

212 *new left review*

EQUALITY AND DECONSTRUCTION

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|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| Michael Mann | Class Politics in the 20th Century |
| Nancy Fraser | Recognition and Redistribution |
| Colin Leys | A Radical Agenda for Britain? |
| Manuel Riesco | Glory to the Jacobins |
| Paul Buhle | Hollywood and Left Aesthetics |
| Merryn Williams | The Prophet of Kelmscott |
| Gavin Bowd | France: la fracture sociale |
| Jon Wiener | Nixon in Hypertext |

Ireland and the British Left

Honour and Eternal Glory to the Jacobins!

I pondered all these things, and how men
fight and lose the battle, and the thing
that they fought for comes about in spite of
their defeat, and when it comes turns out
not to be what they meant, and other men
have to fight for what they meant under
another name.

William Morris 1

'Look! There are mountains on the moon!' exclaimed Brecht's Galileo to a group of theologians as he invited them to look through his newly invented telescope. But they never dared to check the overwhelming evidence, which would have forced them to revolutionize how they and all their contemporaries understood the nature of the universe. During the last few years, the equally historic events surrounding the collapse of the Communist regimes have made it necessary for the whole of humanity radically to change its conception of the twentieth century. An understanding of this epochal phenomenon requires a quite new conceptualization of twentieth-century revolutions. For, whatever may be said now, every protagonist and detractor of these revolutions, every observer, critic and supporter, was convinced that they really were what the first of them proclaimed itself to be: the way out of and beyond the capitalist regime.

This old conception has left everyone in a theoretical blind alley. Those who

think we are living through the final victory of capitalism over its successor are forced into the unlikely conclusion that history has come to an end. But nor is the task easy for those who consider these momentous processes to be only a setback in the transition begun earlier this century toward the overcoming of capitalism; they have to come up with 'explanations' utterly alien to the historical method, or else refuse to look through the telescope. And that is not to count those who simply stop believing.

There is no way out of the paradox that the processes initiated by this century's socialist revolutions eventually speeded up the transition to capitalism—not, that is, if we remain within the theoretical space defined by the concepts we have used up to now. To solve the dilemma, then, we need to broaden that theoretical space by adding a new conceptual dimension.

It may be useful to start from the hypothesis that the epoch of the twentieth century has been no different in character from that of the nineteenth century: that is, that right up to today we have been living through the period of transition from the old agrarian, aristocratic society to capitalist modernity. In this view of things, the revolutions of the twentieth century have not been anti-capitalist (despite the wishes or programmes of their protagonists and the fears of some of their enemies) but rather the same as the revolutions of the last century.

This hypothesis makes it possible: a) to understand our *fin-de-siècle* historical processes in their unity with, but also as a break from, the earlier processes of revolution and transformation in the same countries; b) to claim that those revolutionary processes were progressive and ultimately successful, even though they culminated not as they said they would but, curiously enough, in the opposite way; and c), most important, to clear the theoretical ground for the struggle really to overcome capitalism. If we review some of what is known about older societies and transitions, we will see that this looks like quite a reasonable idea.

Dinosaurs with Multicoloured Plumage

History seems to show that 'it is merely in the night of our ignorance that all alien shapes take on the same hue'.¹ Slave societies took on forms as different as the Athenian (where slaves were the individual property of their masters) and the Spartan (where they were the collective property of the citizenry). Lordship—a concept used by historians to refer to the modes of production that arose between slavery and capitalism on various continents—reflects in its very ambiguity the multiplicity of forms ranging from Aztec to Chinese lordship, as well as the still rudimentary state of our knowledge. Feudalism is the term usually employed for the dominant mode of production in Europe and Japan between roughly the fifth and the nineteenth century—the form of lordship that has been most

¹ Quoted from Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism*, Verso, London 1980, p. 17, himself quoting from E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, London 1978, p. 280.

² Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, Verso, London 1974, p. 549.

extensively studied. But feudalism itself presents a number of distinct forms and stages, in respect of which the development of various regions has been centuries out of step. Thus, in the history of Europe, feudalism stretches for nearly fifteen centuries through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and Absolutism.

The Absolutist stage of feudalism, which developed in Europe between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, also displays very different forms. There seems to be some measure of agreement that classical Absolutism—French, English and Spanish—represented the state form of aristocratic domination over a social structure mainly composed of dependent peasants emancipated from serfdom, cities with powerful guilds and mercantile bourgeoisie, relatively few independent peasants, and an aristocracy with legal title to the land. Eastern Absolutism, by contrast—Austrian, Russian, and so on—was the state form through which the aristocracy consolidated serfdom in its respective part of Europe. Finally, the Absolutism developed by the Swedish aristocracy rested upon a social structure where 'free peasants' were in the majority.

If such diversity is possible at the highly abstract level of analysis of modes of production, what can be said of the countless forms in which these combine at the more concrete level of social formations, with their various regions and stages of development? Slaves, for example, a relic of the decaying modes of production whose synthesis gave rise to feudalism, were present through much of the European Middle Ages, and free peasants were never completely eliminated. In most of the social formations of the time, the old modes of production combined in varying proportions with the feudal mode properly so called.

The passages from antiquity to feudalism were also quite different in Western and Eastern Europe. In the West, the transition lasted nearly five hundred years, from the barbarian invasions of the fifth century up to the consolidation in and around the tenth; it is explained in terms of a fusion of the Roman legacy with the Germanic tribes. Having reached its apogee in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it entered into crisis in the fourteenth before giving way to the Renaissance and Absolutism from the fifteenth century onward.

In the East of the continent, however, where slavery had not become generalized, the Roman legacy was much weaker or non-existent. Feudalism developed upon a much more primitive tribal base, subject both to the stimulus of the feudal West and to the brake of successive nomadic invasions. Thus it was only after the great crisis of the fourteenth century that the peasantry was finally subjugated there, and only in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that a truly feudal economy can be seen to appear—five centuries later than in Western Europe. The development, often only partial, of lordship systems in Asia, America and Africa followed paths and assumed forms which are only just becoming clear. They too stretched over very long periods of time.

When, with our heads still reeling from the blows of present-day reality, we think of this increasing variety of form and development in the transition between earlier historical epochs, it seems strange indeed,

perhaps presumptuous and almost absurd, to have imagined that the advent, rise and senescence of the modern capitalist era could have occupied no more than a couple of centuries. A cycle that took a millennium and a half in the former epoch. The real surprise—and what a surprise!—comes from those parts of the world which, having lagged behind by centuries, are now leaping Olympic-style into the future over a whole epoch.

It is always the case that once discoveries are made, they appear obvious to everyone. So now, how much more rational it seems to consider that the consolidation of capitalism took at least the last three centuries, including the whole of the twentieth century; that it occurred sooner in regions which had been the first to complete the previous stages and only then in the rest of the world; and that there was not a single pattern in every part of the world, but rather alternative, original paths that varied from place to place.

Scientists and cineastes claim that dinosaurs, far from being extinct, were transformed into the countless species of birds that fill the skies above us. Similarly, as historical research advances with the support of ever more powerful and sophisticated theories, the developmental picture of human society is being filled with ever richer colours and shades. And suddenly, what seemed to everyone to be one thing, turns out to be something very different.

All Roads Led to Rome

The end of the twentieth century confronts us with a seemingly definitive fact: the culmination of the transition process to capitalist modernity for the whole of humankind. Perhaps nothing expresses the magnitude of this process better than its impact on world population. It is estimated that at the beginning of the Christian era there were some 250 million people living on earth, and that the figure was still roughly the same ten centuries later, when feudalism was consolidated in Western Europe. By the time of the Renaissance the world's population was approaching 500 million. Today we are talking of 5,300 million, and it is expected that the human race will number 7,000 million early in the next century.

The transition to capitalist modernity is not yet complete—far from it. With regard to the economic structure, the key to the transition to capitalism in general appears to be so-called primitive accumulation—that is, the expulsion of peasants from the land and their subsequent conversion into potential workers. In 1994, however, according to UN figures, more than 70 per cent of the world's population still lived and worked on the land. In Latin America the urban population bordered on 90 per cent of the total in only four countries: Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Venezuela. In others, such as Bolivia or Paraguay, it accounted for scarcely more than 50 per cent; while in Ecuador and Peru, the homeland of Mariátegui, the figure was only a little higher, at just over 60 per cent. It seems clear, then, that much is still lacking for the process to be completed.

Today, however, the transition to capitalism is proceeding at a vertiginous rate, above all in the most densely populated countries. It seems likely that whereas the twentieth century began more or less unnoticed by the great majority of the world's population (who lived in the depths of rural ignorance), the coming of the twenty-first century will be celebrated by most of humanity on the squares and streets of cities linked up as in a global village. Many of them will probably be thinking of going back to live in the countryside, to work from there through the information superhighway.

It should not be forgotten, of course, that as a result of the same process that has freed us from subjugation to land, family and ignorance, we who are bidding farewell to the twentieth century are still subjected to capitalist overlords and dazzled by the fetish of money. On average, we are probably hungrier and colder, more neurotic and less in harmony with nature, than our grandparents were at the beginning of the century.

When historians draw up a retrospective typology of all the forms of transition to capitalism in the century now coming to an end, it will probably include at least two main paths apart from the classical one: the 'Islamic' path, and the path of 'actually existing socialism'. It may be that further types will emerge from the transitions which are still under way or have recently peaked, or through which Latin America and Africa are living or on the point of living today.

It now seems possible, however, to begin examining what is distinctive about 'the path of actually existing socialism': namely, the form which the basic process of the transition, the primitive accumulation of capital, takes within it. As Marx defined it, this actually consists in the primitive accumulation of workers required for capitalism to start putting its reproduction (that is, the reproduction of the workers) on a self-sustaining basis.

Primitive accumulation, which occurs only when it can and must do so for economic reasons, is nevertheless a purely historical phenomenon in which, as Marx said, violence plays a decisive role. In the classical case of seventeenth-century England, which is repeated in similar forms in all transitions of this type, primitive accumulation takes on a private, individual character. This is to say, in all such processes, the peasantry is driven off the land—usually by force, war, revolution, legal expropriation, agrarian reform, counter-revolution, and so on—along paths where it is then hired on an individual basis by private capitalists.

The specificity of 'the path of actually existing socialism' seems to be that this hiring of peasants driven from the land is carried out by the state acting as collective capitalist. In Russia, for instance, the massive primitive accumulation took place during the 'offensive of socialism on all fronts' launched by Stalin in the 1930s. Here the so-called 'collectivization of agriculture' appears to have been exactly the opposite: that is, huge numbers of peasants were transferred to the newly growing Soviet industry, thereby becoming wage-labourers subject to the collective state capitalist without the mediation of private capitalist contracts.

Decades ago, historians of the period were already drawing attention to the homology between this process and the similar one in the West.³ Even some of the laws passed in Stalin's Russia were the same as those in Cromwell's England—for example, the enclosure of the large estates together with all the peasant landholdings within their boundaries. In this way, many more peasants were legally expropriated in socialist Russia of the 1930s than in capitalist England of the seventeenth century. Such would seem to be the essence of Stalin's Five Year Plans.

The specificity of 'the path of actually existing socialism', then, seems to be that the new wage-slaves (peasants forcibly transformed into workers) fell under collective rather than private ownership. This gave a particular shape not only to the exploited class of workers but also to the exploiting class. The latter, in fact, would seem to have been gradually constituted out of the party and state bureaucracy. It became fully conscious of itself only during the processes of this *fin de siècle*, when it rapidly lost its collective character and broke up into thousands of individual capitalists.

Collective ownership of the exploited is not a new phenomenon. As we have seen, it occurred in the slave society of ancient Sparta. But more significantly, there is the recent example of feudal serfdom: just yesterday, in the mid nineteenth century, the Russian Absolutist state 'owned land with 20 million serfs on it—two-fifths of the peasant population of Russia'.⁴

'The Ever-Baffled and Ever-Resurgent Agents of an Unmastered History'⁵

What has been happening in recent years in the Central American region, including the south of Mexico, should be fairly obvious to any observer from a country that has more or less completed its transition to modernity. The backwardness of the region shows that the old latifundia-type relations are blocking its development and need to be removed—not long ago in El Salvador, for example, fourteen families owned much of the country, and most of its inhabitants lived and worked on the land. What the region seems to be crying out for is pretty down-to-earth: somehow to get the peasants off the land and convert them into workers.

But the distance from words to deeds is great indeed. Someone visiting El Salvador today cannot fail to be struck by the epic of this almost purely Mayan people, who have waged a ten-year war in a country not much larger than a big metropolis, against an enemy backed by the main capitalist power in the world, and have now won a dignified peace whilst also profoundly transforming the country's structure. Though still obscured by the final rattle of war and not yet mirrored in the consciousness of its midwives, a small Central American jaguar has just come into being.

³ For example, Isaac Deutscher, in *Stalin and his Trotsky trilogy*.

⁴ Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, p. 346.

⁵ E.P. Thompson, p. 280, quoted from Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism*, p. 16.

How many dreams, how much heroism, how much suffering and death have been necessary to achieve this. Before its birth, the new society was forged in the body of those bringing it to life. To do the things that history required, the people filled its brain with images, its skin with sensations, its heart with loves, its guts with passion!

The people took these ideas of change from any mould. Marxism, the nineteenth century's most advanced expression of human thought in this domain, has been a source of inspiration for millions of revolutionaries in the twentieth century, simply because it is above all a philosophy of development, of change, of transformation. Being anti-capitalist in a 'forward-looking' sense, it is certainly anti-latifundista through and through. The further shores of the communist 'Thule', moreover, link up rather well with peasant notions of communitarianism. And Islam and Christianity have also been major sources of revolutionary inspiration during this century.

In the case of El Salvador, for example, the great theorist of revolutionary change—on a level with its philosophical inspiration—is the Spanish Jesuit priest Ignacio Ellacuría, who was murdered along with five other priests in 1989, by soldiers of the Salvadorean/North American Atlacatl battalion. In turn, he was inspired by the Basque Christian thinker Xavier Zubiri. Ellacuría says, for example: 'To create justice and build freedom, it is not enough to seek the truth philosophically; one must also succeed philosophically in bringing it about.'⁶ No wonder the Salvadoreans let themselves be guided by such ideas in confronting the great transformations that needed to be achieved.

Those who cause history to leap forward may well go on carrying some alien placards among their revolutionary banners. The classical Parisian *sans-culottes*, to look no further, cut off the king's head whilst hankering after 'a general setting of price levels' for 'the profits of industry, the wages of labour and the margins of trade',⁷ an old policy used by the kings of France themselves to secure popular support against the bourgeoisie in difficult times. Similarly, old peasant mentalities, guild ideas or bourgeois protectionist conceptions—each more or less anti-mercantile, oppressive and conservative—have impregnated the thinking of the popular masses who have carried out all the revolutions of this century. Nevertheless, all these revolutions have proceeded without hesitation to achieve the decisive economic and political reforms opening the way to modernity.

Often, then, revolutionaries do what needs to be done even though they are partly inspired by programmes which were suitable for past situations but no longer are today, or by others which will never be appropriate in any situation. But sometimes their action is also motivated by the right ideas whose time has not yet come. What is important is that the ideas stimulate action to carry out the objectively necessary changes.

It seems clearer today, for example, that the enlightened ideas which inspired the heroes of Latin American independence were in advance of

⁶ Ignacio Ellacuría, 'Función liberadora de la filosofía', *ECA*, 1985, pp. 435-6.

⁷ Albert Soboul, *La Revolución Francesa*, Barcelona 1987, p. 127.

what the actual process was creating on the ground. "The extraordinary fact is that, in the century when the Latin American republics gained their independence, the native peasantry were converted into tenants on a very large scale (in a way that had not happened before from Mexico to Chile), because the lands of the indigenous communities were "redistributed". The division and subdivision of indigenous lands gave rise not to Indian peasant ownership but to the latifundias."⁸

It may be that the same thing happened with Marxism in the course of the twentieth century. That could explain why Communist monopoly of it in economics and politics (which subordinated its development to the tactics of a movement somewhat extraneous to this theoretical tool), was a praxis that did not produce new theory, and the enrichment of Marxism was almost entirely confined to the spheres of culture. But for those who are now really considering the critique of capitalism and the problem of how to go beyond it, there seems no reason why Marxism should not be rediscovered with fresh interest as a major fountain of theory.

Leading the People Forward

When a typology is made of the transitions to capitalist modernity, the classical stages in France will probably be the ones used for the general periodization. At least, these stages also seem to be broadly present in the twentieth-century 'Spartan roads' to capitalism. Thus what Soboul called the stage of 'the bourgeois revolution and the popular movement (1789-1792)⁹' finds its correlate in the Russian Kerenskiad. The stage of 'the revolutionary government and the popular movement' in France (August 1792 to May 1795) has a fairly obvious homologue in the period from Red October to the introduction of NEP. And the Thermidorean stage of 'the bourgeois republic and social consolidation' (1795-1799) may present some analogies with the period from Lenin's death in 1924 to Stalin's consolidation of power in 1929. The Bonapartist period (1799-1815) certainly displays evident parallels with the Stalin period. And it's still going on.

Incidentally, no one who has read Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* will fail to note certain features prefiguring the fascist regimes of the twentieth century. Would that Russia, in its transition to modernity, does not repeat the example of Germany and Italy and spares humanity the drama of an Eighteenth Brumaire of Mister Zhirinovskiy! Some hope that fascism is not an inevitable stage in such transitions is offered by the Dutch and English revolutions of the seventeenth century, which began a path that is reaching its highest point amid the convulsions of the present day.

The drawing up of typologies is a very risky game: for each analogy it is always possible to find a number of differences, and anyway the point is not to establish similarities but to identify the general (or 'generative')

⁸ Alejandro Lipschutz, 'El movimiento indigenista y la reestructuración cultural americana', *América Indígena* 12/4, October 1955.

⁹ Soboul, pp. 425-63. [Cf. Soboul's distinct work in English translation, *The French Revolution*, London 1989, pp. 115-251.]

elements of the leap. The time for typologies has certainly not yet arrived. A lot remains to be seen about the future development of the processes now affecting the ex-socialist countries.

Moreover, in addition to the basic theme of the transition to modernity, many other elements of analysis need to be brought into play as determinants of these processes. Not the least, of course, is the geopolitics of national interests. All of these require different approaches that have nothing to do with political economy (like the one here).

For the moment, however, it is important to stress that in the classical transition in France the bourgeoisie finally consolidated its direct rule only in 1830, and did so, curiously enough, in the form of a constitutional monarchy. Before then, in order to overcome aristocratic resistance, 'the bourgeoisie had to resign itself to the popular alliance and consented to the establishment of the Napoleonic dictatorship'.¹⁰

Thus, in the classical transition to modernity, there was a period of at least forty years when its bourgeois character was more or less obscured by the fact that other actors—the people and the power-usurping bureaucracy—played the leading roles. It is hardly surprising that in the socialist revolutions of the twentieth century, the leading role of these same actors—for seventy years in Russia, or forty in China—almost totally obscured the true character of these processes.

This is not the place, nor am I the author, to underscore the respective roles and features of the civilian and military bureaucracies that usurped power in various phases of these processes. The dictators who stood at their head usually presented themselves as 'enlightened leaders of all the world's peoples', awarding themselves every honour and privilege as they crushed their own and (more than once) neighbouring peoples with an iron hand. In a few exceptional cases, these Napoleons were tragic enlightened leaders with a prior history of Jacobinism. In others, however, the jewels in their chain of office appear to have been guile, ambition, treachery, unscrupulousness and, above all, brutality. Soon after their death—if justice did not catch up with them before—they were usually moved to a well-deserved cemetery, in a smaller tomb than the one they had built for themselves.

Of greater interest is to discuss the key role of the mass of people who, when called upon to act in each of these transitions to modernity, burst onto the stage and generally cut down what was rotten to its very roots. It was this which cleared the way for the new to be born. When things had to be done, it was not the smug and contented who decided that the time had come for change. It was always the discontented. People hungry for justice and all. Common, ordinary people. Young people at every age in life. Simple people. The ones at the bottom.

The leading role of the people does not define only one moment in the transition to modernity. In none of these processes can it be reduced to the storming of the Bastille or the Winter Palace. In the classical transition,

¹⁰ Soboul, *La Revolución Francesa*, p. 117.

there are at least three moments at which the voice giving the orders comes from below: the moment of Robespierre, the moment of the 1848 revolutionaries, and obviously the moment of the Communards of 1871. It is possible that, given the events of this end of the century, the children of old Marx and old Lenin will no longer characterize the Storming of the Heavens as the first of the proletarian revolutions. It may be that a much more complex analysis of the world-wide transition to capitalist modernity will regard that heroic moment as an irruption of the people necessary for the process to advance from one to another of its discrete phases. In the transition to modernity, the people bore the greatest share of suffering and endured the greatest privations; they never secured any privilege for themselves; and they ended up in more or less the same need as before, though having won their freedom in many crucial respects. Their leaders were genuine revolutionaries who, in the end, usually felt on their own neck the guillotine that had decapitated the old society.

The Parisian sans-culottes—for example, the 662 victorious survivors of the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789—were far from being ‘the dregs of society’, as some have liked to portray them. A majority, nearly two-thirds of the total, were ‘artisans and workers belonging to thirty trades (first and foremost, to ones associated with wood—49 carpenters and 48 cabinetmakers—then 41 locksmiths, 28 shoemakers). Roughly a quarter were mainly connected with the retail trade (21 shopkeepers, eleven wine merchants, three innkeepers). Workers, hard to identify in the vocabulary of the times, were in a clear minority: approximately 150 (of whom 25, the porters, can be identified with complete certainty). A single woman: Marie Charpentier, wife of Hanserne, washerwoman of Saint-Hippolyte parish in the Saint-Marcel neighbourhood.’¹¹

The sans-culottes were a dominant presence during these days, ‘but small groups of “bourgeois”, persons of independent means and members of the liberal professions also took part in the *journées*; women also played an especially important role on the occasion of the march on Versailles, the subsistence protests and ransacking of 1792 and 1793, and the *journées* of Pradial.’¹² A report on the Red Guards who stormed the Winter Palace in Petrograd in October 1917 would probably not give a different picture of their social origin, although their working-class component would have been rather more significant because of the greater development of capitalist industry in Russia.

It should not be forgotten, of course, that ‘however important and effective was the revolutionary movement of the urban masses, the bourgeois revolution would not have won through if the peasant masses, the immense majority of the nation, had not joined the Revolution in its turn. It is true that the Parisian masses played a key role from the 14th of July to the *journées* of October 1789, and again from the spring of 1792 onwards. But in the intervening period, it was undoubtedly the peasant

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 229.

revolt which drove the revolution forwards.¹³ Would not a simple change of dates make this last paragraph entirely applicable to the role of the Russian peasantry?

The Jacobin International

Marat, Danton, Saint-Just, Robespierre and the other Jacobins, who based themselves on the people and led their uprising from 1792 until the Ninth of Thermidor, Year II (27 July 1794), dominated the stage of the Revolution. They liquidated one another, and those who were left were guillotined on the Tenth of Thermidor. Meanwhile they led the revolutionary government, set rolling the heads of the king and queen and the feudal system, abolished slavery in the colonies, and defeated the intervention of all the major powers of the time. They created the 'single and indivisible' French Republic, providing it with a civil register, a divorce law, a new calendar, free and compulsory primary education, a National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts, and the *École Normale Supérieure*. They bequeathed to the world a new era, the *Marseillaise* and the metric system. In speaking of the French revolutionaries, one cannot fail to mention the militants who led the popular action in the countryside and in the faubourgs of Paris, or the Conspiracy of Equals of Babeuf, 'who, when he appeared on the scaffold in the Place Vendôme, had helped to open the gates of the future'.¹⁴ But it is the Jacobins who, in this classic epic, represent the highest expression of the human will to change the world.

The Jacobins were reborn under different names in the one revolution after another that succeeded the French Revolution, each time widening the sphere of modernity that is now bent on covering the whole planet. The ideas of the new Jacobins were different from, and often critical of, those held by their elder brothers. Their methods were sometimes a little more democratic and humane, in proportion as the human species itself developed; but at many other times they were more brutal than the original, reflecting the more primitive regions through which their history passed.

The Mexican Jacobins sometimes called themselves Maderistas, Carranzistas or Villistas, but most of them were Zapatistas—in that revolution in the land of Cuauhtémoc which paved the way for all the triumphant transitions to modernity in the twentieth century. They were certainly present in the great revolutions that took place in the name of Allah. But in the main revolutions of the twentieth century, the Jacobins called themselves Bolsheviks, Communists, Socialists, *miristas*, Sandinistas or revolutionary Marxists. Their proper names were Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Che Guevara, and many, many others. Although some remained faithful to the *Marseillaise* and even called it socialist, most of us twentieth-century Jacobins have gone into battle intoning the *Internatio-*

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 274. The soundness of this judgement, and the vacuity of so much 'revisionist' writing on the French Revolution, is thoroughly documented in John Markoff, 'Violence, Emancipation, and Democracy: The Countryside and the French Revolution', *American Historical Review*, vol. 100, no. 2, April 1995.

nale. Our dream was no longer the impossible society of petty producers to which our brothers, the classical Jacobins, aspired. The dream of the principal twentieth-century Jacobins, now achievable, albeit in the future, is to pave the way for the inevitable overcoming of the capitalist epoch—the same thing, in the end, that our revolutions of the twentieth century paved the way for. This dream remains standing, intact and eager for the twenty-first century.

In every transition to modernity the Jacobins lose out—that is, after gaining power and doing what they have to do. It has to be so, because the character of every revolution of the last two centuries means that the worker, whose expression they are, is not the fundamental power of the nascent societies. Yet they remain a vigilant presence throughout the transition, as does the people itself, thereby forcing those who become the ruling class within these processes to carry out their historical role effectively. Where this century's revolutions were communist, the Jacobins called themselves Communists. But the Communists did not always continue to be Jacobins. When they retained power, those who actually held it became Thermidoreans, Bonapartists and now finally bourgeois through and through. The true Jacobins mostly ended up victims, purged by their former comrades.

In Chile they were called militants of Popular Unity or *miristas*. They were peasants, workers, artists, intellectuals, students, artisans, shopkeepers, soldiers—the people. They dreamed of socialism, but they carried out the land reform, nationalized copper, gave children half a litre of milk and eight years of compulsory elementary education—the very changes that opened up the road along which the country is now advancing.¹⁵ Many of them were liquidated; thousands disappeared. Others spent the best part of their life in exile, outside or inside the country.

In the clandestine struggle against Pinochet, they never ceased to dig in their heels. And in this way they forced those who came after them to carry out the further changes that the country needed—on pain of losing everything. When it was again necessary, they appeared at the head of popular protests to liquidate the dictatorship and open the way to a democratic state better suited to the country's new structure.

Today they are present as a guarantee that the outstanding changes will be carried through, that the country will develop and the people not live so badly. They accompany and help to construct the popular subject which has been developing through all these struggles. What they watch most attentively is the arrangements being made for the future and those who will create it, in the society that will inevitably succeed the capitalist modernity to which Chile, thanks to the struggles of its Jacobins, is finally gaining entry after such a long delay.

In most parts of the world, the Left of the twenty-first century faces different problems and tasks as a result of the legacy handed down by

¹⁵ Foreign observers of Chile's economic 'miracle' do not always note that it was based upon the structural transformations, notably land reform and copper nationalization, brought about by the Unidad Popular. Cf. Manuel Riesco, *El desarrollo de capitalismo en Chile*, Santiago 1993.

revolutionaries from previous centuries: the legacy of capitalist modernity. These new problems will present themselves first to those who were the first to live through the transition to capitalism. Marx himself analysed a state of things which has only recently, more than a century after his death, spread throughout the world—with new dimensions, to be sure. And those who have retained and developed his legacy in the most advanced countries, naturally suffering the same relative marginalization that marked Marx's own life, understood years ago that the different nature of such problems called for different approaches, more sophisticated and appropriate to more complex and democratic societies. Such people are generally very critical of Jacobinism—and rightly so. Its forms will not necessarily have to be repeated in the transition from capitalism to the society that comes after it.

None of this should make us lose sight of the necessary role played by Jacobinism in the transitions to modernity, especially in the twentieth century when this phenomenon really did become world-wide. Perhaps we could say today that Jacobinism, in the broad sense given to it here, was a characteristic and appropriate political form in certain popular phases of the transition to capitalist modernity. In this sense, its progressive role has been gigantic. Probably historians, intellectuals and popular classes—who are always just in the long run—will duly appreciate its heritage, whatever name it has since acquired. And they will do so with greater distance, sobriety and depth¹⁶ than they can possibly have today in many parts of the world.

It is to Salvador Allende, Jacobin president of Chile, more than to anyone else, that the modern nation it is coming to be owes its existence. The monument he deserves will be built sooner rather than later, 'más temprano que tarde', in the cities and hearts of his people.

Translated by Patrick Camiller

¹⁶ Some have expressed agreement with the general point of view expressed here about 'actually existing socialism', whilst condemning such experiments on the grounds that they did not clearly perceive what they in fact were and even proclaimed themselves to be something rather different. Such a position soon leads to the most absurd conclusions. Take, for example, the recent book *El vacilar de las cosas* (Buenos Aires) by the essayist Juan José Sebreli. On the pretext of defending 'the genuine Marx', Sebreli goes so far as to diagnose a 'leftist disorder' in all of this century's revolutionaries, including 'the Marxists and all their twentieth-century variants, Leninists, Stalinists, Trotskyists, Maoists, Castroites, Guevarists, Third Worldists, ultra-leftists and liberation theologians'. He describes Cuba as 'that quaint little provincial museum displaying the archaeological relics of a vanished civilization', built, like other socialisms, by 'political morons . . . the thousands of nameless militants who suffered persecution, exile, torture and sometimes death'. As we can see, there is no idea, however good, which is free of provincial political idiocy.