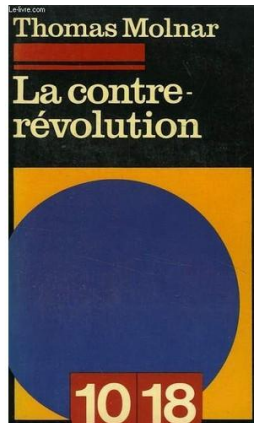


WHAT IS THE COUNTER REVOLUTION?



"Perhaps the victory of the Revolution is only possible once the counterrevolution is over."

K. Marx, Speech at the Cologne Trial (February 1849)

In this period of accelerating capitalist catastrophes, it seems important to us to clarify the very concept of counterrevolution, and to do so within the long-term context of proletarian political cycles. Indeed, this essential characteristic of a historical phase that can last for decades is too often reduced to the limited assertion of the bourgeoisie's immediate reaction to the danger of revolution. Furthermore, it is impossible to define counterrevolution without first clarifying what potential revolution it poses in response. Defining counterrevolution therefore also means analyzing the conditions of the change of era, which allows us to factually assess a pre-revolutionary period without announcing its imminent arrival every day.

This deviation, apart from appearing to be uncritical optimism, primarily serves all left-wing sects to keep their troops mobilized and thus justify their formal existence, which is often more than harmful. In its reactive sense, counterrevolution is almost always considered "right-wing" or far-right. However, in various historical circumstances of the 20th century, from Russia to Germany, via Republican Spain or Maoist China, it was Stalinism and social democracy that acted and imposed the long periods of counterrevolution. Finally, on a global scale, counterrevolution can also develop preemptively, while the revolution remains only a "specter" or an unrealized possibility. Therefore, when we speak of the long history of counterrevolution, we often refer to it as "fascist, Stalinist, and democratic," to illustrate the range of these different possible formalizations.

The strategic importance of understanding proletarian political cycles

It was evidently Marx who most clearly theorized economic cycles as the basic structure that gives rhythm to and conditions the (over)life of the CPM. These economic cycles give rise to successive phases of average activity growth contrasted with phases of crisis-stagnation.

"The economic life of industry is transformed into a succession of periods of average activity, prosperity, overproduction, crisis and stagnation." K. Marx, Capital, Book I, PUF, "Quadrige" pp. 509-510, Paris, 1993.

These economic cycles do not mechanically determine the rise or fall of class struggles and the level of confrontation with capitalist social relations. Therefore, the political cycles of the proletariat are relatively independent of the economic cycles of capitalist valorization. The vulgar often interprets the crisis of overproduction as the sole acting factor, thus generating an automatic and non-dialectical link between economic crises and the "obligation" of a social explosion. It is worth recalling Munis 's critique of the automatic determination of "economic crisis-revolution": *"For the same reason, those who count on a crisis of overproduction, with its concomitant tens of millions of unemployed in all countries, to provoke what they call 'the awakening of the proletariat,' are dangerously mistaken." If anything, they are a sinister omen. Not only do they have a poor understanding of how the human brain works, but they also believe that the working class is incapable of attacking capitalism except through hunger.*" G. Munis, *Party-State Stalinism Revolution*, p.96, Spartacus, Paris, 1975.

It is in bourgeois macroeconomics that political cycles are strictly determined by economic cycles, thus producing the typical view of vulgar materialism, for which economic crisis inevitably implies a resumption of social struggles. All that remains then is to wait for a major, "mythical" economic crisis (seen as an internal fatality of capital) to claim to see in it the unequivocal sign of the impending revolution. This view has proven its falsity and futility in the history of workers. To take the classic example of the great economic crisis that began in 1929 in the United States and continued internationally, it in no way provoked revolutionary movements. On the contrary, thanks mainly to the development of Keynesian economic measures and the policy of the "New Deal," the state continued to subdue the proletariat and ideologically prepared for its massive destruction during the Second World War by promoting the false opposition between fascism and anti-fascism. Contrary to a mechanistic view, which sees only the brutal and traumatic nature of the crisis, the crisis is above all an opportunity for capital to restructure and reorganize, allowing it to relaunch its expansion through a new rate of surplus value.

*«In other words - and profit is merely another name for surplus value, or surplus labor, **the cycle of crisis can be explained by the successive disappearance and re-emergence of an adequate rate of exploitation.**»* Paul Mattick, *The Economic Cycle*, in Marx and Keynes, p.90, Gallimard, Paris, 1972.

It was Engels who devised a diagram to illustrate the cycle of oscillations between revolution and counter-revolution: *"This excess of revolutionary activity was necessarily followed in England by the inevitable reaction, which in turn surpassed the point at which it could have maintained itself. After a series of oscillations, the new center of gravity was finally reached, which became a new point of departure."* F. Engels, *Utopian Socialism and Scientific Socialism*, p. 41, Social Editions, Paris, 1971. This is a first attempt to define the proletarian political cycle, the beginning and end of which are marked by the discontinuity between the predominance of revolutionary activities and the reaction they provoke before stabilizing and leading to a new situation, which in turn is likely, in time, to give rise to a new point of departure. This proletarian political cycle is defined exclusively from the point of view of political struggle, the best expression of which is the tendency towards workers' self-organization. Unlike other revolutionary classes of the past, the proletariat cannot progressively emancipate itself from the capitalist mode of production without confronting the state, as the privileged representative of the dominant

social relation: wage slavery. Unlike the transitional periods between modes of production in class societies, the transition to communism cannot be based on any material foundation existing in capitalist society. Within capitalism, the proletariat has had, has, and will only have its labor power to sell to capital in order to survive. The only power it can claim to have is that of radically opposing the social system that oppresses and exploits it, in order to completely revolutionize it. The productive forces, for example, are totally subsumed by capital and cannot be utilized in any way without being radically transformed or destroyed. The same is true of all the structural elements of the PCM, including "sciences." Therefore, the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat for the abolition of wage labor will be the indispensable moment for its revolutionary overcoming in order to achieve a communist society.

"In a higher phase of communist society, when the enslaving subordination of individuals to the division of labor has disappeared, and with it the opposition between intellectual and manual labor; when labor is not merely a means of subsistence, but has itself become the first necessity of life; when, with the manifold development of individuals, the productive forces have also increased and all sources of collective wealth flow in abundance—only then can the limited horizon of bourgeois law be finally overcome, and society be able to inscribe on its banners: 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.'" K. Marx and F. Engels, Critique of the Gotha and Erfurt Programs, p. 32, Éditions Sociales, Paris, 1972.

Furthermore, when we speak of political struggles, we are not referring to the political maneuvers and delaying tactics employed by the bourgeoisie in its democratic domination, which ultimately requires corruption, intrigue, consensus, and compromise. For the revolutionary proletariat, there is no other path than a radical break with all aspects of the current world through the complete destruction of all states. The only program compatible with its situation today is that of integral communism.

«The gigantic proletarian resurgence movement of the first post-war period, whose power was manifested on a world scale and which was organized in Italy in the solid party of 1921, clearly showed that the urgent postulate was the seizure of political power, and that the proletariat does not seize it by legal means but by armed insurrection, that the best opportunity arises from the military defeat of one's own country and that the political form that follows victory is the dictatorship of the proletariat. Economic and social transformation is a subsequent task for which the dictatorship creates the first condition. » A. Bordiga, The Immediate Revolutionary Program, 1952.¹

Schematically, the positive and ascending phase of the proletarian cycle means the increase of The power of class independence leads to a frontal clash with the state and the wage-earning class. This rise in power means an increase in quantitative (increased number of strikes and workers' actions) and qualitative (development of factory political committees, independent workers' assemblies, etc., publications, agitations, propaganda, sabotage, etc.) elements, concretizing the ferment of the process of organizing the proletariat into a class for itself. It is in the development of this growing assertion that weaknesses are overcome; that the lessons

¹To read these theses in full, please visit the website: <https://www.sinistra.net/lib/bor/bordiga.html> Bordiga, like the vast majority of revolutionaries past and present, makes too clear a distinction between the ineluctable dictatorship of the proletariat and economic and social transformation. The two aspects of the revolution are entirely dialectically linked and must be expressed, as far as possible, simultaneously. The "Russian" revolution focused fundamentally on political power, the "Spanish" revolution on social power. We must understand that both are inseparable and equally important if we want the radical transformation of society to have any chance of succeeding worldwide.

learned from the past are transformed into new orientations of struggle; and that progress is made **when the question of power is concretely posed**, toward a potentially revolutionary situation. It is then the moment for the possible centralized and international constitution of the class party. The course of history thus shifts toward revolution.

In contrast, in the declining and negative phase of the cycle, demoralization, a sense of defeat, and a return to every man for himself predominate. It is time to retreat, preferably in a fair fight. Competition between proletarians reappears, and the bonds of solidarity that had emerged from the common struggle disappear. It is also the moment of dislocation and dissolution of the political bodies that the proletariat had established to direct its struggles. The structures of consensus and capitalist organization-unions, "party-ocracies," and the like-regain control and dissolve the class into the people and their electoral representation. We return to a gloomy social peace and individual survival. The counterrevolution, whatever form it takes, once again unfolds in all its totalitarian logic: increased exploitation and war disasters, climate change, health problems, and so on.

The long times of the counterrevolution

We are, as I said, at the level of world history of the working class and its possibilities, or lack thereof, of changing the world. If we consider the short 20th century (from the perspective of centuries of capitalist domination), the "windows of revolutionary fire" were very brief; essentially at the beginning of the century with the revolutionary wave of 1917-1923 (these dates are indicative and not fixed) and just before World War II with the events in Spain from 1931-1937. In the first of these periods, the counterrevolution manifested itself first in the form of a reaction by the "Whites," or other "free groups," who anticipated the emergence of fascist movements. But the most powerful counterrevolutionary impact was that of Stalinism, produced at the very heart of the defeat of the Bolshevik Revolution. Stalinism perpetuated itself in increasingly dramatic **and** grotesque forms: Maoism, Pol Potism, Castroism, Hoxhism, Madurism, etc. Well, after Stalin's death (1953), it continued to wreak havoc in an abominable way, not only as regimes, but also as "Marxist-Leninist" political formations in many countries around the world². Shortly before the counterrevolutionary triumph of Stalinism, fascist movements appeared, first in Italy (1919) and then in Germany (1922), to complete the demobilizing and repressive work initiated by social democracy in its total and worldwide embrace of nationalism, war and the apparatus of the bourgeois state. Fascism and Stalinism influenced and copied each other in many areas (military structure, charismatic leader, cult of force, open repression of all opponents, anti-Semitism, reactionary moral and artistic conceptions, concentrated spectacle, etc.), often seeming to be two complementary and "opposite" sides of the same counterrevolutionary coin, or even simple variants of the same democratic and dictatorial ideology.

"The historical fact that the worst and also the most intimate enemy of democracy today is not Herr Hitler, but "democracy" itself - this is the "secret" hidden by the verbal battles between "totalitarianism" and "democracy" itself and "anti-totalitarianism", as well as the diplomatic and

²For readers in English, we recommend the Barbaria group's brochure on this subject: "Stalinism, red flag of capital," published in 2022 and available on the website: <https://barbaria.net/2022/09/19/el-estalinismo-bandera-roja-del-capital/> (barbaria @riseup.net: ceci est une adresse mail)

military struggle of a completely different importance which opposes the Axis to the Anglo-Saxon group of imperialist powers. » Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Counterrevolution*, pp. 200–201, Seuil, Paris, 1975.

Like Bordiga³, it was Korsch himself who said: “*It would be an understatement to say that today’s exploitative societies have retained and adopted fascist traits: **defeated fascism has conquered its victors.***” idem, p. 209. Similarly, O. Rühle characterized fascism and Stalinism (under the ambiguous term “Bolshevism”) as “brown fascism” and “red fascism” and recalled the historical responsibility of social democracy in the crushing of the proletariat and the advent of fascism.

«Their profoundly bourgeois nature (that of the German Social Democrats), which had been exposed in the decisive hours, led them once again down the path of opportunism. It was the path of truce, of class collaboration, of the popular front with the democrats and the clericals. The dividing line between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie was pushed back into the bourgeois class itself: between the petite bourgeoisie and the big bourgeoisie. The proletariat no longer had its own representation. The class struggle was waged only by pseudo-combatants and was practically liquidated. » Otto Rühle, *Brown Fascism, Red Fascism*, p. 55, Spartacus, Paris, 1975.

The counterrevolution thus asserted itself in its three complementary forms: fascist, Stalinist, and democratic. The latter would prevail despotically in Western Europe, while Stalinism would persist with some difficulty in Eastern Europe (proletarian revolts in Berlin in 1953, Hungary in 1956, and Poland in 1980/82). Democracy and its social content-social democracy-also demonstrated their greatest strength in the management of both the economy and social conflicts, which, while not disappearing, remained for the most part within the strict framework of democratic legality (with the notable exception of the situation in Italy during the period known as the “Years of Lead,” from 1967 to 1983). But these were merely shocks⁴ that, on a global scale, did not represent a substantial turn in the political cycle and, as in the case of May 1968 in France, were widely over-characterized as revolutionary movements when, once again, they were nothing more than protests, albeit massive ones, that in no way questioned the foundations of the capitalist system and, therefore, of wage labor.

The revolutionary illusion of the 1970s, promoted by leftists and the capitalist left, only prolonged the counterrevolutionary character of the period through the widespread disillusionment it provoked. The heralded big night was nothing more than the flash of dawn. The proletariat returned to the penal colony with a hangover. Their lamentable practice is clearly shown here, in a video from June 1968, in front of a Wonder worker who doesn’t want to return to work.⁵ The strength of the democratic counterrevolution has been its ability to maintain its weak control over civil society far more lastingly and profoundly than the more “dictatorial” forms of counterrevolution, adequately managing conflicts, even violent ones, and managing to present itself as the most viable and “least bad” model for the continuation of capitalist exploitation. But and this should not be forgotten, this democratic form

³Bordiga led the fight against Stalinism directly and against Stalin himself. He devoted numerous lectures and texts to this topic, including *Dialogue with Staline* (1953) and *Dialogue avec les morts* (1957). <https://www.quinterna.org/lingue/francais/historique/fr/dialogueaveclemorts.pdf>

⁴Other major workers’ revolts, such as the Cordobazo in Argentina in 1969 or the events of Vitoria in Spain in 1976, could have led to a positive and international shift in the proletarian political cycle. But each time, these revolts were crushed with bloodshed, “in small clusters” and locally, failing to accumulate into this major political transformation.

⁵« La reprise du travail aux plants Wonder » (1968-2007) on : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ht1RkTMY0h4>

fundamentally owes its survival to the forms it falsely claims to oppose fascism, on the one hand, and Stalinism, on the other. The most important thing for all these forms of political domination is that capitalism is not overthrown by the only force that can do so: the proletariat, the class of the exploited.

«More than any other period in contemporary history, and on a much larger scale, ours is not a period of revolution, but of counter-revolution.» K. Korsch, *State and Counter-Revolution*, 1939, in: *Marxism and Counter-Revolution*, already cited, p. 179.

Change of political cycle and revolutionary situation

Therefore, the negative duration of the counterrevolutionary political cycle can last for many decades, while its qualitative rupture and the opening of a prerevolutionary period require a conjunction of multiple factors, both objective and subjective, which make this type of period manifest itself over a very short period. Contrary to Trotsky's theory, it is the counterrevolution that should have been declared "permanent," while the revolution represents a fleeting discontinuity for long periods.

"The task of counterrevolutionaries is simply to defend society and the principles of a community of order. It is not a spectacular undertaking; it has no final victory; it achieves its successes in the mind and heart rather than in the forum." T. Molnar, *The Counter-Revolution*, p. 228, 10/18, Paris, 1972.

In Russia, after the first "bourgeois-democratic" revolution of February 1917, it was necessary to wait for the situation to mature, until September and the majority obtained by the Bolsheviks in the Soviets, to begin to perceive the opening of a proletarian revolutionary possibility, while the events of July 17 had shown that the situation was not yet sufficiently mature. It was Lenin's "genius" to understand the opening of a new period (after Kornilov's attempted counterrevolutionary coup at the end of August) and **the relevance of the revolution.**

«On the other hand, the genius who has a clear awareness of the true general trend of an epoch, a trend whose influence is alive and well, sees it at work precisely behind all the events of his time; he therefore also concerns himself with the decisive fundamental problems of the entire period, even if he himself thinks he is only addressing the issues of the day.» G. Lukacs, *Lenin's Thought*, p. 9, Denoël Publishing, Paris, 1972.

Only during October 1917 did the more conscious Bolsheviks have to fight vigorously (against the moderate and conciliatory wing of the party majority, led by Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Stalin) to impose an understanding of the changing period and the necessary military preparation for the insurrection. It was obviously because of this prodigious historical experience that Lenin was able to conceptualize the fundamental conditions of a revolutionary situation, even if his definition was often used in an excessively mechanical and automatic manner.

« (...) For a revolution to take place, it is not enough for the exploited and oppressed masses to become aware of the impossibility of living as in the past and demand change. For a revolution to take place, it is necessary that the exploiters cannot live and govern as they did in the past. Only when "those below" no longer want to, and "those above" can no longer continue living in the old way, can

the revolution triumph. This truth is expressed in other terms: revolution is impossible without a national crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters). Therefore, for a revolution to take place, it is necessary: first, that the majority of the workers (or, in any case, the majority of conscious, reflective, and politically active workers) have fully understood the necessity of the revolution and are prepared to die for it; Secondly, the ruling classes must go through a governmental crisis which draws even the most backward masses into political life (the index of every true revolution is a rapid tenfold, or even a hundredfold, increase in the number of men capable of political struggle among the hitherto apathetic working and oppressed masses), which weakens the government and makes it possible for revolutionaries to bring about its rapid overthrow.». Lenin, *The Childish Malady of Communism (Leftism)*, p. 87, Moscow edition, 1969.

This definition of the transition to a revolutionary situation is, however, rich in precision and fundamentally defines the political and social conditions of the revolutionary possibility. Indeed, the need for a crisis affecting both "those above and those below" cannot be reduced to an economic crisis, but must be conceived as a general political crisis for the bourgeoisie, which renders it unable to continue its role as manager of the valorization process, and a political crisis of affirmation for the proletariat, which is radically transformed into an active, voluntary, and conscious subject. Insurrection and the revolutionary seizure of power are neither conceivable nor achievable without the conjunction of these two "crises," which, while interacting dialectically, do not have the same origin or the same dynamic. This also explains the very difficult nature of revolutionary alchemy and the relative brevity with which its favorable character is maintained.

The irreversible reversal of the balance of forces and the change of epoch are rarely identifiable at the time by the actors. It is in this sense that class consciousness always lags the action of agitating minorities and must, as Lukács explains, be "attributed" to the revolutionary subject in the very course of the process. This difficulty is reflected in the fact that many revolutionaries of the past too often "delayed" themselves, due to excessive optimism, realizing only after the fact that the situation had changed and that the moment for revolution had passed. As a result, they failed to develop a clear strategic retreat, which was the only way to avoid a catastrophic reaction. These opportunist tactics and maneuvers, adopted above all by the Communist International since its Second Congress, were aimed at stagnating in the illusory expectation of a resumption of the revolutionary cycle. These delaying strategies and tactics inherited from social democracy, rather than maintaining an international and internationalist direction, strongly reinforced the long-term nature of the counterrevolution. Stalinism, with its one-country socialism, its interclass frontism, and its lamentable "Third Worldism," became the most sinister manifestation of this, perpetuating the revolutionary stance and phrase only to betray its fundamental subversive essence. This was the great "disconcerting lie" (A. Ciliga).

Regarding the events in Spain, we give the floor to Karl Korsch, who *"He⁶ pointed out that the Spanish Civil War, far from inaugurating a new and positive phase in the relationship between war*

⁶The Spanish Civil War served only as a dress rehearsal for World War II **because the social revolution had been defeated** there, essentially thanks to Stalinism under Moscow's command. Furthermore, it took the full weight of the dominant ideology to impose another disconcerting lie on the world proletariat: in Spain, supposedly, two camps were facing each other: that of the democratic republic and that of fascism. The world bourgeoisie, all its tendencies and factions combined, had every interest in preventing the world proletariat from perceiving that a proletarian revolution was taking place, so that it would not actively express solidarity with it.

and revolution, had served as a dress rehearsal for the Second World War. But historical events almost always change their meaning over time: before being the practical and ideological prelude to the global conflagration, the Spanish Social War had constituted the final phase of the revolutionary process launched in April 1931” K. Korsch, p. 242.

An assessment of the shift and reversal of the balance of forces between classes is essential for understanding the period we live in and for the reasoned adaptation of priorities in the tasks and activities of communists, which must correspond either to unfavorable periods or to the more effervescent and enthusiastic periods of prosperity. The voluntaristic danger of "taking dreams for reality" exists as much as, or more so than, the localist danger of failing to perceive the proletarian breath and becoming locked into a paralyzing routine. From "Midnight in the Century" to "The Assault on Heaven," there is an accumulation of countless quantitative elements, both "objective" and "subjective," which must be analyzed precisely to understand the qualitative transformation of the long counterrevolution into a new global revolutionary wave bringing the communist solution. Debate and confrontation on these aspects are, therefore, essential for comrades who wish to understand the situation in order to intervene appropriately, without activism or academicism, in the current dynamics.

May these few notes serve to stimulate debate.

Fj, Eu, Ms & Mm.

Translated by IsaCR.

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