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Raju Das

York University, [rajudas@yorku.ca](mailto:rajudas@yorku.ca)

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# Politics of Marx as Non-sectarian Revolutionary Class Politics: An Interpretation in the Context of the 20th and 21st Centuries

## **Abstract**

This article is condensed from three chapters of my *Marxist Class Theory for a Skeptical World* (Haymarket, 2018) and from a longer article based on these chapters. It is based on a talk on Marx's politics' delivered at 'A Bicentenary Conference: Karl Marx at 200' at Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. I am thankful to the participants at this conference for their comments.

Put simply, Marx's politics is about class struggle for state power to build socialism, a society of popular democracy, by overthrowing capitalism. In this short article, I will explore different aspects of this single idea, from Marx's political writings, *as I interpret them*, and I will do this schematically. This is the first part of the article. In the second part, I will extend my articulation and interpretation of Marx's politics, and briefly and schematically, relate this to some aspects of the Leninist legacy. Needless to say, this article does not provide a detailed exposition of Marx's or Marxist politics (for this, see Das, 2018a).

## **Keywords**

Marxism, Class, Socialism

## **Cover Page Footnote**

Das is a Professor at York University, Toronto. His most recent book, published in 2018, is "Marxist Class Theory for a Skeptical World", Haymarket, Chicago. He is currently writing a book on Marx's "Capital 1", entitled "Marx, Capital, and Contemporary Capitalism: A Global Perspective", to be published by Taylor and Francis, London. He serves on the editorial board and on the manuscript collective of "Science & Society: A Journal of Marxist Thought and Analysis".

The term ‘politics of Marx’ or ‘Marx’s politics’ can refer to both his understanding of politics, and his view of what is to be done politically. Marx’s politics is mainly class politics (explained below), which, ultimately, emerges from his class-based political economy.

The political economy of Marx gives many reasons as to why capitalism must be gotten rid of, such as: income and wealth inequality; unemployment; poverty; capitalist crises creating constant instability in economic life; etc. These reasons are as valid now as they were during his own time.

Yet, while capitalism has been constantly crisis-prone, expressed in the crisis of profitability, and while consequently miseries are piling up on workers, there appears to be a crisis of the politics of leadership of the working class, leaving capitalism intact. This means: while capitalism is beyond its shelf-life, there is no force to take it off the shelf to put it in the dustbin of history.

Social democracy and the traditional communist movement have failed to meet the needs of the working class. The political force to implement a genuine revolutionary socialist program, one that is critical of Stalinist distortions and of social democracy, is deeply fragmented and weak. Some parts of this movement are against even trade union struggle, which is a basic element in Marx’s own politics.

In the middle-class academic milieu, the situation is no better. Here most of the men and women of different ethnic, racial, caste and nationalist backgrounds, including those who associate themselves with Marxism in some ways, are critical not only of the unique revolutionary capacity of the working class but also of the need for the seizure of state power by that class. The Marxist/y academic world (e.g. Wright, 2014a and 2014b) is, more or less, also advocating for a world that is a little more tolerable than the one we live in.<sup>1</sup> While the academic world has become more diverse in terms of its social-demographic composition in the last several decades (and this is a good thing), it has remained homogenous in a fundamental way. I am referring here to the *uniform* rejection of the basic tenets of Marx and Engels (and of Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky) on the part of a *diverse* academic personnel.<sup>2</sup>

There is indeed very little support for Marx’s politics (among what can be called progressive circles). But what *is* Marx’s politics? If politics is about power, then political power is, for Marx, the organized power of one class for oppressing another class. Marx says in *German Ideology*:

*all struggles within the state, the struggle between democratic, aristocratic and monarchy, the struggle for the franchise etc., etc. are merely the illusory forms in which the real struggles of the different classes are fought out among one another* (Marx and Engels, 1978:54).

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<sup>1</sup> This is, ultimately, still a capitalist society in terms of its fundamental class relations. On a detailed discussion on the multiple aspects of the class character of capitalism, see Das, 2018 (chapters 6 and 7).

<sup>2</sup> This, among other things, shows that the diversity in the academic work is narrowly interpreted to mean diversity in terms of identity (race, caste, gender, sexuality, etc.) while there is very little diversity in terms of theoretical and political perspectives. Indeed, the Marxist approach stands thoroughly marginalized in academia (see Das, 2013).

Marx's politics concerns self-emancipation of the working class: 'At the founding of the International, we expressly formulated the battle cry: The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself' (Marx and Engels, 1879). Driven by economic crisis and all the miseries that capitalism creates, and armed with a political capacity to which capitalism itself unwittingly contributes by converting the working class into big armies of labour, the working class must overthrow capitalism and establish socialism.

So, to put it simply, Marx's politics is about class struggle for state power to build socialism, a society of popular democracy, by overthrowing capitalism. In this short article, I will explore different aspects of this single idea, from Marx's political writings, *as I interpret them*,<sup>3</sup> and I will do this schematically. This is the first part of the article. In the second part, I will extend my articulation and interpretation of Marx's politics, and briefly and schematically, relate this to some aspects of the Leninist legacy.<sup>4</sup> Needless to say, this article does not provide a detailed exposition of Marx's or Marxist politics (for this, see Das, 2018a).

## EIGHT THESES ON MARX'S POLITICS

### 1. Class struggle involves the proletariat as the leading revolutionary class

The working class is the sole producer of value and surplus value – the capitalist form of wealth -- which sustains capitalism, as Marx explains in *Capital volume 1* (Marx, 1977).<sup>5</sup> If this class politically withdraws its labour, there will be no value, no surplus value, and no capital, so no *capitalism*. Also, not only has the operation of capitalism led to segments of the working class being geographically concentrated in large workplaces and large cities. Dispossession of small-scale producers (e.g. peasants) by capitalism has also made sure that the working class is the majority of the humanity. This means that: 'the expropriation of a few capitalist usurpers by

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<sup>3</sup> I agree that 'interpretation is inevitably personal' (Carver, 1996: xxvii). The personal character of interpretation involves uneven emphasis: two different people seeking to understand Marx's politics will come up with different interpretations of the same, in part because of their own theoretical assumptions (and practical experiences), although that does not mean that all interpretations are equally valid. I also provide a lot of direct textual evidence for my interpretation so the reader can judge for herself the adequacy/inadequacy of my interpretation/articulation of Marx's politics.

<sup>4</sup> This article is condensed from three chapters of my *Marxist Class Theory for a Skeptical World* (Haymarket, 2018) and from a longer article based on these chapters. It is based on a talk on Marx's politics' delivered at 'A Bicentenary Conference: Karl Marx at 200' at Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. I am thankful to the participants at this conference for their comments.

<sup>5</sup> The working class refers to all those who do not own/control any property or a significant amount of property and is therefore forced to sell their labour power to the owners of means of production, whether in farming or mining or manufacturing or in banks. What is known as industrial proletariat is only a section of the working class. Engels (1847) was clear in his *Principles of Communism*: The proletariat is the working class in capitalist society. 'The proletariat is that class in society which lives entirely from the sale of its labor and does not draw profit from any kind of capital; whose weal and woe, whose life and death, whose sole existence depends on the demand for labor – hence, on the changing state of business, on the vagaries of unbridled competition.

the mass of the people', i.e. by the majority, is on the political agenda now (Marx, 1977: 930).<sup>6</sup> Of course, 'numbers weigh in the balance only if united by combination and led by knowledge [class consciousness], as Marx (1864) said in his Inaugural to the First International.

## 2. Proletariat's struggle involves struggle for reforms, including trade union struggle

Workers should fight for concessions to improve their conditions within capitalism. The struggle for reforms can -- and must -- include the struggle for the conditions of struggle, i.e. the 'political freedoms, the right of assembly and association, and the freedom of the press', etc. (Marx, 1871a).

The struggle for reforms is necessary because without this struggle, workers' conditions will be worse: 'capital, if not checked, will recklessly and ruthlessly work to cast down the whole working class to... the utmost state of degradation...' (Marx, 1976: 54). The struggle for economic and political reform can create: 'elbow-room for development and movement' (Marx's letter to Kugelmann in Marx, 1868a). This struggle can also contribute to the development of consciousness of workers, as they learn about economy and polity on the basis of their agitational experience.<sup>7</sup> It is problematic to say that one should not struggle for a rise in wages on the ground that 'to struggle to increase one's wages or to prevent their decrease is like recognizing *wages*' (Marx, 2010: 327; italics in original).

## 3. The struggle for reforms has serious limitations

If *Capital volume 1* unpacks how capitalism adversely affects the working class and prompts it to engage in struggle for improvements (e.g. struggle for shorter working days or for a rise in wages), *Capital volume 1* also shows the limits to such struggles (Marx, 1977: chapter 25)<sup>8</sup>.

For various reasons, there are serious limits to what the struggle for reforms can do for the masses. For one thing, workers can achieve a certain rise in wages only up to a point: the rise in wages will stop if it interferes with the normal rate of accumulation and profit. As Marx says in *Capital*:

*as soon as this diminution [of unpaid labour] touches the point at which the surplus-labour that nourishes capital is no longer supplied in normal quantity, a reaction sets in:*

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<sup>6</sup> Marx began *Capital volume 1* with a view of communism as 'associated producers' (chapter 1), and he, more or less, ended *Capital volume 1* insisting on the necessity for expropriating the expropriators (and exploiters) (chapter 31).

<sup>7</sup> Workers' consciousness comes in many forms (see Das, 2017: chapter 9; see also Lenin's *What is to be Done* in Lenin, 1977a). Trade union consciousness is when workers are conscious of the conflict between capital and labour, more or less, in the sphere of exchange relations. So trade union consciousness lies behind trade union politics which aims to fight for an improvement of workers' conditions within capitalism (e.g. an increase in wages). This form of consciousness is the lower level of class consciousness. What is class consciousness proper is the consciousness in which there is a conflict of interest between capital and labour that cannot be reconciled within capitalism. This conflict is at the level of property relations. Marx at times appeared to be more sanguine than necessary about his view of the role of the struggle for reforms in generating anti-capitalist political consciousness.

<sup>8</sup> In Chapter 25, Marx presents his famous 'general law of capitalist accumulation', which sets the stage of his theory of crisis in *Capital volume 1*, and which, in turn, is linked to his theory of revolution in his political writings.

*a smaller part of revenue is capitalised, accumulation slows down, and the rising movement of wages comes up against an obstacle* (Marx, 1977: 771).

Further, a rise in wages due to trade union struggle (or indeed because of any other reason) does ‘in no way alter the fundamental character of capitalist production’ (Marx, 1977: 763).

The struggle for reforms can also turn reformist: it may only aim at economic gains, and may not be used as a ‘means of propaganda ... but as the ultimate goal’ (Engels to Bernstein in Marx and Engels, 1982: 300).

#### **4. Workers must go beyond the struggle for reforms and must aim to seize political power**

In the struggle for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class, i.e., in the movement for the present, what is not to be forgotten is ‘the future of that movement’ (Marx and Engels, 1975: 94) which is the seizure of state power by the workers. This is revolution. It is the highest form of class struggle: ‘the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a struggle of class against class, a struggle which carried to its highest expression is a total revolution’, as Marx says in *Poverty of Philosophy* (Marx, 1987).

Revolution means the transfer of state power from one class to another in a leap, a swift process, which however, presupposes a prolonged process of intellectual and political preparation:

*During a revolutionary process, mass views and moods change swiftly. These come not from the flexibility and mobility of man’s mind, but just the opposite, from its deep conservatism. The chronic lag of ideas and relations behind new objective conditions, right up to the moment when the latter crash over people in the form of a catastrophe, is what creates in a period of revolution that leaping movement of ideas and passions which seems to the police mind a mere result of the activities of “demagogues”* (Trotsky, 2008:xvi).<sup>9</sup>

The concept revolution as a leap is also suggested by Engels’ idea discussed in and supported by Lenin: the capitalist state is *abolished* and that it *does not wither* away (which is a prolonged process).<sup>10</sup>

The aim of Marx’s politics is, ultimately, not *amelioration* of workers’ conditions within capitalism, but the *abolition* of class, and ‘The only means of abolition of class ‘is political domination of the proletariat’. (Marx, 1871a).

Why is revolution – seizure of power -- necessary? There are at least two reasons.

- a. The ruling class will not surrender its control over resources in any other way. The capitalist state

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<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the immense “leaps” in consciousness characteristic of a period of revolutionary struggle represent the long-postponed (and therefore explosive) realignment of social thought with external social reality. The experience of mass struggles changes people and their consciousness.

<sup>10</sup> ‘According to Engels, the bourgeois state does not “wither away”, but is “abolished” by the proletariat in the course of the revolution. What withers away after this revolution is the proletarian state or semi-state’ (Lenin, 1917: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch01.htm>).

defending the capitalist class will not wither away. This state – at least, all those institutions of the state that are responsible for physical and ideological subjugation of the masses -- must be taken control of; it must be abolished (=smashed).<sup>11</sup> The force of capital must meet with the counter-force of the masses.<sup>12</sup> The working class cannot simply lay hold of the capitalist state through electoral majority, etc. It must become the new ruling class, holding state power, which will give it economic power wrested from capital and landowners.

Between capitalist and communist society 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, in Marx and Engels, 1977: 26).

- b. Revolution is necessary ‘for the production on a mass scale of’ what is called ‘communist consciousness’ and for ‘the alteration of ...[people]... on a mass scale’. Revolution is needed for ‘the revolutionizing of all the ideas that result from existing social relations of production’ (Marx, 1964: 126). These ideas include not only ideas concerning class relations but also family, unequal relations between men and women, and relations between society and nature.

While Marx (or Lenin) calls for revolution, they also advise against adventurism – the attempt to utilize the sheer force of will to bring about a revolution, irrespective of the objective conditions present.<sup>13</sup> Revolution requires an economic crisis and massive miseries of the masses, and it requires organized proletariat with a high level of class consciousness. Long years of preparation are necessary to develop political capacity.

## 5. The revolutionary process is a process of revolution-in-permanence

In a context where there are agrarian masses, where democratic rights are not established or protected, where one nation is oppressed by another nation, there is a need for a revolution in permanence. That is why as socialists:

*it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has conquered state power and until the association of the proletarians has progressed sufficiently far – not only in one country but in all the leading countries of the world – that competition between the proletarians of these countries ceases and at least the decisive forces of production are concentrated in the hands of the workers. Our concern cannot simply be to modify private property, but to abolish it, not to hush up class antagonisms but to abolish classes, not to improve the existing society but to found a new one (Marx and Engels, 1850).*

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<sup>11</sup> To smash something, one has to get it in the first place.

<sup>12</sup> ‘The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force’ (Marx, 1844).

<sup>13</sup> In an article entitled, ‘Adventurism’, Lenin (1914) says: ‘When Marxists say that certain groups, are adventurist, they have in mind the very definite and specific social and historical features of a phenomenon...[There are] tiny groups, which ... spring ... up for an hour, for several months, with no roots whatever among the masses (and politics without the masses are adventurist politics), and with no serious and stable principles.

## 6. The revolutionary struggle is a multi-scalar process

Class struggle happens at multiple geographical scales. To be more powerful, class struggle must be at the national and global scales. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels (1848) say:

*Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must... first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie... [in what are more or less veiled civil wars, raging within existing society].*

Ultimately, revolution is an international process, and this is because the bourgeois class has produced an inter-connected world (as described in the *Communist Manifesto*), with the law of value operating globally, so the object of revolution is capitalism which is a global entity. Success in one country can only be short-term.

## 7. The revolutionary struggle requires that the working class has its own party

Revolution against the propertied classes relations requires struggle of the masses. But the *process* of struggle requires a material *form* without which, and outside of which, the force of the process will dissipate. Marx says: ‘against this collective power of the propertied classes the working class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes (Marx, 1871b). The working-class party must be organizationally independent of petty-bourgeois and bourgeois influences. Marx himself spent time to build such a party.

A major function of the party is to organize the work of educating the masses to counter the tendency of the workers to accept capitalist production and exchange as a natural order, and to counter the labour movement’s reformist/opportunist ideas (on opportunism, see the second section).

The working class is only the most revolutionary class. But only, potentially. Thanks to the operation of capitalism and its political-cultural apparatuses, actually existing proletarians *can be* traitors, chauvinistic, narrow-minded, conservative, sheep-like and patriarchal, and they can be racist in competition for jobs, government welfare, etc.<sup>14</sup> This means the party has to play an educational role. It is rubbish to downplay racism etc. among workers as some revolutionary groups do. Racism, etc. are concrete responses to the concrete situation (e.g. competition for jobs) on the part of workers, and especially those whose level of class consciousness is low.

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<sup>14</sup> Racism is not inherent to the working class (or indeed to any group or individual). However, when workers have to compete for the dwindling numbers of jobs or for increasingly limited government benefits, they may use race or ethnicity to deny jobs and benefits to, say, minority racial and ethnic groups. When society’s problems (e.g. low wages; high rate of unemployment) are enormous, the ruling class encourages workers to externalize the cause of the problems, making workers believe that the cause of the problems is a racial minority group (or the immigrants, etc.) rather than the capitalist class itself. Racism as an ideology is used by the ruling class to divide the working class and to deflect its attention from capitalism.



It is the party that can create a revolutionary program which can propel and guide working class action. It can help workers represent *their* interests as representing universal interests. It will make use of elections, and make sure that elected representatives work in line with the party program. The party can coordinate trade union and other activities across different areas and sectors and defend the workers against violence from the state. The party, democratically organized and reasonably disciplined, and immersed in the lives of the masses, can then help the working class construct socialism following the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

## **8. The revolutionary struggle of the working class must be as non-sectarian as possible**

Marx's politics involves rejection of reformism, associated with opportunism, and it advocates for the revolutionary road to socialism on the basis of the strategy of self-emancipation of the working class, so Marx's politics also rejects sectarianism, the twin of opportunism. Both opportunism and sectarianism are obstacles to revolution.

Revolution requires 'a class movement' as opposed to 'a sect movement' (Marx, 1868b). 'The sect seeks its *raison d'être* ... not in what it has *in common* with the class movement, but in the *particular shibboleth distinguishing* it from that movement' (ibid.).

Sects may 'act as levers of the movement in the beginning, but become an obstruction as soon as the movement outgrows them' (Marx and Engels, 1872).

*'The development of socialist sectarianism and that of the real working class movement always stand in inverse proportion to each other. Sects are (historically) justified so long as the working class is not yet ripe for an independent historic movement. As soon as it has attained this maturity all sects are essentially reactionary'* (Marx's letter to Bolte in Marx and Engels, 1982: 253).

Why? Obsessed with pure and perfect programme and principles ('*particular shibboleth*'), sects are often 'abstentionist by their very nature — i.e., alien to all real action, politics, strikes' etc. (Marx and Engels, 1872). Not only is actual struggle more or less avoided. Sects are 'alien to ... any united movement', to 'coalitions' (Marx and Engels, 1872). This is one reason why 'The mass of the proletariat always remains indifferent or *even hostile to their propaganda*' (italics added)<sup>15</sup> (ibid.).

Indeed, sects display an excessive amount of negativism: whatever one sect says is often negated by another sect. Engels says: 'We should commit the greatest mistake ... if in our attitude to the "related" parties we confined ourselves merely to negative criticism. There may come a moment when it would be our duty to co-operate in a positive way' (Engels, 1894, in his letter to Turati).

'Contrary to the sectarian organization, with their vagaries and rivalries', what is needed is 'a genuine and militant organization of the proletarian class of all countries, united in their common struggle against the capitalists and the landowners, against their class power organized in the state' (Marx and Engels, 1872). *The Communist Manifesto* says: communists 'have no interests separate

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<sup>15</sup> The words in italics are 'if not hostile to' in Marx (2010:298).

and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole. They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mold the proletarian movement' (Marx and Engels, 1848). *The Manifesto* says: 'The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working-class parties' (Marx and Engels, 1848). One possible interpretation of this is that communists – or the communist party, a party composed of class conscious men and women, -- might work, within limits, with other working class parties which might not be very revolutionary.<sup>16</sup>

Marx and Engels sympathized with non-revolutionary organizations, individuals, up to a point and partially. Indeed, Marx *worked with* chartists who were not socialists. Marx made contacts with Trade Unions, which were not socialistic and revolutionary. The *Manifesto* addressed itself to a mass movement, not a political sect.<sup>17</sup>

Of course, while it is true that sectarianism is counter-productive, and that 'Unity is quite a good thing so long as it is possible', it is also the case that 'there are things which stand higher than unity' (Engels' letter to Bebel in Marx and Engels, 1982: 334). Marx and Engels 'fought harder ... against the alleged Socialists than against anyone else' (ibid.).

## **'FROM' MARX'S POLITICS TO THE LENINIST LEGACY, AND OUR TIMES**

For me, it is more or less the case that: Karl Marx, the revolutionist and revolutionary theorist, is the Vladimir Lenin of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Vladimir Lenin is the Marx of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Marxism minus the Leninist legacy, with its commitment to revolutionary seizure of power and internationalism, is deeply impoverished. To conclude this short article, I will draw some implications of Marx's political proposals from the vantage point of our times and from the vantagepoint of Lenin, and his greatest follower since 1917, Leon Trotsky.

### **1. Necessity for and possibility of rejection of class society, including capitalism**

The politics of Marx is a dialectical rejection of everything that stands in the way of the organized working class self-emancipation. It is against feudal ideas and relations. It is against bourgeois ideas and practices such as liberalism, identity politics and post-structuralist micro-politics, although Marx would also advise that we absorb the best accomplishments of bourgeois society. Marx's politics as I see it is not only extremely critical of social democracy, and bourgeois politics of workers, or trade unionism but also of what is called Stalinism<sup>18</sup>, developmental statism/third world nationalism, and non-party-social-movement-ism, even if politics of Marx would include ideas from each of these streams.

Class, including capitalism, operates politically and economically: it oppresses, subjugates, and exploits. So class struggle must occur in all the different spheres. This implies that there is a series of inter-connected 'binaries' with respect to goals and methods of class struggle. My interpretation of politics of Marx is as follows: fight for democratic rights, including

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<sup>16</sup> Or, as Trotsky interprets the advice from the Manifesto: 'communists *do not* oppose themselves to the actual workers' movements but participate in them as a vanguard. At the same time the Manifesto was the program of a *new party*, national and international' (Trotsky, 1935).

<sup>17</sup> For an excellent recent discussion on Marx's political work (and his life), see Gabriel (2011).

<sup>18</sup> See the symposium in *Science & Society* (2018) on Stalinism.

those of social oppressed groups, and fight for immediate and transitional economic and ecological demands gains<sup>19</sup>, as a part of, and within the framework of, the fight for socialism, nationally and globally, by using legal and illegal and parliamentary and extra-parliamentary methods.<sup>20</sup>

In many ways, the aim of Marxism is to produce knowledge to explain the world so we can intervene to change that world. Revolution is the name of that change, as the world cannot be made merely more tolerable. For a revolution to happen it is necessary that the vast majority know that capitalism is simply a bad society to live in, relative to socialism, but not relative to pre-capitalist societies. It cannot meet the needs of the majority. Marx's political economy gives us many reasons why capitalism must be gotten rid of. We will need to add to these, for our time, three urgent issues all caused by capitalism. a. People of the world, both capitalists and workers, can be roasted in this planet due to global warming. b. Many of us could be roasted in gas chambers or something similar, given fascism is knocking on the door, whether in India or Brazil or Europe. c. Millions could die in the heat – fire -- of nuclear wars. These reasons make Marx's case for overthrowing capitalism stronger than ever.

For a revolution to happen, the vast majority must want it to happen: the majority must know that capitalism is the cause of their problems and that capitalism cannot be reformed and therefore, there is a need for revolution. Marx says that the proletarian movement is the movement of the immense majority against a small minority. The minority to be removed is becoming smaller and smaller, thanks to capitalism because at no point in time was the world as unequal as now. Forty-two people hold the same amount of wealth as the 3.7 billion people who make up the poorest half of the world. It is easy to remove the small minority – barely 1 % of the humanity -- from economy and politics (not necessarily physically). Expropriate them. That is very democratic.

A revolution requires the loss of trust at the masses cease to have the trust in the system's ability to meet their needs. Marx is critical of trade union struggle in part because such struggle in itself will not end wage-slavery. Nor would the struggle against extra-economic coercion (e.g. coercive dispossession of small-scale producers) end the problems that masses face. Capitalist exploitation can go on generally without extra-economic coercion. This means that the economic is formally separate from the political, a point Ellen Wood (1995), among others also forcefully made. A slight decrease in capitalists' *economic* power due to rise in wages, etc., will still leave intact their *political* dominance through its state, which is why concessions given today can be taken away tomorrow and which is why the right to exploit can continue to exist. Yet, Marx's politics advocates for trade union struggle. If workers cannot fight against the effects of capitalism, they cannot fight against the existence of capitalism itself. In spite of what some revolutionary groups say rejecting trade union struggle, and in spite of the adverse impact of globalization on unions, there must be stronger trade union struggles, and Marxists must intervene in these.

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<sup>19</sup> Economic demands include those of workers (wages, etc.) and small-scale producers (e.g. land rights of peasants). In fact, the demand for an ecologically healthy planet can be construed as a social wage demand (Das, 2018b).

<sup>20</sup> The focus must be on legal/open methods and extra-electoral methods.

It is true that the trade union top leadership exhibits ‘reactionary and counter-revolutionary character’ (Lenin, 1920: chapter 6), some of which Marx quite did not live to see. But that does not justify withdrawal from trade unions and other working-class organizations. As Lenin continues, in *Leftwing Communism* (1920: chapter 6).

*To refuse to work in the reactionary trade unions means leaving the ... backward masses of workers under the influence of the reactionary leaders, the agents of the bourgeoisie, the labour aristocrats, or “workers who have been completely bourgeois ...*

And the trade unions must make not only immediate demands but also what Trotsky (1931) called transitional demands. The latter stem ‘from today’s conditions and from today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat’ (Trotsky, 1931). These demands link the immediate demands to the task of seizing power.

Marx’s theory of wages supplies an important idea for a transitional demand. Workers must demand not only an increase in nominal and real wages but an increase in relative wages, as a transitional demand. Luxemburg thought about this seriously. Workers must make such transitional demands as decent and secure employment for all at an inflation-adjusted wage. Making these demands is a concrete way of ‘demanding socialism’ or saying to the ruling class: ‘if you cannot meet our needs, you do not have the power to rule over us’.

Yet, one should not be over-enthusiastic about trade union struggle. Marx’s cautionary remarks on trade union struggle, which means that his politics is not trade unionist, are made stronger by Lenin’s:

*[The task of class struggle is] to convert trade-unionist politics into ... political struggle [for state power], to utilise the sparks of political consciousness which the economic struggle generates among the workers, for the purpose of raising the workers to the level of [Marxist] political consciousness (Lenin, 1977a: 148).*

Capitalism, no matter how crisis-prone, will not automatically collapse. It needs to be pushed. This pushing requires the struggle for reforms (apart from the struggle over more radical demands). Yet, it is futile to believe that the struggle for reforms can act as a school of communism and that people will just develop their class consciousness – as opposed to reformist or trade unionist consciousness – based on such struggles.

Mere experience (of struggle) is no guarantor of genuine knowledge (knowledge that is necessary for revolution), although experience *is* important. Fighting for immediate demands can be a source of knowledge, of education. But education needs educators. And educators need to be educated. And both the educators and those to be educated need: 1) a curriculum, and 2) educational content to be imparted. And this content is a) theory, and b) experience in struggle. In this context: curriculum = party programme; experience = struggle for immediate demands and more radical (transitional) demands; theory: Marxist theory along with world history of revolutionary activities (see Figure 1 below). Without this, any knowledge about the system that people might receive from the struggle for reforms can be, more or less, spontaneous (embryonic, or semi-developed) consciousness, and remain at a reformist level. Limits to

reforms can be interpreted by the masses as being caused by corrupt union leadership, insensitive government, greedy capitalists, etc., and not by the very nature of capitalism and capitalist state

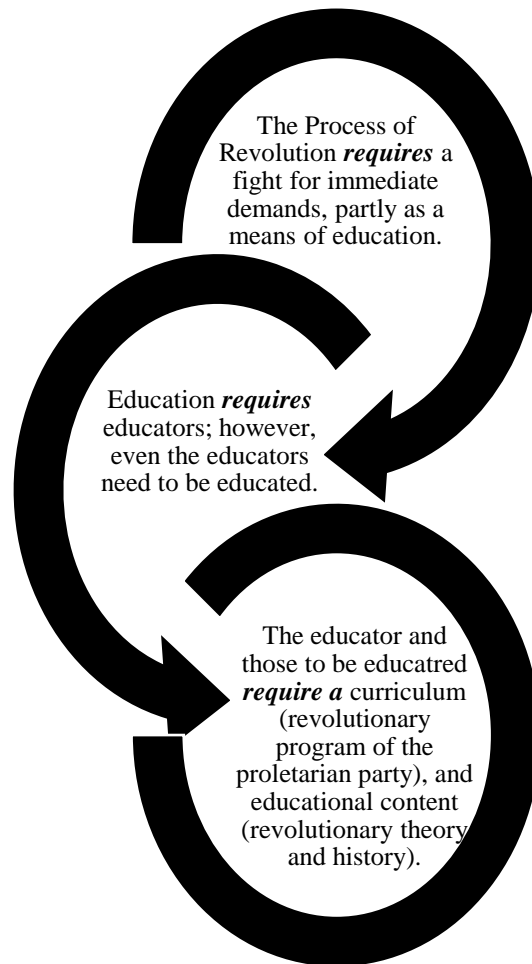


Figure 1: The struggle for reforms, program and revolutionary theory

Marx believed that without an economic crisis there will be no revolution. But we have seen that the ruling class is able to mobilize counter-tendencies to crisis such as a) war and arms economy; b) state-protection of big bankrupt companies on the ground of too big to fail; c) obtaining commodities from poorer economies on the basis of imperialism, at a cheaper than the market price, and d) turn to fascism to break the working class in order to raise the rate of exploitation. The political demands of the working class must emphasize demands around these *counter-measures* (e.g. revolutionary movement against imperialism and against imperialist wars which kill ordinary people and which waste resources and which cause ecological damage; mass mobilization against fascism and against the policy of ‘too big to fail’).

## 2. No to sectarianism, once again.

For revolution to happen, it is not enough that there be a crisis, or that people suffer a lot. There must be self-emancipatory united action, informed by theory and history. For Marx and revolutionary Marxism, revolution requires united action and the need to avoid sectarianism. A

non-sectarian politics requires working with allies. Marx's views on sectarianism require a brief elaboration.

Two groups being engaged in polemical struggles does not make them necessarily sectarian.<sup>21</sup> Nor is the smallness of the groups a necessary indicator of sectarianism; after all revolutionary groups start as small groups.

Yet, within the revolutionary Left, sectarianism does exist. Smith and Dumont (2014:23) point to the existence of 'the genuinely sectarian, cultist and bureaucratic tendencies that have prevailed in many of the groups that have laid claim to revolutionary Marxism'.<sup>22</sup> Sectarianism can be of an individual, a group, a party, or indeed of the socialist revolutionary milieu (which comprises many socialist sects or sect-like groups isolated from one another, almost like Marx's French peasants). Sectarianism coexists with opportunism; they are mutually different from one another and yet share some common ground.<sup>23</sup> It is difficult to be critical of sectarianism without being critical of opportunism.

At an early stage in a nation's history of class struggle, sectarian work – disagreements to achieve clarity over the program – is inevitable, as Marx notes. The process plays a vital role in raising consciousness of workers.

Polemical struggles among revolutionary groups are essential to correct each other's theoretical, strategic and tactical errors.<sup>24</sup> But what is initially an enabler turns into a fetter.<sup>25</sup> This

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<sup>21</sup> Note that it is not sectarian, for me, if a Marxist organization refuses to join a bourgeois/reformist group/party organizationally or if a democratically-functioning Marxist leadership drives away reformist people from its organization.

<sup>22</sup> Trotsky (1935) also might be describing the situation of sectarianism in our times when he says: 'In our epoch of disintegration and dispersion there are to be found a good many circles in various countries who have acquired a Marxist program, most often by borrowing it from the Bolsheviki, and who then turned their ideological baggage into a greater or lesser degree of ossification'.

<sup>23</sup> An opportunist (within the communist movement) is an empiricist, with limited belief in the power of theory to explain the world. He/she prioritizes the constantly changing surface conditions vis the reality at deeper levels, and is, unsurprisingly, ready to change their principles as conditions change. He/she has rather a friendly view towards real opponents, and is always willing to go to bed with almost anyone politically, and is too willing to make compromises, in order to achieve some gains. For an opportunist, tactical advantages and on-the-ground-action for some concessions are prioritized over class-based principles and long-term goal of seizure of power. A sectarian is the mirror opposite of an opportunist. However, as far as the adverse effect on the communist movement is concerned, sectarianism = opportunism.

<sup>24</sup> Some of these could be politically unintentional and could happen because of cognitive errors which are easy to make in the realm of politics relative to thinking about political economy (see the point below about the precision of natural science from Marx's famous *Preface*).

<sup>25</sup> One can say that there is an inverted U relation between time and the usefulness of sectarianism. 'Every working class party, every faction passes during its initial stages through a period of pure propaganda, i.e., the training of its cadres. The period of existence as a Marxist circle ingrafts invariably habits of an abstract approach to the problems of the workers' movement. He who is unable to step in time over the confines of this circumscribed existence becomes transformed into a conservative sectarian' (Trotsky, 1935).

Further, 'The sectarian's method of thinking is that of rationalist, a formalist, and an enlightener. During a certain stage of development rationalism is progressive, being directed critically against blind beliefs and superstitions... But rationalism (abstract propagandism) becomes a reactionary factor the moment it is directed against the dialectic'. (ibid.)

fettering happens when the revolutionary journey of the groups, more or less, stops in the realm of polemical struggles and ideological demarcation, i.e. when possessing and defending a program becomes the sole/dominant focus. The major traits of sectarianism (within the revolutionary left) include: one-sided obsession with programmatic ideas; abstentionism; aversion towards united action, and exaggeration of mutual differences. Marx did not observe the *full* force of these traits. These will be explained below.

One may begin with the fact that there are two sides of the sectarian coin. On one side is the obsession with purity of ideas to be achieved on the basis of thorough critique and discussion. On another side, as Marx notes, is the fact that sects are often ‘abstentionist by their very nature — i.e., alien to all real action, politics, strikes’ etc. And it is not just abstention from action. It is also abstention from *united* action.

There are two potential implications of sectarian abstentionism. One is that the (little) groups fail to test their ideas in practice, forgetting Marx’s advice.<sup>26</sup> So they (possibly) keep repeating their inadequate ideas.<sup>27</sup> Because they remain small and isolated from struggles, they fail to attract ‘loyalty’ and trust of advanced workers, and this in turn means that they remain small and sectarian. Another implication is that: if very limited direct experience or indirect experience shows that their pure program is out of sync with the reality, then sectarians engage in further discussions and lecturing (online or offline). ‘Discord with reality engenders in the sectarian the need to constantly render his formulas more precise’ (Trotsky, 1935). Here also sectarianism acts as a fetter. This is in the sense that often these discussions are based on ideas produced inside a given group, as sectarianism contributes to a situation where these groups do not generally engage with the major theoretical accomplishments in Marxism in the last eight decades, including by Marxists in the revolutionary groups a group opposes and by Marxists in media or academia. Lenin read widely.

Sectarianism is focused on a perfect program regardless of whether the masses accept it. It appears to be oblivious of the two-way relation between the finished and perfect program and messy imperfect struggle.<sup>28</sup> Instead of the task of clarification of principles and of ideological demarcation being a means to the development of the communist movement, it almost ends up becoming a goal in itself.<sup>29</sup> The situation gets worse when one sect calls another sect sectarian, while rejecting the label for itself, and when any critique of sectarianism is counter-critiqued as centrist/reformist, etc.

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<sup>26</sup> ‘The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth — i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question’ (Marx, 1845).

<sup>27</sup> Often they do this by referring to what happened historically. Historical lesson is important but it will not necessarily perform the task of testing the ideas under current conditions.

<sup>28</sup> ‘A sectarian does not understand the dialectic action and reaction between a finished program and a ... mass struggle’, however imperfect and unfinished that is (Trotsky, 1935).

<sup>29</sup> Trotsky (1935) rightly says: ‘it is not enough to create a correct program. It is necessary that the working class accept it. But the sectarian, in the nature of things, homes to a stop upon the first half of the task. Active intervention into the actual struggle of the workers’ masses is supplanted for him by an abstract propaganda of a Marxist program’.

In the sectarian revolutionary milieu, internally related to the obsession with purity of a program and abstentionism, is this: what separates the (little) groups is constantly exaggerated and highlighted (beyond a reasonable limit), and what is forgotten is the common ground among them, which should be a basis for united action (against capitalism, imperialism and social oppression). It is sectarian if a given revolutionary group finds only errors in another revolutionary group (differences) and is not critical of its own history.<sup>30</sup> It is sectarian if one revolutionary group treats another revolutionary group as an enemy almost like the capitalist class itself. It is also sectarian for one group to see the errors of the group under attack as being automatically (or necessarily) due to the group being under bourgeois or petty-bourgeois influence.<sup>31</sup>

In the revolutionary sectarian milieu, all the numerous groups, which are anti-capitalist, socialist and Marxist, claim to differ in terms of their interpretation of a) what is happening and b) what is to be done. They justify their existence almost solely in terms of that difference in interpretation. An underlying problem is the flat ontology within sectarianism. Capitalism exists and functions at multiple levels (some levels are deeper than others), and it produces effects in concrete ways differently, within limits, in different areas. Differences of views at the deeper levels (e.g. capitalism as a relation of exploitation; capitalism inevitably turning to imperialism) must be distinguished from differences of views at more ‘superficial’ – concrete – levels. Not all differences are equally relevant. This is almost like the post-modernization of the revolutionary socialist left.<sup>32</sup>

Marx would be excited to see the power of revolutionary Marxist ideas within what I am calling the sectarian milieu, the ideas that are perhaps to the left of many organizations he worked with. Yet, he would be disappointed to see that there is not a mass party that bears those ideas. He would be disappointed to see that there are numerous little groups in a city or a province, many of them claiming to be a party of the world-working class, while they have little immersion in the struggles of the masses. Marx might be disappointed to see that most of the

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<sup>30</sup> A group does not necessarily and always have to say ‘negative things’ about another group for people to see that one group is better than another group. Engels was very worried about this sort of socialist negativism. After all, in a pre-revolutionary situation, most of the workers – including those who are politically conscious (whether they support socialists or not) – are with the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie, and not with this or that revolutionary socialist group, so how is it useful if a revolutionary group spends a lot of time (relative to its strength) to attack other revolutionary groups rather than the bourgeoisie and its political props, in order to attract advanced workers from these groups?

<sup>31</sup> It is as if: the group in the role of the critic is the only revolutionary-socialist group in town and everyone else among the revolutionaries is petty-bourgeois or even bourgeois in some form. A group that rejects trade union politics and argues for class-conscious economic struggle in a workplace that connects such struggles in other workplaces, is not to be judged as one that is necessarily or automatically an instrument of capitalists. Or a party that might seek to fight fascistic movement mainly by engaging in extra-electoral mobilization of workers, independently of bourgeois forces, and yet might enter into some tacit agreement with parties of the non-fascistic bourgeoisie and small-scale owners to minimize the division of vote against the fascistic party and thus stop it from capturing the government which it uses against communist and progressive movements, is not necessarily a part of the bourgeois establishment, by virtue of that act.

<sup>32</sup> The number of interpretations directly varies with the number of interpreters and these differing interpretations, all claiming to be authentic, produce material effects on the ground (in-fighting). So if there are 10 such groups in a city, it is as if there are 10 views of the reality. Surely, there can be 10 views on anything, but life cannot go on *as if* the reality is 10 realities! Different interpretations of whether the world is flat do not change the reality of the shape of the world and do not affect how we live in that world.



groups remain little groups decades after being formed, often exhibiting cultist and egoistic traits.<sup>33</sup>

Philosophically speaking, relations in the world are relations of identity and difference. As long as magnitude of identity is greater than that of difference, there is a potential basis of different movements working together while remaining engaged in polemical struggles. The greater the magnitude of connection and similarity, the greater is the magnitude of possibility of, and need for, united front type action.

A non-sectarian approach must involve engaging in actual struggles. Doing so might often require fighting capitalism *along with* (not-so-) revolutionary groups, and this may require making temporary compromises. In his *Leftwing Communism*, Lenin was scathing in his criticisms of those German communists who thought that ‘All compromise with other parties . . . must be emphatically rejected’ (Lenin, 1920: ch. 8), and in this sense sectarianism is the opposite of opportunism. Lenin says, in launching class struggle, ‘to renounce in advance . . . any utilisation of a conflict of interests (even if temporary) among one’s enemies, or any conciliation or compromise with possible allies (even if they are temporary, unstable, vacillating or conditional allies)—is that not ridiculous in the extreme?’ (ibid.)

The principle of united front form of struggle ‘is imposed by the dialectics of the class struggle’ (Trotsky, 1933). This is in the sense that ‘No successes would be possible without temporary agreements, for the sake of fulfilling immediate tasks, among various sections, organizations and groups of the proletariat’ (ibid.) The proletariat must engage in ‘Strikes, trade unions, journals, parliamentary elections, street demonstrations’ which ‘demand that the split [within the proletariat] be bridged in practice from time to time as the need arises’ (ibid.).

There is clearly a trinity here: sectarianism, opportunism, and genuine Marxism.<sup>34</sup> In its fight against capitalism and for socialism, Marxism must fight against sectarianism (and its twin, opportunism). This fight must be in the form of comradely, polite and respectful debates in an environment that must discourage aggression in any form, including in words. And the fight must

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<sup>33</sup> One can argue that through mutual polemical struggles, a given group can recruit some politically advanced workers on the basis of superiority of its claims (see the footnote above about sectarian negativity that worried Engels). There is some truth to this. However, there is another possibility as well. Let the revolutionary groups make different claims about what is happening in the capitalist world and what is to be done, and let these groups then trust that politically advanced workers can make sense of these different claims about the enemy itself (the capitalist class) and accept the claims that make sense to them. At the current stage (which is not Marx’s 1840s, or Lenin’s early 1900s or Trotsky’s late 1930s), whether or not a group can attract many people to its program depends much more on how correctly it explains what is going on, how well it calls for people to be mobilized on the basis of immediate and transitional demands, and whether or not it is willing to fight along with its allies, than on how much time it spends in criticizing the groups with which it actually has much in common.

<sup>34</sup> There are sectarians, there are reformists/centrists, and there are genuine Marxists. While considering herself a realist, an opportunist ‘sets out to swim without any ideological baggage whatever and is tossed by every vagrant current’, unable to understand that principles are not dead ballast but a lifeline for a revolutionary swimmer’. On the other hand, ‘The sectarian . . . generally does not want to go swimming at all, in order not to wet his principles. He sits on the shores and reads lectures on morality to the flood of the class struggle’ (Trotsky, 1935).

‘The sectarian is content with a program, as a recipe of salvation. The centrist guides himself by the famous (essentially meaningless) formula of Edward Bernstein, “the movement is everything; the final goal – nothing.” The Marxist draws his [or her] scientific program from the movement taken as a whole, in order then to apply this program to every concrete stage of the movement’ (Trotsky, 1935).

be in practice: Marxists must show that it is possible to come together to produce and refine ideas that are necessary for revolution, and to engage in actual struggles. The Marxist fight against sectarianism is necessary, if the communist movement is to make progress in this epoch of heightened exploitation, recurrent economic crisis, rising fascism, ugly imperialism and irreversible ecological damage.<sup>35</sup> Sectarianism violates the principles of dialectics many times over: it fails to acknowledge the principle of unity/relation and difference (that x is connected to, and similar to, y, *and* x and y have differences), the idea that the reality exists at a more fundamental levels and at the surface levels, demanding different political responses at different levels, and the thinking that ideas (e.g. those contained in a program) must be tested in practice (class struggle). There is indeed an urgent need to avoid a sectarian-politician approach that says that only those who support one's own party/group are correct on this or that issue, and indeed, that no relevant idea can come from a Marxist group/individual with whom one politically disagrees. As well, whether it is possible to work with an individual/group should depend on that person/groups' commitment to the revolutionary program (seizure of state power to abolish private property and to begin constructing popular control over economy, etc.), a program that reflects the interests of the world-proletariat, and not on how this or that small group happens to interpret that program. Revolution is not a commodity in the production of which there is competition among revolutionary groups to capture the market.

Revolutionary groups must, of course, engage in polemical struggles with one another to clarify principles and to learn from one another. Polemical struggles by groups are necessary to demarcate themselves on the basis of their commitment to Marxist theory in which are rooted their strategies and concrete slogans. Yet, the different groups must be engaged in united action against capitalism and social oppression and indeed defend each other when under attack from bourgeois forces and work towards the building of a mass proletarian party, which is more than the sum of little groups, politically and geographically separated from one another, and in the process, gradually build a mass proletarian party to take on the juggernaut of world-capitalism.

In the light of what has been said above, it is clear that revolution requires multiple conditions. Keeping in mind the fact that precision of natural science is not possible in thinking about politics<sup>36</sup>, as opposed to political economy, I suggest that we bear in mind the following minimum conditions for revolution.

A socialist revolution is not an automatic process at all, no matter how much Marxists and communists want a revolution! Revolution requires not only subjective conditions but also objective conditions. The main objective condition is the crisis: this is the situation where the development of productive forces is *fettered* by social relations of production and exchange, a fettering that is expressed as stagnant, or slow rate of economic growth, which is expressed in the lack of jobs, low wages, etc. Marx (1859) refers to this objective condition when he says that 'No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have

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<sup>35</sup> Trotsky says, 'only that organization will be able to survive and develop which has not only cleansed its ranks of sectarianism but which has systematically trained them in the spirit of despising all ideological vacillation and cowardice' (Trotsky, 1935).

<sup>36</sup> Marx distinguishes between 'the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, *which can be determined with the precision of natural science*, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out' (Marx, 1859; italics mine).

been developed'. He is pointing here to the historical-materialist conclusion that the capitalist social order will not come to an end until there is a crisis of the development of productive forces, a crisis caused by social relations of capitalist production and exchange. If a society is experiencing prosperity, if economic growth is not stagnant or is not slowing down, and if the masses are living reasonably well, then objective conditions for development do not exist. So the greater the level of prosperity, the lower the propensity towards revolution. However, there can be objective conditions for revolution as we have been seeing, and yet there will be no revolution because subjective conditions are not present. These include the fact that there must be a significant number of men and women in proletarian conditions, although the majority of the people do not have to be in a completely proletarian class-situation.<sup>37</sup> The *proletariat is the material force* of revolution, and it is also the main subjective raw material (subjective in the sense of revolutionary subjects, or agents). Then the majority of these people, and indeed, the majority of all those affected by capitalism, must be conscious of the fact that capitalism is the cause of *their* problems and of *society's* problems (in our time, these include the ecological catastrophe and tendency towards wars), and that the capitalist system must be abolished as it cannot be reformed. So *class consciousness* is a crucial ingredient. The development of class consciousness is not an automatic process: it is not necessary that low-income, unemployed people will automatically be revolutionaries, although they may have sparks of consciousness that comes from their life's experience and they may be receptive to socialist consciousness more than other classes. Class consciousness requires conscious education as well as action (i.e. trade union struggles and political struggles). Both education and struggles require the interventions of several organizational agencies. These include trade unions and radical mass organizations. And, above all, these include political parties of the working class.<sup>38</sup> The action against capitalism by the masses in different places and sectors has to be coordinated and lessons have to be learnt from successes and mistakes. In other words, what is necessary is *organized action*, not just any form of action. The organized action develops class consciousness; it contributes to the self-confidence of the masses in mounting a fundamental challenge to the system. The larger the mass of the proletariat, the greater the level of class consciousness and the greater the level of organized action (and all these combine with one another, however, unevenly, and feed into one another), the greater will be the propensity towards revolution. And, the propensity towards revolution, as mentioned above, will be reduced if there is greater prosperity. This idea can be summarized by the following formula representing what can be called the Tendency for the Propensity towards Revolution (TPR):

$$\mathbf{R} = [ (\mathbf{N}) (\mathbf{C}) (\mathbf{O}_A) ] / \mathbf{P}$$

Where, conceptually speaking, R = revolutionary propensity;

N = is a combined measure of a) the numerical strength of the working class in society and b) its geographical concentration; C = level of class consciousness; O<sub>A</sub> = organized working-class action;

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<sup>37</sup> Lenin says: 'it would be a profound mistake to think that the "complete" proletarianisation of the majority of the population is essential for bringing about ... a [proletarian] revolution' (Lenin, 1977a: 56). Also, between two countries, one with 100 million proletarians and another with 200 million proletarians, if they are more geographically concentrated in the first country, then the smaller size of the proletarian class is less of a problem, proportionately speaking.

<sup>38</sup> 'Without a party, apart from a party, over the head of a party, or with a substitute for a party, the proletarian revolution cannot conquer' (Trotsky, 1924).

P = prosperity (the extent to which capitalist relations are fettering the development of productive forces and causing miseries for workers).<sup>39</sup>

Hopefully, this formula captures some of the essence of Marx's (and Marxist) ideas about revolutionary class politics as discussed above schematically. The TPR increases positively with the numerical dominance of the proletariat, and with levels of class consciousness and organized action, and inversely with the level of prosperity.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, trade unionist movements and the academic world, generally, throw cold water on Marx's theory of politics. Denied is the importance of class struggle by the proletariat and denied is the necessity for seizure of state power, when in fact, as Lenin said, Marx 'developed his theory of the class struggle consistently down to the theory of political power, of the state' (Lenin, 1977b: 27). The need to smash the existing state is a part of Marx's -- and Marxist -- class theory. The state and capital are two arms of the totality of the capitalist class relation. Every pore of the state is bathed with the imperative of economic and political defense of the dominant class (Das, 2018a: chapter 8).

Marx himself says in his letter to Weydemeyer (Marx and Engels, 1982):

*Ignorant louts ... who deny not only the struggle but the very existence of classes, only demonstrate that, for all their bloodthirsty, mock-humanist yelping, they regard the social conditions in which the bourgeoisie is dominant as the final product, ...and that they themselves are simply the servants of the bourgeoisie...*

Not only is the importance of class struggle by the proletariat denied. With it is also denied the need for the seizure of state power, when in fact, as Lenin said, Marx 'developed his theory of the class struggle consistently down to the theory of political power, of the state' (Lenin, 1977b: 27). The need to smash the existing state is a part of Marx's (and Marxist) class theory. The state and capital are two arms of the totality of the capitalist class relation, and an important defining condition of the working class is its alienation from the state (Das, 2018a: chapter 8). Every pore of the state is bathed with the imperative of economic and political defense of the dominant class (ibid). The state must ensure not only property rights of the capitalist class. It must ensure the conditions for capitalist accumulation involving the production of commodities for profit, which in turn reproduces the class relation between capital and labour. The capitalist state stands between the working class and the expropriation of capitalists, which is necessary for socialism.

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<sup>39</sup> Of course, how the content underlying these concepts is measured is a separate matter. Provisionally: N = numerical importance = proportion of workers in the population, and extent of their geographical concentration in the cities and in large-scale enterprises, where, say, at least 100 people work;

C = level of class consciousness (e.g. % of people who believe that private property rights are a major cause of poverty and inequality).

O<sub>A</sub> = membership in trade unions and revolutionary political parties; incidence of work stoppages and political demonstrations);

P = combined measure of growth in income, rate of profit, productivity, and employment, and reduction in inequality.

It is the state that expresses and exercises the dictatorship of the capitalist class. This must be replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat. Once again, the latter is nothing more or less than the democratic rule of the working class for the interests of the working class, aimed towards the eventual abolition of class society and development of a society where the structuring goals are the free development of all and “to each according to their need, from each according to their ability.”

So, let me close by restating Marx’s politics in his own words:

‘I do not claim to have discovered either the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them. My own contribution was **1.** to show that the *existence of classes* is merely bound up with *certain historical phases in the development of production*; **2.** that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*; ... **3.** that this dictatorship itself constitutes no more than a transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*’. (Marx’s 1852 letter to Weydemeyer in Marx and Engels, 1982).

This is the best political vision to avoid barbarism and to reach socialism, a society where there is democracy in every sphere of life and where there is harmony between society and nature.

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