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Marxism

Uneven and Combined Development and the Sweep of History: Focus on Europe

- Features -

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It is often rationalized that a European bias in the study of world history makes sense because in modern times that history can best be comprehended as a process of “Westernization” - the growing dominance of capitalism in the global economies of our planet, the gradual and accelerating crystallization of a unified global economy, with accompanying spread of Western (i.e., European) cultural, social, and political models and norms. While there is a strong element of validity to this, it also can introduce substantial distortions of the historical process.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Tenochtitlan.jpg>]

Diego Rivera's vision of Tenochtitlan, Mayan city of canals on the site of today's Mexico City, destroyed by the conquistadors

Before the “rise of the West” driven by the emergence of capitalism and particularly the incredible engine of the Industrial Revolution, the more dominant aspect of world history seems to have involved a process of “Southernization” - involving the extensive diffusion of cultural, economic, social, and political influences from portions of southern Asia and the Middle East (including throughout Europe). In addition, even after the beginning of the “Westernization” process, the dynamics of historical development in the various countries and cultures of the global South are marked both by a some-time relative autonomy that challenges Western conceptualizations. But more, there is an obvious, ongoing, and accelerating impact, influence, and interpenetration of the cultures of the global South with those of “the West” (or North), a global transformative process.

An important conceptual tool for responding to such dynamics is the theory of uneven and combined development formulated by Leon Trotsky as a contribution to the rich body of Marxist analysis. Trotsky's theory will be elaborated and utilized in this essay, and while a European focus is adopted here, consistent with the “Westernization” model, it is seen simply as an initial and incomplete effort to suggest the general applicability of Trotsky's theorization, a theorization most consistent with a more rounded account of global history than is proved here.

From the 15th through the mid-19th centuries, a fundamental transformation took place in Europe - a transformation based on the shift from one economic system to another, from one mode of production to another, a shift from feudalism to capitalism. The manner in which this shift took place, and the consequences of the shift, set into motion a number of historical dynamics which shaped the modern world and which - among other things - resulted in calamities of the 20th century: the collision of imperialisms, two world wars that sandwiched the Great Depression, the rise and fall of fascism, the haunting specter of Communism, momentous struggles and death camps and labor camps and shattered dreams, with the Cold War threat of nuclear overkill fading into a new global order. This particular presentation will trace in broad strokes a general interpretative framework in which, hopefully, we can make better sense of the welter of experiences and the swirl of events that constitute the history of modern Europe.

1. The Uneven Transition to Capitalism

The concept of the mode of production consists of two interlinked elements - the forces of production and the relations of production. The forces of production include such things as raw materials, tools, and sources of energy (taken together, these things - raw materials, tools, energy sources - are known as the means of production) plus human labor-power, that can combine these means of production in such a way that create the products which make it possible for individuals and society as a whole to survive and develop. Those are the productive forces: the means of production (raw materials and technology) plus labor. The relations of production are constituted by the economic

ownership of the means of production, and control over the labor force - and this can be referred to as the class relations in society.

The old feudal mode of production was primarily agricultural, in which the two principal classes were the powerful warrior stratum, the so-called nobility, and the laboring peasants, who worked the land but were compelled to surrender to the nobles either portions of their labor or the product of their labor over and above what was needed for peasant family subsistence. In return, the nobility was expected to provide protection and assistance to the peasantry. The traditionalist ideology that dominated feudal society involved a vision of divinely-created social orders, divided between those who prayed (the clergy), those who fought (the nobility, or feudal lords), and those who worked (the peasants, who were often transformed into serfs - that is, forced to stay on the land under the control of the lords). In this organic view of society, the three social orders (or estates) were mutually supportive and had defined roles - outside of which no one born or appointed to a particular order must step. To do so would be a violation of social stability, of the way things were supposed to be, and of God's will.

A transitional period of several centuries saw the erosion of this system, as international trade created a growing market for products coming from one or another area. More and more, goods were produced not simply for immediate consumption by lords and priests and peasants, but for the purpose of exchange at the market place. To facilitate such exchange, a money economy became increasingly important, and the feudal ruling classes became increasingly caught up in it. The notion of property and property rights transformed feudal relations, with the nobles transforming themselves into a landowning aristocracy who came to consider their own private property the lands traditionally occupied by the peasantry.

There was a growing tendency for this aristocracy to exploit their peasants more severely, through feudal dues and rents, in order to accumulate greater wealth and luxuries. This generated peasant rebellions in some cases. In other cases, peasants fled the land. Sometimes peasants were driven out by landowners who sought more profitable uses of the land, such as raising sheep to provide wool for the growing textile trade.

New classes began to emerge, particularly in growing urban areas (or burghs). The burghers - or bourgeois - were largely what came to be known as businessmen, or capitalists. There were those who invested money in trade (or commerce, the activity of the merchants) in order to make a profit, buying products plentiful in one area to sell for a higher price to those in need of them in another area. Some of these merchants were able to accumulate enough money in this way to become financiers - financing various projects undertaken by merchants and aristocrats, making loans at interest. Other merchants of more modest means established small shops, taverns, and inns. Along with these commercial and financial capitalists, these arose a growing stratum of producers - artisans and craftsmen, stratified into apprentices, journeymen, and master-craftsmen, and originally organized into guilds representing various skilled trades.

Less fortunate but increasing in number were unpropertied and unskilled laborers, blurring into the destitute mass of the urban poor. With the passage of time, some capitalists increasingly shifted from a focus in commerce and finance to manufacturing - hiring craftsmen and laborers to produce commodities that would be appropriated by the capitalist and sold at a profit. More and more things became commodities - products to be sold at the marketplace - including human labor-power.

All of this subverted the feudal order. So did the new ideas that began to develop. Individualistic, experimental, scientific and rationalist orientations came to compete with the traditionalist faith-based and supernatural ideologies. This helped to generate, and was in turn further stimulated by, new developments in knowledge and technology. This trend has been identified with "the Age of Reason" and "the Enlightenment," reflecting a different way of thinking connected with a different way of life. A new mode of production, and new ideological perspectives, were gaining power.

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The feudal order evolved under the impact of all this. Previously, limited communications and transportation systems and the localized nature of the feudal economic units had meant that effective rule could only be exercised over a relatively small area. But remarkable changes in technology and the connection of more and more areas by the capitalistic marketplace changed this. Not only had it become possible to rule over increasingly large areas, but the needs of capitalist economic development created strong pressures to do so. Certain powerful sections (or factions) of the feudal nobility sought to take advantage of the new possibilities by establishing centralized monarchies, consolidating nation-states under absolutist rule.

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In those sections of Europe where such monarchist nation-states took shape, a considerable amount of power was concentrated into the hands of absolutist rulers. But the result was fraught with tensions between different modes of production, between widely differing social classes, between different factions within those classes, and between divergent ideological orientations. All of this was heightened by dramatic complications resulting from the development of the market economy - significant fluctuations in prices, economic rivalry between nations (which generated costly military expenditures and wars), and monetary policies by absolutist rulers that generated debts and taxes at levels that would have been unimaginable in earlier centuries.

Increasingly, rival factions within the aristocracy and within the bourgeoisie sought to enhance their power against each other and against monarchist absolutism by appealing to and mobilizing the lower middle classes (artisans and shopkeepers) as well as the urban and even rural poor. This greatly contributed to the ideological ferment - even more so when, in some cases, the newly-politicized masses began to slip away from upper-class influence and develop even more radical notions of their own. What's more, the growth of towns and cities, with dynamic urban populations, was to create centers of social, intellectual and revolutionary ferment that would provide leadership for future transformations.

A series of revolutionary upheavals resulted from this profoundly unstable situation. Revolutions in the Netherlands and England in the 1600s resulted in a new political and social synthesis in those countries. This culminated in non-absolutist - limited - monarchies and the triumph of the capitalist mode of production.

In France, however, the revolutionary explosion of 1789-93 was dramatically more violent and far-reaching. The monarchy sought the implementation of modest reforms that would ease social tensions in a manner that would help preserve the power of the monarchy. In contrast, an alliance of aristocrats and moderate bourgeois elements, with support from the peasantry and the urban masses, sought to introduce political and social reforms that would ease social tensions in France while bringing an end to monarchist absolutism. But the contradictions in French society were too great, and the resulting social crisis too severe, to be solved by mild reforms and half-way measures. In the face of rising expectations and deepening radicalization of the masses, not only was the authority of the crown overwhelmed, but the new aristocrat/bourgeois alliance was swept away. The power of the king was smashed, and a succession of moderately revolutionary leaderships were violently cast aside in the face of the increasingly revolutionary momentum of the masses. The most radicalized and politically conscious sections of the masses wanted a thoroughgoing political democracy and a social order in which freedom, equality and brotherhood would be a living reality.

Although the revolutionary masses of France - covered by the catch-all term "the people" - were uncompromisingly anti-feudal, however, they were composed of contradictory class elements, and this made it impossible for a similar consensus to form around a clear program that would bring about a realization of the most radical of their stated goals. "The people" (that is, peasants, artisans, shopkeepers, laborers, some capitalist manufacturers, and more) may have been united in their dissatisfaction with the old order, but they had different conceptions of precisely what

would be the virtues of the new order. This, combined with economic dislocations, civil war, and foreign invasions, paved the way for confusion and murderous in-fighting among the revolutionary leaders. In this context, the radicalizing momentum of the French Revolution was cut short, giving way, from 1794 through 1799, to a succession of rightward-moving and corrupt dictatorships, and finally the military coup of Napoleon Bonaparte.

2 Uneven and Combined Development to 1850

The French Revolution is often seen as the high-point of bourgeois-democratic revolution. This is defined as a revolution that sweeps away the vestiges of the feudal mode of production, clearing the way for the full development of capitalism, replacing monarchist-absolutism with a popular and representative form of government.

In the course of the 19th century, the capitalist mode of production triumphed throughout Europe. Yet the transformation took place in a manner that was qualitatively different from the form it took in France - and if we understand why that was the case, we'll also be able to grasp one of the central keys for explaining the subsequent history of Europe.

There is an obvious and simple law of history that has profoundly important consequences. This is the law of uneven development: different areas and different countries are just that - different. While all of Europe had been dominated by some variety of feudalism, and while all of Europe was affected by the development of the capitalist market, the different regions had their own particular characteristics. For various reasons, technological and cultural and ideological innovations arose first in one area and then had an impact on other areas at different times - leading to uneven development in the history of Europe as a whole.

This leads to another historical law which was expressed most clearly by Russian revolutionary theorist Leon Trotsky in this way: "Unevenness, the most general law of the historic process, reveals itself most sharply and complexly in the destiny of backward countries. Under the whip of external necessity their backward culture is compelled to make leaps. From the universal law of unevenness thus derives another law which, for the lack of a better name, we may call the law of combined development - by which we mean a drawing together of the different stages of the journey, a combining of separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms."

This law of uneven and combined development guaranteed that the dynamics of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, and the transition to a capitalist social order, would be quite different in other parts of Europe and in later periods than had been the case in France at the end of the 18th century.

The traditional, aristocratic ruling classes of Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe very much felt what Trotsky called "the whip of external necessity." This took several forms. One was the dangerous example of the French Revolution that could potentially become a model for their own discontented classes. Some traditionalists undoubtedly wanted to deal with this through increased repression, pure and simple - favoring reactionary policies that would prevent any changes in the forms and norms of the old social order. There were, however, three other "whips of external necessity" which thwarted such an easy "solution."

Most important was the Industrial Revolution that was unleashed by the capitalist economic development of Western Europe. Such a mighty generator of material wealth and power could hardly be shrugged off. Related to this was the fact that the traditional ruling classes - despite their feudal origins and inclinations - had themselves, for well over a century, been inescapably seduced by and entangled in the world capitalist economy. These two interrelated "whips" (the progress of the Industrial Revolution and the traditional ruling classes' own involvement in the world capitalist

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economy) made it impossible to return to an earlier feudal “golden age.” The traditionalists were, instead, compelled to adapt to a profoundly changing social order. A third “whip of external necessity” was provided by the French invasions during the Napoleonic wars that spanned the first 15 years of the 19th century.

France's capitalist economy was more efficient and dynamic, unencumbered by semi-feudal restrictions and forged into a cohesive national unit. This was also reflected in the superior military capabilities of Napoleon's armies - in which the inertia of aristocratic privilege had been replaced with sweeping organizational, technological and tactical innovations combined with performance-based incentives offered to all regardless of social station. This had two effects. First, Napoleon's forces overran most of Europe and instituted social, economic, and political reforms in those areas, reforms that were designed to facilitate their absorption into a French-dominated social order - Napoleon's French Empire. Secondly, the traditionalists came to realize that if they were to cope successfully in the modern world with a challenge such as that posed by Napoleon, then - at least for military reasons - they themselves would have to initiate some “modernization” reforms in their own societies.

An additional impulse for instituting such reforms (or for maintaining some of the Napoleonic reforms even after the ultimate defeat of Bonaparte in 1815) was provided by a desire to de-fuse the kinds of middle-class and lower-class discontents that had generated the earlier revolutionary explosions in France.

Even with the old ruling classes' grudging adaptation to some aspects of capitalist “modernization,” however, their determination to maintain as much monarchist power and aristocratic privilege as possible was destined to generate a wave of revolutionary explosions throughout Europe in 1848. But the law of uneven and combined development ensured that these explosions would assume different forms and have different consequences than had been the case during the French Revolution. To understand this, we must grasp the new sociological and ideological realities of the 1840s.

The further development of capitalism - and especially of industrial capitalism - resulted in a growing divergence among the new social classes throughout Europe's cities and towns. What had been simply “the people” in revolutionary France became increasingly the sharply defined, self-conscious and often openly antagonistic classes of capitalist employers on the one hand and proletarian wage-workers on the other. In-between was a middle stratum of independent artisans and small shopkeepers, impelled by the dynamics of the capitalist marketplace but also on the verge of being ruined by larger capitalist enterprises. This three-layered class structure in the urban areas - bourgeoisie, petty-bourgeoisie, and proletariat - did not form a cohesive revolutionary mass such as had existed in Paris of 1789, but rather an uneasy alliance in the struggle against semi-feudal absolutism. In the rural areas there were large landowners and various peasant strata - the former more often than not constituting a backward-looking aristocracy, while the peasant masses (who were a majority of Europeans) were often inclined toward traditionalist values and hostile to urban-capitalist pressures, but also inclined to be revolutionary if this could satisfy their deep hunger for land and dignity.

Three fundamental ideological currents took shape in the first half of the 19th century: liberalism, conservatism, and socialism.

Liberalism favored the new capitalist order and sought to eliminate old feudal restrictions and hierarchies, seeking instead to facilitate equal opportunity for all. In its classical form, and throughout most of the 19th century, liberalism favored economic policies of laissez-faire, convinced that wealth and progress would be guaranteed if the state put no restrictions on the decisions of the capitalists on how to run the economy. (By the 20th century the liberal mainstream would come to favor a more active intervention of the state in the economy, presumably to reform and regulate capitalism for its own good.) Committed to freedom of thought and expression, and the separation of church and state, liberalism was inclined toward Enlightenment rationalism as a guide to political reform, favoring the creation of constitutional republics. Throughout much of the 19th century, however, a majority of liberals did not favor

a democratic republic - fearing that giving propertyless masses the right to vote would create a "tyranny of the majority" that would overturn capitalist property rights. At first, it was only the most radical fringe of this political current that favored moving forward to democracy.

Conservatism accepted the new capitalist order but resisted impulses toward equal opportunity and the upsetting of traditional hierarchies. Often counterposing traditional values and cultural norms to the intellectual innovations of the Enlightenment, it challenged optimistic notions about the possibilities of progress and human betterment - yet its adherents were most concerned about conserving the traditional power relations associated with prevailing monarchs and aristocratic elites. Essentially anti-democratic, it often favored freedom of thought and expression only for the elite, and was inclined to keep the masses in their places through a combination of restrictive and benevolent policies by a more or less authoritarian central government. As parliamentary systems and the right to vote spread through Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries, of course, forms of conservatism evolved that more or less accepted and adapted to these changes.

Socialism challenged the new capitalist order, wanting to eliminate both the old feudal restrictions and hierarchies and the new capitalist restrictions and hierarchies. It held that equal opportunity would be possible only through the collective ownership of the economy, and that freedom of thought and expression could only be guaranteed by a radical democracy that encompassed not only the politics but also the economic life of society. Some of the earliest theorists of socialism imagined a utopian future whose blueprints they wished to somehow impose on humanity for its own good. By the mid-19th century, however, it became increasingly identified as a goal to be achieved and shaped by society's laboring majority. (At various times, conceptions of communism and anarchism tended to be identified with this broad current.)

Elements from various classes could be found in each political camp, and not surprisingly, many people of various class backgrounds - particularly among the hard-pressed lower classes - identified with no political current at all. The fact remains that, roughly speaking, in 19th century Europe liberalism found its most consistent base among the rising bourgeoisie, conservatism found its most consistent base among the sections of the aristocracy that were adapting to capitalism, and socialism found its most consistent base among the working class. At different times and in different places, elements of the peasantry were drawn to one or another of these basic currents.

Given this sociological and ideological line-up, it may be easier to understand the differences between the bourgeois-democratic revolution of 1789 and that of 1848. In the case of the latter, I will focus on one major example - that of Germany.

If we examine the events of 1789-93 in France, we see - amid an admittedly complex swirl of events - that elements of the rising bourgeoisie helped lead a mass-based movement of the urban and rural poor in smashing the remnants of the old feudal order. Results of the revolutionary triumph included: the replacement of monarchy with a constitutional republic; the achievement of national unity, with a form of nationalism strongly tinged with radical-democratic content; and a sweeping land reform which broke the power of the aristocracy, clearing the way for a thoroughgoing development of capitalism.

If we examine the events of 1848-49 in Germany, we see that the dominant elements of the already-existing bourgeoisie, frightened by working-class radicalism, drew back from revolution and sought an alliance with potent remnants of the old feudal order. The results of the defeated revolution included: the preservation of a powerful monarchy; the failure to achieve national unity for over two decades; the combined thwarting of democratic political currents and development of a conservative-tinged nationalism; maintenance of power by a landowning aristocracy; and capitalism becoming entwined with traditional elites.

The bourgeois-aristocratic, or liberal-conservative, compromise impacted throughout Europe after 1848, and this

profoundly affected the economic, political, and cultural history of that entire area. In the face of this hostile alliance, the first upsurge of self-conscious working-class radicalism (reflected in Karl Marx's small Communist League, for example, and more massively in England's Chartist movement) was smashed and didn't fully recover for about fifteen years. At the same time, the relative political and social stability that resulted facilitated the dramatic economic expansion of industrial capitalism that would set the stage for an even more dramatic working-class upsurge in the future.

3. Swirling Toward 1914

After 1848, the law of uneven and combined development continued to assert pressure on the triumphant conservatives. They felt compelled to carry out "modernizing" reforms which corresponded to the liberal and radical demands - but in a highly distorted form that preserved much of the aristocracy's status and power.

A prime example can be found in the career of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck of Prussia, who initiated policies over more than two decades after the defeat of the 1848 revolution that finally unified different parts of Germany into a powerfully capitalist nation, but as part of a distinctively conservative synthesis. In Prussia - which he guaranteed was Germany's dominant province - the parliament consisted of elected representatives, but the election laws divided the electorate into three groups: the landowning aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, and the laboring population. The votes of the first two sectors were given greater weight than the third, ensuring that the upper classes would get more representatives than the lower classes.

At the same time, the Prussian monarch - the Kaiser - exercised far-reaching executive powers over all of Germany. Social reforms beneficial to the working class were adopted, but at the same time there were repressive laws against working class organizations. Although land reforms were promulgated to relieve peasant discontent, the domination by the big landowners of the countryside remained intact. In other words, capitalist development blended with aristocratic privilege, social reforms blended with upper-class paternalism, concessions to the principle of representative government blended with continued authoritarianism, "modernization" blended with the policies of repressive bureaucracies committed to maintaining the relationships of power and privilege associated with the old status quo.

This was the pattern throughout much of Europe, although it unfolded with different variations in different countries. In Russia, for example, there had been no bourgeois-democratic upsurge because the indigenous capitalist class and working class did not exist as a significant force until the last years of the 19th century; therefore, the conservatism and authoritarianism of the monarchist system - Tsarism - were much stronger, and the various "modernizing" reforms comparatively weaker in Russia.

The fact remains that the triumph of the capitalist mode of production in Europe was an accomplished fact by the middle of the 19th century, and the stage was now set for technological and industrial developments so rapid and so profound that they are sometimes said to constitute a "Second Industrial Revolution." Communication and transportation systems, levels of industrial production and productivity, the size and proportional increase of urban populations, the level of knowledge and general education, the relative and absolute size of the urban working class, the amount of wealth produced by society - such things increased spectacularly, qualitatively transforming the life-rhythms of European culture.

This naturally increased tensions within European society as a whole, including tensions between different factions of the ruling classes on how to respond to new problems and possibilities. Divergences between conservatives and liberals once again became more pronounced. Both appealed to the masses for support - offering, in return, reforms

extending the right to vote and also increasing numbers of social reforms (which were easier to grant thanks to economic growth).

The consequent resurgence of mass politics in European life, combined with the growing size and productive power of the working class, led to the regeneration of the European labor movement. Mass socialist parties, and mass trade union movements under left-wing leadership, arose and became powerful forces in the political and economic life of Europe. They were able to force important economic, social, and political reforms from the upper classes - combating authoritarianism and injustice in society's political life and in capitalism's factories.

At the same time, they inspired millions of working people with a vision of a socialist future, in which the power of the capitalists and landowners would be replaced by the power of the working-class majority. Despite the fact that a majority of these parties gradually embraced the theoretical orientation advanced by Karl Marx and combined into unified international associations (first the International Workingmen's Association, later the Socialist International), divisions opened up among the socialists over how much the revolutionary vision should be compromised for the sake of immediate reforms, and over strategies for attaining socialism. These divisions, and the compromises that spawned them, created a fatal indecisiveness that was to paralyze the socialist movement at the decisive moment in 1914. The fact remains that, up to the First World War, this movement was seen as a powerful challenge to the status quo.

One of the most effective ideological tools utilized by conservatives was nationalism. Nationalism had first been a central component of revolutionary and liberal ideology - linking the ideas of popular sovereignty and national self-determination, celebrating the culture and sense of community of the popular masses.

Conservatives developed forms of nationalism which were designed to blur class differences, accentuating traditionalist cultural elements, glorifying authoritarian symbols, blending patriotism with anti-foreign prejudices and with militarism. They were able to tap into non-rational longings and fears that had been intensified by the dramatic transformations, disruptions, and tensions introduced by the new industrial capitalist order. Liberals and even socialists were affected in some ways by this variation of nationalist ideology that the conservatives developed so skillfully.

If anything, however, this form of intense nationalism was not a source of social stability and cohesion, but rather a reflection of the deep tensions and instability that had become part of the core of modern European life. This instability had at least three fundamental sources:

1. The uncompleted nature of the bourgeois-democratic revolution - resulting from the aristocratic/capitalist compromise - creating an ongoing antagonism between traditionalist values, expectations and cultural norms on the one hand, and the newer bourgeois values, practices and culture on the other. This deep cultural conflict was felt consciously and unconsciously, not only among the upper classes, but within broad sectors of the population.
2. Within the capitalist mode of production, there was a growing contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production. As we have noted, the awesome development of the forces of production encompassed all of society, bringing about profound and rapid changes in the culture and everyday life of all people in society - but none of this was under their control, because the relations of production involved the private ownership of those productive forces by a small self-interested minority of capitalists - and even this minority was driven by impersonal market dynamics which were not really under anyone's control. The immense changes in society were experienced by large masses as arbitrary, alienating, and threatening.
3. The actual dynamics of the economy contained an additional irrational element. The competition between capitalist

firms periodically resulted in overproduction, which would glut the markets, bringing about a collapse in prices and a decline in production and employment - that is, periodic economic depressions. Such problems naturally generated greater tensions and instability.

The development of imperialism provided an economic, political and even psychological outlet for all of these tensions. The obvious economic outlet was, of course, essential: the continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (and even North America and vulnerable portions of Europe) offered vital sources of raw materials, important markets for manufactured goods, and virgin territories for profitable investments. The traditionalist ethos of military glory and authoritarian grandeur also found an outlet, as did popular impulses toward a super-patriotic national-chauvinism.

At the same time, imperialism - in addition to being a brutal and oppressive assault on the peoples targeted for exploitation - failed to resolve the contradictions of European society, but simply led to heightened rivalries between different companies and countries over who would control what areas. Such rivalry, combined with the rising tide of nationalism and militarism, created a framework that generated the eruption of the First World War in August 1914.

4. Permanent Revolution

The incredible destructiveness of what one Asian scholar once referred to as “the European civil war” resulted not only in the slaughter of millions of people, but also in a dramatic political and cultural transformation on the European continent. A period combining revolutionary upheaval and counter-revolutionary backlash defined the rest of the 20th century. One of the focal-points of this dialectic was Russia, where the theory of uneven and combined development first came to be articulated. The patterns already discussed were dramatically evident there.

At the summit of Russian society was the tyrannical ruler, the Tsar, an absolute monarch. Any opposition to him or to the system over which he ruled could mean arrest, and prison or Siberian exile - or death. Only just below him was a powerful layer of hereditary nobles whose wealth and power was secured through the control of Russia's land and the exploitation of the great majority of the Russian people, who were peasants. The condition of even the fairly well-to-do peasants was impoverished, and the great masses of peasants were deprived of adequate land (monopolized by the rich elite of nobles) and lived in terrible and brutalizing destitution. All of this was justified by the religious hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church, which glorified the Tsar as “our little Father” - a god on earth - and persecuted all who did not accept the doctrines of Russian Orthodoxy. The oppressive second-class status of women received absolute religious justification, as did all policies of the tsarist regime.

The Tsars of Russia had conquered many different peoples, and the tsarist empire was known as the prison-house of nations.” At the same time - and most important for Russian development - the tsarist regime felt compelled, under the pressure of competition with other major powers in the world, to modernize aspects of their society - to develop technology and compete in the dynamically growing world market economy. Because of this, it was especially important for the Tsars to develop capitalist industry in Russia.

This gave rise to a small but growing capitalist class of industrialists and financiers, a layer of professionals. It also resulted in a rapidly expanding class of wage-workers and their families - the proletariat. The labor of this working class created the great wealth that flowed from Russian industrialization, and workers in the factories were exploited intensively - laboring long hours, often in unhealthy and unsafe conditions, pushed hard by factory managers, and paid low wages. It was illegal for workers to organize trade unions to press for improved pay and conditions. In the growing cities workers and their families lived in crowded and impoverished circumstances.

Such realities as these gave rise to a growing revolutionary movement, in which Leon Trotsky became involved. He

would become a theorist and leader of the revolutionary movement second in stature only to Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. In the context of intense struggles, Trotsky developed an analysis of the peculiarities of Russian history that defined it as “uneven and combined development,” and flowing from this he crafted a strategic orientation known as the theory of permanent revolution.

Trotsky's theory linked the struggle for democracy - freedom of expression, equal rights for all, and rule by the people - with the struggle for socialism, a society in which the great majority of people would own and control the economic resources of society to allow for the free development of all. It also linked the struggle for revolution in Russia with the cause of socialist revolution throughout the world. The theory contained three basic points. One held that the revolutionary struggle for democracy in Russia could only be won under the leadership of the working class with the support of the peasant majority. The second point held that this democratic revolution would begin in Russia a transitional period in which all political, social, cultural and economic relations would continue to be in flux, leading in the direction of socialism. The third point held that this transition would be part of, and would help to advance, and would also be furthered by an international revolutionary process.

The first aspect of Trotsky's theory was related to his understanding that the relatively weak capitalist class of Russian businessmen was dependent on the tsarist system, and that the capitalists would be too frightened of the revolutionary masses to lead in the overthrow of tsarist tyranny. The struggle for democracy and human rights could only be advanced consistently and finally won under the leadership of the working class, which was capable of organizing labor unions and political organizations in Russia's cities and towns. Allied with the workers would be the vast peasantry hungry for land, as well as other oppressed social layers - women, oppressed ethnic and national groups, religious minorities, and dissident intellectuals. A victorious worker-led revolution would bring the working class to political power. In other words, democratic revolutions in so-called “backward” countries such as tsarist Russia must spill over into working-class revolutions.

The second aspect of Trotsky's theory was related to the understanding that the victorious revolutionary working class would not be willing to turn political power over to their capitalist bosses. Instead, they would - with the support of the peasants - consolidate their own rule through democratic councils (known in Russia as “soviets”) and their own people's army. Under working-class rule there would be dramatic efforts

- to spread education,
- to create universal literacy,
- to make the benefits of culture available to all,
- to provide universal health care to all as a matter of right,
- to ensure that decent housing would be available for all,
- to secure full and equal rights for women and all others oppressed in the old society,
- and to include all people in building and developing an economy that would sustain the free development of all.

Increasingly, the development of society in this transitional period would move beyond the framework of capitalism and in the direction of socialism.

The third aspect of Trotsky's theory was related to his understanding that capitalism is a global system that can only be replaced by socialism on a global scale. It was his conviction that it would not be possible to create a socialist democracy in an economically underdeveloped country such as Russia surrounded by a hostile capitalist world. In fact, a working-class revolution in one country would inevitably generate counter-revolutionary responses in surrounding countries - with efforts to repress the revolution. At the same time, it would inspire the workers and oppressed of countries throughout the world.

The Russian revolution would be one of a series of revolutions in country after country throughout the world. This

would come about not only because of the example of revolutionary Russia, but especially because of the desire of more and more workers and oppressed people in all countries to end the exploitation and hardship that - Trotsky believed - are the inevitable result of capitalism. The process of socialist revolution can begin within a single country, but socialism can only be created on a global scale.

This orientation, was reflected in the orientation not only of Trotsky but - by the spring of 1917 - also of the Russian socialist movement's most revolutionary wing, the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin. An immense upsurge of the working-class and the peasantry, after sweeping away the tsarist regime, came under Bolshevik sway, culminating in the establishment of a revolutionary workers' government supported by the peasantry.

The combination of the First World War and the Russian Revolution helped to generate revolutionary upheavals on a global scale. The devastating impact of the war not only had disastrous consequences for the populations of Europe (particularly for the continent's working classes), but they also undermined the ability of Europe's "great powers" to maintain their colonial empires. The example of Russia's insurgent workers and peasants inspired masses of people on every continent to struggle more militantly against oppressive realities. The Russian revolutionaries led by Lenin and Trotsky sought to connect with revolutionaries of all countries, establishing the Communist International to aid in the spread of revolutions.

As it turned out, however, the global revolutionary ferment was not able to overcome the resistance of the ruling classes of most countries. Throughout Europe, the ruling powers joined to establish a cordon sanitaire to protect their populations from Bolshevik contagion, and to give massive aid to counter-revolutionary elements in Russia waging a bloody civil war against the Bolsheviks. In some countries revolutionary uprisings and movements were brutally suppressed, in others dramatic concessions were made to more moderate (and absolutely anti-revolutionary) sectors of the social-democratic labor movement to divert the working-class away from the overthrow of capitalism. In some countries, such as Germany, both things happened. The Russian Communists found themselves isolated in a hostile capitalist world. The Russian revolution's isolation led to bureaucratic, authoritarian, and murderous distortions of Communism in the Soviet Union and (due to the influence of the Stalin regime that arose after Lenin's death) throughout the Communist movements of other countries.

5. Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Inter-War Europe

Those who led their countries into the devastation of the First World War utilized an unbridled and murderous "patriotism" that placed militarism into the center of the national ethos. Among the masses of people who were swept into intense political life in the wake of the war, not all were drawn to the banner of Communism or to the more moderate appeals of social-democracy. Interpenetrating elements - ultra-patriotic and militarist forms of nationalism; a glorification of violence, racism, and "benign" tyranny rooted in the maintenance of colonial empires; the searing and brutalizing experience of the world war; long-standing ethnic tensions; deeply-rooted patriarchal and authoritarian mores; uneven combinations of horror and fascination and attraction over the challenge of rapid industrialization and "modernization" to traditional values and ways of life - all fed into a political culture that culminated in the crystallization of a new mass political movement that replaced monarchist-absolutism at the extreme right of the political spectrum: fascism.

Fascism involved a strident and militaristic nationalism, employing radical or populist rhetoric, which sought to overcome class conflict (and the threat of left-wing revolution) through a combination of extreme political authoritarianism, a "corporate state" enforcing cooperation between labor and capital, in practice preserving and reinforcing large capitalist corporations while providing at least modest social welfare programs for the masses. Arising first in Italy under the leadership of Benito Mussolini, it assumed various forms, with its German version - the

Nazi movement of Adolf Hitler - making the most thoroughgoing racism a centerpiece of ideology and policy. It is noteworthy that this extreme right-wing nationalism evolved in two countries where, on the one hand, the crystallization of nation-states had been delayed until late in the 19th century, involving far-reaching compromises and admixtures between modern (capitalist) and traditional (pre-capitalist) upper classes; on the other hand, where the working-class Left was particularly strong.

An essential element in the coming of fascism in both Italy and Germany was the fact that there were mass upsurges in both countries, arising out of profound political and economic crises. It appeared that triumphant revolutions could have resulted, but weaknesses in revolutionary leadership blocked such possibilities. Disappointed hopes among masses of people combined with extreme fears generated among the upper classes and deepening anxieties among sectors of the intermediate "middle classes." This dynamic generated for the rising wave of fascism burgeoning recruits and supporters from sectors of the middle and lower classes and, from sectors of the upper classes, an inclination toward both official and informal encouragement, as well as generous material resources.

The relative isolation of Soviet Russia - transformed into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), whose boundaries corresponded to the old Russian empire - contributed decisively to the transformation of Communism into a grotesque blend of dogmatized Marxism and "modernized" tsarist absolutism. Under Josef Stalin, a conception of creating "socialism in one country" (an industrially-backward USSR) both reflected and further contributed to three profound developments:

1. a distancing of the Soviet regime from a commitment to spreading the world socialist revolution, now deemed unnecessary for the triumph of socialism in the USSR (leading to the eventual dissolution of the Communist International);
2. an institutionalization of bureaucratic dictatorship as representing "working-class rule" and as the initiator of a brutalizing "revolution-from-above" designed to overcome economic backwardness through forced collectivization of the land and rapid industrialization;
3. the de-linking of democracy and equality from the meaning of socialism (now redefined narrowly as state ownership and planning-oriented control of the economy).

"Socialism in one country" helped to transform Communist parties of various countries from revolutionary working-class organizations to vehicles meant to advance or resist revolutionary struggles depending on the narrow, nationalistically-defined foreign policy needs of the USSR. The "revolution from above" required the concentration of political, economic, social, and cultural power in a few hands, at the expense of the majority of workers and peasants. This concentration of power, advanced by new technologies (and labeled by some as "totalitarianism"), had much in common with developments in Nazi Germany and fascist Italy - with the key difference that capitalism's market economy was replaced by a collectivized "planned economy," and that lip-service continued to be paid to democratic, humanistic, and egalitarian ideals repugnant to the likes of Hitler and Mussolini.

The brutality associated with Stalinism was justified by its partisans as a necessary element in dragging "backward Russia" into a modernized existence that would be beneficial to the majority of its laboring population (who were already being offered certain benefits - the right to education, health care and other social services, employment, etc. - previously unavailable). This would, it was argued, eventually become increasingly democratic, and would increasingly prove to be a powerful example for peoples around the world. And to many it seemed to represent a practical, compelling alternative to the capitalist status quo and to the fascist "new order."

The dramatic economic downturn in the global capitalist economy represented by the Great Depression (1929-1939),

with massive business failures and unemployment, generated a sharpening polarization between Left and Right throughout Europe, and also an intensified competition between various capitalist nations seeking markets, raw materials, and investment opportunities on a global scale. Related to this, there was a growing militarism requiring large-scale state expenditures which - in the fascist-dominated nation's first - revived the economy of one capitalist country after another.

The explosion of the Second World War (1939-1945) resulted, far more than the First, in an incredible trauma, in which different portions of the global, and different global realities, came together in lethal and profoundly transformative combinations. In a sense, this was several different wars combined. One involved a murderous confrontation between several contending capitalist empires, while another involved a no less murderous confrontation between Nazism and Communism. There was also an ideological confrontation between democratic and egalitarian ideals on one side and idealized dictatorship and racial purity on the other. For many, the war was a defense of their homeland against a ruthless foreign invader. Among the Allies, there were partisans of imperialism and anti-colonial revolutionaries, those reaching for a socialist future and those determined to save a capitalist status quo.

The consequences of the war were, of course, devastating for the losers - Germany, Italy, and Japan - and brought extreme discredit to fascism in all its varieties, and brought discredit also to much of the tangled ideological sources of fascism (national and ethnic chauvinism, anti-democratic thought, racism, militarism). Among the victors, the war ushered in disintegration and danger, and a new global power struggle that one perceptive partisan foretold would culminate in "the American Century."

6. Complexities of the 20th Century's Last Half

Here it is useful to remind ourselves that what is presented here corresponds to a "Westernization" conceptual model, which needs to be modified by a more complex employment of the "Southernization" conceptualization. Nonetheless, the process and importance of Westernization is undeniable.

Throughout the 19th and 20th century, we find - through a brutal colonialist imperialism as well as an "open door" and "good neighbor" imperialism - the spread and growing predominance of the market economy, with its subordination of more and more aspects of life to the accumulation process and cash nexus, and also with its crystallization of a very specific socio-economic class structure throughout Latin America, Asia, Africa, and other capitalistically "underdeveloped" areas (although often intertwined with earlier socio-economic formations and stratifications). To deal with what were often profoundly invasive, violent, and oppressive realities associated with this economic expansionism, growing sectors of the native population utilized various tools for conceptualization and resistance drawn from Western experience - notions of nationalism, race and ethnicity, democracy, socialism, etc. (although generally, again, dynamically combined with earlier cultural patterns).

Beginning in the wake of World War II (and in large measure due to its destructive impact on European power), a wave of radical anti-colonial and nationalist revolutions challenged and dissolved the European empires through the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. This revolutionary wave coincided and in some areas intersected with a powerful surge of Communist expansion.

This Communist expansion in some cases took place through the efforts of indigenous parties that had played central roles in resistance struggles during World War II (China, Yugoslavia, partially in Vietnam and Korea, almost in Greece). To a large extent it came about due to the central role of the USSR in defeating Nazi Germany and rolling

back Hitler's legions throughout Eastern Europe - and then placing pro-Soviet regimes in power throughout the region. This was carried out, initially, with the reluctant agreement of its capitalist allies (especially the U.S. and Britain) in 1943-45 thanks to Stalin's sincere promise to reign in Communist parties in other portions of Europe (particularly in Italy and France, where they had played central roles in the resistance movements and might have moved to take power). Soon the acquiescence turned into Cold War hostility, particularly as Western European regimes sought to check leftist-influenced anti-colonial insurgencies and dominant forces in the United States sought to realize the "American Century."

The Cold War of 1946-89 involved a global confrontation - short of total war, but marked by multiple smaller wars, diplomatic maneuvering, economic rivalries, coups and counter-coups, insurgencies, counter-insurgencies, massive two-way propaganda barrages, espionage, and an arms race involving weapons that could destroy the entire population of the planet several times over. The diminished power of Europe's capitalist democracies forced them to accept U.S. leadership in a "free world" coalition.

It was not necessary for a nation to be free or democratic to be part of the "free world" (some were, in fact, ruled by vicious and unpopular dictatorships) - it was necessary only to be pro-capitalist, anti-Communist, and accepting of U.S. leadership in the Cold War. Within the advanced capitalist democracies of Western Europe, however, the capitalist economic and political forces (fearing potentially revolutionary working-class militancy and the threat of Communism) established far-reaching agreements with the moderate, social-democratic labor movements (both political parties and trade unions) for extensive "welfare state" programs providing substantial benefits in increased incomes, education, health care, housing, social security, unemployment insurance, etc. These countries enjoyed a long wave of prosperity that significantly improved working-class living standards (as was the case, along with an increasingly robust consumerism, throughout the advanced-industrial capitalist world). In exchange for these benefits, the leaderships of these labor movements agreed to help preserve capitalism, and in some case also to support efforts to maintain colonialism.

Such "welfare state" benefits (minus the robust consumerism) were provided also by the regimes of the Communist Bloc, along with the elimination of capitalist enterprises and the establishment of state ownership and control over the economy. While this was done in the name of the working class and "the people," however, it was the Communist parties in each of these countries that had a monopoly on political power, maintained according to the bureaucratic-authoritarian Stalinist model. While the new Communist regimes were expected to follow the leadership of the USSR in the Cold War and in other matters, in those countries where Communist parties had taken power with popular support (instead of being placed in power by the USSR), a powerful pull toward independence began to assert itself - first with Yugoslavia, later with China.

A significant number of the newly-independent nations emerging from colonialism, particularly those under left-leaning but non-Communist leaders, chose to align themselves neither with the Communist Bloc nor with the "free world" of their old colonial oppressors. Both of the Cold War's contending power blocs sought to increase their influence in this sphere, offering economic aid and various alliances designed to bring them closer to one camp or the other. Throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America, however, there was a powerful desire to find paths of economic development that would nurture at least relative independence and "modernization."

An influential model for economic, social, and political development - "modernization theory" - utilized an interpretation of the historical experience of Western Europe and North America to propose a path for the "less developed" countries. The development of capitalism generated industrialization, which generated greater wealth and new variations of social differentiation, in turn breaking down stagnant customs and traditional hierarchies, generating political pluralism, democracy, prosperity - and all the benefits of modernization. Therefore, the solution for Asia, Africa, and Latin America would be for Western capitalist governments to offer economic aid, and especially for Western business corporations to make investments in these regions, leading to greater capitalist economic development, with the consequent modernization pay-offs in the social, cultural and political realms.

Obviously, “modernization theory” was consistent with the open door/good neighbor variants of economic expansionism advanced by U.S. foreign policy, and also increasingly the foreign policies of the post-colonialist Western European powers. In fact, it was an ideological and policy-making tool in the Cold War struggle. Another aspect of that struggle was a tendency of the United States and other Western capitalist nations to oppose de-stabilizing nationalist, anti-imperialist struggles - especially if in any way tainted with left-wing and especially Communist influences. Often U.S. and Western European policy-makers preferred to support unpopular and anti-democratic regimes when they were challenged by popular insurgencies.

An analysis counterposed to “modernization theory” (and consistent with the theory of uneven and combined development) took the form of what has become known as dependency theory. According to this analysis, the path of economic development followed by such countries as Britain and the United States in an earlier historical period is no longer open. The advanced capitalist nations are now determined to maintain their dominance in the global economy. Any economic aid they give to an “underdeveloped” country will not be allowed to make their economies competitive with those of advanced capitalist countries, but rather to make them develop in a manner that is in harmony with the needs of the advanced capitalist countries - which means, in a sense, to keep them under-developed. The investments of business corporations from advanced capitalist countries, similarly, are not designed to facilitate genuine “modernization,” but rather to maximize profits for the businesses of the advanced countries. They wish to pump wealth out of the less developed countries, not to contribute to progress or rising living standards for the populations of the underdeveloped regions. Nor would the policies of governments or corporations from the advanced capitalist countries be designed to promote democracy in Asia, Africa, or Latin America. Genuine democracy could result in “instability” in the form of popular protests against and powerful challenges to the profit-hungry outsiders. This explained why U.S. political and economic interests preferred repressive regimes that would guarantee “stability” and higher profit margins.

Influenced by such perspectives in the late 1950s and 1960s, rebels throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America initiated revolutionary struggles, challenging traditional elites and also the ostensible “modernizers” whose policies actually led to imperialist entanglements. In many cases becoming principled opponents of capitalism, they gravitated to variants of Marxist programs and Communist organization. They often tended to view political realities from a prism similar to that of permanent revolution: the democratic struggle (against imperialism, against dictatorship, for human rights and equal rights for all, for land reform, for a decent life for all) could only be secured through the struggles of the laboring masses, whose revolutionary struggle must culminate in their own political power, which would result in socialist-oriented economic development.

Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, however, posited an increasingly successful wave of working-class revolutions, particularly in advanced industrial countries, which would give aid to each other as they collectively moved forward to create a world socialist economy. An attempt to create socialism in one country, or even in a scattering of economically undeveloped countries, could not be successful with such a global revolutionary socialist expansion. In the advanced industrial countries of Western Europe, however, the largely socialist-oriented workers who identified with labor parties and social-democratic parties, and even the many workers who were members of Communist parties, were economically relatively well-off and not inclined to make a revolution. In this situation, the USSR and Communist Bloc stood as a substitute for international socialist revolution as the force that could provide for the survival and assistance required for an “underdeveloped” country to embark on a non-capitalist path of development. One dramatic example of this beginning in 1959 was the Cuban revolution.

This was problematical in more than one way. The USSR and Communist Bloc were prepared to lend support not from principle but from pragmatic and often manipulative considerations in the Cold War power struggle. This meant that under certain circumstances they would be fully prepared to withhold, reduce, or withdraw support. They might also be inclined to impose restrictions or conditions consistent with their own narrow foreign policy needs. They were also inclined to influence revolutionaries of other lands to adopt attitudes, structures, and policies consistent with their own Stalinist traditions.

In the Communist countries, lip-service might be paid to democracy, human rights, and control over the economy by the laboring masses, but this was far from the reality. The bureaucratic regimes were increasingly losing whatever genuine confidence, respect and support they may have once enjoyed among their own populations. Uprisings of workers, students, and others were violently repressed in East Germany (1953), Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), Poland (1981) - and gradually many dissidents who might have argued for "socialism with a human face" saw no human possibilities at all in this system called "socialism." The centrally and bureaucratically controlled economy - the so-called "command economy" - proved increasingly vulnerable to mismanagement, not to mention the endemic inequalities and corruptions that had been manifest from almost the beginning. Some Communist Bloc countries, seeking to avoid economic stagnation and impasse, dabbled with "market reforms" (which introduced elements of incoherence into their economic reality) and secured substantial loans from Western capitalist banks (which had fatal consequences when a downturn in the global economy made it impossible for them to overcome the accumulation of debts).

The 1960s and 1970s saw ferment, radicalization, and insurgency on a global scale, most dramatically in Asia, Africa, and Latin America - but also taking the form of a youth radicalization embracing not only students but also sections of the working class of the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe, and also in Eastern Europe. In many cases, the ferment swept past the existing Communist and social-democratic organizations and found expression in a proliferation and expansion of "far left" groups (although ultimately the traditional organizations were able to attract much of this youthful ferment). In the West, there was mobilization around anti-imperialism, opposition to bureaucratic and alienating structures, anti-racism, feminism, anti-militarism, environmentalism, free speech and more. And sections of the trade union movement were impacted as well.

In Asia, Africa, and Latin America, however, there were organizations that developed both the capacity and the will to take political power through revolutionary struggle. In Western Europe those organizations having the capacity to take power (as opposed simply to winning elections in order to run the capitalist state) did not have the will to try. There were many activists, especially among the young, who may have had the will - but they did not have adequate organizations or sufficient mass support. And within the Communist Bloc, with the remarkable exception of Poland at certain moments, the repressiveness of the state apparatus seemed too thoroughgoing to allow for more than seemingly ineffectual dissent.

In reflecting on the developments as they stood in the 1980s, one is tempted to play with the formulation "uneven and combined development" by noting that the three very unevenly developed sectors of the world revolution - the advanced capitalist countries, the Communist Bloc, and the exploited regions of the global South - while influencing and altering each other in important ways, ultimately failed to combine into a coherent and triumphant challenge to the status quo.

7. Problems of Permanent Revolution

If treated as a dogma rather than an analytical tool, the theory of permanent revolution stands challenged and discredited by developments of the late 20th century. A bloc of nations on many continents - for example, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Mexico, Brazil, India, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Turkey, South Africa, Egypt, Algeria - appeared to be following the path from "backwardness" to "modernization" (and, more or less, to realization of "democratic tasks") without a worker-peasant revolution culminating in a workers' state moving toward socialism.

The fact is that Trotsky explicitly denied that the theory of permanent revolution was a schema or practical recipe applicable equally everywhere from Paris to Honolulu. It is, above all, an analytical tool that can inform political strategies, but that cannot be valid if it is utilized as an excuse for not actually studying the specifics and peculiarities of each national and cultural reality. As Trotsky developed it, the theory - far from seeking to establish a closed

theoretical-strategic orientation - was part of an “open” and critical-minded approach to revolutionary analysis and strategy. To make sense of the various “exceptions,” it is necessary to determine to what extent they are incomplete exceptions, and to what extent they may be either exceptions that prove or overturn the “rule” of permanent revolution - a task which goes beyond the present paper.

One could argue, however, that, to the extent that the theory is utilized to provide a strategic orientation, it is consistent with the traditional revolutionary Marxist orientation arguing that the full human needs and rights of the working class, of other exploited toilers, and of all oppressed sectors of the population can only be realized through a thoroughgoing democracy that can only be achieved by the laboring majority taking political power and establishing planful control over the economy. The struggle for democratic demands, if followed all the way, necessary spills over into the struggle for socialism. (This makes the theory relevant not only to “underdeveloped” regions, but also to advanced capitalist nations.)

In the 1980s, another challenge to the theory seemed to be posed by revolutions in Central America and the Caribbean, particularly the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. In this situation, a popular revolution of the partially proletarianized “laboring masses” - led by Marxist-oriented revolutionaries - was mobilized largely as a democratic revolution, culminating in a regime based solidly on mass support, but that instead of moving forward to socialism (taking “the Cuban road”), the Sandinistas doggedly sought to maintain a “mixed economy” with state, cooperative, and private sectors. While some dogmatists accused the Sandinistas of “betraying” the revolution, more realistic analysts noted that - given the dramatic erosion and increasing disintegration of the power of the USSR and Communist Bloc in that period - the “Cuban road” (moving toward the replacement of capitalism with a nationalized planned economy) was not an option for a small nation hoping to survive within the global capitalist economy. This was seen by some as a demonstration that Trotsky's theory had proved to be invalid.

A careful examination of Trotsky's theory, however, indicates that this particular critique is based on a serious misunderstanding. A central component of the theory of permanent revolution asserts that when a workers' state comes to power, a transitional period opens up that includes the development of precisely such a “mixed economy” as came into being in revolutionary Nicaragua. The theory's crowning assertion is that such a development can find completion in socialism only as the revolution expands on the international stage, with workers' states coming to power in more and more countries, including industrial advanced countries. Only on a global scale can a socialist economy come into being. The eventual defeat of the Sandinistas (as a force for socialist revolution) was inevitable given the stalemate and defeat of the revolutionary upsurge in Central America, the collapse of the Communist Bloc, and the failure of working-class revolutions to triumph in other countries (such as Iran, South Africa, Brazil, etc.).

Setting aside such a specific misunderstanding, and setting aside the elevation of Trotsky's theory into a messianic expression of revolutionary triumphalism, there is an additional argument that could be made in the theory's defense. To the extent that political strategies consistent with the theory of permanent revolution have failed:

- to that extent have the movements and struggles of the working class been compromised, eroded, dismantled;
- to that extent has the promise of “the democratic revolution” been compromised, hollowed out, tragically incomplete - despite real gains made in one or another realm of society;
- to that extent have terrible inequalities persisted, deepened, and contributed to the erosion of the integrity and viability of the specific society (and of the world).

This relates to recent discussions regarding the possibility of eliminating global poverty. In 2000 the United Nations initiated a Millennium Development Goals campaign. This projected the realization of the following eight goals: 1)

eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; 2) achieve universal primary education; 3) promote gender equality and empower women; 4) reduce child mortality; 5) improve maternal health; 6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; 7) ensure environmental sustainability; and 8) develop a global partnership for development.

These goals, supported by 190 governments around the world, are to be realized by 2015, as an initial step to assuring a decent life for the world's peoples, involving very specific sub-goals and practical policy projections. For example, of the world's six billion people, half live on less than \$2 per day, but 1.3 billion live on less than \$1 per day - and the goal by 2015 is to cut this number of the "most impoverished" in half.

If these goals can be achieved within the framework of global capitalism, and then progressively advanced upon, a case can be made for the final obsolescence of the theory of permanent revolution. But to the extent that the goals - which, given existing resources, have been shown to be perfectly realizable - prove to be unrealized under the present structures of wealth and power, considerable validity must be credited to at least some variant of Trotsky's theory.

On the other hand, to the extent that there is a decomposition of the political organizations and capacities for class consciousness and struggle on the part of the working class and other sectors of the toiling masses, without an accompanying recomposition of the actual or potential power of the laboring majorities of the various countries and cultures of our planet, to that extent the theory of permanent revolution will cease to have practical relevance.

Regardless of any problems related to the theory of permanent revolution, the fact remains that the overarching theory of uneven and combined development can be shown to be valid (that is, to be a useful and illuminating analytical tool) for historians, anthropologists and other social scientists seeking to understand the developments and complexities of human existence in Europe and beyond.

8. The Past Flows Into the Future

In the past two decades (1985-2005), uneven and combined development has continued to shape the world in which we live.

One of the most dramatic instances has been the decline and collapse of the Communist Bloc. With the failure of working-class revolution to spread to advanced industrial countries, the relative isolation of the USSR (and then the bloc of countries under its tutelage) contributed to a fateful combination of progressive Marxist ideology and goals with reactionary and repressive traditions from the pre-revolutionary period. Bureaucratic elites were increasingly prone to compromise revolutionary principles and goals internationally and internally, becoming in many ways indistinguishable from other privileged and oppressive elites.

The glowing promise of human liberation was increasingly turned into hypocritical propaganda and bombast. Popular hopes and expectations were increasingly transformed into bitter disappointment, disillusionment, and passive hostility. The increasingly unstoppable interpenetration of the cultures of Eastern and Western Europe contributed mightily to the collapse of popular support or acquiescence, particularly given the growing inability of the so-called "command economy" - after initial successes in establishing heavy industry and basic social programs - to compete with or resist the incursions of the dynamics of global capitalism.

The corrosive impact of Stalinist traditions and the inadequacies of the "command economy" had a profound impact beyond the collapsing USSR and Communist Bloc. Particularly as the collapse occurred, rebel regimes of Asia,

Africa and Latin America that had been dependent on the Soviet model and on trade and aid from the Communist Bloc found themselves increasingly isolated, vulnerable, and in many cases unviable. There was a powerful tendency toward rapid degeneration into some of the worst forms of tyranny, compromise and corruption. Some joined the ranks of the so-called “failed states” fragmented by internal divisions, often exacerbated by contending outside economic interests. To a growing extent, multi-national corporations from the “developed” North, while distressed over consequent instabilities, no longer faced dilemmas posed by the threat of left-wing insurgencies.

Communism's collapse obviously meant an end, for the most part, of Western Europe's large Communist movement, which increasingly evolved (or collapsed) into the capitalist-friendly reformism long associated with traditional social-democratic orientations. At the same time, Western Europe (and other parts of the globe) saw a conservative free market assault on the welfare state and social compact that had been secured in the wake of the Great Depression and World War II: a seemingly unstoppable “neo-liberal” wave of privatization, dismantling social programs, breaking unions, driving down working-class living standards - accompanied by soaring corporate profits, the breaking of unions, and the dramatic decline of social-democracy and the collapse of labor reformism.

Triumphant capitalism unleashed similar dynamics throughout the world, accelerated by new technologies and divisions of labor that - under the banner of “Globalization” - has drawn the diverse cultures and unevenly developed regions of the world into an increasingly intimate if unstable mix.

This has brought an incredibly violent reaction from some sectors of the world, exacerbated by increasingly desperate impoverishment, indignation over violations national sovereignty, and rage over the pollution of cultural traditions - with a backward-looking religious fundamentalism combining with technologies and other cultural influences from the “advanced” West. It is unlikely that the consequent dialectic of terrorism and counter-terrorism will play itself out in the near future.

In opposition to this lethal dialectic, and to the overarching reality of corporate-capitalist globalization, there have been stirrings of a so-called “globalization from below.” A variety of oppositional forces - fragments of the traditional Left from various regions of different continents blending with vibrant representatives from a variety of new social movements and political formations, also from various regions of different continents - have come together in massive and worldwide global justice mobilizations, in the World Social Forums, and in international campaigns around a number of issues.

In the present historical moment of 2005, we see the continuing dynamic of uneven and combined development. On the one hand, European elites seek to a more sweepingly pan-national European Union that might facilitate a sharper contestation with U.S. hegemony - even as their economies and cultures entwine ever more intimately with those of the American Empire. On the other hand, masses of “ordinary” Europeans influence each other across borders with their various struggles to maintain national-cultural identities and decent living standards - saying “NO” to a Europe-wide constitution that would undermine national sovereignty and facilitate the further advance of neo-liberal policies.

The past flows into the future in a never-ending swirl and collision of uneven and combined developments.

Bibliographical Essay

There can be no question of providing a comprehensive bibliography here, but a relative handful of titles can suggest some useful sources and what may be fruitful paths for further investigation.

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Discussing Trotsky's ideas on uneven and combined development and permanent revolution in the larger frameworks of Marxist economic and philosophical thought are M.C. Howard and J.E. King, *A History of Marxian Economics, 1883-1990, 2 vols.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), and John Rees, *The Algebra of Revolution: The Dialectic and the Classical Marxist Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1998).

While not referring to Trotsky's theories, but entirely relevant, is Teodor Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and "The Peripheries of Capitalism"* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983). Also relevant, and relating to Trotsky's ideas, are two other volumes from Shanin - *Russia as a "Developing Society"* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) and *Russia, 1905-07: Revolution as a Moment of Truth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

Valuable studies relevant to issues in this essay are Perry Anderson's *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London: Verso, 1978) and *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1979).

Key volumes on transitions from feudalism to capitalism are Rodney Hilton, ed. *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1978), and T.H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin, eds., *The Brenner Thesis: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

There are numerous historical studies that can be useful in considering matters discussed here, among the most obvious being Eric Hobsbawm's four-volume survey - *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (New York: New American Library, 1962), *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875* (New York: New American Library, 1979), *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), and *The Age of Extremes, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books 1996).

A relevant survey of intellectual history is provided in George L. Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe, The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Third Edition (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), and suggestive works on social history are provided in George Rude, *The Crowd in History, 1730-1848* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964) and E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966). A blend of political science, anthropology, and history that offers a provocative vision of struggle that spans centuries can be found in James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance, Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

A pioneering comparative study, quite relevant to this essay, can be found in Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966). It is, in some ways supplemented and in some ways challenged by three outstanding works by Arno J. Mayer, which provide remarkable accounts of European history entirely consistent with uneven and combined development (without referring to it): *The Persistence of the Old Regime, Europe to the Great War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken? The "Final Solution" in History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), and *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Important and relevant volumes making explicit mention of uneven and combined development are David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), and Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Also relevant is Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1960).

The "modernization theory" discussed in this essay refers to that presented by Walt Whitman Rostow in *Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

Discussion on controversies and rival notions of developmental theory can be found in Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (London: Zed Books, 1997). The conception of "Southernization" is introduced in a classic essay by Lynda N. Shaffer, *Southernization* (Washington, DC: American Historical Association, 2002). A sharp critique of Eurocentrism is offered in J.M. Blaut, *Eight Eurocentric Historians* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2000).

Innovative contributions relevant to matters discussed here are provided in the work of anthropologist Carol McAllister - for example, in *Matriliney, Islam and Capitalism: Combined and Uneven Development in the Lives of Negeri Sembilan Women* (University of Pittsburgh, 1987) and *Uneven and Combined Development: Dynamics of Change in Women's Everyday Forms of Resistance in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia* *Review of Radical Political Economy*, Vol. 23, Nos. 3 and 4, Fall and Winter, 1991.

Other works by anthropologists relevant to this essay are Peter Worsley, *The Third World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), and - even more - Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), who gives some usefully critical consideration to Trotsky's perspective.

Relevant to final comments in the essay are: Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The End of Poverty, Economic Possibilities for Our Time* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), Walden Bello, *Dilemmas of Domination: The Unmaking of the American Empire* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2005), Jose Correa Leite, *The World Social Forum: Strategies of Resistance* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005), and Susan Watkins, "Continental Tremors," *New Left Review* 33, May-June 2005.

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