

The World Revolutionary Process

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Empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples “all at once” and simultaneously, which presupposes the universal development of productive forces and the world intercourse bound up with communism. . . . The proletariat can thus only exist *world-historically*, just as communism, its activity, can only have a “world-historical” existence . . . Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence. . [Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 1845, I.A.5)

Between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*. [Marx 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program*]

For socialists, the uprisings across the Arab world, coupled with those in the American Midwest, are vivid reminders that the red mole of revolution is still burrowing, and that we have no way of knowing where she will next emerge. A few short months ago, who could have said Cairo or Madison? Yet the mass demonstrations in these cities far exceed anything we have seen in recent years.

Some of our liberal friends may argue that the “pro-democracy” Egyptians only want elections like we have here in America. And that the unions in Wisconsin only want the right to collectively bargain away their pay and benefits, rather than have them taken away by legislative fiat. But as socialists, we want to see these revolutions made “permanent,” as Marx put it, until “the proletariat has conquered state power ... not only in one country but in all the leading countries of the world,” Our concern is not to take the rough edges off capitalism and imperialism, but to abolish them: “not to hush up class antagonisms but to abolish classes, not to improve the existing society but to found a new one.” [FN*1]

But is this realistic? Isn't American society the very best to which humanity can aspire. Aren't socialist being unrealistic in wanting a world in which all people are healthy, well fed, clothed, housed, and well educated, a world in which, as the *Communist Manifesto* put it, “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”

These are difficult questions, especially for socialists here in the United States where socialists are faced with a difficult situation. Why, in this most highly developed capitalist nation, are the workers not interested in socialism? Answers abound, but my concern is less with these answers than with the question itself, for it leads us to think within the framework of the nation-state and look to factors internal to particular nations. This approach became outmoded with the development of imperialism. Leninism, which is Marxism in the era of imperialism and socialist revolution, places the class struggle and revolutionary process in a global context.

Lenin, Stalin & Trotsky on the World Revolutionary Process

The early Bolshevik leaders agreed on the global nature of capitalism and revolution in the Twentieth Century, although they did not necessarily use the term, World Revolutionary Process.

The following rather lengthy quotations are not intended to indicate endorsement of all aspects of either Stalin's interpretation of Leninism or Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. They are included to set a background for the global concept of the world revolutionary process. With recognition of imperialism, as Stalin noted in *Foundations of Leninism*,

The very approach to the question of the proletarian revolution, of the character of the revolution, of its scope, of its depth, the scheme of the revolution in general, changes accordingly.

Formerly, the analysis of the pre-requisites for the proletarian revolution was usually approached from the point of view of the economic state of individual countries. Now, this approach is no longer adequate. Now the matter must be approached from the point of view of the economic state of all or the majority of countries, from the point of view of the state of world economy; for individual countries and individual national economies have ceased to be self-sufficient units, have become links in a single chain called world economy; for the old "cultured" capitalism has evolved into imperialism, and imperialism is a world system of financial enslavement and colonial oppression of the vast majority of the population of the world by a handful of "advanced" countries.

Formerly it was the accepted thing to speak of the existence or absence of objective conditions for the proletarian revolution in individual countries, or, to be more precise, in one or another developed country. Now this point of view is no longer adequate. Now we must speak of the existence of objective conditions for the revolution in the entire system of world imperialist economy as an integral whole; the existence within this system of some countries that are not sufficiently developed industrially cannot serve as an insuperable obstacle to the revolution, if the system as a whole or, more correctly, *because* the system as a whole is already ripe for revolution.

Formerly, it was the accepted thing to speak of the proletarian revolution in one or another developed country as of a separate and self-sufficient entity opposing a separate national front of capital as its antipode. Now, this point of view is no longer adequate. Now we must speak of the world proletarian revolution; for the separate national fronts of capital have become links in a single chain called the world front of imperialism, which must be opposed by a common front of the revolutionary movement in all countries.

Formerly the proletarian revolution was regarded exclusively as the result of the internal development of a given country. Now, this point of view is no longer adequate. Now the proletarian revolution must be regarded primarily as the result of the development of the contradictions within the world system of imperialism, as the result of the breaking of the chain of the world imperialist front in one country or another.

Where will the revolution begin? Where, in what country, can the front of capital be pierced first?

Where industry is more developed, where the proletariat constitutes the majority, where the proletariat constitutes the majority, where there is more culture, where there is more democracy—that was the reply usually given formerly.

No, objects the Leninist theory of revolution, *not necessarily where industry is more developed*, and so forth. The front of capital will be pierced where the chain of imperialism is weakest, for the proletarian revolution is the result of the breaking of the chain of the world imperialist front at its weakest link; and it may turn out that the country which has started the revolution, which has made a breach in the front of capital, is less developed in a capitalist sense than other, more developed, countries, which have, however, remained within the framework of capitalism.

In 1917 the chain of the imperialist world front proved to be weaker in Russia than in the other countries. It was there that the chain broke and provided an outlet for the proletarian revolution. Why? Because in Russia a great popular revolution was unfolding and at its head marched the revolutionary proletariat, which had such an important ally as the vast mass of the peasantry, which was oppressed and exploited by the landlords. Because the revolution there was opposed by such a hideous representative of imperialism as tsarism, which lacked all moral prestige and was deservedly hated by the whole population. The chain proved to be weaker in Russia, although Russia was less developed in a capitalist sense than, say France or Germany, Britain or America.

Where will the chain break in the near future? Again, where it is weakest. It is not precluded that the chain may break, say, in India. Why? Because that country has a young, militant, revolutionary proletariat, which has such an ally as the national liberation movement—an undoubtedly powerful and

undoubtedly important ally. Because there the revolution is confronted by such a well-known foe as foreign imperialism, which has no moral credit and is deservedly hated by all the oppressed and exploited masses in India.

It is also quite possible that the chain will break in Germany. Why? Because the factors which are operating, say, in India are beginning to operate in Germany as well; but, of course, the enormous difference in the level of development between India and Germany cannot but stamp its imprint on the progress and outcome of a revolution in Germany.

Lenin said that :

"The West-European capitalist countries will consummate their development toward socialism ... not by the even 'maturing' of socialism in them, but by the exploitation of some countries by others, by the exploitation of the first of the countries to be vanquished in the imperialist war combined with the exploitation of the whole of the East. On the other hand, precisely as a result of the first imperialist war, the East has definitely come into revolutionary movement, has been definitely drawn into the general maelstrom of the world revolutionary movement" (see Vol. XXVII, pp. 415-16)

Briefly: the chain of the imperialist front must, as a rule, break where the links are weaker and, at all events, not necessarily where capitalism is more developed, where there is such and such a percentage of proletarians and such and such a percentage of peasants, and so on.

That is why in deciding the question of proletarian revolution statistical estimates of the percentage of the proletarian population in a given country lose the exceptional importance so eagerly attached to them by the doctrinaires of the Second International, who have not understood imperialism and who fear revolution like the plague.

In a similar manner, Trotsky's theory of "Permanent Revolution" represents his effort to come to grips with the global nature of revolution in the Twentieth Century. As David North, Chairman of the Trotskyist *World Socialist Web Site* editorial board, has noted:

Trotsky's approach represented an astonishing theoretical breakthrough. As Einstein's relativity theory—another gift of 1905 to mankind—fundamentally and irrevocably altered the conceptual framework within which man viewed the universe and provided a means of tackling problems for which no answers could be found within the straitjacket of classical Newtonian physics, Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution fundamentally shifted the analytical perspective from which revolutionary processes were viewed. Prior to 1905, the development of revolutions was seen as a progression of national events, whose outcome was determined by the logic of its internal socio-economic structure and relations. Trotsky proposed another approach: to understand revolution, in the modern epoch, as essentially a world-historic process of social transition from class society, rooted politically in nation-states, to a classless society developing on the basis of a globally-integrated economy and internationally-unified mankind." [1] --- [1] "Toward a reconsideration of Trotsky's legacy and his place in the history of the 20th century", David North, available at <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/jun2001/dn-j29.shtml> as quoted in "Leon Trotsky's Analysis of the Emerging Global Role of US Capitalism," By Nick Beams 24 November 2010 <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2010/nov2010/nble-n24.shtml>

Also, Ernest Mandel makes similar remarks in "World Revolution Today: The Marxist Case for Revolution Today - Part 6" Ernest Mandel

The concept of the three sectors of the world revolution refers to the different strategic-historical tasks with which the revolutionary process is confronted today. But this only represents the first step towards a concretization of the concept of world revolution today. The question of these sectors and their interaction, and hence their growing unity, has also to be raised. . . .

The concept of interrelationship between the three sectors of the world revolution is supported by the fact that while victorious revolutions in the Third World countries can weaken imperialism, they cannot overthrow it. In the epoch of nuclear weapons it is obvious that imperialism can only be overthrown inside the metropolis itself. But the main obstacle to that overthrow is not the objective strength of imperialism or the bourgeois state, nor the absence of periodically expressed demonstrations inside the metropolis. The main obstacle is subjective: the level of Western (and Japanese) working class consciousness and the political quality of its leadership. <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article295>

The World Revolutionary Process: General Considerations

Too frequently, socialism is discussed from the standpoint of some particular country, such as the United States, Sweden, Cuba, China, or Venezuela, and the prospects for socialism are discussed from standpoint of the class relations and material conditions within that country as though capitalism were an economic system that exists within nations at different levels of development. Or it is discussed in general and theoretical terms. Either way, the question is approached in abstraction from the reality that capitalism is global system, within which there are, as Lenin stressed, two kinds of nations: imperialist nations and oppressed nations.

In a similar manner, the question of socialism is approached in a mechanical and metaphysical manner: China, Cuba, and other socialist countries are either socialist or they are not, and our task is to determine which. The antidote to such thinking is dialectics. In other words, existing socialist societies must be viewed not just in terms of what they are, but what they have been and what they are becoming, and in terms of their interconnections with the global sweep of modern social change.

Just as capitalism is a global system, so socialism must be a global system. Between global capitalist society and global socialist society must lie a period of revolutionary transformation, the period of the world revolutionary process. This period began in 1917 (although it had a long period of earlier development) and cannot be completed as long as world imperialism threatens any and all attempts to build socialism. Even after the elimination of world imperialism, socialism will continue to evolve as Marx suggested in the *Critique*.

Thus, in spite of whatever claims may be made by their proponents, neither the Soviet Union, China, nor Cuba can be placed in either the lower or higher phase of communism sketched by Marx in *Critique of the Gotha Program*. As long as global capitalism exists and world imperialism remains a threat, the revolution will need to protect itself while it builds socialism. Under these conditions the state, as Marx stressed in the *Critique*, “can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*.”

So, when we refer to the Soviet Union, China, or Cuba as socialist countries, this is not to say that they conform to some abstract notion of what socialism should be, or what socialism may be sometime in the future. Rather, these nations made decisive breaks with world imperialism in 1917, 1949 and 1959 and began the difficult process of building socialism. They are therefore part of the global revolutionary transition from capitalism to socialism, but cannot become socialist until world imperialism has been overthrown, or at least weakened to the point it can no longer threaten them.

To assess the prospects for socialism in the U.S., or the prospects for the uprisings in Egypt, Wisconsin, or elsewhere, therefore, we cannot restrict our analysis to the particular nations concerned, but must look at this World Revolutionary Process. In its broadest sense, this is the process of transformation of class society (aka civilization) into a global classless society. Class society has been around for over five thousand years. The first phase in its transformation was led by the European bourgeoisie, later phases by the international proletariat.

In the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels stress that their theoretical conclusions did not spring from their heads of some universal reformer, not even their own. Instead, they “merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes.” It is important to understand that this “existing class struggle” has been undergoing continual change in the seventeen decades since the Manifesto was written. As we review development of the

world revolutionary process, we will see that there have been revolutionary waves, stronger in some countries than others, as well as periods of relative calm during which, nevertheless, struggles continue, bringing continued evolutionary developments toward socialism. We shall also see changes in organization form, tactics, and general scope of our struggle. We cannot content ourselves with merely repeating the analysis of Marx and Engels. We must do as they would do and critically examine the historical development of the struggle as it presently exists. Only then can we begin to understand the world revolutionary process and the emergence of global socialism.

It is a mistake to think of socialism and capitalism in anything other than global terms. Capitalism is a global system and socialism must be a global system. Between these two global systems, as Marx said in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, “there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.”

The following sketch is by no means comprehensive, but does mark a first effort to understand the nature and significance of the World Revolutionary Process. A more detailed analysis is currently in progress.

World Revolution and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

We Marxists too frequently indulge in an idyllic view of “the revolution,” that it will come soon and that this time, “the workers” will do it right, and that our problems—and the problems of humanity—will be over. Such “revolutionary” escapism may be comforting, but I doubt Marx would be impressed. As a scientist, Marx was critical of those who would “substitute the catchword of revolution for revolutionary development.”

The point of view of the minority is dogmatic instead of critical, idealistic instead of materialistic. They regard not the real conditions but a *mere effort of will* as the driving force of the revolution. Whereas we say to the workers: ‘You will have to go through 15, 20, 50 years of civil wars and national struggles not only to bring about a change in society but also to change yourselves, and prepare yourselves for the exercise of political power’, you say on the contrary: ‘Either we seize power at once, or else we might as well just take to our beds.’ Whereas we are at pains to show the German workers in particular how rudimentary the development of the German proletariat is, you appeal to the patriotic feelings and the class prejudice of the German artisans, flattering them in the grossest way possible, and this is a more popular method, of course. Just as the word ‘people’ has been given an aura of sanctity by the democrats, so you have done the same for the word ‘proletariat’. Like the democrats you substitute the catchword of revolution for revolutionary development, etc., etc. (Revelations Concerning the Communist Trial in Cologne by Karl Marx 1853)

Throughout his life, Marx stressed the difficulties that would be faced in the transition from capitalism to socialism. In 1875, in the *Critique*, Marx was clear that even the first phase of communist society would involve “prolonged birth pangs,” and that during this period, “the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*.”

The founders of scientific socialism had only the briefest glimpse of this dictatorship of the proletariat, during the few months of the Paris Commune. Their views tended to be forgotten with the growing electoral strength of the Second International when many came to believe that socialism could be won through electoral and evolutionary means. Revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat were not necessary.

Lenin understood the significance of this key concept of Marxism and restored it to its central role in the transition, correctly noting that it would be neither brief nor easy:

The transition from capitalism to communism represents an entire historical epoch. Until this epoch has terminated, the exploiters inevitably cherish the hope of restoration, and this hope is converted into attempts at restoration. And after their first serious defeat, the overthrown exploiters—who had not expected their overthrow, never believed it possible, never conceded the thought of it—throw themselves with energy grown tenfold, with furious passion and hatred grown a hundredfold, into the battle for the recovery of the 'paradise' of which they have been deprived, on behalf of their families, who had been leading such a sweet and easy life and whom now the 'common herd' is condemning to ruin and destitution (or to 'common labour...'). (see Vol. XXIII, p. 355).

During this period the proletariat must use state power to suppress the old ruling class:

The dictatorship of the proletariat is a most determined and most ruthless war waged by the new class against a more powerful enemy, the bourgeoisie, whose resistance is increased tenfold by its overthrow . . . the dictatorship of the proletariat is a stubborn struggle—bloody and bloodless, violent and peaceful, military and economic, educational and administrative—against the forces and traditions of the old society.

It is important to understand that this period of revolutionary transition between global capitalism and global socialism, although it will exhibit characteristics of each, will be different from either capitalism or socialism and must be understood as such. Accordingly, it cannot be judged by bourgeois norms nor by the norms that we hope will emerge in a truly socialist society.

Marx stressed that “defects are inevitable” even in the early phase of communist society itself which will be “in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges.” If this is true even after the defeat of the bourgeoisie, how much more true will it be while the bourgeoisie, “with furious passion and hatred grown a hundredfold,” is still using every means to subvert and destroy the attempt to build socialism.

Thus, when we are attempting to understand the efforts to build socialism in the Soviet Union, the Peoples Republic of China, or socialist Cuba, we must place them in this context. It is a mistake to judge them as if they represented the socialism of the global future.

The World Revolutionary Process I: The Revolutionary Bourgeoisie

The history of our species has seen both evolutionary and revolutionary development through, on the one hand the progressive development of humanity's productive forces and, on the other, class struggle. By about 1500 A.D., humanity was poised to enter a new phase in our development, the integration of our species into a single world system. This is being accomplished through the world revolutionary process.

The modern world revolutionary process was initiated by the bourgeoisie, which, as the *Manifesto* stresses, has played a “most revolutionary” role in history. It did this, first of all, by creating the world market, incorporating all earlier forms of class rule within the global capitalist system. During its rule, “the bourgeoisie created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together.”

As the *Manifesto* notes,

the modern bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange.

Each step in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political advance of that class. An oppressed class under the sway of the feudal nobility, an armed and self-governing association in the medieval commune: here independent urban republic (as in Italy and Germany); there taxable “third estate” of the monarchy (as in France); afterwards, in the period of manufacturing proper, serving either the semi-feudal or the absolute monarchy as a counterpoise against the nobility, and, in fact, cornerstone of the great monarchies in general, the bourgeoisie has at

last, since the establishment of Modern Industry and of the world market, conquered for itself, in the modern representative State, exclusive political sway.

In order to establish its rule, the bourgeoisie had to transform the world. There is no better description of the process than in the *Manifesto*:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors”, and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment”. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom — Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers.

The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation.

The bourgeoisie has disclosed how it came to pass that the brutal display of vigour in the Middle Ages, which reactionaries so much admire, found its fitting complement in the most slothful indolence. It has been the first to show what man’s activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former Exoduses of nations and crusades.

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

This first phase of the World Revolutionary Process left its fossilized remains, so to speak, in the Constitution and Declaration of Independence of the United States whose concepts continue to inspire revolutionaries such as Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh.

The World Revolutionary Process II: The Revolutionary Workers

In order to establish its rule, the bourgeoisie developed the whole Enlightenment enterprise of critical social science and democratic institutions that later would come to serve a new class, the proletariat. As Joseph Schumpeter noted:

Capitalism creates a critical frame of mind which after having destroyed the moral authority of so many other institutions, in the end turns against its own; the bourgeois finds to his amazement that the rationalist attitude does not stop at the credentials of kings and popes but goes on to attack private property and the whole scheme of bourgeois values [1954, p. 143].

Further, the bourgeoisie created a new revolutionary class, the proletariat, whose historic mission is the overthrow of, not just bourgeois rule, but class rule itself.

Emergence of the Proletariat (1831-1848)

No sooner had the bourgeoisie gained power than the proletariat began to contest that power and organize itself as a class. This of course had begun earlier, during the English Civil War and the French Revolution, but increasingly the working class was making revolutions on its own behalf, in the historic revolutions of 1831 and 1848. It also began

to create its own political organizations, such as the Workingmen's Parties that formed in the United States in 1828, and the Chartists in England in 1838. As Engels remarks:

In 1831, the first working-class rising took place in Lyons; between 1838 and 1842, the first national working-class movement, that of the English Chartists, reached its height. The class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie came to the front in the history of the most advanced countries in Europe, in proportion to the development, upon the one hand, of modern industry, upon the other, of the newly-acquired political supremacy of the bourgeoisie. Facts more and more strenuously gave the lie to the teachings of bourgeois economy as to the identity of the interests of capital and labor, as to the universal harmony and universal prosperity that would be the consequence of unbridled competition. All these things could no longer be ignored, any more than the French and English Socialism, which was their theoretical, though very imperfect, expression. But the old idealist conception of history, which was not yet dislodged, knew nothing of class struggles based upon economic interests, knew nothing of economic interests; production and all economic relations appeared in it only as incidental, subordinate elements in the "history of civilization".

The new facts made imperative a new examination of all past history. Then it was seen that all past history, with the exception of its primitive stages, was the history of class struggles; that these warring classes of society are always the products of the modes of production and of exchange — in a word, of the economic conditions of their time; that the economic structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical, and other ideas of a given historical period. Hegel has freed history from metaphysics — he made it dialectic; but his conception of history was essentially idealistic. But now idealism was driven from its last refuge, the philosophy of history; now a materialistic treatment of history was propounded, and a method found of explaining man's "knowing" by his "being", instead of, as heretofore, his "being" by his "knowing".

From that time forward, Socialism was no longer an accidental discovery of this or that ingenious brain, but the necessary outcome of the struggle between two historically developed classes — the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Its task was no longer to manufacture a system of society as perfect as possible, but to examine the historico-economic succession of events from which these classes and their antagonism had of necessity sprung, and to discover in the economic conditions thus created the means of ending the conflict. Soc Sci & Utopian, part two

This was the period during which the Manifesto was written, and the Manifesto itself was followed within weeks by the historical revolutions of 1848. In France, workers actually did take to the streets and set up barricades. In England, it saw the rise of the Chartist movement, and in the United States, the growth of workingmen's parties, the abolition movement, and the Civil War.

Perhaps the most enduring accomplishment of this period was the writing of the Communist Manifesto, completed only weeks before the historic revolutions of 1848. The Manifesto provided a set of principles that guided working class struggles in the following decades. Chief among these, as Engels later wrote, was the understanding that

the emancipation of the workers must be the act of the working class itself (and that) the history of these class struggles forms a series of evolutions in which, nowadays, a stage has been reached where the exploited and oppressed class — the proletariat — cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class — the bourgeoisie — without, at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinction, and class struggles." (1888 Preface)

As Marx and Engels stressed, these "theoretical conclusions" of the Manifesto were not simply a product of their own genius, instead, they "merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes." It is important to understand that the "existing class struggle," the "historical movement," has been undergoing continual change in the

sixteen decades since the *Manifesto* was written. Already in 1882, Marx and Engels noted that

What a limited field the proletarian movement occupied at that time (December 1847) is most clearly shown by the last section: the position of the Communists in relation to the various opposition parties in various countries. Precisely Russia and the United States are missing here. It was the time when Russia constituted the last great reserve of all European reaction, when the United States absorbed the surplus proletarian forces of Europe through immigration. Both countries provided Europe with raw materials and were at the same time markets for the sale of its industrial products. Both were, therefore, in one way or another, pillars of the existing European system.

How very different today.

And how different it is today, in the twenty first century, after a hundred and sixty years of development through class struggle.

Defeat of the Revolution (1848-1864)

As Marx observed, revolutionary annals after 1848 must begin with the heading, "Defeat of the Revolution!" Nevertheless, the revolutionary process continued with major advanced. As Marx observed in his Inaugural Address to the First International (1864), two major achievements marked this period: the first was the Ten Hours' Bill, "the first time that in broad daylight the political economy of the middle class succumbed to the political economy of the working class." The second was the cooperative movement, of which Marx observed:

The value of these great social experiments cannot be overrated. By deed instead of by argument, they have shown that production on a large scale, and in accord with the behests of modern science, may be carried on without the existence of a class of masters employing a class of hands; that to bear fruit, the means of labor need not be monopolized as a means of dominion over, and of extortion against, the laboring man himself; and that, like slave labor, like serf labor, hired labor is but a transitory and inferior form, destined to disappear before associated labor plying its toil with a willing hand, a ready mind, and a joyous heart. (1864)

In the United States, this period was marked by the rise of a women's movement after the Seneca Falls Convention in July 1848 and the abolition movement leading up to the Civil War (1861-85)

The First International (1864-1871)

It took over a decade for working class to recuperate from the defeat of 1848, but after the January Uprising in Poland in 1863, the international working class began talking of an international organization of workers to, among other things, prevent the use of foreign workers as strikebreakers. The International Workingmen's Association was formed in London in 1864, and held five Congresses in Geneva (1866), Lausanne (1867), Brussels, (1868), Basle, (1869), The Hague (1872). With a core of perhaps 20,000, its total membership numbered in the millions.

The First International was politically diverse, with a major split between the socialists, or Reds, and anarchists, or Blacks. On learning of this split, Otto von Bismarck remarked, "Crowned heads, wealth and privilege may well tremble should ever again the Black and Red unite!" FN[8] –Wikipedia, First International

This was also the period of Reconstruction in the United States, following the victory of the North in the Civil War. But the most notable event of this period was the Paris Commune. The defeat of the Paris Commune marked the end of this phase of the world revolutionary process. As Marx later wrote:

The civilization and justice of bourgeois order comes out in its lurid light whenever the slaves and drudges of that order rise against their masters. Then this civilization and justice stand forth as undisguised savagery and lawless revenge. Each new crisis in the class struggle between the appropriator and the producer brings out this fact more glaringly. Even the atrocities of the bourgeois in June 1848 vanish before the infamy of 1871. The self-sacrificing heroism with which the population of Paris – men, women, and children – fought for eight days after the entrance of the Versaillese, reflects as much the grandeur of their cause, as the infernal deeds of the soldiery reflect the innate spirit of that civilization, indeed, the great problem of which is how to get rid of the heaps of corpses it made after the battle was over!

To find a parallel for the conduct of Thiers and his bloodhounds we must go back to the times of Sulla and the two Triumvirates of Rome. The same wholesale slaughter in cold blood; the same disregard, in massacre, of age and sex, the same system of torturing prisoners; the same proscriptions, but this time of a whole class; the same savage hunt after concealed leaders, lest one might escape; the same denunciations of political and private enemies; the same indifference for the butchery of entire strangers to the feud. - Marx, Civil War in France, Section titled "The Fall of Paris" <
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ch06.htm> >

Continuing Development (1872-1888)

It took the French working class decades to recuperate from the slaughter of the Paris communards in 1871. Accordingly, leadership of the European working class shifted out of France into Germany, where successful utilization of universal suffrage led to an astonishing growth of the German Social Democratic Party, from 102,000 votes in 1871 to 1,427,000 in 1890. Along with this growth, as Engels noted, “an entirely new method of proletarian struggle came into operation.” Street fighting with barricades, which decided everything in 1848 and 1871, was replaced with legal electoral action. “And so it happened that the bourgeoisie and the government came to be much more afraid of the legal than of the illegal action of the workers’ party, of the results of elections than of those of rebellion.” FN Engels

In the United States, this period was marked by the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the emergence of the KKK and Jim Crow. It was also the period of the Great Upheaval on 1877 and the Eight Hour Day movement and the Haymarket Square massacre of 1881.

The Second International (1889-1916)

The next phase was the phase of the Second International, based on trade union and electoral organization. As Engels remarked shortly before his death in 1895:

With this successful utilisation of universal suffrage, however, an entirely new method of proletarian struggle came into operation, and this method quickly took on a more tangible form. It was found that the state institutions, in which the rule of the bourgeoisie is organised, offer the working class still further levers to fight these very state institutions. The workers took part in elections to particular diets, to municipal councils and to trades courts; they contested with the bourgeoisie every post in the occupation of which a sufficient part of the proletariat had a say. And so it happened that the bourgeoisie and the government came to be much more afraid of the legal than of the illegal action of the workers’ party, of the results of elections than of those of rebellion.

For here, too, the conditions of the struggle had changed fundamentally. Rebellion in the old style, street fighting with barricades, which decided the issue everywhere up to 1848, had become largely outdated. . . .

The irony of world history turns everything upside down. We, the “revolutionaries”, the “overthrowers” — we are thriving far better on legal methods than on illegal methods and overthrow. The parties of order, as they call themselves, are perishing under the legal conditions created by themselves. They cry despairingly with Odilon Barrot: la légalité nous tue, legality is the death of us[463]; whereas we, under this legality, get firm muscles and rosy cheeks and look like life eternal. And if we are not so crazy as to let ourselves be driven to street fighting in order to please them, then in the end there is nothing left for them to do but themselves break through this dire legality. 1895

However, by the outbreak of the Great War, it became clear that the Marxism of the Second International was inadequate to guide workers in the struggle against the war. It had become reformist and opportunist, and succumbed to national chauvinism as many socialist parties supported their own bourgeoisie against the workers of other countries.

Within decades of the historic French Revolution, the vanguard of world revolution shifted from the bourgeoisie to the working class, as working class movements such as the Chartists began to appear and uprisings of workers broke out as early as 1831 and 1848. In 1871, the workers of Paris established the first working class government in history. (It was, however, preceded by the government of former slaves in Haiti in 1804.)

These stirrings of working class revolution were given theoretical form by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* and other works. By the time of their deaths in 1883 and 1895, Marx and Engels could see their theories being confirmed in the actual struggles of the working class in the leading European nations. The working class was becoming increasingly class conscious and powerful, socialist parties were becoming more respectable and successful.

The Communist International

But these very successes tended to blind the followers of Marx and Engels to important changes that were occurring within the capitalist system. It began to appear as though socialism could evolve gradually, through peaceful electoral methods, rather than through a working class revolution that would necessarily involve violence. It further appeared as though the nations that had led the world into capitalism—England, France, Germany—would also lead the world into socialism. All that was necessary was for the workers to elect their representatives to parliament, and use their political and economic power to wrest ever-greater reforms from the capitalists. As Engels himself noted, "We, the 'revolutionists,' the 'overthrowers'—we are thriving far better on legal methods than on illegal means and overthrow" (Engels 1895:571).

But history, which Engels said turns everything upside down, had decreed otherwise. With the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, the representatives of the leading socialist parties in Germany, France, and England voted to support the imperialist war and send their workers off to kill each other. Only the Italian and U.S. socialist parties opposed the war. The outcome of the war was a socialist revolution, not in the leading capitalist nations of Europe, but in backward Russia. How was this possible?

Lenin provided the answer. By creatively applying Marxism to the changed conditions of the early twentieth century, Lenin not only *interpreted* the world, but *changed* it.

For Leninism, the theory of imperialism helped account for the changes in capitalism that had occurred since Marx's time. When Marx was writing *Capital*, he based his analysis on England, which was the leading capitalist nation, and his analysis focused on the capitalism of his time. By Lenin's time, capitalism had matured into monopoly capitalism, dominated by large corporations and finance capital and capitalism had become transformed into imperialism, an international system covering the entire world. Within this world imperialist system, there were two kinds of nations, the imperialist nations and the oppressed nations. The capitalists of the imperialist nations of England, France, and later, Germany, were able to thereby exploit not only their own workers, but also the workers and peasants of the oppressed nations in the colonial world.

This transformation in the nature of capitalism necessarily led to a transformation in the revolutionary activity. It was no longer practical to talk of revolution occurring

within each capitalist nation according to the degree of development of capitalism within that nation, as did the theorists of the Second International. Rather, one had to work for an international revolution in which the entire imperialist system would undergo a revolutionary transformation into socialism. This revolution would not necessarily break out first in the imperialist nations where the capitalists were strongest, but in the oppressed nations, where the chain of world imperialism was weakest. In the twentieth century, the tide of revolutionary activity had shifted out of Europe to the oppressed nations: the Russian Revolution of 1905, the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the Chinese Revolution of 1911, the Persian Revolution of 1905-11.

The shift in the locus of revolution necessitated a shift in revolutionary tactics. In the oppressed nations the working class was not the majority of the population. For this reason, the working class had to ally itself with other oppressed classes, specifically the peasants, who formed the majority of the population in the oppressed nations. This worker-peasant alliance, symbolized by the hammer and sickle, became the basis for revolutionary activity in the oppressed nations.

Further, the oppressed nations lacked the institutions of parliamentary democracy and political freedoms that had emerged from the class struggles in the imperialist nations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This necessitated a different form of struggle than had developed within the imperialist nations themselves. In order to conduct class struggle under these conditions, the proletariat needed a vanguard party, of professional revolutionaries recruited from the most class conscious members of the working class and organized around the principle of democratic centralism.

In the imperialist nations, by contrast, the struggle of the working class becomes deflected by the development of an aristocracy of labor. The imperialists are able to use the superprofits gained by the oppression of their colonies to bribe a sector of the working class. This imperialist bribe becomes the material basis for the opportunism displayed by the Social Democratic parties of the Second International that are committed to reform rather than revolution. This becomes a source of the strength of the bourgeoisie within the imperialist nations.

Thus, Leninism sees capitalism, revolution, and socialism in global terms. The change from capitalism to socialism involves a global transition, not simply individual nations choosing capitalism or socialism.

Two further concepts are essential in thinking about this global transition: the global crisis of capitalism and the world revolutionary process. The global crisis of capitalism is manifest in inter-imperialist rivalries, the two World Wars, the Great Depression, and the rise of socialism. The world revolutionary process is unfolding along three lines: the emergence of socialism in the formerly oppressed nations such as the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba; continuing struggles for national liberation in the oppressed nations; and continuing working class struggles in the imperialist nations themselves.

The Communist International, founded by Lenin in 1918, was the first truly global organization in the history of our species, preceding the United Nations by decades. Other empires such as Rome or China may have incorporated what they considered the civilized world and the British Empire may have circled the globe but it never aspired to embrace our entire species. That was the aim of the International—the liberation and integration of our entire species.

The Empire Strikes Back: The Role of U.S. Imperialism

With the victory of the Russian Revolution in 1917, Leninism became an international movement, and posed a real threat to imperialism. The international bourgeoisie countered this threat economically, politically, militarily, and ideologically.

As Marx observed, whatever differences may exist among capitalists, they “form a veritable freemason society vis-à-vis the whole working-class.” Marx further observed, after the overthrow of the Paris Commune:

The civilization and justice of bourgeois order comes out in its lurid light whenever the slaves and drudges of that order rise against their masters. Then this civilization and justice stand forth as undisguised savagery and lawless revenge. Each new crisis in the class struggle between the appropriator and the producer brings out this fact more glaringly. Even the atrocities of the bourgeois in June 1848 vanish before the infamy of 1871. The self-sacrificing heroism with which the population of Paris – men, women, and children – fought for eight days after the entrance of the Versailles, reflects as much the grandeur of their cause, as the infernal deeds of the soldiery reflect the innate spirit of that civilization, indeed, the great problem of which is how to get rid of the heaps of corpses it made after the battle was over! (Civil War in France)

Many capitalists had hoped that the Nazi invasion would destroy the Soviet Union and with it, socialism. Instead, at Stalingrad, the Red Army tore the guts out of the Nazi war machine, and the Soviet Union emerged from WWII as a victorious superpower with tremendous prestige throughout the world.

Inspired by the Soviet example, the postwar world has seen repeated attempts “to wrest, by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie.” All such attempts have been met by violent repression by imperialism, specifically United States imperialism, typically in the form of overt action by the U.S. military or covert action by the CIA. Thus, the attempt of the Vietnamese to free themselves from French colonialism was met by one of the most vicious wars in history. The attempt of the democratically elected Mosaddegh government in Iraq to nationalize British oil companies was met with a CIA engineered coup in 1953. The attempt of the Arbenz government in Guatemala for very limited land reform involving some of United Fruit’s unused land led to another overthrow in 1954. When Chile elected a socialist President, Salvador Allende in 1973, and began to nationalize the copper companies, there was another violent overthrow.

Such intervention was essential for capitalism to survive the Soviet challenge. As Thomas Friedman noted,

For globalism to work, America can’t be afraid to act like the almighty superpower that it is. . . . The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist—McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies is called the United States Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps. — *Thomas Friedman, What the World Needs Now, New York Times, March 28, 1999. As quoted in “Backing Up Globalization with Military Might” <http://www.globalissues.org/issue/38/free-trade-and-globalization>*

My stress here is on the role of force in maintaining the global capitalist system. A full analysis, of course, would have to include consideration of other organizations of imperialist control such as the institutions growing out of the Bretton Woods system, including the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank, and the mysterious Bank for International Settlements in Basel, Switzerland. Increasingly, the imperialists are keeping the oppressed nations in line using financial methods, such as the infamous SAPs, or Structural Adjustment Programs.

It is clear that, were it not for the actions of U.S. imperialism, the world would be a much different place. As a species, we would be much closer to socialism. The role the

United States has played is analogous to that which Marx worried England would play in relation to a revolution on the continent of Europe, as “the rock which breaks the revolutionary waves.” (“The Revolutionary Movement,” January 1849). The U.S. could not play this role with a fully class conscious working class, so preventing the emergence of such a class is the first prerequisite of Empire. So it is not surprising that American workers are not unlike the British workers that Engels complained about in a letter to Kautsky:

You ask me what the English workers think about colonial policy. Well, exactly the same as they think about politics in general: the same as what the bourgeois think. There is no workers' party here, there are only Conservatives and Liberal-Radicals, and the workers gaily share the feast of England's monopoly of the world market and the colonies. -London, 12 September, 1882

Unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of Americans do support the American system, and, implicitly or explicitly, the two party system, corporate capitalism, and the U.S. military. Such support in part expressed what Hunter S Thompson has called “that dark, venal and incurably violent side of the American character that almost every country in the world has learned to fear and despise.” Yet there is another side to the American character, represented by individuals such as Harriet Tubman, Mother Jones, Eugene Debs, and Martin Luther King, Jr. The question for Americans, and for our species, is which of these two sides of the American character will prevail.

It is also important to note that war and militarism have taken on added significance in the twentieth century. War is the only thing that has preserved capitalism in the twentieth century, in two ways

First, there has been Cold War Keynesianism, perhaps now it should be called War on Terror Keynesianism

Second, war has played a vital role in preventing the natural evolution of our species toward socialism, beginning with the attacks on the Soviet Union in 1918, continuing through WWII. Since the end of WWII, continual Cold War and U.S. intervention against any attempt to move toward socialism in other countries.

It is important to recognize that the imperialism constructed by the United States after WWII differs in many respects from the imperialist of Lenin's time.

The World Revolutionary Process III: Seattle and After

The overthrow of the Soviet Union represented an incalculable loss and a tremendous setback for socialism and for people's struggles around the world. However, the revolutionary process itself was by no means stopped. Within ten years a new movement revealed itself within the very heart of the Empire.

Seattle had, of course, precursors in the U.S. and globally, and the World Revolutionary Process had already been transforming itself. The effect of Seattle was to jump start this process on a new foundation. World revolution is no longer centered in Moscow, Beijing, or anywhere else. It is truly a global movement with a multiplicity of components.

Just as the world revolutionary process of Marxism-Leninism had a number of components, as described above, so the present world revolutionary process has a number of components, in addition to the global peace and justice movement.

The old components, of course, are still there. Although the Communist Party was overthrown in the Soviet Union, the Communist Parties of China, Cuba, Vietnam, and elsewhere are still there, although major policy changes have taken place. Labor unions

and socialist, communist, and social democratic parties are still there, although their strength has been reduced, especially in the heartland of imperialism, the United States.

Another component of the world revolutionary process is the labor unions and socialist parties left over from earlier phases. Although these are weak in the United States, they are much stronger in European nations.

Increasingly, Marxism and socialism have come to be seen as no longer relevant and were forgotten in favor of such ideologies as anarchism, deep ecology, eco-feminism, libertarianism, and postmodernism. This seems to be changing in the aftermath of the global economic crisis.

The Seattle movement itself, sometimes called the “revolt of the globalized,” developed in opposition to the neoliberal globalization policies of the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank, as well as various “free trade” policies such as NAFTA. It is itself a global movement that converges in exuberant gatherings of 60,000 people or more whenever the major international agencies of imperialism meet. It also converges at the various World Social Forums that began in Proto Alegre, Brazil in 2001.

In *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Social Movement in History Is Restoring Grace, Justice, and Beauty to the World*, Paul Hadden estimates that there are over one million organizations working toward ecological sustainability and social justice throughout the world:

This movement, however, doesn't fit the standard model. It is dispersed, inchoate, and fiercely independent. It has no manifesto or doctrine, no overriding authority to check with. It is taking shape in schoolrooms, farms, jungles, villages, companies, deserts, fisheries, slums—and yes, even fancy New York hotels. (p. 3) . . . What *does* meet the eye is compelling: coherent, organic, self-contained congregations involving tens of millions of people dedicated to change. (p. 4)

Millions of people around the world protested the impending war in Iraq on February 15, 2003, leading the New York Times to observe that “there may still be two superpowers on the planet: the United States and world public opinion.” (NYT, 2/16/03)

In Latin America, there is the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA), including the nation states of Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and, before the coup, Honduras.

In Asia, socialist parties have won elections in Nepal and Kerala. the Naxalite insurgency of India, with a Maoist ideology, is active in about 40% of India's land area. Although many on the left think the Peoples Republic of China is a capitalist society, it continues to be governed by the Chinese Communist Party whose long term impact on world imperialism is by no means clear. Vietnam and Korea are also officially socialist nations, even though their socialism may not satisfy some Western “Marxists.”

Cuba, with its participatory democracy and ecological sensitivity, is a better model of socialism, but Cuba is still a nation-state within a global capitalist world, faced with extreme hostility from its nearby superpower.

Further, we must include in the world revolutionary process the United Nations and associated institutions attempting to build a framework of international law, human rights, and human welfare.

What really unites all these movements is that collectively they are capable of providing alternatives in the impending overthrow of U.S. imperialism. They provide the raw material for the emergence of our species into the next phase of humanity's existence, and solving the problems of feeding the hungry and caring for the poor which global capitalism refuses to do.

Although the global corporate empire could not survive without the military/espionage/financial institutions of the U.S. Empire, humanity could do quite well without them. To the TINA of the neoliberal establishment, the World Revolutionary Process says TAPAS, “There Are Plenty of Alternative Solutions.” The nature of the world that will emerge as the institutions of imperialism are overthrown may be seen in the movements which are resisting the devastation of imperialism, for these movements are truly building a new world in the womb of the old.

However, it must be noted that the World Revolutionary Process lacks a theory. True, it has many theories—anarchism, deep ecology, eco-feminism, postmodernism—but it lacks theory in the sense that Marxism-Leninism provided a single, overarching theory for the World Revolutionary Process of the Twentieth Century. Some may see this as a good thing, but we must wonder if a movement that does not understand its own history can lead us into a new future. The movement is often anti-communist and sees the Soviet Union as something to be forgotten. China-bashing is frequent, and China is usually seen as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. The movement tends to be anti-corporate but not anti-capitalist. Many organizations are truly grassroots organizations (GROs) but funding for NGOs frequently comes from bourgeois sources and, in some cases, from the CIA. We wonder to what extent this compromises the revolutionary potential of the movement.

Social change can come with surprising rapidity when it does come, and it can bring with it surprisingly rapid changes in consciousness. Socialism is definitely on the global agenda. Our task, here in the center of world imperialism, is to prepare ourselves for the possibility of a rapidly developing revolutionary situation. It may not come in our lifetimes, or it may come tomorrow. Either way, we need to take our task seriously. Our preparation has many aspects.

John Bellamy Foster has recently suggested that we need a “co-revolutionary movement,” describing along lines similar to those we have been employing:

What is needed is a “co-revolutionary movement,” to adopt David Harvey’s pregnant term, that will bring together the traditional working-class critique of capital, the critique of imperialism, the critiques of patriarchy and racism, and the critique of ecologically destructive growth (along with their respective mass movements). --- David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 228-35

Such a movement is in fact unfolding, for what Foster is describing is nothing less than the world revolutionary process.

Egypt, Wisconsin, and the World Revolutionary Process

As this essay was going through its successive drafts, we watched with hope and anticipation the unfolding of the revolutionary process in Middle East and the Midwestern United States. These uprisings are linked together not only by feelings of solidarity and by the internet and global communications networks, but also by U.S. imperialism. The Mubarak regime in Egypt was installed and supported by U.S. imperialism to serve its interests, and this is the same imperialism that is sucking the wealth out of communities across the United States leading to the resistance we see in Wisconsin.

It is too early to know how these uprisings will develop or their global impact. But it is clear that a new chapter is being written in the history of the world revolutionary process.

Concluding Remarks

Socialism—or Communism, to use Marx’s term—is of world-historic significance. It does not simply involve a change in governmental policy in this or that nation, but the emergence of our species into the next higher plane of human existence, into a social order as different from our own as ours is from the indigenous people who one inhabited America, as noted by the American anthropologists Lewis Henry Morgan. Morgan is credited by Engels with having “discovered afresh in America the materialistic conception of history discovered by Marx forty years ago,” and having arrived at, in the main points, “the same conclusions as Marx.” Like Marx, Morgan saw that

the outgrowth of property has been so immense, its forms so diversified, its uses so expanding and its management so intelligent in the interests of its owners, that it has become, on the part of the people, an unmanageable power. The human mind stands bewildered in the presence of its own creation. The time will come, nevertheless, when human intelligence will rise to the mastery over property. . . .

Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending.

This higher plane, for Morgan as for Marx, would involve the negation of the wage slavery, inequality, and class antagonisms of bourgeois civilization and a return, “in a higher form,” to the liberty, equality, and community of our ancestral commune, once the universal social order of our species.

Morgan worked closely with, and on behalf of, Native Americans, and was even honored by being adopted into the Iroquois nation. But unlike Marx and Engels, he was not involved with the working class movement and accordingly did not emphasize the role of class struggle in moving to this higher plane of civilization. Growing out of their own experience, Marx and Engels saw that this higher plane of civilization would emerge from the class struggle between the capitalist and working class, a struggle which could only end “either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.”

The common ruin of the contending classes in modern bourgeois civilization would involve something far worse than the fall of the Roman Empire, or the collapse of the various dynasties of Egypt, China, or other Asiatic empire. As Fidel recently noted, earlier crises never called into question the very survival of our species, but since 1945 there has been a real possibility of our extinction.

Socialism is also world-historic in the sense that it must be a global society, encompassing our entire species, or at least those peoples and people who want to be a part of it. It cannot co-exist with capitalism because capitalism is its mortal enemy. This is not simply because of capitalism’s inherent tendency to expand, but more importantly by the overt and covertly means it uses to expand. Until these are neutralized, socialism in the proper sense of the term, cannot emerge.

The world revolutionary process must continue, as Marx said, “until all the more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance . . . not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world.” Only then will humanity be able to enter the first phase of communist society.

In Marx’s day, “the dominant countries” would have included, at a minimum, France, England, and Germany. Today, global capitalism is much more complex. It is maintained primarily by U.S. imperialism which has a variety of control mechanism at its disposal: overt, military intervention (as in Korea, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq), covert intervention (as in Iran, Guatemala, Indonesia, Chile, and Nicaragua), financial

intervention (through the IMF, World Bank, WTO, and other global financial institutions), and ideological (through media and academia). In this sense, as Samir Amin has recently noted, the overthrow or collapse of U.S. imperialist becomes “the first priority and the first condition” for the success of the World Revolutionary Movement and the emergence of humanity into the new phase of human existence.

Marx did not have much to say about our period of revolutionary transition for the simple reason that he had few real examples to study. The Paris Commune was crushed within a few months. Even Lenin only had a few years to work on the process of revolutionary transformation. Now, however, we have seen nearly a century of attempts to build socialism within this period of revolutionary transformation. Our task is to proceed as Marx would, by the careful and detailed study of this process. In doing so, we would be examining a real process about which Marx could only make the most general inferences.

As we seek to find our way in the complex global processes of the Twenty First Century, it is vital that we maintain our understanding that Lenin was right in the Twentieth Century, just as Marx was right in the Nineteenth. Our task is to do for Leninism what Lenin did for the Marxism of his day: understand its strengths and shortcomings and creatively apply it to our changing reality.

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April 2011

