Marxist theories of revolution
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Whatever else might be said about the adequacies or otherwise of Marxism, it is virtually the only school of revolutionary thought to produce serious theories about the sociology of revolution. Other traditions — especially the anarchist one — have written about techniques of revolution (e.g. Blanqui) and have speculated, often very perceptivey, on what a post-revolutionary society might be like, but have not produced the detailed analyses of social dynamics and the conditions for revolution which were the forte of the great Marxist thinkers.

It is impossible here to examine in detail the various theories and debates of Marxist revolutionaries. Rather, I will briefly sketch the contributions of the main figures, with reference to a recurring and all-important theme: the determinist versus voluntarist (or spontaneist versus Hegemonist) argument.

Marx and Engels, the founders of the Marxist school of thought, developed a whole theoretical system which was the product of, yet went far beyond, Western European thought up to their time. On the basis of Hegelian philosophy, bourgeois political economy and French Socialism, and taking into account developing technology, the structure of capitalist society and the growing struggles between workers and capitalists, they worked out their system, the principle elements of which were:

1. A philosophical view of the world which has since been called dialectical materialism, although Marx himself never used the term. For our purposes, the main points of this are:
   * Matter exists independently of man, and sets man the external conditions under which he must live and work.
   * Man makes his own history as a part of nature.
   * Social processes (and, according to Engels, natural processes) proceed via “contradictions” and their resolution.

(Already in this philosophical view there are the elements of the great debates which were to take place amongst Marxist revolutionaries. For the first two points raise an inevitable question: To what extent are man’s actions determined by his natural and social environment and to what extent is he free to make choices — to create a world of his own making and in so doing “make himself”? It is very easy to reply that both things happen, but the problems really arise when one attempts to examine any concrete historical situation and make a choice on a particular course of action.)

2. An economic analysis, especially but not only of capitalism, which attempted to lay bare the inherent contradictions in class societies, and thus show the necessity (many were to later argue, the inevitability) of struggle and eventual revolution and change.

Marx and Engels never wrote a specific work on the theory of revolution as such, but their writings are studded with references to the problems of a new society developing out of an old one.

What Marx and Engels did contribute to a sociology of revolution was a theory about the “motor of history”. They saw the main social contradiction which impelled society on as being that between the forces of production and the relations of production. As technology, social classes and economic organisation (productive forces) developed, they outgrew the class structure of society (production relations) and the resulting tension leads to revolution and the institution of a set of production relations which are more in accord with social needs.

After their deaths, a period of differentiation in European Marxism set in. In the main, this centred around the reform or revolution argument: Was the labour movement to seek reforms within capitalism, which would eventually lead to socialism (this gradualist reformism was, and still is, essentially a variant of determinism) or should it see a total revolution as the only solution to society’s problems? It was to be the tragedy of European Marxism that it could not find a satisfactory answer to this problem. Bernstein’s “revisionism” and the subsequent victory of reformist ideas in the main workers’ parties of Western Europe were not adequately countered by revolutionary Marxists, most of whom retreated into sterile slogans or a variant of spontaneism. None of them succeeded in building a large revolutionary organisation before the end of World War I.

It was in the “backward” countries of Eastern Europe and Asia that revolutionary theorists adequate to the tasks confronting them were to lead successful revolutions. The reason for this is not easy to find, but it may have something to do with the fact that for these less developed societies, Marxism was something of a revelation — a prefiguration of their future; whereas in Western Europe, which had developed, Marxism was tending to become a set of dogma whose understanding lagged behind the real and developing social situation.

Whether this is the case or not, the essential features which characterised the four main Marxist theorists (Lenin, Trotsky, Gramsci, Mao — three of whom were leaders of successful revolutions) of the first half of the century were:

a) They all believed in the actuality of the revolution — its existence as a here and now phenomenon, and the possibility, given the right...
conditions plus correct theory, strategy and tactics, of overthrowing the ruling class.

b) Each took marxism not as a dogma, but as a framework to be creatively applied and updated in the given conditions. Each in fact made significant contributions to theory, especially in the analysis of the social conditions of their particular country. In doing so, they all took into account not only marxist writings, but those of other social, political, economic and cultural writers.

c) Each placed great emphasis on two aspects of revolution which at first sight seem contradictory: i) The spontaneous upsurge and creativity of the masses and their urge to take power into their own hands. All saw the importance, and encouraged the development, of autonomous organs of people's power which could form the embryo of the future egalitarian socialist society. ii) The need for an organisation which can bring consciousness by injecting new ideas, trigger off and lead action, and where necessary act on behalf of the masses.

The unity of these two aspects distinguishes Lenin, Gramsci, Mao (also Ho Chi Minh) and (with qualifications) Trotsky, from both those who eschew organisation and idolise spontaneous mass actions (the anarchists etc.) and bureaucratic, reformist and Stalinist leaders who idolise organisation and in practice fear independent activity of the people.

d) Perhaps the most important common feature is an emphasis on the human will as an important element in the social process. Not only did there have to be a consciousness of the need for revolution, but there had to exist, in large numbers of people, the will to carry it out. This voluntarist element was seen as a sine qua non for revolution which could, under certain circumstances, take over from other factors and direct the social process.

Here briefly are some of the main contributions of these four theorists:

 Lenin: Without doubt, Lenin's most important contributions were his sociological analyses of the dynamics of revolution\(^1\) and his fight against vulgar determinism. Lenin opposed the determinist conception (in both its reformist and anarchist variants) that the workers through their own struggles would "spontaneously" achieve a revolutionary, socialist consciousness. He stressed the need for an organisation which would continually inject ideas into the day to day struggles of the people, providing them with an alternative to the existing structure and ideology of society. At the same time, and as a necessary part of this role, the revolutionary organisation served as a milieu for the development and dissemination of a revolutionary culture and politics, and as a "guardian" of revolutionary theory during non-revolutionary periods of general apathy or reaction.

Although he never wrote a work on political

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\(^1\) See for instance Lenin's definition of revolutionary situations in *The Collapse of the Second International*. For this and other relevant passages, see the chapter on 'Revolutionary Situations' in *Lenin's Theories on Revolution* by E. Aarons (Young, Sydney 1970) pp. 68-71.

theory which set forth his ideas as a coherent whole, Lenin also emerged as probably the ablest marxist political theorist and politician yet seen. In particular Lenin's grasp of the vital importance of political struggle against all aspects of class society, and his actual conduct of such a struggle via the written word and brilliant organisational work, are perhaps his outstanding achievements.

The necessity for the development and training of revolutionaries fit to overthrow the ruling classes and then to direct the rule of the working class was also a question which divided Lenin from many of his contemporaries and opponents. This too was a point of divergence from vulgar determinism, for it implies a recognition of the role of conscious effort in the revolutionary process — a recognition that the inner dynamic of capitalist society does not "inevitably" produce a working class (or even a section of the working class) which can consciously take power and direct society in its own interests. Rather, the conscious work and effort of revolutionaries (who themselves go through a long process of developing their capabilities) is needed before even a section of such a class is produced.

Lenin was, and this view still is, accused of elitism. Now there are undeniable elitist, inhuman and undemocratic versions of "Leninism", but Lenin's views were, and still are, an incomparably more accurate empirical statement of the realities of class society than those of either his reformist or anarchist opponents, or most of their modern analogues.

Trotsky: A brilliant analyst in many fields (e.g. literature, military strategy), Trotsky made a major contribution to revolutionary thought with his theory of "Permanent Revolution". This theory, which seems simple enough, was actually an important blow against economic determinism. The latter held that in Russia a bourgeois revolution (to overthrow the Tsar and establish the rule of the industrial capitalists) would have to occur before the conditions for a socialist revolution would set in, and that many decades might pass between the two. Trotsky countered that, in certain conditions, a bourgeois revolution in Russia could lead straight to a socialist revolution because of the weaknesses of the Russian bourgeoisie. In the event he was proved right, for the February revolution in 1917 was followed in October by the bolshevik one. Unfortunately, many of Trotsky's "followers" since then have raised his theory to the status of a dogma which applies in all backward countries — a fate which so many such theories seem to suffer.

Because of the history of his split with Stalin, Trotsky is a little understood figure, both as revolutionary theorist and political activist. It is hard to make an assessment of his theory as a whole, but alongside his voluntarism there is also a determinism, of a kind which differs from orthodox economic determinism. This is a sociological determinism, which has been criticised by Krassö\(^2\) as

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\(^2\) See New Left Review No. 44, also the A.L.R reprint pamphlet. *Trotsky's Marxism*. 
Trotsky’s basic failing. While I would not agree with the degree to which Krasso takes his critique, it seems to me that there is a deal of truth in it.

Basically, he accuses Trotsky of having had, and acted upon, an abstract conception of “social forces” which clash on the historical arena to produce a resultant which depends on the relative strengths of these forces. This conception ignores the relative autonomy of ideas, politics and culture, and according to Krasso, led Trotsky to make certain characteristic mistakes throughout his lifetime. Whatever the case about Trotsky, the important point is that any theory which tries to explain all and sundry social events (even major events) purely in terms of a clash of class interests, and which sees individual historical actors as purely representative of various “social forces” is incorrect, and revolutionaries who act on such a theory are doomed to failure, at least in the long term.

Gramsci: For many years this Italian marxist, who wrote most of his books in Mussolini’s prisons between 1926 and 1933, was ignored and forgotten. His rediscovery has established him as perhaps the most significant and relevant marxist for advanced capitalist societies. His main work centred around analyses of the social “superstructure” (culture, politics and ideas), which most marxists have ignored to their own cost. He developed a theory about ideas, stressing their importance, and hit out at determinism. In this he was very much like Lenin, but he took his analyses of society and culture much further.

What makes Gramsci of especial importance for us today is that he worked and wrote in a society whose structure and culture were far closer to ours than those of Tsarist Russia. Lenin’s theories and political practice took place in a certain specific set of conditions, and even the most widely applicable of his writings bear that stamp. Despite Lenin’s own warnings that what he wrote applied to advanced and complicated situation in western industrial capitalism.

Firstly, there was the stress on ideas, and on combatting rule by consensus and the hegemony of ruling class ideas. In a society advanced beyond the level of elemental material survival, mass consciousness becomes an important, indeed decisive, element. Hence the battle on the cultural front, and therefore the role of intellectuals (in a broad sense of the word — a worker revolutionary can become an intellectual in this sense) becomes extremely important.

Flooding directly from this is an emphasis on the human will as a revolutionary factor. (It is perhaps significant that the concern with conscious revolutionary activity came early in the evolution of both Lenin’s and Gramsci’s ideas on socialist strategy — 1902 for Lenin, 1919 for Gramsci). As with Lenin, this voluntarism never took the extreme forms which it did in Mao — Gramsci always stressed the need for careful analysis and scientific understanding. Indeed, his famous maxim that revolutionaries should possess both “pessimism of the intellect” and “optimism of the will” is an excellent summary of a dialectical revolutionary method. This maxim combats both the pessimistic and optimistic variants of determinism: revolutionaries should not be romantic idealists playing out their own fantasies in a social vacuum, nor should they succumb to defeatism and apathy.

An interesting sidelight on Gramsci’s voluntarism was his polemic against the philosophical and theoretical bases of determinism in certain aspects of marxist thought. He thought Bukharin’s work “suffered from determinism, mechanicalism and ‘vulgar’ materialism” — a criticism which is probably related to Lenin’s judgment in his testament that Bukharin did not “understand dialectics.” Further, Gramsci “doubted the wisdom of mechanically asserting the objective reality of the external world — as though the world could be understood apart from human history.”

Gramsci is raising here an extremely important point. The relation between “objective” and “subjective” is clearly bound up with that between determinism and voluntarism, and a theory about one necessarily entails a theory about the other. There can be little doubt that “objectivism” was part and parcel of vulgar marxist determinism and Gramsci’s formulation is a healthy corrective which restores man (as opposed to “iron laws of history” outside of man’s control) to his rightful place in the social process.

Thirdly, Gramsci developed an extremely important model of the revolutionary party and its relation to other organisations and movements of the workers. The party he saw as merely the agent of the revolution, while the workers must be its embodiment. The official workers’ organisations (the trade unions) he saw as organs of capitalist society, with a specific function within that society. The socialist party ran the risk of ending up similarly. Both problems could be combatted by developing independent organs of the working class — the factory councils. The workers’ councils would be important transitional organisations for the revolution, and were “the model of the proletarian state.” This stress on people’s organisations rooted in the social structure and independent of both traditional institutions and revolutionary parties, is of immense importance, and perhaps the single most important strategic proposition in Gramsci’s work.

Finally, Gramsci (as implied by his emphasis on workers’ councils) developed some affinity and friendship with certain anarchists. While not agree-

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4 Ibid. p. 192.
5 Ibid. p. 82.
ing with the total anarchist view, Gramsci incorporated some of the better features of anarchist ideas into his theory, features which some versions of marxism (particularly stalinism) excluded at their own cost. The rapprochement of marxism and anarchism (in an honest and rigorous manner, not an eclectic one) is an event long overdue. Gramsci's contribution in this respect bears examination.

Mao: Although the dogmatic adherents of Mao like to present him as the “great Marxis of our time” it was by challenging many of the basic tenets of European marxism that Mao achieved success in China. Essentially, he developed a theory of revolution in a peasant society, and a method for carrying it out (guerrilla warfare). Although he has this difference, many of his ideas are strikingly similar, given their different context, to those of the preceding three. In particular, his emphasis on democratic, autonomous institutions of the people (the peasant soviets), strong organisation (the party and the army) and the potential of the human will, all have their counterparts in Lenin, Trotsky and Gramsci.

In the determinist-voluntarist argument, Mao probably stands on a more extreme voluntarist position than the other three. Schram, in his introduction to The Political Thought of Mao Tse Tung brings this out very well. As he points out, Mao possessed a “natural Leninism” which led him to a firm grasp of the principle that political struggle is the key to economic struggle. This was a necessary counter to the various other trends within Chinese communism, but after 1949 Mao raised the human will to an exaggerated place in the scheme of things, so that he sometimes appears to act as if objective reality is a mere extension of human subjectivity, rather than something which interacts with subjectivity.

Mao tends to exalt the revolutionary will of human beings until it becomes not merely an important factor in history but an all-powerful force capable of reshaping the material environment in a completely arbitrary fashion.

Contemporary marxism

With the ascendancy of Stalin in the Soviet Union after 1924, and his domination of the Comintern, marxist theory and practice entered a long period of deformation and degeneration, from which it is only beginning to recover. As in so many other fields, the theory of revolution often suffered from unimaginative and pedestrian analyses. The pronouncements of the Comintern reflected this, and also the effects of pragmatic considerations of what Stalin perceived as being in Soviet interests. The main characteristics of stalinist theory were a vulgar economic determinism, which overemphasised the “objective” conditions and played down the essential role of the human will in the political arena, combined with periods of wild and ill-conceived “adventurism” which ignored social reality.

Only with the failure of stalinism and the rise of new social forces (the anti-war, anti-imperialist and youth movements of the west and the liberation movements in the third world) did a revival of marxist theory begin. This renewal still has a long way to go. In the third world, new guerrilla war theorists have made significant contributions (Ho Chi Minh and Giap in Vietnam, Castro and Guevara in Latin America). In particular, the successful practitioners of revolution by guerrilla warfare in the third world have evolved a political and social practice in working amongst the oppressed peasantry from which we could all (especially some misguided emulators of Mao, Ho and Castro) learn much. Strict attention to organisational detail, daring and imagination in activity, and a genuine concern for involving the people in their own emancipation, are the key factors in the success of guerrilla warfare in Vietnam, Cuba, Algeria and Angola. But it is in the advanced industrial west, where a new and rapidly changing technological capitalism has arisen that the real theoretical problems lie. These societies are far more complex, and therefore more difficult to understand, than any hitherto existing. There are two reactions amongst “marxists” to this problem:

One is to reaffirm the old marxist propositions in new, revamped forms (“Back to Marx”). Although many of these are still valuable, the attempt to fit a totally new social situation into a theoretical framework one hundred years old has semi-religious overtones, and in any case does not solve the problems. (The whole thing smacks of a “reification” of Karl Marx and his writings — an irony for the very person who did so much to expose and analyse that phenomenon.)

In particular, this attempt has led to a new determinism, which sees the future evolution of neo-capitalism as almost “inevitably” leading to socialist revolution. For a very sophisticated example, with many merits besides its basic faults, we can take Ernest Mandel's The Worker Under Neo-Capitalism. Mandel makes a penetrating and persuasive analysis of the various structural features of neo-capitalism. This particular paper, as with his work as a whole, concentrates on a “classical” marxist analysis of the capitalist economy, attempting to bring out “objective” contradictions which impel the workers into a fundamental clash with the system. As a necessary corrective to the other extreme position (that of a purely cultural and ideological critique often associated with disillusion, pessimism and withdrawal from struggle), Mandel's thesis is welcome, particularly in its stress on the signs of hope in the present situation. But as an accurate theory or a guide to action it is sadly deficient.

The whole tenor of Mandel's argument is too simplistic and romantically optimistic. Problems of ideological hegemony and the struggle for consciousness are glossed over, with the suggestion that the rupture of “social continuity” during a revolutionary crisis virtually solves the problem. Even
granting that a social crisis makes the masses more open and receptive to new ideas, it should be emphasised that what ensues then is a titanic struggle for correct ideas, for the dissemination of socialist ideas, culture and values — in short, for the conscious mind of the masses. The outcome of this struggle cannot be determined in advance, and will depend very much on the readiness and prior training of revolutionary movements and organisations.

Moreover, Mandel’s conclusion smacks of the “triumphalism” so prevalent in many communist parties:

... revolution is inevitable because there is such a tremendous gap between what man could make of our world ... and what he is making of it within the framework of a decaying, irrational social system. This revolution is imperative in order to close that gap ...

That the revolution is imperative (in the sense of being urgently necessary) we can all agree, but that it is inevitable is precisely the bone of contention. Mandel seems to come down on the determinist side of this bone, and to have therefore ignored the essential feature of Lenin’s theory, despite his reference to What Is To Be Done?

The point is that simply because there exists a tremendous gap between possibility and actuality is no proof of the inevitability of revolution — in fact there is the opposite possibility of a return to social barbarism as a rejection (even if unconscious) of the latest possibilities. The whole experience of fascism, and the long centuries of stagnation during the Middle Ages is surely proof that human society does not inevitably solve its problems and contradictions by taking a forward step. Inevitability theories have a certain appeal, and movements based on them (e.g., many communist parties during the Stalin era) a certain strength. But they have led to tragic mistakes in the past, and are unlikely to provide the theoretical basis for a successful revolutionary movement now or in the future.

The other reaction is to take the marxist “classics” in a much more reasonable way: as significant contributions to a revolutionary sociology, but not the only ones. Some (although surprisingly few) of the new and neo-marxian left have avoided the first reaction and made important analyses of society and culture (Wright-Mills, Baran and Sweezy, Marcuse, the New Left Review group in Britain etc.), yet the main task still lies ahead: to understand the dynamics and evolution of western society (and for that matter, of the bureaucractic socialist states of eastern Europe) and to evolve a political practice on the basis of that understanding. In doing this, the contributions of the earlier marxists are useful as a starting point, but those who take them as a set of scriptures and ignore the very real contributions of others outside the marxist tradition, do both the “greats” and themselves a grave disservice.

Towards a new theory of revolution?

The elaboration of a theory, strategy and tactics for revolution in the conditions of neo-capitalism is no easy matter. Indeed, the first thing to understand is that we must drop all notions of theoretical certainties and of detailed plans mapped out in advance. Part of what Lenin and Trotsky called the art of revolution consists in the ability to flexibility adopt strategies and tactics according to the developing situation, to drop favourite and long-held notions which have become outdated, and to perceive and act upon new opportunities as and when they arise. Such an art is developed at least as much by practice as by theoretical contemplation. But even given the difficulties, and bearing in mind this warning, it seems to me there are certain features and outlines of a contemporary theory of social revolution which I will put forward in a sketchy form here (I hope to extend this analysis at a later date).

1. We must firstly abstract all that is relevant and useful from earlier theories and strategies. Here we must be careful neither to adopt irrelevant theories nor to miss points which at first glance may seem to have no relevance. Take for instance the Maoist theory of guerrilla warfare. Taken in its concrete application, it has no relevance to our conditions. But if we abstract from it certain general features and ideas, there is much that we can learn. Questions of urban guerrilla activity aside, there are the concepts of utilising small forces in effective ways, of surprise attacks, new techniques and activities, and of hitting the enemy in numbers of different and unexpected ways. These principles are useful and such an orientation, even in the most unfavourable circumstances, might produce quite surprising and favourable results.

2. Perhaps more importantly, we must rid ourselves of the weight of “marxist dogma”. It was Marx himself who said that “The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.” Since (as Gramsci pointed out) the revolutionary movement is a part of history and does not stand outside of or above it, this also applies to it. Unfortunately, the whole history of the revolutionary tradition bears this out only too well. Overcoming this “dead weight” is not only a matter of rejecting the more obvious mistakes (e.g.: Marx’s theory of increasing immiseration) and the more obvious extremes (stalinism, dogmatism etc.) but of coming to grips with the inadequacies of the body of theory as a whole. Marx’s work was completed a century ago and Lenin’s 50 years ago. The changes which have taken place since then are enormous, and the pace of change is itself much greater. It is impossible for Marx or Lenin or Gramsci to provide us with answers to today’s problems, no matter how sophisticated our use of their work.

3. A new revolutionary theory of society would need to incorporate the following points:

a) It would draw upon other schools and traditions of thought besides the mainstream marxist one. In particular, certain anarcho-marxist,

8 The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.
anarcho-communist and libertarian-communist theories have much to contribute. Although marxism as a practical guide to revolutionary activity may be superior to anarchism, it can still learn from the anarchist tradition. The split between anarchism and marxism has had some bad effects on marxism itself, not the least of which were some of the post-October bolshevik mistakes, especially during Stalin's ascendency.

b) There would be a strong emphasis on an attempt to understand the process of human consciousness and the role of ideas. In particular, the relation between the human brain (the bearer of consciousness) and the external world needs to be understood in a far more accurate way than mainstream marxism has hitherto.

Human consciousness should be seen as a part of the material process which is not subordinate to other factors (as some vulgar marxist "reflection" theories would have it) but rather interacts with them as a factor (and an important one at that) in its own right.

c) Related to this is a need for an understanding of the sociology of consciousness and ideas. The work of Gramsci, and Lukacs' *History and Class Consciousness* may well provide the beginnings of such an understanding. The main questions here are how and why people come to adopt their ideas, values and attitudes and to understand the dialectical interplay between individual, group and social consciousness. The inertia of old ideas (their prevalence long after the conditions which led to their emergence have ceased to exist) and the conditions for acceptance of new ideas and ideological frameworks are also extremely important problems.

The key point to establish, as an advance on traditional marxism, is that consciousness is not determined simply by a single dimension of experience: the economic structure of relations. It is in fact produced by a highly complex interaction of factors. All the influences on an individual, not just his place in the economy or the social structure, must be considered before a full explanation of his attitudes and ideas can even be attempted. The same holds for groups and classes of people.

d) Following the above, it must be recognised that a "social force" is not some abstraction (or to use Marx's term reification) which exists independently of men, but is precisely the collective consciousness of groups, sections and classes translated into their social activity — that is, their subjective view of, and reaction to, external conditions.

4. On the main theme of this article: determinism/voluntarism and its relation to a new theory of revolution.

The first point is to rid ourselves of any extreme determinist or voluntarist notions in the "classic" (or not so classic) texts. Thus, Marx's theory of increasing immiseration, the forerunner of a determinist strand in marxism which held that the workers would be forced to overthrow the system by their very life situation, must be seen as not only incorrect but also having false implications for revolutionary practice.

Likewise, the suggestion in Marx that the proletariat inherently espouses socialism must be seen as at variance with reality. (Indeed, it was Lenin's great merit that he recognised the falsity of this position, and saw the need to win the workers to socialism by force of argument).

Equally, ultra-voluntarist notions (particularly prevalent in some versions of anarchism, and certain trends in marxism) which exaggerate the effects of extreme actions by small groups and ignore the need for understanding the inner dynamics of society, must be also rejected.

However, it is in attempting to get beyond mere rejection of extreme positions that the real interest and problems lie.

Any theory which is to be a useful guide to actual revolutionary activity must indicate a dynamic relation between the determinist and voluntarist elements of social evolution. A useful outline of such a theory has been given by Huberman and Sweezy.9 They suggest that "the ratio of determinism to voluntarism in historical explanation necessarily varies greatly from one period to another."10 In periods when a social order is firmly established and evolves according to its own inner dynamic, individuals and groups can do little to change the course of history. Revolutionaries in such non-revolutionary periods seem caught in a pre-determined net of social structure and events, and their possibilities of action extremely limited. But when the dynamic of such a society begins to break down, crises multiply and intense struggles ensue, then "the range of possibilities widens"11 and revolutionary groups "come into their own as actors on the stage of history. Determinism recedes into the background, and voluntarism seems to take over".12

This dialectic is a fruitful basis for elaborating a detailed theory. One thing it seems to ignore though is that even during "determinist" periods of social evolution, there are certain choices and options open to revolutionary groupings and organisations (as witness the current plethora of different tendencies in the revolutionary socialist movement, each with a different orientation to the same basic problems). It is not clearly enough recognised in Huberman and Sweezy's formulation that attitudes, policies and actions adopted perhaps decades before a revolutionary crisis, may influence the outcome of struggles far in the future. Similarly, there are determinist overtones in their position in that the contribution of the revolutionary movement towards bringing about a crisis is not recognised. The presence or absence of effective and

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10 Ibid. p. 19.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
appealing alternatives to capitalist rule, even in periods of relative social stability, may determine whether the workers will move towards a confrontation with the system or remain passive, apathetic and disoriented, trapped within the framework of capitalist ideas and values. From this follows the essential need to develop a model of an alternative socialist society, which attracts rather than repels people, excites them and moves them to take action against existing conditions because they see that other ways are possible.

A further point, which I believe is the crucial one for us all to recognise, is that we can never know exactly what is determined and what is not. Only experience and activity, and constant updating and theoretical generalisation on the basis of these, can tell us the limits or otherwise of the possibilities in any given situation. Moreover, the possibilities open at any given future date may depend, at least in part, on previous actions and orientations. Thus the dialectical view would see the intimate connection between what might be called the preparatory phase of revolutionary activity and the actual period of revolutionary upsurge and change. Small changes and differences in the non-revolutionary phase may become magnified into decisive factors as a crisis develops. For instance, every extra individual won over to an active revolutionary position may be magnified into thousands at times of social upheaval.

Thus, what we finally end up with is the need to develop a revolutionary method which sets guidelines for propaganda and activity. The existence of capable, creative revolutionaries sensitive to all the changes and possibilities in the developing situation, together with effective cooperation, is the best guarantee that possibilities will be neither missed nor imagined where they do not really exist.

Hence, a theory of revolution becomes, above all, a theory of practice. The great revolutionaries have always been those who could translate ideas into action, and in so doing transform mere theoretical conceptions into external reality. As Lukács said of Lenin...

5. The revolutionary method is the link between revolutionary theory and revolutionary activity. As the revolutionary looks out at the society around him, and moves into opposition to it in order to change it, he lives out a tension between three elements which interact in a complex process:

WHAT IS: The situation as it is, and as he/she perceives and understands it.

WHAT OUGHT TO BE: The aims, ideals and values which the revolutionary fights for, and which together make up an alternative "model" of society that enters, in his/her consciousness, into a state of tension with the perceived "what is".

WHAT PROBABLY WILL BE: If the revolutionary is to be effective, and not a mere dreamer, he must also be capable of assessing likely lines of political development, and the probable outcome of political struggle. It is fashionable to castigate revolutionary politicians for "practising the art of the possible" just like bourgeois and reformist politicians (and when the "WHAT PROBABLY WILL BE" dominates the "WHAT OUGHT TO BE" in the revolutionary's mind, his whole orientation and practice do become reformist), but this third element is undeniably present and must be taken account of in any revolutionary method. It is seeking the correct balance of the three which determines the difference between the revolutionary politician as against the reformist politician or the revolutionary dreamer.

Involved in the revolutionary method must be a stress on linking a revolutionary consciousness to the felt needs of the people, on popularising demands which the system finds it difficult if not impossible to absorb and spending much more time on this aspect than we were hitherto inclined to do.

But if we are to make a choice as to what is the task most urgently and importantly confronting us, and to make this the central point of our method, I believe it is the following: To continually challenge people's notions that all is as it should be, or will be even if it shouldn't be, and to demonstrate both in theory and practice, that there is an alternative. In a society in which possibility is so far ahead of actuality, the factor which most holds people back from taking the leap into possibility is their deeply held view (a view which the social structure assiduously cultivates, both consciously and unconsciously) that nothing else is possible, that human nature, or everybody else, or the power structure, or whatever, makes it impossible to substantially alter the way things are. At least in the present period, it seems to me that this is the most pressing problem, the one which should be at the centre of our "revolutionary method".

To put this method into practice, the movement must concentrate on the education and development of revolutionaries who can act creatively and with initiative in unexpected and unusual situations, and can effectively disseminate revolutionary ideas and alternatives amongst the people. Since it is impossible (more so today than ever before) to instruct people on what to do in every conceivable situation, revolutionary cadres would operate via an approach to problems, rather than a pre-ordained answer to them.

Operating according to this method and Gramsci's maxim, such a movement would tend to maximise the possibilities open to it, so that its intervention in history would solve in practice the determinist/voluntarist riddle.