

ON JUSTIFYING REVOLUTION

“Communism does not invent violence but finds it already institutionalized.”

Merleau-Ponty

“Sitting at your ease on the corpse of Ireland . . . be good enough to tell us: did your revolution of interests not cost more blood than our revolution of ideas?”

Michelet to the English

I

There is a classical conception of social justice derived from Plato and Aristotle which socialists must reject. Such a conception pictures the just society as a social order divided into different classes with their distinctive social roles and positions of status and privilege. Justice here consists in a “harmony of preexisting and recognized spheres of interest, which allots different roles to different classes and which can be modified only by agreed and rational procedures.”¹ In such a social order, we have a class divided society where all have their stations, their distinctive rights and duties, their special social roles and where some more fortunately placed have their distinctive privileges; justice and morality require that we each do what is fitting and proper in our station in life. As moral agents we must know our place and accept it.

Against this conception of justice there has emerged, from the principles of 1789, an alternative conception of justice shared by socialists and contemporary liberals alike. This conception of justice has been given an abstract and systematic characterization and defense in the brilliant and philosophically fundamental work of John

¹ Stuart Hampshire, “What is The Just Society?”, *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3 (February 24, 1972), p. 97.

Rawls.² Justice, for him, is essentially fairness, and this consists in the governance of two mutually supportive principles: (1) each person has an equal claim to the most extensive equal liberties compatible with a similar liberty for all and (2) the only morally acceptable inequalities are those which would be to the mutual advantage of the least advantaged stratum in society. The central form of injustice, on such a conception, is in the existence of arbitrary inequalities, to wit inequalities which do not meet the second condition characterized above.

What we must see—to tease this conception out a little—is that where there is an inequality in the distribution of what people on reflection would take to be the good things of life, that distribution is arbitrary and unjustified unless it can be shown to produce benefits in which the least fortunate have a preponderant share. Thus in a poor, economically underdeveloped country trying to take a socialist way, certain commitments to equality may have to be temporarily sacrificed to economic growth. But it remains the case that the acceptance of this conception of egalitarian justice commits one to a social program in which natural and socially derived inequalities are to be eradicated, except in those situations where they benefit the most disadvantaged class and where this benefit is, directly or indirectly, conducive to the attainment of a classless society. Though again this benefit may not be an immediate one. Notice the benefit is not simply

² John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971.) My analysis stands in conflict with Allan W. Wood's "The Marxian Critique of Justice," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. I, No. 3 (Spring, 1972). Wood contends a) that for Marx justice is fundamentally a juridical concept and b) that Marx takes such a concept to be an ideological concept and does not use it in an assessment of social institutions. Yet in my analysis, Wood would surely argue, I use it (or try to use it) in a nonideological way, but, Wood could respond, if Marx's own analysis is correct this must be a mystification. However, this argument rests on the assumption that such a Rawlsian conception of justice must be juridical. But this is not the case. It is a conception used to assess the justice of social institutions (including systems of law) and whole social orders and is only indirectly concerned with individual justice under a determinate legal order. Marx's analysis, as understood by Wood, may apply very well for questions of what, given certain social institutions it is just to do, but it does not follow from that, that we cannot raise in a nonjuridical and nonmythological way questions about the justice and moral adequacy of whole legal and social orders. It is such questions of institutional justice and morality that I am concerned with here.

to rob Peter to pay Paul but to even the distribution of advantages and burdens in the direction of equality and classlessness.³

The thrust of such a conception of justice is to undermine all aristocratic distinctions of caste or class and indeed in the final result all meritocracy as well. Talk of merit and desert, given what we know of character formation, does not make much sense. This being so, privileges are groundless and unfair except as temporary instrumentalities in class-divided societies or as devices in societies of scarcity to help bring about a state of affairs which will be to the advantage of everyone. That is to say, to translate this into the concrete, we might very well, under certain circumstances, be justified, where doctors were on salary, in paying doctors more to work in the north among Indians and Eskimos, if that was the best means of raising the level of medical care for Indians and Eskimos. But the goal, given such a conception of justice, remains classlessness and equality.⁴ The aim is the principled redistribution of the goods of life so that as many people as possible could do and have whatever it is that they want that is compatible with their treating every other human being in the same way. This 'having what one wants' is only subject to the further qualifications that it (1) be what one would want on reflection, (2) would continue to want when one (where this is feasible) had some reasonable understanding of the causes of wanting such things and, (3) where it is something one would continue to want even where one understood the likely consequences of getting what one, without taking this into account, would want. Such qualifications are important, for we must not forget that wants and preferences are not for the most part biological givens but are learned and unlearned, developed and changed, and are subject to manipulation.

The aim of a just and human society—what Marx called a truly human society—is not the attainment or reinforcement of the conser-

³ Rawls does not speak of the attainment of classlessness. His assumptions about human nature are such that he thinks that classlessness cannot be attained. But without those assumptions the push toward the attainment of classlessness is inherent in the logic of a Rawlsian conception of justice. In his discussions of Rawls's work C. B. Macpherson has shown that Rawls's key beliefs about human nature, which in effect rule out a consideration of the attainment of classlessness as a serious option, are unargued beliefs which are plainly not evidently true, if indeed they are true at all. See C. B. Macpherson, "Rawls's Models of Man and Society," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, no. 4 (September 1973), pp. 341-47 and C. B. Macpherson, *Democratic Theory*, (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1973), Essay IV.

⁴ I am not, of course, suggesting that classlessness implies that all people are to have equal pay, though classlessness is not compatible with gross differences in emoluments.

vative justice of doing what is fitting and getting your due in a world of inherited degrees and subordinations, but the bringing about of a society with the maximum human flourishing compatible with equal liberty in which each person counts for one and none counts for more than one.

II

However, abstractly stated in this fashion, this is not a uniquely socialist goal, though socialism will be compatible with such a conception of egalitarian justice. What is distinctively socialist in this domain is how this conception of justice is to be made anything other than just a utopian ideal. Moreover, when this is linked with a socialist conception of work, we begin to get a fair idea of what socialism is and is not.

Negatively, a socialist sees the replacement of capitalism as a necessary condition for the attainment of such a just society. That is to say, there is not to be a mixed economy with a private sector and a public sector; the means of production must be publically owned. However, this remains only a necessary condition—though an extremely important necessary condition—for the building of socialism. In addition it must also be the case that there is an effective workers' control by class-conscious workers of the various means of production. And this means, through workers' councils and the like, that any developed bureaucracies, necessary for central planning, must hold themselves accountable to these democratically controlled workers' councils. Nationalization of the forces of production is not sufficient. Socialism must be a workers' democracy.

This last remark is crucial for it provides an opening wedge to an understanding of the socialist or at least a socialist attitude toward work and leisure. And here it is important to go back to what Marx said about alienated labor. Work under capitalism and indeed under most social conditions, is intrinsically undesirable for most people. It is something they are coerced into doing as a means to another end. It is indeed alienated labor. But while this is an evident social reality for most of us and indeed it is a condition which is exacerbated under capitalism, it is not a natural necessity in all forms of life. Toward the end of his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* Marx describes a higher phase of communist society as a society in which "labor is no longer merely a means of life, but has become life's principal need." This sounds as if Marx were advocating a society of compulsive work addicts. And surely if work were to remain what it is for most people

under capitalism, this is indeed what it would come to. But this is to take 'labor' as an ellipsis for 'alienated labor.' And this Marx argues is not so. Under capitalism labor is alienated in three connected ways: (1) the worker is alienated from the *product* of his labor—labor which is merely a means to material reward, (2) the worker is alienated from the *process* of labor—it is experienced as forced labor rather than as a desirable activity, (3) the worker is alienated from *others* in his work, since workers are typically set against each other in competitive work and since what they do together is not something which they share and in which they are mutually interested but is something they are coerced to do to attain the means of life. Work under those conditions indeed is for the most part drudgery—a necessary evil to be borne in a struggle for survival.

However, the very activity of labor—something which is typically though not always cooperative—can, under other conditions, be satisfying. Activities can be pleasurable and they can be done for their own sake, as often obtains, for example, when one paints a picture, swims, writes an essay, or takes a walk. This does not mean that they are *only* done for their own sake or always done for their own sake. But they often are pleasurable activities done for their own sake, though they may have beneficial effects as well. Work can be just such an activity, as people who are fortunate enough to have satisfying work and who indeed take pride in their work and find pleasure in their work understand.

In a developed socialist society of abundance and technological advance, most work would become increasingly of that nonalienating character. Remember this would be a society with a social system in which workers, given their own democratic control and cooperative ownership, would have a different relation to the system of production than we experience under capitalism. They would increasingly be able to work cooperatively together in creative and fulfilling activities that, as the Nells well put it, would "provide occasions for the exercise of talents for taking responsibilities, and result in products of use and/or beauty."⁵ Most work under such conditions would become a satisfying, intrinsically desirable activity. What work was done would be in the control of the workers themselves—and everyone would be a worker—and what was produced would be produced for the benefit of all, or at least would not be such as to be incom-

⁵ Edward and Onora Nelli. "From Each According to His Ability, To Each According to His Need," *Dissent*, (1972).

patible with the public interest. Since this would be so, drudgery work would be cut to the minimum necessary for the benefit of all in a world in which consumerism and possessive individualism would be a thing of the past. And while drudgery would remain drudgery—sweeping the floors and disposing of the garbage are not self-fulfilling activities—their alienating quality would be very much lessened where such work is only done, and is *seen* only to be done, either (where relevant) for the benefit of everyone or, as would be more typical, for the benefit of the people involved, and where these burdens are shared in an egalitarian manner and constantly diminish as technology develops. After all, to will the end, at least for a non-egvasive person, is to will the necessary means to the end.

What I have tried to do so far is to show how under socialism there is (1) a giving flesh to the ideals of egalitarian justice and (2) an articulation of a conception of meaningful work. We see here what it would be like to have a social order in which such a conception of justice and significant work did not exist simply as ideals. By contrast, even under the most enlightened forms of welfare capitalism this would remain impossible.⁶ But how can we move from capitalism and our state of alienated labor to socialism? It is here where I introduce the topic of revolution and it is here where many equally concerned and equally humane men may very well part company.

III

I shall, in this section, set out in general terms the conditions under which a socialist revolution is in my opinion justified, under what conditions it should be actively worked for and under what conditions it should actually be attempted.⁷

A socialist, to be a socialist, must believe that capitalism must come to an end—utterly disappear—to be replaced by a fundamentally different socioeconomic system. He need not, though he may, speak of the destruction of capitalism. But he must believe in its replacement.

⁶ Something of this comes out — though he would not put the matter as boldly as I have — in C. B. Macpherson's, *The Real World of Democracy*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), "Post-Liberal Democracy?", *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. XXX, No. 4 (November, 1964), pp. 485-498, and in his "The Maximization of Democracy," in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, (Third Series), ed. by Peter Laslett and W. G. Runciman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), pp. 83-103. See also his *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1962), and his *Democratic Theory*.

⁷ I have said some further things about this in my "On the Ethics of Revolution," *Radical Philosophy* 6, (Winter, 1973.)

A socialist, who accepts socialist revolution as a live option or as what is in all likelihood a dire necessity, will have as a central *empirical* belief, the belief that the capitalist system is not likely to be undermined and brought to an end by nonviolent means. Such a socialist will believe that if capitalism is to be replaced, it will likely have to be done by revolutionary activity. Notice that, right or wrong, justified or unjustified, such a belief is not an article of faith or a bit of ideology but a perfectly empirical belief open to evidential and rational assessment.

It should be noticed in passing that revolutionary socialists, like all humane and sane men, recognize that violence is an evil never to be engaged in lightly and to be reprobated under normal circumstances. If there is a nonviolent way of attaining an end, then it is, everything else being equal, to be used rather than the violent alternative. Indeed, to have an understanding of what morality is all about, is to see the moral necessity of using nonviolent means in such circumstances. But everything else may not be equal and it is also plainly the case that violence is not the only evil in the world or the greatest evil. And it is further evident that there are circumstances in which whatever is done violence will occur. Under such circumstances we must decide which stretch of violence is the lesser evil. To avoid such a decision is to relinquish moral responsibility. Such considerations should make it evident that under certain circumstances violence, which is always *prima facie* wrong, is sometimes justified.⁸

At this point, I want to state a crucial argument made by Brian Medlin in his important and powerfully argued "Strategy For the Revolution."⁹ It is both bad tactics and bad morality, he argues, for socialists to *initiate* violence and indeed they must not only not initiate violence they must strive, in the face of counterrevolutionary propaganda, to be *seen* not to be the initiators of violence. Revolutionary violence, to be justified, must always be in response to counterrevolutionary violence. Moreover, there must be nothing, where counterrevolutionary violence has not been practiced, like a preemptive anticipatory strike against the bourgeoisie. In the bourgeois democracies, socialists should proceed by making perfectly reasonable and nonviolent attempts to transform society so that the means

⁸ See my general account of this in my "Against Moral Conservatism," *Ethics*, Vol. 82, No. 3 (April, 1972).

⁹ Brian Medlin, "Strategy For The Revolution," *Dialectic*, Vol. 7 (1972). A similar position is held by Ernest Mandel. See Jean Amery's account of his conversation with Mandel. Jean Amery, "Revolutionar ohne Ungeduld," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Nr. 126, 3., (June, 1972).

of production will be collectively owned and so that the working class—that is the vast mass of people— will control their own destinies, including the control of their own means and manner of work.

Such nonviolent measures, Medlin argues, when they come within a country mile of being successful, will in all likelihood be met by the violence of the counterrevolution. He claims that the violence of the revolution will, when justified, always be in response to that counterrevolutionary violence. Socialists must expect counterrevolutionary violence—anything else would be a lamentable departure from realism—and be thoroughly prepared to meet it and not offer themselves as sacrificial lambs. But we socialists must not initiate the violence ourselves and we must do what we can (and sometimes that is not very much) to make that perfectly evident to the world, knowing that our position will be distorted by the bourgeois press.

There is a network of interrelated moral, tactical, and empirical considerations involved in Medlin's claim. The core empirical ones—to put it crudely—center around the empirical belief that in the face of a serious socialist thrust to fundamentally redistribute power and wealth, the capitalists will not give up without a fight. They will never, for example, simply following the rules of parliamentary democracy, allow their power to be so eroded that capitalism and the capitalist class will become a thing of the past. (Their violent destruction of a socialist democracy in Chile is a dramatic and saddening, though hardly a surprising, example of this.) The bourgeoisie will make concessions when they have to 'cut their losses' but they will never surrender power out of humane considerations or because socialists have established their point morally or rationally.

The related tactical considerations are the following: (1) people lacking power, though oppressed, will not as a rule employ violence against an armed state unless they are first compelled to do so by the violence of the state, (2) effective revolutionary violence will only result when such brutal, direct, and palpable violent oppression obtains and (3) the initiation of violence by socialists will discredit socialism and strengthen, at least temporarily, the capitalist order.

The moral point is simply to keep quite steadfastly before our minds the recognition that the *initiation* of violence is wrong. With that recognition and with the recognition of the fallibility of empirical beliefs, such as the ones we subscribed to, socialists out of the revolutionary tradition in contexts like our own should proceed nonviolently in trying to achieve socialism, *hoping*, but *not believing*, that the Fabians and Bernsteinians are right about the chances of building

socialism without resort to armed struggle. We may, after all, be mistaken in our belief that the transition from capitalism to socialism cannot be achieved nonviolently.

If peaceful attempts to achieve socialism, with the proper wariness about capitalist ruling class intransigence and retaliation, turn out, after all, to be successful, then we should be pleasantly surprised and grateful that our tough-minded assessment of the situation has turned out to be mistaken.

The other alternatives are that this attempt to achieve socialism nonviolently will be frustrated—as it was in Chile—or that the working class movement will develop effective forms of counterviolence—meeting fire with fire—to face the counterrevolutionary violence directed against their attempts to achieve socialism peacefully.

Where the movement is crushed—something to be avoided by not trying to institute a socialist order prematurely before there is a mass base—there still remains from this bashing something of a consciousness-raising lesson and the recognition of, and a partial justification for, socialists to prepare for, at a later date, when conditions are different, an armed struggle with the ruling classes. But there is neither moral justification for nor practical utility in *initiating* violence in trying to achieve a socialist transformation of society.

Medlin's claim that revolutionary socialists must never initiate violence will not go unchallenged by other socialists. It will be argued by some that this claim is both false and in effect harmful to the socialist cause—harmful by leading socialists to be more passive and manageable than they need be or indeed should be. Even where capitalist power is weakening and socialist movements are gaining in strength and where the ruling class is preparing to attempt to destroy the socialist movement, Medlin—so the argument would run—would never sanction preemptive violence on the socialist's part to break or try to break such an impending capitalist onslaught. But to hold back from preemptive violence in such a situation, where its use might be successful, is both foolish and immoral.

Surely Medlin's claim is not, or at least should not be, an a priori one. It should not be held, no matter what the circumstances. There are indeed *conceivable* circumstances in which it would be mistaken; the important consideration, for Medlin's argument, is whether, as things are, or are likely to be, it is a justified belief.

What I think can and should be said in response is that when a situation has so developed that Medlin's critic can plausibly speak of revolutionaries exercising the option of preemptive violence, that by

then the capitalist ruling class will already, through arbitrary imprisonment, brutal exploitation, McCarthyite tactics and the like, have deployed so much violence that such a preemptive strike will not count as *initiating* violence but as a response to counterrevolutionary violence. In such situations, socialist revolutionaries will, of course, be labeled by the mass media as inhuman terrorists, irrational nihilists, etc. They will be said by the media to be 'the initiators of violence.' But this is ideology, not truth, and a central task for socialist intelligentsia is to do their best to counteract such propaganda by making it evident that the revolutionary violence is in response to ruling class violence and is resorted to in situations where the utilization of violence by the ruling class (through the holding of political prisoners, through police brutality at demonstrations, through interrogations, through strikebreaking and the like) is very high and nonviolent methods only strengthen the capitalist's repressive power.

The abstract moral point is indeed well taken that one may very well be justified in initiating violence if someone is threatening violence and probably will use violence unless he is forcefully stopped. Whether one would actually be justified in initiating violence in such a circumstance would depend on the exact circumstance. But in many circumstances there could be such a justification. I take it that Medlin is not denying that general moral point and I certainly am not. What I take he is saying, and what I at least am claiming, is that because of the special circumstances described above, the socialist revolutionary is not justified in initiating violence.

In talking about revolution, I am, of course, talking about socio-political revolution. I am talking about a complete overthrow of a given state apparatus and the substitution for it of a radically different apparatus and the initiation of a development toward a radically changed social order¹⁰. We have with the sort of revolution I am talking about a seizure of power directed toward the destruction of the old social system and the setting in motion of the machinery leading to the attainment of a new order, though it may take years before the new order can take its anticipated and hoped for form. (What this order will be like in advance of actual practice will have to be stated rather generally.) Capitalist exploitation, as Marx realized, can under

¹⁰ I discuss this in my "On the Choice Between Reform and Revolution," in *Philosophy and Political Action*, ed. by Virginia Held, Kai Nielsen, and Charles Parsons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972). For some important remarks about revolution, including nonviolent forms, see Adam Schaff, "Marxist Theory on Revolution and Violence," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 2 (April-June, 1973).

certain circumstances be ended by a few deft strokes, attendant on the seizure of power by determined revolutionaries with the massive backing of the proletariat, but for a long time afterwards capitalist mentality and certain customary capitalist ways of doing things will live on in the early stages of socialism. It will take time, determination, and imagination to change deeply rooted cultural patterns so that socialist persons and a fully developed socialist society can become a reality. Time must pass after the seizure of power before there can be a genuine transformation of society in which human liberation would be a reality: that is, where we would have a state of affairs where there are masses of people whose full human powers and creative capacities are developed in many directions such that they will find pleasure in genuinely creative work, manage their own affairs, help in the ordering and directing of society in the interests of everyone alike and be capable of a wide range of enjoyments and creative activities.

We intellectuals have been conditioned in such a way that such talk about liberation sounds platitudinous. Yet surely, if human liberation is at all possible, this is what in general terms it would come to. Many people of good will and generous sympathies who remain Burkean conservatives do so in large measure because they have reluctantly come to the conclusion that human liberation is a pipe dream. For socialism to be more than a heuristic ideal such a liberation must be a responsible possibility. I do not think that our knowledge of society is such that we can rightly say that we *know* that it is a realistic possibility. But we do know enough about the plasticity of human nature, human conditioning, and intelligence to realize that a cynical rejection of this possibility is not rooted in the authority of science or in some quite unassailable forms of common sense.

It may well be that such a world will never come into existence. But it is essential for us to realize two things. (1) That such a world will not automatically come into existence with the end of the capitalist order and that its attainment (if indeed it can be attained) will take time, thought, vigilance, and determination. (2) That what we do have good grounds for believing is that it cannot come into existence under capitalism. A necessary but *not sufficient* condition for its attainment is the ending of the capitalist order. And it is this which at present should be foremost among socialist strategic aims.

Paradigms of such revolutions are the French, Algerian, Chinese, and Cuban revolutions. We are not speaking of a mere coup d'état where one gang of tyrants or a ruling elite throws out and then re-

places another gang of tyrants or a ruling elite. Rather we are speaking of seizures of state power which aim at a profound change in social structure.

Where revolutions have overwhelming popular support there can be, under optimum conditions, an almost bloodless seizure of power. But nonetheless even in the best of conditions there is likely to be some violence and some killing. Since violence and killing are plain evils, they require justification by showing that they, under the circumstances, are the lesser evil. What the revolutionary socialist should say in a very general and abstract way concerning revolutionary violence is (1) that revolutionary violence is only justified when, of the alternatives available, it will, everything considered, make for less misery and human degradation all around, (2) that *in fact* the continued existence of capitalism does cause, and will continue to cause, as long as it is allowed to exist, extensive misery and human degradation and that a socialist transformation of society (including a revolutionary seizure of power) will very probably, of the available alternatives (including the continued existence of capitalism), cause less misery and human degradation, everything considered, and (3) that socialists should be concerned to minimize the violence of change and not seek to bring about an immediate revolutionary change except where the revolution has the support of the overwhelming majority of the proletariat. This last consideration is important, for socialists, like militant liberals, prize liberty and a free society. Apart from, and in addition to, the intrinsic badness of the suffering and pain caused by violence, violence is also often instrumentally bad, for, if there is extensive violence in the revolution, it will be very hard to achieve a free society after the revolution and if the revolution is actually carried out without popular support, extensive repression is unavoidable in the period directly after the revolution.

The first consideration, recall, was that revolutionary violence is justified when it, of the alternatives available, will make for less suffering, everything considered, than the other alternatives when all the people involved are given equal consideration. This moral claim could hardly be *directly* objected to by anyone, except someone who would take the kind of absolutist position in ethics which claims that no matter what the consequences, one must never kill or use violence. But this plainly has absurd consequences. It would mean that if some yahoo or group of yahoos, Dr. Strangelove-fashion, got a plane with a nuclear device such that their dropping that nuclear device would kill the entire population of New York, Peking, or Moscow, it would

be wrong, if this was the only way of stopping them, to shoot their plane down.

Extensive rational resistance to a justification of socialist revolution will turn on the second consideration. It will be said by some that when we look at the history of sociopolitical revolutions, including the aftermath of these revolutions, we will come to see that it is very dubious whether the continued existence of capitalism will cause more misery and degradation all around than will its violent overthrow to establish a socialist order. Moreover, given modern weaponry, such a revolutionary socialist adventure is quite unthinkable. Surely, this is a question open to empirical assessment which cannot be settled in a philosopher's study. If such a critic of revolutionary socialism has in mind the causing of a nuclear war which will destroy human life or most human life or devastate whole continents, he is without doubt right. No violent response to counterrevolutionary violence is worth that. But there is violence and violence; violence, we must not forget, admits of degrees. When India started a war with Pakistan over what was then called East Pakistan, there were rough calculations made by the Indian government concerning the probable amounts of violence and the resulting suffering, death, and misery. Using these rough calculations and considering the effect on all the peoples on the Indian subcontinent, it is at least reasonable to believe that this war was justified in terms of lessening misery all around. Even if this judgment is mistaken, it would be shown to be mistaken by making just the rough consequentialist calculations I am claiming are relevant. A revolutionary socialist can make the same calculations and while he will not, if he is sensible, claim that in any circumstances revolutionary violence is justified, he will insist that there are circumstances in which it is indeed not only justified but morally mandatory to try to bring down capitalism by revolution.¹¹

However, this does not yet touch the central consideration in such an objection. What we need to consider is what about socialist revolution now in our lives and in the foreseeable future? The answer should be that presently in the western industrial countries—even France and Italy—there is not the working class movement with the support of a class-conscious working class to make any *present* attempt at revolution anything more than the infantile adventurism of

¹¹ See here Herbert Marcuse, "Ethics and Revolution," in *Ethics and Society*, ed. by Richard T. De George (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1966). See also Andre Gorz, "Revolution in the Metropolis," *Canadian Dimension*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (July, 1974), pp. 42-49.

which Marx accused Bakunin. Such adventurism—particularly when accompanied by terrorist tactics—would only strengthen the hands of the most reactionary elements in the bourgeois democracies and would alienate large sections of the working class and keep left liberals from coming over to socialism. The present is a time to work toward building among the working class (and this on my count includes students, salaried technicians, and salaried professionals) a militant, class-conscious political base which will push for radical reforms which can be seen not only by such socialists, but also by concerned, morally sensitive liberals, to be legitimate and reasonable moral demands. I have in mind—as a beginning—such things as militant pressure to end the substandard conditions of life afforded Indian and métis people, genuine and not purely formal equality of educational opportunity, more equal distribution of wages, greater control by the workers over their own working conditions, and the like.

In the present situation, the strategy (and this is an open, morally defensible strategy) should be, with each such reformist victory, to up the ante in a genuinely socialist and egalitarian direction¹². By so proceeding we can and should work with militant liberals and social democrats. If they are right and revolutionary socialists are wrong, by fighting for these quite legitimate moral demands, we can eventually topple capitalism; if we are right and they are wrong, our reformist demands, plainly reasonable and plainly morally legitimate, will be met, when they threaten the positions of power and prestige of the ruling class, with repression and violence. By proceeding in this way, we may eventually be able to produce a mass base. The militant liberals and members of the working class—I do not mean to suggest they are necessarily exclusive—who have come to see the rightness of our demands, will have had their consciousness raised and may well be prepared, after several such defeats, to work for revolution. They may instead fall into despair or cynicism and cop out of the struggle by taking to the hills or to religion or both. This is a possibility that cannot be discounted and, as we are seeing, will indeed happen with some. But it will by no means happen to everyone and (1) such 'dropouts' are no supporters of the capitalist system and (2) they are probably, when the circumstances are more favorable,

¹² I have argued in my "On the Choice Between Reform and Revolution," a) that such a strategy is not to be identified with reformism and b) that in certain circumstances the choice between reform and revolution is an unreal one.

potential if somewhat unreliable supporters of socialism. There can be no guarantees but what other alternatives are there, and is this not a reasonable strategy?

In defending socialist revolution at present in our situation, it is the above general policy that should be defended. We are saying to our social democratic friends: we do not believe that capitalists will ever give up their exploitation and positions of power and prestige peacefully and we do not believe they will assent to the conditions of egalitarian justice. Thus, if we are right about the facts, and if we are really serious about attaining egalitarian justice and a truly human society, we should prepare for class warfare and eventual revolution. We should add that we hope that we are wrong about the facts and we hope that our morally justified demands can be achieved by peaceful agitation and furthermore we proclaim that we should not be the first to use violence. But we also contend that we should prepare ourselves to meet counterrevolutionary violence with violence.

To this, it can be replied, that if the upshot of such a pressure for morally legitimate but radical social demands is going to be met with such counterrevolutionary violence, then we had better drop these demands. To this, we should again apply rough consequentialist calculations (nothing more accurate is possible). Where the forces of reaction are so strong that pressure for the achievement of these reforms will lead to such a bashing of socialist forces that the movement would be destroyed and all resistance would be hopeless, then the pressing of such demands in such a context would indeed be mistaken. One had better fight this issue on another day. But where working class strength, class consciousness, and movement organization are at least probably sufficient for a spontaneous and massive resistance to counterrevolutionary repression and violence, then resistance should be undertaken where it is likely to be successful either in the sense, on the one hand, of winning that particular battle or, on the other, of even losing that battle but affording a good chance of winning the war. There can, of course, be no certainty here. Such matters are always very chancy affairs. We need a good tactical sense, knowledge of the specific situation, and we need to make careful calculations with the understanding that they are very subject to error. But there are no good moral or empirical grounds for saying that we in the bourgeois democracies are never justified in pressing for radical moral demands, no matter how just, which will bring on the repressive force of the bourgeois state. It depends on the prob-

able consequences. If, on the one hand, it is more likely that more misery and less human liberation all around for everyone involved will obtain by such pressure under such circumstances, then the demands should not at that time be pressed; if, on the other hand, the reverse is the case, then the demands should be pressed. In principle this is simple; in practice it is difficult because of the difficulty in predicting or even making educated guesses concerning the probable consequences.

To be reasonable about a socialism with a revolutionary option in western capitalist countries is to be committed to such a revolutionary strategy on such moral grounds. Note that it is not, any more than was Marx, in principle committed to violent revolution. If socialism can be achieved by peaceful means, so much the better. Such a socialist strategy indeed has a kind of fail-safe device built into it, namely always start by proceeding peacefully. This means, where we are in a parliamentary system, that we should at least initially proceed by parliamentary means. There are, of course, in such a system perfectly nonviolent forms of extraparliamentary opposition such as civil disobedience and they will often have to be used. Indeed, if I am right, they are a stage on socialism's way. Here I am making the familiar tactical point that in a parliamentary system we should start by using parliamentary means and not rule out the possibility that they will be sufficient. The nice point is how long we should continue to use them where the ruling class repeatedly abuses them. (Indeed, we should expect where they have a chance the capitalist ruling class will try to play a 'Chile' on us.)

Only when those means are exhausted and the needs of working class people are being frustrated, should we proceed to extraparliamentary opposition.¹³ The move to violent opposition—meeting vio-

¹³ It is surely natural to respond that by now in bourgeois democracies the parliamentary means have been exhausted and human needs remain drastically frustrated. To continue to go through parliamentary procedures is pointless. To this, two points should be made in response: 1) this is where people in our circumstances are at politically and given the political consciousness of most people—including, of course, most workers—this is the only place where we can start and have their support, 2) it is not, as Rosa Luxemburg recognized, the formal apparatus of bourgeois democracies that are the prime sources of conservatism, but the utilization of them by the ruling class. We do not know that we could not successfully utilize parliamentary means to achieve a socialist order. The case of the crushed Allende government certainly makes for skepticism, on this score. But it is also important to remember that Chile's situation is not the only type situation in which 'socialism via the ballot box' might become an issue. Even France's or Italy's situation is quite different from Chile's. See here Ernst Vollrath, "Rosa Luxemburg's Theory of Revolution," *Social Research*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Spring, 1973), pp. 83-109.

lence with violence—should be resorted to only when peaceful extra-parliamentary opposition is met by violent repression. And even here such an option should only be exercised when working class forces have a reasonable chance of winning and lessening the total misery and repression of freedom. It is such a strategy that is a reasonable revolutionary stance for socialists in the bourgeois democracies. I see nothing morally irresponsible or outrageous about it at all. Moreover, if contemporary corporate capitalism with its resultant imperialism, exploitation, degradation, and violent repressiveness is as socialists have taken capitalism to be, it is a moral and strategical stance that we ought to adopt.

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