

Marxism and the 1989 Revolution

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‘Theories of Revolution in the Light of 1989 in Eastern Europe’

Note

A bibliography and a better documented version of this paper will be available from Colin Barker.

Introduction

The 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe had a number of significant characteristics.

Occurring in relatively advanced industrial societies, their main protagonists came from urban classes. Oppositional demands were ‘political’ rather than ‘social’. The revolutions involved only limited popular mobilisation. Romania apart, there was less violence than during the British miners’ strike of 1984-85. The old rulers, mostly, gave up power quickly and with little resistance. Armed forces played little part, some military chiefs urging concessions to the opposition. There was a ‘domino effect’ as the wave of revolt spread swiftly across the whole region. Despite differences in local detail, the political outcomes were similar: party monopolies were broken, elected parliamentary regimes emerged, committed to dismantling the command economies, to privatisation and subjection of economies to market forces.

Dix (1991) suggests that 1989 puts into question some existing theories of revolution. Their urban-industrial character undermines the case that revolutions should be expected only in backward agrarian countries (Huntington, Skocpol, Goldstone, Kimmel). They lack much of the ‘class struggle from below’ associated (for example, by Skocpol) with ‘social revolutions’.

This paper explores several issues in the light of the events of 1989. What does ‘revolution’ mean? What did and did not happen in 1989? What categories make sense of these events, and in what theoretical light should we read them?

Definitional Issues

One question the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe pose is: What should we mean by ‘revolution’? Indeed, were these ‘revolutions’ at all?

Some definitions are very demanding. Huntington (1968: 264) suggests a revolution is ‘a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies’. This is so comprehensive that few sets of

historical events appear to fit it completely. So far as Eastern Europe in 1989 is concerned, half its elements barely fit.

Against a view of revolutions as extraordinary, cataclysmic events, other theorists stress their relative normality. Aya adapts von Clausewitz: revolution is 'merely the continuation of politics by other means' (Aya 1990: 52). Tilly (1978, 1993) follows Amann (1962) in defining revolution in parsimonious and strictly political terms. It is a set of events with two distinguishable parts: a 'revolutionary situation' and a 'revolutionary outcome'.

A revolutionary situation is one of 'multiple sovereignty', a condition where two or more blocs contest for state power. Three elements combine to make up a revolutionary situation. A coalition outside the existing polity makes exclusive claims to state power; these contenders receive support from significant elements of the population, against the old regime's directives; and the police, army etc prove unable or unwilling to repress the contenders and their supporters, thus rendering incomplete the old regime's hold on the state (Tilly 1978). Such a political crisis may be resolved in various ways. One way is *via* a 'revolutionary outcome': the contenders' claim to state power succeeds. But the open-ended nature of political contests makes other outcomes also feasible.

For 1989, even this definition presents problems. Some commentators (for example, Kux, Weitman, Misztal) miss the problem, for they see only a single general process: 'The Revolution in Eastern Europe'. This obscures differences between the processes in various states. Batt (1991; also Friedheim 1993) usefully distinguishes two distinct patterns: 'negotiated transition' in Poland and Hungary and 'regime collapse' elsewhere.

The GDR, Czechoslovak and Romanian events fit nicely in Tilly's criteria for a 'revolutionary situation'. Here we find coalitions contending for state power, large demonstrations contrary to regime directives, and weakened repressive forces. But what of Poland and Hungary? Here ruling parties 'negotiated' their monopoly away, with few direct confrontations between demonstrators and the forces of the old order. Garton Ash (1990), attempting to capture Hungary's distinctiveness, coined the term 'refolution'.

If Poland and Hungary had revolutions, we must modify Tilly's criteria. His account requires that the old regime issue 'contrary directives' to its subjects. In Poland and Hungary this hardly occurred. Their political monopoly challenged, these party leaderships opted to negotiate its abolition.

Even 'political process' definitions of revolution are ragged and uncertain at the edges. The nature of the East European events requires further inspection. What gave the 'revolutions of 1989' their particular character?

Processes

For Lenin a revolutionary situation has two features. The ruling class can no longer rule in the old way; their subjects are no longer willing to be ruled in the old way. The formula, like Tilly's, is useful but leaves an issue open: in a given situation, what is the relative weight of the two elements? In other words, how much did the regimes 'collapse', and how much were they 'pushed'? And, did old élites have merely to abandon their 'old way' of ruling, or were they actually displaced? These questions demand attention to the processes by which politics are

transformed, and to the main groups of active participants.

In 1989, three groups played significant parts: the old ruling class, organised around the communist parties' power-monopoly; and the opposition, itself consisting of its leading figures, and the wider (mostly urban) populations.

†The rulers

Two questions arise about the East European rulers. Elemer Hankiss asks: 'Why didn't they shoot?' (Hankiss 1990). In 1956, 1968 and 1981, they used military force. Why not in 1989? Alternatively, if 'shooting' was out, why didn't they follow de Gaulle in 1968 and simply ride out the storm?

The basic answer seems to be, first, that they saw no option but 'negotiation' or 'collapse followed by velvet revolution' (Batt 1991); and, second, for most of them political reconstruction was not that threatening. The possibility beckoned of a ruling-class 'recomposition' (Haynes: nd) without too much disruption of their lives.

The classic Stalinist regimes yoked together government, state and enterprise in a single framework. The party permeated everything, under the political-military hegemony of the USSR. The regimes pursued a development programme based on national and bloc autarchy, stressing heavy industrial (including military) production, and targetted at catching up with and if possible overtaking the West. To this overriding purpose, all of society was subordinated.

Initially they were successful: average growth rates exceeded western rates; they were widely taken as developmental models for backward countries. Most of the world's Left identified, critically or otherwise, with them. But they ran into internal and external barriers, producing first slower growth and then stagnation. Inside official circles, arguments for 'reform' became more prominent. Actual reform efforts proved disappointing, and in several cases set off political and social explosions. And the satellites' economic benefits to the USSR turned into a net burden (Ost 1992: 90-1; Misztal: 463).

By the early 1970s, the Kremlin encouraged East European governments to look West for investment and technological aid. The strategy failed, but produced new relationships between enterprise bosses and western business. Worsening growth weakened the ideological appeal of the old economic models, and the parties became less effective mechanisms of ruling-class unification. Pragmatic, self-seeking elements in party membership increased (for example, Sutek 1990).

After the rise and crushing of Polish Solidarity, it became apparent that only subsidy or force could preserve Eastern Europe for the USSR. Gorbachev's advent posed new problems for the regimes. In the GDR and Czechoslovakia, they tried to set a distance between themselves and *perestroika* and *glasnost*. Ceausescu simply denounced. But party leaders in Hungary and Poland cautiously embraced the new ideas, enlarging on themes of 'dialogue' and the significance of non-party members (Kolankiewicz 1988).

The pressure for economic reform increased. Poland and Hungary moved towards 'marketisation' policies, now with IMF backing. As they recognised the need for greater world market integration, so it became harder. Debts mounted; manufacturing exports declined; intra-bloc trade increased its share (*Financial Times*, 12.3.1990). Increasingly loudly, regime spokesmen promoted the virtues of 'the

market', often with the same utopian accents as the Adam Smith Institute and their own oppositions.

Further marketisation involved a new spurt of 'nomenklatura privatisation'. Party members with connections, sometimes with dubious legality, converted profitable segments of state industries into private businesses. (On Hungary, Hankiss; on Poland, Misztal: 465). Marketisation also brought new symptoms of crisis, and the threat of social explosions. It did not take much, finally, to bring the 'reform' wings of the ruling party and the opposition together for talks. The impetus came in Poland in 1988 from two waves of strikes, in Hungary from even less. When Gorbachev's accepted both Solidarity's legalisation and then its first government, in August 1989, Hungary followed swiftly.

The Polish developments provided both test-bed and impetus for events elsewhere. Within six and a half months of the semi-free Polish elections in mid-June, the whole region's politics were transformed. Hungary had opened its borders and held free parliamentary elections; the Berlin Wall was breached; Zhivkov of Bulgaria had resigned; the Ceausescus had been executed by firing squad; Havel was President of Czechoslovakia.

The Polish transformation was paradigmatic. The ruling party exited quietly from the stage, allowing new political forces to continue the adaptive process it had, itself, unsuccessfully begun. Most heads of enterprises retained their positions, or moved smartly to establish new links with western banks, advisors and the like. The army and police largely retained their command structures. True, the new government converted the old Warsaw party headquarters into the new Stock Exchange, but whole layers of government officials, judges and magistrates, and others continued in office. The ruling class was recomposed, around a new domestic and foreign policy framework, but its privileged situation was never seriously threatened.

Hankiss details the same process in Hungary:

'When in the late 1980s they discovered the possibility of transferring their power into a new and more efficient socio-economic system and of becoming part of an emerging new and legitimate ruling class or *grande bourgeoisie*, they lost their interest in keeping the Communist Party as their instrument of power and protection. And as a consequence on the night of 7 October 1989 they watched indifferently, or assisted actively in the self-liquidation of the Party.' (Hankiss 1990: 31).

The GDR and Czechoslovak regimes had resisted economic reform and negotiation with the opposition. While the special relationship with Moscow persisted they could stave off the political costs of resistance to reform (Batt 1991: 375-379). Then their Kremlin allies deserted them. When their own security forces declined to use further repression, they collapsed quite quickly in the face of large street demonstrations. Romania refused economic reform, driving the economy back towards greater autarchy, at enormous cost. Ceausescu's fall was marked by a split in the security forces, who fought each other for several days. An alternative government, centred on dissident members of his own party, was waiting in the wings to assume power. Although Romania experienced the most violence, the degree of regime change was the least.

Those who ran Eastern Europe were already in part prepared for a shift to market reform. Often they had made the first moves and were then pushed from outside to complete the process, and to allow a corresponding shift in the nature of the political regimes. Western business gave them a new reference group, and economic stagnation made them dissatisfied with their material situation. Developments in the 1980s prepared them for the possibility of political transition. Those in the ruling class who were not too committed to the 'old way' could adapt to a new one, and hope to thrive.

the opposition

Friedheim (1993) suggests two inter-related circumstances shape the choice between 'negotiated transition' and 'regime collapse'. The former path opened where both a reform wing won dominance in the old regime and an organised oppositional force had already formed. By contrast, 'regime collapse' occurred where hardliners dominated, and where previous repression inhibited oppositional development. 'Negotiated transition' depended on two parties to potential talks having already formed. Poland and Hungary provided a more developed 'political opportunity structure' (Eisinger 1973; Tarrow 1992) for oppositions to develop organisational competence than did more reform-resistant regimes. Paradoxically, the level of overt 'popular mobilisation' was greater where the opposition's 'political opportunity structure' was more restricted.

The argument has validity, but poses some questions. What kind of opposition could and would 'negotiate', and what ideas and interests might it represent?

Again, we find the 'political process' wing of modern social movement theory useful. Against social-psychological reductionism, Tilly, Aya, Tarrow and others argue that 'politics matters'. We agree.

Their approach suggests a series of questions about oppositional organisation and activity in 1989. Who was (and was not) politically active? How were they active? Which part of the modern 'repertoire of contention' (Tilly) was actually used? How long did the immediate 'cycle of protest' (Tarrow) last? Who mobilised whom, and in what organisational formats? Who was included (and excluded) from oppositional organisation?

'Political process' theory is weakest in its exploration of the role of ideas in social movements. Its over-reliance on models of rational action taken from conventional economic theory has been especially criticised (for example, Ferree 1992). Matters concerning 'ideology' and 'framing' (Snow et al 1986), or 'cognitive praxis' (Eyerman & Jamison 1991) are only recently beginning to attract theoretical attention. In relation to the movements of 1989 they are especially significant: since these easily engage western ideological sympathies, few doubt their inherent rationality. But proper enthusiasm over Stalinism's fall can stop us asking significant questions about the democratic opposition.

What ideas animated the leaders of the various oppositions? Were there 'master frames' (Snow & Benford) discernible in these ideas, and were these contested? What did the opposition seek? Did they disagree about goals and how to fight for them? What social interests did they – and did they not – articulate? Questions about 'trajectories not taken' (Leiden & Schmitt) are relevant for Eastern Europe once we compare the events of 1989 with some previous opposition movements:

notably the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, or Solidarity in 1980-81.

Such questions suggests others. Did these movements create new institutional forms? Did the participants experience social and psychological transformations, or alterations in 'identities'? What new ideas emerged? Were these revolutions marked by creative processes of 'collective effervescence' (Durkheim 1912, 1974)? What 'moments of madness' (Zolberg 1972) occurred? What new 'cultures of solidarity' (Fantasia 1988) appeared?

Dix (1991: 237) argues that 1989 was marked by 'spontaneity', but the term is misleading. True, there were no ready-formed revolutionary parties or armies. But political forces, with varying degrees of coherence and organisation, did play significant parts. 1989 did not lack for leaders and ideas. Two groups played particularly significant roles: the 'democratic intelligentsia', and the urban crowds (manual and white-collar) who constituted the majority of the populations. Their alliance completed the 'collapse of communism'. But what form did this 'alliance' take?

the democratic intelligentsia

Leadership came from the intelligentsia, their organisations and ideas. Even in opposition, the intelligentsia in Eastern Europe enjoyed a political importance, and sense of self-importance, unmatched by their western confreres. Their ideas had undergone a significant evolution, varying in tempo in different countries.

Into the 1970s, their main axis of criticism was 'revisionist'. Accepting the claims of 'socialism', they sought reforms from above which would better match reality to the regimes' professed ideals. But revisionism's attractions weakened by the 1980s. The intelligentsia increasingly criticised the failings of the command economies and looked for alternatives in a new direction: to the revival of classical liberal themes. The conviction spread that freedom was inherently connected to market institutions. Still assuming that what existed in the East was 'socialism', they now desired its replacement with capitalism – perhaps, some mused hopefully, 'with a human face'. Dissident discussions of the market and capitalism took on some of the mystical air that previously characterised Stalinist invocations to 'socialism'. Both positions shared an élitist assumption: the intelligentsia knew what was in society's interest, and had a duty to introduce the brave new world.

The intelligentsia rarely celebrated or participated in popular movements from below. When they did – notably in the Solidarity period – their involvement always tended to have a conservatising and bureaucratising effect (for example, Kuron & Modzelewski 1965; Staniszkis 1981; Kowalik 1983; Barker 1987; Ost 1989; Ost 1992). They were prone to claim credit for social innovations not of their own making, with western commentators usually happy to grant these claims (Laba 1991).

The evolution of their thought from top-down 'socialism' (Stalinist or revisionist) to top-down 'market liberalism' was matched, as we saw, by a convergent evolution within the Hungarian and Polish ruling parties. Official and oppositional discussions cross-fertilised each other. It was not that one stole the other's new clothes; both came to share the same wardrobe.

Poland was especially significant. There, after 1980 and despite martial law, dissident intellectuals enjoyed the greatest degree of organisational development

and sense of self-identity. As Ost (1989) notes, underground debates about the causes of Solidarity's defeat were dominated by the right. Solidarity had lost because of its 'leftism', an over-emphasis on its 'trade union' and working-class side. It had been too militant, insufficiently moderate. Conservative ideas about workers flourished, along with open hostility to working-class activity and demands. Solidarity's left was notably silent (Ost 1989): one reason was that they had nothing coherent to say.

In the years of illegality, Solidarity's working-class base decayed. Impulses from below subsided. Its membership decline, shift in social composition and rightward evolution all made it a more suitable 'partner' for an accommodation with the party's reform wing. To play that part, one thing was required: Solidarity must contain radical tendencies on its own side. This it was willing and able to do. As Walesa expressed the matter, 'It is not the streets that are supposed to solve the problem. The problem should be solved for the sake of the street but not by the street.' (cited by Haynes 5)

Polish dissidents had a heritage of working-class revolt and organisation to overcome. Elsewhere, the intelligentsia had less tradition of involvement with workers' movements. As in Poland, they shifted towards admiration of the market. The more organised and independent the intelligentsia in different states, the stronger the tide.

the people

Undoubtedly the 1989 revolutions were popular, in the sense that the majority of the population approved the removal of the one-party regimes. But the part that majority played was more passive than many commentators recognise.

In Poland, two waves of strikes in 1988 finally impelled the regime and Solidarity towards talks. Solidarity had not called these strikes, even if Walesa had the authority to end them. Thereafter strikes and demonstrations played little part in the political process. All the population was asked to do, in practice, was watch the talks on television, and then vote for the Solidarity list in the June elections.

The Hungarian transition was accomplished with even less public mobilisation. The few street demonstrations that occurred enjoyed semi-official blessing. The 'revolution' in Hungary was, as Ash (1990) remarked, largely a 'media event' so far as the majority of the population were concerned. They were never called into action.¹

It was of course different in the GDR, Czechoslovakia and Romania. Here mass demonstrations swelled in the streets, and Romania had days of actual street-fighting. The great demonstrations in Leipzig, Berlin and Prague eventually precipitated the regime collapses.

Even here, what was notably absent was anything significant by way of independent working-class forms of contention. There was a two-hour general strike in Czechoslovakia, but it was more a victory celebration at the Jakes governments' resignation than a vehicle of resistance and popular mobilisation. Such popular mobilisation as did briefly occur took the transient and 'cross-class' or 'populist' shape of street demonstrations (and in Bucharest street-fighting) – a rela-

¹There is an interesting parallel in the Watergate affair in the US: a media event given a liberal-conservative construction that excluded leftwing interpretations: cf Alexander 1988.

tively 'anonymous' form of protest out of which nothing organisational was likely to emerge, and a form which dissolved as rapidly as it was assembled. Certainly, large numbers of workers participated in the various demonstrations, but they did so as individuals.

1989 was marked by an 'absence': any significant element of independent grass-roots institution-building. No strike committees or workers' councils emerged, no peasant committees, to enunciate specific class demands. Certainly nothing appeared in 1989 comparable with the workers' councils and civic committees of 1956 in Hungary, or the inter-factory strike committees and the like of Solidarity's birth in Poland during 1980.

Specifically 'social' demands were not directly posed by organisations created by representatives of particular classes. There was little in the way of a 'moderate-radical' split.

Habermas, Furet, Petras and others have pointed to the notable absence of 'new ideas' in 1989. That ideational gap cannot be dissociated from the relative brevity at best of popular involvement in the process of regime change, and its actual non-appearance in Poland and Hungary. The mass of the population of these countries were not active participants in these revolutions. These were not simply the first 'TV-revolutions', but also the first 'TV-watchers' revolutions'. One consequence is that there was little in the way of 'self-transforming' experiences of the kind widely noted in other revolutionary situations.

Theorisations

A theoretical account of the 1989 revolutions must be able to provide answers to at least three key questions. First, why did the rulers of the old regimes capitulate with such ease? Second, what relevant comparisons can be drawn between other recent cases of 'negotiated transition' and popular revolution? Finally, how should we categorize the revolutions and what common features do they share with revolutions of the past?

One kind of popular account proves unhelpful: the simple moral tale of a 'surge to freedom' (Brown 1991) or of 1989 as 'the year of the citizen, the year of civil society, the year of the power of the powerless, the year of the victory of those who had decided to live within the truth' (von Geusau 1992: 4). The poetics simply ignore too many empirical problems.

A more serious contender comes from an unlikely liaison. Some of the commentary reveals a curious convergence between accounts offered by modernization theorists and more recent theories of civil society and, more exotically, post-modernism.

Modernization theory is essentially a 'descriptive theory of parallel processes' (Andorka 1993: 320) underpinned by the teleology of liberal pluralism. On this view, 'industrialization' and the rise of liberal political institutions and democratic norms and values are mutually reinforcing processes.

Looking at Eastern Europe, modernization theorists claim to have located a convergence with liberal pluralism in the incipient elements of 'civil society' developing within the interstices of totalitarian states. Noting the relatively industrial and urbanised society there, Eisenstadt argues:

'The revolutions ... need to be seen as rebellions against certain types of modernity which negated in practice other more pluralistic elements of modernity, while officially instituting certain central components of their premises ... (They) were rebellions against a misrepresentation of modernity, a flawed interpretation of modernity. They were an unfolding of the dynamics of modern civilization.' (Eisenstadt 1992: 33; cf. also Misztal 1993; Janos 1991; Andorka 1993; Chirot 1989).

The contradictory unfolding of 'modernity' which brought the collapse of the East European regimes also produced political effects with 'a rather interesting parallelism ... with respect to some of those developments which have often been dubbed as "post-modern".' (Eisenstadt 1992: 34; Bauman 1991) Other theorists invoke the language of post-modernism and 'civil society' to explain both the intellectuals' limited ideological repertoire – the lack of 'new ideas' – and the political, rather than class-based, character of the revolutions themselves. Dix argues that any future revolutions are unlikely to be 'revolutions of economically-rooted discontent'. Revolutions in modern societies may prove to be based more on the intelligentsia and their post-materialist concerns than on the peasantry or the proletariat ... (Dix 1991: 235-6) Only such revolutions now seem structurally possible.

What of this proposition, that the 1989 revolutions were in some sense 'post-materialist'? Theorists seem to have uncritically accepted the oppositional intellectuals' own theorization of their situation. The desire to create a sphere of 'civil society' independent of the state is taken as evidence of a much wider prevalence of 'post-materialist values' across society (Dix 1991: 234). Ost traces the roots of this discourse to the increasingly reformist theory and practice of Solidarity in 1980-81. There was little room in the concept of 'civil society', he suggests, for the recognition of actual conflicts between different groups and classes. In the hands of Havel and other leading opposition intellectuals 'civil society' was associated with the idea of an 'associational democracy' and rights of citizenship. Finer distinctions in the meaning of 'civil society' were simply ignored (Kumar 1992: 328) – in particular, its meaning in classical political economy as a sphere of competitive market relations under the hegemony of capital.

The supposedly 'post-materialist' concern with notions of 'civil society' was, therefore, wilfully self-limiting in its vision of social change. Within Solidarity any challenge to the notion of a 'harmony of interests' was regarded as treachery, especially when working-class interests were counterposed to those of other societal groups. Infatuation with 'democracy without adjectives' (Petras 1991) has served as a form of intellectual self-deception in the aftermath of 1989. As the more rapacious side of 'civil society' has revealed itself, the new intellectual rulers have resorted to élitist denunciations of the people for not appreciating the benefits of democracy (Petras 1990: 2153). Conditions of economic want have apparently not yet sufficiently instructed the masses in the veracity of 'post-materialist' politics. The 'anti-politics' of 'civil society' has revealed itself as an essentially reformist project, and a not very practical one at that: 'its very sublimity disables it as a guide to the practical problems of the day' (Kumar 1992: 333).

That so many theorists have taken at face value the discourse of 'civil society' reveals how their own preconceptions fit with the ideas of opposition leaders. But

an act of identification does not constitute explanation. At best, it mirrors how participants interpret what do. As Marx warned, it is also a dangerous way to write history.

Modernization theory has always suffered from a weak theory of capitalism. Concepts like 'industrial society' and 'modernity' tell us little about social forces shaping historical development. Beneath its 'stages of growth' lies a barely concealed technological determinism. Thus Janos:

'technological innovation, including its impact on beliefs, structures, and social goods represents the only logical point of departure for the study of both communism and the dynamics of political change across the wider landscape of the modern world.' (Janos 1991: 104)

But capitalism's history is far from a linear process of technologically driven 'modernization.' It has been highly uneven in at least two important ways. First, different configurations of class power and property systems have shaped development in different countries. Second, economic and political competition results in some states falling backward while others move forward. Indeed 'economic modernization' is not a once and for all affair. The Eastern bloc countries offer prime examples of how the competitive pressures of the world system can result in economic failure. One cannot understand why these regimes entered into crisis just by reading off the the political changes in 1989 from the imperatives of technological development. If, as modernization theorists contend, a process of 'convergence' between East and West unfolded, its roots lie not in technology but in world competitive pressures.

Many have noted these regimes' highly militarized character, and how the exigencies of military competition undermined the rulers' ability to meet their populations' basic economic demands (for example, Janos 1991: 94-110; Misztal 1993: 462-63). Competition in its political-military form dominated the original Stalinist autarchic model. The powerful drive to accumulation was focussed on the state's needs for military goods. But world conditions of military competition altered, away from simple mass production models, at the same time that the costs of economic autarchy in an increasingly interdependent world economy grew. More purely market axes of competition became of ever greater significance, and with them the need to adopt more complex measures of productive efficiency, as further growth depended increasingly on 'intensive' rather than 'extensive' factors. Faltering growth and moves towards economic integration with world markets and multinational capital all combined to ease and reconfigure party control. The formerly homogenised elements of the 'one-party' system showed marked tendencies to separation into distinctive 'interests'. As we saw, ideological unity in ruling circles diminished. In a context of deepening economic crisis, sectors of the élite could more openly consider a re-design of the old political model. Many were making money on the side through various national and international 'second economy' deals. 'Communism' had become for many a sentimental nuisance. Particularly in Eastern Europe, where economic and cultural links with the West were always more developed than in the USSR, ruling-class consumption and even political tastes shifted sideways across the political divide. Most could hope to survive a sideways jump into a new, less state-centred, regime of accumulation.

But if the issue is a move 'sideways' from a system of state-directed accumulation to one probably more like some form of 'mixed economy', then a question arises. Did the transition in 1989 represent a qualitative shift in systems – from communism to capitalism – or might it not be more accurately described as a move from one form of capitalism to another? (Callinicos 1991)

On this view, 'communism' was simply the most complete form of state control of capital accumulation. The state was both the mechanism which through which production was organized and the appropriator of economic surpluses. It was the key agent of competition with other ruling classes in a world system dominated by the logic of competitive accumulation. For the Eastern bloc states the form of this competition was initially military but increasingly involved market competition as well.

Too often, commentators fail to acknowledge the degree of state involvement in the economies of the West. Yet '... in the real world, pure market economies or pure centralized economies simply do not exist. Not only are they invariably impure, but they are also necessarily mixed' (Ellman 1988, cited by Narayan-swamy 1992: 365). Despite a succession of right-wing governments in the West in the 1980s, in most countries state economic activity as a percentage of GNP has continued to grow. Even if we grant that Eastern Europe saw the highest levels of peacetime state control it still remains the case that 'if we put all the world's economies on a scale of state control measuring from 0 to 100 percent then virtually all the economies would cluster in the middle third quarter' (Haynes 1992: 56).

This offers a different light on the events of 1989. In the twentieth century world economy, as Bukharin (1915) noted, two main tendencies operate. One is the drive towards greater internationalisation, the tendency for national economies to become more integrated into the world economy. The other is the drive towards nationalisation, towards greater levels of state intervention. In summary, both tendencies have operated simultaneously, but that toward nationalization was more dominant from the 1930s to the late 1960s. Across the globe, all major states increased the level of their economic intervention. The conditions of world competition meant that economically weak states attempting to industrialize used state power as the main engine of capital accumulation, often attempting to limit the external effects and penetration of the world market. The East European states were only one variant of this model.

The 1960s saw the balance in the world economy begin to shift. Pressures favouring greater internationalization and integration became more pronounced, in tandem with the onset of economic crisis. States and capitals now sought to offset the effects of crisis by pursuing new markets and new sources of technology and cheap labour. The opening up of new centres of capital accumulation in Asia and parts of Latin America were symptomatic of the 'multi-nationalization of capital' which was occurring.

Eastern Europe's level of integration into the world economy remained weak. Trade links were limited. Though some western multinationals had set up joint ventures here and there in the 1960s and 1970s, their presence was still comparatively small. So too, therefore, was these states' capacity to take advantage of technological efficiencies arising from world specialisation. Plus, decades of military competition with the West had created a highly skewed industrial sec-

tor. In combination, these factors meant that world economic difficulties in the 1980s were felt particularly sharply in the Eastern bloc economies. A political shift 'sideways' became ever more imperative.

None of this provides a sufficient explanation of the 1989 revolutions. The same economic pressures were exerting themselves on western economies, yet they remained relatively free from major social convulsions. Or some did.

In a number of countries in Europe and elsewhere, similar regime transformations have taken place along both 'regime collapse and revolution' and 'negotiated transition' paths.

In the mid-1970s the end of Portuguese dictatorship unleashed a revolutionary upheaval from below involving working class struggle on a scale not seen in the West since the 1930s. In Spain, by contrast, the post-Franco transition was less tumultuous. Brazil, Argentina and Chile have recently undergone regime transitions from military to civilian rule without yet sparking sustained popular revolts. On the other hand, in the Philippines, withdrawal of US support for the Marcos regime sparked a political revolution – rather as Gorbachev undermined Honecker and Jakes. All these, no one disputes, were cases of regime change *within* capitalism. Whatever the particularities of 1989 in Eastern Europe, the differences look more ones of degree than of kind.

The East European revolutions, therefore, make sense as species of 'bourgeois revolution'. This claim requires several assumptions about the nature of bourgeois revolutions. Eley and others argue the need to distinguish revolution as a specific state crisis and reconstitution of political relationships, and deeper processes of structural change in capitalist productive relations (Eley & Blackbourn 1984: 82-83; Callinicos 1989; Mooers 1991).

What gives a revolution its 'bourgeois' character is that it creates the conditions for capitalist development. This definition says nothing about the social background of those who carry out the reconstitution of the state. Bourgeois revolutions need not be led by actors who are capitalists or who are consciously acting in the interests of capitalism, though they may be.

'Bourgeois revolution' as a category is broad enough to include 'revolutions from below' involving varying degrees of popular mobilization as in the 'classic' bourgeois revolutions in England and France, 'revolutions from above' such as that initiated by Bismarck, and the 'anti-colonial revolutions' of the twentieth century.

The classic bourgeois revolutions were *initiators* of capitalist development. That is, they were political revolutions coupled with a deeper social revolution in the relations of production. But bourgeois revolutions may also occur within already constituted capitalist relations. Because capitalist development is both 'uneven and combined' nations not only leap over stages of development, they also fall backward. Capitalism not only revolutionises the means of production, it also revolutionises the political conditions of its own existence. Specific state and regime forms become impediments to further capitalist advance. On occasion crises of capitalist reproduction produce revolutions that accomplish a shift 'sideways' from one path of capitalist accumulation to another. Such were France's nineteenth century revolutions, Germany's political transformations of 1918-19, 1933 and 1945, the Iberian revolutions of the 1970s and the Latin American 'democratic transitions' of the 1980s. Such, we suggest, were the 1989 revolutions.

Outcomes and Prospects

The new governments brought in market reform programmes which were, as Ost (1992) remarks of the Polish 'shock treatment', decidedly anti-working class in character. Some former poachers turned gamekeepers with a vengeance: Jacek Kuron, formerly revolutionary Marxist then founder of KOR, became Poland's Minister of Labour, urging an end to strikes along with savage wage cuts. Pressed forward by the IMF and a host of advisors, the new governments disclosed a less-remarked feature of 'civil society': new disciplines on labour. Unemployment and official poverty levels rocketed.

Initial illusions – voiced not least by western 'experts' – that the transition to the market would be easy soon faded. Growth was difficult or negative. The world economy was entering its most serious postwar recession. Despite price reform, closures, loss of jobs, falling real wages, the promised boom did not materialise. The main new growth was in small business, especially commerce rather than manufacturing (Kuczynska 1992). The dreams of Western aid proved less than rhetoric suggested (Haynes 1992b; Kuczynska 1992). The 'new Europe' turned out to include European Community restrictions on key exports.

Privatisation proved slower than had been expected, and state enterprises proved to have a staying power – and a variety of allies – that even 'shock treatments' did not overcome. The death of the state has been much exaggerated.

Social inequalities widened, as avid marketeers had hoped. But those who benefitted were as often as not members of the former *nomenklatura*, converting into a new 'privilegentsia' (Singer 1990). Since 1989 the 'enfranchisement of the *nomenklatura*' has proceeded apace (Misztal 1993: 465). Entire sections of the old ruling class did step painlessly sideways into managerial positions in denationalized firms and in western multinationals setting up new operations (Haynes 1992: 86-90). The degree of personnel change in élite positions was lower than many had expected, or feared.

Such euphoria as the events of 1989 produced did not last long. The brief political importance and unity of the intelligentsia did not long survive the transition. Indeed, their political function turned out to have been 'transitional' (Petras 1991). GDR dissidents were rapidly outmatched by West German party machines; Slovak nationalists converted the velvet revolution into a velcro separation of states; Solidarity split into rival wings. The intelligentsia's assumed popularity did not last. Mazowiecki's fate was exemplary: a popular prime minister in January 1990, heavily defeated in November for presiding over the 'shock treatment' from above, even by a Polish-Canadian with no dissident credentials.

For the mass of the population, the outcome of the revolutions was not quite the joyous leap into freedom and democracy many imagined. Disaffection had various expressions. There was, as Jens Reich commented from the GDR, a rapid loss of 'that intoxicating spirit and energy' which animated the street demonstrations of 1989 (Reich 1990). Even that degree of 'intoxication' had anyway been missing from the transitions in Poland and Hungary. Disaffection was reflected in low election turnouts. Nationalist, anti-semitic, anti-gypsy and anti-foreigner sentiments received open expression. These, in turn, fed the intelligentsia's élitist despair at the stupidity of the people (for example, Ost 1993: 455,481).

Strikes returned, and levels of unionisation did not fall as much as expected

(Kloc 1992; Marciniak 1992). Slowly, what Ost terms a 'politics of interest' began to assert itself. One reflection of this was the survival, and in Poland the return to electoral favour of the former communists, now reconstructed as social democrats.

Yet 1989 brought three unqualified gains. First, if popular self-mobilisation was not the basis of these revolutions, nonetheless the political conditions they achieved – rights to freedom of speech, assembly and organisation, and to vote – are precious victories in themselves.

Second, the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution saw a thousand pundits, including numerous miserabilist ex-leftists, proclaim the impossibility and undesirability of revolution. History replied: European revolutions were celebrated.

Third, Stalinism was dealt a death-blow. That was significant far beyond Eastern Europe and the USSR. For over half a century, Stalinism dominated the world's Left ideologically and organisationally. It spoke Marxist words and practised counter-revolution. From the mid-1920s, there was no major defeat the working-class movement suffered in which Stalinist politics did not have a deadly hand. Stalinism's death may have correlated with a temporary recession in working-class struggle, but it clears the way for a rediscovery and redevelopment of a Marxism that does centre itself on the self-emancipation of the working class. What Shanin (1986: 312) has nicely termed 'alternativity' has, on balance, expanded.

The 1989 revolutions were also marked by, and reflected, the weakness of the Left. Illusions in the virtues of an ill-comprehended 'market society' were no more challenged than was 'civil society' theory. The limits of capitalist 'freedom' and 'democracy' and 'wealth' were not criticised. Alternatives to the hegemony of the right were not offered.

For Eastern Europe, this is not so surprising. Stalinism's 'conceptual embezzlement' (Szkolny 1981) of the language of socialism necessarily played a part. But the Left's weakness also reflected wider world processes. The 1980s also saw the Left in Western Europe and beyond drifting right, adopting 'market' arguments and abandoning socialist language for 'new realism', post-modernism, and the like. Few impulses from the West contradicted the rightward flow of oppositional thought, indeed East and West reinforced each other.

The Left internationally paid in the 1980s for its insufficiently critical view of Stalinist politics, for its underdeveloped theory of world capitalism, and its lack of clarity about working-class self-emancipation. Its central error was its notion of working-class disappearance, which it misread from a downturn in working-class struggle – to which the Left's own flaws contributed not a little. It transmuted a conjunctural, political phenomenon into a depressive image of structural decline. The oddity is that the 1980s probably marked the occasion when world proletarianisation gave the working class its first global majority.

Our reading of 1989 may seem utopian. But the forces behind the Eastern bloc's crises were not peculiar to that region. Our news is about declining growth rates, pollution, waste, bureaucratic government, falling living standards, and loss of belief in an improving future. Deepening structural crises can yet provoke more national and regional political upsurges. 'Bourgeois revolution' remains a point of danger for capitalism, for it occurs in the presence of a still expanding and culturally more developed working class. That force was relatively passive in 1989, but need not be so in the future. Its needs are still stimulated beyond satisfaction.

Theorists of revolution can still hope for more materials to ponder.