

## **Class Struggle: A Political and Philosophical History**

Domenico Losurdo and Gregory Elliot

### **The Return of Class Struggle?**

Historically, the decades from the end of the Second World War to the successful ‘pacification of class conflict’ also witnessed the explosion of the anti-colonial revolution. The peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America threw off the yoke of colonialism or semi-colonialism, while the USA saw the development of the struggle by African-Americans to end the regime of racial segregation and discrimination, which continued to oppress and degrade them, relegate them to the bottom rungs of the labor market and even treat them as guinea pigs.

Did this massive revolutionary wave, which profoundly altered the division of labor globally and did not even leave it untouched in the USA, have something to do with class struggle? Or is the latter limited to the conflict pitting proletarians and capitalists, dependent labor, and haute bourgeoisie, against one another in a single country?

‘the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles’

### **Different Forms of Class Struggle**

Shortly before launching its final appeal for the ‘communist revolution’ and ‘the forcible overthrow of all existing conditions’, the Communist Manifesto invokes the ‘national emancipation’ of Poland. Here we find a new watchword emerging. From his earliest writings and interventions, Engels supported the ‘liberation of Ireland’, or ‘the conquest of national independence’ by a people that had suffered ‘five centuries of oppression’. In his turn, having demanded the ‘liberation’ of ‘oppressed nations’ in late 1847, Marx never tired of calling for a struggle for ‘the national emancipation of Ireland’.

The struggle for the liberation of oppressed nations is no less important than the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat.

In a long letter of April 1870, Marx supported a union whose heterogeneous features stand out: it would have as its protagonists, British workers, on the one hand, and the Irish nation as such, on the other.

India’s tragic situation had already been invoked in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, which drew attention to a reality generally ignored by bourgeois economists intent on demonstrating capitalism’s capacity for improving the condition of the working class. They lost sight of ‘the millions of workers who had to perish in the East Indies so as to procure for the million and a half workers employed in the same industry in England three years’ prosperity out of ten’.

### **A Distraction from Class Struggle?**

French Socialist, Charles Longuet, Marx's son-in-law, having paid tribute to the martyrs of Paris Commune, in 1872, reported from Marx's household 'the Polish insurrection of 1863, the Irish rebellions of the Fenians in 1869, the Land League and Home Rulers in 1874: these movements of oppressed nationalities were followed from the battlements of this fortress of the International with no less interest than the rising tide of the socialist movement in both hemispheres.' So, interest in the 'movements of oppressed nationalities' was no less lively and constant than that reserved for the agitation of the proletariat and subaltern classes.

Sixteen years later from Marx's pen, International Working Men's Association stressed that the political economy of labor' was imperative, but insufficient.

### **Class Struggle & National Struggle: 'Genus' and 'Species'**

In the same year as the Communist Manifesto, (Feb. 1848), Marx issued an authoritative warning: those who 'cannot understand how one nation can grow rich at the expense of another' were even less well-equipped 'to understand how in the same country one class can enrich itself at the expense of another'.

Some years later, with the colonial rule imposed on India by Britain in mind, Marx reiterated: 'the profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked'.

In Ireland there was no 'social question' apart from the 'national question'. A defective identity existed between them at least for a whole historical period until political independence was gained. A passage from *Wage Labour and Capital*, read: 'class struggles and national struggles': class struggle is the genus which, in determinate circumstances, takes the specific form of 'national struggle'. The species cannot be understood if it is detached from the genus. We must keep in mind 'division of labor' not only nationally and also internationally, never losing sight of the 'world market'.

We can conclude that while Marx did not define the relationship between class struggle (social question) and national struggle (national question), clearly and unequivocally, and only in fits and starts did he arrive at the formulation which distinguishes genus and species. But the interest and passion with which he followed the movements of oppressed nationalities, were an expression of not a distraction of the class struggle and the social question, but an attempt to grasp their manifestations in a concrete form. Oppressed nations are summoned to be the protagonists of the second great class struggle for emancipation.

### **The Condition of Women and the 'First Class Oppression'**

The genus of class struggle includes a third species. There is another social group that is so numerous that it exceeds half of the population; a social group that suffers 'autocracy' and awaits its 'emancipation': women. Weighing on them is the domestic oppression exercised by the male.

As early as 1845-46, in *The German Ideology*, which Engels refers to in his book: *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Marx had observed that in the patriarchal family 'wife and children are slaves of the husband'. In the *Communist Manifesto*, bourgeoisie is criticized for reducing the proletariat to the condition of a machine, and an instrument of labor, observes that 'the bourgeoisie sees in his wife a mere instrument of production'. And that is the aim. The category used to define the condition of the worker in the capitalist factory is now applied to the social condition of woman in the patriarchal family.

In largely pre-modern Russia, subject to ruthless repression by their masters, the peasants (Marx observed) proceeded in their turn to 'awful beating-to-death of their wives'.

While the capitalist of the new factory in England abused all workers, his treatment of women went a step further, Engels noted: 'his mill is also his harem'.

### **1848-1849: A 'Class Struggle in Colossal Political Forms'**

A major historical crisis is characterized by a conjunction of multiple, contradictory class struggles.

In *Wage Labor and Class Struggle*, written April 1849, Marx situates everyday 'class struggle' in the context of the upheavals underway: the 'defeat of the revolutionary workers' (who had risen in Paris in June 1848); the 'heroic wars of independence' and 'the desperate exertions of Poland, Italy, and Hungary'; the emergence on the horizon of a possible 'world war', which would see 'the proletarian revolution and the feudalistic counter-revolution' ranged against one another; the 'starving of Ireland' by the terrible famine that decimated its population, which the British bourgeoisie greeted as an act of Providence; Britain and Russia crushing the revolutionary movement, returning Europe to the double slavery with 'the commercial subjugation of and exploitation of bourgeois classes of the various European nations by the despot of the world market – England.' Thus, the world had seen the 'class struggle develop in colossal political forms in 1848'.

Rather than presenting itself directly in economic guise, the class struggle had assumed the most varied political forms (working-class and popular revolts, national insurrections, repression unleashed by domestic and international reaction with recourse to military or economic tools). Far from disappearing, it had become more acute.

In his *Class Struggles in France*, written in 1850, Marx draws a balance sheet: With the victories of the Holy Alliance, Europe has taken a form in which every fresh proletarian upheaval in France, directly involves a *world war*. The new French revolution is forced to leave its national soil, (given the intervention from Prussian Monarchy) forthwith and conquer the European terrain, on which alone the social revolution of the nineteenth century can be accomplished. Here Marx's revolutionary impatience runs ahead of a highly complex historical process unfolding, but the theoretical and categorical aspect is clear: What is configured as a 'class war' is 'world war', a nexus of revolutions and international conflicts."

What is novel in 1848, against 1789, was that there were three, not two protagonist subjects: proletariat, in addition to bourgeoisie and aristocracy, which Marx hoped, may play a decisive role in overcoming, not just the *ancient regime*, but also the rising capitalism.

While Marx's revolutionary fervor ran ahead of the reality, his prophetic insight was undeniable. During major historical crises, characterized by a conjunction of domestic and international conflicts, the class struggle intensifies and becomes a revolutionary struggle in a country invested in an unprecedented national crisis.

A key aspect of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the blossoming of national liberation movements that were hegemonized by communist parties or parties that were communist inspired. And the development of these movements was punctuated by two world wars wherein the aspect of counter-revolutionary intervention was massively present. The intervention of the entente during the Soviet Revolution was followed 20 years later by Hitlerite Germany, which aimed to end the socialist movement and establish colonial empire in the East. And its defeat provoked a great wave of anti-colonial revolutions on a world scale, confirming Marx's insight.

### **American Civil War 1861-1865: A 'Crusade of Property against Labor'**

Above all, emancipating the labor, referring to American Civil War, Marx declared: 'branded ... in the black [skin]' of slavery proper, the Union's 'Abolitionist war' on the slaveholding, secessionist South had created more conditions more propitious for the emancipation of labor 'in the white skin'. With the abolition of Black slavery, the Civil War ended in the emancipation, albeit partial, of an oppressed 'race' or nationality.

### **The Formation of the Theory of Class Struggle**

With its class struggle, the Western bourgeoisie had imposed an international division of labor based on the enslavement of Blacks and the expropriation, deportation and even annihilation of Native Americans. The class struggle of oppressed peoples' did not fail to respond to all this.

Unfortunately, the British workers, as Marx observed in 1870, had the same attitude towards the Irish workers, as the poor Whites had towards the 'niggers' they hated in American South.

### **Class Struggle & Ideological Struggle**

Class struggle not only encompasses different social relations but is also played out at an ideological level, not sparing religion.

Religion plays out the role of 'opium of the people', facilitating the task of the ruling feudal and bourgeois classes. It is important to dwell on this point as Marx's discourse on religion has been confused with Enlightenment discourse, which risks an understanding of Marxian critique of ideology. For Marx, religion is one of the ideologies, not ideology as such. The concrete role played by religion in the context of class struggle is not that simple.

Religious affiliation can be experienced very intensely and mobilized effectively in political and historical upheaval. But it is not the primary cause of such conflict.

In its expansionist march, tsarist Russia exploited it. Although engaged in ferocious persecution of Jewry, it ‘came soon upon Poland in the name of religious toleration’ and the rights of Orthodox Christians infringed by a Catholic, obscurantist country and government. In so doing, Russia could count on the support and benevolence of the philosophes: Voltaire sang praises of the empress Catherine II, as heading a most progressive country governed on liberal principles and religious toleration.

During the American Civil War, Marx warmly stressed the vanguard role played by Christian abolitionists like William L. Garrison and Wendell Phillips. Marx came down in favor of Garrison and Phillips, celebrating them as champions of the cause of liberty.

But all this did not prevent Marx from formulating a balanced judgement. ‘Regeneration’ was represented by the mass struggle for national independence, while ‘reaction’ consisted in the obscurantist ideology informing the struggle.

In Marx and Engels, religion was represented as an ‘opium of the people’s in as much as it claims to transcend conflict, thereby impeding attainment of revolutionary consciousness and strengthening the chains of oppression. But it may be that religion is the terrain where rudimentary consciousness of the conflict, of class struggle in its various configurations, emerges.

### **From Religion to ‘Rustic Idyll’**

In 1803, Friedrich Schiller had sung: ‘Only on mountains is liberty to be found.’ Only where nature was as yet uncontaminated by man ‘is the world perfect.’

Hegel rejected this consolatory escape from the contradictions and conflicts of political world, whether nature or religion. After the failure of the 1848 revolution, criticizing stupid ‘rustic idyll’, Hegel stated ‘What is created by human reason must possess at least the same dignity as what is created by nature’: “Even the criminal thought of a malefactor is more grandiose and sublime than the marvels of the heavens”.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx says: ‘Hobbes had much better reasons for invoking nature as proof of his *bellum omnium contra omnes*, and Hegel ... for perceiving in nature, cleavage.’ The only thing that can overcome the dichotomy of life and happiness is political action: class struggle.

### **‘Nature’ between Escape and Class Struggle**

Marx and Engels criticized the evasion implicit in the ‘cult of nature’, as in religion, in the strict sense. But this did not prevent them to be among the first in drawing attention to what is now called the ‘ecological question’.

From the outset, Marx stressed that ‘man lives on nature.’ ‘The first premise of all human history is of course the existence of living human individuals, whose ‘physical organization’ and ‘consequent relation to the rest of nature cannot be ignored.’

Almost 30 years later, in the Critique of Gotha Program, Marx cautions: however great and growing labor productivity might be, ‘labor is not the source of all wealth’. ‘Nature is just as much the source of use values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists of!) as labor, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, namely human labor power’. And ‘All progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the laborer, but of robbing the soil’, ‘The potato blight resulted from the exhaustion of the soil, it was a product of English colonial rule, and the policy of colonial despoliation pursued by the London government.’

So, Marx draws a conclusion: ‘from the standpoint of higher economic form of society, private ownership of globe by single individuals, will appear quite as absurd as private ownership of one man by another, such is in the relationship of slavery.’

### **A General Theory of Social Conflict**

Firstly, the theory of class struggle encompasses social conflicts in all of history. It is law of motion of human history. Secondly, effecting a radical break with all naturalistic ideologies, Marxian theory of class struggle situates social conflict on the terrain of history. Thirdly, it strives to take into account the multiplicity of forms the *social* conflict manifests itself in. *Social conflict* means between social classes, not individuals.

Class struggle then is a general category – a genus – which can subsume different species, i.e. types of class struggles. So, on one hand, there were struggles between the rising bourgeoisie and the feudal classes. And when the latter ones were overcome, then among the bourgeoisies of different countries among themselves resulting, for example, in two world wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, there are struggles for emancipation, class struggles, in which the social subjects are in struggle against those preventing them, example is slaves vs. their masters.

At this point we must make a second distinction - to be exact, a tripartite distinction - between the struggle whose protagonists are peoples in colonial or semi-colonial conditions; the struggle waged by the working class in the capitalist metropolis (the one on which Marx and Engels were particularly focused); and the struggle of women against ‘domestic slavery’.

The three struggles for emancipation challenge the three fundamental ‘relations of compulsion’ constitutive of the capitalist system as a whole.

In fact, the colonializing of the world was closely also related to lift the pressure on the capitalist system from workers threatening socialist revolutions in Europeans countries where capitalism advanced: Britain, France, US and others, who ended up owning over 90% of the globe as masters.

In the USA of Black slavery and white supremacy the fate of African Americans was sealed primarily by 'racial' affiliation.'

In such circumstances, to raise the 'racial' (or national) question did not in fact means repressing social conflict, but confronting it in the concrete, particularity, in which it manifested itself.

Only if we appreciate this can we understand the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was marked by epic class struggles, and national resistance struggles against the attempt by the Germany's Third Reich and Japan's Empire of the Rising Sun to revive the colonial and even slavery tradition in Eastern Europe and Asia.

In short, what escapes many Marxist intellectuals today is the role played by class struggle in contradictions, clashes, and confrontations that seem purely national and racial in character. They fail to appreciate that Marx and Engels' theory of class struggle is a general theory of social conflict, even if it is not organically and systematically expounded.

### **Universal Levelling or 'Great Divergence'?**

The liberal French intellectual Tocqueville, describes how opportunities opened for French men in getting most fertile lands in Algeria, moving them up the ladder of society, when France colonized it, but fails to note its consequence that the Arab population in Algeria was 'literally dying of hunger' while the Native Americans were on the point of being wiped off the face of the earth in America. That is, if it reduced inequalities in the metropolis and within the white community, the enrichment of 'adventurers' and colonists created an ever-wider gulf between conquistadors and subject peoples.

Indeed, with voting rights having been obtained by the popular masses and the abolition of legal discrimination, wealth lost its immediate political significance, but could henceforth precisely celebrate its triumph: mass poverty now pertained to a private sphere where public power had no right to intervene.

The German Ideology argues very differently: 'the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently, also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it'.

In 1820 China, still boasted a GDP amounting to 32% of the world GDP, The history of India is not very different. In 1820, it still accounted for 16% of global GDP, before likewise succumbing to desperate poverty.

In any event, far from rendering class struggle obsolete through 'universal levelling', bourgeois society aggravates national and international inequalities, which can only be contested through class struggle.

### **Obsolescence of War?**

Far from being synonymous with peaceful development, Marx in *Capital* in opposition to Tocqueville and other bourgeois authors, stressed that far from peaceful, involved 'brute force'. Wars against 'barbarians' were rivalry and conflict in the 'civilized world' between Great powers, who were protagonists and beneficiaries of colonial expansion and despoliation. Overall, what characterized capitalism was 'the commercial war of the European nations, with the globe for a theatre'.

Communist Manifesto discerned on the horizon either proletarian revolutions (or 'bourgeois revolutions' liable to be transformed into 'proletarian revolutions'), or 'agrarian revolutions' as a precondition of 'national emancipation.' 'Revolt of Netherland from Spain, England's anti-Jacobin war and still ongoing Opium wars against China' were cited. In 1870 in an article he wrote for International Workingmen's Association, Marx called for struggle for 'a new society ... whose international rule will be peace, because its national ruler everywhere will be the same ... Labor.'

### **An Eternal Conflict between Masters and Slaves?**

The true novelty of historical materialism lies in its assertion of the historically determined and transient character of societies based on class struggle and class domination.

In mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, The *Communist Manifesto* referred to 'class struggle', Nietzsche likewise saw 'struggle between estates and classes', but the difference was that while both recognized these two types of slavery, Nietzsche and defenders of US slave-holders (e.g., Calhoun) attempted to demonstrate the inanity of the abolitionist project, while Marx actively supported it all the way to the Civil War, when Marx wrote to Lincoln.

In Nietzsche, who also identified, two other categories in Marxism, 'surplus labor' and 'exploitation', but like Calhoun, these are a general and irrepressible tendency of natural and social reality, of life as such. In Marx and Engels, in contrast, not only slavery in all its forms can be overcome, but these forms are not equivalent.

Already in an early writing (The Holy Family), Marx and Engels criticized the Jacobins for having confused the 'real slavery' of the ancient world with the 'emancipated slavery' of the modern world.

### **The Proletariat, Class Interest, and its Transcendence**

In Marx and Engels, not only is there no eternal clash between masters and slaves, but the latter, definitely abolishing social order based on domination and exploitation, an order which, from a strategic perspective, creates an order, that yields richer, more fulfilling forms of existence for ex-masters as well.

In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, Marx comments on what occurs intellectually and morally in capitalism: 'production does not simply produce man as a

commodity, ... man in the role of a commodity, it produces him in keeping with this role as a mentally and physically dehumanized being. – Immorality, deformity and dulling of the workers and capitalists.’ Along with the exploited, the process of stupefaction and commodification ends up engulfing the exploiters themselves.

In *The Holy Family*, Marx repeats: ‘The propertied class and the class of the proletariat present the same human self-estrangement. But the former class feels at ease and strengthened in this self-estrangement, ... as its own power and has in it a semblance of human existence. The latter, feels annihilated in this estrangement: it sees in it its own powerlessness and the reality of an inhuman existence.

The capitalist master ‘is rooted in that alienation process and finds in it his absolute satisfaction, whereas the worker, as its victim, stands from the outset in a relation of rebellion towards it and perceives it as a process of enslavement’

### **Marx ‘against’ Nietzsche (and Foucault)**

Something remarkable has emerged: there is no escaping the class struggle, but it tends to transcend itself, pursuing and achieving objectives that are universal in appeal. How is this possible?

The authors of *Communist Manifesto* evinced reason and science throughout their careers: ‘truth is general, it does not belong to me alone, it belongs to all, it owns me’.

The history and critique of ‘the capitalist employment of machinery’ in *Capital* are precisely the history and critique of the capitalist use of science.

Prejudice is incapable of an analogous operation: it refuses to submit itself, and the tradition to which it pertains, to the authority of reason.

Indeed, modernity and the reason cherished by it are characterized by ‘resistance to every special claim, special right and privilege’.

Emancipatory class struggle and reason tend to converge. Recognition of personhood is an essential part of such a struggle.

The direct identification of reason with domination encouraged the emergence of a hermeneutics of universal suspicion and greatly compromised the space of inter-subjective communication.

Ignoring its argumentative basis and logical structure, it interpreted any proposition as an expression of class struggle. Furthermore, the construction of post-capitalist society was rendered even more difficult by a ‘microphysics of power’ that denounced the advent of new forms of power and domination in the regulation of any relationship or institution, in the judicial order as such.

This basically anarchistic attitude created an enormous void, without rules, which could only be filled by direct violence and the indefinite continuation of the direct violence contained in the revolution.

### **Struggles for Redistribution or Struggles for Recognition?**

The interests of the exploited and the oppressed tend to transcend in the emancipatory struggle. So, has the emancipatory movement that set out from *Communist Manifesto*, exclusively or primarily raised the banner of redistribution?

From its inception, it engaged in all three fronts of emancipatory class struggle, on a platform that certainly included economic demands, but it went far beyond them. When founded, the International Working Men's Association declared itself in favor of the liberation of 'oppressed nations'. As to the political and social emancipation of women, with the defeat of their exclusion from their political rights and liberal professions, and with the end of domestic slavery, August Babel's book, *Women and Socialism*, it should be noted, went thru 50 editions and translated into 15 languages, had its success, thanks to clandestine distribution by the Socialist Party in Germany outlawed by Bismarck. The feminist movement was bound by multiple ties to the labor movement.

So, the redistribution paradigm would not be of any help in the emancipation of either women, or of slaves. It does not even adequately explain the working-class struggles at the point of production. Along with low wages and hunger, the *Communist Manifesto* denounces the despotism of the boss.

Applied to the proletariat, the key phrase, in Engels *Principles of Communism*, is: 'recognized as a person', as a member of civil society, which the slave is not, even though he does not have to sell himself daily, which the proletariat must do. The slave may have better subsistence, but the proletariat belongs to a higher stage of development of society, and himself stands at a higher stage than the slave.

The liberal tradition interprets class struggle in reductionist and vulgarly economic terms. Their advocates set 'liberty/equality' as a pair of qualities against those who promote class struggle to fundamentally change society as driven simply by material gain motives.

### **A Widespread Demand for Recognition**

A famous cartoon from Abolitionist movement portrayed a black slave in chains exclaiming: 'Am I not a Man and a Brother?' Martin Luther King in his marches for Civil Rights in 1960s has his black janitor fellow marches asserting 'I am a Man'!

In Santo Domingo, the rebels argues: However modest their condition, human beings could not be 'confused with animals', as happened in the slave system.

Almost a century later, Marx's daughter, Eleanor, in her capacity as a militant in both the labor and feminist movements, denounced the fact that in bourgeois society women, like workers, were denied 'their rights as human beings'.

The recognition sought by the modern slave represented by a wage worker did not follow the fall of the *ancient regime*. The same applies to the other protagonists of class struggles: oppressed nations and women. We can now understand the terms in which the *Communist Manifesto* addresses the bourgeoisie, who pose as champion of 'person' and her or his dignity: by "individual" you mean no person other than the bourgeois, the middle-class owner of property.

### **'Positive Humanism' and the Critique of Processes of Reification**

Capitalist society inflicted severe mutilation on the proletarian, confining and isolating him in 'abstract existence of man as mere *workman*, who may therefore daily fall from his filled void to the absolute void – into his social and therefore his actual non-existence.' – Marx.

Still in the mid-nineteenth century, we find the Black slave in the USA so dehumanized by his master as to take the form of mere 'property' like any other, the form of 'human chattel' or 'black chattel'. The struggle for recognition was far from over.

Scientific analysis and moral condemnation are intimately linked. However faithful and pitiless, the scientific description of the existing society; it cannot in and of itself stimulate its overthrow, except with the mediation of moral condemnation, and condemnation resounds all the more powerfully, because the socio-political order analyzed and indicted for non-recognition of the human dignity of a whole social class and colonial peoples in their entirety—in other words, ultimately, the great majority of humanity.

### **Contractual Paradigm**

At the heart of Capital is precisely the critique of the contractual paradigm: 'the isolated laborer, the laborer as "free" vendor of his labor power, when capitalist production has once attained a certain stage, succumbs without any power of resistance'.

Following the abolition of slavery in the colonies, Britain was concerned to replace the Blacks, ensuring a flow of indentured servants from Africa and Asia: hence, the Indian and Chinese 'coolies', subject to a slavery or semi-slavery that was legitimated andedulcorated by a 'contract'.

In Kant's words, 'any pact of servile submission is in and of itself null and void; a man can only lease out his own labor' and only do so in adhering to the 'imprescriptible duty' to safeguard 'his own human determination with respect to the [human] race'.

Accordingly, states Hegel's Philosophy of Right in its turn, 'those goods, or rather substantial determinations, which constitute my own distinct personality and the universal essence of my self-consciousness are ... inalienable'.

### **The Shortcomings of the Natural Law Paradigm**

Engels' Anti-Dühring is readily intelligible: 'the American constitution, the first to recognize the rights of man, in the same breath confirms the slavery of the colored races existing in America'.

### **Hegel, Marx and the Paradigm of the Struggle for Recognition**

In *Elements of Philosophy of Right*, Hegel observes that a man, who risks dying of starvation, is reduced a condition of forfeiting all his rights, a condition akin to that of a slave. And what defines a slave is the non-subsumption under the universal concept of man, i.e., non-recognition as a man. (Raj - In this sense, the proletariat is reduced to be a slave.)

In *On the Jewish Question*, Marx criticizes the bourgeois society in these terms: in it the individual 'regards the other men as means', but in doing so, 'degrades himself as a means'. Preceding Marx, Hegel describes in his *Encyclopedia*, 'I am truly free only when the other is free as well and is recognized as free by me.'

The basic thing about the paradigm of recognition is this: determination of the subject regarded as signatory to the contract or bearer of human rights, or participant in praxis, or communicative action, has been at the center of centuries-long exclusion clauses aimed at colonial peoples, subaltern classes, and women. Its cancellation has been the result of painful historical process and a protracted struggle for recognition. Social theory of Class Struggle is thus at the same time the theory of struggle for recognition.

### **The Struggle for Recognition and the Conquest for Self Esteem**

The Hegelian model undergoes some change with Marx and Engels. Wage slaves take the first step in the struggle for recognition by forging relations with one another. Nietzsche and Bentham describe proletarians and subaltern classes as 'barbaric caste of slaves' and a tribe of 'savages'. The victims of capitalism begin to shake off the sense of culpability, and consequent loss of self-esteem, with which the dominant classes saddle them, when overcoming isolation, they engage in a joint struggle and in building organizations to foster it. At this point, Marx in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, says there emerges 'a new need – the need for society', so that 'association, society and conversation', become an 'end' in themselves.

In London dock workers' strike of 1889, of 50,000 workers, poor, degraded, oppressed, as Engels wrote to Laura Lafarge, Marx's daughter, and Eduard Bernstein, lowest stratum above *lumpenproletariat*, *Misérables* of East End, held out for over a week, terrifying the wealthy and powerful Dock Companies. The significance philosophical and political here is that the 'barbarians' and 'savages' had ceased to be such, as they had mutually recognized each other as members of an exploited and oppressed class, called upon to achieve their emancipation through struggle.

### **The Struggle for Recognition, from Individuals to Peoples**

A second alteration from the Hegelian model occurs in the paradigm of the struggle for recognition: its presence in Marx and Engels emerges with particular clarity in connection with the relations between peoples. Just as with Hegel, freedom of an individual is dependent on another's, which he recognizes, the same according to Engels is between two groups of people. The *ancient regime* of Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia, oppressed Poland in 1847, as it did Germans, so Engels called out during a solidarity demonstration in London in late 1847: 'Liberation of Germany cannot take place without liberation of Poland.' He repeated it after the outbreak of 1848 Revolution. In 1869, Engels observed: 'Irish history shows what a misfortune it is for one nation to oppress another'. According to Marx, the British working-class' inability to work in solidarity with the oppressed workers in the colonies, reinforced the rule of aristocracy and bourgeoisie at home as well: 'enslavement of Ireland, prevented the 'emancipation of British working class'. (Raj – it can also be stated that by standing by as the US waged wars on Korea, Indo-China and in the ME, 1950 to 2025, rather than actively oppose it, the American working class similarly strengthened the bourgeoisie's control over it. Today it is near lumpen state.)

### **Overcoming Binary Logic: A Difficult, Unfinished Process**

The most mature the theory of 'class struggles' - is in the form of a general theory of social conflict, encouraging multiplicity of struggles for recognition. But it is difficult to attain and maintain this vantage point. From Proudhon, to Lassalle, to Bakunin, social question of poverty was supported at the cost of other social questions: oppressed nations and women. This is an example of mutilation of class struggle.

Mutilation of class struggle takes another form in Imperial Socialism. It is when one closes eyes to the fate visited upon colonial subjects or people of colonial origins: Native American, Blacks, and India's masses under the British. Marx called attention to 'millions of workers' who died in India for the British capitalists to make modest concessions to workers in England. (Raj – what Lenin described as 'bribed' workers in imperialist countries, who allowed their social democratic parties to vote for war-credit in Germany, and the British workers who would not support the decolonization of India. Disraeli, who extended political rights to commoners, was at the same time a great defender of imperialism and right of 'superior races' to subjugate 'inferior ones'.

### **'Class against Class' on a Global Scale?**

In *Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx issued a kind of watchword phrase: The struggle of class against class. Society as a whole, Marx declared is splitting into two great hostile camps facing each other: The Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat. In sum, because the condition of workers in all countries are the same, their interests are the same, their enemies are the same, they must also fight together. Not only everything revolves around a single contradiction, but politics, national peculiarities and ideological factors play no role in this formulation. *Capital*, vol. 1, recalls that the 'June (1867) insurrection in Paris,' united all fractions of the ruling classes'. Just three years later, Franco-Prussian war broke out, and in its wake the Paris Commune emerged, crushed by a collision between former enemies: Prussia and France. But this understanding in turn became hatred and industrial scale slaughter of WWI 44 years later.

Marx and Engels distanced themselves from the binary logic interpretation of social conflict by 1859, when Marx published an article on developments in Russia, which had suffered a defeat at the hands of Britain and France in 1856, and shortly Alexander II abolished serfdom in 1861. But instead of social peace, serfs killed 60 nobles every year and hoped to overthrow the system when the French advanced on Russia, Marx wrote. Here Marx departed from the binary logic of poor against the rich and included conjunction of international war and social conflict, and that as we know also how Russian Revolution of 1917 unfolded.

### **Binary Logic and the ‘Self-Evidence’ of Exploitation**

The corollary of the class against class binary is this logic: So intolerable are the conditions of life under capitalism, that the proletarians cannot but rebel and ‘contemplating’ this members of other social classes may be induced to join them. This argument is made in the *German Ideology*. It implies sensory perception can overcome or makes proletarians immune to ideological influences of the dominating class. Engels says the working classes of Britain has shown themselves to be free from national pride and prejudice, in his *Conditions of the Working Class in England*. But contrary to that the same text draws attention to the fact that the competition of the Irish workers has ‘forced down ... the wages of English workers.’ Three years later, Engels with focus on Eastern Europe, summarized the principles adhered to by the dominant classes: they ‘employ their skill and efforts to set one nation against another, and use one nation to subjugate another nation, to perpetuate absolute rule.’ The united of the class dissolves along with the binary logic of class against class in social conflict. Later Engels in 1870, identified the ‘lumpen proletariat of the cities’, along with petit-bourgeois small peasants as possible ally of the proletariat, the latter being still a small minority of the total population, if by its political action it managed to isolate the ruling class. Here then binary logic has been replaced based on concrete conditions. One is reminded of Lenin in his battle with Trotsky prior to the Russian Revolution, doing the same.

### **Class Struggle or the Struggle between ‘Oppressor and the Oppressed’?**

The *Communist Manifesto* reads: Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, *in a word, oppressor and oppressed*, stood in constant opposition to each other, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that ended in either revolutionary reconstruction of society or in common ruin of the contending classes.

So, class struggles are extremely variegated, so, what Marx and Engels are emphasizing here is that these can be summed in a general term: struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed. That is the genus, of which working class struggle against capitalist class is species.

For Marx and Engels, conflicts between the exploiting classes is the rule, not an exception. The In French Revolution, they explain the basis was primarily the conflict between the feudal aristocracy and industrial bourgeoisie. The industrial bourgeoisie was not an oppressed class, especially before 1789. It oppressed workers in their factories and dominated colonies using genocidal practices. The same was true of the slave-holders in the US, grabbing land, by

genocide, in opposition to the London government of the bourgeoisie. Then eventually being subjected to a brutal war by the Yankee industrialists in 1861-65.

Even if we confine ourselves to emancipatory struggles, the picture hardly changes. In the liberation struggles of the oppressed nations or of women, we witness the participation of a social strata that cannot be considered “oppressed”. As for the class struggle of the proletarians, it more often is opposed by the sub-proletariat, rather be supported. Exploited in the factory, the worker can be indifferent to the subjugation of Ireland, India, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, etc.

Take the case of Irish or Indian worker, who is doubly oppressed: as worker in the factory, and a colonial subject. But he is often an oppressor of woman in the family, who is thus trebly oppressed. But the woman also participates in the patriarchal family in the ‘exploitation of the children by their parents’, as *Communist Manifesto* noted, and to which the communists are determined to put an end.

The world capitalist system is based on a multiple a tangled web of these social coercions, and not on a single social coercion, i.e., capitalist vs. worker.

### **Exporting Revolution?**

The binary logic of interpreting social conflict has an impact on what should a country do where the proletariat has won power and become the ruler, i.e., it is not oppressed anymore within the national border but is threatened from outside since the bourgeoisie still rules most of the world, as was the case with the USSR after 1921, end of Civil War. In 1848, workers revolts in Paris and national revolts in Hungary, Poland and Italy were repressed by the Austrian and Russian Empires. So, it wasn’t Trotsky alone, after the Russian revolution who felt the worker state must go outside to help overthrow the bourgeoisie, it was Marx, who concluded from 1848 experience, that proletarian revolution would be ‘forced to leave its national soil forthwith and conquer the European terrain.’ So, even in power in the country it gained, proletariat remains ‘oppressed’ by outside enemies. Counterrevolution after 1917, was like in the Paris of 1871, was with the help of outside powers. But Stalin read the geopolitical situation correctly, in that the Europeans powers had exhausted themselves in WWI, so the USSR had a breathing decade ahead, so Trotsky’s idea of ‘Permanent Revolution’ carried to Germany was dangerous and defeated it.

### **The Brief Season of ‘International Civil War’**

The ‘Platform’ issued on 4 March 1919 by the First Congress of the Third (Communist) International called for the subordination of ‘so-called national interests to the interests of the international revolution’. The word emphasized by me is revealing: there are no real national interests. The Manifesto of the Communist International to the Proletariat of the Entire World (6 March 1919), which not coincidentally was the work of Trotsky, painted a telling picture. Humanity ran the risk of becoming the slave of a single ‘world clique’ controlling the entire terrestrial globe through ‘an “international” army and “international” navy’. Ranged against this

was an equally monolithic international front, and hence, a ‘proletarian revolution, which will liberate the productive forces of all countries from the constraint of the national state’.

Clearly, the binary interpretation of social conflict on a global scale, already encountered in certain pages of Marx and Engels, recurs here.

Tukhachevsky, commander of the Red Army, set out in a letter to Zinoviev. They should be prepared ‘for the forthcoming civil war, for the moment of a world attack by all the armed forces of the proletariat on armed world capitalism’.

‘The Communist International proclaims the cause of Soviet Russia as its own cause. The international proletariat will not sheath the sword until Soviet Russia becomes a link in a federation of Soviet republics of the whole world’.

### **Assertion of the National Question**

In fact, on closer inspection, the national question had registered its presence in the October Revolution itself, which broke out amid the struggle against chauvinism and patriotic rhetoric, amid the transformation of imperialist war into a revolutionary civil war. Between February and October 1917, Stalin presented proletarian revolution as the vehicle required not only to build a new social order, but also to reassert the national independence of Russia. The Entente sought to force it to fight on at any cost and bleed itself dry, with a view to turning it into ‘a colony of Britain, America and France’.

The Mensheviks, bowing to imperialist diktat, supported the ‘gradual bartering away of Russia to foreign capitalists’, were leading the country to ruin, and hence, revealed themselves to be the ‘real betrayers’ of the nation. Ranged against this, proletarian revolution would not only lead to the emancipation of the popular classes, but also ‘pave the way for the real emancipation of Russia’.

Placing themselves in a relationship of discontinuity, but also continuity, with the history of Russia, the Bolsheviks expressed ‘class awareness’, but were at the same time capable of ‘winning to the new state the loyal majority of Russian people’, of building ‘the state of the whole Russian people’. Imperialism was not resigned to this and was continuing its policy of aggression. However, ‘the Russian people were standing up to it ... They were armed for their Valmy’. (Valmy is in France, where the French revolutionary forces defeated Prussian forces in 1792, a pivotal victory.) Inspired by ‘class awareness’, the Communist Party was in fact called upon to lead the struggle for national independence, in imitation of the Jacobins.

In the USA—as highlighted by the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in 1850—‘every clash between the classes [was] concealed by the outflow of the surplus proletariat population to the West’ (see Chap. 2, Sect. 1)—that is, by the expropriation and deportation of the ‘redskins’.

It was necessary to put ‘inferior races’ to work ‘for the benefit of the conquering race’. It was clear: ‘the Europeans are a race of masters and soldiers. Reduce this noble race to work for life

like Negroes and Chinese, and it will revolt', (Ernest Renan, 19<sup>th</sup> Century French philosopher justifying racism.)

Capitalists in the West pacified the workers by colonial acquisition in the East. According to Marx, the 'social question in Ireland was the 'national question'. Hence, according to Lenin's analysis, if in the West, appealing to Marx and Engels' teaching, the task was to counter 'social imperialism', in the East anti-colonial revolution must be unequivocally supported.

In summer 1920, the Congress of the Peoples of the East, the new slogan read: 'Workers of All Lands and Oppressed Peoples of the Whole World, Unite!'

### **The East and the Dual Struggle for Recognition**

We are now in a better position to understand why the revolution invoked by the *Communist Manifesto* first occurred in Russia and then in the Colonial world, rather than in the West. Lenin's *weakest link in the chain of imperialism* formulation is shrewd, because it breaks from the binary interpretation of the revolutionary process. (Raj – but remains somewhat mechanical.)

Digging deeper, we can identify an even more basic datum: it was in the East that the need and demand for recognition was most strongly felt. We find a conjunction not only of political and social contradictions (Raj – created by imperialism), but also of struggles for recognition.

Prince G.E. Lvov acknowledged this in a significant self-criticism: 'the revenge of the serfs' was a settlement of accounts with those who had for centuries refused 'to treat the peasants as people rather than dogs', or like game, as in the sequence of events described by Dostoevsky (Raj – e.g., in *Brothers Karamazov*.)

In tsarist Russia, workers demanded more respectful treatment by their employers. They wanted to be called by the polite 'you' (vyi) rather than the familiar one (tyi), which they associated with the old serf regime. They wanted to be treated as 'citizens'. It was often this issue of respectful treatment, rather than the bread-and-butter question of wages, which fueled workers' strikes and demonstrations.

Lenin highlighted this. Among the various definitions of imperialism he offered, one of the most significant one characterizes it as the claim of 'a few chosen nations' to base their own 'prosperity' and primacy on despoliation and domination of the rest of the humanity. They regarded themselves as 'model nation[s]' and assigned themselves 'the exclusive privilege of forming a state'. Regrettably, 'Europeans often forget that colonial peoples too are nations'.

While they sought to evade their pursuers, ('Whites') the Red Army's leaders thought about how to integrate them, at least partially, into the requisite broad united front.

### **Mao and the 'Identity between the National Struggle and Class Struggle'**

Mao on 27 December 1935, 'when the national crisis reached a crucial point', and the nation risked being enslaved by Japanese imperialism, the main target must be invaders and

collaborators, entailing a transition from the ‘agrarian revolution’ to the ‘national revolution’ and the conversion of a ‘workers’ and peasants’ republic’ into a ‘people’s republic’.

A radical change had occurred, and revolutionary class struggle now consisted in resistance to Japanese imperialism’s attempts to enslave the Chinese nation as a whole. “Fight to defend the motherland against the aggressors.” For us defeatism is a crime’.

In an intervention on 5 Nov. 1938, CPC made this appeal: ‘subordinate the class struggle to the present national struggle’, while on the other it was asserted that ‘in a struggle that is national in character, the class struggle takes the form of a national struggle, which demonstrates the identity between the two’.

It takes us back to Marx’s analysis of Ireland. The appropriation of the land by the British settlers and the consequent condemnation of the Irish people to deportation and starvation meant that the ‘land question’ (its possession), and hence, the ‘national question’, became ‘the exclusive form of the social question’.

‘Mao: ‘in wars of national liberation patriotism is applied internationalism. ... These are good patriotic actions and, far from running counter to internationalism, are its application in China. ... To separate internationalist content from national form is the practice of those who do not understand the first thing about internationalism’.

This takes us back to Engels’ analysis, who said: subject to national oppression, the oppressed Irish and Poles were truly ‘international’ only when ‘authentically national’.

### **‘Racial Struggle’ and Class Struggle at Stalingrad**

The national and colonial question erupted in Europe itself. In fact, it was precisely there (in the central-eastern part of the continent) that it assumed its most brutal form. We are familiar with the intellectual tradition which, as early as the nineteenth century, identified colonial expansion as the answer to the social question. Hitler drew on this tradition, proposing to build a colonial empire of a continental kind in Eastern Europe—in particular, in the immense Asian spaces of Russia. Here, in the almost unanimous view of Western elites, barbarism had returned and rampaged following the Bolshevik Revolution: and it was here that Germany was called upon to restore civilization with a vigorous or ruthless labor of colonization. The ‘imperial socialism’ advanced for the first time in Disraeli, and subsequently articulated very effectively by Rhodes, reached its acme.

In our day, it has rightly been observed that ‘Hitler’s war for Lebensraum was the greatest colonial war in history’. Challenging the colonial system and causing or aggravating ‘the confusion of white European thinking’, Bolshevism represented a deadly threat to (capitalist) civilization.

In July 1942, Hitler issued this order for the colonization of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: ‘the Slavs must work for us. If we have no more need of them, let them die.... Education

is dangerous. It is enough for them to know how to count up to one hundred. The only education allowed is that which procures useful manual laborers.... We are the masters’.

Himmler expressly referred to slavery, when not in public: ‘If we do not fill our camps with slaves—in this room I mean to say things very firmly and very clearly—with worker slaves who will build our cities, our villages, our factories, without regard to any losses’, the program of colonization and Germanization ...in Eastern Europe will not be accomplished.’

The Third Reich, thus, became the artisan of a slave trade conducted post-haste, and hence, more brutally than the slave trade, proper.

Already impending was the ‘Great Patriotic War’ whose most crucial and epic moment was The Battle of Stalingrad. The struggle of an entire people to avoid the fate of enslavement to which it had been condemned cannot but be characterized as a class struggle.

British historian Niall Ferguson claims Marx was wrong, as the 20<sup>th</sup> century conflicts were ethnic and racial, not class based. Sure enough, if you read Himmler, but then Hitler tried to ally with the “yellow” Japanese; and described the Spanish as having returned to ‘White hands’, when Franco gained power, even though his victory was significantly aided by the Moroccan troops.

### **A Ubiquitous and Elusive Class Struggle**

Having arrived late at their tryst with colonialism, Germany, Italy, and Japan aspired to catch up, resorting to an extra dose of brutality and subjugating and even enslaving peoples of ancient civilization. But the popular front policy, which did not appear to challenge capitalism as such, and not even imperialism as such, seemed like ‘the strangulation of the class struggle’ to Trotsky.

In a country like India, revolution from below was intertwined with revolution from above. There it was the colonial power itself, now weakened by the new international constellation, which abdicated, to avoid a more radical revolution from below. These upheavals even ended up having impact in the USA. The fall of the ancien régime based on racial hierarchy and white supremacy was inconceivable without the wave which, investing colonial peoples, included African Americans in the US.

Placing itself at the head of the national liberation struggle, the Communist Party of the USSR succeeded in achieving significant political and social changes, and in winning such broad support that for a time it embodied the Gramscian lesson of the struggle to win hegemony in the eyes of much of international public opinion. Hence, far from being contradicted, Trotsky’s prediction of 1938 received striking historical confirmation.

### **From World Bolshevik Party to Dissolution of the Third International**

Communist Party of USSR led by Stalin had Seventh and last Congress in 1935. And it is easy to see why the Seventh Congress was also the last. At its heart was the national question, as clearly emerges from Dimitrov’s report, which called for an end to an internationalism incapable of

‘acclimatizing itself’ and ‘sinking deep roots in its native land’, which even issued in ‘national nihilism’, therewith proving utterly incapable of leading a struggle for the ‘salvation of the nation.’ Not by chance, the Seventh Congress was held as the Communist Party in China called for suspension of the civil war and for national unity, while the advent of Hitler anticipated the accentuation of the national question in Europe as well.

The concept of two polar opposite blocks, one of capitalists and the other of workers found its most concentrated expression in the Third International, which projected itself as a ‘world Bolshevik party’ organized and centralized in iron fashion beyond national and state boundaries. Once this view had been superseded, the dissolution of the Third International was an imperative consequence. It did not simply answer to political calculation, though that was not lacking (the desire to consolidate the anti-fascist coalition, facilitating the formation of popular fronts in each country with the participation of communist parties, which it would now be more difficult to suspect of being mere Russian pawns); the role played by awareness of the concrete dialectic of the revolutionary process was more important.

The October Revolution broke out in the wake of denunciation of the ‘betrayal’ by the Second International. Three years later, Lenin drew up a historical and theoretical balance sheet that highlighted a crucial point: a revolutionary situation presupposes so many contradictions, of such severity, as to provoke ‘a nation-wide crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters)’. In other words, the Bolsheviks ultimately prevailed because they proved to be the sole political force capable of offering an answer to the economic, political and social disintegration triggered by the war and the fall of the *ancien régime*.

Third International was founded in 1919, to facilitate revolution in the West, but failed. A giant revolutionary wave did develop after the defeat of Hitler’s Germany, that spread globally until the dissolution of the colonial system that end of Apartheid in South Africa in 1994. But it occurred, only after the dissolution of the International decreed by Stalin in 1943; and was fueled by revolutions which, contrary to the expectations of 1919, saw social conflict and national conflict indissolubly fused.

At this point it is worth reflecting on a formulation by the mature Marx, according to which, the exacerbation of the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production results not in a single revolution, but in ‘an era of social revolution’. In such an era, various particular revolutionary processes develop, each of which can only be explained on a specific set of national contradictions, that is different each time. And this applies to bourgeoisie revolution as well.

In conclusion, it might be said that the organizational model of the International proved inadequate because it frequently referred to a pure class struggle which very rarely existed; and was fueled by expectations of a pure socialist revolution that never has occurred and never will. This does not mean that there is no longer any need for internationalist solidarity between those who, in one way or another, suffer from a system based on exploitation, oppression and the law of the strongest. Indeed, it remains to examine the forms that such solidarity might concretely take.

### **A Collectivism of Poverty & Suffering**

In its new forms, the class struggle required ending a situation of wretchedness and devastation in order to improve the people's living conditions, consolidate the social basis of support for Soviet power, and not leave it defenseless in the face of imperialism's economic and military pressure.

Having overcome his hesitations, Lenin began to harshly criticize war communism as a collectivism of poverty and suffering. 'capitalism is a bane compared with socialism'. But it was 'a boon compared with medievalism, small production, and the evils of bureaucracy which spring from the dispersal of the small producers.'

Corresponding to the optical illusion of 'war communism' in Russia was the optical illusion (and ideological manipulation) of 'war socialism' or 'state and nation socialism', in the West.

Just as 'war communism' had very little to do with the construction of a post-capitalist society, so disdain for the market economy pertained to 'the old Russian, semi-aristocratic, semi-muzhik and patriarchal mood, with their supreme contempt for trade', not to socialism and Marxism, observed Bukharin.

Consider the fact that the well-to-do upper stratum of the peasantry, along with the middle peasant, who is also striving to join the well-to-do, are both afraid at present to accumulate. A situation has been created in which the peasant is afraid to buy an iron roof and apprehensive that he will be declared a kulak; if he buys a machine, he makes certain that the communists are not watching. Advanced technology has become a conspiracy.

Bukharin: 'In general and on the whole, we must say to the entire peasantry, to all its different strata: enrich yourselves, accumulate, develop your farms. Only an idiot can say that the poor will always be with us. We must now implement a policy whose result will be the disappearance of the poor.' (Raj - The problem with this prescription was there was no way to enrich it, until much later, and well before that Stalin advanced collectivization.)

The survival of poverty was a precondition for Christians, or at least some of them, enjoying a sense of moral nobility attendant upon their aid for the poor.

The seriousness of help for the poor should instead be measured by its contribution to overcoming poverty as such. 32

Stalin also responded to Bukharin's formulation: 'it would be absurd to think that socialism can be built on the basis of poverty and privation, based on reducing personal requirements and lowering the standard of living to the level of the poor. On the contrary, socialism 'can be built only on the basis of a vigorous growth of the productive forces of society' and 'on the basis of the prosperity of the working people'—in fact, 'a prosperous and cultured life for all members of society'.

Populism was to the fore during the international polemic conducted by the Chinese Communist Party in particular against the Soviet leader Khrushchev, who was allegedly guilty of pursuing 'goulash communism' under the sign of material prosperity and 'the bourgeois way of life', while neglecting the tasks and ideals of revolutionary transformation of the world.

### **An Unprecedented Class Struggle from Above**

The *Communist Manifesto*, addressed the issue of poverty and socialism thus: 'the proletariat will its political supremacy to initiate the socialist transformation of society, obviously, but it will also increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible.'

On science and its use by capitalism, this Lenin had this observation of Russian situation after the revolution: 'The Russian is a bad worker compared with people in advanced countries. ...The task that the Soviet government must set the people in all its scope is—learn to work. The Taylor system, the last word of capitalism in this respect, like all capitalist progress, is a combination of the refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of the greatest scientific achievements in the field of analyzing mechanical motions during work, the elimination of superfluous and awkward motions, the elaboration of correct methods of work, the introduction of the best system of accounting and control, etc. The Soviet Republic must at all costs adopt all that is valuable in the achievements of science and technology in this field. The possibility of building socialism depends exactly upon our success in combining the Soviet power and the Soviet organization of administration with the up-to-date achievements of capitalism. 43

It involved not only increasing productivity in general but concretely demonstrating the superiority of the public sector of the economy to the private sector. On 27 March, he addressed supporters thus: 'show by your practical efforts that you can work no less efficiently than the capitalists. ...Look at things more soberly. Cast off the tinsel, the festive communist garments, learn a simple thing simply, and we shall beat the private capitalist'.

Bukharin in 1925 had the same idea: 'how do we squeeze out our immediate opponents, the private capitalists? By means of competition and economic struggle. If they sell cheaply, we must reach a position where we can sell still more cheaply. This is the form taken by our class struggle under present circumstances'.

In 1929, NEP was replaced by collectivized farming and rapid-industrialization. Stalin repeated what Bukharin said: 'in the period of reconstruction, technique decides everything'; ... it therefore necessary to study technique and master science.' This problem manifested in China and Cuba as well.

### **Class Struggle and the Two Forms of Inequality**

With the hopes dashed of a revolution in the West, the Bolsheviks faced two inequalities: internal inequality of classes, as well at the global level, inequality of nations.

Recognizing this, said Lenin: 'We must remember that at present all their highly developed technology and their highly developed industry belong to the capitalists, who are fighting us. We

must remember that we either strain every nerve in everyday effort, or we shall inevitably go under. Owing to the present circumstances, the whole world is developing faster than we are. While developing, the capitalist world is directing all its forces against us. That is how the matter stands. That is why we must devote special attention to this struggle.

In the 1960s, Che Guevara observed in Cuba: ‘since monopoly capital took control of the world, it has kept the majority of humanity in poverty, dividing the spoils among the most powerful countries. The standard of living of these countries is based on the poverty of ours’.

In October 1978, Deng Xiaoping observed that the technological gap between China and advanced countries was growing larger; they were developing ‘with tremendous speed’, and China was not managing to keep pace with them. The inequality that has risen in China, given the Western investment and capitalist mode of production is real, but is it worse than having a country of poor and even more poor?

### **Quantitative and Qualitative Inequality**

Mao’s two initiatives: Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution were aimed to tackle both types of inequalities that a socialist China faced in 1950s and 1960s. But mass mobilization and appeal for self-sacrifice used in the Chinese Revolution for political power gain were not effective, and the break between the USSR was in no small measure due to the pressure applied by severe sanctions on both economies by the US led imperialist block. When the condition of starvation traches to hanging between life and death, the inequality becomes absolute. This led to disastrous and tragic results.

Mao self-critically admitted this to Edward Heath, former British PM, in response to Heath saying, ‘making mistakes is the fate of all great statesmen’, Mao said: ‘my faults are more serious. 800 million people want to eat, and moreover, China’s industry is undeveloped. I can’t boast much of China. Your country is developed and ours is an undeveloped one.’ So, we can now understand Deng’s turn, Marxists should realize that ‘poverty is not socialism. Socialism means eliminating poverty. Unless you are developing productive forces, raising peoples’ living standards, you are not building socialism.’

Marx’s definition (Critique of the Gotha Programme), a communist society was one regulated by the principle: ‘from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs’. Hence, it presupposed an enormous growth of the productive forces and social wealth. It was, therefore, a contradiction in terms to speak of ‘poor communism’ or ‘poor socialism’ (given that socialism was the preparatory phase of communism). At this point, as a follower of the ‘principles of Marxism’ and ‘communism’, Deng was concerned about distinguishing the meaning of his slogan in different social orders. ‘Unlike capitalism, wealth in a socialist society belongs to the people’; ‘prosperity’ is something ‘for the entire people’: ‘we permit some people and some regions to become prosperous first, for the purpose of achieving prosperity faster. That is why our policy will not lead to polarization, to a situation where the rich get richer while the poor get poorer’.

From Deng Xiaoping's point of view, China's turn under his leadership was the 'second revolution', or a new stage in the revolution. But for his domestic opponents, and a majority of Western Marxists, it is a bourgeois and capitalist counter-revolution.

### **Social Classes and Political Castes**

After Revolution and the Civil war combined with WWI destruction, industrial production was reduced to 14% of pre-WWI level. So, the proletariat, on whose behalf the party declared 'Dictatorship of Proletariat' was nearly extinct – majority of workers were surviving on peasant life in the countryside. Lenin first drew attention, as emerges in particular from an intervention of October 1921: the 'industrial proletariat' in Russia had been 'dislodged from its class groove and has ceased to exist as a proletariat.' Given that 'large-scale capitalist industry has been destroyed, and since factories are at a standstill, the proletariat has disappeared.' At this point the party took over the role of the proletarian class and acted as a political caste.

With the repression of the workers' revolt in June 1848, General Jean Baptiste Cavaignac (beloved by the liberal bourgeoisie) exercised 'the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie by the Sabre', but this ended up being transformed into 'the dictatorship of the Sabre over bourgeois society' and even over the bourgeoisie itself. The ancien régime was over, but certain Strata hailing from it continued to be entrusted with important functions by the dominant bourgeoisie, often with a new significance relative to the past.

Bonapartism or Caesarism is one of the ways that the autonomization of ideological, political and military castes occurs. Gramsci's distinction between regressive Caesarism and progressive Caesarism remains valid; and it also remains the case that in different historical situations, the progressive or regressive character of Caesarism proves more or less pronounced.

### **Dominant Class and the Delegated Class**

Marx's analysis of the period preceding the outbreak of the 1848 revolution in Prussia is significant: 'The middle-class, still too weak to venture upon active movements, felt themselves compelled to march in the rear of the theoretical army led by Hegel's disciples against the religion, the ideas and the politics of the old world. In no former period was philosophical criticism so bold, so powerful and so popular as in the first eight years of the rule of Frederick William IV ... The power of philosophy during that period was entirely owing to the practical weakness of the bourgeoisie; as they could not assault the antiquated institutions in fact, they must yield precedence to the bold idealists who assaulted them in the region of thought.'

Lenin referred to Engels in 1894: 'we by no means consider compensation (to capitalists for their factories) as impermissible in any event. Marx told me (and how many times!) that in his opinion we would get off cheapest if we could buy out the whole lot of them.'

We once again find ourselves in the scenario which, even after the anti-capitalist revolution, envisages the partial persistence of major wealth that is bourgeois or bourgeois in origin.

It should be borne in mind that what is intended by 'state capitalism' here is not nationalized means of production in state hands. Instead 'state capitalism' is synonymous with 'capitalism controlled and regulated by the proletarian state'.

However, it should be remembered that 'state capitalism in a society where power belongs to capital, and state capitalism in a proletarian state, are two different concepts.'

Gramsci, who was in Moscow from May 1922 until December 1923, wrote: 'The popular masses who continued to suffer a life of hardship were disorientated by the sight of 'the *Nepman* in his furs, with all the goods of the earth at his disposal.' But this should not be a cause for scandal or rejection, because the proletariat, just as it could not conquer power, could not retain it, if it was incapable of sacrificing its particular, immediate interests to 'the general and permanent interests of the class'.

In 1929, Mao Zedong engaged in a struggle against 'absolute egalitarianism'. With its pettiness, charge of envy and even resentment (when the Red Army quartered, 'equality was demanded in the allotment of billets, and Headquarters would be abused for occupying larger rooms'), it was the expression of mean-spirited social relations, 'the product of a handicraft and small peasant economy', and thereby frustrated or prevented the creation of the social bloc needed to reverse the *ancien régime*. Successful revolutions required the consolidation of unity between the most immediate victims of exploitation and oppression, as well as a policy of alliances to isolate the power to be overthrown. All this was possible only on condition of banishing or containing individual pettiness as well as envy, rancor, and resentment towards the contiguous or immediately higher social strata who were the natural target of such mindsets.

But it is the second stage that contains significant novel features: the proletariat exhibits mature class consciousness only when it rises to a view of the class it belongs to as the leading nucleus of a broader social bloc called upon to carry the revolution to victory.'

The idea of catharsis was already stirring in Engels' thesis that communist consciousness presupposes transcending the immediate, narrow interests of the proletarian class (see Chap. 3, Sect. 4); and was operative in Lenin's polemic against trade unionism. But it was only now that it met with an organic, consistent formulation.

Acquisition of revolutionary consciousness requires struggle on two fronts: 1. Rejection by proletariat of co-optation by the dominant bloc; 2. Increasing proletariat's capacity for mediation vis-à-vis classes or social strata that live in better material conditions than itself; which in Gramsci's terms - a class that was formerly subaltern, can make the transition 'from the purely economic (or egoistic-passional) to the ethico-political moment', thereby becoming a ruling class.

### **Bourgeoisie as a Class in itself and as a Class for Itself**

Marx in *Poverty of Philosophy*: As regards the bourgeoisie, 'we have two phases to distinguish: that in which it constituted itself as a class under the regime of feudalism and absolute monarchy,

and that in which, already constituted as a class, it overthrew feudalism and monarchy to make society into a bourgeois society’.

In October 1978, initiating the policy of reforms and openness, Deng Xiaoping warned that ‘we shall not allow a new bourgeoisie to come into being.’

We have seen Marx celebrate the nobility of the Polish aristocrats who allowed themselves be governed by the national interest as opposed to its own class interest. Particularly at times of more or less acute historical crisis, an individual can find him- or herself located not within a single contradiction, but within multiple contradictions.

(Raj - In Russian Revolution we find such a figure, for example, in Felix Dzirzhinsky, appointed the first head of Cheka under Lenin.)

The Russian model itself had three different ones after 1917: War Communism, New Economic Policy and finally, Collective Farms and Socialized Industry. So, how are we to explain the exhausting pursuit of a society undefined by the slightest bourgeois contamination?

Expressing himself cautiously, aware that he was moving in a minefield, Stalin, in listing the functions of the socialist state, along with the traditional one of defense against the class enemy at home and abroad, theorized a third function: ‘...economic and organizational work and cultural and educational work performed by our state bodies.’ That is, work geared to ‘developing the young shoots of the new, socialist economic system and re-educating the people in the spirit of socialism.’

On the eve of his death, Stalin had to engage in a difficult ideological battle: ‘...commodity production must not be identified with capitalist production. These are two different things.’

More than 30 years later, Deng Xiaoping stressed: ‘...there is no fundamental contradiction between socialism and a market economy. The problem is how to develop the productive forces more effectively...’

At all events, in the economic field, one could not look to militarily organized mass enthusiasm for long; ‘personal interest’ would have to be relied on sooner or later.

So now we have Raúl Castro exhorting his compatriots to ‘abolish once and for all the idea that Cuba is the only country in the world where one can live without working...’

In the history of socialism, the appreciation of the market (and competition) as the motor of development of the productive forces expressed in The German Ideology was henceforth registered: via ‘universal competition’ and the market, large-scale industry ‘forced all individuals to strain their energy to the utmost’.

### **The Socialist Camp and Class Struggle**

Lenin commented: ‘...just because the proletariat has carried out a social revolution, it will not become holy and immune from errors and weaknesses. But it will inevitably be led to realize this truth by possible errors (and selfish interest – attempt to saddle others).’ However, as long as this lesson has not been assimilated, long as the victorious proletariat continued to express chauvinist or hegemonic tendencies, revolutions—against the socialist state—and wars are possible.’

This analysis confronts us with bitter conflicts that are irreducible to a struggle between opposing classes in power in the different countries.

The confrontation between the USSR and China was represented as a class struggle on an international scale, pitting a country dominated by the bourgeoisie against one ruled by the proletariat. Such an approach seems more in accord with historical materialism, in as much as it involves social classes in analyzing the international situation. In reality, however, it represents a lapse into an idealism of practice—the view that, as a result of revolutionary class struggle, the material objectivity of different national interests would disappear.

Called on to put an end to the ‘humiliations’ that began with the Opium Wars, from the outset the Chinese Revolution not only had an explicitly national dimension, but was also situated in an extended temporal perspective, which saw the process of political and social transformation unfolding in successive phases.

In his essay, *On Practice*, published in 1937, Mao argued, consistent with Marx on Science, a subject external to class struggle: ‘knowledge is a matter of science, and no dishonesty or conceit whatsoever is permissible. What is required is definitely the reverse—honest and modesty’. Material production itself is not determined in class struggle: material production and ‘scientific experiment’ are two forms of social practice beside class struggle, even if the latter has a strong influence on them.

In his essay penned in 1956, *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among Peoples*, Mao argued: In themselves the contradictions inherent in the knowledge process are not class contradictions, so they would continue to exist under communism, even after the disappearance of classes and class struggle: struggles between the true and the false ‘will never end’; nor would those between the old and the new, which could be hindered only by ‘lack of discernment’.

Fidel Castro arrived at the conclusion that ‘we socialists made a mistake in underestimating the strength of nationalism and religion’.

The idealism of practice, and the attribution to class struggle of a sovereign power to remold (and even erase) the social being of the state, nation, religion, market and so forth, made a decisive contribution to the defeat suffered by the socialist project between 1989 and 1991.

What dispels any possible doubt is the New York Times Magazine dated 18 April 1993, containing the headline: ‘Colonialism’s Back—and Not a Moment Too Soon!’

The UN was neutralized not only because the USA arrogated to itself the sovereign right to mount punitive expeditions without Security Council authorization (as in 1999 against

Yugoslavia and in 2003 against Iraq). More important was the fact that this alleged sovereign right could be applied, in utterly devastating fashion, without resorting to war in the strict sense.

Following the collapse of 'real socialism', in a unified world under US hegemony, embargos represented the quintessential weapon of mass destruction.

An Italian Daily Newspaper in early 1990s, referred to a debate in the US on Libya: 'China opposed sanctions against Libya, and the three Western powers threatened trade reprisals.' And such reprisals could be so devastating, a well-known US political scientist stressed at the end of the decade, as to represent the commercial equivalent of recourse to 'nuclear weapons.' (Raj – today, this is being applied to India on purchase of Russian Crude Oil, by the US to force Russia accept NATO dictated settlement of its conflict with Ukraine, which Russia is militarily winning. Like China in 1990s, India today cannot afford to lose US markets for its exports.)

Niall Ferguson, the quasi-official historian of the Western World, lamented the loss of Liberal Imperialism thus: there were no more self-confident imperialists than the Founding Fathers themselves.'

In 1991, after the collapse of the USSR, and right after the first Gulf War, in the British journal *International Affairs*, Barry Buzan, boasted happily: 'the West has triumphed over both communism and *tiers-mondisme*' (means ideology that support anticolonial movements). The second victory was no less important than the first: the center is now more dominant, and the periphery more subordinate, than at any time since decolonization began'.

It is clear that, arrogating to itself the right to declare the sovereignty of other states superseded, the great Western powers grant themselves expanded sovereignty, to be exercised far beyond their own national territory. To all intents and purposes, this reproduces the dichotomy that marked colonial and imperial expansion, whose protagonists constantly refused to recognize the countries they subjugated, or converted into protectorates, as sovereign states.

If the reaction that followed 1989 did not achieve all its objectives, it was down to economic and political processes outside the West's control. Nor should we lose sight of the resistance to military occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan. These processes and movements, unanticipated by the triumphant years of the turn (reversal), all directly or indirectly pertained to the enduring anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist impulse deriving from the October Revolution.

### **The Return of Primitive Accumulation**

The reversal in Russia starting 1989, dropped industrial production by 14% in 1992. Conditions then in Russia in that period of 1989-1999 decade, brought to mind conditions in areas attacked by Hitler's armies in WWII. The elderly died in large numbers from diseases caused by the loss of social safety net. More than half the population fell below poverty line. There were abandoned babies all over. There were at least 200,000 babies abandoned in the whole country, according to experts. As many as in Russia in 1925, after the Civil War.... They are the primary victims of a country that is sacrificing everything to the God of money, which has abandoned the old scale of values without replacing it, which has set in train a process of degradation that is perhaps

unstoppable. Ten years ago, in the totalitarian, Brezhnevite USSR abandoned children were practically non-existent.

There is no doubt that the turn of 1989 swept away the economic and social rights hitherto enjoyed by the population in Eastern Europe.

### **Emancipation and Dis-emancipation.**

Eastern European countries had to play the role of the buffer between capitalist Europe and Socialist USSR, the USSR learned how vulnerable it was in its absence from previous invasions, the latest the most devastating, Hitler's. But it naturally bred resentment in the Eastern European populations. Their attraction to liberalism offered by the West European capitalism supported by the US was based on this reality.

But they were blissfully unaware of it in the very source of their hope: the US. McCarthyism in the USA, the banning of the Communist Party in West Germany, etc., not to mention the imposition, often promoted and blessed by Washington, of ferocious military dictatorships, especially in the Third World. But it is undeniable that 1989-91 period saw growth of political rights in Eastern Europe. But at the same time, money was quickly becoming the deciding factor in politics in the US as well as in Europe. In the USA, it ended up 'limiting politics to candidates who have money of their own or who take money from political action committees, i.e., money interest lobbies.

While in capitalist civil society division of labor is a result of unbridled competition, in the factory, it is directly enforced by the capitalist. In contrast, in socialist countries considerable anarchy in factories and workplace (with the disappearance of traditional, more or less pronounced employer despotism) was flanked by the terror exercised by the state over civil society. All this came to an end with the turn of 1989-91.

Some decades earlier, Hayek had already waged a campaign to demonstrate that the 'freedom from want' proclaimed by Roosevelt, and the 'social and economic rights' promulgated by the UN, were the result of the influence—deemed ruinous by Hayek—of the 'Marxist Russian Revolution'.

China sought to end the anarchy in the workplace, where it was known that even until 1994, a Chinese dependent worker could get away doing absolutely nothing for a whole year, and still remain employed, getting his salary every month. In Cuba it was the same.

In the USSR, Education and Health services were not a part of market category. You got what you required, and state provided the best it could without regard to how poor or rich one was. The intellectuals of free market argued this was not civilized way of life.

To escape barbarism, and be admitted into the circle of genuinely civilized countries, internationally it was necessary to join NATO and take part in its neo-colonial wars, while domestically one had to proceed to abolition of the welfare state.

## Old Order and New Order

The old order in Russia was the Czarist ancien regime, which was overthrown by 1917 Revolution.

Britain's residual ancien-régime was intimately bound up with the ancien régime maintained and nurtured in the colonies by the London government. But it also help overthrow the ancien regime in the West, where censitary discrimination had persisted. In 1911, King George V, was declared King of India, and ceremonies held to establish him the lord over all Indians. The 1917 Russian Revolution was a hammer to bring down not just the Czar, but also of Britain in less than four decades.

In these years, the institution of slavery had disappeared from the USA, but the 'old lords in the South' or 'barons' referred to by Engels continued to exercise power over the blacks, who were deprived not only of political rights but also civil rights. This too was challenged by the 1917 Russian Revolution. So, what was overthrown in 1989-1991 was the new order, which the less than capable inheritors were unable to secure it, in the face of the adversity posed by a resurgent capitalism based in the US that had found a new life, thanks to the destruction of overproduction by wars, and the modernity forced upon it by the socialist revolutions in Russia and China, and because its industrial upsurge was ignited by the two World Wars, from which it itself was not devastated materially.

This learning process that bourgeoisie experienced and had the good fortune of not having a resurgent adversary in the French Revolution from 1789 to 1871, which only discovered the political form of its rule after this period of great trial and tribulation, creating the parliamentary republic on the basis of universal, though only male, suffrage. That rule proved enduring in the modern society on condition that it can combine hegemony and coercion and can activate coercion and dictatorship only in the time of acute crises.

Hegel regarded the Jacobin terror as legitimate and necessary: 'in the French Revolution, a terrible force took hold of the state, and indeed everything. But it is not despotism, it is tyranny, a pure terrifying dominance. But it is *necessary* and *just*, to the extent to which it constitutes, and maintains the state as real individual entity. On the other hand, Hegel the philosopher recognized the legitimacy and necessity of the Thermidor as well. With the suppression of the state of emergency, tyranny' became 'superfluous' and had to make way for 'dominance of laws'. Robespierre was oblivious of this and thus was overthrown: "his power abandoned him, because necessity had abandoned him. So, he was violently overthrown.'. The antagonists in this struggle became the embodiments of two moments 'of necessity'.

According to Dahrendorf, it was necessary to have done not only with Marx, whose teaching 'has come to grief in 1989, if not long before', but also Hegel and Rousseau. It was necessary to go back to Burke, drawing inspiration from the theoretician of the 'open society' and unbending enemy of the French Revolution. Dahrendorf thus became a reactionary.

There is no reason to proceed differently in the case of changes in Eastern Europe, notwithstanding the pitiless interpretation we can and must give of the history of regimes that

collapsed between 1989 and 1991. Use of the category of restoration is all the more convincing, if we bear in mind the fact that in the capitalist West itself the crisis, and then collapse, of 'real socialism' paved the way for the deletion of economic and social rights from the catalogue of rights.

In fact, the national question played a decisive role in the dissolution of the 'socialist camp' and the country created by the October Revolution.

Not by chance, the dissolution of the socialist camp began on the periphery of the 'empire', in countries long replete at the limited sovereignty imposed on them.

Napoleon, back from the disastrous venture in Russia and defeat at Leipzig; and confronted by a formidable enemy coalition and the growing disaffection of the French people, was forced to abdicate and accept the return of the Bourbons.

Far from abolishing or reducing the work of slaves, technology, which greatly facilitated cotton ginning, increased it terribly. This state of affairs was challenged by class struggle and the abolitionist revolution, in the particular forms they took during the American Civil War.

A distinction must be drawn between machines, which are potentially capable of reducing the hardship of work, and 'the capitalist use of machinery', which can afflict workers as 'a most frightful scourge', increasing 'the sufferings of the workmen displaced by machinery' or, when not made redundant, further 'crippled by the division of labor'.

What explains it, and the discouragement of the English proletariat, which ended up accepting its 'political nullity', is the 'defeat of the continental working classes', the 'iron hand of force' they were subjected to as a result of the failure of the 1848 revolution, compelling the vanguard elements, 'the most advanced sons of labor', to seek refuge across the Atlantic.

And naturally, we must bear in mind, the colonial expansion that muffled social conflict in the metropolis, in fact accentuating national (and social) conflict in the colonies, as demonstrated by the Sepoys' rebellion in India some years before the foundation of the First International.

The Communist Manifesto stresses that the acquisition of class consciousness by the proletariat is impeded by 'competition' within it, which the bourgeoisie has an interest in stoking.

In reality, we have seen that on three fronts (the emancipation of the working class, oppressed nations, and women), Marxian class struggle rejected any such distinction.

Ho Chi Minh, on his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday recalled: "Lenin's theses [on the national and colonial question] roused me to great emotion, great enthusiasm, great faith, and helped me to see the problems clearly."

Togliatti in 1954, questioning the liberal principle of British rule is claimed to be based: 'The truth is that liberal doctrine ... is based on barbaric discrimination between human creatures (metropolitan vs. colonial)'.

Women's emancipation has been part of the communist movement starting with the Russian Revolution. Bolsheviks gave Russian women the right to abortion and the right to divorce, well ahead of what women gained in the Western World. In Italy, The date is 1945. In subsequent years, the feminist movement underwent significant developments and radicalization.

Palestinian situation. The 'natives' have their land expropriated and are condemned to poverty and marginalization. At the same time, they suffer dual non-recognition: they are not regarded as worthy either of constructing an independent nation-state or of becoming citizens of the state which, annexing their territory, prevents them from constituting themselves as an independent nation-state.

The subjects of class struggle are diverse; and struggles for recognition and emancipation are multiple. There is no pre-ordained harmony between them. For objective and subjective reasons, misunderstandings and divisions can occur.

The high points in the history that started with the Communist Manifesto are those where fragmentation was avoided, so that that the various struggles merged in a single powerful wave of emancipation.

Disraeli extended the suffrage to the popular classes, thereby promoting their political emancipation, but in exchange for support for the policy of British colonial expansion. It was a successful policy. Marx and Engels were obliged to note that even the quintessential revolutionary class—the proletariat—could succumb to the siren of colonialism.

This syndrome is much more pronounced today given that, with the advent of neo-colonialism and what an American political scientist highly attentive to geopolitical themes has defined as 'human rights imperialism', the oppressor and aggressor can easily envelop violence against an oppressed country in a fog of mystification. It is not the only factor fragmenting class struggle. Let us glance at the third front of the class struggle—the women's liberation movement.

In 1887, Eleanor Marx, tackling the 'woman question' along with her husband Edward Aveling, and demanding political rights for women, not only compared the 'oppressed condition' and 'merciless degradation' of women to that endured by workers, but added that 'the relation between men and women' was the clearest, most repugnant expression of the 'gruesome moral bankruptcy' of capitalist society as such.

In the early twentieth century, in a country like Britain, there was no shortage of women distinguishing themselves in celebration of colonial expansion and the role of 'Crusader for Empire'. Nor were feminists lacking who demanded women's emancipation in the name of the role they played in building the empire. 41 In this case, the women's liberation movement came into contradiction with the colonial peoples' liberation movement.

While the First World War was raging, Lenin, on the one hand, called on the proletariat in the West to rise up against the bourgeoisie and transform the imperialist war into a revolutionary civil war, and on the other saluted the national liberation struggles and wars waged by 'colonial nations' and 'oppressed nations', and drew attention to the permanent condition of 'domestic

slavery' imposed on women, 42 who not by chance were excluded from political rights along with the 'poor' and the 'lower stratum of the proletariat proper'. 43 The three fronts of the class struggle converge here.

In the past, colonial powers (including Mussolini's Italy) promoted their expansion in the name of emancipation from the slavery still extant in Africa, only to proceed to impose forced labor in even more odious forms—and not merely on a specific class, but on the whole indigenous population.

Mao Ze Dong, in 1963, with reference to the struggle of African Americans for their civil and political rights, stressed: 'national struggle, in the final analysis, is a question of class struggle'.

In the great revolution by the black slaves of Santo Domingo, from the outset, included a national liberation component: the insurrection led by Toussaint L'Ouverture freed not a specific subaltern class, but black people as a whole from the shackles of slavery.

Stalingrad—the battle that inflicted defeat on Hitler's plan to colonize and enslave entire peoples in Eastern Europe.

Napoleon's invasion of Russia is often compared with Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union. But it was Napoleon's expedition against Santo Domingo is more like what Hitler attempted but failed against the USSR. In both cases, what was at stake was the fate of the colonial system and the institution of slavery. In both cases, there was a class struggle that was simultaneously a war of resistance and national liberation.

In 1963, invoking Lenin, the Communist Party of China repeated: 'the national question in the contemporary world is one of class struggle'. To demand 'a clear line of demarcation' between 'oppressed nations and imperialism was the Marxist-Leninist class stand'. How could the anti-colonial revolutions exploding then in Vietnam, Algeria and Latin America be outside the ambit of class-struggle?

In reality, in a situation of the theoretical crisis of Marxism, a tendency to evade the challenge involved in interpreting the tangle of contradictions—what might be characterized as the populist tendency to fall back on the binary interpretation of conflict—asserts itself.

Once again, the most striking case is the revolution of Santo Domingo's black slaves. It managed to defeat the strongest army of the day—namely, Napoleon's. The independent country that emerged – Haiti – played a revolutionary role far beyond its borders. It impelled Simon Bolivar to abolish slavery in Spanish Latin America and it aided him in his struggle for independence from the Yankies. For this the slave-holding US and France combined to isolate Haiti diplomatically and economically, as the US is attempting even until today to Cuba.

Having emerged from the Second World War bled white, the former ally of the US was offered this choice under Marshall Plan: The Soviets must open their economy to Western investment, their markets to Western products, their account books to Western administrator' and 'accept economic and media penetration' by the countries about to form NATO. Stalin understood it

meant submitting to (neo-) colonial control once again, declined even as the Soviets were faced with nuclear annihilation, so it must prepare to counter it, even under the conditions of half of the economy devastated by Hitler's armies by 1945.

The economic struggle manifestly played a far from negligible role in the ultimate defeat of the October Revolution in Eastern Europe.

The Chinese communists faced a similar scenario: a devastated starving country from the Civil War and by the Japanese imperialists. Truman administration's goal was stated very clearly: China must be 'plagued' with 'a general standard of life around and below the subsistence level', 'economic backwardness', and a 'cultural lag'. There must be a long 'a heavy and protracted cost to the social structure'. So, the embargo was placed on medicines, tractors and fertilizers exported to China all way into 1960s, over six presidential terms. It set back China's economic development many decades.

We can now understand the transition in the sphere of international relations from colonialism to neo-colonialism; political annexation' corresponds to 'personal dependence', while 'economic' annexation with formal national independence corresponds to material 'dependence' with 'personal independence'.

The struggle to develop production was cast as a continuation of the struggle against colonial or semi-colonial domination, by many leaders of anticolonial movements as noted. Four decades after Mao gained power in China, Deng Xiaoping repeated that 'to achieve genuine political independence a country must lift itself out of poverty.'

It is transition that needs to be made at a certain point in any anti-colonial revolution, in any revolution that challenges the international division of labor imposed by capitalism and imperialism.

This dialectic seen in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was already visible before, as noted in the case of Haiti, and before that inside the US. Following gaining their freedom from slavery, the blacks were denied land ownership by various means, by the ruling elites, pushing them into the ring of the lowest wage workers in the US. Their situation endures to this day. The average net worth of a black family is less than 10% of an average net worth of a white family.

Zizek and many Marxists, not just Trotsky's followers, disdain the alleged degeneration of class struggle into struggle against imperialism. But many of the same also see what imperialism has done to Palestine, Chile, Cuba and Venezuela, earlier, Iraq, by economic sanctions. The National question can be negated, but the conduct towards Palestine, Chile, and Venezuela show that a class struggle which ignores this question lacks credibility and effectiveness.

On the other hand, those who, by analogy with the First World War, ridiculed 'defense of the fatherland' and enjoined defeatism, ended up playing the game of the Third Reich or the Empire of the Rising Sun. This confirms that substituting the easy game of analogies for the 'concrete analysis of a concrete situation' is a source of nothing but disasters.

According to Mao's statement of 16 September 1949, China risked becoming dependency of 'US flour' and thus also, 'US colony'. Until at least late 1950s, Mao did not call into question his thinking that class struggle and national struggle had converged in China. The picture certainly changed with the launch of the Great Leap Forward and then, in particular, the Cultural Revolution, when the slogan 'one divides into two' reverberated. The anti-imperialist united front was split, and the principal target of the class struggle was identified as domestic.

Five centuries back, we come to the discovery & conquest of America and the beginning of what Halford J. Mackinder, one of the fathers of geopolitics, defined as the 'Columbian epoch' of the discovery and 'political appropriation' of the world by the West, which expanded triumphantly in the face of 'almost negligible resistance'.

From Marx and Engels' standpoint, engagement in overcoming the patriarchal division of labor in the family was to be regarded as an integral part of the process of emancipation (and class struggle). It would be very strange if engagement to end the division of labor imposed internationally by force of arms in the 'Columbian epoch' were to be regarded as foreign to the process of emancipation (and class struggle)!

Marxism or post-Marxism of the trade-unionist/populist variety seems indifferent to all this. It proclaims a desire to struggle against inequality, provided it is not global inequality—the form of inequality most pregnant with violence, which creates the profoundest rift between human beings.

The financial editor of the Wall Street Journal (in 2013) observed that in the USA 'one per cent of the population owns more than one-fifth of the country's wealth, and fifteen per cent of people live below the poverty line'.

The ideological and political struggle that dictated the new course in China is now becoming clear: on one side, advocates of an egalitarian distribution of penury, inclined to a populist transfiguration of this condition into a synonym for political and moral excellence; on the other, advocates of a 'prosperity' that is 'common', to be achieved through competition between individuals and enterprises, the market, a mix of public and private industry, with the leading role of the state and the public sector of the economy (and public power) taken as read.

China finds itself having to confront two different inequalities: global inequality and domestic inequality. In theory, China could avoid such pressures and conditions by embarking on a autarkic road of development. In reality, as the Communist Manifesto had already explained, the economic and technological lag cannot be overcome in isolation from an ongoing process at a global level, which sees 'old-established national industries' replaced by 'new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe'.

In the case of Mao Ze Dong who died in 1976, and who governed the whole of China from 1948 and more or less extensive areas of it from 1928 onwards, only the years of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution are considered. What gets repressed is the essential thing.

Taken as a whole, the ‘social achievements of the Mao era’ were ‘extraordinary’. An elementary consideration suffices to appreciate this: major industrial and technological development, and the escape from ‘poverty’ of ‘more than 600 million people’, would not have been possible had China not defeated US plans for regime change. And the success of any such project now would block the road to the further advances required in the struggle against the two inequalities and would, in fact, imperil what has already been achieved.

Lenin criticized the corporatist Trade Union secretary of Great Britain, for losing sight of the struggle for emancipation in its different national and international aspects, thereby sometimes becoming prop of a nation that exploits the whole world.

Mao politically expropriated the bourgeoisie, but only partially expropriated economically. Deng restored the economic power of the bourgeoisie, but not its political power. This political expropriation does not simply entail the impossibility of converting economic power into political power. Nobody can predict what the outcome would be in the long run. But China in the meantime has become an economic giant, which the US cannot easily subdue.

### **Class Struggle poised between Marxism and Populism**

Susan Weil was a French philosopher who entered into this issue in 1930s. Based on Weil’s own definition—class struggle combats ‘the destruction of human dignity’—we must unquestionably speak of class struggle in connection with the Great Patriotic War and other liberation struggles against German and Japanese imperialism. But the French philosopher did not use this category: the possibility, in specific circumstances, of class struggle taking the form of national struggle lay beyond her intellectual horizons.

Despite Stalingrad, Hitler was not yet conclusively beaten and had not in fact given up on building his continental empire. More than ever, he resorted to genocidal practices to reduce the peoples of Eastern Europe to the condition of redskins (whose land was to be expropriated) and blacks (fated to work like slaves in the service of the master race). But what Weil seems to be concerned about is a single contradiction that divides all countries from top to bottom, pitting mendicants against non-mendicants. This represents the triumph of populism: independently of any concrete historical and political analysis—there is no room for Marx’s distinction between proletariat and lumpen-proletariat—the locus of moral excellence resides in those bereft of power and wealth, the weak—in fact, the humiliated and the most humiliated of all. In this instance, populism functioned as a way of evading the class struggles that were raging all around.

But Weil went further. She asserted that the overthrow of capitalism and nationalizations of factories would not bring about any real change, because the evil lies in the factory system, with its hierarchies of workers and management, not on the ownership of the means of production. Marx, according to her, wanted the liberation of the productive systems not the workers.

But Marx saw class struggle as struggle for recognition of workers as human beings, which capitalism destroys by subordinating his powers to the power of the machines. Capitalism sends

to grave early one section of the workers by overwork, controlling them by machinery, the other section as lumpen or near lumpen, who loses self-worth as unemployed or underemployed.

We may conclude with Marx: ‘the present use of machinery is one of the relations of our present economic system, but the way in which machinery is exploited is quite distinct from the machinery itself. Powder is still powder, whether you use it to wound a man or to dress his wounds’.

The motto ‘Fatherland or death’, with which Fidel Castro’s speeches and Che Guevara’s speeches and letters sometimes conclude, now reverberates as ‘industrialization or death’. The second formulation is simply a clarification of the first. While the first expresses the identity, in specific circumstances, of the ‘social question’ and the ‘national question’ (Marx), or ‘class struggle’ and ‘national struggle’ (Mao), the second expresses an awareness that political independence proves fragile and even illusory if not sustained by economic (and technological) independence—an awareness that termination of ‘political annexation’ is not in and of itself the overcoming of ‘economic’ annexation (Lenin).

Marx explained the broad support enjoyed by Louis Bonaparte in the peasant world thus: there was ‘no wealth of social relationships’ and ‘intercourse with society’ was extremely limited. This served to disarm peasants in the face of maneuvering by the Bonapartist adventurer and dictator.

Proudhon, while he stressed the devastating consequences for the poor of the theft of property by the narrow circle of the wealthy, he branded the women’s movement, which was in its early stages, as ‘pornocracy’. The real explanatory key lies elsewhere. In the emergent women’s movement, a far from negligible role was played by women who were not of popular extraction.

The critique of ‘austere morality’, which entails consecration of the patriarchal power of the male, tends to find more fertile ground where ‘liberal morality’ takes root. Western European countries, thus, witnessed the development of two different social contradictions at the time. In addition to that, pitting proletariat against bourgeoisie, the contradiction highlighted by the feminist movement was operative. The subjects of these conflicts are different. From Marx’s standpoint, these are two different manifestations of ‘class struggle’, which is difficult to unify and merge into a single social and political bloc.

Denunciation of the feminist movement as pornocracy allowed Proudhon to dispense with such problems and adhere to the populist schema involving the opposition exclusively of the weak and the powerful, the oppressor and oppressed.

In Poland, we see a third contradiction emerge in force: the national one. We know that Marx saluted participation by the nobility in the national struggle against ancient regime of Czarist Russia that oppressed Poland. Proudhon derided and condemned the national aspirations of oppressed peoples as an expression of obscurantist attachment to outdated prejudices.

In Poland, an extremely broad social alliance, extending far beyond the ranks of the powerless, participated in the struggle for independence and national renaissance. It is not surprising, given that the nation, as a whole, suffered oppression. But it is a scandal for the populist, inclined to

believe that the only genuine contradiction is the one between rich and poor, between the weak, uncorrupted ‘people’ and the great and powerful (bourgeoisie and nobility).

For Proudhon, society was divided between those who owned property and those who did not. Thus, populism betrays another of its aspects: it is also a flight from complexity.

### **The ‘Totality of Bosses vs. The Totality of Workers’**

Proudhon expected the state to help the poor and the weak. This binary interpretation of the conflict had not yet produced a rigorous, consistent populism. This also applies to ‘global civil war’, i.e., global socialist revolution, which is later associated with Trotsky’s ‘Permanent Revolution’ thesis, but even Lenin thought that as inevitable before 1915. Lenin soon corrected himself. Advance of socialist revolution in fact required active help of State – a powerful socialist state, a role the USSR played in advancing the socialist revolutions in China, and later, in other parts of Asia.

When the state and party factor vanishes, we have populism in the pure, as it were: the protagonists of the impending struggle are those bereft not only of wealth but also of any form of power.

Marx powerfully demonstrated the subordination of workers to machinery, which is used by capitalists competing with each other, and ultimately, of the totality of the capitalist as a class against the totality of workers, as a class. In the same way, war is characterized today by the subordination of the combatants to the instruments of combat; and the weapons—the real heroes of modern warfare—like the men destined to serve them, are directed by those who do not fight.

This is a further expression of populism: moral excellence lies with the oppressed who rebel and those who offer help to the oppressed and the rebels. But once they have won power, the latter cease to be oppressed and the rebels; and thus forfeit their moral excellence. And the one who, by virtue of aiding them, basks in their moral excellence also finds himself in serious difficulties.

Populism, which regards the constitution of a national liberation movement as a state as contamination, winds up being heavily contaminated by support for the military interventions of the most powerful state in the world.

And how are we to explain the silence on the Taiping Rebellion (1851–64), ‘the bloodiest civil war in world history with an estimated 20 to 30 million dead’?

The fact is that this conflict possessed a national dimension as well: the rebels took up arms in the name of social justice, but also to put an end to a dynasty that had capitulated to the aggression of ‘British narco-traffickers’ and rulers, to terminate ‘the Ching regime, the running dog of imperialism’. 67 It is no accident if, in the areas controlled by them, the Taiping hastened to prohibit the consumption of opium—a de facto challenge to the London government, which lined up behind the tottering dynasty. Once again, evincing both prophetic foresight and revolutionary impatience, Marx observed in 1853 that ‘the chronic rebellions subsisting in China

for about ten years past ... [have] now gathered together in one formidable revolution', which was destined to make its influence felt well beyond Asia.

David Harvey, in his book titled *What is to be Done?*, referring to Lenin's 1903 essay points out that 'Many of the revolutionary movements in capitalism's history have been broadly urban, rather than factory based.' For example, he cites 'revolutions throughout in Europe in 1848, the Paris Commune of 1871, Leningrad in 1917, Seattle general strike of 1918, the Tucuman uprising of 1969, as well as Paris, Mexico City and Bangkok in 1968, the Shanghai Commune in 1967, Prague in 1968, the list goes on...'

No less significant is the absence from David Harvey's list of the Sepoys' revolt in India in 1857, which has been characterized by a contemporary Indian historian as a 'gigantic class struggle' and, at the same time, a major anti-colonial revolution. This 'patriotic and ... class, civil war' was waged primarily by peasants, targeted colonial rule and 'pro-British big princes and big merchants,' and lasted far beyond 1857. At times, it developed along the lines of the model later theorized by Mao of the countryside encircling the city and cost more than ten million Indian lives. Is the silence explained by the 'identity between national struggle and class struggle' which, according to Mao, tended to obtain in anti-colonial revolutions?

And how are we to assess the uprisings against the Nazi occupation that occurred in successive European countries, and the revolutions in the colonial or semi-colonial world which continued to develop even later, effecting unprecedentedly radical changes in the global set-up?

To judge from the British scholar's silence, one would say that wars of resistance and national liberation, and anti-colonial insurrections and revolutions, have little or nothing to do with class struggle.

Class struggle is an exoteric macro-history, not the esoteric micro-history to which it is often reduced. Either the theory of 'class struggle' formulated in the Communist Manifesto is valid—and then we must know how to interpret history in this key, starting with the decisive events of the nineteenth, twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Or, if such events have nothing to do with class struggles, we must take our leave of this theory.

If victorious, the events in Tiananmen Square in 1989 would, in all probability, have meant the rise to power of a Chinese Yeltsin.

It is hard to conceive of an egalitarian revolution in China at the very moment when the capitalist and neo-liberal West was triumphing in Eastern Europe, as well as Latin America (one thinks of the defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua), when communist parties the world over were rushing to change their name, and when the power of the USA and the influence and prestige of the Washington Consensus were so uncontested and incontestable as to seed the idea of the 'end of history'! Only a populist can believe in such miracles—on condition, that is, of abandoning secular analysis of classes and class struggle (domestic and international), and replacing it by mythological credence in the redemptive value of the 'people' and the 'masses'.

In reality, ‘rightful’ rebellion had very precise limits, and could certainly not be pushed to the point of challenging the revolution that gave birth to the People’s Republic of China.

In absolutizing the contradiction between masses and power, and condemning power as such, populism proves incapable of drawing a line of demarcation between revolution and counter-revolution.

The populist rebel who would be bound to consider Hegel insufficiently revolutionary could always heed Gramsci’s warning against the phraseology of ‘primitive, elementary “rebellion-ism,” “subversion-ism” and “anti-statism,” which are ultimately an expression of de facto “apoliticism”’.

Marx and Engels concurrently highlighted the reactionary, anti-abolitionist abolitionist role played by immigrants of Irish origin in the USA during the Civil War. The Communist Manifesto vigorously condemns not only the oppression of women, but also the process of reification to which they are subject. At the same time, however, it has no difficulty referring to ‘the exploitation of children by their parents not excluding mothers.’ However, we find a residue of populism in the view that the state is destined to wither away in communist society.

It is true that, when Marx and Engels looked to the absorption of the state into civil society, they had in mind a civil society liberated from class antagonism. However, in their discourse a certain idealization of civil society (conceived in opposition to power) is present and, with it in this sense, a residue of populism.

It can indeed be said that the epic class struggles waged at Valmy, Port-au-Prince, Paris (June 1848), Gettysburg, and Stalingrad witnessed the clash of oppressors and oppressed. But this is true only in the last analysis. That is, given the absolute centrality and urgency of what was at stake on each occasion (the respective fates of the ancien régime, black slavery on Santo Domingo, wage slavery in France, black slavery in the USA, and the new colonial slavery that the Third Reich was resolved to impose on Slavs), all the other contradictions, all the other relations of coercion, became (in that determinate historical moment) altogether secondary.

However, in the West, (communist) parties capable of giving organized expression to the burgeoning mass discontent do not exist. There is no reason for the magnates to be particularly anxious.

A potential reason for particular concern is the placards waved by the demonstrators that express their fury not only at Wall Street, but also War Street. The district of high finance is identified as the district of war and the military-industrial complex.

An awareness of the link between capitalism and imperialism is emerging or starting to emerge. Compounding the objective difficulties is the political and ideological initiative of the dominant class.

In the USA, especially, following an established tradition and tried-and-tested technique, it seeks to externalize social conflict, diverting growing popular anger to emerging countries—

particularly China, which, having left behind the ‘century of humiliation’ and desperate mass poverty that followed the Opium Wars, is now challenging the ‘Columbian epoch’ and 500 years of uncontested Western supremacy.

Hence, the organization of dependent workers into a coherent class struggle in the capitalist metropolis requires a capacity for orientation amid the multiple contradictions and class struggles traversing the contemporary world. What is needed more than ever is a re-reading of Marx’s theory of ‘class struggles’ (plural). Only thus, can we re-appropriate an indispensable tool for understanding the historical process and undertaking struggles for emancipation.

---