foregone conclusion. Trotsky still faced some opposition from leading figures within the organisation but decided to pre-empt them by publishing a statement in *Pravda* to the effect that 'there are in my opinion at the present time no differences either in principle or tactics between the Interdistrict and Bolshevik organisations; accordingly there are no motives which justify the separate existence of these organisations'.⁴

CHECKING ADVENTURISM, COMBATING REACTION

As Trotsky had predicted, the Provisional Government's **June Offensive** had been a disaster. Preparations for the offensive had been the one thing that had kept the unstable government together but, as it faltered, the liberal ministers decided to bring it down by resigning. In the absence of a secure government, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks resolved to organise mass demonstrations under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets'. Although in the Petrograd Soviet as a whole the Bolsheviks were still in a minority, the Soviet had both Workers' and Soldiers' sections and in the former Trotsky and the Bolsheviks had a clear majority by July. The Workers' Section thus supported the idea of a demonstration which would lobby the meeting of the Soviet Executive called to decide how the Soviet should respond to the collapse of the government. Crowds rallied outside the Tauride Palace as, in the early hours of 4 July, the Executive held preliminary discussions, resolving that any decision taken should be binding on all members, something which prompted Trotsky and his supporters to walk out. Many workers wanted to protest with Trotsky at the way the Executive planned to force through a motion in favour of forming a second coalition government, but this anger soon intermingled with a separate but related issue.

Throughout the June Offensive the First Machine Gun Regiment, stationed in Petrograd, had resisted orders that it was to move to the front. By the end of June rumours were rife that the whole regiment would either be sent to the front or disbanded, and activists were determined to rebel rather than suffer either fate. Some offered the **Bolshevik Military Organisation** enough machine guns to seize power, but the Central Committee stamped on such a wild scheme. However, the Bolshevik Military Organisation did encourage the gunners to take part in the planned demonstration, and by the evening of 3 July some had taken control of strategic positions in the capital. Trotsky learned that the regiment had joined the demonstration only around that time. The news took him by surprise, particularly when it became clear that the Kronstadt sailors were also determined to join in. When the Bolsheviks and the Interdistrict Group met before dawn on 4 July they had to decide whether to try to cancel the demonstration, which already seemed to be getting out of hand, or stand at its head and try to keep it within bounds. They opted for the latter. Trotsky played a key role during these 'July Days'.

The Kronstadt sailors arrived at about ten in the morning and marched straight to the Bolshevik headquarters at the Kshesinskaya Mansion. Lenin addressed them from the balcony, but, for all his revolutionary rhetoric, he

June Offensive: In mid-June 1917 (the start of July by the western calendar) Russia's Provisional Government launched a long-planned offensive, hoping to hasten victory in the First World War. Despite detailed preparation, and some early success, within ten days it was clear that the offensive had fizzled out. Since it was the policy of the Provisional Government to delay major reforms in Russia until victory had been secured, the collapse of the offensive did much to radicalise those who felt immediate social reform was essential.

Bolshevik Military Organisation: The Bolshevik Military Organisation was founded in April 1917 to organise disenchanted soldiers. By mid-July it had over 30,000 members and held a conference representing some 500 military units. Thereafter it played a key role in all preparations for an insurrection.

did not urge them to seize power. Instead the demonstrators were led to the city centre, to link up with workers who had marched in from the industrial suburbs. The angry demonstrators then marched along the main thoroughfare, Nevskii Prospekt, and on to the Field of Mars. En route there was some shooting, but a heavy downpour of rain calmed the mood a little. After this tour of the city the demonstrators arrived at the Tauride Palace at about five in the afternoon, where they were joined by more workers.⁵ When the Kronstadt sailors arrived at the palace they demanded to speak to one of the socialist ministers who had been in the government. The most left-wing of their number, the leader of the SR Party, Victor Chernov, agreed to talk to them. He made a short speech, blaming the liberals for precipitating the crisis, but when a voice from the crowd called for the nationalisation of the land the crowd surged forward and angry demonstrators grabbed Chernov and pushed him into a nearby car, declaring he was under arrest. Trotsky was quickly on the scene. Pushing people aside, he rushed to Chernov's rescue and eventually persuaded the sailors to release their captive.⁶

Notwithstanding Trotsky's swift action to defuse the situation, the violence displayed on that day played into the hands of the Provisional Government. During the night of 4–5 July, units loyal to the Soviet Executive and the Provisional Government began to arrive and by midday on the 5th these troops were in full control of the capital. At the same time the Provisional Government announced that it had evidence that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were funded by the Germans and their plans to seize power and surrender the country had barely been thwarted.

That morning, Trotsky had met Lenin. The latter was in a gloomy mood: 'now they will shoot us down, one by one', he said. A warrant had been issued for his arrest, and Lenin felt he had no choice but to go into hiding. Several other leading Bolsheviks were detained at this time, leaving the Bolshevik group in the Soviet leaderless, so Trotsky was approached to take over as leader, even though, strictly speaking, he was not yet even a member of the Bolshevik faction. On 10 July he defended the action of the Bolsheviks during the July Days both on the floor of the Soviet and in the Executive, and published an open letter to the Provisional Government in which he stressed that the Interdistrict Group had supported the Bolsheviks fully. With a rhetorical flourish he ended: 'you can have no grounds for exempting me from the action of the decree by virtue of which Lenin . . . [was] subjected to arrest'. The Provisional Government called his bluff and did indeed arrest him on 23 July.⁷

He was released on 2 September.⁸ By then, the political situation in revolutionary Russia had changed completely. A second coalition government had been formed, but it was even less stable than the first. The new prime minister, Alexander Kerensky, appointed as Commander-in-Chief of the

Army General Lavr Kornilov, whose troops on the South-West Front had achieved some success during the ill-starred June Offensive. Kornilov, however, was an inveterate plotter against the revolution and his summer campaign for the restoration of discipline in the rapidly disintegrating army through the reintroduction of the death penalty made him the rallying point for all counter-revolutionary forces. By mid-August plans were already well advanced for Kornilov to seize power and arrest the Soviet. Kerensky discovered this threat to his position on 26 August, but he could resist Kornilov only by appealing to the Soviet to mobilise its forces. This he did and the Soviet saved both the prime minister and the revolution.

Trotsky went straight from the Kresty prison to a meeting of the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution, which had been established by the Soviet. Within the Soviet itself Kornilov's attempted putsch had prompted a radical turn to the left, particularly among the soldier delegates. Indeed, the day before Trotsky's release, on 1 September, the Soviet had supported a Bolshevik resolution for the first time. The Menshevik and SR leaders of the Soviet decided to test whether this had been a 'one-off' or marked a complete change of direction, so they called a second vote on the Bolshevik resolution for 9 September. This was Trotsky's first public appearance at the Soviet since his release and the vote was won; two days later there was an even more convincing Bolshevik victory after another display of Trotsky's oratory.⁹ With Lenin still in hiding and Trotsky's oratorical skills plain for all to see, he was set to dominate the public face of Bolshevism for the next six weeks.

The issue facing the country in the aftermath of Kornilov's attempted putsch was whether to support Kerensky's bid to form a third coalition government with the liberals, or to favour a Soviet government – the policy of the Bolsheviks. To win popular backing for his proposal for a third coalition government, Kerensky summoned an assembly known as the Democratic Conference made up not only of the various soviets that now existed throughout Russia but also of other democratically elected organisations, such as trade unions, co-operatives and local town and provincial councils. The conference opened on 14 September and Trotsky read out the Bolshevik Party's official statement. After a series of rather contradictory votes, Kerensky won support for his proposal; however, the majority of delegates insisted that his new government should be held responsible to a temporary popular assembly so that it and its policies could be monitored until elections to a national Constituent Assembly could be held in mid-November. This temporary assembly was given the name 'Preparliament', and the key debate at the Democratic Conference then became: would all political parties be willing to take part in the work of the Preparliament, which would comprise not only those social groups represented at the Democratic Conference but also representatives of property owners and their organisations?

The Bolsheviks discussed the issue of participation in the Preparliament on 20 September at a conference which included delegates to the Democratic Conference, members of the Petrograd Committee and members of the Central Committee. Trotsky called for the Preparliament to be boycotted; however, the majority of those present did not agree that the parliamentary struggle should be abandoned. No agreement could be reached in the Central Committee, so it was left to the Democratic Conference delegates to decide, and they voted to participate. Consequently, on 22 September, the Bolsheviks informed the Democratic Conference that they would take part in the Preparliament.¹⁰

Trotsky's call for a boycott meant that he and Lenin were now on exactly the same wavelength. Although, very briefly, Lenin had toyed with the idea of what might be termed the parliamentary way forward, he was soon bombarding the Bolshevik Central Committee with a series of letters ever more urgently urging them to prepare to seize power through an armed uprising. When he heard of Trotsky's stance on the Preparliament, he sent him the message, 'Bravo Comrade Trotsky!'¹¹ However, while Lenin and Trotsky were both calling for an armed uprising to establish a workers' government, their visions of how this was to be achieved were far from identical. Lenin favoured a coup staged by the Bolshevik Party and its Military Organisation of radicalised soldiers. Trotsky favoured action through the soviets.

At the very close of the Democratic Conference it had been decided to summon a Second Congress of Soviets to take place in Petrograd on 20 October. Trotsky assumed that this would be the occasion for action, so in the interim he acted quickly to gain control of the Soviet, formally taking over as chairman of the Executive on 25 September. The very first resolution passed under his chairmanship set Trotsky's agenda: it called for the new coalition government to resign and announced that the forthcoming Second Congress of Soviets would create a genuinely revolutionary government.¹²

As a result of Lenin's interventions, the Bolshevik Central Committee reopened the question of participating in the work of the Preparliament. On 5 October it was decided that the Bolsheviks would stage a demonstrative walkout on the first day. Thus Trotsky denounced the Preparliament during its opening session on 7 October, after which the Bolshevik delegates made their exit.¹³

INSURRECTION

Although Trotsky was committed to a Soviet insurrection against Kerensky's government, the precise agent of that insurrection was still unclear to him at the beginning of October. However, he was sure that it could not be the

Bolshevik Party (meaning he had diverged yet again from Lenin's view). Ironically, it was the Mensheviks who resolved the conundrum for him. With the Imperial German Army apparently preparing to march on the capital, and the government drafting plans to evacuate the seat of government to Moscow, on 9 October the Mensheviks introduced into the Soviet a proposal that a Committee of Revolutionary Defence be formed to help defend the capital. Trotsky backed this proposal, seeing a military committee of the Soviet, rather than the Military Organisation of the Bolshevik Party, as the perfect instrument to carry out an insurrection.¹⁴ Not all Bolsheviks agreed, however. On 10 October the Bolshevik Central Committee met to debate the issue. Lenin put the case for an immediate putsch, while Kamenev and Zinoviev argued against.¹⁵ Neither Lenin's views nor those of Zinoviev and Kamenev were accepted. The Central Committee voted in favour of the *principle* of insurrection, but appeared to do little more.

Nevertheless, Trotsky busied himself with preparations. He wrote very little during 1917, apart from the ephemera of short inflammatory speeches. It was only later, in exile, when he wrote his *History of the Russian Revolution*, that he explained some of the tensions that existed between himself and Lenin during October. As he made clear in his account [**Document 7**], no practical plan for insurrection was adopted on 10 October, but since it was supposed to occur before the opening of the Second Congress of Soviets, originally planned for 20 October, the target date for insurrection had to be around the 15th. On 12 October he guided through the Soviet a draft resolution establishing the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC), as the Committee for Revolutionary Defence had been rechristened; the next day this was endorsed by the Soldiers' Section of the Soviet. Also on the 13th, Trotsky attended the Congress of Soviets of the Northern Region, where the resolution he proposed was, in his words, 'an almost undisguised summons to insurrection' on 20 October.¹⁶

However, when the Bolshevik Central Committee next met – on 16 October – those opposed to insurrection, including Kamenev, could rightly point out that almost a week had passed since 10 October and the Party had done nothing of consequence to prepare for an uprising. This expanded meeting of the Central Committee, which included representatives of the Petrograd Party Committee and the Military Organisation as well as members of the Soviet, tried to work out a consensus on the issue. Again Kamenev and Zinoviev called for the policy to be dropped, and again Lenin wanted an immediate insurrection. Lenin therefore interpreted the statement made by the MRC representative Trotsky had sent to the meeting, Krylenko, as shilly-shallying on Trotsky's part. Krylenko argued, 'the water is boiling hard enough' and there could be no question of withdrawing the resolution of 10 October. However, he (and therefore Trotsky) disagreed with Lenin 'on

the question of who shall begin it and how it shall begin'. A Party-led insurrection on a fixed date would not work, Krylenko argued; what would work was exploiting the growing opposition to Kerensky's movement of troops from the capital to the front. In this sense, Kerensky's determination to transfer the troops, and the Soviet's determination to resist this, meant that 'the thing is already begun'. As Trotsky made clear some 15 years after the event, 'within the general frame of Lenin's formula' – the resolution in favour of insurrection backed by the Central Committee – 'there arose subordinate, but very important questions'.¹⁷

Lenin wanted the Bolsheviks to seize power before the Second Congress of Soviets assembled. Trotsky believed that defending the congress from possible government attack was likely to present an opportunity for a seizure of power. He would be proved right, even though the opening of the congress was postponed from 20 October to the 26th. In any event, the idea of the Bolsheviks staging a coup on their own behalf had been moved off the agenda by Kamenev's decision to resign from the Central Committee and publish in the Menshevik press an explanation of why he and Zinoviev opposed insurrection. By 18 October, the press was full of articles on Bolshevik plans for an uprising. Trotsky understood that Lenin's idea of unilateral action by the Bolsheviks was so unpopular that rumours of it had to be denied. As he recalled later, alarm 'penetrated even the workers' sections and still more the regiments; to them, too, it began to seem as though a coming-out were being prepared without them'. So he resolved to make a statement both to the Soviet and on its behalf in which he outlined his strategy for revolution. This made clear that

we have not set a date for the attack. But the opposing side has, evidently, already set it. We will meet it, we will repel it duly, and we will declare that at the first counter-revolutionary attempt to hamper the work of the Congress [of Soviets] we will answer with a counter-offensive which will be ruthless and which we will carry out to the end.

To Trotsky's fury, Kamenev, sitting next to him, jumped to his feet and stated that he endorsed Trotsky's statement fully, implying that the statement was a rejection of the insurrection rather than a rather tortuous explanation of how the insurrection would take place.¹⁸ When the Bolshevik Central Committee met on 20 October it was not planning insurrection, but squabbling about the behaviour of Kamenev.¹⁹

Despite Lenin's concern and Bolshevik infighting, below the surface Trotsky's strategy was beginning to bear fruit. Not only had he got the Soviet to establish the MRC, but it had agreed to call a conference of the Petrograd garrison, which took place on 18–21 October. This made clear that the garrison

had no confidence in the Provisional Government and would be prepared to take armed action in defence of the revolution if called to do so by the Petrograd Soviet or the Congress of Soviets. With garrison support for the policy of the MRC, late in the night of the 21st Trotsky sent three of the MRC Bureau members to talk to the command of the Petrograd Military District and ask them to accept that, henceforth, all orders would have to be countersigned by the MRC. The proposal was turned down and the MRC reported to the Soviet that it had broken with the command. A gauntlet had been thrown down, but it was still unclear how things would develop.

Sunday 22 October had been designated 'Soviet Day', a day of peaceful meetings and demonstrations, and Trotsky spent the day addressing public meetings and working the crowds, heating the mood. By the 23rd the MRC had got down to drafting a detailed plan of operations. As Trotsky recalled, it was basically very simple: chosen detachments were allocated to seize strategic points of the capital when a signal was given. The key to success was to win over as many garrison units to support the MRC, or at least to ensure that they remained neutral in any struggle. A key moment came on the afternoon of the 23rd, when Trotsky addressed the garrison of the Peter-Paul Fortress, at the very heart of the capital, and persuaded its members to follow the MRC. Later in the day the troops responsible for the arsenal also came out in support of the MRC.

Lenin, though, was concerned that all this activity was being undertaken not in the name of a seizure of power but in order to defend the Second Congress of Soviets from possible government attack. As Trotsky recalled, 'that word "insurrection" was not spoken by any one of the leaders'. When the MRC reported to the Soviet on the evening of the 23rd it listed those units which had now stated that they would obey the orders of the MRC rather than the untrustworthy government, but the logic that crowding out the government implied its overthrow was never spelled out. The Soviet backed the actions of the MRC in the spirit that they were measures to defend the Congress of Soviets, and it was up to Kerensky to attack – and attack he did.²⁰

On the morning of the 24th he closed down the Bolshevik and Soviet press; at the same time he cut the Smolny telephone lines, resolved to prosecute members of the MRC and demanded the removal of all MRC commissars. Trotsky sent troops to reopen the Bolshevik press, and by doing so he had effectively embarked on an insurrection. As he noted later: 'although an insurrection can win on the offensive, it develops better the more it looks like self-defence'.²¹

When the Central Committee met on the 24th its task was to try to give organisational form to a process that was already under way. Yet the central ambiguity of what was taking place remained. Was power actually being

seized or was all this military activity simply intended to ensure the Second Congress of Soviets met and had the opportunity to resolve the political future of the country? Trotsky dared not come clean, even with the Bolshevik caucus gathering for the opening of the Second Congress of Soviets: 'it was still impossible to throw off the defensive envelope of the attack without creating confusion in the minds of certain units of the garrison'. He reassured a delegation from the Petrograd City Council that 'the question of power is to be decided by the Congress of Soviets . . . if the congress declines power, the Petrograd Soviet will submit'.²²

Kerensky was busy during the day. He ordered loyal troops to occupy the railway stations, established checkpoints at major road intersections, and raised the bridges across the Neva. The MRC responded by asking the crew of the battleship *Aurora* to restore movement on the Nikolaevskii Bridge, thus re-establishing traffic between the city centre and the large working-class district on Vasilevskii Island. The captain of the battleship refused to implement the order, but agreed that he could be 'arrested', then dutifully brought the ship towards the bridge, prompting Kerensky's guards to flee. The sailors then lowered the bridge. At about the same time MRC commissars gained access to the telephone exchange and restored the phone connections to Smolny. Government authority was being challenged, but power was not yet being seized. In Trotsky's words, 'right up to the evening of the 24th, the umbilical cord of "legality" was not conclusively severed'.²³

Around six in the evening of the 24th Lenin wrote a letter to the Central Committee urging the Party to end the ambiguity and seize power before what he called the 'wavering vote' of the Second Congress of Soviets. Asking rhetorically, 'Who must take power?', Lenin answered that it no longer mattered whether it was the MRC or the Party; action was the essential thing. So the Bolshevik Military Organisation followed the MRC's lead and dusted off its plans for the seizure of key installations. The operation began around two in the morning of the 25th. According to Trotsky's account, small groups 'usually with a nucleus of armed workers or sailors under the leadership of a commissar' occupied strategic sites such as railway stations, the electricity network, bridges, the State Bank, big printing plants and the telegraph office. All of this was the work of just 'a few thousand Red Guards and two or three thousand sailors'.²⁴

While these forces were being deployed, Trotsky was called on to address a preliminary meeting of delegates to the Second Congress of Soviets. At about three in the morning of the 25th, he finally ended the ambiguity and made clear that an insurrection was under way in which the Bolshevik Party was leading the masses.²⁵ Yet, when dawn broke on the 25th, the insurrection seemed to stall. By seven in the morning, the Supreme Army Headquarters, the Petrograd Military Headquarters and Kerensky's government in the Winter

Palace had no telephone service; but there was no sign that they were on the point of surrender. Three hours later, Smolny broadcast that the Provisional Government had been overthrown, but this was not the case. By midday troops had persuaded the Preparliament to disperse; but the government still remained inside the Winter Palace. In the early afternoon, both Lenin and Trotsky addressed an emergency session of the Petrograd Soviet; but the latter's declaration that the Provisional Government had been overthrown was quickly followed by a clarification that the Winter Palace had not yet been taken.

The Bolsheviks were desperate that the overthrow of Kerensky's government should be complete by the time the Second Congress of Soviets was due to open at eight in the evening; but the Winter Palace was still not in their hands even then. A wrangle with the Mensheviks delayed the opening of the congress until well after ten, but as Trotsky paced backwards and forwards between the congress hall and the room where Lenin was based, the continuing sound of artillery fire confirmed that the Winter Palace remained in government hands. It finally surrendered after 2 a.m. on the 26th.²⁶

Trotsky claimed in his memoirs that it was while he and Lenin awaited the opening of the Second Congress of Soviets that Lenin became reconciled to the strategy of the insurrection adopted by Trotsky. Lenin was clearly glad that the insurrection had taken place before the congress commenced, but that had not been Trotsky's intention. In his *History of the Russian Revolution* he wrote that 'the insurrection began earlier and ended later than had been indicated'. He had assumed, as he stated repeatedly in public, that the insurrection would be a product of the Congress of Soviets and take place when it was in session, but Kerensky's action had prompted the MRC to act earlier, unexpectedly bringing the timing closer to Lenin's preference. However, by acting before the Congress of Soviets had assembled, the veil of constitutionality had to be dropped – resistance by Kerensky's government was more stubborn and the Winter Palace, unlike some of the earlier targets, held out much longer than expected.²⁷

RESULTS AND PROSPECTS IN ACTION

In *Results and Prospects* Trotsky had argued that in the first stage of rule by a workers' government virtually the whole nation would support it. However, as its socialist agenda began to be implemented, the individualist aspirations of the peasantry would be offended and soon the workers' government would come under peasant attack.

The Bolsheviks' relationship with the political voice of the peasantry proved problematic from the start, largely because of the Bolsheviks' initial

decision to rule alone. Just as they had failed to agree about whether to stage an insurrection, they could not reach agreement on which sort of government to form. During the day of 26 October Lenin and Trotsky called an informal meeting of those Central Committee members who happened to be around and resolved to form a government comprising only Bolsheviks. Trotsky described this as 'the only thinkable' proposal. However, later in the day the Central Committee invited three representatives of the Left SRs, the radical peasant party, to a more formal meeting and proposed the formation of a coalition government. The Left SRs rejected this proposal and so a purely Bolshevik government was formed, prompting immediate protests from the Left SRs.

The Left SRs then used their control of the Railway Workers' Union to try to force the Bolsheviks to compromise.²⁸ Those Bolsheviks like Kamenev and Zinoviev who had opposed an insurrection were keen to reach a compromise; Trotsky and Lenin were not. They issued the dissenters with an ultimatum, prompting several Bolshevik commissars to resign. The precise shape of the post-insurrection government began to be clarified only when the Extraordinary Congress of Peasant Soviets was held on 10 November and endorsed the policies of the Left SRs, rather than the mainstream of the SR Party; the Left SRs endorsed Kerensky's overthrow, the SRs did not. The Left SRs' triumph was repeated at the Second Congress of Peasant Soviets on 27 November. Confident in their popular mandate, the Left SRs decided to join the Bolsheviks in a coalition government, and this was finally formalised on 8 December. It started work at once on a Land Reform Bill that would give land to the peasantry. It had taken a while, but, as Trotsky predicted, 'proletariat in power' had recognised the importance of revolutionary land expropriation and won peasant support 'in the first most difficult period of the revolution'.

In *Results and Prospects* Trotsky had argued that peasant support for the proletarian revolution would soon evaporate and that the only way out of this dilemma was to spread the revolution to Europe. Two months before the October insurrection he had written, 'a lasting, decisive success is inconceivable for us without a revolution in Europe', and as the newly appointed Commissar for Foreign Affairs he sought to achieve just such a revolution by bringing the First World War to an end. The new Council of People's Commissars instructed the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army to begin armistice discussions, but he informed Lenin that he did not recognise the Bolshevik Government. An impasse followed, which ended only with the murder of the Commander-in-Chief on 21 November. The Russian and German armistice delegations had, in fact, first met two days earlier, and during a total of four days of talks Trotsky tried to persuade the Germans to accept a general peace and to agree not to transfer troops to the Western

Front. This proved impossible, but a truce was agreed on 22 November. Still hoping for a general rather than a separate peace, a further appeal was made to the Allies, but when no response was forthcoming the Bolsheviks had no choice but to consider a separate peace. Trotsky appeared before the Soviet Executive on 8 December to justify this stance and in his speech outlined his personal agenda for the next six months [**Document 8**].

The armistice has made a breach in the war. The gunfire has ceased and everyone is nervously waiting to see how the Soviet Government will deal with the Hohenzollern and Habsburg imperialists. You must support us in treating them as foes of freedom, in ensuring that not one iota of this freedom is sacrificed to imperialism . . . We are becoming more and more convinced that peace talks will be a powerful weapon in the hands of other peoples in their struggle for peace. If we are mistaken, if Europe continues to be silent as the grave, and if this silence gives Wilhelm the chance to attack us and to dictate his terms to us, terms which would insult the revolutionary dignity of our country, then I am not sure whether, given our shattered economy and the general chaos (the result of the war and internal strife), we could fight. I think, however, that we could do so. For our lives, for our revolutionary honour, we would fight to the last drop of our blood . . . [raising] an army of soldiers and Red Guardsmen, strong in its revolutionary enthusiasm.²⁹

The talks at Brest-Litovsk got under way on 9 December but progress was slow. After the formal opening there was an adjournment, followed by postponements, and it was only on 25 December that the German demands became clear. On 29 December the Soviet delegation returned to Petrograd, bringing with them what Trotsky called the 'monstrous demands of the Central Powers'. After a brief discussion among the Bolshevik leadership it was agreed that the only thing to do was to play for time in the hope that a European revolution would materialise. The negotiations had to be spun out for as long as possible, and Lenin insisted that 'to delay the negotiations, there must be someone to do the delaying': Trotsky was ordered to head the delegation himself and set off 'as if being led to a torture chamber'.³⁰ No sooner had he arrived than he asked for another adjournment, arriving back in Petrograd on 7 January 1918.

While he was en route, there had been dramatic developments in the capital. The Constituent Assembly had met and been dissolved on 6 January, and its place had been taken by the Third Congress of Soviets. On 8 January the Bolshevik Central Committee and leaders of the Bolshevik delegation to the Third Congress of Soviets met to consider what to do, and Trotsky proposed a tactic of neither peace nor war; the Bolsheviks would simply not sign

the treaty proposed by the Germans, but nor would they resume hostilities. This tactic presupposed that the German proletariat would rise up in fury when it saw how outrageously its imperialist government was behaving.

The meeting accepted Trotsky's suggestion, but this was just an advisory vote; when the Central Committee resumed its discussion on 11 January, without the participation of extraneous delegates, Lenin and Trotsky clashed. Lenin felt they had no choice but to accept the German terms: 'what comrade Trotsky suggests is political showmanship', he argued. If the Germans attacked, the Bolsheviks would be forced to sign an even worse peace. However, the meeting endorsed Trotsky's policy by nine votes to seven.³¹ Before returning to the negotiations, Trotsky put an optimistic gloss on the situation when he addressed the Third Congress of Soviets:

They cannot threaten us with an offensive, as they cannot be sure the German soldiers will take part in one . . . and if German imperialism attempts to crucify us on the wheel of its military machine, then . . . we shall appeal to our elder brothers in the west and say: 'Do you hear?' and the international proletariat will respond – we firmly believe this – 'We hear!'.

Just prior to Trotsky's departure, he and Lenin came to a private understanding, which modified the 'no peace, no war' decision of the Central Committee. Trotsky promised to sign the peace if Lenin's fears were realised and the Germans resumed hostilities.³²

However, before 'no peace, no war' became an issue, there remained the tactic of spinning out the negotiations, and this was feasible because, initially, both sides were interested in time-wasting. The Germans proposed a democratic peace in line with President Woodrow Wilson's principle of the self-determination of nations. They would effectively break up the Russian Empire, allowing the Bolsheviks to control the Russian heartland but establishing German-sponsored independent regimes in the Baltic and Ukraine. The Germans needed time to persuade Ukrainian politicians to back this scheme, while the Bolsheviks needed time to put an end to the growing Ukrainian autonomy movement and establish Soviet power in Ukraine by force. Just after the Bolshevik army captured Kiev, the Germans had their Ukrainian delegation ready.³³ On 27 January the Central Powers signed a separate treaty with the Ukrainian delegation, and on the 28th Trotsky made his final statement [**Document 9**]:

In expectation of the approaching hour when the working classes of all countries seize power . . . we are withdrawing our army and our people from the war and issuing an order for full demobilisation . . . At the same

time we declare that the terms proposed to us by the governments of Germany and Austro-Hungary are in fundamental conflict with the interest of all people . . . We cannot put the signature of the Russian revolution under a peace treaty which brings oppression, woe and misfortune to millions of human beings.

Back in the capital, on 16 February (the Gregorian calendar was introduced in Russia at the start of February 1918, so 1 February became 13 February) he told the Petrograd Soviet that the odds against a German attack were nine to one.³⁴ He was soon proved terribly wrong. The Germans resumed hostilities just two days later. Under the terms of the tacit agreement between Lenin and Trotsky, this was the point at which Trotsky should have agreed to sign the treaty. However, he had changed his mind. Lenin still insisted that the Bolsheviks should offer to sign the treaty at once; Trotsky argued that the offensive should be allowed to begin 'so that the workers of Germany would learn of the offensive as a fact rather than as a threat'. When the Central Committee had met on 17 February he had voted for the principle of peace, but on the 18th he refused to vote for the dispatch of the necessary telegram to the Germans. He reported that the German offensive had indeed begun with an aerial bombardment of the city of Dvinsk, but argued, 'the masses are only just beginning to digest what is happening . . . we have to wait and see what impression all this makes on the German people'. Later that day, Trotsky informed the reconvened Central Committee that Dvinsk had now fallen and it was time to make a direct appeal to the civilian politicians in Berlin and Vienna. Trotsky was behaving recklessly and Lenin once again insisted that the time had come to sign. Trotsky finally backed down and on 19 February the Bolsheviks sued for peace. Trotsky assumed command of a Committee for Revolutionary Defence.³⁵

Declaring a willingness to sign the peace treaty was one thing; persuading the Germans to stop their advance was quite another. Fighting had begun and until the Germans agreed to resume talks, they had to be resisted. Allied representatives had responded to the 'no peace, no war' declaration by offering to aid Russia should hostilities resume. On 18 February Trotsky was visited by the British representative in Russia, Bruce Lockhart, who offered British military support. Lockhart found Trotsky surprisingly optimistic: 'even if Russia cannot resist, she will indulge in partisan warfare to the best of her ability'. However, when Trotsky met with his key military advisers on 20 February they persuaded him that partisan operations could not hold back a modern army; the only thing to do was to retreat to a defensible line and hope to build up reserves.

By 21 February a Russian delegation had reached Brest-Litovsk, only to discover that the terms now offered by the Germans were, as Lenin had

Czechoslovak Legion: In spring 1917 the various units of Czechoslovak prisoners of war which had been operating within the framework of the Russian Imperial Army were transformed into an independent Czechoslovak Legion and greatly expanded. Based in Kiev, the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk presented them with a dilemma. As the Imperial German Army entered Ukraine, the Czechoslovak Legion helped slow their advance, but once on Russian territory, their future was unclear. Slowly units gradually moved eastwards, heading for Vladivostok and the long journey across America to France, where they hoped to fight on the Western Front. Before the 'English ultimatum' was rejected, Trotsky had plans to keep at least some of the Czechoslovak Legion in Russia as part of an anti-German army, but after the arrival of the German ambassador, this became impossible and so he called for the legion to be disarmed. It was this call which prompted the Czechoslovak Legion to rebel against the Bolsheviks. Since the legion was by then strung out along railway lines from the Volga to Vladivostok, the whole of eastern Russia was suddenly freed from Bolshevik rule.

predicted, far worse than the original ones. At first even Lenin thought there was now no choice but to fight for survival. Given this bleak scenario, it was not surprising that Trotsky maintained contact with the Allies, not only with Lockhart but with French representatives. On 22 February he persuaded a sceptical Central Committee to accept a French offer of military aid, but the military situation was worsening all the time. On 23 February news came of the fall of Pskov and a crisis meeting of military advisers predicted that Petrograd would soon fall, too. When the Central Committee met later that day Lenin insisted that 'this is where the policy of revolutionary phrasemongering ends'. Trotsky did not agree. He insisted that the Party could 'tackle the task of organising defence'; even if Petrograd and Moscow surrendered, 'we could hold the whole world in tension'. The problem was, he said, that the Party was not united, and 'we cannot fight a revolutionary war when the Party is split'. Reluctantly, he would therefore resign as Commissar of Foreign Affairs and abstain in the forthcoming vote; as a result of this, Lenin's motion to sign the new German proposals was passed.³⁶

Even so, Trotsky was convinced that the time to fight Imperial Germany would soon come. The peace was signed on 3 March and the very next day the Bolsheviks established a Supreme Military Council and made Trotsky its chair. He had told the Soviet Executive even before the Brest-Litovsk negotiations had started that if the Germans dictated terms which 'insulted the revolutionary dignity of our country' then they would raise an army of soldiers 'strong in its revolutionary enthusiasm'. That was precisely what he now set out to do. At the Extraordinary Seventh Party Congress held on 6–8 March to endorse the signing of the treaty, Trotsky followed a justification of his actions with a prediction that would guide his behaviour over the next few weeks: 'the present breathing space can be reckoned to last no more than two or three months at best, and most likely only weeks and days'.³⁷ War with Germany would resume, and it was imperative to have a capable force ready for that day by disbanding the disintegrating army and building a new one.

During the Fourth Extraordinary Congress of Soviets, 14–16 March, which ratified the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Trotsky was appointed Commissar of War and began to draft a plan in the event of renewed German aggression for a fighting retreat beyond the River Volkhov, to be co-ordinated with the construction of defensive 'screens' to protect Petrograd and Moscow. Allied representatives continued to be closely involved in these preparations and, as part of this strategy, Trotsky was also keen to keep in Russia the **Czechoslovak Legion**. Formed by the Provisional Government from Austro-Hungarian PoWs of Czech and Slovak ethnicity, the Legion had been stationed near Kiev when the armistice with the Germans was signed. When, under the terms of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, the German Army marched into Ukraine, the Legion helped pro-Soviet forces slow its advance. Once back in the

Russian heartland the Legion announced it planned to leave Russia for the Western Front, but Trotsky could see the advantage of keeping this battle-hardened force at hand to fight alongside his newly constructed Russian Army. To help persuade the Legion to stay, on 20 March he temporarily forbade any of their units proceeding further east towards Vladivostok.

Trotsky was equally clear that his new army had to be professional. In a speech to a session of the Moscow Soviet on 19 March, immediately after his arrival in the city, he stated that a properly and freshly organised army meant using military specialists from the old army and imposing discipline. This message was repeated to a conference of the Moscow City Communist Party on 28 March: 'I have had occasion several times already to say at public meetings that in the sphere of command, of operations, of military actions, we place full responsibility upon military specialists and consequently give them the necessary powers.' He therefore dismissed the principle of elected officers and soldiers' committees. To the surprise of many, on 30 March Trotsky appointed to the Supreme Military Council Admiral D. V. Verderevskii, the Navy Minister in Kerensky's last government.³⁸

By April 1918, Trotsky's discussions with the Allies had reached the point where both sides envisaged a major British intervention at the moment when the 'breathing space' with Germany ended. The British would persuade the Czechoslovak Legion to stay in Russia, where they would be reinforced by an Allied expeditionary force which would land in Archangel. Trotsky backed the scheme, but pointed out that the German Ambassador was due to arrive in Moscow on 26 April, making close relations between himself and the Allies more problematic thereafter. Yet, even after the arrival of the German Ambassador, such contacts continued. They did so because on 29 April the Germans changed tack in Ukraine. Until then, they had worked with the local democratically elected government, but because of the commitment of that government to land reform, the Germans now decided to overthrow it and establish a dictatorship. For many Bolsheviks, this revealed the true face of German imperialism, and on 4 May Russian troops were instructed to resist any German violations of their new border. The Central Committee then went into a crisis session which lasted the best part of the week of 6–13 May.

A rupture with Germany seemed possible at any minute, but when Trotsky outlined to the Central Committee what he and the Allies were proposing Lenin spoke out against 'the **English ultimatum**' and Trotsky's scheme was dropped. Yet German encroachments on the agreed demarcation line between Russia and Ukraine continued – at Cherkovo station on 9 May and at Bataisk railway junction on 2 June.³⁹ Obsessed with the possibility of internationalising the revolution through a new war with Imperial Germany, Trotsky took his eyes off the danger of what was, for him, the inevitable and growing peasant dissatisfaction with the proletarian regime.

English ultimatum: The term used by Lenin to condemn Trotsky's proposals made during the Central Committee's repeated discussions in early May 1918 over whether to annul the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The German imposition of a reactionary puppet regime in Ukraine, coupled with repeated violations of the new border with Russia, convinced many Bolsheviks that the treaty was intolerable. Trotsky had been encouraging the British to send an expeditionary force to north Russia, and hoped that these troops, in combination with the Czechoslovak Legion, could give some backbone to the new Russian army he was hastily constructing. Lenin convinced the Central Committee not only that the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk should be honoured, but also that it should be reinforced by a trade treaty.

FURTHER READING

As well as Trotsky's *My Life*, his *History of the Russian Revolution* is an essential source, as is another account written by a participant, N. Sukhanov's *The Russian Revolution: A Personal Record*. For the July Days, see A. Rabinowitch's *Prelude to Revolution*; and for Lenin and Trotsky's differing views on how to seize power, see J. D. White's 'Lenin, Trotsky and the Arts of Insurrection: The Congress of Soviets of the Northern Region, 11–13 October 1917'. For events surrounding the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, see G. R. Swain's *The Origins of the Russian Civil War*. Two important documentary collections are of relevance here: J. L. H. Keep's *The Debate on Soviet Power*; and *The Bolsheviks and the October Revolution: Central Committee Minutes*.

NOTES

- 1 A. Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), pp. 42–47.
- 2 L. Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (London: Sphere, 1965), vol. I, p. 340; N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution: A Personal Record* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 359; Trotsky, *My Life*, p. 329.
- 3 Deutscher, *Armed*, pp. 266–67.
- 4 Sukhanov, *Russian Revolution*, pp. 383–84; Trotsky, *History*, vol. II, p. 296.
- 5 Sukhanov, *Russian Revolution*, pp. 432–29; Trotsky, *History*, vol. II, pp. 40–42; Trotsky, *My Life*, p. 311.
- 6 Sukhanov, *Russian Revolution*, pp. 444–47; Trotsky, *My Life*, p. 312.
- 7 Trotsky, *My Life*, p. 316; for the July Days generally, see Rabinowitch, *Prelude*.
- 8 Trotsky, *My Life*, p. 317.
- 9 Trotsky, *History*, vol. II, pp. 289–90; Deutscher, *Armed*, p. 288.
- 10 Sukhanov, *Russian Revolution*, p. 544; Trotsky, *History*, vol. II, p. 325; for the Preparliament more generally, see G. R. Swain, 'Before the Fighting Started: A Discussion on the Theme of the "Third Way"', *Revolutionary Russia* no. 2, 1991.
- 11 Trotsky, *My Life*, p. 339.
- 12 Trotsky, *History*, vol. II, p. 329.
- 13 R. P. Browder and A. F. Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional Government 1917: Documents* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), vol. III, p. 1729.
- 14 Trotsky, *History*, vol. III, p. 90.
- 15 Trotsky, *History*, vol. III, pp. 140–43.
- 16 Trotsky, *History*, vol. III, pp. 81, 483.
- 17 *The Bolsheviks and the October Revolution: Central Committee Minutes* (London: Pluto Press, 1974), pp. 101–02. For the differing tactics of Lenin and Trotsky at this time, see J. D. White, 'Lenin, Trotsky and the Arts of Insurrection: The Congress of Soviets of the Northern Region, 11–13 October 1917', *Slavonic and East European Review* no. 1, 1999.

- 18 Browder and Kerensky, *Documents*, p. 1767; Trotsky, *History*, vol. III, p. 102.
- 19 *Central Committee*, p. 110.
- 20 Trotsky, *History*, vol. III, pp. 114, 116–17.
- 21 Trotsky, *History*, vol. III, p. 195.
- 22 Trotsky, *History*, vol. III, p. 198.
- 23 Trotsky, *History*, vol. III, p. 208.
- 24 Trotsky, *History*, vol. III, pp. 209–12; Trotsky, *My Life*, p. 323.
- 25 Trotsky, *History*, vol. III, pp. 213–14; Sukhanov, *Russian Revolution*, p. 617.
- 26 Trotsky, *My Life*, p. 324; Trotsky, *History*, vol. III, pp. 284–85.
- 27 Trotsky, *My Life*, p. 324; Trotsky, *History*, vol. III, p. 205.
- 28 Trotsky, *History*, vol. III, pp. 299, 314; *Central Committee*, p. 138. The Railway Workers' Union talks are fully explored in Swain, 'Before'.
- 29 J. L. H. Keep (ed.), *The Debate on Soviet Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 187.
- 30 Trotsky, *My Life*, p. 363.
- 31 *Central Committee*, pp. 175–80.
- 32 D. Volkogonov, *Trotsky: The Eternal Revolutionary* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 109; Deutscher, *Armed*, pp. 375–76.
- 33 A more detailed account of events in Ukraine at this time can be found in G. R. Swain, *The Origins of the Russian Civil War* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 92–118.
- 34 Volkogonov, *Eternal*, pp. 111–12.
- 35 Trotsky, *My Life*, pp. 387–88; *Central Committee*, p. 204.
- 36 Swain, *Origins*, p. 133; *Central Committee*, pp. 218–25.
- 37 Volkogonov, *Eternal*, p. 116.
- 38 L. Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed* (London: New Park Publications, 1979), vol. I, pp. 23, 43–47; for Trotsky's contacts with the Allies, see Swain, *Origins*, pp. 132–48.
- 39 J. M. Meijer (ed.), *The Trotsky Papers* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1964), vol. I, p. 55.

2 Reform or revolution, 1787–89?

The final crisis that the *ancien régime* went through was essentially man-made. Indeed, it was triggered in large measure by the needs and actions of absolute monarchy. If the Bourbons had refrained from foreign-policy entanglements that required heavy war expenditures, it is possible that the budgetary problem could have been managed within existing structures. This was not to be, and Alexis de Tocqueville's dictum, which holds that the most dangerous moment for an authoritarian government occurs when it embarks on reform, was framed precisely to accommodate the situation in which France now found herself (1969, Headlam edn: 182).

Yet no one *knew* that the country's governing system was in its death throes at the start of 1787. A few commentators reached for the word 'revolution' in order to describe what was happening as early as the preceding autumn, but they used the term imprecisely and with little sense of what it might mean. For instance, the Parisian bookseller-publisher Nicolas Ruault confided in a letter to his brother that a frightful revolution was in the offing (Ruault, 1976: 79). But 'revolution' – in this context – can be understood as the superlative of 'reform'. Even as late as the spring of 1789, it is likely that the majority of thinking men and women had little inkling of what lay in store. This chapter lays out the sequence of events that led from reform to revolution. It explains why reform from above failed to win sufficient support in the country at large, and how this failure helped to unleash forces that would cause the *ancien régime* to fall to pieces within a short space of time.

Gripping the nettle of reform

After two decades of stop-go reform, it is clear that by 1783 Louis XVI's most senior officials were keenly aware of the gravity of the situation facing the country. The window of opportunity to carry out meaningful reform would not remain open for very much longer – if only because the third *vingtième* tax was scheduled to expire in 1787, the year in which the contract for the collection of indirect taxes also fell due for renewal. Even the most devoted servants of the Crown were coming to the realization that

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only by reining in foreign policy commitments and curtailing tax exemptions could the power of absolute monarchy be preserved. Charles Alexandre de Calonne, the Controller General, numbered among them. It is true that he continued to spend on a lavish scale in order to sustain the confidence of international lenders, but he could not have been unaware of the difficulties that lay ahead. After a period of calm, relations between ministers and the Parlement of Paris were becoming strained again too – another reason for action sooner rather than later. Calonne's diminishing freedom of manoeuvre can be traced in the reports despatched from the British embassy in Paris. Daniel Hailes, the chargé d'affaires, noted in August 1785 that recent attempts to secure a loan of 125 million *livres* had proved 'very unsuccessful'. Another, floated in December to the tune of 80 million *livres*, ran into similar difficulties – particularly after registration was refused by the Parlement. 'M. de Calonne must have now nearly exhausted all his resources', reported Hailes, 'and it seems next to impossible that he should remain in office. The expenses of Government have exceeded its income near 160 millions of *livres* this year' (Browning ed., 1909: 44, 86). Nevertheless, Calonne tried, in April 1786, to raise 30 million *livres* via a lottery and a further 24 million on the strength of the credit rating of the Paris Hôtel de Ville.

In fact, 1786 was the last year in which the *ancien régime* exhibited an outward appearance of normality. Yet Calonne knew that both his own position and that of the monarchy had become precarious, and in August he obtained the king's assent to a thoroughgoing financial recovery programme. Its key was the proposal for a universal land tax. The new levy would apply to all owners of land, irrespective of rank; it would not be susceptible to reduction via negotiation; and it would replace the two remaining *vingtième* taxes. This was the proposal, packaged with a number of other reforms, which was put before a specially convened *Assembly of Notables* in February 1787. The Notables were a hand-picked body of dignitaries whose endorsement of the reforms would, it was hoped, deflect and discourage any obstructionism on the part of the Parlement of Paris. Unfortunately, they were not very well picked (too few members of the Third Estate), nor were they particularly compliant. Commentators likened their summoning to the convocation of a 'national assembly' (Jones, 1995: 116), which was not at all Calonne's intention. This misapprehension reveals the extent to which the government was beginning to lose control of opinion among the educated public.

In the event, a whole programme of proposed reforms, albeit somewhat hastily cobbled together, was submitted to the Notables for their consideration. Nearly everything it contained (deregulation of the corn trade; conversion of the road-building *corvée* into a monetary tax; reform of local government; reform of the *taille* tax; redemption of the clerical debt, etc.) had been talked about constantly for several decades. Nevertheless, Calonne made no bones about the need for swift and far-reaching action, disclosing

publicly for the first time that government spending outstripped tax receipts by a wide margin. The deficit, he suggested, was attributable to the American War and, more particularly, to Necker's financial mishandling of France's intervention in that conflict. In reality, it went back much further – to the Seven Years War and beyond. For a minister with powerful enemies at Court, it was scarcely a statesmanlike move to antagonize in this way Necker's numerous friends within the Assembly. Nevertheless, the Notables were not incapable of responding to the perceived urgency of the situation. They endorsed the proposals regarding the grain trade, the *corvée* and even the *taille*, and raised no serious objection to the scheme for a uniform and consultative system of local government. On the other hand, they declared themselves not qualified to approve any new financial impositions. Both the universal land tax and the proposal for a wider duty to be levied on stamped documents were open-ended, they noted, and therefore gave rise to objections of a 'constitutional' nature. As for suggestions as to how the Church might clear its accumulated debts, they amounted to a frontal attack on property. The king, who had pledged his support for reform the previous summer, was incensed by the opposition and complained that the clergy and the nobility were blocking the proposals and relying on the common people to pick up the increased tax bill. He would have turned to Vergennes for a solution, but the trusty minister had died as the Notables were gathering in Versailles. Instead, Calonne tried to outflank them, claiming that they were only interested in defending the edifice of corporate privilege. But government ministers who were suspected of 'despotic' tendencies could no longer expect to win the battle for the public opinion of the educated, and with the king's support ebbing as well he was dismissed and exiled to his estates.

Resistance to the royal will

By April 1787, therefore, the ploy to substitute the sanction of an Assembly of Notables for that of the Parlement of Paris had succeeded only in increasing the number of voices calling for restraints to be placed on the powers of absolute monarchy. But Loménie de Brienne, the prelate-administrator who replaced Calonne a month or so later, tried to find a middle way between the proponents of the streamlined state and those who discerned in the Notables an opportunity to wreak an aristocratic revenge on the Bourbon monarchy for ever having pioneered the theory and practice of absolutism in the first place. Loménie de Brienne had no better idea than Calonne of how to overcome the fiscal problem in the short term; however, he had a medium-term strategy. The local government reform initiative would be used to bring regional elites into a new administrative partnership so as to widen the basis of consent to taxation. Chosen on the basis of a tax-paying franchise and unencumbered by distinctions of 'estate', well-to-do land-owners would occupy seats in a tiered structure of municipal, district and provincial assemblies. Over time – Brienne reckoned on five years – such a

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structure would give birth to a 'national' assembly of deputies recruited on the basis of their wealth and public spiritedness.

But such a vision belonged to the future, and to a future that even the small circle of enlightened advisors clustered around the Principal Minister could scarcely anticipate. Loménie de Brienne's most immediate problem remained the Assembly of Notables and, secondarily, the Parlement of Paris. Having succeeded only in embittering the political atmosphere, the Notables were sent home by the king towards the end of May. This turned the spotlight onto the Parlement and simplified the battle lines in the sense that a confrontation between the monarchy and the powerful body of Parisian magistrates could not now be averted. Ministers resolved on a softly-softly approach initially, although Chrétien François de Lamoignon, the new Keeper of the Seals and a firm adherent of absolute monarchy, expressed his misgivings. As a result, the Parlement was induced to accept the proposals regarding the grain trade and the *corvée*. More surprisingly, the magistrates also endorsed the local government reform. However, on the land tax and the stamp duty they were obdurate. Only an Estates General could sanction new taxes, they declared, thereby echoing a call first uttered in the Assembly of Notables. Brienne thus had little choice but to proceed on 6 August 1787 to a *lit de justice* and enforced registration of the key financial reforms. When the magistrates persisted in their resistance to the royal will, the whole body was sent into internal exile.

Exile to some dismal provincial town (Troyes in this case) far removed from the pleasures of the capital was a method of cooling heads that the monarchy had employed before. Most dispassionate observers drew the conclusion that the advantage now lay with the government. The new provincial, district and municipal assemblies were coming into being amid widespread satisfaction, and the Parlements risked being left behind by events. Hailes, writing from the British embassy, thought them at their 'last gasp' (Browning ed., 1909: 232) unless the call for that long-forgotten institution – the *Estates General* – could somehow be rooted in the public's imagination. In a polemical foretaste of what was to come, the *abbé* Morellet informed Lord Lansdowne that the magistrates were defending nothing more than their privileges: 'You should know, milord, that there is not a single counsellor in the Parlements of the realm who pays his *vingtième* or *vingtièmes*, nor a tenant farmer of these messieurs who pays his *taille* on the same footing as his neighbours' (Fitzmaurice ed., 1898: 248).

What would change these perceptions of relative strength, however, was a foreign policy crisis in the Netherlands. For a year and more, the Dutch provinces had been moving in the direction of a civil war as a 'patriot party' of lesser bourgeois and artisans exerted pressure on the chief magistrate (*Stadhouder*) William V and the ruling Orangeist oligarchy. The liberal outlook of the Patriots had been nurtured during the American War of Independence when the Dutch had lined up with France and Spain against Great Britain. Shortly after the resolution of this conflict, France had signed a

defensive alliance with the Patriots. The ruling House of Orange, by contrast, maintained ties with both Britain and Prussia. These ties became stronger in 1786 when the brother of the Princess of Orange (the *Stadhouder's* wife) ascended to the throne of Prussia as Frederick William II. Having secured promises of assistance from Britain, Prussia decided to intervene decisively in the Dutch crisis and on 13 September 1787 troops were sent over the border to aid the Orangeists. The Patriots now looked to France for military assistance, but the conclusion of a full-blown alliance between Britain and Prussia early in October brought home to the Bourbons that they were no longer in a position to back up their clients with force. Although there were divisions in the Royal Council, Brienne concluded with the backing of **Marie-Antoinette** that another land war, which might well involve a confrontation with Britain on the high seas, was out of the question (Murphy, 1998: 80–87). In any case the news had just come in that the Russians and the Turks were moving towards a war posture. This news strengthened Frederick William's hand and raised searching questions about the reliability of France's main ally, Austria. The pledges previously given to the Dutch Patriots were consequently repudiated.

A more dramatic and humiliating demonstration of the connection between taxation, diplomacy and the ability to wage war could scarcely have been conceived. Therefore, some form of accommodation with the Paris Parlement, if only short-term, would have to be reached. In return for their recall, the magistrates agreed to endorse the reinstatement, or extension, of the *vingtièmes* taxes for a further five years – this despite the fact that they had earlier declared themselves incompetent to approve any new taxes whatsoever. But Brienne's needs were more pressing still, and this enabled the magistrates to wring from the government a major political concession. As the price of its consent to a 420 million *livres* loan spread over five years, the Parlement secured an undertaking from the monarchy to call an Estates General by 1792. Presumably, the Principal Minister reckoned that he would have his new system of assemblies up and running by this time in any case. As for Lamoignon, the other strong figure in the government, he intervened to make sure that it was understood that a future Estates General would serve merely as an adjunct to the king's existing councils. It would not possess any legislative or executive initiative. Disconcerted, the magistrates prepared to resist once more, whereupon the king forced through the registration of the loan by means of a *lit de justice* on 19 November 1787. When his cousin, the Duke of Orleans, protested, he was ordered to his estates and two outspoken magistrates were arrested.

The year ended in suspicion, recrimination and stalemate. The Parlement of Paris, together with its lesser brethren in the provinces, stood accused of wishing to turn the monarchy into an 'aristocracy of magistrates', probably unfairly, whereas ministers fumed at the waste of another year in procrastination and palliatives that failed to address the key issues. Investors in government funds, meanwhile, had begun to weigh up the likelihood of a

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declaration of state bankruptcy. At least there was no unrest in the country at large and the harvest had been plentiful.

1788 would witness a deterioration on all of these fronts, however. The denouement was set in motion by Lamoignon, the Keeper of the Seals, who has been described as ‘the last true servant of the old monarchy’ (Hardman, 1993: 136). In April of that year it became known that the head of the judiciary was secretly planning to remove the constitutional powers of the Parlements once and for all, and to curtail severely their judicial competence. This was a gamble, since measures of such severity risked giving substance to the allegations of ‘ministerial despotism’ and provoking a general rallying of the discontented against the government. Daniel Hailes, the perspicacious diplomat in the British embassy, even alerted his superiors to the possibility that the populace might become involved in the conflict, resulting in ‘the total subversion of the monarchy’ (Browning ed., 1910: 33). For a comment made on 17 April, this was prophecy indeed. The blow fell in the shape of a *lit de justice* on 8 May, which compulsorily registered Lamoignon’s Six Edicts dismantling the authority of the Parlements. Henceforward, the formality of registering royal edicts would be transferred to a special ‘plenary court’ whose composition would be tailored to ensure that it remained a docile tool of government.

All thirteen of the Parlements reacted, often clothing their protests in the borrowed garb of contract government [Doc. 3]. By July 1788, nine had been sent into exile. That of Rouen railed against ‘rash innovators [who] have dared to advance the fatal project of bringing everything into a system of *unity*’ (Stone, 1994: 189). This is the familiar idiom of corporate, *ancien-régime* France. It suggests that, even at the moment of their greatest trial, the magistrates scarcely had the ‘rights’ of an undifferentiated ‘nation’ uppermost in their minds. But all would change with the news from Grenoble in the Dauphiné. On 7 June, as troops sought to enforce the banishment of the Parlement, they were assailed by riotous citizens, who hurled bricks and tiles from the rooftops.

This ‘Day of the Tiles’, followed as it was by the meeting at Vizille a short distance from Grenoble (21–22 July), would transform the character of the parlementaire resistance movement. The magistrates and those of their supporters who reassembled in the chateau of Vizille announced their intention to campaign not merely for the particular rights attaching to the inhabitants of the Dauphiné, but for those of ‘all Frenchmen’ (Jones, 1995: 152). Popular demonstrations against the king’s representatives (the intendants and the military commanders) occurred in Pau and in Rennes as well, but it was the Dauphiné example that became the pacemaker for constitutional change. Nevertheless, it should not be supposed that by the late spring of 1788 the whole of the country was up in arms. Provincial France, while inwardly digesting the lesson of judicial disobedience, remained calm for the most part.

Loménie de Brienne, if not Lamoignon, was not unduly alarmed by these developments. More than twenty of his provincial assemblies were now on



Figure 2.1 ‘The Day of the Tiles’, Grenoble, 7th June, 1788

an active footing, and the talk of a ‘nation’ embracing all Frenchmen was perhaps more of a help than a hindrance to his plans. Detached observers agreed: ‘This nation is rising from the dust’, the American ambassador, Thomas Jefferson, reported to fellow diplomat William Stephens Smith. ‘They have obtained, as you know, provincial assemblies in which there will be a more perfect representation of the people than in our state assemblies’ (Boyd ed., 1956: vol. 13, 458). However, the Dauphiné model envisaged that the ‘nation’ would come together within a framework of revived Provincial Estates rather than provincial assemblies. And there remained the ticklish question of the Estates General, of course. Loménie de Brienne’s response was to lift the censorship and to invite suggestions as to how this rather antiquated body might be converted into ‘a truly national assembly both in terms of its composition and its effects’ (Brette, 1894: vol. 1, 19–22).

Why did the ministry retreat, thereby negating the apparent gains of the spring? The plain answer is that the Bourbon monarchy was finally held to account for its debts. All governments relied on short-term credit in order to carry on day-to-day business – that is to say on the willingness of bankers to accept promissory notes drawn against future income in return for cash advances. That willingness ebbed away during the first week of August 1788 even though Brienne signalled that he was ready to abandon the idea of a ‘plenary court’ and to bring forward the calling of the Estates General to

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1 May 1789. On 16 August, he was forced to announce a delay in payments to creditors and part reimbursement in Treasury bills rather than cash. As the Comte de Ferrand, a veteran campaigner in the Parlement of Paris recognized, these measures amounted to ‘bankruptcy in disguise’ (Murphy, 1998: 35). Confidence collapsed.

While a few historians consider that the revolution truly began with the convening of an Assembly of Notables (Gruder, 2007: 4), most do not. The twenty-month period from February 1787 until September 1788 is often described as a phase of ‘pre-revolution’, but this term makes hindsight assumptions about the direction of events. As far as we can tell, the duel between ministers and the Parlements involved a large number of inactive spectators but not many active participants. Even the capital’s intelligentsia, who were in the best position to judge what was going on, seem to have been caught unawares when absolute monarchy suddenly imploded in the summer of 1788.

The nation awakes

Loménie de Brienne left the ministry in a matter of days, notwithstanding the efforts of the queen to protect her favourite. He was replaced by the Swiss banker and reputed miracle worker Jacques Necker, whom public opinion considered to be the only person capable of rescuing the country. Since the king agreed with Necker that it would now be necessary to recall the Parlement of Paris (from a second episode of provincial exile), Lamoignon’s days were numbered too. Sure enough, the embittered yet triumphant magistrates demanded a complete return to the old status quo and on 23 September 1788 a royal declaration rescinded the Six Edicts. Financial confidence was already returning when on the following day the magistrates were escorted by a joyful Parisian crowd to their courthouse like conquering heroes. After the excitement and tumult of the previous months, their pronouncement that the up-coming Estates General be convened in accordance with the precedents established in 1614 (when it had last met) seemed like a detail [Doc. 5].

Signs that the ripples from this long-running and highly visible dispute between the government and the sovereign courts had spread beyond the confines of polite society were not wanting by the autumn of 1788. The departures of both Brienne and Lamoignon were accompanied by extensive rioting in the central districts of Paris. Not unconnected was the fact that the price of bread rose sharply in the capital towards the end of the summer once it became apparent that the harvest had not been plentiful. Anticipating trouble, Necker advised that the policy of free trade in corn, enacted only a year earlier, be suspended. By November, the first reports of food riots in the provinces started to come in. By November also, the implications of the Parlement’s determination to follow the precedent and protocol of 1614 began to strike home. Since the Estates General would be a

gathering of ‘orders’, it followed that each order would meet, deliberate and vote separately. This meant that the commoner deputies of the Third Estate would be unable to make their numerical presence felt; indeed, they would find themselves in a permanent minority. One of Brienne’s last acts before retiring had been to solicit opinion on the reformist path that the monarchy should follow in the months to come; in effect, therefore, to remove the last remaining restraints on open political discussion. The sudden removal of royal censorship controls struck contemporaries forcibly inasmuch as it tacitly invited ordinary people to think for themselves.

Press freedom could now be directed with devastating effect against the Parlement of Paris and its provincial siblings. They were accused – rightly or wrongly – of having mounted a selfish defence of their own privileges under the pretence of the national interest from the very beginning. The proof, if proof were needed, could be found in the magistrates’ efforts to stay in control of events by recommending that the procedures adopted on the occasion of the meeting of the Estates General of 1614 be adhered to.

Pamphlets, lampoons and even political satires had long been an accompaniment to the public life of the monarchy. They were easily produced on small, hand-operated printing presses that could be found in virtually all provincial towns. Anonymity, if required, could be guaranteed and street vendors would see to the business of circulation. That autumn, the trickle of such material became a flood. In Paris, about 150 political pamphlets and manifestos were produced in the six weeks following the reinstatement of the Parlement. But by mid-November, they were appearing at a rate of three or four a day, and by mid-December ten to twelve a day (Garrett, 1959: 126). Between 12 and 27 December, over 200 pamphlets were offered for sale or posted up at street corners; at the turn of the year *abbé* Sieyès’s devastating critique of the privileged orders entitled *What is the Third Estate?* [Doc. 4] came out. In a dramatic escalation of the political temperature, he encouraged his readers to believe that they already possessed everything required for incipient nationhood. If it is true that ordinary French men and women did not have much of a political vocabulary before 1789, the means of acquiring one now lay readily to hand. ‘Precisely who read precisely what?’ is not a question that can be easily answered, of course, and without a doubt the inhabitants of Paris and Versailles were ahead of the rest of the population. Nevertheless, outside observers were in agreement that an elemental shift in the focus of public opinion was under way. The Spanish ambassador reported on 10 November 1788 that ‘The passion for the Parlements is diminishing. A third party is rising up with nothing but the word *liberty* on its lips, which it shouts out to the point of breathlessness’ (Mousset, 1924: 41).

With all around in movement, it seems strange that Necker, the Director General of Finance, should confine himself to budgetary matters and resolutely decline to use his powers of ministerial initiative taking. However, all government reform agendas were now on hold until such time as the Estates

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General was able to take on the burden of advice giving. As for the word 'revolution', it had been spoken at intervals as we have noted, but chiefly in the now redundant context of the monarchy's conflict with the Parlements. Further ingredients would need to be added – fear, famine and the numbing cold of the winter of 1788–89 – before 'revolution' could be construed to mean the threat of a collapse of the state rather than simply an alteration to its fabric. Yet the notion that 'reform' had been placed on hold was pure fiction in practice. The ministry might have wished to wait upon the meeting of the Estates General but no one else chose to do so, whether in Paris or in the provincial capitals of the kingdom. Pamphleteers filled the void with an increasingly well-articulated programme for change, which identified both short- and medium-term objectives.

The most pressing need had to be a revision of the protocols governing the convocation of the Estates General. Time had moved on since 1614; the wealthy elite of the Third Estate were now more numerous and socially adept and it made no sense to restrict the contribution they might make to the regeneration of the kingdom purely on the grounds of respect for precedent. The representation of the Third Estate should be doubled so that it at least matched that of the other two orders, and the deputies of all three orders or estates should be required to work together in a common assembly. This was alarming talk to magistrates, to much of the aristocracy and the upper clergy (also nobles by birth), and to anyone else who still considered the corporate heritage of the monarchy to be sacrosanct. More alarming still was the tendency of pamphleteers to take their cue from the priest Sieyès and argue as though the Third Estate alone constituted the source of the common good [Doc. 4].

Necker bestirred himself sufficiently to call into being a second Assembly of Notables on 6 November. However, five out of its six working committees declared against the pretensions of the Third Estate. He had ruled that the opening of the Estates General would be brought forward to January 1789, but this proved unrealistic and the event was finally rescheduled for April. Even this deadline would allow barely sufficient time to make the necessary preparations. There could be no avoiding executive action, though, and in December, after a marathon session of the royal council, the king took the weighty decision to allow the Third Estate the same number of representatives as the clergy and the nobility combined. Although greeted as a great victory for the nation-in-the-making when made public on 27 December 1788, the 'Result of the King's Council' had nothing to say about the issue of voting (by order or by head), however. On the other hand, Louis XVI took the opportunity to declare his sincere wish to rule henceforward as a constitutional monarch.

Countdown to a revolution

At this point the clock started to tick for some kind of revolution, if only because the initiative began to pass from powerful men in Versailles and

Paris to individuals unknown, or barely known, on the streets of the great cities and in the small towns and villages of the provinces. Three factors can be identified, all acting upon one another. Rural France had been a silent spectator to the political manoeuvring and jousting of the previous two years, but this was now coming to an end. From November onwards the agrarian distress caused by harvest shortfall was exacerbated by the severest winter conditions that anyone could remember. Country dwellers in eastern France led the way, for on 5 January 1789 the local newspaper for the Franche-Comté acknowledged that ‘agitation has spread from the towns to the countryside’ (Jones, 1988: 61). At this stage the ferment was mostly confined to threats directed against the owners of monastic storehouses and the collectors of feudal dues, but in February and March it spread to the rural populations of the Dauphiné and Provence and took on a more purposeful appearance. By April, the reports coming in were describing the mobilisations in the southeast as both organized and explicitly anti-seigneurial in character.

The second factor in play can be described as the mobilisation of minds consequent upon the publication, in late January, of detailed electoral regulations for the forthcoming Estates General. All three orders, that is to say the clergy, the nobles and the commoners, were to choose deputies and to draw up lists of grievances (*cahiers de doléances*) for eventual presentation to the monarch. Since the Third Estate of commoners alone amounted to a constituency of between 4 and 5 million adult males, this was a massive and complicated undertaking. In small towns and rural parishes there can be no doubt that the consultation process conjured up thoughts and hopes for the future that would have been literally unthinkable only a few months previously [Doc. 9].

The third factor in the equation, which looked as though it might trigger something more radical than an orderly rectification of fiscal abuses once the Estates General had settled down to business, was the ongoing pamphlet campaign. As early as December, the *Princes of the Blood* had taken fright and signed an appeal to the monarch warning that the state was in mortal danger – all, that is, save for the Duke of Orleans and the Comte de Provence [Doc. 6]. The Princes were concerned lest a struggle over tax exemptions should become the pretext for a more general questioning of the legitimacy of a society based on ranks or orders. It is true that spokesmen for the Third Estate were starting to emerge and to envisage that the Estates General might acquire legislative powers, enabling it to enact a bill of rights and a modern constitution. The utility of social distinctions had even been opened for discussion, as had the feudal regime and the corporate status of the clergy.

The opinions of historians differ as to just how much was at stake when the Estates General finally opened in Versailles after a delay on 5 May 1789. Had a metropolitan caucus of liberal nobles persuaded their order to make timely and prudential sacrifices? It now seems unlikely. Once again Thomas Jefferson is our surest guide. On 13 March, he felt able

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to assert that 'equal taxation is agreed to by everybody' and went on to predict that the majority of noble deputies would accept voting by head. However, on 9 May, he reported that 'the Noblesse on coming together shew that they are not as much reformed in their principles as we had hoped they would be. In fact there is a real danger of their totally refusing to vote by persons'. He went on to clarify the nature of the impediment in a subsequent letter: 'The great mass of deputies of that order which come from the country shew that the habits of tyranny over the people are deeply rooted in them' (Boyd ed., 1958: vol. 14, 652; 1958: vol. 15, 110). In other words, the elections had exposed the fault-line between 'enlightened' opinion in the capital and the mood of the Second Estate in the kingdom at large [Docs. 7 and 8]. In a sense, though, the divisions within the nobility (or, for that matter, within the clergy) were not the most telling factor. What soured the Estates General almost from the outset was the protracted political stalemate running from early May until the middle of June. The refusal of clerical and noble deputies to countenance common voting with the Third Estate prevented a meeting of minds from taking place, while the ministry itself proved to be internally divided and therefore incapable of responding to the gravity of the situation with clear advice for the king on how he should intervene.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to identify three steps that, once taken, led in the direction of a full-scale revolution. On 17 June 1789, an impatient chamber of Third Estate deputies – or Commoners as they now preferred to call themselves – decided to adopt the title 'National Assembly'. This amounted to an acceptance of Sieyès's logic that sovereignty resided in the majority of the nation. As a corollary, they then 'decreed' (as befitted a sovereign body) that the collection of existing taxes should be brought to a halt if, for any reason, they were dissolved. Thus, a group of deputies who had come to Versailles with no real intention of challenging the prerogatives of the Crown took their courage in their hands and claimed control of the most important sinew of government.

Louis XVI's response to this defiant and quite illegal act reflected both his vacillating character and the deep disharmony among ministers. It brought forward the second step in the direction of revolution. Assailed on all sides with conflicting advice (and mourning the death of the dauphin, his eldest son), Louis agreed that firm action was required: but what kind of action? The Parlement of Paris urged that the so-called National Assembly be disbanded, by force if necessary, and a powerful faction of courtiers and ministers headed by the Comte d'Artois (youngest brother of the king) and Barentin (the Keeper of the Seals) appears to have shared this view, too. In fact, Louis adopted the less brusque middle course of calling all of the deputies together and telling them what he would, and would not, accept.

In the Royal Session of 23 June 1789, the Bourbon monarchy stood at the crossroads. Had the king made the gentler, more accommodating statement proposed by the liberal-minded Necker, it is possible that the final crisis

might have been averted. But this assumes that the Commoner deputies – notwithstanding the famous Tennis Court Oath sworn three days earlier – did not really possess the courage of their convictions. In the event though, Louis delivered the judgement scripted by the hardliners. Although some fiscal and budgetary concessions were offered, he declared that the ‘decrees’ issued by the National Assembly on 17 June were unacceptable to him and therefore null and void. As for the ancient distinctions between the orders, they were to remain. Since Versailles was packed with troops for the occasion, the ‘body language’ of the Royal Session was scarcely conciliatory, either, and indeed Necker took care to absent himself. On being ordered to return to their separate chamber by the master of ceremonies, the Commoner deputies hesitated; but then their resolve was stiffened by an intervention from within their ranks by a *déclassé* nobleman, the Comte de Mirabeau. He retorted: ‘We shall not leave; return to those who have sent you and tell them that we shall not stir from our places save at the point of the bayonet’ (Goodwin, 1959: 70).

The third and final step towards revolution followed swiftly on the heels of this riposte. Louis’s conservative advisors – and particularly his sibling, the Comte d’Artois – argued for a military solution, but Necker was still a part of the ministry and the noisy demonstrations in his support urged caution. Moreover, the pressure (or menace) directed towards those who were now routinely dubbed ‘the privileged classes’ was beginning to have an effect. Already large numbers of deputies drawn from the lower clergy had defected to the National Assembly and the more progressive nobles were beginning to follow suit, encouraged by royal assurances that the distinction of orders was not in jeopardy. By 27 June, the intransigents among the clergy and the nobility had dwindled to 371, whereas the representatives of the so-called nation numbered 830.

At this point, the king simply ordered the diehards to fuse with the Third Estate. The English agricultural commentator Arthur Young, who was in Paris when the news came through, noted in his journal: ‘The whole business now seems over, and the revolution complete’ (Young, Betham-Edwards edn, 1900: 182). Historians have found it difficult to fathom this decision on the part of the monarch. Most likely it was taken under duress – under the threat or rumour of an invasion of the Palace of Versailles by an expeditionary force of Parisians. But it was also a decision that bought time – time to bring up more troops and to position them in and around the capital. When Louis XVI was finally prevailed upon to dismiss Necker on 11 July, he must have had some inkling of what was likely to happen. Hopefully, the troops would contain any violent reaction on the part of the populace. They did not, and the taking of the Bastille was the outcome. This was the step that acknowledged the failure of attempts at reform from above and pitched France into a revolution.



A Decade of Revolution in Cuba

8

April 1959	May 17, 1959	1960–1962	June 1960	July 6, 1960	August 23, 1960
Castro visits United Nations in New York	Agrarian reform law introduced	14,000 Cuban children are sent without parents to the United States in Operation Pedro Pan	U.S. oil refineries refuse to refine Soviet crude, resulting in nationalization; more nationalizations follow	United States cuts Cuban sugar quota by 700,000 tons	Cuban Federation of Women (FMC) founded

Some fifty years on, the Cuban Revolution remains a powerfully polarizing symbol.¹ Ideologues on both the left and the right still invoke the Cuban Revolution as a story of good versus evil, as something that is vibrant or nearly dead, and seem largely incapable of imagining it in historical (as something that changes over time) or ambiguous terms. Fidel Castro and Che Guevara are Third World heroes, standing up to U.S. imperialism on behalf of the poor. They represent an evil form of authoritarianism, and drove almost 10 percent of the island's population into exile. The Revolution taught the illiterate to read, provided healthcare to the poor, and reshaped the Cuban economy in spite of a crippling blockade. The revolutionaries were bumbling bureaucrats, relied on Soviet subsidies for decades, and ultimately made the island (once again) a haven for sex tourism in their effort to save themselves. Che was a model for the best kinds of youthful idealism and rebellion. Che was an incompetent ideologue who led a generation of naïve youths to their deaths.

Viewed together, these competing narratives provide a baffling portrait of revolutionary Cuba. When we add to that our current tendency to fetishize and massify star power, stories of the Revolution veer into the absurd. As Figure 8.1 attests, the complex ways in which ideology, youthful rebellion, and mass marketing have become embedded in narratives of the



Figure 8.1 Iconic Che cartoon

Source: Cartoon by Matthew Diffie. The New Yorker Collection / Cartoon Bank.

Revolution can leave us shaking our heads. The Revolution becomes an empty signifier—it can represent just about anything you might desire.

Then again, Bart Simpson on a t-shirt worn by Che Guevara, in a cartoon in the *New Yorker*, actually makes some sense. We understand how all these images are linked together because the Cuban government has taken a defiant attitude towards an imperial power through both its symbolic repertoire and its material acts for more than fifty years. Bart may be no revolutionary, but we can understand his resistance to unjust authority (Principal Seymour Skinner, Homer Simpson, and Nelson Muntz). Bart also shares a certain charisma with the icons of the Revolution. Like Castro and Che, he is quick-witted, intelligent, and a born leader for the weak, willing to stand up to bullies at risk to his own life.

Bart, of course, is a cartoon. Che and Fidel were idealistic revolutionaries, men willing to use violence in order to reshape Cuba in their image. Given this rather significant distinction, the fact that we can relate to Che and Fidel through Bart Simpson ought to give us

pause. It tells us something about how North Americans have made meaning of the events in Cuba since the 1950s, how they have made the Revolution into a legend that serves their narrative needs (a need, for example, for youthful rebel heroes or despotic villains). It tells us very little about Cuba.

If we are to move beyond this problem, we must seek to understand the Cuban Revolution, along with Che and Fidel, as phenomena in time. Unlike cartoon figures, the Revolution and its leaders lived through specific historical moments, and changed along with global historical events. Even if part of Che's appeal was that he died young in a failed Bolivian Revolution (1967), he did leave a complex imprint on the historical record, and was fundamentally a man of the 1960s. Bart Simpson, on the other hand, will forever be ten years old, and seems to live out of time. He is a simple and enduring symbol of the youthful rebel spirit, leaving no actual victims in his wake and is as relevant today as he was when he was created in 1987. Real people don't enjoy that luxury. They impact other's lives in substantive ways, and they either change with the times or get left behind, dead or forgotten.

If we are thinking about change over time, we might begin by asking a simple question: when was the Cuban Revolution? A literal answer would focus on the violent conflict during 1957 and 1958, when a guerrilla movement led by Fidel Castro, his brother Raúl, Camilo Cienfuegos, Che Guevara, and others, fought Fulgencio Batista's regime to a standstill, helped discredit the government in the eyes of the United States (so that military support was cut off), and took their time while a broad opposition coalition came together to force Batista out of power. The Revolution, in this sense, was over on January 1, 1959, when rebels marched gloriously through the streets of Cuban cities.

With Batista gone, it was unclear what would happen next. The rebels were a loose coalition of different opposition groups, not a single army. The fluidity of the moment represented an opportunity for whoever might assert their control over the situation, and it was then that Fidel Castro's political and rhetorical skills became fully evident. In the weeks following January first, Castro made dozens of speeches and public appearances, declaring over and over again both the end of tyranny and the beginning of some as yet unspecified process. He mostly avoided talking about agendas, and focused his energies on transforming himself into the undisputed savior of the nation.

This helps to explain a photo taken while Castro spoke at Camp Colombia, an old army barracks, on January 8, 1959, which became one of the most powerful images we have of these early days. It records a speech that was not unlike many he gave during his victorious descent on Havana, full of exhortations to unity, promises of real change, and vague threats to his enemies. At some point during the speech, doves were released in the crowd (rumors always had them descending from the sky). They flew through the air and settled on the podium. One even sat on Castro's shoulders (Figure 8.2). Critics claim the fix was in, that Castro had seed for the birds or that the spotlight trained on Castro attracted them to him. It did not matter. The doves, read popularly both as a sign of peace and of divine approval of Castro's role as *El Comandante* (the Commander), sealed some unspoken deal. Castro, as the Revolution, would save the Cuban people.²

Castro's words and deeds signaled the next phase of the revolutionary process, which linked consolidation of the new regime to the transformation of Cuban society. The cross-class alliances that overthrew Batista rapidly disintegrated as Fidel asserted power within the new coalition and implemented a radical egalitarian transformation. He announced



Figure 8.2 Fidel Castro and the doves

land reforms, the nationalization of foreign property, and decided to build closer ties to the Soviet Union. He drove thousands of opponents into exile. At once radical and authoritarian, his government was simultaneously a revolution and a socialist regime intent on concentrating power.

The distinction between a regime and a revolution is not simply academic. The very term *revolution* implies a transformation, and has been used again and again across Latin America to denote moments in which the social and political order was overturned. The 1910 Mexican Revolution, the 1952 Bolivian Revolution, and the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution saw old systems collapse and new political actors create more inclusive political orders. At some point each of these new regimes also seemed less like radical transformative governments and more like entrenched power blocs defending their own interests. The “Revolution” in each of these cases then became an argument. If you could claim to represent

the Revolution, you were the legitimate heirs of the last popular upheaval, and thus the true representatives of the people. Mexico's *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI), for example, ruled the country as the heirs of Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata for seventy-one years. This claim suggested that the Mexican Revolution had never ended, and that the best way poor people could see their interests served was to work with, and not against the state.

A similar, but even more powerful sentiment has long been attached to the Cuban Revolution. Even in 1959 Fidel insisted that the Revolution was not an event, but a process. Over time, the long-standing antipathy of the United States and the sense of incompleteness that has plagued the island have reinforced this claim. If you take the regime's rhetoric at face value, the Revolution is still not over, the battle is still being fought, and Cubans must remain loyal, forever, until victory.³

For more than half a century, this merging of Revolution–nation–regime has dominated everyday life in Cuba. It has shaped politics, social life, and even private affairs, leaving what was once one of the most dynamic and open societies in Latin America closed to most forms of political expression. Near constant surveillance, or at least a fear of surveillance, has produced a society where distrust is ever-present, where acts of criticism are carefully framed to avoid detection, and where individuals are acutely aware of their powerlessness.

As masters of political management, the regime has spent decades perfecting the craft of responding to growing disaffection by making limited concessions, and then rescinding those concessions just as quickly. Stressful moments may bring new busses or increased rations, restrictions on the entry into hotels might be lifted, or dollars (and even cell phones) legalized. These privileges may also be taken away in an instant. As long as the United States remains the enemy, Cubans must live in the Revolution, which links Cuban nationalism and Socialist revolution so seamlessly that to critique the Revolution is to be a traitor to the Cuban nation. And to do that is to opt for social and economic marginalization, the possibility of jail, and perhaps exile.

The threat may be constant, but the regime is not. There is little in the experience since the 1950s that suggests that the Revolution can be understood as a stable or singular phenomenon. Rather, the regime has taken a heterodox approach to changing Cuban society, keeping itself in power, coping with changing international circumstances, and dealing with their own successes and failures. Even Castro narrated different phases of the Revolution—the Push towards Communism during the 1960s (discussed below), the Retreat to Socialism of the 1970s (promoting soviet-style planning, material incentives, and limited private enterprise), the Rectification of the 1980s (when limited private enterprise was eliminated), and since 1989 the Special Period in a Time of Peace (the name seems fittingly empty of content). The only constant in Cuba's recent past has been the U.S. embargo, and the possibility of blaming all failures on the unflinching hostility of the U.S. government. One need not be too cynical to imagine that at critical moments of potential thawing in United States–Cuban relations, Castro actively sought to renew this enmity, as without it he would have no one to blame for Cuba's problems. How many of us recall that in February 1996 Castro shot down the Miami-based planes flown by *Brothers to the Rescue* (an anti-Castro group that was dropping pamphlets on the island) at the very moment when the Clinton administration seemed to be on the verge of changing U.S. policy towards Cuba?

Making a Revolution

With an annual per capita income of \$353 in 1959, Cuba was hardly a poor country by Latin American standards. Cuba was, however, a highly unequal society, one of the most unequal in the Americas. Rural workers earned only about \$91 annually, leaving the country with a Gini coefficient of around 0.57.⁴ The economic instability of the sugar industry (almost one-quarter of the workforce was employed in sugar, leaving them idle four months per year) and foreign domination of the economy (among other things, 75 percent of arable land was foreign owned) exacerbated these inequalities, generating twin sets of grievances for ordinary Cubans. Though they relied on sugar and the United States for their livelihoods, both were also a source of misery.

The appropriate means to liberate the country from these dependencies were far from clear. While the M-26-7 (named for the origins of their movement in the failed July 26, 1953 attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba) under Fidel Castro grabbed most headlines and clearly led the opposition, Batista fell because of a concerted effort that included rural guerrillas, an urban underground, and striking workers. His fate was sealed when the police and military refused to support the regime in late 1958. A small minority believed that all the opposition needed to do was topple the dictator, and that further reform was unnecessary. Many more believed that they needed to establish stable democratic institutions, like those imagined in earlier political struggles (as recently as 1940). Most Cubans agreed that their political parties were hopelessly rotten, and needed to be remade with entirely new faces. There was likewise considerable popular support for limited economic and social reforms, especially those that would put foreign owned assets into the hands of Cubans.

The differing agendas proposed in 1959 were not easily reconciled, and any faction that managed to consolidate their hold on power would have to do so in a perilous setting. Too much change would alienate the United States and powerful economic interests. In the past the enemies of reform had been quite capable of scuttling even minor efforts (notably during the regime of Ramón Grau San Martín in 1933). Yet many revolutionaries were unwilling to settle for meager results, and could defend their interests with weapons. Eastern peasants demanded immediate land reform. Urban workers demanded immediate 20 percent wage increases, better working conditions, and more control of the shop floor. Others demanded rent freezes, housing, education reform, women's rights, and the removal of Batista era government officials.

Castro proved to be an extraordinarily savvy politician as he dealt successfully with these various demands. He found ways to isolate (or execute) his rivals, to build a tight-knit and loyal following, to ensure his own survival, and concentrate power in his own hands. All of this he accomplished while also enacting concrete measures that responded to popular demands. The March 1959 Urban Reform Law mandated substantial rent reductions (50 percent for rent under \$100). Telephone and utility rates were reduced, wages increased, and the property of high government officials seized. The Agrarian Law of May 1959 restricted landholdings to 1,000 acres, with limited exceptions. Together, these reforms dramatically reduced poverty in the early years of the Castro regime. By 1963 Cuba's Gini coefficient had fallen to 0.28.

Reform meant confrontation with the United States, and here Castro again proved adept at turning circumstances to his favor. As it became clearer during 1959–60 that radical

reform meant a violent clash with the United States, the country grew increasingly polarized. Though much of the opposition was Cuban in origin, Castro managed to cast acts of sabotage, attempted assassinations, and any number of protests as the work of the CIA (in part, because sometimes they were). Cubans, he argued, must unify to confront Cuba's internal and external enemies. He also increasingly argued that the only way to do this was through an embrace of communism. As he convinced more and more Cubans that a liberated Cuba depended on his communist Revolution, he was also able to convince many that opposition amounted to treason.

With every successful confrontation with the United States, Cubans saw a leader who could defend their nation as no other ever had. He bravely went to New York and Washington, taking the rhetorical battle directly to the enemy. He survived their assassination attempts unscathed. And after the failed invasion at the *Playa Girón* (Bay of Pigs) on April 17, 1961, he could rightly claim to have repelled an American invasion. In the face of such a compelling heroic narrative, moderates who called for elections could be dismissed as bourgeois dupes, traitors to the Revolution who would allow an intractable enemy to weaken the nation by fomenting electoral discord. Dissent became criminal (100,000 suspected dissidents were in jail by the end of April 1961).

Radical economic policies had a similar effect on Castro's hold on power. By the end of 1961, Castro had nationalized 85 percent of Cuban industry. As more and more of the economy wound up in the hands of the state, the regime eliminated certain professions (including insurance, real estate, and law), and many of Castro's enemies and rivals lost their livelihoods. Without opportunities in Cuba, these potential opponents of the regime were increasingly inclined to consider exile. The pull to leave was exacerbated by the Kennedy administration's offer of asylum on exceptionally easy terms to Cubans, a policy designed to isolate the regime but which in fact made it easier for Castro to eliminate the opposition.⁵ With the opposition increasingly ensconced in Miami, revolutionary militants took over virtually all facets of the island's economic and political life.

Had the Castro regime been simply a run-of-the-mill authoritarian government, its success in consolidating its hold on the state and isolating or eliminating the opposition might have been viewed as an end in and of itself, or at the very least a propitious moment to begin stripping the country of its assets and opening off-shore bank accounts. This was not however, a regime like those that then ruled Nicaragua, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and elsewhere. Castro wanted control, but he wanted to use that power to bring Cubans together to collectively remake, defend, and police their nation.

Democratic processes could have linked the masses to the state, but would also create opportunities for the opposition to upend the revolutionary process. Castro then needed structures that would empower the masses, but would do so in ways that limited the autonomy individual actors enjoyed in liberal democracies. He needed to control the process even as he created a system that allowed popular groups to participate. The way he did this was by creating a series of mass organizations whose members had access to the state to make their demands and participate in the political life of the nation, but required that they swear complete loyalty to the state as a precondition for participating. The first of these organizations, *Asociación de Juventud Rebelde* (Association of Rebel Youth, AJR), was created in March 1960. On the advice of Vilma Espín, a fellow M-26-7 fighter and then Castro's sister in law, the regime founded the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (Cuban Federation of

Women, FMC) in August 1960. In September 1960, after a public rebuke from the Organization of American States (OAS), the *Comités de Defensa de la Revolución* (Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, CDRs) were convened. The *Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños* (National Small Farmers Association, ANAP) and *Central de Trabajadores de Cuba* (Cuban Workers Confederation, CTC) were likewise turned into mass organizations around this time.

In the heady days of the early 1960s, these associations offered Cubans an opportunity to participate in a process that promised to liberate Cuba from its imperial past, and they attracted tens of thousands of members, who in turn provided critical support for the regime. By the end of 1961, there were 300,000 members in popular militias, and 800,000 in the CDRs. Explicitly charged with physically defending the country from invasion, these groups did much more. Together with other mass organizations they served as pressure groups, demanding any number of benefits from the state, and taking credit for revolutionary programs. They were also instruments for the dissemination of revolutionary fervor, charged with raising consciousness, administering healthcare, encouraging students to go to school and workers to go to work, and as always, ferreting out enemies of the Cuban people.

When the labor ministry introduced new laws mandating secure and safe environments for women, the FMC used these laws to attract new members and new support for the regime. By 1962 the FMC had 376,000 members, many of whom could directly attribute significant life changes to the Revolution. In 1959 one quarter of the women in the workforce were domestic servants, a category that ceased to exist after the Revolution. During the early 1960s FMC efforts helped 19,000 former household servants attend special schools and find new jobs. Tens of thousands were given scholarships, materials, and training to study for new professions, and over a thousand entered the revolutionary vanguard in public administration.

Utopias

Although often undertaken as practical efforts to shore up support for the regime, we should not underestimate the ways early revolutionary projects were linked to a utopian vision of what Cuba could become. Articulated most clearly by Che Guevara, the Revolution was a movement against history, an effort to remake the world. This made particular sense given the challenges the new regime faced. Utopian thinking seemed in some ways the only means to get out of the very real conundrums that Cuba faced as a monoculture society ninety miles away from a hostile super power. At first, the utopian thinking came in a plan to shift the country away from its dependence on sugar exports, to diversify and industrialize Cuba in order to ensure its independence. As Minister of Industry and a principal architect of the land reform, Che directed this transformation.

Either out of pure naiveté or simple desperation, Guevara chose to forgo the socialist phase of revolutionary reform and push Cuba directly into communism. With an eye towards the end of money, Che worked to eliminate cash transactions for food, transportation, and rent. Rejecting the suggestion that he keep market mechanisms in place in order to ensure productivity, Che insisted that Cubans could do away with the law of value, which allocated resources where they were productive instead of where they were most needed. His was a

program of centralized planning, a program in which the state would directly intervene in all aspects of the economy to ensure “balanced” development. He would rely mostly on the willingness of people to sacrifice for the common good in order to make this happen.

Under Che’s economic model, businesses would not be supported because of their viability or efficiency or their capacity to generate enough revenues to cover their costs. They would be supported because they were deemed intrinsically good. Centralized budgeting would allow the government to allocate funds based on ideological rather than economic (read bourgeois) reasons. Wage scales would be eliminated because all workers deserved the same income. Bonuses and overtime would similarly be banned. Even though material incentives were common in the Eastern Bloc, Che argued that they encouraged individualism and undermined the revolutionary project of creating “new men,” with new forms of consciousness. Hard work would instead be recognized with moral rewards—banners, flags, pins, and plaques rewarding the contribution of workers to the Revolution. These would in turn help foment widespread revolutionary consciousness, which Che understood as an essential ingredient in the battle against Cuba’s powerful enemies.

The gendered quality of this project was inescapable. Guevara’s new man was just that. For all its pretenses to feminism and nods to Vilma Espín and the FMC, the leadership of the M-26-7 viewed males, females, and their sexuality in extraordinarily conservative ways. As images of Castro in the fields cutting sugar cane attested, the Revolution was the work of strong-backed men—men who enjoyed a cigar, a strong drink, and took pleasure in the sensuality of revolutionary women (Figure 8.3). This image linked Castro’s physical strength to the survival of the Revolution against its enemies.



Figure 8.3 Castro cutting cane as a part of the 1970 Cuban sugar harvest

Source: Photo by Gilberto Ante/Roger Viollet/Getty Images

We see this both in the ways that Castro's heterosexual masculinity was fetishized, and in the fact that homosexuals were actively persecuted by the regime into the 1990s. In the *machista* culture of the Revolution, their attraction to males was linked to national weakness, decadence, and U.S. imperialism. The New Man could not tolerate homosexuals, narcissists who were supposedly obsessed with self-satisfying pleasure and debauchery; the essence of the counter-revolution.

Prostitutes likewise drew special ire from the regime. The sex trades were banned in the early revolutionary period, and former prostitutes were sometimes given opportunities to train for a new career. Like homosexuality, prostitution was linked to carnal pleasure, decadence, and U.S. imperialism (after all, North Americans were frequent sex-tourists in Cuba before 1959). The prohibition produced at least one memorable tale of a drug-dependent prostitute who turned her life around and received a university education as a result of the Revolution,⁶ but one supposes that not all prostitutes viewed the regime's efforts to outlaw their profession favorably. The sex trades had always been one of the few ways that poor, uneducated women could earn a decent living, and quickly returned to prominence in the 1990s when Castro embraced tourism as a means to earn foreign revenues.

These experiences remind us of the difference between imagining and actually creating a new man, or new society. The new Cuba was the vision of a revolutionary vanguard, and in creating the new society the regime invariably attempted to impose a series of practices on Cubans, some of which were unwelcome. The Revolution promised to liberate women, but drove millions (if you include domestic workers) out of work. Indeed, the end of domestic service, prostitution, and the flight of many middle-class women to the United States actually caused a reduction in the number of women in the workforce during the 1960s.

Later the Revolution would promise domestic equality under the Family Code (1975), which required Cuban males to do an equal share of the housework. Like the ban on prostitution and domestic service, it was a utopian idea, dreamed up by the vanguard, and its affect on actual Cuban women was quite uneven. Yet even if we mock these top-down reforms for their idealism we should not forget the substantive changes Cuban women saw in their lives during these years. In part because of the exodus after 1959, in part because the Cuban state did open educational and professional opportunities for women, and in part due to the efforts of the FMC, by the end of the 1960s Cuban women found it easier to pursue a career, to get a divorce, and to make their own reproductive decisions than women anywhere else in Latin America. All could visit a doctor if they were sick, and virtually none faced the kind of desperate hunger that had affected millions before 1959, and still affected millions in other parts of the region.

Dystopias

There is no question that some aspects of Cuba's experience during the 1960s are best read as comedies. It seems quaint to think that anyone ever believed that moral incentives—asking workers to be more productive because it is good, rather than because they would personally benefit—would ever work. Few people today believe that the state has the capacity to transform consciousness in even small ways, let alone direct the massive

transformation from individualistic thinking and towards the communist consciousness that Che envisioned. Our own awareness of corruption, nepotism, and cronyism in Eastern Bloc countries (and Cuba) long ago put the lie to that promise.

We need only examine the rate of absenteeism in Cuba during these years to see the problems in Che's theories. By 1967 the daily absentee rate at work was about 20 percent across the country, and 50 percent in some regions, including Oriente (the heartland of the Revolution). In part these rates were due to low morale, and in part they were due to the fact that mismanagement elsewhere left workers standing in long lines for food, provisions, and buses instead of working. Even accounting for these factors however, we are left with the clear impression that Cubans effectively went on strike to protest moral rewards.

It was not simply moral incentives that failed. Economic diversification failed. Industrialization failed. Centralized budgeting failed spectacularly. The government confronted food shortages as early as 1962, when it began rationing food, clothing and consumer items. By 1963 production volumes of any number of staple crops had plummeted and production across the economy had declined. The sugar harvest also fell, from 6.7 million tons in 1961 to 3.8 million in 1963. Facing pressure from the Soviets and an economy in chaos, Castro then turned his attention to increasing sugar exports in order to improve Cuba's balance of payments.

Even this was something of a disaster. As a part of a lurching series of policy shifts during the 1960s, Castro abandoned Che's management strategies in 1964 (Che himself went off to promote worldwide revolution), and committed most of the country's productive capacity to producing a ten million ton sugar harvest by 1970. Cuba had never had a harvest this large, and if successful, it would be an enormous victory for the Revolution. Road construction, manufacturing, port facilities, and agriculture were all refocused to serve sugar. Most other economic activities were neglected.

It may have made sense to prop up Cuban exports by reinvesting in the neglected sugar sector, but beyond emphasizing sugar, Castro also punished those sectors that might have dynamically supplemented sugar exports by selling to local markets. Renewed land reform in 1963 concentrated land in large state run export facilities (in sharp contrast to first land reform in 1959, which put land into the hands of peasants). Working under the logic that, if peasants possessed land, they would work on it to the detriment of the state farm, the state increasingly denied small-scale farmers access to land of their own. Those most negatively affected by this decision were some of the Revolution's most ardent supporters, peasants who had been providing a wide range of fruits and vegetables to a shortage plagued domestic market since 1959.⁷

Fearing that small businessmen also represented a threat to the regime, Castro nationalized 57,000 small businesses in 1968. These were not pre-revolutionary holdouts. Most had been established since 1959. Among the prohibited businesses were street vendors who provided essential services, including sellers of fruit, bread, coffee, eggs, sandwiches, and other goods. These small businessmen and women worked in the space between the informal and formal economy, selling some goods they got from official sources and others they purchased on the black market; commodities grown on small farms and sent to market without the permission of the state. As such they also filled a critical need for Cuban consumers, because state cafeterias and stores could not meet the needs of the people. And with the formal sector unable to fill the void left by the absence of the informal economy, shortages

became worse after the street vendors were banned. Spare parts for cars, fresh fruit, and even coffee were increasingly available only through the underground economy. Minor protests flared here and there, and graffiti attacking the regime began to show up on walls in Havana.

Even the mass organizations that earlier helped legitimize the revolutionary state were failing by the mid-1960s, their initial promise having faded into bureaucratic intransigence, nepotism, and a tendency to abuse their power and spy on ordinary Cubans. Castro responded with new efforts to win popular support, including a much ballyhooed program called Local Power, and the comical sounding Campaign against the Bureaucracy (parodied in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's film, *The Death of a Bureaucrat*). Local Power was (as most Cubans knew) mostly an illusion. By the mid-1960s the mechanisms that had once promised power to the people were chained to the state.

Workers, for instance, saw their unions wither away during these years. They lost the right to strike, and thus to demand higher wages. The grievance commissions that the government put in place to arbitrate work-place conflicts were abandoned in 1964, jettisoned because they sided with workers too often. They were replaced with work councils, which were indirectly charged with enforcing the will of the state and labor discipline. Workers were invited to work cooperatively with management in the councils, where their demands were set aside in favor of efforts to increase productivity, save materials, reduce absenteeism, promote voluntary labor, prevent accidents, and of course, cultivate a revolutionary consciousness. There would be no more bonuses, guaranteed sick days, or strikes.

In a tragically absurd combination of these initiatives, the very mechanisms created to improve the lives of Cubans sometimes did the opposite. During the late 1960s planning was impossible, as the principal planning agencies, JUCEPLAN⁸ and the National Bank, lost 1,500 positions in the Campaign Against Bureaucracy, and could not function because receipts, taxes, cost accounting, and interest were all abolished. The budget itself ceased to exist between 1967 and 1970, replaced by a series of *fidelista* mini-plans. Political control fell to an ever more vanguardist Cuban Communist Party (Fidel's version was founded in 1965), which spent most of its energies demanding revolutionary consciousness and self-sacrifice from Cubans. By 1970 the GDP was barely higher than it had been in 1965, and in per capita terms it was lower.

To be sure, more than mere incompetence hurt the Cubans. They faced the loss of professional technical expertise, and were not always up to the difficult task of reorienting Cuban trade away from the U.S. market and towards the Soviet bloc. The larger freighters that took Cuban sugar to Russian ports needed deeper harbors, more port facilities and warehouses. Inventory needed to be stored, and orders were not quickly filled. Cubans also had to deal with the challenges caused by bad Soviet parts and general shortages of spare parts for their U.S.-made cars, trucks, appliances, and more. Still, in simple terms, Cubans were worse off in 1970 than they had been in 1959. When it became clear that on top of all of this, the sugar harvest was going to fail to reach its goal (in the end it was 8.5 million tons), Castro appeared before an enormous crowd in the Plaza de la Revolución on July 26 to offer his resignation.

Cubans refused his offer, resoundingly. The question is: why? We might start with Castro's charisma. It is difficult to divorce the simple power of Castro's magnetism from his actual policies in the early years of his regime. He was rare among politicians for his ability to stir the crowd. Cubans also responded to his common touch, his willingness to get

down from his jeep and cut cane with the workers, his capacity to appear anywhere and everywhere, his tirelessness, and his simple ability to stir up feelings of fraternal (and later paternal) love. These qualities made certain failings worthy of forgiveness. Nonetheless, while Castro's appeal ought to inform our interpretation of these events, it does not fully explain why the crowd refused his resignation.

It may be that the crowd's response was some sort of common emotional catharsis, the expression of the sense that his failure was everyone's failure. While not exactly a democratic mandate for thirty-eight more years in office, we could interpret this as a sign of just how successful Castro had been in identifying himself and his revolutionary struggle as synonymous with the Cuban people. Still, even this is not enough to understand the enduring popularity of Fidel Castro in 1970 in spite of the repeated failures of the 1960s. To understand this we need to come to terms with the fact that millions of Cubans shared Castro's utopian dreams, his belief that Cubans had to remain ever vigilant in defending their nation against the United States, and his sense that many of these crises were the fault of sinister foreign elements.

We see this in more than just the crowd's response. Moral incentives, for example, produced high rates of absenteeism. They also inspired millions of Cubans to sacrifice for their country/revolution. Volunteer work, begun in October 1959 to prepare the Havana waterfront for a convention of travel agents, drew many millions of participants during the 1960s. Two hundred thousand Cubans volunteered for a teachers' brigade committed to reducing illiteracy during the 1960s, which reduced the adult illiteracy rate from 21 percent in 1959 to 13 percent by 1970. In 1970 alone 1.2 million Cubans left their jobs and worked in the sugar harvest.

Moral incentives may have been a planning disaster, but in many ways they were an ideological success. They highlighted the need for sacrifice, and acted as a means of linking the people's sacrifice to a national revolutionary project that would not otherwise succeed. When Cubans suffered some form of deprivation, they were doing the work of the Revolution. One could be proud, and ought not complain. Moreover, Cubans did believe that they were a poor people living on a rich island. Who could challenge the argument that, absent the negative impact of neo-colonialism and capitalism, Cubans would be prosperous, even as prosperous as the North Americans? And who could argue with the material benefits many poor people gained under Castro?

Their idealism spoke of a generational moment, framed both by the cold war and Cubans' long history of fighting imperial rule. Twenty years later their willingness to contribute to voluntary labor was not nearly as strong as it was early on, and Cubans would increasingly be noted more for their cynicism than their idealism. These however, were heady times. Most Cubans were willing to suffer, and suffer a great deal, if it would lead to a better world.

The Documents: Over Time

Knowing what would become of Cuba's revolution in the 1970s and beyond, it might be tempting to dismiss those cane-cutting revolutionaries as naïve. Like North American anti-war protestors, Mexican students who marched before the 1968 Olympics demanding

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greater democracy, and the jubilant Czechoslovakians who celebrated the Prague Spring before the Soviet tanks rolled in, today the Cubans who sacrificed themselves in pursuit of becoming new men seem so very young, and so very distant. It is good to have this perspective, because it reminds us that the 1960s were a specific historical era in Cuba and elsewhere. This perspective also reminds us that the era was short lived. Cuba was not alone in growing increasingly conservative and authoritarian after 1970.

It is this shift that compels us to consider time very closely when we imagine the Cuban Revolution. Neither the Cuban state nor its enemies prefers this approach. The Cuban state represents the Revolution as timeless, as a single phenomenon that connects the M-26-7 Movement, the Bay of Pigs, and the idealism of the 1960s to the less than ideal present, holding that all the ideals of the era could have been accomplished if not for the implacable hostility of the United States. Its enemies prefer a stripped down and simplistic version of an unchanging evil, a totalitarian threat that is embodied by an unchanging Castro regime (even if Raúl has replaced Fidel). These images serve certain political ends very well. A dysfunctional relationship with the United States has reinforced the power of the regime for half a century (the 1996 Helms-Burton Act in the United States, for instance, strengthened the regime by mandating that U.S. relations with Cuba would not be normalized until all those who had lost property in the Revolution received full restitution). It has also provided a flash point for U.S. politics, creating opportunities for U.S. politicians to win votes in South Florida. What these images don't do is tell us much about what has changed over half a century. And they tell us almost nothing about how Cubans' perspective on their government has changed over time.

In order to attempt to capture some of this change, below we present five documents. The first comes from 1965, the second 1990, and the third, fourth, and fifth from the very recent past. The first is an iconic example of the optimism of the 1960s. The second, written in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, offers a perspective on the dashed hopes and dreams of that era through a meditation on the tensions between Cuba's New Man and the Cuba that has been lost through the exile of so many people. The final documents consider just what is left of the revolutionary dream after all these decades, and offer a perspective on the corrosive effects that five decades of authoritarian rule have had on life on the island.

Each document is in its own way a commentary on the tensions between idealist reform and authoritarian rule that first surfaced during the 1960s, and each is informed by a loyalty to something (Cuba, the Revolution) that over time became increasingly difficult to disentangle from the deleterious effects of one party rule. The author of the first document is no longer alive, but the authors of the other texts remained in Cuba, choosing their love of the patria and lingering attachment to the ideals of the 1960s over the freedom and prosperity of exile. That in and of itself should remind us that this era continues to offer a promise that we are well advised to take seriously.

Document 8.1 is a letter that Che Guevara wrote to Carlos Quijano, editor of the Montevideo weekly magazine *Marcha*, in March 1965. The letter represents one of Che's signature intellectual accomplishments, written while on a tour of Asia, Africa, and Europe. While it seems clear in retrospect that the tour represented an effort by Castro to move Che out of the administrative responsibilities he had assumed in Cuba, at the time it also made a great deal of sense to promote Che as the face of the utopian project. This essay

contributed in considerable ways to building the legend of Che the visionary revolutionary, as it contains his clearest description of the New Man, the figure who promised to realize the revolutionary project. Because of this, this essay has long been read in contradictory ways; as an ideal to live up to, and as an impossibly naïve work of propaganda.

By the time Che wrote the New Man essay, a clear majority of those who remained on the island supported the regime, especially because of its success in defending the country from what Cubans understood as a foreign invasion. Those who spoke critically of the Revolution often found themselves in prison or forced out of the country, often the former leading to the latter. Once in exile in Miami, New York, or Madrid, their writing came to be characterized by bitter feelings of loss and a clear and unremitting hatred of Castro. Even if they had once been somewhat sympathetic to the reform agenda, in their stories the regime was violent, arbitrary, cynical, the worst kind of dictatorship.⁹

On the island these writers were often called *gusanos* (worms), an insult that suggested treason on their part. In the 1960s it was relatively easy to dismiss critics in this way, in part because the Revolution had such an array of genuine boosters who had remained in Cuba, including a new generation of artists, filmmakers, poets and writers who were producing brilliant and innovative work in support of the regime. These artists were not simple stooges for the regime. Much of their work was mildly critical of the government, mocking bureaucrats and demanding the best from the Revolution. They were tolerated because they were producing brilliant work, work that found an audience around the world, work that signaled the openness of the Cuban Revolution to self-criticism.

This happy state of affairs came to an abrupt end with the arrest of the poet Heriberto Padilla in 1971. Imprisoned, tortured, and forced to make a humiliating confession and name supposed subversives in his circle of friends, his experience had a deeply chilling affect on Cuban intellectual life. In its aftermath, the Cuban government began to exercise considerable control over the arts, and many of the intellectuals who had imagined themselves as revolutionaries during the 1960s increasingly found that there was no place for them in Cuban society.

Some chose exile. Others developed an increasingly sophisticated repertoire of strategies for critiquing the regime while remaining within the revolutionary fold. Jesús Díaz (who was only forced into exile after many years of critical work), Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Senel Paz, the author of Document 8.2, wrote, produced plays and films, and generally skirted a fine line between art and politics in their work. The text presented here, which is an excerpt from Paz' brilliant short story, *El bosque, el lobo y el hombre nuevo* (The Forest, the Wolf, and the New Man¹⁰) had life both as literature and as the basis for one of the most important films in Cuban cinema history, *Fresa y chocolate* (Strawberry and Chocolate, released in 1993), which was directed by Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío. Published in 1990 and set in 1979, the story considers the relationship between a young, upright revolutionary student (the archetypal New Man) who is studying at the University of Havana and his urbane homosexual friend, Diego. They embody many of the conflicts between the new, revolutionary Cuba and the bourgeois elites of the *ancien regime*, with the crux of the story focusing on whether or not Diego can remain in Cuba. Diego is a fierce nationalist, and swears loyalty to the Revolution, yet his need to express himself freely ultimately leaves him with no choice but to emigrate. The selection here is drawn from the portion of the story where Diego elects to leave.

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Paz set this story in 1979 largely because this was a moment when the ideals of the Revolution remained viable to many within and outside of Cuba. The Soviet Union was still supporting Cuba then, and Fidel's charisma had not faltered much during a decade of significant transitions away from the free-for-all of 1960s era reform (and its vast dreams, as embodied in Che's work) and towards a heavily institutionalized Revolution that was more closely aligned with the Soviet model. In 1979 it seemed that the Revolution still had life, and could promise better standards of living and greater equality, even if it could not promise the political freedoms, freedom of artistic expression, and rich intellectual life that many in the island's artistic and intellectual circles desired.

Most Cubans knew that some of the Revolution's accomplishments were illusory, that beneath all the bluster Cubans continued to struggle, continued to hoard dollars and rely on the black market for many of their necessities. Given the chance, many would choose exile over life on the island, as 125,000 did when Fidel Castro briefly lifted exit restrictions in 1980 (the Mariel boat lift). Even then, few could imagine just how crucial Soviet aid was to maintaining the Revolution. They would discover the extent of their dependence after 1989, when the collapse of the Soviet Union devastated the island's economy, bringing widespread hunger and devastation. For tens of thousands of Cubans their only escape from the disaster lay in shabbily constructed flotation devices that they hoped would deliver them to the United States. By the early 1990s, over a million Cubans were living in the United States.

Writing from 1990, Paz offered 1979 as a moment in which the choice between freedom and equality still seemed possible. From 1989 forward, Cubans were faced with different challenges. They had to determine how to revive the economy, were forced to open the island to trade and private investment, to reinvigorate the hotel and restaurant sector in search of hard currencies, and to turn a blind eye while sex tourism again flourished. By the end of the 1990s a taxi driver could earn many times what a doctor was paid, and many of the vaunted accomplishments of the 1960s seemed like distant history.

Yoani Sánchez, the author of Documents 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, is a product of this "Special Period." She is also one of the most accomplished bloggers Latin America has produced since the advent of the form. Her work is featured on her own blog (*Generación Y*), on the Huffington Post, and elsewhere. Since beginning her blog in 2007, she has also been one of the most read critics of the Castro regime anywhere.

Except of course, in Cuba, where her blog has been repeatedly blocked, and where Cubans are often forced to learn what she is saying by hearing about it from abroad. In the past she furtively wrote her short postings on her own computer, put them on a thumb drive, and then emailed them from hotel computers and internet cafes to the friends who maintained her blog's German website. She would also use her time in cafes to download volumes of information onto flash drives and then take them home so that she could read the material she sought (she has long maintained that the thumb drive is an essential tool for social and political change in Cuba). Sánchez has been harassed and detained (at one point tweeting out her arrest even as it happened). So far she has refused to leave.

Her impact in Cuba is difficult to ascertain. In some sense she is like the critics long produced by the regime, tolerated to a point, and then forced into exile. This worked in the past in part because critics had access to relatively limited audiences, though it is not clear that this logic applies to people like Sánchez, whose work defies censorship in part because of the nature of the internet. At once funny, sad, and inspiring, and widely read on the

island and off, Sánchez seems to have succeeded in offering an alternative narrative to life in Cuba to the one posited by the regime. Having stayed (she actively chose life in Cuba over life in Europe), she can authoritatively claim that she has remained staunchly loyal to the island even if she is a harsh critic of the Castros. Whether or not this points the way to an alternative future depends on her ability to continue to mobilize these new technologies, and whether or not they truly have the capacity to produce change.

Read together, Che Guevara, Senel Paz, and Yoani Sánchez offer us three dramatically different visions of the promise and possibilities envisioned in the 1960s. Each must be read for the individual proclivities of the author—the fiery idealism of the revolutionary set against the prose of the storyteller and the pointed critiques of the blogger. Each should also be read for the time in which it was created. Guevara’s work could only be a product of the dreams of the 1960s. Paz hearkens back to the 1960s through his own ambivalent take on the New Man. Operating in two periods instead of one, Paz is also telling us something both about the height of the Revolutionary Man and his seeming demise in this story. Sánchez in turn gazes over the rubble of revolutionary reform with a cynicism that is very much of the new millennium.

In considering these texts chronologically, it is possible that we might create a larger narrative of the Revolution, of its birth, maturity, and decline. Then again, it is possible that these three different writers, each separated by decades from the other, are simply describing different worlds, or different places within the same world. This is the challenge we face when we try to sum up an experience as vast and contradictory as the Cuban Revolution.

Document 8.1 Letter from Major Ernesto Che Guevara to Carlos Quijano, editor of the Montevideo weekly magazine *Marcha* (March, 1965)

Source: Guevara Internet Archive (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/03/man-socialism-alt.htm>). Copyright: © Ocean Press, www.oceanbooks.com.au. Reprinted by permission.

I am finishing these notes while travelling through Africa, moved by the desire to keep my promise, although after some delay. I should like to do so by dealing with the topic that appears in the title. I believe it might be of interest to Uruguayan readers.

It is common to hear how capitalist spokesmen use as an argument in the ideological struggle against socialism the assertion that such a social system or the period of building socialism upon which we have embarked, is characterized by the extinction of the individual for the sake of the State. I will make no attempt to refute this assertion on a merely theoretical basis, but will instead establish the facts of the Cuban experience and add commentaries of a general nature. I shall first broadly sketch the history of our revolutionary struggle both before and after the taking of power. As we know, the exact date of the beginning of the revolutionary actions which were to culminate on January 1, 1959, was July 26, 1953. A group of men led by Fidel Castro attacked the Moncada military garrison in the province of Oriente, in the early hours of the morning of that day. The attack was a failure, the failure became a disaster and the survivors

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were imprisoned, only to begin the revolutionary struggle all over again, once they were amnestied.

During this process, which contained only the first seeds of socialism, man was a basic factor. Man—individualized, specific, named—was trusted and the triumph or failure of the task entrusted to him depended on his capacity for action.

Then came the stage of guerrilla warfare. It was carried out in two different environments: the people, an as yet unawakened mass that had to be mobilized, and its vanguard, the guerilla, the thrusting engine of mobilization, the generator of revolutionary awareness and militant enthusiasm. This vanguard was the catalyst which created the subjective condition necessary for victory. The individual was also the basic factor in the guerilla, in the framework of the gradual proletarianization of our thinking, in the revolution taking place in our habits and in our minds. Each and every one of the Sierra Maestra fighters who achieved a high rank in the revolutionary forces has to his credit a list of noteworthy deeds. It was on the basis of such deeds that they earned their rank.

The First Heroic Stage

It was the first heroic period in which men strove to earn posts of great responsibility, of greater danger, with the fulfillment of their duty as the only satisfaction. In our revolutionary educational work, we often return to this instructive topic. The man of the future could be glimpsed in the attitude of our fighters.

At other times of our history there have been repetitions of this utter devotion to the revolutionary cause. During the October Crisis and at the time of hurricane Flora, we witnessed deeds of exceptional valour and self-sacrifice carried out by an entire people. One of our fundamental tasks from the ideological standpoint is to find the way to perpetuate such heroic attitudes in everyday life.

The Revolutionary Government was established in 1959 with the participation of several members of the "sell-out" bourgeoisie. The presence of the Rebel Army constituted the guarantee of power as the fundamental factor of strength.

Serious contradictions arose which were solved in the first instance in February, 1959, when Fidel Castro assumed the leadership of the government in the post of Prime Minister. This process culminated in July of the same year with the resignation of President Urrutia in the face of mass pressure.

With clearly defined features, there now appeared in the history of the Cuban Revolution a personage which will systematically repeat itself: the masses.

Full and Accurate Interpretation of the People's Wishes

This multifaceted being is not, as it is claimed, the sum total of elements of the same category (and moreover, reduced to the same category by the system imposed upon them) and which acts as a tame herd. It is true that the mass follows its leaders, especially Fidel Castro, without hesitation, but the degree to which he has earned such confidence is due precisely to the consummate interpretation of the people's desires and aspirations, and to the sincere struggle to keep the promises made.

The mass participated in the Agrarian Reform and in the difficult undertaking of the management of the state enterprises; it underwent the heroic experience of Playa Girón it was tempered in the struggle against the groups of bandits armed by the CIA; during the October Crisis it lived one of the most important definitions of modern times and today it continues the work to build socialism.

Looking at things from a superficial standpoint, it might seem that those who speak of the submission of the individual to the State are right; with incomparable enthusiasm and discipline, the mass carries out the tasks set by the government whatever their nature: economic, cultural, defense, sports, etc. The initiative generally comes from Fidel or the high command of the revolution; it is explained to the people, who make it their own. At times, local experiences are taken up by the party and the government and are thereby generalized, following the same procedure.

However, the State at times makes mistakes. When this occurs, the collective enthusiasm diminishes palpably as a result of a quantitative diminishing that takes place in each of the elements that make up the collective, and work becomes paralyzed until it finally shrinks to insignificant proportions; this is the time to rectify.

This was what happened in March, 1962, in the presence of the sectarian policy imposed on the Party by Anibal Escalante.

Dialectical Unity Between Fidel and the Mass

This mechanism is obviously not sufficient to ensure a sequence of sensible measures; what is missing is a more structured relationship with the mass. We must improve this connection in the years to come, but for now, in the case of the initiatives arising on the top levels of government, we are using the almost intuitive method of keeping our ears open to the general reactions in the face of the problems that are posed.

Fidel is a past master at this; his particular mode of integration with the people can only be appreciated by seeing him in action. In the big public meetings, one can observe something like the dialogue of two tuning forks whose vibrations summon forth new vibrations each in the other. Fidel and the mass begin to vibrate in a dialogue of growing intensity which reaches its culminating point in an abrupt ending crowned by our victorious battle cry.

What is hard to understand for anyone who has not lived the revolutionary experience is that close dialectical unity which exists between the individual and the mass, in which both are interrelated, and the mass, as a whole composed of individuals, is in turn interrelated with the leaders.

Under capitalism, certain phenomena of this nature can be observed with the appearance on the scene of politicians capable of mobilizing the public, but if it is not an authentic social movement, in which case it is not completely accurate to speak of capitalism, the movement will have the same life span as its promoter or until the rigors of capitalist society put an end to popular illusions. Under capitalism, man is guided by a cold ordinance which is usually beyond his comprehension. The alienated human individual is bound to society as a whole by an invisible umbilical cord: the law of value. It acts upon all facets of his life, shaping his road and his destiny.

The Invisible Laws of Capitalism

The laws of capitalism, invisible and blind for most people, act upon the individual without his awareness. He sees only the broadness of a horizon that appears infinite. Capitalist propaganda presents it in just this way, and attempts to use the Rockefeller case (true or not) as a lesson in the prospects for success. The misery that must be accumulated for such an example to arise and the sum total of baseness contributing to the formation of a fortune of such magnitude do not appear in the picture, and the popular forces are not always able to make these concepts clear. (It would be fitting at this point to study how the works of the imperialist countries gradually lose their international class spirit under the influence of a certain complicity in the exploitation of the dependent countries and how this fact at the same time wears away the militant spirit of the masses within their own national context, but this topic is outside the framework of the present note).

In any case we can see the obstacle course which may apparently be overcome by an individual with the necessary qualities to arrive at the finish line. The reward is glimpsed in the distance and the road is solitary. Furthermore, it is a race of wolves: he who arrives does so only at the expense of the failure of others.

I shall now attempt to define the individual, the actor in this strange and moving drama that is the building of socialism, in his two-fold existence as a unique being and a member of the community.

I believe that the simplest approach is to recognise his un-made quality: he is an unfinished product. The flaws of the past are translated into the present in the individual consciousness and constant efforts must be made to eradicate them. The process is two-fold: on the one hand society acts upon the individual by means of direct and indirect education, while on the other hand, the individual undergoes a conscious phase of self-education.

Compete Fiercely With the Past

The new society in process of formation has to compete very hard with the past. This makes itself felt not only in the individual consciousness, weighted down by the residues of an education and an upbringing systematically oriented towards the isolation of the individual, but also by the very nature of this transition period, with the persistence of commodity relations. The commodity is the economic cell of capitalist society; as long as it exists, its effects will make themselves felt in the organization of production and therefore in man's consciousness.

Marx's scheme conceived of the transition period as the result of the explosive transformation of the capitalist system torn apart by its inner contradictions; subsequent reality has shown how some countries, the weak limbs, detach themselves from the imperialist tree, a phenomenon foreseen by Lenin. In those countries, capitalism has developed sufficiently to make its effects felt upon the people in one way or another, but it is not its own inner contradictions that explode the system after exhausting all of its possibilities. The struggle for liberation against an external oppressor, the misery which has its origin in foreign causes, such as war whose consequences make

the privileged classes fall upon the exploited, the liberation movements aimed at overthrowing neocolonial regimes, are the customary factors in this process. Conscious action does the rest.

A Rapid Change Without Sacrifices is Impossible

In these countries there still has not been achieved a complete education for the work of society, and wealth is far from being within the reach of the masses through the simple process of appropriation. Under development and the customary flight of capital to "civilized" countries make impossible a rapid change without sacrifices. There still remains a long stretch to be covered in the building of the economic base and the temptation to follow the beaten paths of material interest as the lever of speedy development, is very great.

There is a danger of not seeing the forest because of the trees. Pursuing the chimera of achieving socialism with the aid of the blunted weapons left to us by capitalism (the commodity as the economic cell, profitability and the individual material interest as levers, etc.), it is possible to come to a blind alley. And the arrival there comes about after covering a long distance where there are many crossroads and where it is difficult to realise just when the wrong turn was taken. Meanwhile, the adapted economic base has undermined the development of consciousness. To build communism, a new man must be created simultaneously with the material base.

That is why it is so important to choose correctly the instrument of mass mobilization. That instrument must be fundamentally of a moral character, without forgetting the correct use of material incentives, especially those of a social nature.

Society Must be a Huge School

As I already said, in moments of extreme danger it is easy to activate moral incentives; to maintain their effectiveness, it is necessary to develop a consciousness in which values acquire new categories. Society as a whole must become a huge school.

The broad characteristics of the phenomenon are similar to the process of formation of capitalist consciousness in the system's first stage. Capitalism resorts to force but it also educates people in the system. Direct propaganda is carried out by those who are entrusted with the task of explaining the inevitability of a class regime, whether it be of divine origin or due to the imposition of nature as a mechanical entity. This placates the masses, who see themselves oppressed by an evil against which it is not possible to struggle.

This is followed by hope, which differentiates capitalism from the previous caste regimes that offered no way out. For some, the caste formula continues in force: the obedient are rewarded by the *post mortem* arrival in other wonderful worlds where the good are requited, and the old tradition is continued. For others, innovation: the division in classes is a matter of fate, but individuals can leave the class to which they belong through work, initiative, etc. This process, and that of self-education for success, must be deeply hypocritical; it is the interested demonstration that a lie is true.

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In our case, direct education acquires much greater importance. Explanations are convenient because they are genuine; subterfuges are not needed. It is carried out through the State's educational apparatus in the form of general, technical and ideological culture, by means of bodies such as the Ministry of Education and the Party's information apparatus. Education takes among the masses and the new attitude that is praised tends to become habit; the mass gradually takes it over and exerts pressure on those who have still not become educated. This is the indirect way of educating the masses, as powerful as the other, structured, one.

The Process of Individual Self-education

But the process is a conscious one; the individual receives the impact of the new social power and perceives that he is not completely adequate to it. Under the influence of the pressure implied in indirect education, he tries to adjust to a situation that he feels to be just and whose lack of development has kept him from doing so thus far. He is education himself.

We can see the new man who begins to emerge in this period of the building of socialism. His image is as yet unfinished; in fact it will never be finished, since the process advances parallel to the development of new economic forms. Discounting those whose lack of education makes them tend toward the solitary road, towards the satisfaction of their ambitions, there are others who, even within this new picture of over-all advances, tend to march in isolation from the accompanying mass. What is more important is that people become more aware every day of the need to incorporate themselves into society and of their own importance as motors of that society.

They no longer march in complete solitude along lost roads towards far-off longings. They follow their vanguard, composed of the Party, of the most advanced workers, of the advanced men who move along bound to the masses and in close communion with them. The vanguards have their eyes on the futures and its recompenses, but the latter are not envisioned as something individual; the reward is the new society where human beings will have different characteristics: the society of communist man.

A Long and Difficult Road

The road is long and full of difficulties. At times, the route strays off course and it is necessary to retreat; at times, a too rapid pace separates us from the masses and on occasions the pace is slow and we feel upon our necks the breath of those who follow upon our heels. Our ambition as revolutionaries makes us try to move forwards as far as possible, opening up the way before us, but we know that we must be reinforced by the mass, while the mass will be able to advance more rapidly if we encourage it by our example.

In spite of the importance given to moral incentives, the existence of two principal groups (excluding, of course, the minority fraction of those who do not participate for one reason or another in the building of socialism) is an indication of the relative lack of development of social consciousness. The vanguard group is ideologically more

advanced than the mass; the latter is acquainted with the new values, but insufficiently. While in the former a qualitative change takes place which permits them to make sacrifices as a function of their vanguard character, the latter see only the halves and must be subjected to incentives and pressure of some intensity; it is the dictatorship of the proletariat being exercised not only upon the defeated class but also individually upon the victorious class.

To achieve total success, all of this involves the necessity of a series of mechanisms, the revolutionary institutions. The concept of institutionalization fits in with the images of the multitudes marching toward the future as that of a harmonic unit of canals, steps, well-oiled apparatuses that make the march possible that permit the natural selection of those who are destined to march in the vanguard and who dispense rewards and punishments to those who fulfill their duty or act against the society under construction.

Perfect Identification Between Government and Community

The institutionality of the Revolution has still not been achieved. We are seeking something new that will allow a perfect identification between the government and the community as a whole, adapted to the special conditions of the building of socialism and avoiding to the utmost the commonplaces of bourgeois democracy transplanted to the society in formation (such as legislative houses, for example). Some experiments have been carried out with the aim of gradually creating the institutionalization of the Revolution, but without too much hurry. We have been greatly restrained by the fear that any formal aspect might make us lose sight of the ultimate and most important revolutionary aspiration: to see man freed from alienation. Notwithstanding the lack of institutions, which must be overcome gradually, the masses now make history as a conscious aggregate of individuals who struggle for the same cause. In spite of the apparent standardization of man in socialism, he is more complete; his possibilities for expressing himself and making himself heard in the social apparatus are infinitely greater, in spite of the lack of a perfect mechanism to do so. It is still necessary to accentuate his conscious, individual and collective, participation in all the mechanism of direction and production and associate it with the idea of the need for technical and ideological education, so that the individual will realise that these processes are closely interdependent and their advances are parallel. He will thus achieve total awareness of his social being, which is equivalent to his full realisation as a human being, having broken the chains of alienation.

This will be translated concretely into the reappropriation of his nature through freed work and the expression of his own human condition in culture and art.

Work Must Acquire a New Condition

In order for it to develop in culture, work must acquire a new condition; man as commodity ceases to exist and a system is established that grants a quota for the fulfillment of social duty. The means of production belong to society and the machine is only the front line where duty is performed. Man begins to free his thought from the

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bothersome fact that presupposed the need to satisfy his animal needs by working. He begins to see himself portrayed in his work and to understand its human magnitude through the created object, through the work carried out. This no longer involves leaving a part of his being in the form of labour power sold, which no longer belongs to him; rather, it signifies an emanation from himself, a contribution to the life of society in which he is reflected, the fulfillment of his social duty.

We are doing everything possible to give work this new category of social duty and to join it to the development of technology, on the one hand, which will provide the conditions for greater freedom, and to voluntary work on the other, based on the Marxist concept that man truly achieves his full human condition when he produces without being compelled by the physical necessity of selling himself as a commodity. It is clear that work still has coercive aspects, even when it is voluntary; man has still not transformed all the coercion surrounding him into conditioned reflexes of a social nature, and in many cases, he still produces under the pressure of the environment (Fidel calls this moral compulsion). He is still to achieve complete spiritual recreation in the presence of his own work, without the direct pressure of the social environment but bound to it by new habits. That will be communism.

The change in consciousness does not come about automatically, just as it does not come about automatically in the economy. The variations are slow and not rhythmic; there are periods of acceleration, others are measured and some involve a retreat.

Communism's First Transition Period

We must also consider, as we have pointed out previously, that we are not before a pure transition period such as that envisioned by Marx in the "Critique of the Gotha Program", but rather a new phase not foreseen by him: the first period in the transition to communism or in the building of socialism.

Elements of capitalism are present within this process, which takes place in the midst of violent class struggle. These elements obscure the complete understanding of the essence of the process.

If to this be added the scholasticism that has held back the development of Marxist philosophy and impeded the systematic treatment of the period, whose political economy has still not been developed, we must agree that we are still in diapers. We must study all the primordial features of the period before elaborating a more far reaching economic and political theory.

The resulting theory will necessarily give preeminence to the two pillar of socialist construction: the formation of the new human being and the development of technology. We still have a great deal to accomplish in both aspects, but the delay is less justifiable as far as the conception of technology as the basis is concerned; here, it is not a matter of advancing blindly but rather of following for a sizable stretch the road opened up by the most advanced countries of the world. This is why Fidel harps so insistently on the necessity of the technological and scientific formation of all our people and especially the vanguard.

Division Between Material and Spiritual Necessity

In the field of ideas that lead to non-productive activities, it is easier to see the division between material and spiritual needs. For a long time man has been trying to free himself from alienation through culture and art. He dies daily in the eight and more hours during which he performs as a commodity to resuscitate in his spiritual creation. But this remedy itself bears the germs of the same disease: he is a solitary being who seeks communion with nature. He defends his environment-oppressed individuality and reacts to esthetic ideas as a unique being whose aspiration is to remain immaculate.

It is only an attempt at flight. The law of value is no longer a mere reflection of production relations; the monopoly capitalists have surrounded it with a complicated scaffolding which makes of it a docile servant, even when the methods used are purely empirical. The artists must be educated in the kind of art imposed by the superstructure. The rebels are overcome by the apparatus and only the exceptional talents are able to create their own work. The others become shame-faced wage-workers or they are crushed.

Artistic experimentation is taken as the definition of freedom, but this "experimentation" has limits, which cannot be perceived until they are clashed with, that is, until they confront the real problems of man and his alienated condition. Senseless anguish or vulgar pastimes are comfortable safety valves for human uneasiness; the idea of making art a weapon of denunciation and accusation is combatted.

If the rules of the game are respected, all honours are obtained—the honours that might be granted to a pirouette-creating monkey. The condition is not attempting to escape from the invisible cage.

A New Impulse for Artistic Experimentation

When the Revolution took power, the exodus of the totally domesticated took place; the others, revolutionaries or not, saw a new road. Artistic experimentation took on new force. However, the routes were more or less traced and the concept of flight was the hidden meaning behind the word freedom. This attitude, a reflection in consciousness of bourgeois idealism, was frequently maintained in the revolutionaries themselves.

In countries that have gone through a similar process, endeavours were made to combat these tendencies with an exaggerated dogmatism. General culture became something like a taboo and a formally exact representation of nature was proclaimed as the height of cultural aspiration. This later became a mechanical representation of social reality created by wishful thinking: the ideal society, almost without conflicts or contradiction, that man was seeking to create.

Socialism is young and makes mistakes. We revolutionaries often lack the knowledge and the intellectual audacity to face the tasks of the development of the new human being by methods different from the conventional ones, and the conventional methods suffer from the influence of the society that created them (once again the

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topic of the relation between form and content appears). Disorientation is great and the problems of material construction absorb us. There are no artists of great authority who also have great revolutionary authority.

The men of the Party must take this task upon themselves and seek the achievement of the principal aim: to educate the people.

Socialist Realism Based on the Art of the Last Century

What is then sought is simplification, what everyone understands, that is, what the functionaries understand. True artistic experimentation is obliterated and the problem of general culture is reduced to the assimilation of the socialist present and the dead (and therefore not dangerous) past. Socialist realism is thus born on the foundation of the art of the last century.

But the realistic art of the 19th century is also class art, perhaps more purely capitalist than the decadent art of the 20th century, where the anguish of alienated man shows through. In culture, capitalism has given all that it had to give and all that remains of it is the foretaste of a bad-smelling corpse; in art, its present decadence. But why endeavour to seek in the frozen forms of socialist realism the only valid recipe? "Freedom" cannot be set against socialist realism because the former does not yet exist; it will not come into being until the complete development of the new society. But let us not attempt to condemn all post-mid-19th century art forms from the pontifical throne of realism at-all-costs; that would mean committing the Proudhonian error of the return to the past, and straight jacketing the artistic expression of the man who is born and being formed today.

An ideological and cultural mechanism must be developed which will permit experimentation and clear out the weeds that shoot up so easily in the fertilized soil of state subsidization.

21st Century Man

The error of mechanical realism has not appeared (in Cuba), but rather the contrary. This is so because of the lack of understanding of the need to create a new human being who will represent neither 19th century ideas nor those of our decadent and morbid century. It is the 21st century man whom we must create, although this is still a subjective and unsystematic aspiration. This is precisely one of the basic points of our studies and work; to the extent that we make concrete achievement on a theoretical base or vice versa, that we come to broad theoretical conclusions on the basis of our concrete studies, we will have made a valuable contribution to Marxism-Leninism, to the cause of mankind. The reaction against 19th century man has brought a recurrence of the 20th century decadence. It is not a very serious error, but we must overcome it so as not to leave the doors open to revisionism.

The large multitudes of people are developing themselves, the new ideas are acquiring an adequate impetus within society, the material possibilities of the integral development of each and every one of its members make the task ever more fruitful. The present is one of struggle; the future is ours.

Intellectuals Not Authentically Revolutionary

To sum up, the fault of many of our intellectuals and artists is to be found in their "original sin": they are not authentically revolutionary. We can attempt to graft elm trees so that they bear pears, but at the same time we must plant pear trees. The new generations will arrive free of "original sin." The likelihood that exceptional artists will arise will be that much greater because of the enlargement of the cultural field and the possibilities for expression. Our job is to keep the present generation, maladjusted by its conflicts, from becoming perverted and perverting the new generations. We do not want to create salaried workers docile to official thinking nor "fellows" who live under the wing of the budget, exercising freedom in quotation marks. Revolutionaries will come to sing the song of the new man with the authentic voice of the people. It is a process that requires time.

In our society the youth and the Party play a big role. The former is particularly important because it is the malleable clay with which the new man, without any of the previous defects, can be formed.

Youth receives treatment in consonance with our aspirations. Education is increasingly integral and we do not neglect the incorporation of the students into work from the very beginning. Our scholarship students do physical work during vacation or together with their studies. In some cases work is a prize, while in others it is an educational tool; it is never a punishment. A new generation is born.

The Party: Vanguard Organisation

The Party is a vanguard organisation. The best workers are proposed by their comrades for membership. The party is a minority but the quality of its cadres gives it great authority. Our aspiration is that the party become a mass one, but only when the masses reach the level of development of the vanguard, that is, when they are educated for communism. Our work is aimed at providing that education. The party is the living example; its cadres must be full professors of assiduity and sacrifice; with their acts they must lead the masses to the end of the revolutionary task, which means years of struggle against the difficulties of construction, the class enemies, the defects of the past, imperialism . . . I should now like to explain the role played by the personality, the man as the individual who leads the masses that make history. This is our experience, and not a recipe.

Fidel gave impulse to the Revolution in its first years, he has always given it leadership and set the tone, but there is a good group of revolutionaries developing in the same direction as Fidel and a large mass that follows its leaders because it has faith in them. It has faith in them because these leaders have known how to interpret the longings of the masses.

So That the Individual Feels More Fulfilled

It is not a question of how many kilograms of meat are eaten or how many times a year someone may go on holiday to the sea shore or how many pretty imported things can be bought with present wages. It is rather that the individual feels greater fulfillment,

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that he has greater inner wealth and many more responsibilities. In our country the individual knows that the glorious period in which it has fallen to him to live is one of sacrifice; he is familiar with sacrifice.

The first came to know it in the Sierra Maestra and wherever there was fighting; later, we have known it in all Cuba. Cuba is the vanguard of America and must make sacrifices because it occupies the advance position, because it points out to the Latin American masses the road to full freedom.

Within the country, the leaders have to fulfil their vanguard role; and it must be said with complete sincerity that in a true revolution, to which you give yourself completely without any thought for material retribution, the task of the vanguard revolutionary is both magnificent and anguishing. Let me say, with the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love. It is impossible to think of an authentic revolutionary without this quality. This is perhaps one of the great dramas of a leader; he must combine an impassioned spirit with a cold mind and make painful decision without flinching. Our vanguard revolutionaries must idealise their love for the people, for the most hallowed causes, and make it one and indivisible. They cannot descend, with small doses of daily affection, to the terrain where ordinary men put their love into practice.

A Large Dose of Humanity

The leaders of the revolution have children who do not learn to call their father with their first faltering words; they have wives who must be part of the general sacrifice of their lives to carry the revolution to its destination; their friends are strictly limited to their comrades in revolution. There is no life outside the revolution.

In these conditions, the revolutionary leaders must have a large dose of humanity, a large dose of a sense of justice and truth to avoid falling into dogmatic extremes, into cold scholasticism, into isolation from the masses. They must struggle every day so that their love of living humanity is transformed into concrete deeds, into acts that will serve as an example, as a mobilizing factor.

The revolutionary, ideological motor of the revolution within his party, is consumed by this uninterrupted activity that ends only with death, unless construction be achieved on a worldwide scale. If his revolutionary eagerness becomes dulled when the most urgent tasks are carried on a local scale and if he forgets about proletarian internationalism, the revolution that he leads cease to be a driving force and it sinks into a comfortable drowsiness which is taken advantage of by imperialism, our irreconcilable enemy, to gain ground. Proletarian internationalism is a duty, but it is also a revolutionary need. This is how we educate our people.

Dangers of Dogmatism and Weaknesses

It is evident that there are dangers in the present circumstances. Not only that of dogmatism, not only that of the freezing up of relations with the masses in the midst of the great task; there also exists the danger of personal weaknesses, which might threaten our task. If a man thinks that in order to devote his entire life to the

revolution, he cannot be distracted by the worry that one of his children lacks a certain article, that the children's shoes are in poor condition, that his family lacks some necessary item, with this reasoning, the seeds of future corruption are allowed to filter through. In our case, we have maintained that our children must have, or lack, what the children of the ordinary citizen have or lack; our family must understand this and struggle for it. The revolution is made by man, but man must forge his revolutionary spirit from day to day.

Thus we go forward. Fidel is at the head of the immense column—we are neither ashamed nor afraid to say so—followed by the best Party cadres and right after them, so close that their great strength is felt, come the people as a whole, a solid bulk of individualities moving towards a common aim; individuals who have achieved the awareness of what must be done; men who struggle to leave the domain of necessity and enter that of freedom.

That immense multitude is ordering itself; its order responds to an awareness of the need for order; it is no longer a dispersed force, divisible in thousands of fractions shot into space like the fragments of a grenade, trying by any and all means, in a fierce struggle with their equals, to achieve a position that would give them support in the face of an uncertain future.

We know that we have sacrifices ahead of us and that we must pay a price for the heroic fact of constituting a vanguard as a nation. We the leaders know that we must pay a price for having the right to say that we are at the head of the people that is at the head of America.

Each and every one of us punctually pays his share of sacrifice, aware of being rewarded by the satisfaction of fulfilling our duty, aware of advancing with everyone towards the new human being who is to be glimpsed on the horizon.

We Are More Free Because We Are More Fulfilled

Allow me to attempt to come to some conclusions: We socialists are more free because we are more fulfilled; we are more fulfilled because we are more free.

The skeleton of our complete freedom is formed, but it lacks the protein substance and the draperies, we will create them.

Our freedom and its daily sustenance are the colour of blood and swollen with sacrifice.

Our sacrifice is a conscious one; it is in payment for the freedom we are building.

The road is long and in part unknown; we are aware of our limitations. We will make the 21st century man; we ourselves.

We will be tempered in daily actions, creating a new human being with a new technology.

The personality plays the role of mobilisation and leadership in so far as it incarnates the highest virtues and aspirations of the people and does not become detoured.

The road is opened up by the vanguard group, the best among the good, the Party.

The basic raw material of our work is the youth: in it we place our hopes and we are preparing it to take the banner from our hands.

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If this faltering letter has made some things clear, it will have fulfilled my purpose in sending it.

Accept our ritual greetings, as a handshake or an “Ave María Purísima.”

PATRIA O MUERTE

[Fatherland or Death]

Document 8.2 Senel Paz, “El Lobo, el Bosque, y el hombre nuevo” (Excerpt)

Translated by Robert Forstag.

The following weeks and months passed pleasantly enough until the Saturday when Diego cracked open the door when I arrived for tea and abruptly announced: “You can’t come in. I have someone here who doesn’t want to be seen and I’m having a wonderful time. Please come back later on.”

I left, but only retreated to the sidewalk on the other side of the street so that I could see the face of the person who didn’t want to be seen. Diego left the house shortly afterward—by himself. He seemed nervous, looking down the street in both directions before quickly scurrying around the corner. I rushed to catch up, and managed to see him get into a car with diplomatic plates that was partially hidden in a back alley. I had to hide behind the column of a building, because the vehicle suddenly raced away.

Diego in a car with diplomatic plates! I felt an unbearable heaviness in my chest. So it was true after all. Bruno was right, and Ismael was wrong¹¹ about such people needing to be analyzed on an individual basis. Not true. You can never let your guard down: Fags are natural born traitors: It’s their original sin. I myself, on the other hand, am completely free of any duplicity. I could forget all about this¹² and be happy. For me, it had been nothing more than class instinct. But I couldn’t manage to be happy. I felt hurt. It hurts when a friend betrays you. It gets you down deep. And it made me angry that I had once again been so stupid, that I had let myself be manipulated by another person. It really hurts when you have no choice but to recognize that the hard-liners are right, that you’re just a sentimental sack of shit ready to make friends with anyone. I reached the boardwalk of Old Havana and, as is so often the case, I noticed that nature reflected my state of mind: The sky had suddenly become overcast, claps of thunder grew louder and louder, and the air was heavy with impending rain. I found myself heading directly to the university, in search of Ismael, but I realized in a moment of clarity (or whatever you want to call it, because I find it hard to credit myself with actually having clarity) that I wouldn’t be able to make it through a third meeting with him—not with that clear and penetrating gaze of his. And so I stopped. My second meeting with Ismael had followed the elaborate lunch I had had with Diego that had replicated the meal described in Lezama Lima’s *Paradiso*, when I needed to sort things out in order to keep my head from exploding. “I was wrong,” I had told him back then. “He’s a good guy, just a poor bastard really, and it doesn’t make sense to go on watching him.”

"Weren't you the one who said he was a counter-revolutionary?" he responded sarcastically.

"Even as far as that point goes, we have to recognize that his experience of the Revolution hasn't exactly been like ours. After all, it's hard to be around people who'll only accept you if you stop being who you are. To summarize. . . ."

But I didn't go on to summarize anything. I still didn't trust Ismael enough to say what I was really thinking: "His actions reflect who he really is, and what he's really thinking. He conducts himself with an internal freedom that I can only wish that I had myself. And I'm someone who is committed to the cause."

Ismael looked at me and smiled. The difference between the clear and penetrating gazes of Diego and Ismael (to wrap things up with you, Ismael, because this isn't your story, after all) is that Diego's only pointed out how things really were while Ismael's demanded that, if you didn't like the way things really were, that you take immediate action in order to change them. That's why he was better than either of us. He made some casual conversation with me and, when we said our goodbyes, he placed his hand on my shoulder and said he hoped we would stay in touch. To me, this signaled the release from my duties as an agent, and the beginning of our friendship.

What would he think now if I told him what I had just found out? I went back to Diego's apartment building prepared to wait for him as long as I needed to. He came back in a taxi during a driving rainstorm. I followed him into the building and entered his apartment before he could close the door.

"The boyfriend already left," he said jokingly. "What's with that face? Surely you aren't jealous. Or are you?"

"I saw you get in the car with diplomatic license plates."

He was not expecting this. He suddenly turned pale, fell like a lump in one of his chairs, and looked down at the floor. When, after some time, he finally lifted his head, his face looked ten years older.

"Let's have it. I'm waiting."

Now it was time for the confessions, the remorse, the begging for forgiveness. He would give me the name of his counterrevolutionary faction and I'd go to the police—straight to the police.

"I was going to tell you, David, but I didn't want you to know so soon. I'm leaving."

"I'm going," in the way that Diego was now saying it, is something that has dreadful implications for us. It means that you're leaving the country for good, that he will blot you forever from his memory—and that you in turn need to blot the person saying those words from your memory. It also means, whether you like it or not, that you will be seen as a traitor. You know that from the beginning, but you accept it because it is part of the price of your ticket out. Once you have that ticket in your hand, you'll never convince anyone that you weren't thrilled when you got hold of it. But this couldn't be true in your case, Diego. What would you do with yourself far away from Havana, from the heat and filth of its streets, from the raucousness of its people? What could you possibly do in another city, my dear friend—in a city that could not lay claim to Lezama Lima, or where you could see Alicia Alonso dance for the last time every single weekend? In a city that didn't have bureaucrats and party hardliners to criticize, and without a loyal friend like David at your side?

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"It's not for the reasons you suspect," he said. "You know that politics really doesn't matter to me at all. It's because of what happened with Germán's exhibition. You really aren't very observant, and you don't realize what a stir it caused. And they didn't fire him. They fired me. Germán reached an understanding with them. He rented a room and started working for Havana by making crafts. I admit that I went too far in defense of the works that were exhibited, that I didn't show party discipline and that I acted selfishly, taking advantage of my position. But so what? Now, with this record in my file, the only work I'll be able to get is in agriculture or construction. Now tell me, what am I going to do with a brick in my hand? Where would I put it? It's just a reprimand at work, but who's going to hire someone that looks like me? Who's going to go out on a limb for me? I know it's not fair. The law is on my side by all rights, I should end up getting a ruling in my favor and being compensated. But what am I supposed to do? Fight? I'm weak, and the weak have no place in your world. In fact, you act as if we don't even exist, as if the only reason we're weak is to torture you and to join the cause of those who've betrayed the Revolution. Life is easy for you people. You don't suffer from Oedipus complexes. You aren't tormented by beauty. None of you ever had a cat that you loved that you saw your father cut up so that he could make a man out of you. It's possible to be a fag and be strong at the same time. There's no shortage of examples of this. I have no doubt about that at all. But this isn't true in my case. I'm weak. I'm terrified of growing old. I don't have the luxury of waiting 10 or 15 years for you to re-examine your views, even though I am fully confident that the Revolution will eventually correct its mistakes. I'm 30 years old. At most, I have another 20 good years left. I want to do things, make plans, gaze into the mirror of *Las Meninas*, give a lecture on the poetry of Flor and Dulce María Loynaz. Isn't this my right? If I were a good Catholic and I believed in the afterlife, I wouldn't care, but I've been infected with your materialism after being exposed to it for so many years. This is the only life there is—there isn't anything else. In any case, this is most likely the only life we have. Do you understand me? I'm not wanted here. What's the point of continuing to run in circles? Anyway, I like being who I am and to spread my wings every once in a while.

"I ask you, as a friend: Who is it that I'm offending by doing this. They are, after all, my own wings."

Not all of his final days here were sad. At times, he seemed euphoric, flitting about among packages and old papers. We drank rum and listened to music.

"Before they come and take inventory, make sure you take my typewriter, electric burner, and this can opener. Your mom will find it really useful. Here are my studies on architecture and urban planning—quite a few, aren't there? And they're good. If I don't have the time, send them anonymously to the City Museum. There are accounts here of Garcia Lorca's visit to Cuba. It includes a very detailed itinerary and photographs of places and persons with captions that I wrote." A black man who I didn't recognize suddenly appeared. "You can keep the anthology of poems on the Almendares River. You can supplement it with some other poems about it that I have here, even though the Almendares doesn't inspire poetry any more. Look at this photo. It's me during the Literacy Campaign. And these here are of my family. I'm going to take all of them with me. This is one of my uncles, a very handsome man who choked on a *papa rellena*.

Here I am with my mother. She was a good-looking woman, wasn't she? Let's see, what else do I want to leave with you? You took all the papers already, didn't you? Send the articles that you consider the most digestible to the magazine *Revolución y Cultura*, where there might be someone who appreciates them. Choose topics having to do with the nineteenth century. They're more likely to be published. Give the rest of them to the National Library—you know to whom. Make sure you don't lose contact with that person. Give him a cigar every once in a while, and don't be offended if he pays you some compliment—it won't go any further than that. I'll also give you the name of someone at the Ballet. And these as well, David Alvarez: the cups that we've used to drink so much tea together. I'm entrusting them to you. If you have the chance some day, send them to me. Like I told you before, they're made of porcelain from Sèvres. But not because of that—they belonged to the Loynaz del Castillo family and they were a gift. OK, I'll level with you. I actually stole them. My records and books were already taken away. You already took yours, and the ones that are left are to throw the people taking the inventory off the scent. Find me a poster of Fidel with Camilo Cienfuegos, a miniature Cuban flag, the photo of Martí in Jamaica and the one of Mella with his hat. But move fast!: I want to send these in the diplomatic pouch, along with the photos of Alicia in *Giselle* and my collection of Cuban coins and banknotes. Do you want the umbrella for your mother, or the cape?"

I generally accepted everything in silence. But at times, a certain hope surged within me and I would give him back some of the items.

"Diego, what if we write to someone? Think about who it could be. Or I could go and ask to meet with some government employee, and you can wait for me outside."

He looked at me sadly, rejecting that line of thinking.

"Don't you know some lawyer, one of those sympathizers with the exiles who are out there? Or some closeted fag who has an important position? You've done a lot of favors for a helluva lot of people. I graduate in June. By October, I'll have a job, and I can give you fifty pesos a month."

I stopped when I saw that his eyes were tearing up, but he always managed to pull himself together.

"I'm going to give you one last piece of advice: Pay attention to the clothes you wear. You're no Alain Delon, but you have a charm and a certain air of mystery that, regardless of people say, always tends to open doors."

It was me who couldn't find anything to say in response. I lowered my head and started rearranging his packages and looking them over.

"No, not that one! Don't unwrap it. Those are Lezama Lima's unedited manuscripts. Don't look at me like that. I swear that I'll never use them in an inappropriate way. Well, I also swore to you that I would never leave, and I'm leaving—but this is a different matter. I will never use them as a bargaining chip and I'll also never give them to anyone who could use them for political purposes. I swear by my mother, by that basketball player¹³—and by you. So there! If I can weather the storm ahead without using them, I'll return them. Don't look at me like that! Do you think that I don't appreciate my responsibility? But if I find myself in a tight spot, they could help get me out of it. You're making me feel bad. Pour me a drink and get out of here."

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He did worse and worse as the date of his departure drew near. He had trouble sleeping and he lost weight. I was with him as much as possible, but he didn't say much. At times, I think that he didn't even know that I was there. Curled up in the big armchair¹⁴ in his apartment with a book of poems and a crucifix in his hands—for he'd suddenly become more religious—he seemed to have lost color and vitality. He listened to the low and smooth voice of Maria Callas. One day, I noticed him looking at me with a special intensity. "I know you love me. Has being my friend helped you? Was I disrespectful toward you? Do you think that I am hurting the Revolution?"

Maria Callas was no longer singing.

"Our relationship has been appropriate, yes. And I appreciate you."

He smiled.

"Don't evade the issue. I'm not talking about appreciation, but about love between friends. Please, let's not be afraid of words any more."

This was also what I had wanted to say, I suppose. But I have that problem of mine. So in order to be sure of my affections and of the fact that, at least in some ways, I was different—that I had changed during the course of our friendship—and that I had become the person that I had always wanted to be, I added: "I'd like you to come and have lunch with me tomorrow at El Conejito. I'll go early and get in line. You just need to get there before noon. It'll be on me. Or, if you prefer, I can come and get you and we can go together."

"No David. That won't be necessary. Everything has worked out just fine."

"Diego, I insist. I really want to do this."

"OK, but not El Conejito. Once I get to Europe, I'm going to become a vegetarian."

Did I really want—did I really need—to be seen with him? Is this what had to happen for me to be at peace with myself or some such thing? Well, I suppose that's true. He arrived at the restaurant at ten minutes to twelve, when people were crowded around the door underneath a Japanese umbrella. He was dressed in a way that allowed me to identify him from two blocks away. He shouted out my complete name from the other side of the street, waving his arm, which was adorned with bracelets. When he reached me, he kissed me on the cheek and started describing to me a beautiful dress that he had just seen in a shop window, and that he said would be perfect for me. But to his surprise—and mine, and that of the other people waiting in line—I got the better of him by defending a different style of clothing. That's one thing about us shy people: If we manage to shake off our inhibitions, we can be brilliant. The lunch thus turned out to be a kind of celebration of his technique for loosening up communists.

Turning to my literary education, he added other titles to my reading list. "Don't forget the Countess of Merlin. Start finding out about her. Your encounter with that woman will be something that will have people talking."

We finished up our desserts in Coppelia, and then made our way through a bottle of Stolichnaya back at Diego's place. It was all wonderful until we stopped drinking.

"I needed this Russian vodka in order to tell you two last things. I'll leave the most difficult for last. David, I think that you are somewhat lacking in initiative. You need to be more decisive. You shouldn't be a spectator, but an actor. I assure you that you'll do better now than you did in *A Doll's House*.¹⁵ Don't stop being

a revolutionary. You're probably thinking, 'Who is *he* to be talking to me like this.' But I do have my own moral standards. At one point, I told you that I am a patriot and a devotee of Lezama Lima. The Revolution needs people like you, because we can't let the *yanquis* take over. But your food, your bureaucracy, the kind of propaganda that you engage in, and your arrogance might bring it all to an end, and it is only people like you who can help (Cuba) avoid such a fate. It won't be easy for you. It will take a real emotional investment on your part. The other thing that I have to tell you—let's see if I can actually do it, because my head is bowed in shame, go and pour me the few remaining drops of vodka—is this: Do you remember when we met in Coppelia? I wasn't very nice to you on that day. I was with Germán, and when we saw you, we made a bet that I'd take you back to my place and get you into bed. We made the bet in dollars. I did it as a way of motivating myself to approach you, because I always had a respect for you that tended to make me freeze up. Spilling the milk on you was part of the plan. Your shirt and the Manila tablecloth hanging on the balcony were the sign of my victory. Of course, Germán went and spread the word—and afterward even more, now that he hates me. In some places lately, because I've only been spending time with you, they call me 'the Red Queen.' Other people think that this silliness of mine is nothing more than a cover, and that I'm really being sent to Western Europe as a spy. Try not to worry about it too much. These kinds of questions about a man don't really harm him. On the contrary, they lend him an air of mystery, and many women would willingly fall into his arms with the idea of getting back on the right track. Do you forgive me?"

I remained silent, and he interpreted this as a yes, that I forgave him.

"So you see, I'm not so good after all. Would you have been capable of such a thing, behind my back?"

We sat looking at one another.

"OK, now I'm going to make our last cup of tea. After this, you'll leave and you'll never come back again. I don't want any goodbyes."

And that was it. When I was back in the street, a long line of Communist Youth Pioneers blocked my way. They wore freshly ironed uniforms and each carried a bouquet of flowers. Even though flower-carrying Pioneers had for some time been a clichéd symbol of the future, the sight made me happy—maybe for that very reason. I stood looking at one of the boys, who stuck his tongue out at me as soon as he noticed. At that point, I told him (I told him, I didn't promise him) that I would go to all lengths to defend the next Diego that crossed my path, even if no one understood what I was doing, and that I would not feel detached from my Spirit and my Conscience as a result of doing so. On the contrary. And that's because, if I understood things correctly, acting in that way would mean fighting for a better world not only for you, my young Pioneer, but for me as well.

At that point, I wanted to close this chapter of my life by thanking Diego in some way for everything he had done for me. I did this by going to Coppelia and asking for ice cream just the way he did.

And that's why, even though they had chocolate, I asked for strawberry.

Document 8.3 Yoani Sánchez, "Architecture of the Emergency," October 11, 2009

Source: Translation by Mary Jo Porter. Reprinted by permission of Mary Jo Porter and Yoani Sánchez. Originally posted at: <http://lageneraciony.com/arquitectura-de-la-urgencia/>.

In the early morning they removed the first bricks from the exterior wall, to sell them for three pesos each on the black market. Like an army of ants, the poorest people in the area took over the old factory—now closed—and began to dismantle it. Some kids watched from the corner in case the police approached, while their parents sifted through the residue of the debris to extract the mortar. Deft hands knocked down during the day and carried away at night these construction materials that would allow them to build their own homes. After three weeks, all that was left of the enormous building was the floor and some columns standing in the vacuum. Everything that could be used had been moved to the territory of needs, had gone to support the architecture of the emergency.

On an island where to acquire cement, blocks or steel is comparable to getting a bit of lunar dust, destroying in order to build has become common practice. There are specialists in extracting clay bricks intact after eighty years of being embedded in a wall, experts in peeling off the glazed tiles from a demolished mansion, and adroit "deconstructors" who extract the metal girders from collapsed heaps. They use the reclaimed materials to build their own habitable spaces in a country where no one can legally buy a house. Their main "quarries" are those houses that have fallen down or workplaces abandoned for many years by the apathetic State. They fall on these with an efficiency in looting that one might want to see in the dozing bricklayers who work for wages.

Among these skilled recyclers, some have been killed by a collapsing roof or falling wall, riddled by too many holes in its base. But now and again lady luck also smiles on them and they find a toilet without cracks, or an electrical socket that, in their hurry, the owners of the demolished house couldn't take with them. A few kilometers from the site of the looting a small dwelling of tin and zinc slowly begins to change. The tiled floor from a house that collapsed at Neptuno and Aguila streets has been added, along with a piece of the exterior railing from an abandoned mansion on Linea Street, and even some stained glass from a convent in Old Havana. Inside this house, fruit of the pillaging, a family—equally plundered by life—dreams of the next factory that will be dismantled and loaded onto their shoulders.

Accompanying the blog posting was the following YouTube posting: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFTOJOgvtvg>.

In it, the Cuban poet *Amaury Pacheco*, reads his poem "Plan económico." It goes like this:

*Economy! We have fulfilled the annual plan:
1,100 street hustlers; 2,000 young prostitutes; 8,000 opportunists.
Plus, 300 non-mentally disabled and the syndrome of mediocrity.
Economy! In times of a Havana that is unrecognizable,*

*By sweeping the house, you cleanse the economy.
Strong legs for the rocky path,
Legs that are only for the percentages of economic shame.
Shameful economy! Economy of shame! Economy of shame!*

Document 8.4 Yoani Sánchez, “The Blackout Ends,” February 9, 2011

Source: Translation by Mary Jo Porter. Reprinted by permission of Mary Jo Porter and Yoani Sánchez. Originally posted at: <http://lageneraciony.com/termina-el-apagon/>.

Seated in an armchair in a hotel with my laptop open, I note the slow blinking of the WiFi transmitter and watch the stern faces of the guards. This could be one more day trying to enter my own blog through an anonymous proxy, jumping over the censorship with a few tricks that let me look at the forbidden. On the bottom of the screen a banner announces that I’m navigating at 41 kilobytes a second. Joking with a friend I warn her we’d better hold onto our hair so it won’t get messed up from “speeding.” But the narrow band doesn’t matter much this February afternoon. I’m here to cheer myself up, not to get depressed all over again by the damned situation of an Internet undermined by filters. I have come to see if the long night of censorship no longer hangs over Generation Y. With just a click I manage to enter the site that, since March of 2008, has not been visible from a public place. I’m so surprised I let out a shout and the camera watching from the ceiling records the fillings in my teeth as I laugh uncontrollably.

After three years, my virtual space is again visible from inside Cuba.

I don’t know the reasons for the end to this blockade, although I can speculate that the celebration of the 2011 Havana International Computer Science Fair has brought many foreign guests and it is better to show them an image of tolerance, of supposed openings in the realm of citizen expression. It is also possible that after having proved that blocking a website only makes it more attractive to internauts, the cyberpolice have chosen to exhibit the forbidden fruit they so demonized in recent months. If it’s because of a technical glitch that will soon be corrected, once again throwing shadows over my virtual diary, then there will be plenty of time to loudly denounce it. But for the moment, I make plans for the platforms www.vocesucubanas.com and www.desdecuba.com to enjoy a long stay with us.

This is a citizen victory over the demons of control. We have taken back what belongs to us. These virtual places are ours, and they will have to learn to live with what they can no longer deny.

Document 8.5 Yoani Sánchez, “In 2013: Reasons to Stay,” January 1, 2013

Source: Translation by Mary Jo Porter. Reprinted by permission of Mary Jo Porter and Yoani Sánchez. Originally posted at: <http://lageneraciony.com/en-este-2013-razones-para-quedarse/>.

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Someone has to be at the foot of the aircraft steps, saying goodbye and waving their handkerchief. Someone has to receive the letters, the brightly colored postcards, the long distance phone calls. Someone has to stay to look after the house that was once full of children and relatives, to water the plants they left and feed the old dog that was so faithful to them. Someone has to keep the family memories, grandmother's mahogany dresser, the wide mirror with the quicksilver peeling off in the corners. Someone has to preserve the jokes that no longer spark laughter, the negatives of the photographs never printed. Someone has to stay to stay.

This year, 2013, when so many await the implementation of Immigration and Travel Reform, could become a year when we say "goodbye" many times. While I respect the decision of each person to settle here or there, I can't help but feel sad for the constant bleeding of creativity and talent suffered by my country. It's frightening to know the number of Cubans who no longer want to live here, to raise their children on this Island, or to realize their professional careers in this country. A trend that in recent months has me saying goodbye to colleagues and friends who leave for exile, neighbors who sell their homes to pay for a flight to some other place. Acquaintances I no longer see, I learn some weeks later are now living in Singapore or Argentina. People who got tired of waiting, of postponing their dreams.

But someone has to stay to close the door, turn the lights off and on again. Many have to stay because this country has to be reborn with fresh ideas, with young people and projects for the future. At least the illusion has to stay, the regenerative capacity must remain here; the enthusiasm clings to this earth. In 2013, among the much that remains, one thing definitely must be hope.

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Introduction

The protest and unrest of 1848 constitutes a 'Year of Revolution' throughout much of Europe that had repercussions throughout the globe. Even those countries like Britain, Spain and Russia that escaped serious disturbances, were involved diplomatically or militarily, as well as affected by new ideas, often spread by refugees fleeing reaction elsewhere. The events were related by many participants explicitly to earlier European revolutions, notably those in France of 1789 and 1830, leading those on the left to present 1848 as the culmination of an 'age of revolution' (Hobsbawm, 1962; Rudé, 1964).¹

Revolution was certainly widely predicted before 1848 and observers believed it would not be restricted to one country. Most expected revolution in France, Belgium and Britain, and doubted that the Germans would do more than theorize, while the Habsburg monarchy and Italy would remain quiet in the presence of strong garrisons. In fact, revolution began in Palermo, in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, on 12 January 1848 and spread to other parts of Italy within two months. Most read the events through the memory of those of 1789 and only felt that a 'European' revolution was underway once protests in France toppled the Orleanist monarchy in February.² Serious unrest had engulfed large parts of Prussia, the German Confederation and the Austrian Habsburg monarchy by mid-summer, while events in Italy finally forced the pope to flee Rome in November. The rapid spread created a very different pattern from that of 1789 when revolution had been firmly centred on France, especially Paris. The presence of Vienna, Berlin and Rome alongside the French capital as revolutionary centres furthered the impression of a pan-European phenomenon.

European revolutionaries were united by broadly similar aims. Demands for written constitutions were at the centre of all protests, and most drew inspiration from a common set of precedents: the 1812 liberal constitution in Spain, the 1814 French Constitutional Charter and the 1815 Federal Act of the German Confederation. The failure of the conservative governments to fulfil the hopes raised by such documents had fuelled resentment over the following three decades (Church, 1983; Jardin/Tudesq, 1983; Berkley, 1932).³ Revolutionaries demanded an end to royal or princely prerogatives, or at least their constitutional restraint. Representative institutions were to be established, or expanded and the franchise extended to

* I would like to thank my colleagues Peter Waldron and Mike Turner for their advice.

1 The influential writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels have contributed to this: Marx, *Class Struggles in France* and his *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis-Napoleon*; Engels, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany*. See also the comparative perspectives in Porter/Teich, 1986, and the good short overview in Price, 1988.

2 The literature on France is extensive and generally good. For the background see Collingham, 1988. All aspects are covered by Price, 1975a. The Second Republic and the subsequent repression are covered by Agulhon, 1983; Calman, 1980; de Luna, 1969; Merriman 1978; Price, 1972. Contemporary accounts include Berlioz, 1960; Price, 1975b. For an example of French influence see Canevali, 1985.

3 For the ability to discuss change prior to 1848 see Collins, 1959; Green, 2001.

encompass a broader section of adult male property owners. National assemblies were to be created in those countries where these did not exist, notably within the German Confederation, but also Italy. Armies were to be reformed, or even replaced entirely by militias under elected officers. Freedom of assembly and of the press were to be proclaimed. Full equality before the law was to be established and safeguarded through trial by jury. Finally, careers were to be thrown open to talent, especially in public institutions.⁴ These demands were expressed in broadly similar language, as revolutionaries of one country borrowed slogans from another, with French examples generally predominating. Foreign activists were invited to address meetings, while volunteers rushed to defend the oppressed in other parts of Europe.

Expressions of unity and solidarity masked deep divisions between revolutionaries along national, regional, social and ideological lines preventing general agreement on the precise definition of the common broad demands. This source of weakness has led many historians to see the revolutionaries as utopian romantics doomed to failure (Namier, 1946/1992; Robertson, 1952; Rath, 1957; Sigmann, 1973).⁵ Others stressed the bourgeois character of the leadership and their failure to mobilize or retain working class support, as well as their timidity in embracing radical change. The end of the Cold War encouraged a move away from class analysis as the primary explanation for the revolutionaries' defeat by 1849. Research since 1991 has shifted attention from the leadership and the activities of radical socialists in the cities, to examine events in the provinces and countryside (Sperber, 1994; Siemann, 1998; Evans/Pogge v Strandmann, 2000). The picture that is now emerging is one of deep rooted resistance to change and a widespread lack of enthusiasm for socialist goals. European monarchs could draw on considerable passive loyalty and benefited from a conservative backlash fuelled by alarmist reports of revolutionary violence.⁶ The work presented here reflects these trends so far as they have appeared in the Anglophone academic journal literature. Material has also been selected to indicate the pan-European spread of the revolution and its wider influence, as well as to illustrate other key areas of research.

The revolutionaries' demands indicate their faith in political reform as a panacea for the complex underlying problems wrought by structural changes in European economy and society.⁷ The population of most countries had been growing at an accelerating rate since the late eighteenth century, at a time when economic activity was increasingly market-orientated. The result was widespread pauperization and underemployment, causing a crisis in the pre-industrial crafts. Technological change also encouraged proletarianization that spread to both town and country (Koditschek, 1990; Neufeld, 1989; Aminzade, 1981; Bezucha, 1974; Scott, 1988).⁸ Change fuelled anxiety that expressed itself in a desire to return to a past utopia and lashed out at traditional targets like Jews and other minorities (Harris, 1994; Mosse/Paucker/

4 For the formulation of these demands and their links to socialism, see Kamenka/Smith 1979; Johnson, 1974; Hammen, 1969; O'Boyle, 1961; Spitzer, 1957; Wright, 1958. Other discussions of intellectuals and demands for change include O'Boyle, 1970; Eyck, 1959; Sheehan, 2nd ed., 1995; 1st 1978; Lovett, 1982; Smith, 1994. From a postmodernist perspective see Ranchière, 1989.

5 Other older general works include Anderson and Anderson, 1967; Langer, 1969; Lougee, 1972.

6 Important studies of conservatism include Berdahl, 1988; Coppa, 1990. For the strength of popular religion in this period see Berenson, 1984; Bigler, 1972; Sperber, 1984.

7 For these see Abel, 1980; Blum, 1978; Good, 1984; Lévy-Leboyer/ Bourguignon, 1990; Lis, 1986; Price, 1983; Slicher van Bath, 1963.

8 See also the works by Sewell Jr., 1980, 1985, 1974.

Rürup, 1981). Matters were worsened by crop failure, famine and inflation between 1845 and 1847 that also stirred rural protest (Bergman, 1967; Gailus, 1994; Tilly, 1970–1; Agulhon, 1982). Combined with the urban problems, these difficulties exposed the ineffectiveness of established government. Paternalist welfare, protectionism and limited intervention seemed incapable of mastering difficulties that appeared to be worsening.⁹ The situation encouraged the conviction that all would be well once constitutional reform swept away the barriers to fairer, more effective government.

National sentiment underpinned this belief in central Europe and Italy that remained divided into numerous small states, often under dynasties that were widely considered unwelcome alien impositions. The myth of the unredeemed nation added force to revolutionary demands within the German Confederation, Habsburg Monarchy and Italy, but nationalism was present even in nominally united countries in the association of radical reform with national renewal.¹⁰ Like the political demands, however, nationalism could prove a divisive force, because there was little agreement on who constituted each nation, or where its boundaries should be.¹¹ Activists hoped for German and Italian national revolutions, but in practice the movement fragmented along the lines of the existing states and provinces such as Baden, the Rhineland, Schleswig-Holstein, Venice, Naples and Rome. This reflected the relative strength of existing political arrangements, despite the failure of the governing elite to address very real socio-economic problems. Europe remained a continent of dynastic states.

In Chapter 1, Matthias Schulz investigates the relative role of domestic and external factors in the response of Europe's great powers to the revolution and its aftermath. Britain and Russia waited on the sidelines to see whether France would export its revolution as it had done in 1792. Events in France proved self-contained, removing the danger of international war (Jennings, 1974; Sked, 1979). Constitutional reform of the German Confederation had the potential to transform the relatively loose federal structure into something capable of a more assertive international stance. As with France, events proved otherwise as reform stalled at national level, while reaction quickened in the component states.¹² Britain and Russia intervened diplomatically to defuse the Confederation's war with Denmark over Schleswig Holstein (Carr, 1963; Hjelholt, 1971; Mosse, 1958).¹³ The situation in the Habsburg monarchy was far more serious, because the nationalist aspirations of its component territories threatened the

⁹ This has led some historians to interpret the 1848 revolutions through a theory of social or political modernization, explaining government collapse through a disjunction between state and economic development: Stearns, 1974; Gillis, 1971 and from a comparative perspective: Gillis, 1969.

¹⁰ See generally Breuilly, 1982; Hroch, 1985. For individual countries see Schulze, 1991; Griffith, 1975; Tyler, 1990; Banac, 1983; Deme, 1984; Florescu, 1967; Haas, 1968–9; Himka, 1988; Hitchins, in Winters/Held, 1975; Hitchins, 1977; Kozik, 1986; Loewenheim, in Brock/Skilling, 1972; Magocsi, 1978; Pech, 1976; Vucinich, 1967.

¹¹ Nationalism could also be a conservative force: Mosse, 1975.

¹² The best overview of events in the German Confederation is Siemann's book (Siemann, 1998). For other general accounts see Blackbourn, 1997; Hahn, 2001; Hamerow, 1957; Randers-Pehrson, 1999; Sheehan, 1989; Stadelmann, 1978. Events in Prussia are covered by Orr Jr., 1980, and the works of Barclay, 1995, in Dwyer, 2001, in Jones/Retallack, 1993. See also the historiographical review Mattheisen, 1983.

¹³ For Austro-Prussian tension see Sondhaus, 1991, and the essays by Austensen, 1984, 1980, 1991.

stability of the Vienna Settlement that had served as the basis for all European relations since 1815.¹⁴ The danger of a liberal Hungary and its expansionist version of Magyar nationalism helped prompt Russian military intervention (Roberts, 1991; Rock, 1970–1). By contrast, in Italy the Habsburg monarchy proved capable of crushing attempts by Sardinia to promote national and reformist causes by force of arms in 1848–9.¹⁵

Schulz stresses that all governments, including revolutionary ones like the French and Hungarian, were forced by internal and external pressures to steer a middle course in their dealings with other powers, as they attempted to satisfy domestic demands for change without provoking unwelcome foreign intervention. Moreover, those countries that largely escaped unrest, still had to decide whether to recognize the new governments. The cautious approach adopted by Europe's major powers served to dampen enthusiasm for radical change. Neither liberal Britain nor autocratic Russia recognized the revolutionary Roman Republic of December 1848. The absence of war between the great powers belied the underlying shift in international relations. Although it produced no major boundary changes, the revolution fatally weakened the Vienna Settlement, opening questions about the future shape of the continent that were only resolved by war between 1859 and 1871.

Miles Taylor (Chapter 2), draws attention to the wider imperial dimension to the European events, presenting 1848 as a 'crisis of empire' affecting not only the Habsburgs and Romanovs, but also France and especially Britain. The standard explanation for the absence of the British 1848 revolution stresses the success of the governments of the 1840s in dampening discontent by reducing the tax burden on the poor, as well as the loyalty of the middle classes and the effectiveness of the police and justice system in crushing Chartists and Fenians (Saville, 1987; Thompson, 1984; Weisser, 1971). Taylor argues this explanation only works when placed in its imperial context. The empire provided a safety valve, allowing the home government to exile agitators, draw on external resources to relieve the budget and shift the cost of free trade onto colonial producers. These policies kept Britain relatively quiet, but at the cost of major discontent within the colonies, especially in newly acquired areas like the Punjab.

Henry Weisser (Chapter 3), offers further insight into the British experience in his discussion of Chartist and Fenian attitudes to continental events. Despite expressions of international solidarity, most Chartists shared middle class prejudices of British superiority and faith in a distinctive national development that made revolution unnecessary. Spain also escaped revolution, though it appeared to share the characteristics that contributed to violent upheaval elsewhere. In Chapter 4, Daniel R. Headrick addresses this paradox by widening the customary focus from Madrid to look at events in the provinces. General Ramón María Narváez acted swiftly before the Spanish conspirators even made their first move, and was able to present his government as saving national honour from evil foreign powers and corrupt sedition. Perhaps more fundamentally, Spain lacked a substantial disaffected middle class that sought change.¹⁶

14 For the revolutions of 1848–9 in the Habsburg Monarchy see Beller, 1996; Fejtő, 1948; Sked, 1989. For aspirant nationalism in parts of the monarchy see Bodea, 1970; Florescu, 1976–7; Orton, 1975; Pech, 1969; Polisensky, 1980.

15 The Habsburg military response is analysed by Sked, 1979. The international dimension to revolution in Italy is covered in Coppa, 1992; Harder, 1983; 1994. Though dated, Berkeley, 1936, and vol III, 1940 still provides useful diplomatic and military detail.

16 See also Esdaile, 2000.

The Roman Revolution of November 1848 represented the opposite end of the political spectrum. By forcing the pope to flee, the revolutionaries toppled a chief representative of the old regime and challenged the theocratic basis of the Papal States. Harry Hearder (Chapter 5), explores these events, drawing attention to Rome's complex position within wider Italian politics. The Republic's failure to secure international recognition undermined its legitimacy and led to its demise.¹⁷ The Hungarian revolutionaries overcame this problem only to fall at another hurdle. In Chapter 6, George Handlery argues that the presence of existing national representative institutions provided the Hungarian liberals with a path to legitimate government once they achieved a majority in the diet by March 1848. While they were comparatively successful in fostering acceptance within the country, the need to remain within the existing framework compromised their defence against Russian intervention. Emergency military and fiscal measures were perceived as unconstitutional by many Hungarians who no longer regarded the new government as their legitimate authority (Deak, 1979; Deme, 1976; Kosáry, 1986; Janos, 1982). Donald J. Mattheisen (Chapter 7), examines the Frankfurt Parliament that convened in the German Confederation as an expression of the desires for national unity and liberal reform, but ultimately failed to overcome widespread resistance to change. Only a minority of the deputies embraced radical causes, while the liberalism of the rest was partial at best and most preferred the existing princely governments.¹⁸

Events were characterized by rapid escalation due largely to improved communications, both within and between countries. Rail and steam transport, the regular press and the electric telegraph all assisted in the spread of revolutionary ideas and action. Many governments conceded initial demands for constitutions in February and March 1848. In the case of Denmark and the Netherlands this was sufficient to defuse tension and prevent violent protest.¹⁹ However, in the case of Rome and many other states, concessions only prompted further demands, especially when these had been granted elsewhere. Governments suffered a double crisis of confidence: the governed lost faith in their rulers, and the governors no longer believed in themselves. Metternich provided the counter-point to Narváez: already losing confidence prior to February 1848, he quickly gave up and fled Vienna after the initial unrest there in March.

The rapidity of events raises the question of political mobilization. Pamela Pilbeam (Chapter 8), identifies an 'insurrectionary tradition' in France that encouraged people to take to the streets. The failure of previous governments to control protests in the 1790s and 1830s suggested the state was vulnerable to direct action. The stability of Guizot's conservative cabinet 1840–8 discouraged hope that change could come through the existing parliamentary process. Reformers turned away from open actions like the banquet campaign and embraced conspiracies intended to topple the government through popular action (Baughman, 1959; Higonnet, 1969).²⁰ Paul Ginsborg (Chapter 9), tackles the question how such conspirators

¹⁷ See also Woolf, 1979.

¹⁸ See also from a conservative perspective Eyck, 1968. The deputies were divided over the national question: Vick, 2002.

¹⁹ Some material on the Danish debate in Clemmensen, in Sevaldsen/Bjorke/Bjorn, 2003.

²⁰ Political mobilization is well covered for France, even if the focus tends to be on Paris and the major centres: Amman, 1975; Clark, 1982; Gould, 1995; Stewart-McDougall, 1984; Traugott, 1985. For the countryside see Margadent, 1979; McPhee, 1992; and with a general look across the century Weber, 1982.

could mobilize wider support. He challenges the view that only the Hungarian liberals were able to forge alliances with peasants, and argues that the Venetian revolutionaries rallied support by abolishing taxes that hit the poor. Contrary to the expectations of the Habsburg commander, Marshal Radetzky, the Venetian peasants did not side with church and state. However, the Venetian revolutionaries failed to convert this passive sympathy into active support for their cause and were ultimately defeated.²¹

In Chapter 10, Carola Lipp and Lothar Krempel shift the perspective to look at grass-roots mobilization. The Frankfurt Parliament received 17,000 petitions from three million people. Lipp and Krempel go beyond an examination of the demands to investigate the political, social and cultural networks that produce some of these petitions, suggesting that politicization began well before 1848. James Brophy's study of violence in the Prussian province of the Rhineland (Chapter 11), also reveals patterns of behaviour that were to prove significant in 1848. The violence with which public officials responded to civil demands fostered a broad anti-statist alliance between bourgeoisie and workers. It also politicized soldiers and led to demands that the army be reformed as a citizens' militia.²² Brophy identifies a common language of liberty trees, revolutionary songs and other media that transcended social boundaries. Chapter 12 is Jonathan Sperber's brilliant case study of the festivals of 'unity and freedom' which offers a further example from the same region. His piece is important for directing attention beyond the Frankfurt Parliament to other levels of the debate on national identity. The festivals provided Rhinelanders with 'a festive discourse of the nation', similar to that in France 1787–99, but with specific German elements like the black-red-gold flag and the rifle associations (*Schützenvereine*).²³

The presence of a common language does not necessarily entail that all who use it share the same views. While considerable attention has been paid to social distinctions amongst European revolutionaries, research on gender differences has scarcely started.²⁴ Stanley Zucker in Chapter 13, explores one aspect through the example of the Humania Association in Mainz that provided welfare to insurgents' families, as well as public lectures and education programmes. Female participation still adhered to the early nineteenth century ideal of domesticity. Though the Humania closed in the wake of counter-revolution, it served as a precedent in the revival of German feminism in the 1860s.

Studies of counter revolution tend to stress its repressive dimension. Alf Lüdtke's article (Chapter 14), summarizes the findings of his substantial monograph on Prussian state, police and society 1815–50, arguing that government repression militarized attitudes as well as the organization of policing (A. Lüdtke, 1989).²⁵ In Chapter 15, Karl Wegert offers a contrasting view, emphasizing the 'civility' of many governments, especially those of the smaller states in the German Confederation that continued the enlightened absolutist tradition of responding to complaints by legal redress and limited reform. He argues that the radicals' difficulty in

21 See also Ginsborg, 1979 that in fact ranges beyond Venice to other parts of Italy.

22 On the question of military reform see Lee, 1989; Canevali, 1985.

23 Events in the Rhineland are the subject of Sperber's monograph, 1991. In contrast to France, German political mobilization is poorly covered in English apart from the rather unsatisfactory Noyes, 1966.

24 The revolutions are generally subsumed into other aspects of gender history: Frevert, 1989; Moses, 1984; Prelinger, 1976; Robertson, 1982.

25 See also Davis, 1988; Goldstein, 1983; Forstner, 1981; Merriman, 1978.

sustaining political mobilization stemmed from their inability to comprehend the essentially conservative character of popular demands.²⁶ Alan J. Reinerman (Chapter 16), looks at political mobilization from the conservatives' perspective in his study of the papacy's attempts to tap resistance to Italian unification. Cardinal Bernetti set up a loyalist paramilitary organization called the Centurions after the 1831 revolution. The Centurions' unruly behaviour and extra-legal violence undermined the legitimacy of papal rule and compelled Cardinal Lambruschini to disband them in 1847, depriving the regime of the means to mobilize conservative support when unrest broke out the following year. By contrast, France's repressive apparatus remained intact, despite the replacement of the monarchy by a republic. Roger Price (Chapter 17), argues that these forces played a role in crushing the more radical elements in the revolution. Other factors proved more significant, however, in the longer term reduction of violence in state–society relations. The 1848 revolution hit states that were still struggling to overcome localism and establish a truly national bureaucratic network. The official response to the problems that triggered the revolution improved slowly with better communications, the spread of education and the modernization of markets.²⁷

Violent counter revolution was most pronounced in the Habsburg Monarchy where the army saved the dynasty by defeating Italian and Hungarian revolutions. Nonetheless, the events proved traumatic as Istvan Deak's study of the officer corps indicates in Chapter 18. Revolution divided the army and led to civil war. Though few officers rejected the dynasty completely, all faced profound moral and ideological dilemmas. Ultimately, the force of tradition and dynastic loyalty proved stronger than national or political sympathies. Serious problems developed in Hungary, however, where the clash between the Hungarian and imperial governments created a conflict of loyalties. General Jelacic disobeyed government orders because he felt they were not in the emperor's true interests²⁸

Outright repression could prove counter productive, even where it achieved its aim of smothering revolutionary activity. Comparatively timorous suggestions for mild reform in Russia prompted ruthless repression, mass arrests, intensified censorship, the restriction of university education and the abandonment of a tentative reform programme. The country remained quiet and the tsar was able to intervene in Hungary, but the failure to respond positively alienated the intelligentsia and left Russia backward and ill-prepared to meet the challenge of the Crimean War that broke out in 1853 (Lincoln, 1973; Roosevelt, 1986; Saunders, in Evans/Pogge v Strandmann, 2000; Seddon, 1985).

Repression drove many people into exile, especially to Britain and Switzerland, but also to Belgium and the Netherlands. Most did not settle, but moved on to the United States and Latin America, or were allowed to return home later. Migration not only blunted repression by removing the agitators, it also alleviated the underlying problem of overpopulation. Recent work has done much to demonstrate the impact of this largely German and Hungarian-speaking diaspora, especially in North America, as well as establish the role of 1848 in Irish–American links (Heideki, 2002; Levine, 1992; Roberts/Howe, in Evans/Pogge v Strandmann, 2000;

26 These arguments are extended in Wegert, 1992. See also Lee, 1980; Werner, 1975.

27 See also Price, 1983. Liebman, 1980 also stresses the effectiveness of pre-emptive strategies. For the French military and revolution see O'Brien, 1975; Porch, 1974.

28 See the further discussion in Deák, 1990, and the two studies by Rothenberg, 1976 and 1965.

Rohrs, 1994; Spencer, 1977; Thomson, 2001; Tolzmann, 1998).²⁹ However, the example of revolutionaries like Garibaldi and Kossuth inspired further calls for change within Europe, notably in Spain as illustrated in Chapter 19 by Guy Thomson (Kiernan, 1966).

However, the general view of 1848 is one of failure. German historiography has long blamed the revolutionaries for that country's later ills, whether it be a conservative critique of a failure to secure national unity, or a progressive lament at 1848 as a lost opportunity to liberalize a semi-feudal political structure. Although 1848 now features prominently in the German museum of freedom in Rastatt, there is often a sense that such official commemoration is motivated by a search to find an acceptable democratic past to legitimize the post-war Federal Republic. In France, commemoration of 1848 has been overshadowed by the Paris Commune of 1871 that, in Timothy Baycroft's words (Chapter 20), provided the left with 'better martyrs'.³⁰

Nonetheless, 1848 made a real difference in European history. Radical governments proved transitory, but some of their key reforms remained in place. The remnants of western European feudalism disappeared for good, as in the case of the jurisdiction of the mediated princes in Germany, while serfdom was dismantled across central and much of eastern Europe. In the short term reaction reduced freedoms of speech and association, retarding the causes so dear to the revolutionaries' hearts. In the longer term, however, governments became more responsive to popular pressures. The state became more sophisticated, moving to diverse forms of non-violent policing, as well as wider social programmes intended to lessen the adverse effects of industrialization and urbanization. Moreover, the experience of mass mobilization meant that while political emancipation might be slowed, it could not be reversed. Openly critical groups were closed, but others continued and were soon joined by other parties and associations whose ideas were disseminated by mass-circulation press. Socialism may not have attracted wide support in 1848, but Marx and Engels had given it a powerful new language.

The brittle confidence that characterized elite attitudes in 1848 was replaced in time by a more mature reflection that new forms of political emancipation and activity did not necessarily threaten the state, but could even strengthen it. Russia's defeat in the Crimean War provided one good example of the failure to reform. The wars of national unification between 1859 and 1871 stimulated this trend towards a broader civil society. The liberals' distaste for violence and the mob that had been so evident in 1848, now made them acceptable allies of moderate conservatives and secured support for reforms in Germany, France, Britain and elsewhere. European states were strengthened prior to the still more rapid and far-reaching pressures of industrialization and urbanization that swept the continent in the last third of the nineteenth century. Liberalism's alliance with the state sharpened the distinction between reform and revolution, refining the language of the latter and associating it more closely with socialist goals.

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²⁹ For a neglected aspect of the international impact of European revolutionary ideas see Müller, 1999. The Irish–American links are explored in two articles by Belchem, 1994 and 1995.

³⁰ See generally Gildea, in Evans/Pogge v Strandmann, 2000.

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11

VENEZUELA

In the eye of the storm

For almost three decades the Latin American Right has been immersed in a rebuilding process that, as Alejandro Fierro (2016) notes, ‘never reaches an end’. For one thing, the neo-liberal experiment of the 1980s and 1990s failed miserably, leading to what has been widely described and we have discussed in this book as a ‘progressive cycle’ in Latin American politics. For another, under the post-neo-liberal regimes formed in this cycle the elites and their subordinate classes were forced to give up some political and social privileges, even though in the case of Venezuela they managed to maintain their enormous economic power in a regime that, notwithstanding the rhetoric of a ‘Bolivarian Revolution’ and a series of progressive and anti-imperialist measures,¹ was non-revolutionary in that rather than expropriating their property and ill-gotten wealth the government allowed the elite and the economically dominant class their prerogatives of private property. Even so, the elites feared that as the Chavista regime advanced towards their plan for a socialist society they would eventually be forced to surrender their well-deserved if not hard-earned wealth to the masses of the urban poor that had thus far been confined to their ghettos in the favelas or slums.

The response of the various forces that made up the political right to this existential threat to their class privileges was to launch a class war against the regime, with the enthusiastic support of the US, which rightly saw the regime as the greatest regional threat to US hegemony. But to understand why the forces of opposition to the Chavista regime have thus far, after a decade and a half of concerted efforts and US aid, failed to bring the regime down, we need to understand an important feature of the Venezuelan – and Latin American – Right, namely that it is fundamentally divided within itself. You cannot unite politically what is structurally divided. Fierro (2016) makes this point in distinguishing three sectors of the Venezuelan Right.

First, we have a *sociological Right* consisting mostly of the middle class, which is bigger in Venezuela than in other Latin American countries thanks to the avails of the oil industry, but it is much smaller than the popular classes, which represent 70 per cent of the population. It has always been a class at the service of the oligarchy and the elites, since members of this middle class make their living by providing the oligarchy and the elites with all manner of professional and personal services. Fearing (or made to fear) that the dispossessed were coming to rob them and dispossess them of their property and power, they maintain a racist, classist and meritocratic world view, and a negative outlook on the country as well as the Chavista regime.

Second, we have a *political hard Right* composed predominantly of the traditional oligarchy and the economic and political elites linked to oil, imports and land ownership. The rise of Chavism and the resounding failures in attempting to bring it down (the 2002 coup, 2002–03 oil sabotage) forced some members of these elites to come out of the shadows and the rearguard and enter the political arena. Like the sociological base it stands on, as Fierro sees it, the political Right is a prisoner of yesterday's habits. Its proposals and political project lack a clear objective, although they cannot hide their desire to return to the previous state of affairs. It feeds off the voters' disenchantment with the complex economic situation of the country, but it is unable to seduce the electorate with arguments and proposals for democratic change because its image has been tarnished by a history of attempted coups and destabilization.

And then we have what Fierro describes as *the neo-liberal Right*. They are mostly liberal professionals such as Luis Vicente León, president of the Datanálisis polling company; the economist and deputy José Guerra; economist Asdrúbal Oliveros; or electoral adviser Juan José Rendón. They have understood the political moment better than anybody else. Upon seeing the paralysis of the Right, which is tangled in its own internal disputes, the neo-liberal Right is designing the most efficient plan to retake power (but their opinions do not always reach the social right or other sectors, because those who should act as mediators – that is, the political Right – are impervious to their discourse). They firmly believe that the way to reach power is through elections and that the best tactic is an economic offensive. Therefore, they do not participate in accusing the government of authoritarianism or of alleged human rights violations. They have learned, through years of experience, that accusing the other side of being anti-democratic only appeals to the most radicalized portion of the masses. But most do not see Chavism as anti-democratic. This is because democratic participation has grown notoriously under Chavism. This group's hidden agenda is neo-liberalism, which is disguised under a cascade of criticism of the 'intrinsic inefficiency of socialism' and advanced with arguments that appear to be rational or that appeal to common sense, combined with a direct appeal to the working class. They know that they cannot win without the working class. It is the main lesson they have extracted from the past. But, given that notions of neo-liberal capitalism are fundamentally antagonistic, it is still unclear how they will redirect this novel interest in the poor should their campaign succeed.

Capitalism, socialism and the social economy: the Venezuelan model

Although the Bolivarian Constitution of 1999 focused upon the development of human capacity, it also retained the support for capitalism – and support for continued capitalist development was precisely the direction of the initial plan developed for 2001–07. While rejecting neo-liberalism and stressing the importance of the state presence in strategic industries, the focus of that plan was to encourage investment by private capital – both domestic and foreign – by creating an ‘atmosphere of trust’. To this was to be added the development of a ‘social economy’ – conceived as an ‘alternative and complementary road’ to the private sector and the public sector. But it is significant how little a role was conceived for self-managing and cooperative activities. Essentially, this was a programme to incorporate the informal sector into the social economy; it is necessary, the plan argued, ‘to transform the informal workers into small managers’. Accordingly, family, cooperative and self-managed micro-enterprises were to be encouraged through training and micro-financing (from institutions such as the Women’s Development Bank) and by reducing regulations and tax burdens. The goal of the state was explicitly described as one of ‘creating an emergent managerial class’ (Lebowitz, 2015).

Thus, as Lebowitz noted, the social economy was to play the role it plays in Brazil and elsewhere – as islands of cooperation nurtured by states, NGOs, Grameen-type banks and church charities, that serve as shock absorbers for the economic and political effects of capitalist globalization. Of course, if seriously pursued, this could make things easier for the unemployed and excluded (the half of the Venezuelan working class in the informal sector), by providing them with a better opportunity for survival and improving their social condition. But the point is that the social economy in Venezuela’s 2001–07 plan was not envisioned as an alternative to capitalism (except insofar as survival within the nooks and crannies of global capitalism constitutes an alternative). The goal, in short, was not socialism as we tend to understand it but a different capitalism; i.e. socialism was conceived of as a different more human form of capitalism – based on popular or social participation – to ensure the complete development of people, both individual and collective (which is, of course, a socialist ideal and nothing to do with capitalism, the logic of which runs in an entirely different direction).

In any case – ‘bracketing’ the question of socialism vs. capitalism – there is a fundamental difference between the ‘development of the social economy’ in the context of the Bolivarian Revolution, such as it is as an idea and project, and the social economy/solidarity economics as understood and promoted by ECLAC, FAO, ILO and the development agencies of international cooperation (including the World Bank), and as conceived by Chávez and the ideologues/theorists of the Bolivarian Revolution. For the former, the social economy is a mechanism of adjustment to the forces of capitalist development, a way of creating spaces within the system for poverty reduction based on local sustainable self-development, the social capital of the poor and the empowerment and agency of the poor (and a

means of converting the informal sector into a more productive sphere of economic development).

However, for the theorists and architects of the Bolivarian Revolution – see Articles 62 and 70 of the 1999 Constitution – the social economy or solidarity economics is viewed through the lens of socialist human development, i.e. ‘self-management, co-management, cooperatives in all forms’ as examples of ‘forms of association guided by the values of mutual cooperation and solidarity’. With its emphasis upon a ‘democratic, participatory and protagonistic’ society, the Bolivarian Constitution contains the seeds of the ‘social economy’, conceived of not as a supplement to the dominant private and public sectors but as nuclei of socialism for the twenty-first century, i.e. as a national not just local development model, brought about from below as well as above.

A new development path

Cooperatives and cooperativism play an important role in this model. Any form of development requires an institutional framework. The framework of endogenous socialist human development brought about by the Bolivarian Revolution is based on the institution of the *misiones* and the *comuna* (or commune), which are oriented towards and designed to bring about the building of new human capacities both by teaching specific skills and preparing people to enter into new productive relations through courses in cooperation and self-management. The effect of this development programme was dramatic: the number of cooperatives increased from under 800 when Chávez was first elected in 1998 to almost 84,000 by August 2005.

All this occurred in the context of Chávez’s attack upon the ‘perverse logic’ of capital and his stress upon the alternative – a social economy whose purpose is ‘the construction of the new man, of the new woman, of the new society’. The deepening of this ideological offensive was marked by the renaming of the social economy as ‘socialism’. In January 2005 at the World Social Forum, Chávez explicitly called for the reinventing of socialism – different from what existed in the Soviet Union – ‘We must reclaim socialism as a thesis, a project and a path, but a new type of socialism, a humanist one, which puts humans and not machines or the state ahead of everything’.

Six months later, influenced – according to Michael Lebowitz, an advisor to the minister of the economy at the time – by István Mészáros’s *Beyond Capital*, Chávez stressed the importance of building a new communal system of production and consumption, in which there is an exchange of activities determined by communal needs and communal purposes, not just what Marx described as the ‘cash nexus’ or the profit motive, the incentive to make money, accumulate capital. ‘We have to help to create it, from the popular bases, with the participation of the communities, through the community organizations, the cooperatives, self-management and different ways to create this system.’ The occasion was the creation of a new institution – the Empresas de Producción Social (EPS). Drawn from a number of sources – existing cooperatives (pledged to commit themselves to the community rather

than only collective self-interest), smaller state enterprises, and private firms anxious to obtain access to state business and favourable credit terms – these new enterprises of social production were to be committed to both serving community needs and incorporating worker participation.

Upon Chávez's re-election in December 2006 a new building block was added: the communal councils (based upon 200–400 families in existing urban neighbourhoods and 20–50 in the rural areas). These were established to democratically diagnose community needs and priorities. With the shift of substantial resources from municipal levels to the community level, the support of new communal banks for local projects, and a size which permits the general assembly rather than elected representatives to be the supreme decision-making body, the councils have been envisioned as a basis not only for the transformation of people in the course of changing circumstances but also for productive activity which really is based upon communal needs and communal purposes.

These new councils were identified as the fundamental cell of Bolivarian socialism and the basis for a new state. 'All power to the communal councils!' Chávez declared. An 'explosion in communal power', designated as the fifth of the 'five motors' driving the path towards socialism. The logic is one of a profound decentralization of decision-making and power; and, as with the third motor, 'moral y luces' (morality and enlightenment), a major educational and ideological campaign, the consistent theme was the stress upon revolutionary practice in order to build socialism. Citing Marx and Che Guevara, Chávez (*Aló Presidente*, No. 279, 27 March 2007, cited in Lebowitz (2007); see also Veltmeyer, 2014, on this point in the Cuban context) insisted that it is only through practice that new socialist human beings produce themselves.

Communes or nothing? Three years after a change of direction

It was on 20 October 2012, 13 days after the new electoral victory of Hugo Chávez as president of Venezuela. The meeting, a cabinet broadcast on national television, was deemed a 'change of direction' (*golpe de timón*) and had a central slogan: *comunidades or nothing*. Duiliam Virigay, spokesman of the Revolutionary Bolivarian and Zamora Organization (CRBZ), which currently accompanies, 'directly, with leadership, and with organizational structures', 450 of the existing communes and that are 300 under construction, said the following:

For us, the change of direction is a claim collected by *the Commander* directly from people, which is felt in all territories where the people want to empower themselves, and there is resistance within the government itself, which he himself instils; where are the communes? How do we build socialism if we don't empower the people? How will we build a process if each leader is not committed, and if they don't give space to the people?

The change of direction is a public demand in view that only the people can save the people, in order to deepen the construction of socialism, in concrete, the direct and participative democracy.

The bet on the communes from the CRBZ is prior to the change of direction of 20 October. It comes from the attempt of the constitutional change in 2007:

There, the Commander raised the new geometry of power, the structural re-foundation of the Republic, from a political, organizational point of view, to change a State that was mainly a rentier, oil-dealing, and bourgeois State to set the foundations of a socialist State, a native socialism, built by our people.

That is when, from below, began the construction of communal councils, socialist communes, and – first tested and now a reality – socialist cities.

With the development of the lines of work, tensions began: ‘All processes of empowerment of the people in the framework of the Bolivarian revolution have met much resistance from colleagues who have institutional spaces, sometimes due to lack of awareness, or by not understanding the Commander’s vision’. That is why, says Virigay, he wanted to transmit the meeting by national television, to accelerate the transition process:

Three years after ‘the change of direction’ it is more alive than ever, it seems like we are still making the same claim. There are still many obstacles, the same happens to the President of the Republic: things are oriented, the presidential council is organized nationally, but in the States, the empowerment of the people is not achieved without a fight. It would be much easier if every person who is in the head of the process in the different structures would facilitate the process of empowering the people, the construction of that instrument, of the people of the territory, where all social actors coincide.

When the presidential term of Nicolas Maduro started, the number of registered communities was less than 100. Today, there are more than 1,300 throughout the national territory. How can we measure the depth of this process of communalization of life, the ‘spirit of the commune?’ One thing is the written record: ‘that’s a quantitative way to measure, but it is not enough. Another thing is the process within the commune, their empowerment,’ Chávez said in a speech at the National Assembly. The people’s power, he added, should be institutionalized progressively in its territory,

and in that matter we have much to do, because you can register the commune but the process of transferring powers to the commune is still slow, as is the management of some political and economic issues, and also the recognition of the old institutional framework to the new one, these new socialist institutions. The commune could be legally recognized but not recognized as a political player in the process, as an economic actor.

The scenario of the difficulties should not overshadow the strengths that the revolutionary process has, emphasizes the leader of the CRBZ. One of them is the

existing will: 'The people want to empower themselves, take the leading role, fight for their spaces, have courage to continue building this political and economical subject, which is the commune'.

The stage we are currently emerged on, which it is always necessary to remember, has a structural difficulty from its start:

We must review the history of the continent, the world and revolutions. Which processes were maintained after the loss of their historic leader? Our historical leadership was and remains to be Commander Chávez, and even though he is not with us today, even after this loss, this process continues.

At this stage, Virigay notes, there are many strengths: 'That level of consciousness that the Commander Chávez created is alive today, as if he were here today, all he did to raise awareness to the people is still present today'. Therefore,

[i]t is important to highlight President Maduro's will, expressed in the conclusions of the last Congress of the national leadership of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), that the legacy of Commander is maintained, but above all, to support, encourage and try to consolidate the people's power and ensure that slogan from October 20th: communes or nothing. Calling popular government to the presidential council is a strategic investment.

There are more advantages, such as the unity that exists today within Chavism, through its two main policy tools: the PSUV and the Great Patriotic Pole, and also that, according to the polls,

Over 60 per cent of the population it remains *Chavistas*, and over 50 per cent believe in building socialism. Not one country in the world, at any point in history, has had such a high level of acceptance for the construction of a socialist project, an alternative to capitalism and neoliberalism.

These are the foundations on which Virigay considers that is possible and necessary to deepen the line of work proposed on 20 October, addressing weaknesses such as continuing to disarm the oil rentier model:

We can only leave behind that model by building a new one, and in Venezuela there are possibilities of that happening through the communes, so, we, as actors of this process, have to dedicate ourselves to that, so that any grassroots leader, even the ones that write articles for newspaper, opinion pieces, are able to start building socialism through the commune.

The alternative to the legacy in the communes is articulated in a powerful movement:

It is important that the whole communal movement bets on unity for it to become a major player in the process, that when we talk we build the agenda,

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that despite the differences, strategic unity is not lost. We need the empowerment of the commune along the territory, to have a growing importance in the national dynamic, politically, economically, and even in the dynamic of the Party.

For this to continue, the parliamentary elections on 6 December 2015 were viewed as key:

We must close ranks in the elections of December 6th, in order for President Nicolas Maduro, and the entire military-political process, continue to be at the head of this government because a right-wing government would completely eliminate the possibilities of building the dreams that Commander left open for us, such as the construction of the communal State, the social State of law and justice.

Maduro totally underestimated the severity of the economic crises and popular disenchantment, and the government's incapacity to confront capitalist-induced shortages.

The legislative defeat on 6 December revealed that Chavista unity and the growing role of communes on a strategic perspective were inoperative. The right-wing legislative majority emptied the slogan of Chavista party ideologues who claimed that:

Commune or nothing is what we can say in these times to make the revolution irreversible, to continue to transform our economic model, and keep Venezuela in the forefront of the process of building socialism in the continent and in the world.

Clearly the Chavistas were in retreat, their leaders on the defensive, and their dependence on the oil-extractive development model in shambles.

The US and Venezuela: decades of defeats and destabilization

Although Venezuela was regarded by the US under President Obama as the region's main 'threat' to US security interests – replacing Cuba in this regard (the challenge presented by its alternative socialist development model) – current US policy towards Venezuela is a microcosm of its broader strategy vis-à-vis Latin America. The aim of this strategy is to reverse the regional trend towards the construction of an independent foreign policy and to restore US dominance; replace regional integration pacts with US-centred economic integration schemes; realign the international relations and foreign policies of governments in the region with US interests; and reverse the nationalization and socialization processes that the red wave of post-neo-liberal regimes in the new millennium have given rise to.

The resort to several 'hard' military coups in Venezuela was a strategy designed to impose a client regime. This was a replay of US strategy during the 1964–83 period. In those two decades US strategists successfully collaborated with business-military elites to overthrow nationalist and socialist governments, privatize public enterprises and reverse social, labour and welfare policies. These client regimes implemented the neo-liberal policies of the Washington Consensus and supported US-aligned 'integration'. The entire spectrum of representative institutions, political parties, trade unions and civil society organizations were banned and replaced by the empire-funded NGOs, state-controlled parties and trade unions. With this perspective in mind, the US has returned to all-out 'regime change' in Venezuela as the first step to a continent-wide transformation to reassert political, economic and social dominance.

Washington's resort to political violence, all-out media warfare, economic sabotage and military coups in Venezuela is an attempt to discover the effectiveness of these tactics under favourable conditions, including a deepening economic recession, double-digit inflation, declining living standards and weakening political support, as a dress rehearsal for other countries in the region.

Washington's earlier resort to a 'regime change' strategy in Venezuela, Bolivia, Argentina and Ecuador failed because objective circumstances were unfavourable. Between 2003 and 2012 the national-populist or centre-left regimes were increasing political support, their economies were growing, incomes and consumption were improving and pro-US regimes and clients had previously collapsed under the weight of systemic crises. Moreover, the negative consequences of military coups were fresh in people's minds. Today Washington's strategists believe that Venezuela is the easiest and most important target because of its structural vulnerabilities and because Caracas is the linchpin of Latin American integration and welfare populism.

The concentrated and prolonged US war against Venezuela and the resort to extremist tactics and groups can only be accounted for by what US strategists perceive as the large-scale (continent-wide) long-term interests at stake. The war waged by the US against Venezuela started shortly after President Chávez's election in 1999. His convoking of a constitutional assembly and referendum and the subsequent inclusion of a strong component of popular participatory and nationalist clauses 'rang bells' in Washington. The presence of a large contingent of former guerrillas, Marxists and leftists in the Chávez electoral campaign and regime was the signal for Washington to develop a strategy of regrouping traditional business and political clients to pressure and limit changes.

Subsequent to 9/11 Washington launched its global military offensive, projecting power via the so-called 'war on terror'. Washington's quest to reassert dominance in the Americas included demands that Venezuela fall into line and back Washington's global military offensive. President Chávez refused and set an example of independent politics for the nationalist-populist movements and emerging centre-left regimes in Latin America. Chávez told President Bush 'you don't fight terror with terror'. In response, by November 2001 Washington strategists shifted

from a policy of pressure to contain change to a strategy of all-out warfare to overthrow the Chávez regime via a business–military coup in April 2002.

The US-backed coup was defeated in less than 72 hours and Chávez was restored to power by an alliance of loyalist military forces backed by a spontaneous million-person march led by thousands of supporters from the popular or working-class neighbourhoods and barrios, the social base of the grass-roots revolutionary collectives that would come to make up the most organized element of *Chavismo*. Washington lost important ‘assets’ among the military and business elite, who fled into exile or were jailed.

From December 2002 to February 2003, the White House backed a lockout by executives in the strategic oil industry, supported by corrupt trade union officials aligned with Washington and the AFL-CIO. After three months the lockout was defeated through an alliance of loyalist trade unionists, mass organizations and overseas petrol-producing countries. The US lost strategic assets in the oil industry as over 15,000 executives, managers and workers were fired and replaced by nationalist loyalists. The oil industry was renationalized and its earnings were put at the service of social welfare.

Having lost assets essential to violent warfare, Washington promoted a strategy of electoral politics – organizing a referendum in 2004, which was won by Chávez and a boycott of the 2005 congressional elections, which failed and led to an overwhelming majority for the pro-Chávez forces.

Having failed to secure regime change via internal violent and electoral warfare, and having suffered a serious loss of internal assets, Washington turned outside by organizing paramilitary death squads and the Colombian military to engage in cross border conflicts in alliance with the far-right regime of Álvaro Uribe. Colombia’s military incursions led Venezuela to break economic ties, costing influential Colombian agro-business exporters and manufacturers’ losses exceeding US\$8 billion. Uribe backed off and signed a non-aggression accord with President Chávez, undermining the US ‘proxy war’ strategy. At this point Washington revised its tactics, returning to electoral politics and street fighting. Between 2008 and 2012, Washington channelled millions of dollars to finance electoral party politicians, NGOs, mass media outlets (newspapers, television and radio) and direct action saboteurs of public energy, electricity and power stations.

The US’s ‘internal’ political offensive had limited success – a coalition of warring right-wing political groups elected a minority of officials, thus regaining an institutional presence. A Chávez-backed overtly socialist referendum was defeated (but by less than 1 per cent). NGOs gained influence in the universities and in some popular neighbourhoods, exploiting the corruption and ineptness of local Chavista elected officials. But the US strategy failed to dislodge or weaken the Chávez-led regime for several reasons. Venezuela’s economy was riding the prolonged commodity boom. Oil prices were soaring above \$100 a barrel, financing free health, education, housing, fuel and food subsidy programmes, undercutting the so-called ‘grass-roots’ agitation of US-funded NGOs.

The entire electoral strategy of the US depended on fomenting an economic crisis – and given the favourable world prices for oil on the world market it failed. As a result, Washington depended on non-market strategies to disrupt the socio-economic links between mass consumers and the Chávez government. Washington encouraged sabotage of the power and electrical grid. It encouraged hoarding and price gouging by commercial capitalists (supermarket owners). It encouraged smugglers to purchase thousands of tons of subsidized consumer goods and sell them across the border in Colombia. In other words, the US combined its electoral strategy with violent sabotage and illegal economic disruption.

This strategy was intensified with the onset of the economic crisis following the financial crash of 2009, the decline of commodity prices and the death of President Hugo Chávez. The US and its mass media megaphones went all-out to defend the protagonists and practitioners of illegal violent actions – branding arrested saboteurs, assassins, street fighters and assailants of public institutions as ‘political prisoners’. Washington and its media branded the government ‘authoritarian’ for protecting the constitution. It accused the independent judiciary as biased. The police and military were labelled ‘repressive’ for arresting fire bombers of schools, transport and clinics. No violent crime or criminal behaviour by opposition politicians was exempt from Washington’s scrofulous screeds about defending ‘human rights’.

The crisis and collapse of oil prices greatly enhanced the opportunities for the US and its Venezuelan collaborator’s campaign to weaken the government. Under these conditions the US relaunched a multi-pronged offensive to undermine and overthrow the newly elected Nicolas Maduro regime. Washington at first promoted the *via electoral* as the route to regime change, funding opposition leader Henrique Capriles.

After Capriles’s electoral defeat, Washington resorted to an intense post-electoral propaganda campaign to delegitimize the voting outcome. It promoted street violence and sabotage of the electrical grid. For over a year the Obama regime refused to recognize the electoral outcome, accepted and recognized throughout Latin America and the world. In the subsequent congressional, gubernatorial and municipal elections the US-backed candidates suffered resounding defeats. Maduro’s United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) won three-quarters of the governorships and retained a solid two-thirds majority in Congress.

Beginning in 2013, the US escalated its ‘extra-parliamentary’ offensive – a massive hoarding of consumer goods by wholesale distributors and retail supermarkets led to acute shortages, long lines, long waits and empty shelves. Hoarding, black-market speculation of the currency and wholesale smuggling of shipments of consumer goods across the border to Colombia (facilitated by opposition officials governing in border states and corrupt National Guard commanders) exacerbated shortages.

US strategists sought to drive a political wedge between the consumer-driven middle class and the popular classes and the Maduro government. Over time they succeeded in fomenting discontent within the lower middle class and directing it against the government rather than the big business elite and US-financed opposition politicians, NGOs and parties.

In February 2014, emboldened by growing discontent, the US moved rapidly towards a decisive confrontation. Washington backed the most violent extra-parliamentary opposition. Led by Leopoldo López, an ultra-rightist who openly called for a coup and launched a nationwide assault on public buildings, authorities and pro-democracy activists. As a result 43 people were killed and 870 injured – mostly government supporters and military and police officials – and hundreds of millions of dollars of damage was inflicted on schools, hospitals and state supermarkets.

After two months, the uprising was finally put down and the street barricades were dismantled – as even right-wing business operators suffered losses as their revenues diminished and there was no chance for victory.

Washington accelerated the pace of planning, organizing and executing the next coup throughout 2014. Taking advantage of the Maduro regime's lax or non-existent enforcement of laws forbidding 'foreign funding of political organizations', the US via the agency of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and its 'front groups' poured tens of millions of dollars into NGOs, political parties, leaders and active and retired military officials willing and able to bring about 'regime change' by means of a coup d'état.

Exactly one year following the violent uprising of 2014, on 14 February 2015, the US backed a civilian-military coup. The coup was thwarted by military intelligence and denunciations by lower level loyalist soldiers.

Two power grabs in a year is a clear indication that Washington is accelerating its move to establish a client regime. But what makes these policies especially dangerous, is not simply their proximity but the context in which they occur and the recruits who Washington is targeting. Unlike the coup of 2002, which occurred at a time of an improving economy, the most recent failed coup took place in the context of declining economic indicators – declining incomes, a devaluation that further reduced purchasing power, rising inflation (62 per cent), and plummeting oil prices.

In 2015 Washington embraced the 2002 strategy of combining multiple forms of attack including economic destabilization, electoral politics, sabotage and military penetration – all directed towards a military-civilian coalition seizing power.

Obama's imperialist offensive against Venezuela

Venezuela today leads the anti-imperialist struggle in Latin America. This struggle, in the current form of the Bolivarian Revolution, according to President Maduro, can be traced back 26 years (27–28 February 1989) to the popular rebellion against the neo-liberal policies of the Carlos Andrés Pérez government that produced the *Caracazo* – the massacre by government security forces of at least 3,000 protesters. 'This was,' he noted (in a telephone conversation with the governor of the state Aragua), 'the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution to escape the mistreatment [of the people], the pillaging and neo-colonialism, [and] the false democracy' of the republic (Petras, 2015). Venezuela under the leadership of Hugo Chávez, he noted – in a televised broadcast at the time – was the

first country in the region to say ‘no’ to the concerted effort of imperialist forces to convert the countries in the region into ‘colonies of the IMF’ and to reject capitalism in its current neo-liberalism form.

Maduro in this televised broadcast also alluded to the form that the anti-imperialist struggle would take under Chávez’s leadership, that of the Bolivarian Revolution, or, as he put it: ‘the miracle of the socialist revolution and *las misiones*’.

Obama, as it turned out, led the opposition to this ‘miracle’, labelling it the greatest threat to the security of the region and thus to the US. In confronting this threat and to bring about the required regime change, the US under President Obama escalated its efforts to overthrow the government, using its full arsenal of weapons short of the ‘military option’. One of these weapons included mobilizing the large retailers to provoke artificial shortages and thus rebellion. Also, with the aid of the local and international mass media and corporate- and state-funded NGOs they accuse the Maduro government of being ‘authoritarian’. Mobilizing the massive resources of the NED and other US-funded NGOs and self-styled human rights groups concerned with ‘democratic development’, the US launched and orchestrated a virulent propaganda campaign against the government for jailing oppositionists that have been exposed in their plotting of terrorist activity and a military coup – oppositionists like the mayor of Caracas, Antonio Ledesma, who, it was later revealed, signed a document endorsing a coup programmed for February 2015.

The staged propaganda campaign was designed to take advantage of the economic crisis to discredit the government by exaggerating the deterioration and labelling the government as incompetent.

The US government’s second serious attempt to provoke a coup – the first being in April 2002 – was in February 2015 in the context of Operation Jericó, a US operation supported by Germany, Canada, Israel and the UK (Meysan, 2015). The plan for this military operation kicked in on 12 February 2015. A aeroplane owned by Academi (formerly Blackwater), disguised with the insignia of the armed forces of Venezuela, would bomb the presidential palace in Caracas and kill President Nicolas Maduro. The conspirators planned to put into power former congressional deputy Maria Corina Machado and seek the support of several former Latin American presidents who would acclaim the necessity and legitimacy of the coup as an act of restoring democracy.

President Obama issued a clear warning and put it in writing in his new defence doctrine (National Security Strategy): ‘We are on the side of citizens whose full exercise of democracy is in danger, as in the case of Venezuelans’. In reality, Venezuela, since the adoption of the 1999 constitution, has been one of the most democratic states in the world. Obama’s bellicose rhetoric presaged a worst-case scenario in terms of the US government’s attempts to impede Venezuela’s march on the road of national independence and the redistribution of national wealth – towards the socialism of the twenty-first century. By 6 February 2015, Washington was in the process of finishing planning the overthrow of Venezuela’s democratic institutions. The coup was planned for 12 February.

Operation Jericó had the oversight of the National Security Council, under the responsibility of Ricardo Zuniga. This ‘diplomat’ is the grandson of another Ricardo Zuniga, president of the National Party of Honduras, who organized the military coups of 1963 and 1972 on behalf of General López Arellano. The Ricardo Zuniga who worked in the Obama White House directed the CIA station in Havana from 2009–11, where he recruited agents and funded a feeble opposition against Fidel Castro.

As always in such operations Washington strove not to seem to be involved in the events that it led. The CIA organized and directed the coup through ‘non-governmental organizations’ or ‘civil society’: the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and its two tentacles on the right and the left – the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI); Freedom House; and the International Centre for Non-Profit Law. Moreover, the US always uses its domestic clients as contractors in organizing or conducting certain aspects of the coup. This time at least Germany was an active participant, charged with the responsibility of ensuring the protection of citizens of NATO countries during the coup. As for Canada, an avid supporter of Obama’s campaign against Venezuela, it was assigned control over Caracas’s international airport. And Israel was put in charge of ensuring the murder of several Chavista personalities, while the UK was put in charge of propaganda for the coup, putting a ‘democratic’ spin on it. Finally, the US government planned to mobilize its political networks in securing recognition of the coup: in Washington, Senator Marco Rubio; in Chile, former president Sebastián Piñera; in Colombia, former presidents Álvaro Uribe Vélez; in Mexico, former presidents Felipe Calderón and Vicente Fox; and, in Spain, the former prime minister José María Aznar.

To justify the coup, the White House encouraged large Venezuelan companies to hoard their store of staples and sabotage the economy. The non-distribution of these products was aimed at causing large queues at the shops and the outbreak of riots provoked by the action of provocateurs infiltrated among disgruntled consumers. But the manoeuvre failed because, despite the artificially induced scarcity during January and February and the queues at the shops, Venezuelans did not riot or attack the shops as was hoped.

To strengthen the planned economic sabotage, on 18 December 2014 President Obama signed a decree imposing sanctions against Venezuela and several of its leaders. Officially Washington said it wanted to punish the persons responsible for the ‘repression’ of student demonstrations. But, in actual fact, since the beginning of the year Washington had been paying a salary – at four times the average income of Venezuelans – to gang members to engage them in assaulting the police. The pseudo-student riot led to the killing of 43 people, mostly police and regime supporters, and spread terror in the streets of Caracas.

The military action was put under the supervision of General Thomas W. Geary, from SOUTHCOM headquarters in Miami, and Rebecca Chavez, from the Pentagon. The actual military operation was subcontracted to Academi (formerly Blackwater), currently administered by Admiral Bobby R. Inman (former head of

the NSA) and John Ashcroft (former Attorney General of the Bush administration). According to this part of the plan, a Super-Tucano military aircraft, with the registration N314TG, purchased by Academi in Virginia in 2008, was to be used. The plane, to be falsely identified with the insignia of the armed forces of Venezuela, would bomb the Miraflores presidential palace and other targets such as the headquarters of the Ministry of Defence, the intelligence directorate and the headquarters of Telesur, a multinational television channel created by the ALBA. The plane was parked in Colombia, the headquarters of the coup-makers, who were installed in the US Embassy in Bogota with the participation of US Ambassador Kevin Whitaker and his deputy, Benjamin Ziff.

Several senior officers, active and retired, had prepared a pre-recorded message to the nation announcing that they had seized power to restore order in the country. They were also expected to underwrite the transition plan, drafted by the Department of State and published on the morning of 12 February 2015 in *El Nacional*. The plan included the formation of a new government, led by former deputy Maria Corina Machado, president of Súmate, the association that organized and lost the recall referendum against President Hugo Chávez in 2004. Machado's funds came from the NED. Maria Corina Machado had been received with honours by President George W. Bush in the Oval Office of the White House on 21 March 2005. But, after being elected in 2011 as a representative from the state of Miranda, on 21 March 2014 Machado appeared before the OAS as head of the delegation of Panama to the continental forum and was immediately dismissed from her post as deputy for having violated Articles 149 and 191 of the Constitution of Venezuela.

Unfortunately for the coup-makers, Venezuelan military intelligence had under surveillance individuals suspected of having fomented a previous plot to assassinate President Maduro. On the night of 11 February the main leaders of the conspiracy, and an agent of the Israeli Mossad, were arrested and aerial protection of the Venezuelan capital was reinforced. Others involved were arrested on 12 February. On 20 February, the confessions of those arrested led to the arrest of another accomplice: the mayor of Caracas, Antonio Ledezma, a liaison officer with Israel. The coup had totally unravelled (but not without the attempt of the White House to accuse the Maduro regime of actions to subvert democracy).

When the plan of the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition to overthrow the democratically elected Maduro government, by diverse measures including destabilizing the economy in an effort to provoke street violence and repression by the government, was discovered and made public, editorials in the *Washington Post* on 23 February and the *New York Times* on 14 February 2015 denounced the 'conspiracy' as a 'distraction' engineered by the government to divert attention away from the growing economic crisis, and denounced the government's response (arresting the plotters) as the actions of a 'repressive government'. They called on the government to resign and supported the opposition's call for Maduro to step down in favour of a regime that would implement the 'transition programme' elaborated and presented by the undemocratic and authoritarian opposition forces.

On 9 March 2015, Obama signed an executive order declaring Venezuela to be a threat to national security and US foreign policy. Why at this time did Obama declare a 'national emergency', claim that Venezuela represented a threat to US national security and foreign policy, assume executive prerogatives and decree sanctions against top Venezuelan officials in charge of national security? To answer this question it is essential to begin by addressing Obama's specious and unsubstantiated charges of Venezuela constituting an 'extraordinary threat to national security and foreign policy'.

First, the White House presented no evidence whatsoever. There were no Venezuelan missiles, fighter planes, warships, special forces, secret agents or military bases poised to attack US domestic facilities or its overseas installations. By contrast, the US had warships in the Caribbean, seven military bases just across the border in Colombia manned by over 2,000 US special forces, and air force bases in Central America. Washington has financed proxy political and military operations intervening in Venezuela with the intent of overthrowing the legally constituted and elected government.

Obama's claims resemble a ploy that totalitarian and imperialist rulers frequently use: accusing their imminent victims of the crimes they are preparing to perpetrate against them. No country or leader, friend or foe, supported Obama's accusations against Venezuela. His charge that Venezuela represented a 'threat' to US foreign policy requires clarification. First, which elements of US foreign policy are threatened? Venezuela has successfully proposed and supported several regional integration organizations, which are voluntarily supported by their fellow Latin American and Caribbean members. These regional organizations, in large part, replaced US-dominated organizations that served Washington's imperial interests. In other words, Venezuela supports alternative diplomatic and economic organizations, which its members believe would better serve their national interests. For example, Petrocaribe, a Central American and Caribbean association of countries supported by Venezuela, addresses the development needs of its members better than US-dominated organizations like the OAS or the so-called 'Caribbean Initiative'. And the same is true of Venezuela's support of CELAC (the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) and UNASUR (the Union of South American Nations). These are Latin American organizations that exclude the dominating presence of the US and Canada and are designed to promote greater regional independence. Both ELAC and UNASUR, together with the G77 within the UN, and China, have denounced the Obama government's decree regarding Venezuela as a threat to regional and national security.

Obama's charge that Venezuela represents a threat to US foreign policy is an accusation directed at all governments that have freely chosen to abandon US-centred organizations and who reject US hegemony. In other words, what aroused Obama's ire and motivates his aggressive stance towards Venezuela is Caracas's political leadership in challenging US imperialist foreign policy.

The 6 December 2015 election. What was at stake and what were the odds?

Hugo Chávez's first attempt to gain control of the state was by leading an armed rebellion of military officers against an oppressive government. But, having failed in this tactic, Chávez turned towards the institutional mechanism of democratic elections to achieve state power as a means of advancing his political project. Once Chávez gained state power by winning the December 1998 presidential elections he made maximum use of the state's legislative and executive powers to advance the project of a Bolivarian revolution that would work to bring about what he described as the 'socialism of the 21st century' (Chávez, 2007).² The project was to bring about socialism from above, by means of a policy of missions and support of a community-based strategy of socialist development, organizing communes and from below by empowering the poor in their communities to act for themselves.

Subsequently, the government made maximum advantage of its broad popular support by contesting a series of local and national elections, winning each one by an increasing plurality. The level of electoral support for the government and the Chavista project of the Bolivarian Revolution over the years was impressive, even after Chávez's death, when Maduro took over as head of state and government leader and went back to the people several times for an extension of the government's popular mandate.

The right-wing parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition to the Chavismo fervently supported the 2002 coup. It seems that when they orchestrated the assault on the Miraflores presidential palace they thought that Chavista supporters and the population would be indifferent to the usurpation of presidential power. They also actively supported – as did the US government – the antipatriotic strike by the executives of the state oil company on December 2002–February 2003, and more recently they supported the actions of ultra-rightists led by Leopoldo López, who openly called for a coup and launched a nationwide assault on public buildings, authorities and pro-democracy activists, leading to 43 deaths that were cynically blamed on the government.

Having failed in several coup attempts, and subsequently having lost one election after another, in the wake of the 2013 presidential elections the right-wing opposition turned up the heat on the government by opening up various new fronts in its class struggle and by changing some of its tactics. Among the new tactics was to orchestrate a shortage of basic consumer goods in order to provoke popular discontent and ire – to 'heat up the streets' (*calentar la calle*) by means of an orchestrated media campaign of disinformation (media terrorism); destabilization measures, articulating actions across the country with paramilitary actions orchestrated by Álvaro Uribe Vélez from Colombia; and contributing to an international disinformation and propaganda campaign designed to 'Satanize' Venezuela's socialist government and the Bolivarian Revolution, a campaign orchestrated by José Maria Aznar, former prime minister of Spain, in his capacity as a lieutenant of a legion of self-styled guardians of the Washington-based global campaign and fight for imperial controlled electoral regimes.

You only need to search the internet for ‘Venezuelan Opposition Primaries+2015’ to find a number of imperial-slanted propaganda articles in English from *Fox News*, *Yahoo*, *International Business Times* and *Reuters*, among others. All of these articles forecast that ‘this is the best chance that the Venezuelan opposition has had in a decade to recoup control of the national parliament’. In other words, they continue to parrot politicians such as the secretary general of the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), Jesus ‘Chuo’ Torrealba. In a carbon copy of the last national elections for mayoralties, the argument was that, according to twice-defeated presidential candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski, the vote would be a plebiscite and Maduro would have to resign when the opposition won that vote. But, in fact, the opposition lost by 11 points to Chavismo and only won control of 24 per cent of the 335 mayoralties in the country. This was opposition defeat number 18 of 19 since Chávez won the presidency in December 1998. Evidently, after two years of an ‘economic war’ orchestrated by the far Right, many Venezuelans had come to realize that shortages, inflation, devaluation of the currency and other ills were manipulated if not created by the opposition and their gringo handlers, as had been the case in Bolivia and Argentina (Rosales, 2015).

In response to a spate of electoral defeats, the right-wing opposition to the government redoubled its tactical manoeuvres and began to experiment with a range of other tactics in its efforts to overthrow the government and return to power. In addition to contesting whatever elections with whatever forces they could muster, these tactics included economic warfare measures such as hoarding goods and sabotage, and reliance on massive support from the US, which poured millions of dollars into the coffers of the right-wing opposition in support of their electoral campaigns to oust the dictatorial regime and restore ‘democracy’, i.e. restore themselves to power. But none of these tactics worked because conditions did not favour them. However, the results of the mid-term referendum on the government’s point towards a possible change in the correlation of forces in conditions of a deepening economic crisis and a deteriorating situation that the government had been unable to manage except by some ineffective attempts to regulate the market for welfare goods and counter-hoarding – preferring to rely on charges of economic warfare and sabotage and US imperialist intervention.

Ironically, it was a change made by the government to the constitution to mandate a mid-term referendum on any government’s policies that created the political opening for the right-wing opposition forces. The stakes in the referendum, held in the context of the mid-term parliamentary elections on 6 December 2015 were high. It would either strengthen Maduro’s mandate to deepen the Bolivarian Revolution, even under conditions of economic crisis, or it would strengthen the position of groups positioned on the far Right.

Both the government and the opposition came to the mid-term parliamentary elections in the hope and expectation that they would win. On the government’s side were the evident gains made in the social condition of the popular classes after 15 years of efforts from both below and above to push the country in a socialist direction. The government has done much over the years to dramatically improve

the social condition of the masses, including dramatically improved access to education and health services, and to housing, meeting the basic needs of the rural and urban poor, and lifting many thousands out of poverty. According to ECLAC data, the rate of poverty over the years was reduced by about two-thirds.

It was expected that the government could count on the support of around a third of the electorate whose condition improved immeasurably or were ideologically – and politically – committed to the government's vision of a socialist future, or the belief that things would improve or that the gains would be reversed if the government were to lose state power. On the other hand, the opposition counted on the widespread social discontent generated by the conditions of a protracted economic crisis, including runaway inflation and the shortage of consumer goods, exacerbated by the economic sabotage engineered by groups and enterprises in the private sector and the collapse of oil prices in recent years. According to several polls conducted just before the elections, the opposition would also be able to count on around 35 per cent of the electorate, leaving about a third of the electorate undecided or vacillating between the two electoral options.

Before the referendum both the government and the right-wing opposition made efforts to increase their electoral support. On the government's side, this meant more spending and infrastructure and social investment, as well as heated rhetoric about the non-democratic right-wing opposition and US intervention. The problem for the government, however, was its inability to confront the crisis and to control inflation, which had reached 200 per cent and was decimating the living standards of the working and popular classes, pushing many of them back into poverty. After losing the previous elections it now confronted a right wing-dominated Congress, which made it impossible to advance any progressive legislation and to rely on governing by decree. As for the right-wing opposition, they had an easier path towards increased electoral support, paved by themselves and US government support in the form of economic sabotage and endless propaganda, as well as a deteriorating economic situation of the middle and lower classes that were particularly susceptible to ideological appeal and propaganda about the current problems and impending disaster of socialist policies.

The US was particularly aggressive in its support of the forces of opposition and reaction. It intervened in the political process in diverse ways, including declaring Venezuela a threat to the security of the US. It poured millions of dollars into the opposition referendum campaign, channelling this money to the opposition via the National Endowment for Democracy and other NGOs. Washington's plan was for the opposition to gain control of the Congress and to generate the conditions that would lead to the removal of the president – a strategy of a soft coup that had worked in Honduras and Paraguay, and that was also in the works in Brazil.

As it turned out the opposition won the congressional mid-term elections, gaining the support of 52.1 per cent of the electorate. This was evidently a setback to the government's political project, although the government put a positive spin on the electoral outcome, viewing it as a challenge. The 'fight for socialism', Maduro declared, would continue. Even so, a poll of voters showed that up to 90.9

per cent considered the economic and political situation to be 'bad', and this included 75 per cent of Chavista supporters. As for the image held by the electorate of political leaders Henry Ramos Allup, current speaker of the National Assembly and former leader of the social democratic Democratic Action Party, was viewed in positive terms by 51.1 per cent of the electorate, while Leopoldo López, the currently imprisoned opposition leader, and Henrique Capriles (of the Justice First party), seen as the parliamentary opposition's 'best democratic hope' – i.e. for a 'democratic' alternative to right-wing violence – had positive images of 47.8 and 47 per cent, respectively. Maduro meanwhile received a positive rating from only 33.1 per cent of the voters who were polled.

Venezuela in the crosshairs

In just the years 2014–15 the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) channelled to the Venezuelan opposition almost US\$3 million in support of their electoral campaign for the mid-term parliamentary elections. For example, US\$125,000 was turned over to the opposition group Súmate, created by the NED in 2003 to lead the recall referendum against President Hugo Chávez. Another US\$400,000 was channelled towards a programme to 'assist members of the National Assembly in the development of policies'. And over US\$40,000 was dedicated to 'monitoring the National Assembly'. This raises the question as to what right an organization of one country has to 'monitor' the legislative body of another. Worse still when organizations of one country are financed by a foreign government to spy on their own government. But this is par for the course for the United States, which has taken upon itself the responsibility for democratic development across the world as the leader of the free world, and to intervene in the political affairs of any country that is deemed to be a security threat to its national interest – and this includes the deployment of any and all of its state powers to bring about regime change when and where it is called for.

The agency of the NED, one of US imperialism's most effective weapons for 'democratic development' (the spread of US values and the idea of democracy), in promoting the parliamentary and non-parliamentary opposition to the Chavista regime includes the channelling of close to half a million dollars (US\$410,155) to improve the strategic and communication capacity of targeted political organizations by creating and promoting alternative communication and media outlets (as if the right-wing of the opposition did not already have at their disposal diverse media outlets that are all too keen to disseminate their ideas and projects). This includes the financing of diverse social networks to project an anti-government vision in the social media and influence public opinion both within Venezuela and abroad. The NED has channelled another US\$73,654 to 'strengthen the technical capacity' of targeted opposition groups and promote 'freedom of expression' and human rights via Twitter, and US\$63,421 for 'training [of groups] in the effective use of social networks and alternative media'. The social networks embedded in what the NED and USAID term 'civil society' have in effect been converted into a battlefield in the imperialist class war that the US state has launched against Venezuela.

In this context it is not a coincidence or at all surprising that the US and its allies over the last year have strongly criticized the Maduro government for presumed violations of human rights. The NED has channelled close to half a million dollars to the opposition to finance their 'documentation and dissemination' of information regarding the human right situation in Venezuela, and in preparation of denunciations of the government's violation of human rights in the international arena.

In addition to the millions of dollars channelled through the NED, a foundation created by the US Congress in 1983 to 'do the work that the CIA cannot do publicly', the State Department and its Agency for International Cooperation (USAID), funnelled more than US\$15 million to opposition groups in Venezuela during the period 2014–15. In the State Department's budget for overseas operations for 2016, which began in October 2015, US\$5.5 million was set aside to 'defend and strengthen the democratic practices, institutions and values that advance the respect for human rights in Venezuela'. According to the budget already approved by Congress, a large part of this money will be used to 'help civil society promote institutional transparency, the democratic process and the defence of human rights'.

Conclusion

How is it possible that a mediocre opposition without a political programme beyond a desire for revenge against Chavism achieved such a favourable result in the 2015 parliamentary elections? There are undoubtedly a number of reasons for this result and the current political situation, some of which relate to the agency of US imperialism and the enemy within, and some caused by contradictions and mistakes of the revolutionary process itself.

Maduro was possibly right when he pointed out, early in the morning following the 6 December 2015 parliamentary mid-term elections, where the opposition garnered over 50 per cent of the popular vote, that with this result the economic war launched by the right-wing opposition had triumphed, setting the counter-revolution on the brink of achieving the power so longed for by these groups and their masters in Washington.

The economic war launched by the right-wing opposition forces, and financed by the US, translates into women and men anxious to feed their children having to endure long hours of waiting outside the supermarkets, the lack of milk, flour, toilet paper, soap and other products that are criminally kept under lock and key by the big economic groups and companies, or smuggled to Colombia. One has to live this situation to understand the frustration, anger and despair that this situation causes, which is not necessarily directed at the unscrupulous millionaire entrepreneurs and actual operators of these lethal strategies linked to a most despicable Right, but illogically at the government regime.

The second key negative factor was the Chavista policy of depending on oil for 95 per cent of its exports and the terrible losses resulting from the decline of prices from \$100 a barrel to \$35. The extractive strategy and the failure to diversify the economy led to shortages, inflation and economic recession.

Venezuela: in the eye of the storm

Given the heightened level of class consciousness acquired over the course of a 15-year revolutionary process, it is understandable that Venezuelans would demand that the government give immediate solution to the economic crisis and not to hesitate if this means further nationalization or filling the jails with commercial criminals and traitors, or the expropriation of their ill-gotten gains. To acknowledge the government's inability to redress these problems and to respond to the concerns of the populace led to despair – or, as it turned out, electoral support for the opposition in the hope that that the class war might be brought to an end.

But there are other reasons for the success of the right-wing opposition in gaining the support of that one-third of vacillating electors who can always be swayed either to the right or the left. One of these is what Golinger (2015) describes as

the deadly cascade of lies coming from local and foreign media, creators of imaginary scenarios, managers of destabilization manoeuvres and masters of the production of new 'leaders' – like imprisoned coup-maker Leopoldo López – who appeal to the institutionalization of the oppressors as victims.

Another reason for the electoral success of the right-wing opposition to the government and its political project is the anti-Chavist international campaign orchestrated by an imperialist coalition that includes Aznar, Felipe González, Pastana, Tuto Quiroga and Uribe Vélez. And we should not underestimate the impact of the machinations of the US administration and the offensive launched against Venezuela by President Obama.

Imperialism is undoubtedly the main enemy of the revolutionary process under way in Venezuela and elsewhere, which, in the case of Venezuela, is on the brink of failing. On the other hand, US imperialism is a two-edged sword that could very well be turned against its wielders and be used to bring the Revolution back from the brink by helping to reconstruct an anti-hegemonic bloc of popular forces – to harness the revolutionary forces and protect Venezuela's social conquests, the *misiones* and *comunas*, the advances made in poverty eradication and education, the housing projects and the redistribution of land and wealth.

Notes

- 1 These socialist measures included the nationalization of enterprises in strategic sectors of the economy (the oil sector was already a state monopoly) and the creation of a system of community councils and cooperatives. The regime's anti-imperialist measures included the promotion of a series of anti-imperialist regional institutions such as ALBA (which today serves not only as an alternative regional trade regime but as a clearing-house for a regional alliance of social movements). Other anti-imperialist institutions created at the behest or with the instigation of Hugo Chávez are UNASUR, CELAC, Petrocaribe, Telesur and el Banco del Sur. Together these institutions constitute what might be described as an alternative world/regional order, a regional socialist system.
- 2 According to Lebowitz (2015), Chávez's ideological commitment towards socialism and the revolution was formed while in prison for having staged a military rebellion.

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