

Editorial / Editorial

The confluence of the rise of late capitalism, the neoliberal university, the precariousness of intellectual work, the weakening of the labor movement, the retreat of the Latin American left, and the rise ultra-right populisms has stimulated the idea that the transformations provoked on different levels by the Russian Revolution—which affected the lives of millions of human beings—are today part of the past, an anachronistic legacy. The rise of such phenomena has contributed to distortions and even falsifications not only of the Russian Revolution itself, but of its global influence. The revolutionary experience is commonly dismissed with such arguments as “power was seized by only a few”; “the Bolshevik party replaced the working class”, “a red terror was applied to those who sustained the revolutionary process”, and “Bolshevism is the past”, amongst others.

The immediate consequences of the ideological dispute nurtured by the fear of elites was the attempt to deny the enormous achievements to history of the Russian Revolution in terms of social, cultural, political-economic and military issues. At the same time, an offensive was unleashed to gradually erode recognition of the contributions of Lenin, Trotsky and Gramsci; not to mention the silencing of the legacy of women peasant fighters, of the militants Krupskaya, Stassova, Kollantai, and of other women activists such as Rosa Luxemburg.

Eric Hobsbawm, in his book *The Short Twentieth Century* (1997), singled out the magnitude and depth of the movement that shook the world. Comparing it to the French Revolution, he states that while the latter remains largely in the realm of ideas from the West, to this day, the Russian Revolution had practical consequences larger and more lasting in modern history.

The lucidity of his argument is demonstrated by the social struggles that spread through the Latin American-Caribbean continent in the last 100 years and continue to the present day. Processes

that began with the Mexican Revolution, with the motto “Tierra y Libertad” (*Land & Freedom*), acquired greater strength with the victory of the Russian Revolution. These include but are not limited to the mobilizations promoted by communist and socialist parties; the anarchist workers’ demonstrations of Brazil (1917); the student movements for university reform in Córdoba, Argentina (1918) and the creation of popular universities in Peru (1920); the military rebellion led by the socialist Marmaduke Grove (1932) and the decades from the Popular Front (1936-1941) to Popular Unity (1970-1973) in Chile; the anti-imperialist revolutions in Bolivia (1952), Cuba (1959-), Nicaragua (1979-1990) and Granada (1983); the armed insurrections of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Colombia, Venezuela, Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil; and the peasant, indigenous, black, and feminist movements of a variety of tendencies and nuances.

This issue of *World Tensions* is dedicated to critical reflections on the legacy of the Russian Revolution in the Latin America and the Caribbean, in multiple aspects and from different theoretical perspectives, given that neither is the spread of ideas a linear process, nor do social movements tend to be constant, suffering continuous mutations in the daily struggle with imperialist powers and their neo-colonial allies. The articles presented in this issue reflect the choices of their authors in relation to conceptual and methodological approaches. Each text was selected with care and commitment by Camila Costa, Deborah D’Antonio and Robert Austin, our dedicated team of co-editors, who acted diligently in all phases of the journal preparation.

Opening we share the opinion of one of the first members of our Advisory Board, Boaventura de Souza Santos, concerning the impossible consensus on the success or failure of the October revolution. His merit is to lay out the problems that capitalist societies face today and argue to the workers of the whole world that capitalism is not inevitable. Consistent with his innovative conception of the epistemologies of the South, Boaventura suggests that only a clear alternative, as proposed by the Russian experience, can break with colonial, capitalist and patriarchal legacies.

Omar Acha then reflects on the impact of the concept of “revolution” in Latin American history, and its interweaving with the news that led to the Russian revolution in the region. He understands that as an historical force it was not foreign to the experience of Latin America revolutionary movements, though because some of them took place previous to 1917, they should be interpreted on their own merits. The construction of a revolutionary genealogy allows the author to articulate several historical processes, such as the indigenous rebellions of late 17th century, the contingencies of 19th-century anti-colonial revolutions, anarchist and socialist ideologies that came with European immigrants in the early 20th century, the Mexican Revolution of 1910, indigenous movements in the twenties, the populism of the thirties, the radical nationalism of the forties, and the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions of the second half of the 20th century.

In this saga, the Russian revolution finds its place when each of the Latin American countries, with their own ideological traditions and their own relations of social and political forces, comes to wonder about the specific character revolutionaries’ processes assume at the regional level. The author, who is an historian, evaluates the symbolic effect of the Russian revolution with regard to both the procedures with which the various lefts have interpreted different emancipatory experiences on the Latin American continent, and through the concern expressed in the sixties and seventies by military elites in their zeal to persecute and brutally eradicate every form of communism.

Historian Dan La Botz discusses the issue from another perspective. In his article he argues that the uneven influence of the Komintern across the region diminished the potential for socialist revolution and democracy, and subordinated worker-peasant struggle to Soviet foreign policy. He considers the “peaceful coexistence” strategy of the Latin American communists’ parties in the postwar period to be akin to Western social democracy. From 1930 to 1990, and in the wake of the early successes of the Russian Revolution and later the Soviet triumph in World War II, broad sectors of the Latin American Left eulogized the USSR and its Communist Party, a process which intensified with triumph of

the Cuban Revolution and its subsequent intertwining with the Soviet Union.

But, he observes that the Communist parties generally elided the issues of Stalinism, the one-party state, and how its bureaucracy subordinated the working class in the Soviet Bloc, China and Cuba. Further, recent studies do not alter this negative balance sheet for understanding the role of the Communist International in Latin America. Still, he concludes that the initial trajectory of the Russian Revolution and of the Communist party continue inspiring revolutionaries that learned, from their own experience, that international socialism must be constructed through democratic practices.

For the sociologist and Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLASO) researcher Lia Pinheiro Barbosa, the effects on Latin America and Caribbean of the Soviet revolution must be investigated from the specificities of the historical economic, socio-cultural and political formation that identify us in Latin America as nations and as a region. In this sense, one must begin by analyzing the roots of the subjugation of our peoples in colonization, slavery, and *latifundio* ownership of land. In her point of view, the Russian revolutionary experience motivated many resistance strategies, of international scope, with deep resonances in Latin American and Caribbean social struggles. Her work highlights the armed insurgency in Chiapas, Mexico, of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), on 1 January 1994, and the elements that structure the Chiapanecan identity. These include the cultural matrix of Mayan cosmovision; the *organicity* inherited from the tradition of indigenous-peasant political struggle; and strongly felt bond with the land.

Next, Marcio Lauria Monteiro analyzes the influences of Trotskyism, through the Revolutionary workers ' Party (POR), in the process that led to the 1952 Bolivian Revolution. Drawn from solid literature review, the article reveals the increasing disputes and crises within the revolutionary movement, the resulting internal divisions, and questions the ability of the POR in organizing the Bolivian proletariat in order to drive it toward a socialist revolution. The author also questions the interest of the majoritarian

wings of the Fourth International in boosting revolutionary actions in South American continent. For this historian, studying the action of Trotskyists in the Bolivian Revolution makes possible to rethink established narratives on the international Trotskyist movement and its post-war crisis.

Túlio Cesar Dias Lopes contrasts the arguments that make the claim that Marx and Engels did not formulate a systematic conception about the “party”. He reminds us that in the Communist Manifesto one could already find the theoretical basis for creating a party, one not only able to organize workers to fight against capital, but to also develop socialist consciousness. This young scholar explores the ideas of Lenin and Gramsci on a new type of party, and the collective role played by the “modern Prince”, in addition to systematizing the contributions of Mariátegui to the political organization of the Peruvian and Latin American working class. These three communist intellectuals shared the understanding that the formation of political parties was indispensable to socialist revolution, because, through the party organizations, the working class could remain united, making it possible to conduct the revolutionary process.

In turn, the work of the researcher of the Study and Research Group on State and Class Struggle in Latin America (Praxis), social scientist Jórissa Danilla Aguiar, addresses the affinities between the Bolshevik movement and the praxis of José Carlos Mariátegui. In the journal *Amauta*, Mariátegui put forth his proposals for educating the “masses”, which he argued was a crucial tool for the political-ideological confrontation that would culminate in the victory of the proletariat. Thus, much of his work underscores the educational task of the party with indigenous populations, in order to help them understand their historic role in social transformation. Jórissa notes that this Peruvian Marxist used the dialectic analysis of local experiences of self-organization with concrete conditions in Latin America and the international level, making his work necessary reading even today, as can be attested to by the numerous indigenous movements across Latin America.

This dialogue between the Soviet experience and revolutionary cycles in Latin America continues with Jhosman Barbosa who,

in his article, examines the centrality of the issue of the transition to socialism in Cuba and the debates that it sparked as part of the historic challenge of building a new society. This economist sustains that this dynamic was stimulated by the presence of Cuban thinkers concerned with sovereignty, against annexation and in favor of national independence. Intellectuals of the late 19th century and early 20th century, like Martí, Baliño, Comañonga Mena, Guiteras Holmes y Rodríguez supported the ideas of international socialism in an original way, and created a unique body of reflection from the specificities of the Cuban historical process. With the experience of the 1959 revolution, Ernesto Guevara, Fidel, and Raul Castro discussed the existing options: the “socialist realism” of the USSR, the reading that ECLAC offered for Latin American development, and the contribution to the construction of socialism of personalities such as the economist Charles Bettelheim and the agronomists Jacques Chonchol and René Dumont.

Thus, if the Council of Mutual Economic assistance was the articulating agency of international socialism that, by exporting the Soviet experience, propelled the planning and the economic calculation in the Member States, the Budget Funding System turned out to be the specific way by which planning materialized on the island. The transition to socialism in Cuba, which alternated between applying imported models or developing its own model, is understood by Jhosman as a period of constant tension between theories and the reality, between the wishes and the possibilities arising from the material conditions of life in the Caribbean region.

The scholar of the Russian and Cuban revolutions, Steve Cushion, then draws heavily on *in situ* research on, inter alia, the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) to provide an alternative, nuanced interpretation of the relationship between what are, arguably, among the handful of world-changing projects of 20th Century socialism. Of vital importance, the author directs readers to the decisive role of organized labor—notably Afro Cuban—in the 1959 Revolution, which has been largely-ignored in orthodox histories (especially from outside Cuba), though more widely explored in his 2016 *Hidden History of the Cuban Revolution*. Focusing on the role of the Fidel Castro-led July 26 Revolutionary Movement, to the

exclusion of labor movement history, argues Cushion, necessarily distorts the key, albeit belated role played by the PCC in eventually breaking US imperialism's hold over the island republic and winning independence.

Jersey Oliveira, a member of the May 13 Center for Popular Education, refutes the claim that the revolution of 1917 had no impact on Brazil, and seeks to deconstruct this widespread common belief held by the bourgeoisie and pushed by the media. For this sociologist, the ideological discourse of revolutionary failure was constructed in order to prevent critical efforts to understand the potential and the limits of these historic events. Based on the literature and teaching experience acquired in courses for students and workers on the subject, the author argues that the idea indoctrinated in workers, that only under state management will their needs will be met, leads to inertia and lack of energy in the fight for their interests, creating a mass of voters. The mobilizations that have taken place in Brazil, particularly the strikes of 1917, the so-called "red year", were surprising because of the extent and radicalism of the workers' claims. Finally, he advocates studying the lessons of revolutionary strategy to help workers succeed in their goals.

The ideals propagated by the Russian revolution brought, also in the arts, renewed strength to the militancy of Latin American left. Frida Kahlo symbolized in her work "Marxism will bring health to the sick" the power of salvation offered by her political convictions: holding a book of Marx, and supporting herself with her hands, she frees herself of that crutches that plagued her.

Between 1920 and 1950, throughout Latin America, artists and intellectuals defended fervently a politically combative artistic production, launching journals and manifests. Mariátegui stated on the pages of the journal *Amauta* that a revolution in art cannot be satisfied with formal achievements. It is necessary that the new techniques are accompanied by a new spirit. Thus, the major change undertaken by nativists like Julia Codesido and José Sabogal, active collaborators of *Amauta*, wasn't formal, but rather thematic, dedicated to rethinking the national culture.

The Uruguayan Joaquín Torres García inverts the map of Latin America and declares: the North is now below. Amelia Pelaez finds in the combination of tropical fruits with arabesques in bold colors the expression of Cuban culture, while Eduardo Abela turns to the representation of peaceful *guajiros*. In Argentina, Antonio Berni paints a manifestation in which the attentive mass doesn't hide the individual expressions. Workers and peasants were subjects of emblematic paintings, marching obstinately towards the dreamed-of social transformations, as in the murals of the Mexican Siqueiros and the Bolivian Pantoja; while Portinari depicts the tragic saga of the northeastern migrants on the work "Burial on the net".

Our expectation is to provide readers of World Tensions with a varied collection of works produced by artists and intellectuals, from Brazil and abroad, committed to social struggles and thus to broadening international solidarity.

The editors

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