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The twenty-first century revolutions and internationalism: a world historical perspective

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ABSTRACT

In his essay, 'It is imperative to reconstruct the Internationale of workers and peoples', Samir Amin (2018) suggested that in order to 'deconstruct the extreme centralization of wealth and the power that is associated with the system', we should seriously study 'the experience of the worker Internationales [...], even if they belong to the past. This should be done, not in order to "choose" a model among them, but to invent the most suitable form for contemporary conditions'. In this paper, I will follow Amin's suggestion and provide a brief examination of the past experiences of first Internationales in the nineteenth century, and conditions that produced them, with an eye to the present moment. By comparing the political climate of the early twenty-first century to analogous comparable periods in world history, I will argue that today we need two distinct forms of global political organizations. First one should serve as a horizontal 'movement of movements' that reflects the spontaneous and creative energy of mass movements from below; the second one should serve as a hierarchically organized international party which points out, brings to front and represents the global and long-term interests of the movements against their local/short-term interests.

KEYWORDS

Social revolutions; social movements; internationalism; global political organizations; Samir Amin

Samir Amin, a leading scholar and co-founder of the world-systems tradition, died on August 12, 2018. Just before his death, he published, along with close allies, a call for 'workers and the people' to establish a 'fifth international' [<https://www.pambazuka.org/global-south/letter-intent-inaugural-meeting-international-workers-and-peoples>] to coordinate support to progressive movements. To honor Samir Amin's invaluable contribution to world-systems scholarship, we are pleased to present readers with a selection of essays responding to Amin's final message for today's anti-systemic movements. This forum is being co-published between Globalizations [<https://www.tandfonline.com/rglo>], the Journal of World-Systems Research [<http://jwsr.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/jwsr/issue/view/75>] and Pambazuka News [<https://www.pambazuka.org/>]. Additional essays and commentary can be found in these outlets.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, we have been experiencing rapid intensification of revolutionary situations, social revolts and rebellions on a global scale (Badiou, 2012; Chase-Dunn & Nagy, 2019; Karatasli, Kumral, Scully, & Upadhyay, 2014; Mason, 2012; Therborn, 2014; Žižek, 2012).

This is not an ordinary wave of social unrest. It belongs to one of the major world historical waves of mobilization (see Silver & Slater, 1999) which has the *potential* to transform political structures, economic systems and social relations. Recent research shows that the frequency and the geographical spread of social unrest around the world in the post-2008 era are exceptionally high, making it one of the major waves of social mobilization in the long twentieth century (Karatasli, Kumral, & Silver, 2018). Furthermore, the number of revolutionary situations in the 2010–2014 period are almost equal to the 1915–1919 period (Beissinger, 2018). Hence structural and objective conditions of another round of world-historical transformation seem to be almost as fertile as it was a century ago.

There are also other interesting similarities between the current moment and the early twentieth century that might help us make sense of the current era we are living in. For instance, similar to the early twentieth century, the major wave of social revolts and revolutions that we have experienced in the twenty-first century has been taking place in synchrony with interlinked political-economic and geopolitical crises on a world scale (Fominaya, 2017; Karatasli, 2018; Wallerstein, 2012). In the previous era, the intensification of economic and geopolitical crises that spanned roughly from 1870 to 1940s had undermined the foundations of the British world-hegemony and gave birth to the U.S. world hegemony, which transformed the way historical capitalism operated (Arrighi, 1994). Today, since the 1970s, we have been experiencing similar interlinked crises in economic and geopolitical spheres, which have been undermining the U.S. world hegemony, and signalling that capitalism can no longer operate in the way it used to do. Hence from such a world-historical perspective, it can be argued that we are living in a period analogous to the ‘chaos’ phase of the decline of the British world-hegemony in the early twentieth century (Arrighi & Silver, 1999). Moreover, like the early twentieth century, the rise of social unrest in twenty-first century has widely been interpreted as a counter-movement to the rise of self-regulating markets and commodification (Burawoy, 2012; Fraser, 2017; see Polanyi, 1944). Both periods reversed the previous trends of trade globalization and unleashed a period of de-globalization in the world-economy (Alvarez & Chase-Dunn, 2018; also see Chase-Dunn & Gills, 2005). In both periods, world-wide social mobilization was accompanied by nationalist movements that started to challenge existing territorial maps of the world (Karatasli, 2018), and were followed by the rise of far-right groups and parties around the world (Chase-Dunn & Nagy, 2019). We can easily extend the list of such similarities.

Focusing only on similarities, however, will conceal the radical differences between the socio-political climates of these two periods. One major difference is that in the early twentieth century many of these revolutionary situations produced revolutionary outcomes. Put differently, while the communist, socialist and national liberation movements in the early twentieth century failed to fulfil their promises in the long run, they were spectacularly successful in the short and medium run (Arrighi, Hopkins, & Wallerstein, 2012). Especially the success of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia and the rising tide of proletarian revolutions and national liberation movements went beyond the preceding historical examples of the 1871 Paris commune and 1905 revolutions by demonstrating that the exploited, the oppressed and the excluded could take power, establish their own states, invent new modes of governments and successfully defend it against the ruling classes and imperialist states. In short, despite all of their shortcomings, the revolutions that took place in the early twentieth century were unprecedented world-historical achievements.

Today the picture we see, however, is quite different. The overwhelming majority of revolutionary situations that could potentially transform the world have failed to make their bids for such a change. Neither the occupy-type anti-austerity movements in Europe and North America nor the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa nor the rising labour militancy and pro-democracy movements in East Asia have so far made an impact compared to the revolts and revolutions of

the early twentieth century (Springborg, 2011). Of course, we should be careful in this assessment because this period is not yet over. We will probably continue to see rounds of interconnected waves of social unrest in years to come as the crisis of the U.S. world hegemony further unfolds. Moreover, we should keep in mind that success is a relative and highly subjective term for evaluating social movement outcomes. From a certain perspective, it has been argued that the movements of the early twenty-first century have already been very successful in ‘changing the subject’ (Milkman, Luce, & Lewis, 2013) by turning attention – for the first time in a long while – to the issues of capitalism, class, inequality and democracy. Likewise, it has been suggested that these movements have been extremely successful in demonstrating that spontaneous, horizontal and leaderless movements can be very effective in opening spaces ‘for people to voice their concerns and desires’ (Sitrin, 2012). While these observations are correct, they employ a very low threshold for assessing social change. Despite their contribution to turning attention to these issues, the progressive counter-movements in the twenty-first century have not slowed down or reversed Polanyi’s (1944) marketization pendulum in a way that would reduce the rate of commodification of land, labour and money. Of course, rising protests and conflicts have overturned governments in many places such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Ukraine. Yet, in none of these places (probably except for Kurds in Rojava¹), have movements representing the exploited, the oppressed and the excluded sections of the society managed to take power. In most cases, movements in the twenty-first century ended up replacing one type of authoritarianism for another type. Even according to bourgeois-democratic standards, we have been experiencing a major failure.

Divergent trends of the ‘Marxist Century’ and the ‘American Century’

I argue that the differential outcomes of the revolutionary waves of 1915–1919 and 2010–2014 have their roots in the asymmetrical evolution of the ideological and organizational structures of social movements in the course of what Arrighi (1990) called the ‘Marxist Century’ (i.e. the long nineteenth century) and the ‘American Century’ (i.e. the long twentieth century). Today, the dominant tendency is to explain these divergent trends as an outcome of a switch from vertical to horizontal organizational structures in social movements (Mason, 2012; Sitrin, 2012). While this distinction is not altogether wrong, it does not capture the essence of the problem. The issues at stake are more complex than verticalism and horizontalism.

Divergent trends in these two long centuries can better be understood by examining the different attitudes of movements towards ‘voluntarism’ and ‘spontaneity’ (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 196–205) in the two centuries. In the early nineteenth century, vertically organized revolutionary movements in Europe – such as the *Carbonari* and the various proto-communist organizations founded by Buonarroti, Barbes and Blanqui after the example of Babeuf’s *Conspiracy of the Equals* – were voluntarists (see Draper, 1986, pp. 123–127; Greene, 2017). Their approach to revolution took into account neither objective conditions (e.g. structural opportunities for mobilization, class relations, crises in political, social or economic spheres) nor the dynamics of spontaneous mass movements. Voluntarists believed that revolution ‘required the conscious intervention of a revolutionary elite through an act of will’ (Greene, 2017, p. 109) and its success was function of organizational strength. Accordingly, many of these voluntarist organizations proclaimed the exact date of their revolutionary insurrection months (or sometimes years) in advance regardless of the fertility of objective conditions.

In the course of the nineteenth century, however, revolutionary organizations gradually moved away from such unqualified voluntarism. Especially those inspired by Marxism tried to counter-balance their voluntarist heritage by seriously considering dynamics of the spontaneous mass

movements. For Marxists, the proletariat was the main force of revolution. On the one hand, Marx and Engels argued, under capitalism ‘the modern labourer [...] sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth’ (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 233; also see Marx, 1867, Ch. 25). On the other hand, capitalism gives an end to isolation of labourers, brings them together in large factories and increases contact, cooperation and coordination among workers, and thus strengthens and empowers the proletariat (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 233; also see Marx, 1867, Chs 13–15). Therefore, through simultaneously plunging the proletarians into misery and strengthening them, ‘the bourgeoisie produces [...] its own gravediggers’ (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 233). Moreover, the periodic crisis tendencies of capitalism produces periodic upheavals among its gravediggers, preparing the preconditions for a proletarian revolution.

Despite these observations, however, Marx and Engels did not believe that the proletariat could make a global revolution without an external intervention by the communists. This is why the dominant tendency in the Marxist left during the second half of the nineteenth century was not a gradual switch from ‘voluntarism’ to ‘spontaneity’, but rather to a synthesis of these. Hierarchically organized formerly voluntarist revolutionary organizations now saw their task as to *guide* and to strategically *intervene* the horizontally organized spontaneous mass movements for the success of the world revolution. Of course, there has never been a progressive consensus regarding on the nature and form of this ‘intervention’ and hence the role of communists in a workers’ revolution. Should the communists be a part of these mass movements and try to convince them from within or should they bring them consciousness from outside? Could they ride the tide of these mass movements to come to power? The practices of different organizations – ranging from the Communist League (1846–1852) and the International Workingman’s Association (1864–1876), from the Socialist International (1889–1916) to the Communist International (1919–1943) – reveal different attitudes on these issues. Yet, most communists agree on the minimal formulation that Marx and Engels laid out in the *Communist Manifesto*. According to this formulation:

The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole. (Marx & Engels, 1848)

Marx and Engels’s explanation of *pointing out*, *bringing to front* and *representing* the global and long-term interests against national and immediate interests is a shorthand formula for the role they ascribed to a communist party. In its more general form, this formula suggests that communists should struggle to *expand mass movements’ spatial, temporal and substantive horizons*; which means to unite struggles in different geographies, movements with different immediate priorities and groups with substantive problems together in the pursuit of a unified revolution. For this reason, in contrast to purely *voluntarist* organizations which largely ignore the dynamics of spontaneous mass movements, the communists should use their associational power (1) to coordinate localized and spontaneous struggles in different sectors and geographies into united national struggles aiming at taking over state power and abolishing private property, and (2) then to coordinate national struggles in different parts of the world into a united international struggle aiming at spreading the revolution to all over the world.

While an advanced version of their strategy, implemented by Bolsheviks, played a key role in the success of the 1917 revolution and triggered a revolutionary wave, structural conditions of such

synthesis gradually dissolved in the course of the ‘American’ century. Parallel to the uneven spatial development of the capitalist world-system, the two interlinked tendencies Marx and Engels observed in the case of the conditions of the proletariat in England in the nineteenth century (i.e. immiseration on the one hand, and empowerment on the other hand) developed unevenly across the core and the (semi)peripheral regions in the twentieth century (Arrighi, 1990). While empowerment and strengthening of the working classes were more prominent in industrial capitalist ‘core’ countries, immiseration and pauperization remained the dominant tendency in ‘(semi)peripheral’ regions of the Global South. This uneven development deeply influenced internationalist revolutionary organizations’ ability to find a synthesis of ‘spontaneity’ and ‘voluntarism’.

In advanced capitalist countries of the Global North, labour movements turned out to be strong enough to pressure capitalist business-government complexes for economic redistribution and partial extension of their social and political rights. Also directly benefiting from post-1871 wave of new imperialism, labour aristocracies in core regions did not feel the necessity of a revolution. Especially after the 1917 Revolution and the 1929 economic depression, the bourgeoisie in Western Europe and North America also found such partial welfare redistribution to working classes as a useful strategy to maintain their rule. Under these conditions, existing revolutionary organizations could not mobilize ‘spontaneous’ energy of the masses for a revolution to overthrow the state and capital. These structural conditions pushed some of these organizations to become reformist working class parties that defend the national interests of the labour aristocracies, and some of them to remain as left-wing sectarian and ineffective groups that are largely isolated from broader masses and mass politics.

In peripheral regions of the Global South, where immiseration of the masses and the legitimacy crisis of the ruling classes were more prominent, the revolutionaries of different varieties managed to take state power but failed to fulfil their promises (Arrighi et al., 2012). For one thing, instead of bringing the proletariat to power, the communists and the revolutionary cadres had to take power themselves in the name of people. Likewise, especially after the dissolution of the *Communist Internationale*, communist regimes in the Global South did not proliferate through new waves of social revolutions by ‘soviets’ or ‘communes’. Expansion of communism in the Global South after the 1940s was a variant of what Gramsci (1971, pp. 104–107) called as ‘Piedmont-type function in passive revolutions’ where states (or armies) acted on behalf of social classes. Expansion of communism during the ‘American century’ mostly occurred through the defeat of national/imperial armies by socialist armies established by existing communist regimes or by indigenous armies controlled by communist parties that were formed during the national liberation against Axis powers (Arrighi, 1990, p. 45). Furthermore, as victories of the Old Left gained momentum, instead of coordinating the spontaneous mass movements into a unified global revolution, the Old Left mainly ignored, suffocated and repressed these movements in most locations when they got to power under the pretext of protecting their national and ‘revolutionary’ interests.

Faced with such betrayal both in the West and the rest of the world, instead of trying to re-balance degrees of *spontaneity* and *voluntarism* to simultaneously get rid of capitalism and bureaucratic socialist or national states that were formed by the Old Left, the New Left rejected the voluntarist heritage completely. Hence, from the second half of the twentieth century to present, horizontally connected spontaneous mass movements gradually became the norm (Robinson & Tormey, 2009; Sitrin, 2012). Efforts to guide, coordinate and intervene in mass movements were seen as authoritarianism or, at best, arrogance (Arrighi et al., 2012, p. 102). This emphasis is important because the failure of the post-2008 wave of social unrest is not a failure of the masses who took the streets, occupied squares and challenged governments and economic institutions. These movements proved that

they are *still* extremely powerful agents of world revolution both in the Global North and in the Global South. The failure belongs to the Global Left, which was not able to appear in its historical mission to guide, coordinate and strategically intervene in these mass movements for the success of a world revolution. Without such intervention, the *spatial, temporal and substantive horizons* of spontaneous mass movements remained insufficient to transform the world. For instance, the temporal horizons of most of the movements in the post-2008 wave of social unrest were minimal without any plans beyond the short run. Hence most of the activists who occupied and emancipated ‘squares and parks’ all over the world did not know what to do next, were not prepared for it, or were not even interested in that question. Similarly, the spatial horizons of many movements have also been very narrow. According to the trends we have been observing from 1968 onwards, we can see that many localized struggles have less and less interest in taking state power (Sitrin, 2014, p. 256), and many struggles operating at the *national* level – e.g. those who want to take state power through electoral or other means – are not interested in such a ‘universal revolution’.

Do we need a global political organization in the twenty-first century?

If the political landscape of the early nineteenth century was dominated by voluntarist movements that were preoccupied with the subjective conditions of revolutions without paying attention to dynamics of spontaneity and the objective conditions, the contemporary landscape in the twenty-first century is dominated by spontaneous movements and activists who do not trust or find much value in political organizations that have a clear vision of the necessary steps for a world revolution. Hence, what is absent today – in comparison to the early twentieth century – are the global political communist organizations who can coordinate, guide and strategically intervene in these mass movements through a synthesis of *voluntarism* and *spontaneity* without committing the errors of the early twentieth century communists. Do we need a global political organization (i.e. an *Internationale*) in the twenty-first century as Samir Amin (2018) has proposed? My answer is *no! We need two of them!*

In order to understand what the term ‘*two Internationales*’ refers to, we first need to understand a conceptual ambiguity in the way that we think about Internationales. Today we have a tendency to count Internationales as the First, the Second, the Third and so on. This practice did not exist in the late nineteenth century and is quite misleading for two main reasons.

First, what we call as the First, Second and Third were not the same types of global-level organizations. For instance, aiming to bring together trade unions with political parties, socialists with anarchists, English Owenites with French Proudhonists and Blanquists, Bakunin and his followers with Mazzini’s followers and Garibaldi, Marx with Irish and Polish nationalists, the International Workmen’s Association (i.e. the ‘First Internationale’) was more similar to contemporary World Social Forums in the context of the nineteenth century than the ‘Communist International’ (i.e. the ‘Third Internationale’), which acted as a *communist world party* (also see Amin, 2008). In direct contrast to all other global or national level political organizations of the Left, the groups that composed the First Internationale had an exceptional degree of diversity and autonomy. As Hal Draper rightly observed ‘[t]here has never been any socialist organization, national or international, that rivalled it in this respect’ (Draper, 1990, p. 151). Despite the enormous autonomy the First Internationale provided to its sections, however, it was not completely horizontal. Because it had an organizational decision-making structure that was rather similar to the *diagonal vessel form* of organization that combines horizontalism and verticalism (Alvarez & Chase-Dunn, 2018).

Second, contrary to what is widely assumed, the history of *the Internationales* in the communist movement does not start with the formation of the ‘First International’ in 1864 [which was the name

later given to the ‘International Workmen’s Association’ (1864–1876)]. An embryonic form of *International* had already been realized when an ex-Blanquist organization founded by German emigres called *Bund der Gerechten* (*the League of the Just*) merged with the Brussels *Communist Correspondence Committee*, which put forward a new variant of socialism led by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The *Communist League* (1846–1852) – for which the famous *Communist Manifesto* was written – was already an *Internationale*. As a report by the *League*’s central authority – Schapper, Bauer, and Moll (1847) – made clear, before the outbreak of the 1848 revolutions, the *Communist League* was organized in Switzerland, France, Belgium and Sweden, and was in the process of organizing in America, Norway, Germany and Holland. The Preamble of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, explained that the *League* was composed of ‘communists from various nationalities’. Hence they needed to publish the Manifesto in a number of languages including English, French, German, Italian, Flemish and Danish (Marx & Engels, 1848). Because of its *International* nature, the *Manifesto* declared the *League*’s political stand in various parts of the world including England, America, France, Switzerland, Poland and Germany in its final chapter. This practice was consistent with the template of communist organization that Marx and Engels provided in the Manifesto. This suggests something quite interesting about the nature of communist organizations. *They are, by definition, global level political organizations*. Communists’ claim to defend general/long-term interests against particularistic/short-term interests does not come merely from their ideology but more importantly from the global character of their organization.

In direct contrast to the International Workingmen’s Association, the *Communist League* was a hierarchical, homogenous world party in an embryonic form. While the International Workingmen’s Association tried to include the broadest possible alliance of the Left, the Communist League tried to do its best to distinguish itself from all other variants of socialism in the nineteenth century as they explained in Chapter III of the *Communist Manifesto*. Regarding structure and political claims, it resembled the *Communist Internationale* founded by the Bolsheviks, although not in size and strength. However, unlike the *Bolshevik Third Internationale*, the *Communist League* did not have the size, organizational capacity, connections with mass movements and experience to effectively intervene in the 1848 revolutions. Hence, it quickly failed. That’s why, today, the *Communist League* itself is little known except for its political vision as explained in the Manifesto. In many ways, the International Workingmen’s Association was the diametrical opposite of the *Communist League*.

In the twenty-first century we need both kinds of global level political organizations (horizontal and vertical). But we should be careful not to confuse their purposes. The horizontal should serve as a ‘movement of movements’ at global, national and local levels. The primary goal and the basic principle of this *Internationale*, as Marx (1872) had put it in a speech to the International Workingmen’s Association, should be forging *solidarity*. This horizontal *Internationale* should struggle to counter capital’s, states’ and all other existing racial, ethno-religious, patriarchal and other historical orders’ tendency to divide the masses, and force them to compete with each other and exclude them. This movement of mass movements should be as inclusive as possible, representing the broadest possible spectrum of progressive democracy forces, and bringing together associations of workers, peasants, ethnic and racial minorities, environmentalists, oppressed genders and sexualities, to name a few. It should consist of trade unions, mass associations, workers cooperatives, environmentalist organizations, human rights associations, transnational and local movements, feminist organizations, progressive political parties as well as individual activists. In short, it should aim to include any movement which is organized around concrete grievances caused by activities of states, capital or other historical racial, religious, patriarchal orders as long as their activities do not contradict with the general purpose of ‘resisting against capital’s, states’ and other historical orders’ efforts to

divide and exclude masses' and 'forging solidarity'. Because of the diversity of elements it aims to bring together, this Internationale must be ideologically heterogeneous. By coordinating with, learning from and forging solidarity with each other this movement of mass movements should reflect, boost and spread the spontaneous and creative energy of the masses from below. In addition to this, however, we also need a global world party analogous to *the Communist League*, which the Bolsheviks reinvented in the early twentieth century. In contrast to the horizontally connected, ideologically heterogeneous and eclectic 'movement of mass movements' this global communist party should be vertically organized and ideologically homogeneous and coherent. In order to avoid Eurocentric biases, it should be organized in all regions of the world and have a strong representation from the Global South. This party should not see itself as a rival of the 'movement of mass movements' but, on the contrary, should aim to further enhance and extend the movement of movements' networks at local, national and global levels. It should especially pay attention to strengthening the movement of movements' ties with the most exploited, oppressed and excluded sections of each nation, as consistent with the minimal formula suggested in the Manifesto. In each nation, the world party should aim to bring these organized masses from below to power (rather than coming to power itself). By *pointing out*, *bringing to front* and *representing* the general and long-term interests of people's revolution against the particularistic and immediate interests that naturally arise out of the spontaneous and heterogeneous nature of mass movements, it should struggle to overcome tendencies that would prevent the abolition of private property and the dismantling the bourgeois character of each state. Likewise, it should actively defend the right of national self-determination against great-nation chauvinism and defend and advance the rights and liberties of all ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities and oppressed groups against counter-tendencies that may appear in an extremely heterogeneous mass movements. While propagating the necessity of a global revolution for emancipation, it should defend the idea that the exploited, the oppressed and the excluded sections of each country must, in Marx and Engels' words, 'first settle matters with their own bourgeoisie' (Marx & Engels, 1848). When the mass movements from below become strong enough to produce a backlash from right-wing groups and neo-fascists, it should defend mass forces of democracy and take all precautions to defeat this reaction. Last, but not the least, when a revolution occurs in a particular region of the world, this global political party should defend and spread the revolution with an eye to its universal and long-term interests. Hence, it should aim to spread the social revolution worldwide until the revolutionary wave gains a global character.

Spreading a revolution is important for two reasons: First, it is the only way to defend a revolution without sacrificing its revolutionary character. As Marx observed '*this is the great lesson of the French Commune, which fell because none of the other centers – Berlin, Madrid, etc. – developed great revolutionary movements comparable to the mighty uprising of the Paris proletariat*' (Marx, 1872). This statement should not be read from an economic perspective. It does not imply that revolutions will fail unless they are accompanied by revolutions in advanced capitalist countries. The reverse is also correct. As Marx once asked Engels:

The difficult question for us is: on the Continent the revolution is imminent and will immediately assume a socialist character. Is it not bound to be crushed in this little corner, considering that in a far greater territory the movement of the bourgeoisie is still in the ascendant? (Marx, 1858)

The answer to this question, without hesitation, should be 'yes'. This is precisely why the communist party must assume a 'global' character.

Secondly, in an interconnected capitalist world-economy, the exploited, the oppressed and the excluded groups in a particular country or region *cannot* 'emancipate' themselves unless those in

all other countries and regions are emancipated. This was because ‘emancipation’, for communists, means something more than a revolution in a particular geography. It requires taking over *all* objective forces of production and regulation developed by historical capitalism and the bourgeoisie states, and radically transforming social and class relations that constitute them in a way that would give an end to the class-based, economic, social and political contradictions they produce on a global scale. However, the experience of the twentieth century shows that the *methods* used to spread the revolutions matter. For this global revolution to be emancipatory, communists should bring the exploited, the oppressed and the excluded masses to power through social revolutions, and should not try to rely on ‘Piedmont-type functions’ (where states or armies act of behalf of people) to expand the domain of communist regimes.

Towards an anarchist or a second Marxist twenty-first century?

If the analysis about the political climate in the twenty-first century presented above is accurate, then we should expect disproportionately more people to agree with the first part of the proposal (formation of a movement of mass movements at local, national and global levels) than the second part (formation of a world communist party). This is necessarily so because, while the first part of the proposal is broad and inclusive, the second part requires an agreement about the fundamental premises of communism as well as limitations of spontaneous mass movements. Yet, since especially the last quarter of the long American century has unmade all ideological and organizational experience and heritages that the communist revolutionaries had gained in the course of the long Marxist century, today, even a minimal agreement on such premises has become extremely rare.

Likewise, when we look at the actual historical development toward the realization of these two *Internationales*, we can easily see a divergence. Despite all its failures and shortcomings, something close to a ‘movement of movements’ has already been taking place in recent decades (see Cox & Nilsen, 2007). The ups and downs we see in the development of this process since the turn of the twenty-first century should not be demoralizing for its proponents because these cycles eventually reflect the tempo and pace of spontaneous mass movements from below. Yet, except for small circles of revolutionaries, there is no serious and visible effort to establish a world communist party; and even the most sympathetic circles are rather skeptical regarding the idea. Hence, we are further away from the realization of a world communist party than a movement of movements.

These divergent tendencies suggest that if contemporary trends do not change in the near future, the twenty-first century might be closer to an ‘anarchist century’ than a ‘second Marxist century’. The current tendencies in social movements in the twenty-first century already point out this trend. I must note that the anarchism we observe today is a new political formation and most activists do not openly embrace this title. This new anarchism is neither similar to Blanqui nor to Bakunin in the nineteenth century. The new anarchist movements are not preoccupied with taking over state power (as was the case with Blanqui) or destroying it (as was the case with Bakunin). They are usually quite hostile toward vertical organizational structures and voluntarism which were strategically used both by Blanqui and Bakunin in different ways. If we really work to find historical analogies, in many respects, the new anarchism of twenty-first century is an eclectic mix of Proudhon’s utopian vision towards ‘transformation of societies from within’ and creating a ‘new society within the shell of the old’ (preformism) with Bernstein’s revisionist socialist motto that ‘movement is everything’. In contrast to Proudhon, however, today, together with the legacies of communism, almost all utopian visions – both their anarchist and socialist variants – have vanished. In most cases, they have been replaced by visions of re-establishing ‘welfare states’, which started to look

like a utopia for many. This is one of the key differences between the current moment and the early nineteenth century.

Despite all differences between these two centuries, however, there is one key similarity that is fundamental. As explained above, the early nineteenth century provided the preconditions for the rise of Marxism and led to the formation of a series of Internationales. Similarly, despite all the disadvantages already mentioned, the current waves of social revolts and revolutions and ‘new anarchism’ has also been preparing the structural preconditions of a second Marxist revival, including the opportunities to bring together those who recognize the necessity of a world party. To understand this link, it is important to note that, in the nineteenth century, the idea of international or global political organizations was not confined to the communist organizations but was also embraced by liberals, anarchists and even nationalists. Even before the establishment of the First International in 1864, from Buonarroti to Weitling, from Blanqui to Mazzini, from Bakunin to Marx and Engels, all different strands of revolutionary and reformist opposition in Europe shared some ideal of internationalism. The key factor for the rise of internationalism in the nineteenth century was the defeat of the French Revolution and the revolutionary waves it triggered. Especially after the Bourbon Restoration of 1815, there was a shared feeling of defeat by liberals and radicals who believed in the ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. Dissolution of the Napoleonic army produced thousands of ex-Napoleonic officers spread all around Europe who were ready to take part in emerging secret organizations to realize the ideals of the French Revolution. While Carbonari style organizations were spreading all around Europe, the Concert of Europe and the Holy Alliance between autocratic monarchies and empires of Europe (i.e. Prussia, Austria and Russia) were constantly repressing any kind of liberal, anarchist, nationalist or socialist opposition. Activists who faced collective oppression by the Holy Alliance *intuitively* grasped that their resistance and their cause had to transcend the narrow boundaries of local organizations and their countries. Internationalism and the need for an effective international political party were not abstract ideals but matters of necessity.

In short, the revolutionary organizations that shaped the Marxist century did not emerge out of the thin air. They emerged when revolutionaries who were serious about overcoming obstacles before the revolution seriously considered the limitations of their strategies, organizational structures and ideologies, and came together with those who had similar concerns. For instance, Karl Schapper, the revolutionary who convinced and recruited Marx and Engels into the organization that eventually became the ‘Communist League’ (McLellan, 1995, pp. 150–151), was a former member of Mazzini’s ‘Young Germany’ and ‘Young Europe’ organizations (Wittke, 1950, p. 22), and later a member of the *Bund der Geächteten* (i.e. League of Outlaws) and its offshoot *Bund der Gerechten* (*League of the Just*) (McLellan, 1995, pp. 150–151). He fought side by side with Blanqui’s *Société des saisons* in May 1839 uprising in Paris (Wittke, 1950, p. 29) and became comrades with revolutionaries as diverse as Mazzini, Weitling, Marx and Engels. Schapper’s life is an example of revolutionaries of the era who were constantly struggling to overcome the limitations of their revolutionary activities to invent something better (McLellan, 1995, pp. 150–153; Wittke, 1950, pp. 22, 29, 97–105).

This analysis is critically important because the series of defeats and failures we have been experiencing in this most recent wave of social revolts and revolutions make the current moment very similar to the early nineteenth century. The major difference is that instead of ‘voluntarism’, in this century ‘spontaneity’ has become the norm. Hence, activists who really want to overcome the limits of current social movement strategies will need to re-introduce the ‘organized subjective will’ into this ‘spontaneity’ to find a new synthesis, without committing the errors of the early twentieth century communists. Objective conditions for such synthesis are more fertile today than the previous century. In contrast to the ‘American’ twentieth century where ‘immiseration’ and ‘strengthening’

tendencies of the global proletariat took place in different world geographies, today we see a convergence in these two trends. As the crisis of the U.S. world hegemony deepens, together with the middle classes, labour aristocracies in core regions that were formed during the long twentieth century are losing their privileges and gradually dismantling. Together with the precaritization of the labour in the Global North, we also see the formation of new working classes in the Global South. As the post-2008 wave of revolts and revolutions show, the exploited, the oppressed and the excluded sections of societies in the Global North and South have already been taking the streets and facing serious obstacles towards producing a better future. What is missing are coordinated efforts to *organize* these masses effectively at local, national and global on the one hand, and to *point out, bring to front* and *represent* the global and long-term interests of the movement on the other hand. If we can succeed at these fronts, the twenty-first century can be a second and successful Marxist century.

Note

1. The Kurds in Rojava, who were a part of this most recent revolutionary wave, have managed to produce a completely different outcome. Using the revolutionary opportunities produced by the Syrian Arab Spring and the Syrian internationalized civil war, Kurds took up arms, gained de facto control of their territory and have started to transform the social, economic and political relationships in their region.

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