

Communism 2010, Part I

February 2010

Part A. Political power and revolutions: with reference to Communism

A schematism of class dictatorship

We can begin with a dogmatic-schematic depiction of political power.

In society, sovereignty is possessed by an economic class that has a de facto *class* executive with effective influence on the security services and the permanent government. (Never mind powers vested in elected officials.)

Bourgeois society is characterized by the grand bourgeoisie's direct relation to the army and the permanent government: the relation that affords a protection to private property independent of who may be elected to government office.

The permanent government: career bureaucrats and army officers who hold their jobs as elected officials come and go.

“The system” is not changed when different officials are elected. If the policies of elected officials are deemed to be crackpot populism, then the army deposes the officials at the behest of the ruling class executive. (As happened in Chile.) Matters are less clear if the elected official who espouses crackpot populism has a military background and acts to convert his office into a dictatorship. (Venezuela.) Nevertheless, if his populist utopia is ill-conceived, we may expect that “conservatism” will somehow overturn it.

It follows that bourgeois society is a class dictatorship of the grand bourgeoisie. A class dictatorship does not need to mean a personal tyranny. In the U.S. as of 2008 or 2009, big bankers clearly enjoyed a class dictatorship. The de facto configuration was entirely outside the Constitution. The government relied on officials drawn from bankers' ranks, and was at the service of bankers. But there was no personal tyranny. Governance was a consultation of bankers and their representatives.

The U.S. central bank gives bankers a concentrated post of influence on U.S. society. But bankers have other, noneconomic avenues of influence. The Council on Foreign Relations is an undeclared guide of the federal government. It is entirely outside the Constitution. In fact, the CFR may substantiate Gramsci's notion of civil society, given that government is guided by a private voluntary organization. (The CFR is not so voluntary for government officials, who may need to belong to it in order to advance in government.)

[A very important lesson: the U.S. government does not proceed in accordance with the U.S. Constitution. A descriptive Constitution would not look anything like the historic

Constitution. E.g. all war-making power is in fact vested in the President, and wars are fought without being declared.]

It would follow that the coercive system of power here depicted can only be broken by coercion. The class dictatorship can only be broken by an armed seizure of power. But then the armed seizure of power is dictatorship by definition.

The question then is how representation is structured in the armed band that seizes power.

membership

consultative body

chain of command

Once an armed band seizes power, once a new class dictatorship is in force, the question is whether it establishes democratic institutions.

The above coarse schematism overlooks a crucial juncture. It follows by definition that one class dictatorship will be succeeded by another. But that does not settle the question of whether the new sovereigns will proceed by decree and repression. It calls to mind Lenin's piece, "A Contribution to the History of the Question of the Dictatorship," 20 October 1920. Lenin is associated with the use of the word 'dictatorship' in the unfamiliar sense of class power. But he had to acknowledge that it more conventionally meant rule by decree and repression on the part of one or a few people.

What must be understood is that a revolution may pass through a phase in which a democratic agenda is advanced through a dictatorship in the conventional sense, even a terror. But then that exercise of power may correspond to an extremely unstable situation.

•

Lessons from history

Given a schematism of "political power as a class dictatorship," it would be perfectly exemplified in practice if

a revolution that transferred sovereignty from one class to another were made by a hegemonic insurgency fighting the established regime with a dedicated insurgent army.

But when we consider historic revolutions, matters are not this neat. The American and French revolutions advanced the interests of the bourgeoisie under the slogan of the equality of all men.

In fact, it is possible to argue that the net result of the American revolution was to institute a bourgeois sovereignty under the cloak of a revolution in political form. The revolutions depicted themselves as revolutions in political form. The French revolution did not have a hegemonic insurgency or a dedicated insurgent army.

We spell all this out in detail in an appendix.

What the American and French revolutions created (as opposed to transmitted) was entirely political. As we say at the end of the appendix, in America, substantial men were divided between capitalists and slaveowners. The feudal estates were back in Britain. The Constitution was a compromise between capitalists and slaveowners; the 1776 revolution would not end slavery. The Revolution did not create an economic system.

The French case saw sovereignty pass to an economic class that had not held sovereignty before. **But the revolution did not create that class or its economic activity. It was rather a matter of the class appropriating real sovereignty to itself.**

Thus, the eighteenth-century revolutions did not create any mode of economic activity, although they certainly enabled it to burgeon.

•

Appendix.

Political Power and Actual Revolutions

Given a schematism of “political power as a class dictatorship,” when we test it against actual revolutions, matters seem to be more loose than the schematism allows for.

The American Revolution of 1776

We find that the American Revolution had more the character of a *secession* of existing bodies from an existing structure.

“The American war against Britain” started in 1775 when the British acted at Concord. The colonies called out their militias and sent troops to Boston. Thus, the colonies were already rudimentary “states.”

After the battle of Concord, the American colonies sent delegates to the Second Continental Congress of 1775. This body was the “other side” in the “war against Britain.”

The colonies successively established themselves as states by ratifying constitutions c. January 1776. These constitutions provided for filling many political offices by election. In that sense, democracy was already taken for granted.

We find it necessary to speak of the Revolution's principals or constituency—**propertied white Christian males**—since the democracy was a democracy for them. The vote was intended for only a fraction of the population. Plantation production was carried on in the colonies, and individual property in slaves was legal (and would continue to be). Thus, there was a civil issue of slavery in the colonies that was not proximate in France and in the French Revolution. (For France, slave production was externalized to its colonies.)

In the American Revolution, a **new class dictatorship** emerged from the Revolution's constituency. The new class dictatorship manifested itself, for example, in restrictions on the electoral process—on who could vote and who could run for office. That was over and beyond the nullification of individual liberty represented by slavery.

The Continental Congress formed the American nation and issued the Declaration of Independence in July 1776. George Washington was given the command of the Continental Army.

We understand that Washington and his soldiers had had military experience in the French and Indian War. Thus, the Continental Army was not created in a vacuum. As an army with ranks and promotions, it had a precedent.

The Continental Army immediately gained control of the colonies. The British were routed.

What students know as the Revolutionary War was a British counter-insurgency that started after the British were nominally defeated. The British counter-attack began in 1776. The war lasted from 1776 to 1781.

We understand that the Continental Congress was very casual in its supervision of Washington's military campaign. Washington could almost be thought to have been heading a private army. In that sense the revolution was remarkably anarchic.

The Continental Congress created a more formal continental body in 1777, the Confederation. We are told that the Confederation was finally ratified and renamed the United States as of 1781. This may be the crucial juncture as far as the nature of the ensuing regime was concerned. Now there was a template of continental governance, and if anything, it was too anarchic.

The British counter-insurgency collapsed when Cornwallis surrendered in Yorktown in 1781 and Britain abandoned the field. That left the continental Confederation or United States as the ruling authority.

In the diplomatic maneuvers with Britain, the United States was still called the "Confederation." (This is a contradiction in the way the history is told.) Adams, Franklin, and Jay were sent to Paris as representatives of the Confederation. They negotiated the Treaty of Paris with Britain in 1783. The Treaty was ratified by the Congress of the Confederation in 1784.

After the United States existed diplomatically, what came to be known as the Constitutional Convention of 1787 was called to resolve disputes between states. Its perspective broadened, and it wrote and signed a Constitution in September 1787. The Bill of Rights was added later.

The Confederation never became despotic relative to its principals, its constituency, because it formed and reformed itself from precedents of elective governance. The Revolution's principals were steeped in an expectation of individual autonomy for themselves, and abhorred being the objects of despotic paternalism. Thus, the delegates acted in good faith relative to their constituency. All the while, individual autonomy was envisioned for a fraction of the population only. Today this may seem like a screaming inconsistency. But given a significant nucleus of individual liberty, the rationale of the situation would be to extend it to other segments of the population in the ensuing decades.

The Constitution the delegates wrote and signed in 1787 did not satisfy the public that it adequately protected the individual from the state. So the Bill of Rights was formulated and adopted. Again, that bespoke the good faith of those colonists who had governmental authority.

Give or take isolated rebellions, the constituency gave its consent to the new arrangements. There was no surviving local formation—aristocracy or Church—seeking to regain authoritarian power. No individual or group sought to constitute a tyranny. There was no division of society that required a tyrant to keep order. A slave rebellion was not able to be mounted. (Although a slave rebellion would break out in Haiti less than a decade later.)

Only in marginal ways was anything like a tyrant's power exercised in the American Revolution: in the flight of loyalists to "Canada"; in the suppression of certain small rebellions. (Historians speak of loyalists fleeing to "Canada" even though the country Canada did not exist until 1867. It might be more accurate to say that they fled to "the Canadas.")

The actors in the American Revolution were not so much self-acting individuals as a loose coalition of existing governments already committed to democracy for the constituency. They already had militias and they had leaders who were already military veterans. After the body became a diplomatic reality, it reconstructed itself. An important and permanent feature of the polity—protection of the individual from the state—was the result of popular pressure.

The remarkable achievement of the American Revolution is that there was no Restoration, no backtracking to the status quo ante. Nor, again, was there any pronounced democratic terror. The fraction of propertied white Christian males whose interests were expressed by the Revolution and the Constitution held to both the Revolution and the Constitution as ideals.

The Civil War that came many decades later, in 1861, may be considered to be part of the unfinished business of the Revolution. (Which individuals were autonomous, which were franchised?) All the while, the Constitution was safeguarded. There was no regression to an earlier era; there was no despotic usurpation. (The victorious Union exercised a radical despotism over the Confederacy for a few years as a right of conquest.)

•

The French Revolution

The event called the French Revolution began because the King sanctioned an elected assembly, the Estates General. But already a new order was being envisioned privately, because the Club of Duport, also called the Committee of Thirty, had been formed in 1788. It consisted of a social upper echelon. It called for a greater role in society for the Third Estate. It would be displaced in importance by the more radical Jacobin Clubs.

As for the King's assembly, it began to confer autonomy and constitution-making powers on itself. Conspicuous among the delegates envisioning a new order, so far as occupation was concerned, were the lawyers. In June 1789 the assembly declared itself the National Assembly. The Constituent Assembly was formed on 9 July 1789. It was supported by the mob, which began to lynch unpopular authorities.

There was only one formal army in France, the royal national army. An infantry regiment went over to the Constituent Assembly. An important qualification here. La Fayette took up command of the National Guard, so that it became a pro-revolution military detachment under him. (Why didn't the King challenge this immediately?) In fact, La Fayette's National Guard would act like a political party.

The National Constituent Assembly began to enact democratic measures, including the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Thus, by late 1789, monarchist France had a republican Assembly without a formal army of its own, only support from certain military detachments.

Finally, in 1790, "the French" army began to split along political lines.

Even though the King still held the throne, and France had only one royal army, the Assembly proceeded to enact revolutionary measures.

By July 1791, the polarization between royalism and republicanism came to a head. The royalists began to counter-attack.

France achieved a Constitutional Monarchy in 1791. A Legislative Assembly was formed from the Constituent Assembly. It degenerated into chaos in 1792.

Evidently the sympathies of the mob were tremendously important. The King was allowing elected delegates to steal the state under his nose. His half-hearted attempts to impede them were overrun by the mob. Again, formally, there was only one army, the royal national army.

In September 1792, a Convention was constituted. It declared France a republic. Now, incredibly, France commenced various foreign wars with its only army. France remained one nation to the world even though it was civilly divided.

As of 1792 at the latest, governance was split between the royal camp and, approximately, the republican camp. Power had slipped from royal hands. There was only one army. It was now commanded, at least de facto, by the radicals. It was fighting abroad on behalf of "France."

Dual power with the monarchy effectively ended when the King was executed in January 1793. In June 1793, the Convention adopted the Constitution of 1793. In the turmoil, it was never applied. For a period, Robespierre had the enthusiasm of the mob.

The first civil war of the Revolution erupted in 1793, started by counter-revolutionary peasants. (The same peasants who had ended feudalism by their rebellion?) The peasants were isolated and crushed by a national army that sided with the Revolution. But matters were far from being rosy. The radicals in the French government dealt with the counter-revolution with the utmost ruthlessness. The Revolution became a mass hysteria whose violence verged on genocide.

Incredibly, the foreign wars were prosecuted successfully by the French national army commanded by the radicals.

In 1794-95, the sentiment of **the new class dictatorship** swung to the political Right. There was a reaction among the well-placed cadres of the new order. The governing body was reconstituted as the Directory.

After that, the charade of democracy would prove unworkable. The lately "conservative" new ruling class was bedeviled by social divisions it could not manage. In 1799, Napoleon, a creature of the adventures of the French national army, was welcomed as a benign despot by the Directory.

o

Thus, the French Revolution did not begin with an insurgent body with a dedicated military with a clear program. A new order was conceived privately by advocates of the Third Estate. The public formal process began by royal invitation in an attempt to appease discontent. The private "clubs" had democratic aspirations, but none of them was a hegemonic insurgency fighting the royal state with a dedicated insurgent army. Governance evolved in a fluid way in which the sympathies of the mob were all-important.

A class had already formed, sometimes using the label the Third Estate (although that was misleadingly inclusive), that was able to appropriate real sovereignty to itself (behind political forms). It was suffused with republican and democratic ideas. At the same time, it had a “conservative” focus and a “radical” focus. First one, then the other dominated; the differences were a life-or-death matter.

As noted, the occupation most common among advocates of the Third Estate was that of attorney. The lawyers represented a class, the bourgeoisie, that appropriated real sovereignty to itself in the Revolution. After the era of the Empire, there would be a throwback in political form in the Restoration. How deeply that cut into the bourgeoisie’s new sovereignty is a question we will not explore here.

The aroused mob was able to choose heroes for itself to some extent. Some aspects of the theory of representative government and democracy were understandable to the mob as demands on its behalf. The right to vote. The price of bread was an issue that went beyond the theory of republicanism. When only men were given rights, there was a spontaneous insurgency of women. That insurgency illustrates that the democratic idea was intuitively understandable. But female suffrage and so forth were not generally entertained ideas, and women did not have the force to impose them.

As another example, France’s colonialism did not become a signal issue in the course of the Revolution. It was not intuitively obvious to the mob that France’s existence as a nation conducting military adventures and as a colonial power were “undemocratic.” All the same, we must not overlook that a slave rebellion broke out in Haiti as early as 1791—in fact, well before the climax of the Revolution. If Haiti did not become a signal issue to the Revolution, that must be kept in mind in comparing the French case to the American case. It is not that France did not have a slave question; it is that that question was successfully kept external.

The idea of Communism was introduced into the turmoil, but it did not arrive as an intuitive goal of the mob. It was introduced by one man’s conspiracy and was easily crushed while the Directory prevailed, during 1796-97.

All this being said, the French Revolution was not simply a matter of the representatives of a class constituting a democracy as a humanitarian act. The climactic years of the Revolution encompassed the Reign of Terror (1793-74) and Thermidor/the Directory (1794-1795 and after). The political center of gravity swung from radical republicanism to conservative republicanism.

These positions were expressed by a political behavior that has not adequately been identified and studied as a distinct phenomenon. The intentions may have been democratic on paper. But in both phases, government was dictatorial. The written pretensions to democracy were ignored, and government was by decree or by machination and repression. At all times, the mass hysteria of the mob translated into terror.

Thus, the French Revolution went through an episode that the United States was spared. As noted above, only in marginal ways was anything like dictatorial power exercised in the American Revolution.

The very pivot of the French Revolution was something that could be called a **revolutionary dictatorship or a democratic terror**. In the name of democracy, rule by decree and repression were the order of the day. Perhaps there were precedents in the republics of Savonarola and Cromwell.

In the French case, the immediate ending was not rosy. The Directorate could not manage the situation, and handed power to Napoleon. Not only that; Napoleon's rule was succeeded by an era of monarchist restoration. As in seventeenth-century England, the idea of republicanism proved to be only an episode in the short term.

Only with the proclamation of the Third Republic in the second half of the nineteenth century did France gain anything like a sustained democracy. But that democracy collapsed in the test of 1940. It remains to be seen whether the democracy France finally achieved after the Second World War will prove to be enduring.

If the Third Estate harbored a ruling class, it seems that that class could appropriate real sovereignty while abiding with monarchy in politics at various times in the nineteenth century. (As we said, that is a question we do not explore here. It cannot be shocking given that many nations in Europe are monarchies to this day. It is the fact that revolutionary France ultimately acceded to a republic that is unusual and notable.)

o

Let us resume with the governance of France in the 1790s. The prevailing mythology presents a picture of the French Revolution that is a poor guide to future action. In the first place, the Revolution is presented as a model, as an ideal. But it simply cannot be a model, because it did not have a rosy outcome. The best you can claim for it is that it was a necessary disaster. But to give the Revolution credit even for the Third Republic simply leaps over decades of embarrassing political backpedaling.

Secondly, to repeat, it is covered up that the pivot of the revolution was a **revolutionary dictatorship or democratic terror**. Democracy was not advanced by democratic means. We cannot even praise what happened by saying that the revolutionary dictators always used their power for virtuous purposes. Such a justification does not work. The Revolution's very heroes were executed. Power was then handed off to a benign despot.

We have never begun to learn the lessons of the French Revolution. It is pictured as a model of the accession of a new class and the replacement of one political system with another. A new class, which gains power with the grudging sanction of the existing system, and recruits its army from the existing army, gives democracy to the populace as a humanitarian act. Then everyone lives happily ever after.

To repeat, this ignores the two greatest lessons. In a few years, the experiment failed (if you don't like overt despotism and reaction).

And, the pivot was a political form that has never been assimilated in political thought. To give the revolutionary dictatorship automatic approval would be unwarranted, because it ended badly. When the rule of law was shouldered aside, the outcome was not always felicitous. When Robespierre and the others became heroes of the revolution, they signed their own death sentences. The mass murders carried out in 1793 did not bring about a harmonious society.

All the same, France might not have escaped the orbit of monarchy without these extreme measures. What we have not assimilated is the seeming oxymoron, a revolutionary dictatorship or democratic terror that arrives at a preferred goal by taking a wretched path.

The prevailing mythology indoctrinates us with the notion that dictatorship is an instrument of the Right. That is a major conceptual miscalculation. Dictatorship has been an authentic Leftist instrument as well. Then the perspective for the dictatorship is that *absolute power in the hands of a few* will be used to *democratize* society. Or that a part of the populace, including the masses, will impose democratic measures while disintitling the portion of the populace that doesn't support them. There is an immense paradox here. The entire fate of the society is entrusted to the good will of the dictators. The problem is not only that they may begin to confer privileges on themselves. The problem is that they may employ the tyranny to keep the society subjugated when their scheme for a utopia proves ill-conceived. (Cuba.)

As to the first problem, there is no guarantee that ruthless individual power in the name of democracy will be used to extend actual democracy further and further. The important lesson from France is that the Jacobins did not even live long enough to make a privileged clique of themselves. The very structure they endorsed turned against them. Even the Directory was not able to become a proper usurper. When despotism was the order of the day, the Directory simply gave the job to a man unburdened with revolutionary credentials.

o

The preceding observations have to do with the detail of the Revolution as it lurched towards despotism. We may return to the larger upheaval in which Louis XVI was removed, and a new class moved to the fore in French society, whatever the political forms. This upheaval lacked the political clarity of a revolutionary civil war. The contest for political hegemony was tossed on a sea of popular sentiment and mob violence. The Revolution's leaders did not survive their respective days in the sun. One phalanx after another was executed on the roller coaster ride.

•

In both the American and French cases, the ideas of a new society were abroad as the process unfolded. Tom Paine was a crucial propagandist. Republican ideas and republican allegiance may have been explored in secret by French Masons—although other private self-appointed radical headquarters may have been even more important in the French case.

•

Both the American and the French Revolutions had a striking feature that would recede into the past in later political upheavals. Large, obvious segments of the population had not been granted individual autonomy by the prevailing revolutionary doctrine. “Liberty for all” was constrained in ways that seem to today’s sensibility to be screamingly inconsistent.

But again, given the nucleus of individual liberty, the only direction in which the situation could evolve was to extend that autonomy to unfranchised segments of the population in subsequent political upheavals.

Today, the only frontier in this respect is the doctrine of minor children: there is a bio-developmental reason for not giving children the rights of adults.

•

A major feature of these revolutions is that their new creations were entirely political. In America, substantial men were divided between capitalists and slaveowners. The feudal estates were back in Britain. The Constitution was a compromise between capitalists and slaveowners; the 1776 revolution would not end slavery.

The French case saw sovereignty pass to an economic class that had not held sovereignty before. But the revolution did not create that class or its economic activity. It was rather a matter of the class appropriating real sovereignty to itself.

Thus, the revolutions did not create any mode of economic activity.

• • •

Part B. The means of production. Technology and the evolution of forms of property.

Passing from previous centuries to the present, post-industrial technological progress introduces an increasing artificiality in society. Economic property is increasingly centered on financial conjuring.

Work is shifted toward the supervisor (automation) or the consumer (desktop production)—even if there is still a role for mass manual labor outside the high-wage zone. Let us not pass over this too quickly. The reality of automation is key.

In politics, there are more avenues of popular communication, even if they do not translate into a more democratic distribution of power in present society.

Communism might be heralded by a revolution. Even so, there would have to be an evolutionary preparation of the means of production and of forms of property. Communism would be accomplished by the redeployment of existing productive technology—that technology could not be conjured up from nothing.

Moreover, a socioeconomically abnormal, technologically sophisticated island could not exist autonomously in today's world. Thus, Communism might require the world to have become federated beyond the existing regional federations and the present United Nations arrangements.

So it is that the “Communist” countries of the twentieth century proved to be opportunistic disasters. The notion of socialism in a backward country (introduced by the Bolsheviks) was an opportunistic fantasy.

Helphand and Trotsky impermissibly revised Marxism: to give a chance for “socialist revolution” in the Tsarist empire which they misguidedly thought of as their homeland. (The empire with the least respected, most degenerate, and most hated regime in the “Western” orbit.)

The notion that Communism could be the last resort of the modernization process was a disaster for Communism (and for the populations affected). (“Disaster”? The path of modernization passed through mass murder, entirely senselessly in cases such as Cambodia or Ethiopia. The terror and the police-state political culture inflicted a long-lasting traumatization on the population in every case—evident in the reversion of post-1993 Russia to strongman rule.)

• • •

Communism 2010, Part II. The case for Communism

July 2010

I. There are four well-considered reasons to be in favor of Communism.

I.A. Capitalism can only function via lending. But the buying and selling of debts is conducted by a private financial hierarchy whose activity is always a confidence racket when it is viewed piercingly. (The activity is always discovered to violate existing laws of fraud if the latter are enforced.)

Debt costs rise at a higher rate than the value of production. Periodically, then, incautious lenders and borrowers have to be shaken out of the economy. The confidence racket collapses.

If we add national government to the system, additional dimensions are added to the collapse. National governments print the money and operate national banks. Governments, too, can fail financially. And—governments can bail out private lenders who otherwise would go bankrupt. (The famous socialism for the rich.)

There will always be another financial collapse that will bring on hard times for most people. Physical production is the tail, wagged by the dog, the racket.

So, developed capitalism is crowned by its financiers, who become its general staff. This lesson became manifest during the economic turmoil starting in 2008. The need of humans to provision themselves is met by an incredibly elaborate and counter-intuitive racket that must periodically nosedive. Humans depend for their survival on a quantified hoax far beyond their understanding, one that inevitably plunges them into economic distress. Finance is an impenetrable god that humans have created and set above themselves, one that rewards and punishes in a perpetual cycle.

This is unworthy of reason and ingenuity. If humans cannot think of something more transparent and more steady, then the human race is pathetic.

I.B. Capitalism needs one or more “poverty” classes in order to function. i) A class of “slave” labor. ii) A class of the destitute who do not have “certified” (on-the-books) jobs.

Even as capitalism creates “pleasure palaces” in the advanced nations, in which millions of people are affluent and those who aren’t at least have the dream of escaping poverty, it leaves vast populations in destitution.

It didn’t play out in the manner of Marx’s immiseration of the proletariat. Skilled and organized labor is rewarded above the poverty level—while capitalists export production as much as possible to low-wage segments or regions. [The immiseration is exported by the “pioneer modernizing nations” (which began as colonizers) to become the fate of those bypassed by modernization’s social reconstitution.]

In fact, history has brought us to the point that one of the *outsider multitudes*, one multitude bypassed by modernization, has become a political actor in opposition to the affluent world. The umma—Islam. A multitude which was never modernized—but which has a sophisticated (i.e. monotheistic-imperial) identity—has launched a war on the affluent world in the name of social regression.

Other multitudes, as in the Sudan, languish without striking at the affluent, without having any organization by which to strike.

I.C. Private property in the means of production is a mode of property conferring invidious power. Like ownership of slaves. Standard provisioning facilities, whether power plants or vehicle plants or hospitals, should be publicly or collectively owned. This means in practice that they should be at the disposal of a public representative executive (see below).

I.D. What is *really* wrong with capitalism: **commodification**. Commodification means that everything an individual does must be a quantifiable success or failure in selfish aggrandizement. It imposes on a person a soul-destroying addiction to pecuniary thrift or acquisition. This fault can be conceived somewhat separately from solicitude for the destitute. Our text on this topic is “The Economist’s Commodification of Life.” It is an advanced topic and we won’t go into it here.

•

II. By what avenue should we conceive Communism? As prerequisites for that answer, two large chapters in an economic sociology for Communism need to be supplied. We have dealt with that in two studies, found in Part I of this series. Part A:

Political power and revolutions: with reference to Communism

Appendix. Political Power and Actual Revolutions

Part B:

The means of production. Technology and the evolution of forms of property.

•

III. As to the avenue by which we should conceive Communism, there are two facets.

III.A. Communism needs to be defined in the first instance by certain standards — standards that do not attempt to specify the solutions of detail. These standards establish what Communism is at all. If they are not met, the formation does not deserve to be called Communism.

Boldface indicates the standards. Some discussion follows.

1. **Communism is intrinsically high-tech. Inasmuch as technological progress can be represented as a one-way climb, Communism conserves all progress, and adds to it immeasurably.**

2. **There is no money; there are no markets. The economy functions without price-defining trades of goods. That means that production has to be scheduled in physical terms in quantities that are all aligned in a central clearing-house.**

Capital construction projects are scheduled without reference to an interest rate. No monetary valuation of alternative solutions, e.g. power plants. Then computer simulation of alternatives in physical terms might become immensely important.

3. **Even though the physical quantities that comprise economic activity are all aligned in a central clearing-house, they are not all dictated from the central**

clearing-house. In other words, it is out of the question for Communist economic activity all to be ordered from one central computer. There must be local discretion, discretion that communicates with the central clearing-house and is tested against priorities.

This has to be said because the first mathematical model of Communist economic coordination may make the unrealistic assumption of absolute central direction for illustrative simplicity.

4. **Everyone will unconditionally be provisioned at a “subsistence” level (which level may be rather generous).** To each according to his or her needs.

5. **There are no personal hordes of goods. What you cannot use cannot be your property.**

6. **Liked work. People’s consumption is not tied to the “work” they contribute. People “work” because humans have a natural tropism for purposive activity. People “work” to *give back* to the community that has nurtured them.** There is, then, the problem of organizing labor service. An excellent example: physicians. People who need intensive training for several years and are given life-or-death responsibility for other people. They have to attain certified competence. Once they are accredited, they need to stay on the treadmill of service to be proficient.

Another excellent example: engineers of all descriptions, especially those dealing with technologies that can be weaponized.

There will, then, be peer pressure on individuals to make choices of careers when young and hew to them.

Presumably construction and maintenance workers will still be indispensable, even if the character of the work is redesigned around automation.

7. **The society may have many administrative bodies whose role is to supervise necessary functions.** The training of physicians and their allocation to [service regions] would be one small example.

8. **At the same time, the society has a general or strategic executive. Delegated sovereignty, i.e. authority.**

[an executive at the center with a system-wide perspective is mandatory.]

How is the strategic executive chosen? By election? Will those seeking to be the world leader campaign as individuals (with programs for the social future) in elections?

9. **Devolving from the strategic executive. The security service (army/police). The “court of justice” system.** (Types of crimes that could be possible in a Communist society and the means of curbing them.)

Because there exists high tech that can be weaponized, there has to be a policing organization.

10. **There have to be safeguards against usurpation by the strategic executive.**

What prevents the strategic executive from usurping power, or, for that matter, from creating an enclave of luxury for itself?

Social democracy, for example, may be accused of wanting to reduce the general population to contented servility in relation to their social democratic lords. In contrast, Communism would strive to create a society of peers: that is its whole point.

Would it help to educate all members of society up to the level of a profession (even if that word might be broadened and weakened)? [Graham Priest: out of the question.]

[When we propose that everybody will be a social equal, I think of the example of knowing a psychiatrist socially. Their training and accreditation gives them certain significant powers which are formidable, not to say intimidating. If they have the legal power of involuntary commitment, they are like prosecutor, judge, and jury in one person. It takes some doing for a layperson to relate to somebody of with that accreditation as a social equal.]

Would there be institutions as in the federal government of the U.S., with separation of powers and checks and balances? The determination of policies by a body (the strategic executive) separate from those who administer the policies? (Then the strategic executive would be legislative.) Independence of the courts?

III.B. Once we have these non-negotiable standards, the question *what formation might realize them* is a question for science fiction. It is a conceptual problem.

The question of whether Communism is “good” was already taken care of in I and in II.A—or else we do not propose to answer that question in conceiving how Communism might be implemented. **The only question is whether it is possible to implement II.A (in a pragmatic sense of ‘possible’).**

It has nothing to do with a contest of intuitive moral superiority, with special consideration for victims.

We do not refer to “the interests of this or that birth-group” or the like. Special benefits for Native Americans or transsexuals or the like.

The point is so profound and so important that it bears repeating. Marx's bearded, prophetic indignation in fact takes the wrong path. It encourages the idea that Communism issues from a contest in intuitive moral superiority, a contest to find which "group" is the most pathetic and victimized. In fact, Communism is sophisticated and counter-intuitive, and could never result from such a contest. To envision Communism is not a moral superiority contest. The only moral superiority consists in what may have already been covered in the earlier statements of requisites. Beyond that, the question is not whether Communism is "good" (there may always be people who would rather have lived as royal courtiers), but whether it is possible at all. That question has not yet received an assured affirmative answer.

• • •

IV. Communism's sophistication

What is uniquely demanded in a socialist or Communist revolution is that a mode of economic activity is expected to be created by the revolution. In this respect, the early socialist or Communist visions were quite naïve. Marx and particularly Engels were wrong in trumpeting optimistically that the reorganization of capitalism in the late nineteenth century already achieved the socialization of production. Big factories, big companies, and publicly held companies were not precursors of Communism—as we now know.

The early visions assumed that the mode of economic activity already existed in the form of production by wage labor. All that was needed was to declare the organizations of laborers (e.g. the unions) to be sovereign and to continue industrial production as before. The right label for that is probably syndicalism.

Unfortunately, syndicalism has nothing to do with an actual socialism or Communism capable of permanently superseding the preceding system. Syndicalism would merely make workers partners in the factory where they work. The factory becomes an atelier run by partners.

For genuine socialism or Communism, property in the means of production cannot remain private. The collective, the society, must be the owner. A representative executive must view the system as a whole. And it must plan for the system as a whole.

Let us backtrack and review the capitalist phenomenon. Capitalism is anarchy in economics. Every individual corresponds to a stock of wealth (which may be zero). Individuals meet in self-interest and trade at market prices. (Why does one not simply rob the other?—That is never adequately explained. How do auction market prices, sometimes called parametric prices, come about?—There have to be many buyers and sellers of each product.) The individuals proceed in narrow self-interest. Somehow the ensemble of their independent decisions is supposed to take the economy in a prosperous direction. "The invisible hand."

In contrast, in Communism, individuals do not live from their own hordes so that some are rich and some are poor. All consume from the collective stock according to their different individual needs. (E.g. men and women need different consumer goods. Different goods are needed for different ages and different sizes of people. Etc.) There is a hierarchy of economic monitoring and direction. Final authority resides at the apex—even as provisions for decentralization are imperative. The economy is viewed as a system in real time by a public, representative executive, and is steered by that executive.

The Communist idea does not issue from the spontaneous consciousness of the poor. The nineteenth-century Communists went completely wrong in this respect. The poor may dream of a change of fortune that makes them individually wealthy in the existing, capitalist economic system. Even if they accept the notion of “share and share alike,” to demand that an authority seize all consumer goods, and ration them so that no individual lives luxuriously or starves, will only have the effect of equalizing poverty. (A partial equalization of poverty may have been seen in Cuba—and what happened in Cuba is far from the worst case. North Korea may be more like the worst case. Of course, the leaders are spared the wretched conditions in which the populace lives.)

Communism’s solutions would comprise an immensely sophisticated science that would basically have nothing to do with the spontaneous consciousness of the poor. Communism cannot rise from some spontaneous politics of the poor. It has nothing to do with the poor demanding that the state debit the rich in order to give consumables to the poor. Under Communism, the rich would not exist as a cow the government could milk. Nor would the poor go to the rich to receive employment. Nor would there be a class of “poor” who existed only to receive state charity.

What is more, Communism cannot rise from a politics that identifies victim groups and defers to them and lionizes them. The systemic planning for automation that would characterize Communism has nothing to do with what is intuitively cathartic to victims. Communism would not salve victimhood. It would not simply turn oppression upside down. It would not foster regressive (obscurantist, demagogic) cultures that give victims their identity. It would eliminate victim status in favor of treating people alike.

An authentic Communism focuses on the question how production is organized: its organization has to be high-tech and counter-intuitive. Moreover, Communism would not only have consumer goods being dispensed from one public stock. Larger or smaller regions could request supplies of intermediate goods, from which they would make their own final goods via voluntary labor. (E.g. cooking. People may want to cook as an alternative to eating from what amounts to national Horn & Hardarts dispensaries.)

Marx was utterly wrong that in positing that you can build Communism without knowing what the end result will look like. The end result dominates absolutely, dictating solutions that are counter-intuitive.

Communism is counter-intuitive and high-tech. The “operations research” involved could not possibly present itself to the untutored intuition. It can only be launched, if at all, in a

late industrial economy in which automation is already well-understood (whether or not it has been “best” implemented). Moreover, Communism might require the world to have become federated beyond the existing regional federations and the present United Nations arrangements. Communism could not be just an island. A socioeconomically abnormal, technologically sophisticated island could not exist autonomously in today’s world. It would be axiomatic that Communism would spread everywhere.

•

V. How Communism Might Accede to Power

We may pass from historic examples to speculate on how Communism might accede to power. Communism would have to begin with a literature that spelled out how it would work, a literature that made its feasibility plausible.

The core of the transition to Communism would begin with a community of research on Communist economic engineering. Already this is a remarkable step, because we are calling for the rise of a science that is not approved by the class in power. We are asking that work of a professional level be done for free without being solicited by any organization approved by the ruling class. And yet the trend is in the opposite direction. In late capitalism, advanced research becomes more and more mercenary. Unsolicited and unpaid research is treated with more and more condescension, if not contempt.

Communist economic engineering would have to become an identified theoretical science even though the ruling class did not support it. That research would have to gain a constituency among well-educated and even well-placed people. Even a large number of them.

Communism’s support would come from social elements the technocrats hoped to recruit. But somehow these elements would want something beyond a monopolistic and paternalistic reinforcement of capitalism.

A technology-heavy capitalism would enter one of its periodic financial crises. By now, the Communist idea would be popularized. Disorder and chaos would portend. There would be a widespread demand for a Constituent Assembly, which the existing regime would grant because of its severe insecurity.

What is the scope of the regime and the Assembly we are talking about? Again, it may be that Communism is not possible without a precedent of world federalism. The regime and the Assembly might have as their scope one or more continents or the entire world.

Well-placed people favoring Communism would dominate in the Constituent Assembly. The Assembly would confer autonomy and constitution-making powers on itself. It would attempt to recruit elements of the existing army to the side of itself and the agitated populace.

The Assembly would begin to enact measures comprising the institutional preconditions of Communism. Ownership of property would be transferred to the Assembly. A representative executive would be constituted with the mission of making an inventory of the economy and drafting a plan for conversion to Communism.

The Assembly would want to isolate the existing regime politically so that it could no longer expect its orders to be obeyed. Again, the Assembly would seek politically to win the army to its side. In any division of the population and test of strength, the Assembly would command *whoever was loyal to it* as an army to secure its hegemonic authority.

Necessary labor would be required to build the infrastructure of Communism, which would require a great deal of dedicated productive capacity accompanied by a great deal of new “planning” software. In this period, such labor would still be motivated, or at least recompensed, by wages redeemable in consumer goods. To gain or maintain political support, the Assembly would have to enact measures immediately understandable by the populace as democratic benefits.

As I have recognized in recent years, it is an odd and unanswered question how a directorate with Communist aspirations is going to steer a post-capitalist economy toward actual Communism. The difficulty is that we would have something that would resemble the Soviet Union or Cuba institutionally, even though it would start from a far higher level and would have a goal far beyond “catching up with capitalism in industrialization.”

•

VI. A revolutionary dictatorship?

What we have not yet addressed is whether the accession of Communism would involve a revolutionary dictatorship as was exemplified in the French Revolution.

Communism is “democracy in economics,” but the measures taken would not evolve through a prolonged process of negotiation with all elements of the population. Rather, radical measures would be taken abruptly that would better the position of non-propertied elements, period-paid labor and so forth. They would be defended by whatever army the Constituent Assembly or representative executive could recruit to itself.

The dictators would create representative and democratic institutions and then dissolve their directorate in favor of those institutions. The chances of success of this crucial transition depend in part on how keenly the constituency is monitoring what its representatives do.

•

VII. Does Communism begin with a ruling class, and what is it?

Do we find the intimation of a ruling class in the above picture of how Communism might accede to power?

In the first place, there are obviously classes and segments of the population in late-bourgeois society that would be disintegrated by a revolution. Large and small capitalists. Private farmers, whether individuals or agribusinesses. Segments of the population committed to parochialism to the point of preferring an established religion. (Note that the question of an established religion affects many nations today. Modernity has not outgrown this issue.)

We speculate about a revolutionary dictatorship because Communism could proceed only if the wishes of these segments of the population were blocked, and that might require the exercise of force.

Where would support for Communism come from? From whom would a revolutionary directorate be drawn?

What is the first class that is the candidate to replace the bourgeoisie as ruling class? What class can represent all those who are not major owners, and at the same time can supervise a political executive?

Consider the non-propertied populace (roughly speaking). Marx imagined that “period-paid labor” would be driven to Communism because capitalism would inexorably drive down their standard of living in the advanced nations. (To him, the colonies were not a theater of political action.) But there has not been an immiseration of the proletariat as Marx imagined it. Skilled and organized labor is rewarded above the poverty level—while capitalists export production as much as possible to low-wage elements or regions.

A circumstance likely to arouse support for Communism is not general long-term immiseration in the advanced nations, but an economic collapse following a fever of speculation.

Will “period-paid labor” be the class to sponsor a pro-Communist dictatorship? There are difficulties here. It is dubious that manual workers could exercise a class dictatorship. Workers do not have an economic power base except for the power of the strike, which is purely negative. Workers are helpless in the face of the classic techniques of hierarchical usurpation. Army and police would be loyal to their masters in the hierarchy. They would be detached from general fraternization with wage-labor. The danger is exemplified by Mafia-controlled unions.

Manual workers will not spontaneously envision the theory of Communism. That will be left to those with specialized education. We have assumed well-educated and even well-placed people who are fully conversant with Communist ideas. They fall into a grey area between labor and capital. They seek control of a Constituent Assembly. The Assembly would begin to enact measures comprising the institutional preconditions of Communism.

Under capitalism, a minority experience affluence as a matter of luck, while majorities labor in humiliation. The measures of the Assembly or revolutionary dictatorship would be presented to the workers as a rationalization of society that would afford them greater justice.

Extrapolating from present conditions, we cannot see how manual labor could be a class literally in control of a Communist executive. The architects of Communism would have to be drawn from an expert class (well-educated and even well-placed people). A revolutionary directorate might have to act by decree and by repression to create the appropriate democratic institutions. It would then have to dissolve itself in favor of those institutions.

•

VIII. Supplement on the first step

What would be Communism's first step? As we have already said, we do not expect that the first Communist measures would follow on a guerrilla war—which presupposes an existing army acting on behalf of a political party, with a regional base. Then the Shining Path would be a terrible model.

What, again, of the established regime? Sovereignty is in the hands of a grand bourgeoisie that has a *class* executive with effective influence on the security services and the permanent government.

More credible than a guerrilla war would be a situation in which the established regime would authorize a Constituent Assembly because of a financial collapse. Pro-Communist experts would gain control of the Constituent Assembly. It would confer autonomy and constitution-making powers on itself. It would handle a test of force by recruiting elements to its side as it proceeded.

The first step might consist of a period in which the Assembly governed by decree and by repression of unsympathetic segments of the population: a revolutionary dictatorship.

As said above, to gain or maintain political support, the Assembly or revolutionary dictatorship would have to enact measures immediately understandable by the populace as democratic benefits. The measures would be presented to the workers as a rationalization of society that would afford them greater justice.

So: Immediately nationalize property in the means of production.

Government health care, “single payer”? That is a problem, continues to assume a market economy. But indeed the Assembly would have to conjure with a market economy in the first phase. Indeed: In this period, necessary labor would still be motivated, or at least recompensed, by wages redeemable in consumer goods.

Didn't such steps already occur in the USSR and Cuba? I have to posit that the reason the USSR and Cuba failed is because the regimes were not able to follow up appropriately. The preconditions were not remotely available.