



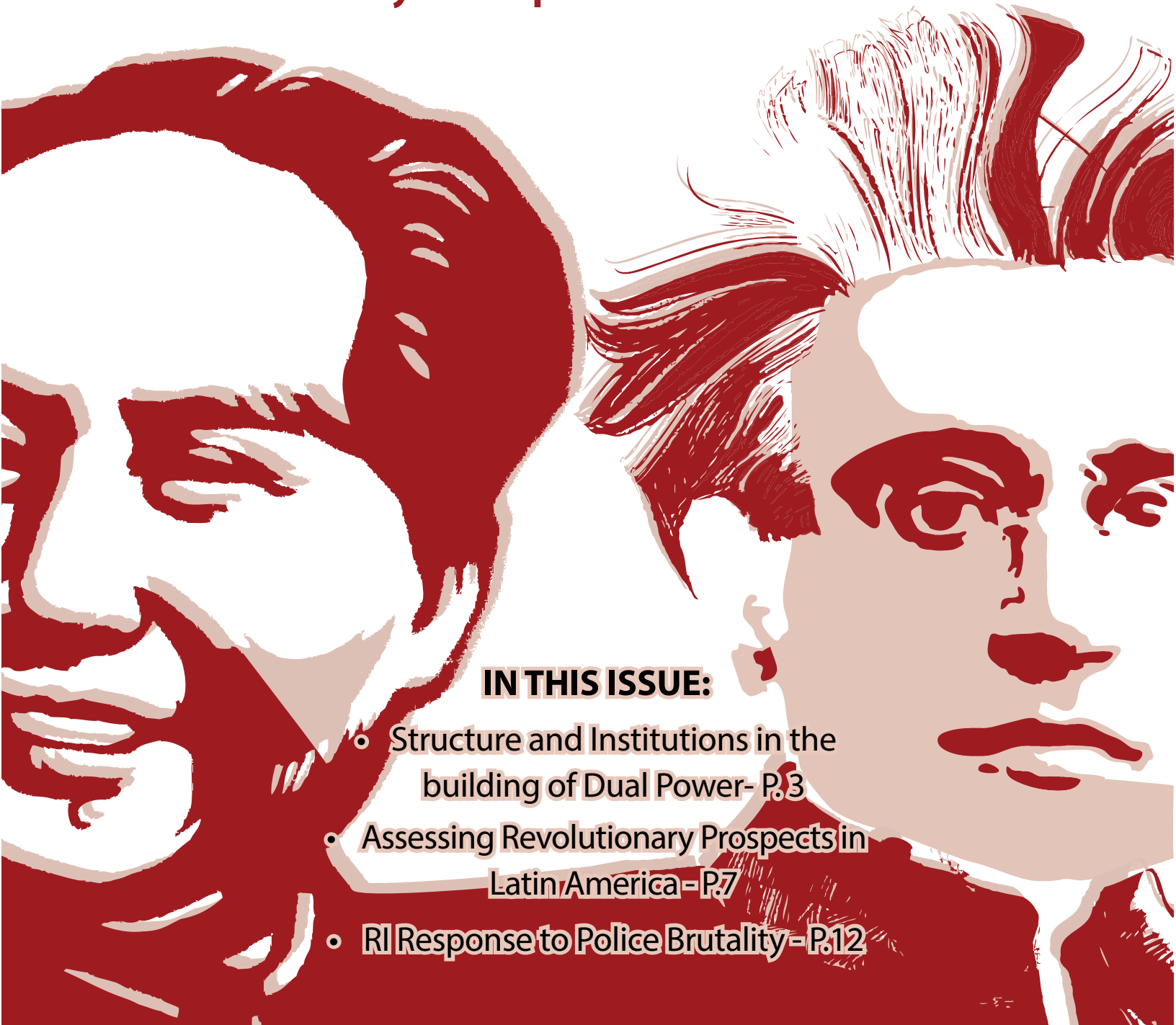
UPRISING

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Towards the War of Position:

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Towards a revolutionary strategy

In this issue of UPRISING, we continue the discussion and debate around revolutionary strategy, particularly as concerns imperialist countries.

The central focus of this issue is the examination of the work of Antonio Gramsci and revolutionary strategy. Comrade Amil undertook to place Gramsci's work within the context of his actual political work, rather than the obtuse, pacified location that liberal academia has relegated Gramsci to. From this, the article suggests that Gramsci's analysis of the failure of European communist parties of the 1920s and 1930s to successfully overthrow their governments through an insurrectionary strategy (a form of 'October Road') indicates that there are other considerations that need to be taken into account. The extent to which the masses are controlled by

the bourgeoisie through consent, through their hegemony present in the superstructure of bourgeois society, need to be recognized.

From this, Comrade Amil raises Gramsci's 'war of position' as being similar to the concept of a protracted revolutionary struggle - what many Maoists in the world today are calling 'Protracted People's War' articulated for imperialist countries. Within the 'war of position', communists must accumulate forces and wage struggle to challenge bourgeois hegemony, breaking the hold of the ruling class over the popular masses. Understanding that a 'war of position' will lead to opening for a 'war of manoeuvre', that is, an opportunity where insurrection could be realized successfully.

Comrade Azaad's piece looks to dissect the terminology used previously in articles relating to the building of dual power, which relates considerably to the interrogation of Gramsci. It is essential to arrive at unified understandings of terms such as 'institution' or 'structure' when discussing dual power, and understanding how a revolutionary proletarian institution differs from a bourgeois one.

In Latin America, there are currently a number of places where popular, political processes are in development. In Venezuela, for example, the Bolivarian revolution has raised the ire of US imperialism but it has also generated much debate among left currents and tendencies, many who attempt to validate their general political perspectives through either overly rosy or utterly dismissive appraisals of the



in imperialist countries

Bolivarian process. Needless to say, both of these miss the mark.

Comrade Victor looks at two of the processes in order to situate revolutionary currents within them as well as their perspectives and projects. Rather than simply analyzing the players in government, this piece stresses what advanced people's movements are doing and how they are relating to the state-led aspect of these processes. While contradictions are sharpening daily, there are important initiatives within the Bolivarian movements in Latin America that the masses are advancing which deserve consideration and support from revolutionary communists.

Resituated to the context of Canada, we are republishing the statement made by the Central Committee of

Revolutionary Initiative on the murder of an 18-year-old Sammy Yatim by Toronto Police in the summer of 2013. The incident, caught on video and circulated widely over social media, provoked indignation and outrage from a considerable swath of society. What this incident revealed, beyond the brutal and adhorrent nature of the police institution in Canada, is the latent anger and distrust that considerable numbers have towards institutions like the police. This is a site where rupture could occur.

Certainly, when we talk about strategy, we need to realize that we have an strong adversary and that they have their relative strengths but also weaknesses. If we study them, we can pick up on what their patterns, behaviours and sources of maintain-

ing power and direct our resources accordingly.

Unlike a chess game, where each side has the same number of resources and there are rules of engagement, we are in a struggle against an enemy who has considerably more resources of a certain type and who tries to set and change the rules to his advantage. Only through appropriate strategy, one that seeks to build and concentrate our forces upon our relative strengths through protracted struggle, can we have hope of victory.

In this vein, we welcome and encourage feedback on these articles and in general, the strategy we need to employ in order to triumph.

Central Committee of R.I.

Clarification of the Terms on Dual Power

by Comrade Azaad

In the past year, our organization has been working to synthesize its experiences and practice into a series of discussion documents on the question of what exactly it is we are developing in the immediate horizon, and how this relates to revolutionary strategy. Our point of convergence has been dual power.

Here, I would like to review two articles by comrades of Revolutionary Initiative on the question of dual power, and I hope, with humility, that my contribution will be to clarify and explain of few terms and concepts being used. Specifically, the basis for my discussion are two articles: the first by Comrade Victor Hampton entitled "Breaking the Illusion of Liberal Democracy and Building 'Dual Power' in the Urban Setting" in Vol. 2 (2012) of Uprising; and the second essay is the extension of the said essay by another, Comrade Stella B. in Vol. 3 (2013), entitled "The Institutions and Elements of Working-Class Power". First of all I want to congratulate our comrades and Revolutionary Initiative for developing further the concept of dual power. It is a bold break from the stale agit-propaganda and dogmatism of much of the left; and comes out of our important practice over the last half-decade or so.

Before I start, let me explain what this essay is not about. This is not an academic exercise. It is a simple version of concepts and terms based on our very initial, though vital, practice. The actual situation is far more complex and concepts can be problematized at any level. Right now, I am isolating our attempts at dual power construction from already existing liberal-capitalist

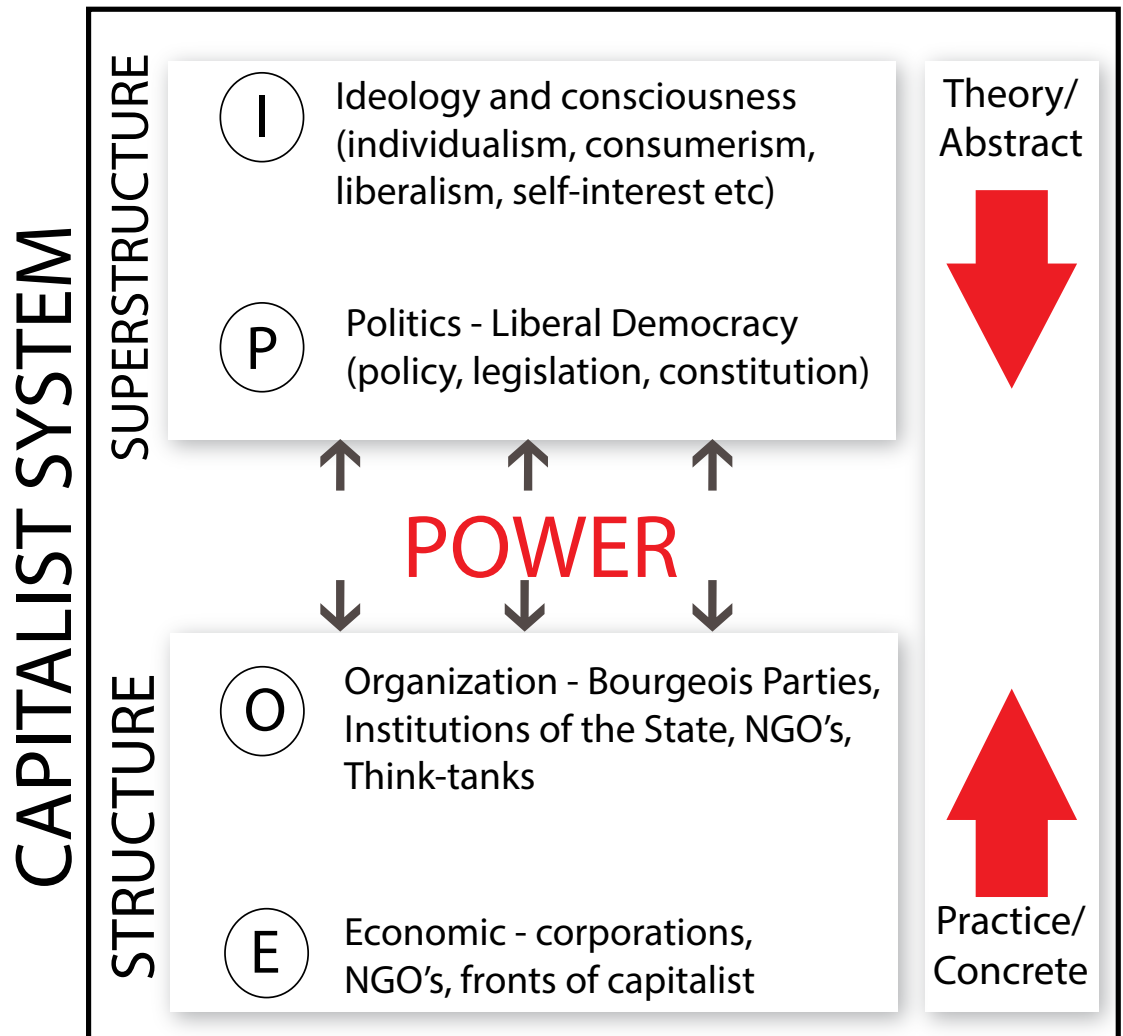
projects, institutions, and structures. In a forthcoming article, I'll explain how 'dual power' interacts with already existing structures and institutions with different class bases (which is where revisionist and reformist forces spend their all their energies). Certain pre-existing structures of liberal-capitalist society are important to engage in, but how and in what way? This is the topic of a forthcoming article and will address the question of alliances, the united front and other tactical issues. Right now, our practice (in our projects) is building 'dual power' in a way that connects peoples' new economic/

social/political structures with peoples' institutions, giving birth to new consciousness and adding to our theory (from the masses).

Explaining the Terms: System, Structure, Superstructure, Institution, Organization, Power, Agency

Let's focus first on the parts of Stella's article with the sub-titles, "Build an Understanding of Institutions" and "Institutions Meet Ideological, Political, Organizational, and Economic Structural Needs: Let's Talk Institutions of Working Class Power." Here Comrade Stella defines organiza-

Fig. 1 - Capitalist structure, superstructure and institutions



tion as “structure designed to facilitate the process of building class unity and defending class struggle.” Furthermore “Institutions have organizational use and control functions.” Then, the comrade defines an institution of working class power as “a community-owned and controlled organizational structure that meets human need and performs the necessary tasks of organizing our communities and our society while generating new values, belief system, knowledge.” There are a lot of terms here: ‘institution’, ‘power’, and ‘organizational structure’ (organization and structure together). But I think it is essential to define separately the terms System, Structure, Superstructure, Institution, Organization, Power, and also human agency from a dialectical and historical materialist point of view. At a later stage I’ll try to illustrate the relation among these terms from the perspective of building dual power.

Structure & System

In its simplest expression, structures can be defined as sets of internally related objects or practices, e.g. landlord-tenant relation with private property, rent, and the production of economic surplus form a structure. Structures are not visible; we have to abstract them from concrete relations among things. The system is the reproduction of these relations between various actors or collectivities over time, organized as regular social practices, e.g. capitalist system. A social system is thus a ‘structured totality.’ When structures create recurrent social practices as an interdependent relation between individuals or groups, we see them as social systems.

Very important to note is that a structure occupies a level of reality below surface appearances. The terms system and structure overlap, but a system defines a characteristic of structure. When a social system exists through time and flows during social interaction it acquires structural properties, but they are not structures in themselves. The identification of structure should not be the only aim of sociological investigation (for academic purposes) and social investigation (for more in terms of political practice) but how structures work for the reproduction of social systems as a

medium and as an outcome, that is, reproduction in the super-structural layer which we’ll define soon.

Institutions

The most deeply-layered practices constitutive of social systems in each of these senses are institutions. In a simple way, we can say institutions as the ‘rules of the game’ as deeply-layered social practices. There are formal rules (liberal democracy) and informal rules, like aspects of culture.

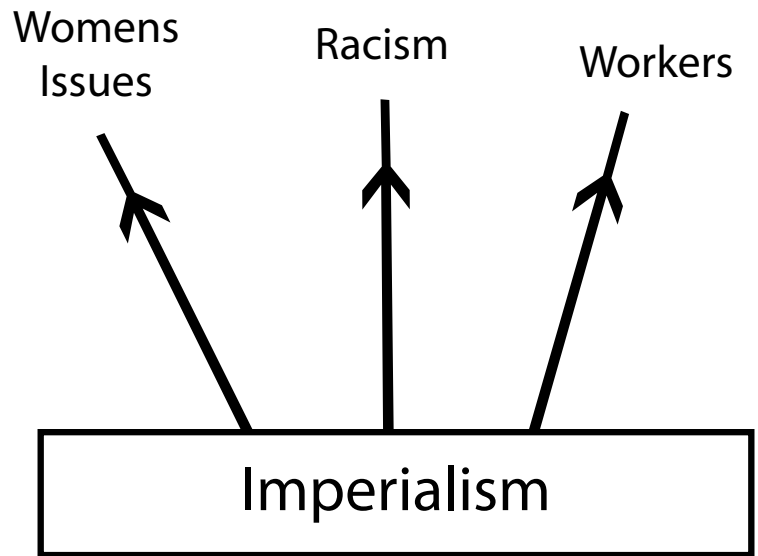
Organizations

Organizations consist of groups of individuals bound together by some common objectives. Firms, trade unions, co-operatives are examples of economic organizations; political parties are the organizations of classes; the Senate is an organizational part of the State; religious bodies, sports clubs, are examples of social organizations. For example hockey is an institution in terms of the rules of game and how to play; but hockey teams are organizations, as are the leagues in which they play. Similarly liberal democracy is an institution, that is, how to elect a government and run it. But the conservative, liberal and social democratic parties are all organizations.

Power

Power connects institutions and structures. It is a relational concept. Liberals look at power as a capability of an actor to achieve his will at the expense of resistance of others (Max Weber); or as a property of collectivity (Parsons). But the analysis starts from individual to collective. On the other hand, Marxists treat power as the property of a

Fig 2. Liberal Projects



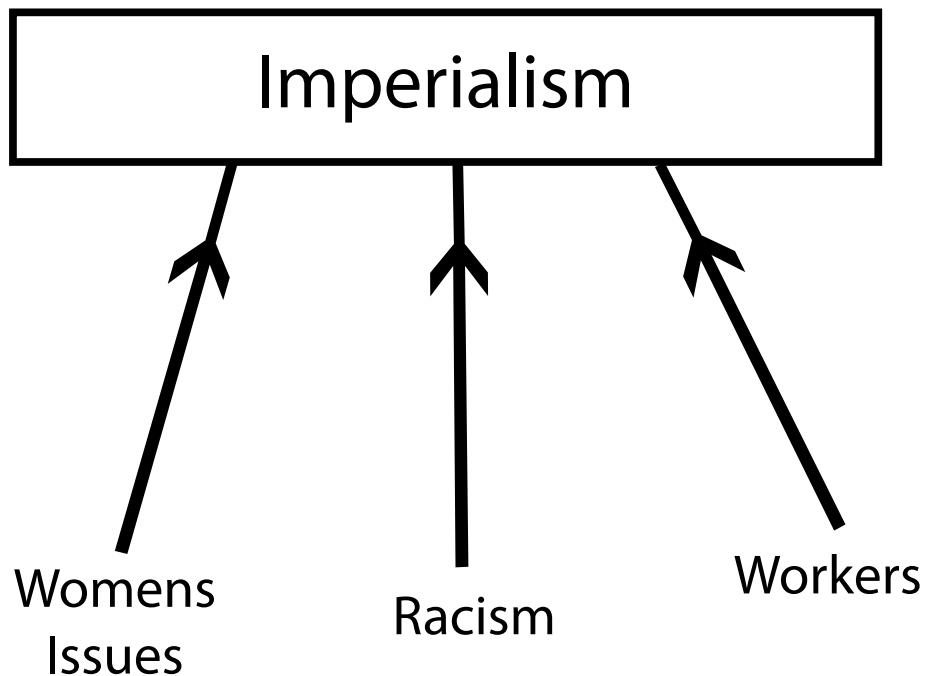
social group and a medium where class and common interests are realized. The ability to exercise power within a given set of institutions and structures depends on the variable access to resources of different social groups within those institutions and their associated structures. So in a capitalist system, when power connects its structure and institutions, different classes have different resources and therefore different transformative capacities and ability to exercise their domination. Capitalists and the working class have unequal resources that they bring to bear within the institutions of liberal-democratic society. That is why capitalist maintain their domination in this system. When this domination is routine and a social practice then we can say that capitalism is a system.

Individual Agency

The way I have ‘mechanically’ connected all the above concepts could lead to the accusation that I have ignored ‘human agency’ in it all – like the disappearance of the subject or the end of the individual. I’ll try to explain the individual in it without lapsing into subjectivism. Also, I do not want to exclude the unconscious drives and motives, but want to explain that the unconscious can only be explored in relation to the consciousness.

The conscious level of thought is the reflexive monitoring and rationalization of

Fig. 3 Dual Power Projects



conduct, which is grounded in practical consciousness. Action or agency is not a series of discrete acts combined together but a continuous flow of conduct (In our case not piecemeal struggles but an organized struggle). Individual actions and structures presuppose one another, and the relation between them is a dialectical one.

Defining agency like this, two points follow based on the foregoing analysis:

(1) Structures or structural analysis does not mean disappearance of agency, but rather points us in the direction of how the collection of individual agencies can be organized to break the capitalists structure and make a structure. The protracted co-existence of two structures is what we call dual power – a situation that will exist in the lead up to a revolution.

(2) Agency/action described like so is not random, unconscious, or a bunch of angry individuals. Rather it must be a self-conscious collective being with organized and coherent thought and rationality having a continuous flow of conduct.

Building the “working class” expertise: Distinguishing between structure and superstructure

On Page 3-4 in Stella’s essay in Volume 3. of Uprising, in the section “Transforming the Capitalist Superstructure”, we need to make a distinction between structure and superstructure. It should be connected with the following sections, “One Divides into Two: ‘Use Function’ versus ‘Control Function’ in the Superstructure” and “Lieutenants of the Bourgeoisie: the Professionalization of ‘Use’ and ‘Control.’” Here we deal with expertise knowledge. So the conclusion of this part is that we need to build the “working class expertise, and a new working class knowledge and science of social organization” [p.5, end of middle column].

First, let me separate structure and superstructure. Institutions as defined above are superstructural. An example of a formal institution would be liberal democracy and informal institutions would be cultural practices. These institutions also include ideology and consciousness.

In Revolutionary Initiative, we tend to organize our plans, actions, and assessments in Ideological, Political, Organizational and Economic terms, and we have tended to do this somewhat unconscious of how these terms relate to structure and superstructure. Without this clarification, we cannot have any

sense of priority, order, or relationship amongst these various categories.

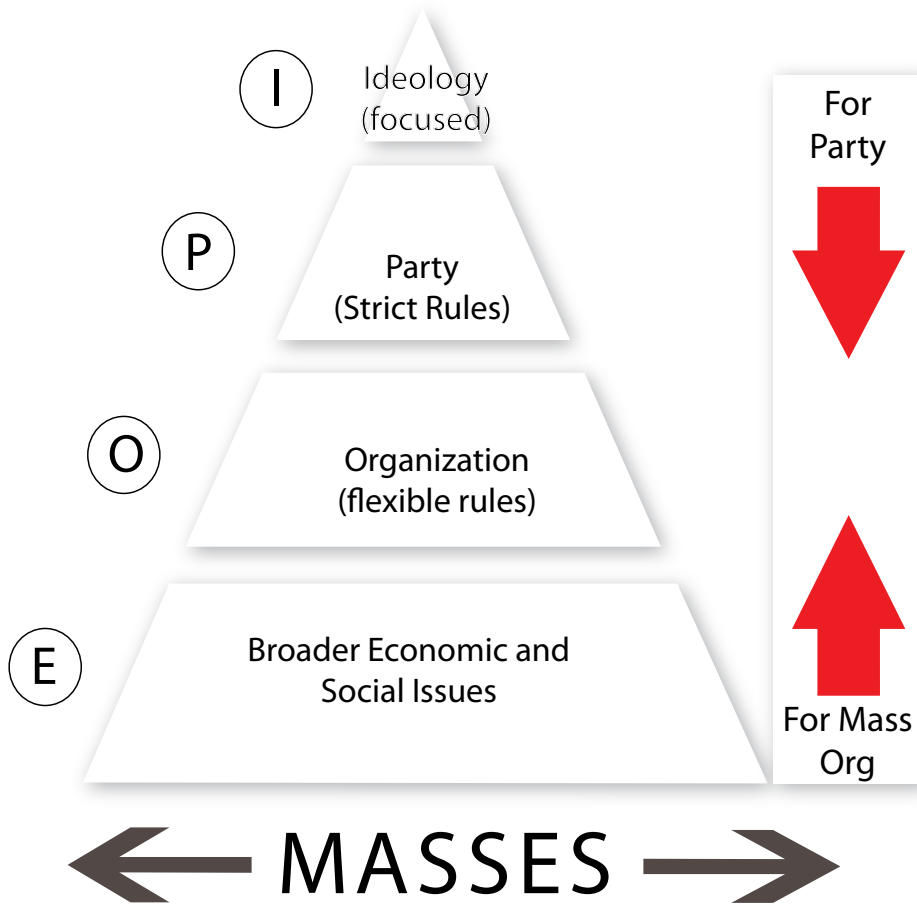
Let me explain the capitalist system and some of the concepts above through our IPOE approach (See Figure 1).

In capitalism, the category Ideological consists aspects individualism, consumerism, racism, etc. Political aspects of capitalism include liberal democracy. Power connects ideology and politics through the organization of capitalists (political parties), as well as through other organizations of the capitalists, like NGOs, corporations and capitalists (see top to bottom of Figure 1.). They have corporations, NGOs, and charities as their mass organizations, and their political organizations are their parties, like conservative and liberal parties, who actually run liberal democracy. They are responsible for the promotion of bourgeois freedoms and rights, as the ideological forms of individualism, etc. (see from bottom to top of Figure 1).

Politics happens in the visible and concrete aspects of the superstructure, and lieutenants of the bourgeoisie use these to control us. When comrade Stella talks about them it simply means all types of knowledge forms. We need to define “politics”. What is politics? I would define it as the contestation of power – a power struggle. What we see in bourgeois politics is a combination power struggle within the bourgeois class, and against the subaltern classes.

We should remember that current mainstream theory of liberal legalism is new institutionalism, which insists on stability of institutions like liberal democracy. It does not even think about structures. In mainstream liberal politics and activism, we often hear terms like ‘good governance’, ‘flexibility’, ‘improve participation’, ‘foster experimentation and deliberation’, ‘complex multi-level systems’, ‘bottom-up approaches’, ‘use of soft law along with hard law’, ‘law-like processes’, ‘opportunity structures’, ‘participatory development’, etc. These are all different forms of institutional arrangements (rules of game) within the capitalism system aimed at reproducing the same structure. All above terms are forms of expertise knowledge produce by “lieutenants of the bourgeoisie” to exercise a control function over the

Fig. 4 Mass Organizations



masses from within the superstructure. The working class also participates in these institutions (politics) but they have unequal resources (power) and hence always lose. All institutionalist explanations in a capitalist structure are meant to reinforced the position of the dominant class, and leave silent the question of the working class.

Comrade Stella emphasizes the need to build “working class expertise, a new working class knowledge, and science of social organization.” But is she referring to the pre-existing superstructural elements of bourgeois society? No. She is referring to a proletarian revolutionary ideology, politics, organization, and to the extent that we can prior to a structural transformation of society, economics. What is this? See Fig 2 for concepts of system, structure, superstructure, institutions, and agency in our conception of building dual power. Ideologically, we stand for ideology of collectivism amongst the masses, sacrifice and solidarity. As opposed to consumerism, we stand preserving the

resources of earth and their sustainable collective use. For this we believe in a new democracy or socialist democracy – in either case a politics on its way to communism, which must be led by a working class party (Clandestine or open depending upon the stage of struggle). At the level of organization, we must build a party that works with the masses through our mass organizations that defend the rights and welfare of the people and bring them into a power struggle with their class enemies. In practice, when we build a serve-the-people project, it means we are building a new economic structure where working class collectively manages its economic problems. When we do this we are devising new rules of the game (institution), which are different than how peoples needs are met (or not met) under capitalism. We develop a new knowledge of managing the affairs of the people. We build a totally new consciousness (ideology) of working class – on that is collective. In this way the working class acquires a new

capability (power) which connects their structure with their institutions. This is a situation of dual power.

This approach to building revolutionary power can be accused of economism, NGOism, and charity work, like a liberal project. But Comrade Stella is aware of this and immediately explains the difference.

Liberal Projects of Charity vs ‘Dual Power’ Projects

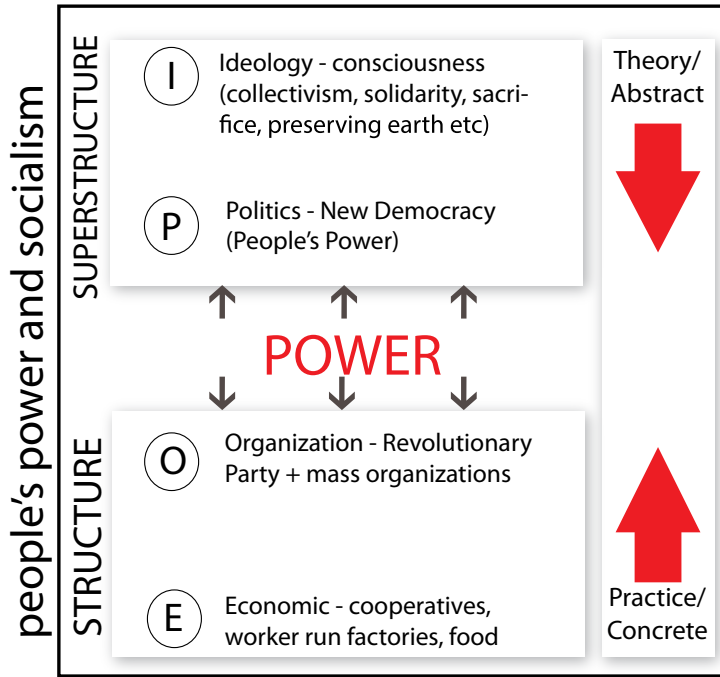
How are such community projects and mass organizations any different from liberal projects? The answer to this question is found in the following part of Stella B’s article, “Avoid the Trap of Economism, NGOism, and Charity Work.” Here are my thoughts:

(1) Liberal projects are based on individuals helping others on a piecemeal basis, such as a human rights case, taking up a deportation case, helping a worker, etc. and doing so under the pretense of liberal democratic society. As opposed to this, our projects are collective efforts and are geared towards building organizations in a coherent fashion that can lead to a contestation of power (politics).

(2) In liberal projects, assistance often comes from state, or at least refuses to challenge the state. Elite individual charity foundations funded by corporations actively hinder the capacity of collective initiative on the part of the people. As opposed to this, in our efforts the people themselves build their projects. In these projects, much of the resources and capacity are mobilized from within the community itself. This way people build their collective capacity, in which individual is able to flourish.

(3) Mutual-aid cooperatives that refuse to move beyond legal structures only reinforce the capitalist system. As opposed to this, our projects aim to constitute power structures that are not completely reliant upon the capitalist system, in preparation for revolutionary struggle. It is different than cooperatives of utopian socialists for correcting the capitalist system within or transition to socialism as is in social democracy.

Fig. 5 - Working Class structure, superstructure and institutions



emerge related institutions and consequent consciousness. Actually they are happening at the same time. Our projects are not simply consciousness-raising exercises (like petty-bourgeois projects of reforms are often based around), but aimed at creating new structures.

(6) Here when I say institutions, I am now talking about 'New

through a party formation we can bring back to the masses. [See Fig 5]

Let me illustrate this process with the example of a cop watch project or community self-policing. We, being the part of community, are facing this problem and this comes directly out of social investigation. People will ask first for legal help/advice within the system [A liberal project will stop here and confine itself to this]. We slowly will come to know that this is a vicious circle and may proceed to encourage and assist with the creation of parent councils and community councils to keep an eye out for the cops [A liberal project will convince the people how should obey law and partake in some friendly games with police]. By systematizing people's experiences and encouraging organization, we can convince the community to keep an eye on police harassment and slowly build their capacity not to involve police. This will result in mass organization. This mass organization will create a space where we can talk about new laws and new political change and new constitutional rights. In a way we can build our new expertise and institutions where we can have collective policing of future.

Through a process like this, we can build the people's consciousness alongside and within new structures that can increase our power against our class enemies.

I hope this helps clarify some of the terms we need to understand in constructing dual power. More to follow.

(4) In liberal projects, first they want to disarm you from your politics. They start from depoliticization, dispersion, fragmentation and difference. If you talk to liberals about anti-imperialism, they will start insisting there is women's issue, race, gender, that is completely distinct from imperialism. Focus is dispersed and dispersed forces have no power to effectively assert themselves [See Fig 3]. However, in our projects, we follow the bottom-up IPOE. We first talk about women's issues, workers, peasants, urban poor etc. then we connect it with a critique of existing bourgeoisie institutions and organizations, and convince the people how they are unable to solve their issues in a dispersed way. Then we push all struggles against imperialism in a pincer movement that is focused [Fig 4].

(5) Our projects are aimed not merely at changing consciousness (superstructure) first, which is how poststructuralist discourse analysis, critical legal studies, subaltern studies see things. Rather, ours is to build a new structure, that will slowly give rise to new institutions (as rules of the game), and a dual power that will connect our new structures with institutions in opposition to our class enemy and its institutions and organizations. While doing this a new consciousness and ideology will emerge. Let us make it clear here that we need to build structure first and then there will

Institutions: 'New formal' institutions in the sense of how we run projects economically and lay down our organizational rules; and by 'New informal,' I mean a new culture of socialist camaraderie and solidarity.

Connecting a project, mass organization, party and Ideology- Consciousness

In our efforts to organize the people and meet their needs, we often start with social investigation among vast masses, where we take ideas and concerns from the masses. In doing this, people tell us about their economic and social issues. We ask them or try to understand which problems are most urgent to solve first. Then we help them plan some economic/social projects. This is E in our IPOE – the economic. Based on this, people (we with them) organize and make a mass organization, with some voluntary flexible rules. We should avoid two extremes in our mass work, which is tailism and vanguardism. During organizing the masses, some people try to proceed immediately to form parties with stricter rules than the masses are able to handle without being disciplined and trained in mass organizations. What is distilled through the process of building such mass organizations is ideology, which

Fig. 6 Cop Watch Project



Between hype and hubris: a communist perspective on revolutionary prospects in Latin America



by Comrade Victor Hampton

For almost a decade, the political developments in Latin America have been a topic of considerable discussion and debate within academia, the mainstream media and among 'the Left' (broadly defined). Much of this attention, however, has been relegated to assessments of electoral movements and events and has especially focused on governments that have been categorized as 'left of centre' and as such, the debate has been predominantly between those who almost uncritically support these governments and those who outright dismiss these processes.

It shouldn't be surprising then that when these complex and contradictory political processes in Latin America are examined, the critiques are more often than not centred on those in positions of leadership in government as well as their electoral apparatus. From a revolutionary perspective, certainly the positions and trajectory of governments cannot be ignored but neither can the relationship and orientation of mass movements to these governments. Omission of this critical component leads to two main errors in evaluations of the current political moment in Latin America.

On the one hand is the interpretation of what is taking place in Latin America as more or less an electoral process, albeit with varying degrees of engagement from social movements in and around

these electoral projects. The so-called 'pink tide' theory, which emanates largely from liberal/social democratic/NGO sectors, seeks to reduce the current political conjuncture in Latin America to an electoral domino effect, where charismatic 'left' leaders and their emergent parties are building from each others momentum, capturing the imagination and aspirations of the people in successive elections across the region. This view sees governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile (up until the election of Sebastian Pinera), Ecuador, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Paraguay (during the brief government of Francisco Lugo), Uruguay and Venezuela as part of a unified and regional electoral 'trend'.

What is implicit in this analysis is reinforcement of the reformist notion that social transformation is accomplished primarily, if not exclusively, through winning elections and subsequently seeking to reform the state apparatus through the government. Among many things, what is obfuscated in this analysis is the dramatic difference in the political character of particular governments, which are reflected in their particular political programmes as well as the positioning of advanced sectors and the organized popular masses to it. For example, despite having elected a President from Socialist Party in Chile under Michelle Bachelet, there were massive mobilizations by the student sector against education reforms which

failed to address the main grievances of people around the cost and quality of education; to fierce resistance from Mapuche communities to continued sacking of resources from their ancestral lands in the south of the country. The policies of the Bachelet government, as well as other 'centre-left' governments in the region, represented in large part a continuity of neoliberal capitalism despite in its programme and as such, the masses and with advanced sectors and organizations were mobilized against many of their proposals.

Indeed, the election of centre-left governments has, in almost all of the aforementioned countries, not resulted in meaningful redistribution of resources, let alone a revolutionary transformation of society. In post-neoliberal Latin America, national bourgeoisies arguably have more power today, despite a widespread repudiation of the completely subservient comprador bourgeoisies to North American and European imperialism. There is not a example in Latin America today where revolutionary mass movements do not find themselves at odds – at least from time to time – with decisions and positions of those in government in their respective countries. More importantly, few if any purport to build socialism merely through incremental government reforms.

The view that presents the progressive, nationalist governments in Latin America as proof of the feasibility of a non-confrontational transition to socialism ignore three basic facts of Latin America today: (1) the

means of production, including much of the land base, are still in the hands of the bourgeoisie in all of Latin America; (2) elements and attitudes of the 'old state' endure in spite of the measures and campaigns against them (where such measures have been attempted); and (3) that the many advanced mass movements and revolutionary organizations in the region (including those that are in some measure supporting a government within their locality) do not actually purport to suggest that socialism will be achieved simply by forming the next government.

On the other hand, there is a perspective among a section of the 'radical left,' including those with anarchist and anti-revisionist orientations, that tends to dismiss the entirety of the government-mass political projects in Latin America, with others in the region even positioning themselves in opposition to them (for example, the Communist Party of Ecuador- Marxist Leninist and the Communist Party of Ecuador – Red Sun who are in opposition to the Correa government and in the case of Red Sun, also in opposition to the Venezuelan government). The basis of these critiques range from a general distrust of the role of the government / state as well as military in these processes; the correct point of the continuity of the old regimes and the 'revolutionary' governments in the form of bureaucratism, corruption and cronyism; the continued concentration of production in private hands; the penetration of Chinese capita; among a wide array of other valid criticisms of Latin America's leftist governments. They reaffirm, correctly, that these processes have not undergone socialist transformation. But in the end, their final analysis is one of dismissal for what these processes are not. In coming to such a conclusion, these forces negate to recognize potential and opportunity in these processes to accelerating the struggle.

Nonetheless, between these two erroneous positions that generally negate the agency of the masses, is the view which recognizes that what is developing in Latin America – with the disparity and complexity that defines the many unfolding of processes in all their particularities – is a process that has politicized

and mobilized millions of people while facilitating the accumulation of forces and strength of revolutionary mass movements. For all the continued problems and contradictions that of Latin America's leftist and center-leftist governments, the political shifts in the region has opened up opportunities for a reorganization of revolutionary forces that had dispersed by the end of the 1980s and early 1990s. Some of the current governments in Latin American are the fruit of the increasing and evolving mobilization of the masses since the 1990s. These struggles, mostly in response to the imposition of neoliberal economic reforms, had the effect of realigning political forces, discrediting market economics and its proponents (from both the right and 'left' parties). In certain cases, gains have been made in areas such as health, education, infrastructure and communications as well as other areas (which will not be mentioned in this article, but are considerable in certain countries). These victories have not only been the result of popular struggle but have in turn, raised the expectations and consciousness of the people to demand deeper transformation. In a few cases, these struggles have put the building of 'socialism' (albeit in ambiguous and inconsistent terms) back on the agenda. In terms of mass struggle, some of these processes are providing political space and resources that have in some cases, facilitated the development of dual power.

While proletarian internationalists have a duty to observe closely and provide criticism to what we perceive as errors being committed by our comrades in other lands, we also need to appreciate the political moment and take advantage of opportunities presented to strike against the principle enemies and advance our overall objective. That said we must be clear about the contradictions that still exist (as most advanced sectors in these countries are not shy to acknowledge and confront) and guard against arriving at erroneous conclusions, particularly those that have a narrow electoral or gubernatorial focus.

By looking at the examples of the developing revolutionary mass movements in Venezuela and Ecuador, we

can see that there are clearly important and positive initiatives underway to draw inspiration and lessons from. More importantly, far from being destined to failure there are most definitely signs for optimism as struggle transforms the people who become more organized and determined to see their processes radicalize.

Venezuela

Compared to other countries in the region, historically Venezuela's revolutionary left was an active but relegated force for much of the second half of the 20th century.

Following the popular rebellions against the Perez Jimenez regime in 1958, the social democratic Accion Democratica (AD) colluded with other political forces to isolate the Venezuelan Communist Party and cement its role as a the power broker 'on the left'. From the signing of the Punto Fijo pact (a power sharing agreement signed by the AD with two other parties), the AD retained a tight grip on the main worker and peasant organizations of the country, bringing them into a corporatist arrangement with capital and the state.

Venezuela has been exploiting its oil resources since the turn of the last century. The revenues from oil, mostly conceded to US capital, generated revenues for mega projects (most of which were flawed due to skimming and corruption) as well as for generating a clientelist relationship between politicians and the people. Moreover, a labour aristocracy was created in the oil sector where some workers, technicians, professionals as well as trade unionists, lived materially well-off compared to the majority of the population.

Within this scenario, armed organizations waging guerrilla wars formed to foment a popular uprising, although these organizations never grew to the capacity of organizations in Colombia or Central America. Of these, the most significant armed organization was the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN), which was comprised of members from the PCV as well as the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR). The FALN was active from 1960 into the



Bolivarianism, as eclectic as it is has nonetheless adopted the call of building peoples power

1970s and modelled itself on the Cuban July 26th Movement, concentrating itself in the countryside. The group had presence throughout the country and certainly impacted Venezuelan politics, but was never able to repeat the achievements of the movement they were modelled on. By the early 1980s, the armed struggle dissipated.

What's more, many of the figures from the period of armed struggle integrated



Argimiro Gabaldon, a leader of the FALN.

themselves into the electoral sphere, starting electoral parties such as the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) or Causa R.

In fact, such was the effectiveness of corporatism in Venezuela that it was held up and lauded by liberals and conservatives alike as an 'exceptional democracy'. That is, until this facade was lifted during the Caracazo rebellion of 1989. A severe structural reform and austerity package imposed by the International Monetary Fund and implemented by the Accion Democratica led to dramatic increases of the price of oil and basic food stuff, leading to a mass uprising throughout the country and severe state repression. In the aftermath, with up to 3000 people massacred, traditional political parties were discredited and the entire political-economic system was in disrepute.

In this crisis of illegitimacy for the Venezuelan state and all its political actors,

steps in a paratrooper named Hugo Chavez Frias, who was widely recognized for having played a leading role in a failed coup attempt in 1992 that sought to implement a progressive nationalist platform. Following his jailing and release, Chavez campaigned heavily and won the presidency in 1998

with a main campaign promise to call a constituent assembly to change the constitution of the country. Importantly here, Chavez did not merely win an election due to some mystical charisma. With the experience and networks previously worked out from his clandestine Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement '200', they spent several years organizing, weaving together scattered groups and organizations with the demand of a constitutional assembly.

While constitutional reform still operates within the framework of bourgeois democracy, the importance of this demand in laying the foundation for mass politicization and mobilization as well as for left regroupement cannot be overstated. By calling for a constitutional assembly not only was the entire foundation of the previous socio-political (not yet economic) system fundamentally questioned and rejected, but it also opened the door for widespread organization and agitation, winning over the people to materializing all of their concrete demands as the legal foundation for how society should be and operate. Using the constitutional assemblies as vehicles for mass education and democratization, tens of thousands were politicized and organized, while mass organizations and advanced sectors benefitted from the opportunity to

The Venezuelan masses flooded to the streets against the imperialist backed coup



accumulate forces.

Moreover, the new constitution provided an ongoing reference for the people when making their demands as well as a tool for political education for the masses that reframed the traditional bourgeois paradigms of representation and paternalism. The constitution not only guaranteed civil rights, but also social rights such as access to education, health care, culture, etc. and rested these on a foundation of popular participation where the masses and organized communities had the right to participate in any and all aspects of social, political and economic life. With the passing of the 1999 constitution, not only was the stage set for an acceleration of struggle as the people began to organize themselves, but also the foundations were set for the sectors of the Venezuelan people with the most revolutionary potential to build and/or consolidate dual power.

However, with a few notable exceptions, at the start of the Bolivarian process there were few large, seasoned mass organizations to play a leading role in advancing and radicalizing the process. This is evidenced by the absence of organizations to direct the Caracazo rebellion, leading instead to the military rebellion two years later. During the early years of the Bolivarian process then, the government made various attempts to initiate, stimulate or encourage different forms of organi-

zation on national scales. This ranged from the Bolivarian circles to more specialized neighbourhood committees addressing specific issues. In this regard, insufficient credit is given to Hugo Chavez, who despite occasional outbursts at not only at the Venezuelan Communist Party but also at revolutionary organizations such as the Alexis Vive collective or La Piedrita (both political-military organizations based predominantly in Caracas), consistently recognized the role and necessity of organized mass and advanced (even armed) movements and encouraged the people to exercise political and economic power. This was increasingly present in Chavez's political discourse and emphasis where he called on the people to organize and assume political power through the manifestations of their organization.

While most of the early government initiatives towards creating popular mass organizations were not as successful as expected, throughout the development of the Bolivarian process the organization of the people has grown exponentially. Thousands of cooperatives have been formed, numerous factories occupied and reorganized under workers control, hundreds of community and alternative media form and unified under a network as well as sectoral organization. Moreover, there has been increasing coalescing of revolutionary forces as demonstrated by the creation of the Great Patriotic Pole, which brought

the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) under the same electoral banner with leading mass organizations, many of whom are independent from and hold critical positions of the PSUV and its leadership.

The call for people to organize themselves was adopted and institutionalized by the government under Chavez. In Caracas and other places people began to organize themselves in their neighbourhoods order to carry out some of the reforms passed by the government including land regularization and surveying. Some places enjoyed a longer tradition of community self-organization, such as the '23 de Enero' neighbourhood where the Movimiento Tupamaro had effectively built a form of local dual power including the creation of an armed counter-balance to the police. From these experiences, advanced organizations began to develop geographically-based organizations for community control, which led to the passing of the Law of Communal Councils in 2006 and a strategy for the creation of communal power, which effectively created parallel structures of popular control over territory and resources. The subsequent laws passed including the Law of Communal Councils and Law of Communes outlined a model for communities to follow in organizing themselves so as to access resources to meet the identified needs of the community. Importantly, these laws were a case where government responded to popular calls and initiatives, not the other way around.

To date, more than 30,000 communal councils have been created, organizing literally millions of people. Importantly, movements like the Corriente Revolucionario Bolivar Zamora, a merger between the Ezequiel Zamora National Campesino Front with other organizations, have been able to use these Laws of People Power to organize on larger levels, including communes (groupings of numerous neighbouring communal councils) as well as communal cities (groupings of communes) to effectively create popular control on large swaths of territory.

From the sour experiences of dealing with government bureaucracy, corrup-

tion and indifference under the previous governments – which unsurprisingly carries into the new government – the initiative of communal power took on the objective of countering representative, bourgeois structures. Until his death, Chavez reaffirmed the call of many revolutionary mass organizations and adopted the slogan “commune or nothing” as the path for the Bolivarian process. Far from being subsumed into government, revolutionary mass movements are vigorously guarding their autonomy from the Bolivarian government, as well as the PSUV. For these movements, the objective is socialism under popular power, with the organized people exercising direct control over geographic communities, resources and media just to name a few. The Bolivarian process has been an opportunity for the people to prepare, in ideological as well as in practical terms, to wrest and exercise power.

The masses have been steadily radicalizing and increasing their capacity and organization while pushing for the Bolivarian process also radicalize. At times, this has been reactive, as with the fall out of the attempted coup and oil strike. At other times, it has been proactive, as with the proliferation of popular initiatives to place production and communities under popular control (as with the worker run factories and communal councils).

There are today numerous revolutionary movements and organizations building popular control using the constitution and laws passed to control territory and air waves. While some of these groups are more inclined to participate in the government-created People’s Militias (which number in the hundreds of thousands), some retain their own armed structures. Notwithstanding the numerous challenges ahead, it is clear that there is an active and sizeable revolutionary mass movement that is determined to fight for popular power and socialist revolution, even communism, and that they see the continuation of struggle within the current Bolivarian process as the most viable form to advance this.

Ecuador

Unlike Venezuela, Ecuador has a more recent experience of revolutionary armed struggle and mass struggle out of which the current situation emerges.

Building from previous revolutionary collectives, the Eloy Alfaro Popular Armed Forces (more commonly known as Alfaro Vive Carajo) formed in 1983 to wage a people’s war modelled on the Cuban ‘focoist’ strategy, but with a mostly urban base. While most guerrilla movements in Latin America were based in the country-side particularly during this period, the AVC were predominantly based in urban centres. By the end of

the decade however, the AVC had been liquidated by the government of Febres Cordero and the remaining AVC members signed a peace agreement and created a legal party.

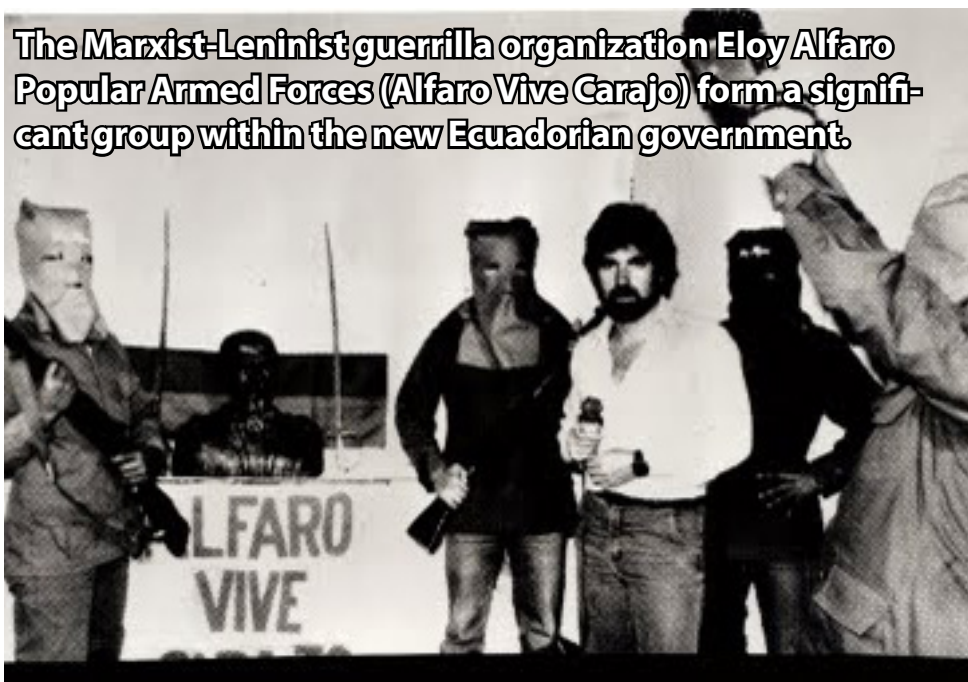
In the 1990s, however, Ecuador became the Latin American epicentre of mass mobilization and social upheaval. Popular organizations in general and Indigenous organizations operating under the Indigenous National Confederation of Ecuador (CONAIE) initiated a massive anti-neoliberal and anti-imperialist front that brought down a number of presidents through mass mobilizations. During the uprising against the Mahuad government in 2000, a brief popular junta was established that included the President of CONAIE, the head of the Supreme Court and the leader of a section of the military that supported the uprising, Colonel Lucio Gutierrez. Gutierrez would subsequently be elected with a coalition of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary popular left forces on a progressive and anti-imperialist platform (which included opposition to the Plan Colombia proposal) in 2003. Included in the coalition that formed part of the Gutierrez cabinet included the electoral wing of CONAIE, Pachakutik and the Popular Democratic Movement (MPD), the electoral mass front of the Communist Party of Ecuador- Marxist Leninist (PCMLE).

Gutierrez quickly betrayed the movement and changed his orientation to a pro-US, pro-IMF line which generated a desertion of the previous support base. Pachakutik was first to withdraw, with the MPD withdrawing support after about 6 months. Again, the masses took to the streets in huge numbers, demanding the resignation of Gutierrez. With the military withdrawing its support of Gutierrez, he was forced to leave Ecuador and sought refuge in Brazil in 2005.

Following the ousting of Gutierrez, fresh elections resulted in Rafael Correa winning the Presidency

Correa, a US-educated economist who was Minister of Finance under Alfredo Palacio, the successor of Gutierrez, was well-regarded as an honest politician for his resignation from the Palacios govern-

The Marxist-Leninist guerrilla organization Eloy Alfaro Popular Armed Forces (Alfaro Vive Carajo) form a significant group within the new Ecuadorian government.





The Ecuadorian masses overthrew several Presidents between 1998-2005

ment due to an unwillingness on the part of that administration to challenge the IMF loan repayment demands.

From his election in 2006, Correa and his allies in government along with mass movements began a similar Constituent Assembly process as in Venezuela under the banner of a 'Citizen Revolution'. As with Venezuela, the Ecuadorian constitution contained dramatically different philosophical foundations, enshrining the Sumak Kawsay, an indigenous principle translated as 'good living' as the guiding principle of government policy. The constitution also provided for mass participation in all aspects of governance, and prohibited any foreign military bases on Ecuadorian territory (effectively removing the US military base located in Manta).

Despite the comparatively progressive character of Correa in relation to Gutierrez, in the aftermath of the Gutierrez government, there were significant political developments that impacted left formations. The influx of money coming from North America and Europe to fund NGOs, particularly those working on environmental issues and with Indigenous communities, served to continue the cooption of leaders within mass movements, particularly the CONAIE. The MPD also emerged weakened from the Gutierrez experiment, and has increasingly been at odds with the Correa government in almost every respect, but particularly over education reforms, which is a base of MPD membership. Both CONAIE (and its electoral wing) as well as the MPD have been in opposition

to the Correa government, with the MPD even supporting the 2010 coup d'état attempt by police and army officials and backed by imperialism. There are certainly grounds for scepticism and opposition to aspects of Correa's governance and policies, including what is perceived at times to be an arrogant attitude, not to mention the neo-developmental orientation of its extractive policies.

Similar to Venezuela however, the process in Ecuador has not only consisted of increased social expenditures and some positive position on international affairs (as evidenced by the firm position against the Colombian bombing of a FARC camp in Ecuador as well as the granting of asylum to Julian Assange) but also a process of mass mobilization and facilitation of creating popular control. Aside from the significant levels of participation in elections since the 2007 Constitutional Assembly, mass mobilizations have been constant including the mass response to the 2010 coup d'état, where tens of thousands mobilized to confront the short-lived coup. In addition, mass organizations pushed for a democratization of the media achieving a law that distributed 34% of the airwaves to organized communities.

In the past few years also, there has been an increase in extra-parliamentary organizing with new revolutionary formations taking advantage of the favourable social and political conditions to organize themselves, while also calling for a deepening of the process. Revolutionary mass organizations have not only been at the forefront of the calls to reject US military presence in Ecuador and the democratization of media, but have also been calling for 'agrarian revolution' to redistribute land. There are also reports that there is greater coordination with armed struggle organizations in Colombia including the FARC, who are also assisting in training and arming people in the event of another coup attempt.

It must be stated however, that unlike in Venezuela where Chavez was always largely aligned with the advanced elements and organizations among the masses, Correa has more than once been at odds with certain elements within the mass movements and even within his own party. Indeed, there are valid

concerns about tendencies towards cuadillismo, seeing himself as the process as opposed to an instrument of it. As such, the tendency towards sacrificing principle and progressive policy in order to perpetuate his government remains and signals that revolutionary mass movements currently aligned with the process could find themselves at odds with the government in the near future.

While the process in Ecuador may not be as advanced in terms of revolutionary organization of the people and construction of people's power, it does nonetheless appear to be heading in that direction. As in Venezuela however, this will largely depend on the organization of the people and the ability of revolutionary organizations to manoeuvre through the apparent contradictions of the state-led projects, taking advantage of opportunities to organize, build unity among revolutionaries and accumulate forces and power while not being sucked into or entangled by bourgeois reformism.

Additional thoughts

A revolutionary analysis of what is taking place in Latin America must begin with an examination of what revolutionary mass movements are doing and saying, and where these movements are heading. Indeed, they must be viewed as ongoing processes, as opportunities for revolutionary forces to make gains in preparation for intensification of open conflict with enemy classes within.

The sites of greatest prospects for revolutionary advancement are those where advanced movements, autonomous from government and not subsumed in governing parties, are taking advantage of the circumstances of being able to shape policies and access resources to build forces while also utilizing their space and legitimacy to push for radicalization. Indeed, when one compares Ecuador or Venezuela – where the newer mass parties have entered into government – to Nicaragua, El Salvador, Brazil or Uruguay, where revisionist left parties with longer histories and tighter reigns over mass organizations, the importance of the self-organization, renewal and independence of mass movements and revolutionary organizations in pushing

for radicalization of government policies and an intensification of struggle is evident.

Other important but less emphasized aspects of these processes include the broader attempts towards regional integration to create a united front against imperialism while also mitigating the social and economic impact of economic and political sabotage (as with the embargoes that were applied to Cuba, Chile and Nicaragua). By creating regional alliances and institutions to ensure and expand regional trade of goods and materials, the ability of US imperialism to attack processes by refusing to export or intervening to deny and even withhold credit for imports, is dramatically weakened.

Indeed, it can be said that these experiences have learned from past struggles, including the Chilean tragedy of 1973 where the Socialist government of Salvador Allende was overthrown in a bloody military coup. In that case, the Chilean left became divided on the question of arming the people, which was ultimately rejected by the Allende government and the Socialist and Communist Party. In Venezuela, the creation of a militia as well as the tacit approval given (by Chavez at least) to armed revolutionary groups speaks to the realization that the people need to be able to defend themselves and their gains against violent enemies.

Importantly, these processes are also learning from previous experiences in

the history of our liberatory, communist movement in so far as they are recognizing that people need to be prepared not only to take power, but also to exercise it. Despite being the creators of all value, the history of revolutions from the French to the Russian to the Chinese to the Cuban have shown that there is a steep learning curve to creating socialism. While bourgeois attitudes linger in people and transpose into remodelled institutions, the people must learn how to govern and how to control production through trial and error.

If we can make generalizations about the more advanced processes in Latin America such as those profiled here, while it can be argued that they are not yet socialist and are not yet revolutionary, are undoubtedly anti-imperialist, popular and are preparing the ground for revolutionary ruptures in the future. The accumulated struggles in the region have led to the creation of space and gains, not usually permitted or conceded by the bourgeoisie, to build revolutionary organization and consciousness among the people. The bourgeoisie have been forced to yield this territory because of the strength and organization of the masses under these processes, including the demonstrated capacity to withstand, repel and respond to violence of the ruling class (with Ecuadorians overthrowing several Presidents and Venezuelans repelling the coup attempt of 2002).

However, it must be clearly understood – and the advanced movements

in Latin America recognize this – that there is currently a war of position which requires revolutionary forces to prepare themselves and the masses for intensification of struggle. The bourgeoisie and imperialism will not allow for a peaceful construction of socialism and a transfer of wealth and power to the people. In both Ecuador and Venezuela, there have been numerous examples to illustrate the validity of this assertion. Within a protracted struggle, preparation must include the creation of dual power up into and including the capacity of the people to defend themselves militarily against internal and external threats. We salute those forces that are advancing these calls and preparations, and see this as a sign of the reason to identify positive development in the revolutionary struggle in Latin America.

At the same time, from a Marxist-Leninist perspective, the absence of a leading ideological and organizing collectivity, represents an obvious concern and weakness. Without a strong reference and centre for the masses to push the process across sectors along a revolutionary path, the ability to withstand the offensives of the bourgeoisie and imperialism are low and the possibilities of defeat and dispersal, high.

All revolutions must be conceived as processes with different stages, and the task of communist revolutionaries is to progressively improve our position (strength) relative to our enemy. As outlined in the article by comrade Amil K. in this issue, this requires consideration not only of the capacity of force that the enemy has in terms of arms and manpower, but also the tools and factors that allow it to rule by consent. Any accumulation of forces must contest with this reality, and take into account that the building of dual power as a necessity to decisively break the power of the ruling class over the people and prepare for decisive engagement with it. As the revolutionary movements in Latin America develop and the people learn and prepare, an internationalist's duty is to accompany these processes so that experience and victories accumulate along with our forces, while errors and defeats are progressively minimized.



The Tupamaro Revolutionary Movement, one of several urban military/ political organizations in Venezuela.

Justice for Sammy Means Fighting the

Central Committee of Revolutionary Initiative (Canada)

The brazen execution of 18-year old Sammy Yatim by a Toronto police officer on July 27, 2013 has unleashed an unprecedented level of popular disdain for the Canadian state's third-largest armed apparatus – the Toronto Police Service (TPS). The popular outrage over the nine shots fired at young Sammy has forced virtually every major media outlet to echo the indignation of the masses; meanwhile, bureaucrats, politicians and the labour aristocracy have made unprecedented public condemnations of the TPS and have called for changes to training and misconduct investigation practices.

Why has Sammy's execution sparked so much attention?

But all the hype amounts to little more than smokescreen while the agents of this miserable system work frantically to re-establish the legitimacy of the Toronto

Police Services as quickly as possible and channel popular discontentment onto this single cop, James Forcillo, who is neither extraordinary for his act of violence nor his killing of yet another unarmed youth in Toronto. The only exception is that he was caught on camera. As a consequence, the state at municipal and provincial levels may be forced to charge and convict this officer and may even have to implement some minor reforms. The mass movement we need must be on guard against any reforms that seek to deflate and disperse an upcoming movement, while leaving the structure of our enemy virtually intact.

The only thing that distinguishes this latest incident is that the encounter was recorded on a civilian's camera, which subsequently disrupted the usual conspiracy of silence by the media, or else

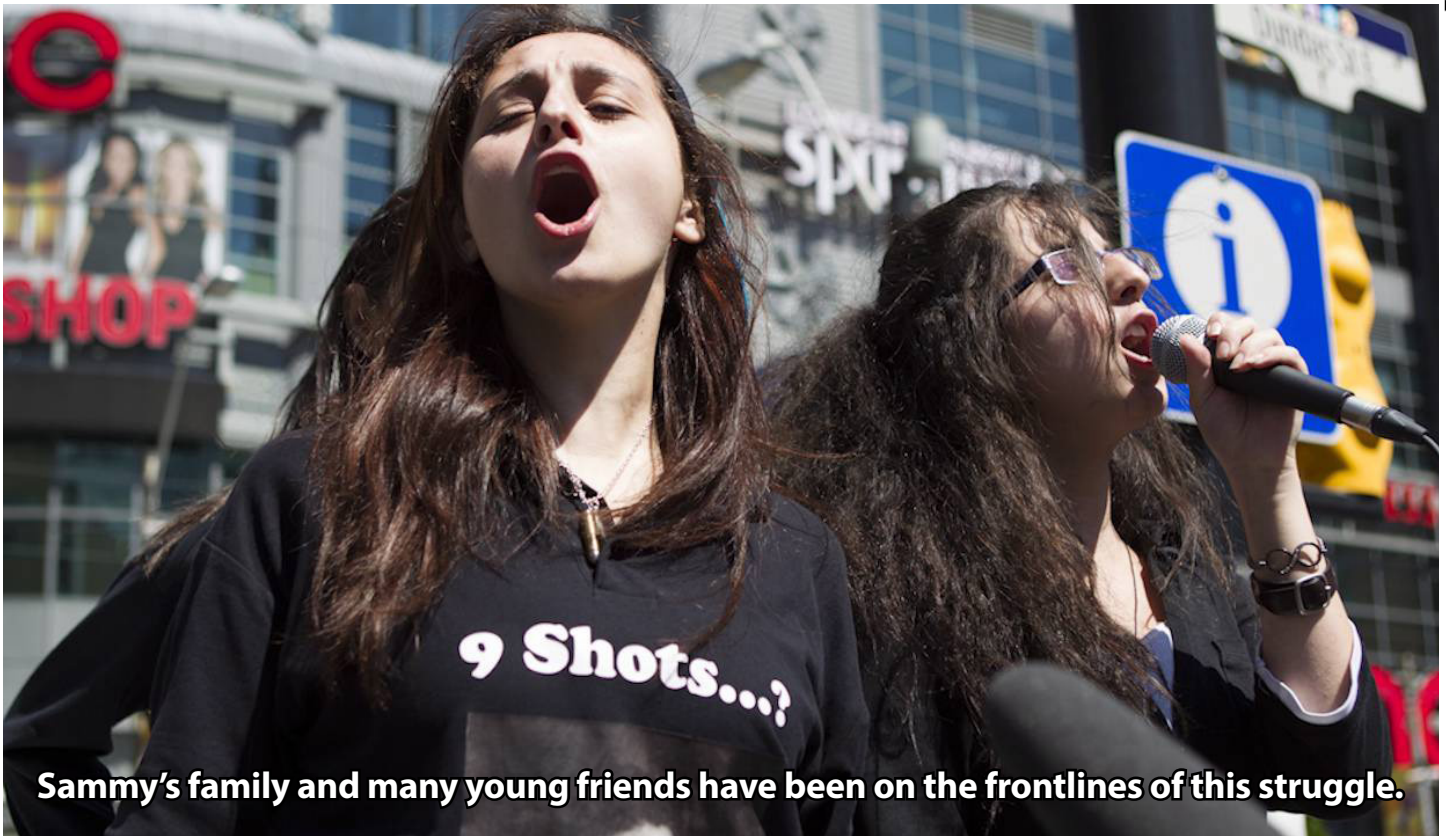
the narratives spun in the media that make the victim into the perpetrator and the cop into the victim and the hero.

If there was no footage, Sammy Yatim's name would have never hit the headlines. Video footage is the distinguishing factor of Sammy's untimely and undeserved killing, thanks to which the world now knows.

Yet another extra-judicial killing

Let's call it what it is: an extra-judicial killing. And Sammy Yatim is only the latest victim in a long running list that has stacked up over the decades in Toronto and across Canada. How else should we refer to the execution of youth like Sammy, which just happened to be caught on camera; or native people, especially women, all across the country? The vast majority of victims of these trigger-happy cowboys are racialized proletarians, the homeless, and Indigenous peoples – all of whom the agents of the Canadian state





Sammy's family and many young friends have been on the frontlines of this struggle.

can and have always done away with while hardly batting an eye.

When the people hit back...

Such killings have often been sparks for mass mobilization, and in some cases even rebellious upsurges. When the two officers who killed unarmed black teenager Michael Wade Lawson were acquitted in April 1992, and a month later a Jamaican man was shot dead by Toronto Police, over 1000 people took to the streets in the so-called "Yonge Street Riot", breaking windows on Bay St. and clashing with police.

In August 2008 when Montreal Police shot 18-year old Fredy Villanueva to death, his neighbourhood erupted in rebellion as stores were looted, cars set on fire, and most significantly, police were met with projectiles and gunfire. A paramedic and an officer were injured while another policewoman was shot.

Such spontaneous uprisings or the threat of them have in deed had the effect of curbing police killings for a time. The 'Yonge Street Riots' in 1992 had a part in bringing to a halt for the better part of the 1990s the common occurrence of police shooting Black men throughout Toronto – one of the outcomes of which was the creation of the Special Investigations Unit, however much of a sham that institution

is. While we see these forms of rebellion as justifiable expressions of the indignation of the people, we must make clear that they will never result in fundamental change and they are no substitute for the conscious and organized revolutionary offensive against the system.

The role of the police in a capitalist society: Counter-revolution and containment

To serve and protect who?

The Toronto Police Service – or any other police body in Canada, for that matter – is not simply a bureaucracy or institution onto itself: they represent the armed apparatus of the state and the first line of defense for the rich. Overall, municipal police forces throughout Canadian history have served two primary functions: (1) Repress the most advanced political strata of the masses which the ruling class sees as hostile to itself; and (2) contain the most impoverished, unruly and oppressed sections of society.

Historically, we see this with the Toronto Police gaining its first mounted unit in response to the Streetcar Strike of 1886; and later with the establishment of its criminal investigative capacities after the waves of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe in the early 1900s. The

brutality and arsenal on display at the G20 Summit in Toronto in 2010 on the one hand, and the daily harassment, surveillance and terror imposed on racialized proletarians in Toronto, on the other hand, are contemporary examples of these two functions of policing – counter-revolution and containment. And programs like TAVIS, policies like Form 208 "Carding", and paramilitary operations such as the 'Project Traveller' raids at Dixon/Kipling in mid June 2013, clearly illustrate how the racialized segments of the working class, especially the African segments of the population, are being fiercely targeted for subjugation. The same logic applies to Africans in cities like Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax; and to Indigenous peoples in Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, Edmonton, and other cities out west.

Therefore, the impunity of the police is only possible because the ruling classes need to preserve their image and keep them readied and on guard as a repressive and quasi-paramilitary force against the masses. To reign in the police and to check such wreckless behaviour would contradict these basic functions of the police, potentially causing the cops to waver when they really need to crack down on the masses, not to mention blunting the racism and terror that constitutes the daily work of police in poor, racialized

communities.

The police function not to prevent crime but to enforce the social order of the capitalist system through the active use of and threat of violence. And the police do everything they can to maintain the ruling class's monopoly on violence, letting that monopoly slip only to permit or even facilitate horizontal and reactionary forms of violence amongst the people, such as through the drug trade and by provoking conflicts among groups of youth and street gangs.

Transform outrage into conscious organization and resistance

In the urban centers of imperialist countries, one of the fruitful sites for building dual power and fostering revolutionary consciousness lies in this space between the most oppressed masses and the repressive institutions of the state. As the only element in that bureaucracy to regularly employ physical violence, municipal police forces provoke the most consistent and radical opposition from the populace. Therefore, we must see any attempt to divert this anger by placing the terms of the struggle in the hands of the ruling class, media, politicians and bureaucrats is defeatist and opportunistic in the extreme.

Aside from typical leftist forces, Sammy Yatim's killing has mobilized not only the large family and many working class youth who knew him, but new swathes of people with no previous presence at rallies and demonstrations. There is a major opportunity at this point for the masses to make serious inroads into their defensive capabilities to prevent the state's war of attrition on proletarians in this city, especially racialized people, not to mention to advance the accumulation of revolution-

ary forces.

We need to build the capacity to confront patrols, raids and assaults on a neighbourhood level, but this can only be done through mass action and widespread vigilance and a long-term building of capacity and conscious resistance. To do this, mass campaigns must be launched and maintained all across urban centers where police containment and repression are leading to killings like that of Sammy Yatim, not to mention the daily raiding of our communities for our sons, brothers, fathers, comrades, and friends through repressive 'Tough on Crime' policies.

We must take up the most advanced demands of the masses currently circulating, including a disarming of the police altogether and dismantling the Special Investigations Unit. The mothers, workers, even the semi-lumpenized youth who have the greatest hatred for this system, but who are alienated and excluded from most radical anti-capitalist movements, must be brought into mass organization and eventually revolutionary organization, and must come to recognize and take ownership over these struggles.

Communists and revolutionaries must build the mass organizations and mass movement necessary to bring the most impacted class forces into full political life, to oppose, contend with and eventually defeat the power of the police and the Canadian state as a whole alongside the rest of what must be a revolution of all oppressed and exploited peoples in this country.

In the course of building this work, we must contend with and challenge both the right opportunism and "ultra-left" er-

rors in relation to resisting police violence. The rightist solutions will come in the form of the "sugar-coated bullets" that the state and the reformists will put forward to kill the movement, such as charging Forcillo and maybe offering some token reforms.

On the other hand, we also need to actively challenge the limitations of the all-too-easy calls for "smashing the state" and "fuck the police" in the course of our active campaigning and agitating amongst the masses, which, although express our sentiments and long-term goals, have no meaningful short-term demands or goals that could be tactically effective in accumulating forces of mass struggle and recruiting revolutionary forces therefrom.

What we require are calls and demands that neither legitimize the state nor bolster illusions concerning its ability to reform, but demands that are still perfectly reasonable in the eyes of the masses. It is through organizing around such demands – demands that accumulate forces for reforms which, if passed, would not liquidate them – that we can make the fighting capacity of the people stronger.

Let us not let Sammy Yatim's death pass in vain, as with so many other extra-judicial killings of young men in recent years in Toronto, from Jeffrey Reodica, Alwy Al Nahdir, Byron Debassige, Michael Eligon, Junior Manon and many more.

Let's feed the fire sparked by those nine shots. We can't afford to let our enemies drown the movement that's waiting to flare up. Seize the time!

THE WHOLE DAMN SYSTEM IS GUILTY OF SAMMY'S DEATH!

BUILD PEOPLE'S POWER TO DEFEND OUR COMMUNITIES!



Towards the War of Position: Gramsci in Continuity and Rupture with Marxism-Leninism

By Comrade Amil



Introduction: It's Time to Jailbreak Gramsci's Ideas

Among the leading figures of the international communist movement (ICM) in the twentieth century – Lenin, Stalin, Ho Chi Minh... – Antonio Gramsci, leader of the Partito Comunista d'Italia / Italian Communist Party (PCI), features less prominently than many others – this in spite of his canonical status in the liberal academy. Granted, he didn't lead a successful revolution. But no communist party in the imperialist countries did. Also, that the bulk of Gramsci's theorizing – and certainly most of his original and most penetrating texts – were written in position of captivity in Italy's fascist prisons contained Gramsci's reflections on communist strategy. Gramsci's thought would remain quite inaccessible to ICM and even the PCI until well after his death. But even when his prison notebooks return

to Italy from their safe haven in the Soviet Union after the Second Inter-imperialist War (WWII), the revolutionary content of his ideas would be contained by the revisionism of the 'Eurocommunists', of which the PCI's Togliatti was at the forefront. Liberal academics would later further strip Gramsci's thought of its clearly communist objectives.

For these reasons, it can be said that Gramsci has had, at best, very little impact on communist strategy in the twentieth century. But Gramsci had much to say on the challenges of accumulating revolutionary forces in imperialist countries that should not be overlooked, and I would argue, have much import for the task of reconceptualizing communist strategy today. It's time to jailbreak some of these ideas out of the confines of the liberal academy.

The revolutionary crisis that spanned the course of the immediate postwar years revealed serious limitations in how the 'October Road' to revolution that the Bolsheviks inspired came to be understood and applied throughout the Communist International. The insurrections that were inspired by the Russian revolution in the immediate postwar years all failed – from Europe to North America to the failed 1927 insurrections in China. The Revolutionary Communist Party of Canada (RCP Canada) and the new Communist Party of Italy (nPCI) today uphold the idea (with some conceptual differences between them) that this was the result of inappropriate strategy: the insurrectionary strategy underestimates the resilience of the state and that something akin to a protracted people's war strategy is required. I would like to approach this problem (in a way that builds upon the critique of insurrectionism carried out by RCP Canada and nPCI) by digging a

little deeper into how the State and bourgeois power were conceived at this time within revolutionary Marxism, particularly by comparing Lenin's State and Revolution with Gramsci's prison notebooks.

The conception of the state contained within Lenin's 1917 publication State and Revolution came to be widely accepted in the international communist movement and in turn informed the insurrectionary approach to revolution and a very specific expression of the vanguard Party. Whether we attribute the success of the Russian revolution to the contingencies of a particular historical conjuncture or whether reactionary regimes were more prepared for proletarian revolution in the wake of the October 1917 revolution – likely both factors apply – the 'October Road' led only to bloody defeats wherever else it was attempted. And out of the depths of these defeats, Antonio Gramsci was at the forefront of articulating a more comprehensive strategy for the advancing the proletarian revolution in countries where capitalist social relations and the hegemony of the bourgeoisie was more advanced.

Gramsci's contributions to communist theory are many, but among the most important is his substantial elaboration to the conceptualization of the bourgeois State, one that falls within Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy as articulated in Lenin's

State and Revolution, but also builds upon elements of and far surpasses it. In this way, Gramsci's ideas are in continuity and rupture with elements of Leninism. Gramsci's inclusion of bourgeois civil society within his theorization of the bourgeois state elaborates a theory of class power and domination that is more comprehensive than Lenin's. And this conception of class power points us in the direction of a communist strategy that somewhat more protracted (not to be confused with reformist) in its conceptualization of accumulating proletarian revolutionary forces.

Gramsci's moment, though separated from us by eighty years and in a very different context from our own, in certain ways is like our own. Gramsci's prison notebooks commence a project of communist reconceptualization after the wave of failed insurrectionary attempts in the international communist movement that has yet to be adequately taken up by the ICM.

Upon a critical re-examination of Lenin's conception of the state and revolution, we can establish the points of continuity and rupture of Gramsci vis-a-vis Lenin. It is the argument of this essay that apprehending these points of continuity and rupture with Leninism are not only fundamental to rescuing Gramsci's ideas from the clutches of liberal academic

appropriations, but for reconceptualizing the place of these ideas within our project of reconceptualizing communist strategy today.

The Strengths and Limitations of Lenin's State and Revolution

As the title of Lenin's State and Revolution (S&R) suggests, the question of the State and the question of revolution are intertwined; and the first should be answered before the second. How one conceptualizes the State comes to bear upon how one conceptualizes the revolution that is required to overthrow it.

S&R is written in the throes of the first inter-imperialist war and published on the eve of the Russian revolution in August 1917. S&R was intended to be a decisive polemical intervention against all the revisionist forces of the Second International and their "superstitions concerning the 'State'" (Lenin, State and Revolution, p.5), more than any others the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries who were supporting the bourgeois Kerensky government after the February revolution.

The approach of Lenin's S&R is to reclaim the ideas of Marx and Engels, or "those aspects of their teachings which have been forgotten or opportunistically distorted" (p.6) by "resuscitat[ing] the real teachings of Marx on the state" (p.7). In essence, Lenin is making a series of affirma-



In March 1927, the General Labor Union in Shanghai, under direction of the Chinese Communist Party, launched a general strike and an armed insurrection of some 600,000 workers (image to left) against the warlords and in support of the approaching Revolutionary Nationalist Army led by the Kuomintang, which the communists were members of. While praising the unions publicly, Chiang Kai-shek proceeded to secretly raise a paramilitary force with support from the bourgeoisie and the criminal underworld to drown the communist forces in their own blood.

On April 12, these reactionary paramilitary elements launched a series of attacks against the city's large unions against the now disarmed workers (image to right). Union members were slaughtered, arrested, and disarmed. When townspeople, workers, and students staged a protest rally the next day, they were fired on by Kuomintang troops, with executions continuing for weeks. The General Labor Union organizations were declared illegal, and all strike activity in the city ceased. At this time, the CCP operated with a strategy of urban-based insurrection based on the proletariat. This event encouraged the shift to the protracted people's war in the countryside with the peasantry becoming the main force of the revolution.

tions of revolutionary Marxism in light of the Second International's usurpation, degeneration, and revisionism of some of the basic tenets put forward by Marx and Engels. Among these affirmations include the points that:

- "The state is the product and the manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms," and, therefore, "the existence of the state proves that the state class antagonisms are irreconcilable" (p.8);
- The state is an instrument for the exploitation of the oppressed classes; and finally,
- The state is made up of "special bodies of armed men who have at their disposal prisons, etc." (p.10), which is contrasted with the "self-acting armed organization of the population" that preceded the rise of the state.



A monument to Gramsci under construction in 2013 at a housing complex in the Bronx. So people still find Gramsci relevant.

These ideological interventions were essential on the eve of the Russian revolution for establishing a definite clarity about the inability of the bourgeois state (managed by the Kerensky government, after the February revolution) to serve as a mediating force for resolving the antagonism of classes in Russia. The third affirmation, concerning "special bodies of armed men" in the service of class dictatorship, underscores the need for an armed force of the proletariat to replace bourgeois dictatorship with a transitional proletarian dictatorship. A substantial part of the rest of S&R is dedicated to defending the historical necessity of a dictatorship of the proletariat as an instrument for repressing the bourgeoisie. As Lenin puts it,

Opportunism does not lead the recognition of class struggle up to the main point, up to the period of

transition from capitalism to Communism, up to the period of overthrowing and completely abolishing the bourgeoisie... the state during this period inevitably must be a state that is democratic in a new way (for the proletariat and the poor in general) and dictatorial in a new way (against the bourgeoisie) (30-1).

In affirming these essential theses of Marxism on the question of the state, Lenin is affirming an analysis of the state that while evidently applicable to Russia – considering the success of the Russian

revolution – is arguably less applicable to other western States at the time of Lenin's writing. Lenin's exclusive emphasis on the coercive aspects of the state – as a dictatorship of the ruling class(es), with its "special bodies of armed men" – while essential, overlooks those aspects of bourgeois power that are beyond the repressive apparatus, such as in ideology and civil society where consensual domination is exercised, the realm of hegemony. It is difficult and would be erroneous to fault Lenin with not developing a theory of the state more applicable to the conditions of societies other than Russia. S&R, while arguably containing certain universal positions on the bourgeois state, is not a completely universal view of the State in its modern form, or even in Lenin's day.

Those aspects of bourgeois power constituted in the realm of civil society were already well-developed and quite formidable in the capitalist-imperialist countries to the West in Lenin's time, and certainly underwent further development between the inter-imperialist wars with the vast expansion of the productive base of capitalism. Gramsci acknowledged the differences between the Russian state and the western European states at the moment of the Russian revolution when he reflected more than a decade later in his prison notebooks that

In the East the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the state tottered, a sturdy structure of civil society was immediately revealed. The State was just a forward trench; behind it stood a succession of sturdy fortresses and emplacements.

(Gramsci [1930-32], Selections from the Prison Notebooks, 238).

Therefore, the urban insurrection that succeeded in Russia would prove less than sufficient to topple the more "sturdy fortresses" of the more advanced capitalist regimes, as the postwar period would reveal at the expense of great losses to the proletarian movement.

But with the triumph of the Russian revolution, the enormous prestige of Leninism in its wake, and the urgent necessity of building an international communist movement in the context of the postwar revolutionary situation meant that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union served as a major pole of attraction for new communist parties around the world. In the context of the revolutionary situ-

ation in the immediate postwar period where a rapid regroupement of communist forces was required, unfortunately emulation trumped innovation. The consequence of inadequate theorization of the state in the ICM led to the application of strategies and tactics ill-conceived for contexts other than where they were originally formulated.

This is not to suggest that there were no contributions by Lenin that were universal, and that should not have been appropriated of by the new Communist Parties. Lenin's conception of the vanguard party and the Bolshevik example set it apart from the failed 'mass parties' of social democracy that placed the proletariat under the leadership of the petty-bourgeoisie, labour aristocracy, and opportunists almost universally. Lenin's theory of imperialism was also a significant theoretical contribution, not only in advancing internationalism and developing anti-colonialism within the communist movement, but also in explaining the relationship between imperialism and the corruption of the 'bourgeoisified' section of the working-class. These elements of Leninism all contributed to its widespread appeal for communist regroupement in the immediate postwar period. But the strength of Leninism, and its canonization in the Communist International, also relieved communist parties of their duty of creatively adapting and developing Marxism-Leninism in relation to their domestic contexts.

Another major limitation of S&R that should be mentioned here, and is relevant to the conceptual innovations by Gramsci, concerns the supposed "withering away of the state" after the revolution that Lenin defends in his book. Lenin defends Engels' position on the question of the "withering away" of the state, which was that it can only come after the proletarian revolution, and that it is an act of socialist society. Lenin affirms Engels' position against the opportunists who use this phrase against the essence of what Engels meant in order to propose a process of "slow, even, gradual change, free from the leaps and storms, free from revolution. The current popular conception... of the 'withering away' of the state undoubtedly means a slurring over, if not a negation, of revolution" (State and Revolution, 16). The point is reiterated

by Lenin that the bourgeois state does not "wither away... but is 'put an end to' by the proletariat in the course of the revolution. What withers away after the revolution is the proletarian state or semi-state" (17). Engels' own polemic was aimed at both the reformists and the anarchists: the former for their rejection of revolution, the latter for refusing to understand the state (in all its forms) is not simply "smashed" in one grand night. Lenin further clarifies his position on this point later in the text when he states: "the proletarian state will begin to wither away immediately after its victory, because in a society without class antagonisms, the state is unnecessary and impossible" (25).

Once again, in making these affirmations, Lenin was countering the distortions of the opportunists. But what S&R has to say on this question is historically limited by virtue of a socialist society having not yet existed. But the historical experience of socialist society that follows the Russian revolution reveals in practice that, quite the opposite of withering away, class struggle rages on within socialist society, and not just against the old enemies, the bourgeoisie, but new ones as well. The bourgeoisie and its foreign imperialist sponsors in Russia are militarily defeated by the end of the Civil War; and any remnants of the rural bourgeoisie are liquidated by the forced collectivization policies of the late 1920s. However, this does not prevent the rise of a new bourgeoisie within the Soviet Union, which in time comes to exercise influence, leadership, and ultimately control over the CPSU in subsequent decades. Suffice it to say that for the purposes of this essay that the protracted and violent struggles within the Soviet Union itself, from the civil war to the forced collectivizations, certainly bears its mark upon Gramsci's notion of the sort of proletarian power that would be required to make revolution in countries with even more powerful and deeply entrenched bourgeois social relations. Gramsci was afforded with the hindsight to see that the greatest challenge facing the dictatorship of the proletariat was not simply in seizing state power, but holding on to it, maintaining the dictatorship of the proletariat in the face of all external and internal enemies in a way that moved

socialist society closer and closer to communism. When the problem is posed like so, the question then arises of what forms of proletarian power are necessary in the lead up to a revolution in order to best secure the dictatorship of the proletariat after the revolution? The answer to this question entails a rethinking of both forms of States – the dictatorships of the bourgeoisie and of the proletariat. And to these questions Gramsci responds with a protracted revolutionary strategy that elaborates the Leninist party form and communist strategy in a way that articulates the relationship between the Party and the organizations of the masses that had not yet been clearly articulated in the international communist movement, and was only just beginning to take form in the Chinese Communist Party.

The Historical Context and Gramsci's Political Work Prior to the Prison Notebooks

It must be said that Gramsci's conceptual apparatus is not entirely original. This is not a diminution of Gramsci's thought, but rather a recognition that Gramsci quite clearly builds upon Marxist-Leninist foundations. But to be sure, Gramsci does not simply apply what he called "philosophy of praxis" (Marxism) to the Italian situation – you know, break out the old Marxist tool bag and begin putting them to work in Italy. Rather, Gramsci articulates a conceptual apparatus that attempts to get beyond some of the limitations and under-developed aspects of Leninism, ideas that may be instructive for our own challenges today.

The communist movement proved insufficiently capable of emerging victoriously from the revolutionary crisis after World War I. Its gains were important; but its defeats were not insignificant and owed a lot to the lack of preparation of Communist Parties for the tasks they faced. With the exception of the Bolsheviks, virtually all communist parties emerged as breakaways or left-poles of pre-existing social democratic, socialist and/or syndicalist organizations which either had no clear strategy for revolution, or were not working towards a forceful revolutionary transformation. In Italy, the base for the formation of the PCI was the left tendency in the Socialist Party that defined

themselves as 'electoral absentionists' (the same Socialist Party out of which Mussolini originates!). None of these formations were prepared to meet the challenges of proletarian revolution and all the questions that went along with it. None were prepared to answer the question of by what means can the proletariat take and hold onto power and crush the resistance of the exploiters and oppressors.

By the time of the formation of the Partito Comunista d'Italia (PCI), the postwar revolutionary crisis already peaked and passed with the Turin metalworkers strike in April 1920, where an effective dual power existed between revolutionary workers and the bosses (Hoare and Nowell Smith: xl-xli "Introduction" to Gramsci's Selections from Prison Notebooks). The closest Italy came to its insurrectionary moment was later in 1920 with the factory council movement which extended from Milan to Turin and all across much of the country. Hoare and Nowell, the editors of the first English edition of the Selections from the Prison Notebooks, summarize the failures of the early Italian communist movement:

[Gramsci's] Ordine Nuovo might have implanted an idea that had caught imagination of the masses; the intransigents and Bordiga's abstentionist fraction might have defined an attitude which rejected all compromises; but not even these forces – and how much less the mass organizations, the Party, and the trade unions – had made any serious attempt to organize the proletariat, on a national scale, for a revolutionary assault on the capitalist state. Instead, what transpired was the state taking initiative to disarm the movement through concessions, while beginning to arm and finance the fascist squads. In short, they lacked even the sort of disciplined vanguard organization that Lenin had been advocating since 1903 as an alternative to the opportunist organizational structures of social democracy, and that Gramsci would come to further elaborate upon. Bordiga's effective leadership within the Party came to an end with the smashing of the Party apparatus, which reduced its membership by 80% to 5000 members (lv).



In September 1923, Gramsci proposed creating a new working-class daily, *Unità*, along the lines of the *Ordine Nuovo* of 1919-1920, and proposed the creation of "a federal republic of workers and peasants" as ideological preparation for a Soviet regime in Italy. As Hoare and Nowell recount, "Gramsci sided with Bordiga in resisting the Comintern's advice of adhesion to the PSI, but broke with him on a series of other questions, particularly his lack of a positive strategy for Italy and his desire to start an internationalist opposition to the Comintern" (lxi). Gramsci also differentiated himself from Bordiga on the question of the relationship between Party and masses. Taking historical inspiration from how the *commissioni interne* of the factory councils 1919-1920 served as a counter to the leadership of the reformist trade union movement, the *Confederazione Generale del Lavoro* (CGL), Gramsci argued that the mass organizations of proletarian revolution were the institutional basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In response to the setbacks to the PCI, and with Bordiga in captivity, Gramsci proposed a new strategic orientation for the communist movement in Italy. Gramsci strategic points included:

1. Intensive propaganda for a worker-peasant government;
2. A struggle against the labour aristocracy and reformism to cement an

alliance between northern workers and southern peasants;

3. A new programme of political education in the party to overcome past divisions that were no longer decisive; and
4. Stepping up communist activity in the émigré population in France.

The foundation of Gramsci's strategic points was his new conception of the Party:

The error of the party has been to have accorded priority in an abstract fashion to the problem of organisation, which in practice has simply meant creating an apparatus of functionaries who could be depended on for their orthodoxy towards the official view... The communist party has even been against the formation of factory cells. Any participation of the masses in the activity and internal life of the party, other than on big occasions and following a formal decree from the centre, has been seen as the result of a dialectical process in which the spontaneous movement of the revolutionary masses and the organising and directing will of the centre converge; it has been seen merely as something suspended in the air, something with its own autonomous and self-generated development, something which the masses will join

when the situation is right and the crest of the revolutionary wave is at its highest point, or when the party centre decides to initiate an offensive and stoops to the level of the masses in order to arouse them and lead them into action (Ixii-iii).

This is essentially a critique of the party form under Bordiga, a bureaucratic centralist organizational structure. Bordiga's conception of the Party may have opposed the reformist structures of the Second International parties. But neither could the conception of the Party that he maintained bring about a positive strategy for the making of revolution in Italy, nor an organizational form to identify and carry through such a strategy. By the spring 1924 election in which the PCI participated, under the guidance of Gramsci's strategic changes, the Party had once again grown to 12,000 members.

The foundation of Gramsci's strategy was a class analysis that embraced Lenin's theory of the labour aristocracy and applied it to Italy, recognizing the obstacles that this stratum of labour posed to proletarian revolution. However, at this period of time, this stratum of labour only really dominated the labour movement in the advanced capitalist-imperialist countries, where the bourgeoisified stratum of labour plays its part in disciplining the proletariat and channeling its struggles into arenas of struggle where the bourgeoisie always wins. Whereas the backwardness and under-developed nature of capitalism in Russia had meant that the masses were not under the domination of a labour aristocracy, Gramsci pointed out that in:

...Central and western Europe the development of capitalism has determined not only the formation of broad proletarian strata, but also and as a consequence has created the higher stratum, the labour aristocracy with its appendages of trade-union bureaucracy and the social-democratic groups. The determination, which in Russia was direct and drove the masses into the streets for a revolutionary uprising, in central and western Europe is complicated by all these superstructures, created by all the greater development of capitalism; this makes the action of the masses

slower and more prudent, and therefore requires of the revolutionary party a strategy and tactics altogether more complex and long-term than those which were necessary for the Bolsheviks in the period between March and November 1917 (Ixvi-ii).

The period in which Gramsci led the PCI was the practical basis for the working out of his thinking in prison. Gramsci dismissed Zinoviev's scapegoating of the German Communist Party's Brandler for the failure of the 1923 attempt at an insurrection, and offered a deeper critique of its attempt as being putschist. Under the new strategy and Gramsci's leadership, the PCI made considerable advances despite the growing strength of fascism. As repression intensified throughout 1925, Gramsci viewed insurrection as only possible through a unification of workers and peasants committees well prepared in advance. The former would take the form of autonomous factory committees, while defending the independence of the CGL from fascist liquidation. Attempts were also being made to create an underground apparatus. Despite intensifying repression, PCI membership rose to 27,000 members, with an increasing proportion coming from the ranks of the peasantry. Gramsci came to recognize that the situation was qualitatively changing, and this led to his 1926 paper on the Southern Question, in which he articulated his theses on the dual role of the northern proletariat and the southern peasantry.

In the early months of Gramsci's incarceration, before facing solitary confinement, Gramsci's political agitation in prison can be seen as the seminal form of the profound theoretical points that he later worked out in prison notebooks over the coming decade. These theoretical points consisted of the following:

1. The conception of the party as being led by the organic intellectuals of the proletariat;
2. The need for military organization understood not in narrow technical terms but broad political terms;
3. The importance of the intermediate slogan of "constituent assembly," as first a means of winning allies for the

proletariat in its struggle against the ruling class, and subsequently on the shifting terrain to struggle against all compromise and capitulation;

4. A more precise formulation of the worker-peasant alliance under the slogan of "a republic of worker and peasant soviets in Italy";
5. Fascism as a particular expression of the bourgeois revolution on the basis of Italy's specificities, which included the lack of unity amongst Italy's bourgeoisie;
6. Countering the weight of the Catholic Church; and
7. The necessity of proletarian hegemony over the peasantry (xci).

From some of Gramsci's strategic points, I believe we can extrapolate questions of significance for the entire international communist movement (many of which have been responded to by Maoism. But let's hold off on elaborating those for Part II of this essay.). I find that these general contributions consist at least of the following:

- The question of actual proletarian leadership in the proletarian revolutionary party, to which Gramsci responds with the "organic intellectual" and to which Mao responds with the concept of the mass line [Point 1 above];
- An understanding of the military question as a political question, of war as politics and political struggle as a form of military struggle [Point 2 above];
- A class analysis that differentiates among the popular classes which will play the leading role in the revolution, which constitute a numerically main force, and which must follow the hegemony of other classes [Points 4 and 7].

It was only incidentally that Gramsci's sister-in-law Tatiana Schucht was able to smuggle out his 33 prison notebooks after his death, allowing us to study how Gramsci develops these points over the course of nearly a decade in fascist prisons.

The Prison Notebooks: Towards a 'War of Position'

The main concern of the prison notebooks is the development of "the philosophy of praxis" with the aim of rejuvenating communist strategy in light of the failures and setbacks in Gramsci's period. However fragmentary the passages of the notebooks are, they compose a totalizing system of thought in which a major focal point is the question of strategy. While there is so much more to the prison notebooks in terms of Gramsci's intellectual contributions than questions of class war and strategy – hence, the Gramsci being a treasure trove for liberal academics – many of the notes point back to what Gramsci calls the war of position. But this concept can only be appreciated by unpacking some of the conceptual apparatus built up around it throughout the prison notebooks, which includes concepts such as the historical bloc; the 'analysis of situations'; hegemony; Gramsci's concept of philosophy and the organic intellectual; his distinct notion of the Party; and finally, his explanation of civil society.

Understanding the Historical Bloc

One of the core concepts of Gramsci's prison notebooks is the 'historical bloc'. While the term is only scarcely mentioned in the prison notebooks, given the concept's role in framing much of Gramsci's conceptual apparatus it can be argued that Gramsci's prison notebooks are a long-running elaboration of the concept. There is no section dedicated to the historical bloc, only a couple short passages:

Concept of 'historical bloc', i.e. unity between nature and spirit (structure and superstructure) unity of opposites and of distincts (137).

Structures and superstructures form an 'historical bloc'. That is to say the complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures is the reflection of the ensemble of the social relations of production (366).

If I may take the liberty to flesh this out somewhat, in light of my reading of the prison notebooks, the historical bloc

is the organic but contradictory unity between the dominant and subaltern social groups in a given historical period, the relations of which are historically emergent and need to be understood as such in order to understand the nature of the relations among these social groups in the present. Whereas 'nature' here is considered relatively fixed and generally changes only over much longer periods, the 'spirit' is the contradictory unity between structural and super-structural elements in a bloc of time. On the one hand, the concept of the historical bloc is a rather orthodox reformulation of Marx's historical materialism, a principle thesis of which Gramsci paraphrases at certain points throughout the prison notebooks: "1. That no social formation disappears as long as the productive forces which have developed within it still find room for further forward movement; that a society does not set itself tasks for whose solution the necessary conditions have not already been incubated" (106).

On the other hand, Gramsci's elaboration of the architecture of the historic bloc (without actually referencing the term) throughout the prison notebooks reveals an awareness of the incredibly dynamic and ever-shifting character of the relationships among the "discordant... ensemble of the social relations of production" (366). The acute awareness of the dynamism at play amongst various levels of relations of force is a feature of Gramsci's thinking that makes his analyses of history so penetrating and his overall method of historical and political analysis such a force of rejuvenation for "the philosophy of praxis" and the communist movement. Of particular importance for Gramsci, and for any communist movement, is a comprehensive study of the oppressed and exploited classes within their own historical bloc.

In his note "History of the Subaltern Classes: Methodological Criteria", Gramsci provides a schema for what such a historical reconnaissance actually consists of when it comes to the "subaltern classes." Whereas the historical unity of the ruling classes is realized in the State (and therefore its historical development can be traced through the development of the State as well),

The subaltern classes, by definition,

are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a "State": their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of States and groups of States. Hence it is necessary to study: 1. The objective formation of subaltern social groups, by developments and transformations occurring in the sphere of economic production; their quantitative diffusion and their origins in pre-existing social groups, whose mentality, ideology, and aims they conserve for a time; 2. their active or passive affiliation to the dominant social formation, their attempts to influence the programmes of these formations in order to press claims of their own... 3. the birth of new parties of the dominant groups, intended to conserve the assent of the subaltern groups and to maintain control over them; 4. the formations which the subaltern groups themselves produce, in order to press claims of a limited and partial character; 5. those new formations which assert the autonomy of the subaltern groups, but within the old framework; 6. those formations which assert the integral autonomy (52).

This schematic outline for studying the subaltern is a major component for understanding the historical bloc. This method of historical analysis is the means by which a communist formation ultimately determines whether or not a favourable situation exists for the subaltern social groups to accumulate revolutionary forces and whether the situation is favourable to them becoming the ruling class at a given conjuncture of history; in other words, the essence of this historiographical method reduces to the question of whether the situation is favourable for revolution in the present historical bloc.

The factor driving the dynamism within Gramsci's historical schema ultimately reduces into a question of the development of the mode of production. As Gramsci reiterates in his outlining of the concept of the passive revolution,

No formation disappears as long as the productive forces which have developed within it still find room for further forward movement; 2.

that a society does not set itself tasks for whose solution the necessary conditions have not already been incubated, etc. It goes without saying that these principles must first be developed critically in all their implications, and purged of every residue of mechanism and fatalism. They must therefore be referred back to the description of the three fundamental moments into which a 'situation' or an equilibrium of forces can be distinguished, with the greatest possible stress on the second moment (equilibrium of political forces), and especially on the third moment (politico-military equilibrium) (106-7).

Here, Gramsci directly links his method of historical analysis to an elaboration of the philosophy of praxis that he provides in his note "Analysis of situations." The implicit statement here is that the object of the study of history and an account of the historical bloc is to grasp the situation, and the various levels of force that make up a given situation.

Grasping 'the situation' and Relations of Force at Three Levels

In his explication of the notion of 'a situation' the contours of a theory of revolution begin to emerge which distinguishes Gramsci from communist strategies

overly focused upon what he calls the rapid war of siege/war of maneuver. Gramsci directly critiques Trotsky's concept of 'permanent revolution', Luxemburg's advocacy of the mass strike, and syndicalism's methods in general for each for overestimating the capacity of the war of maneuver (238) to overwhelm bourgeois power and all of them being laden with notions of spontaneity because – as we shall see in further elucidations of Gramsci's notions on state and civil society below – they misidentify the locus of power of the bourgeoisie, at least in the case of the more advanced capitalist countries where civil society is more advanced. A proper analysis of a situation is a precondition for revealing the objective conditions for or against the revolution.

"The study of how 'situations' should be analyzed," Gramsci tells us, is to "establish the various levels of the relations of forces," and this, ultimately, is what constitutes the "elementary exposition of the science and art of politics" (175). Such an analysis of the situation, Gramsci tells us, is the basis for formulation of the strategic plan with a strategy and tactics, for propaganda and agitation, for developing the command structure, organization of the armed forces, and resolving other questions pertaining to organizational structure (175).

Once one has resolved "the problem of the relations between structure and superstructure" – in other words, the nature of the contradictions in the structure of society and the trajectory of their development – one can proceed to correctly analyze the role of the forces that are active in the history of a particular period. However, one must also be able to distinguish between the organic (or structural) and the conjunctural crises, which differ from one another by virtue of being long-term crises consisting of basic contradiction in the structure of society versus the conjunctural phenomenon arising from "occasional, immediate, and almost accidental" movements in the superstructure (177). "A common error in historical-political analysis consists in an inability to find the correct relation between what is organic and what is conjunctural," and Gramsci warns that such lines of research are "most serious in the art of politics, when it is not reconstructing past history but the construction of present and future history which is at stake" (178-9). What this reconstruction consists of is a determination of the immediate relations of force that define the situation.

Gramsci defines three levels of relations of force, beginning from the most structural and proceeding into the superstructural. The first is the relation of social forces, which is

closely linked to the structure, objective, independent of human will and which can be measured with the systems of the exact or physical sciences... By studying these fundamental data it is possible to discover whether in a particular society there exist the necessary and sufficient conditions for its transformation (181).

The development of any clash of political or military forces will originate from contradictions at this level.

The subsequent moment is the relation of political forces, "in other words, an evaluation of the degree of homogeneity, self-awareness, and organisation attained by the various social classes" (181). By way of example pulled from elsewhere in the prison notebooks, Gramsci's methodological criteria for conducting historical research into the subaltern classes – points four through to six, which



Despite the overthrow of immensely popular liberation theology priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide twice in a decade by U.S.-led imperialism, for years after the 2004 occupation the Haitian masses remained militant and mobilized. But Aristide never supported arming the people during his term, nor after he was overthrown. Neither was his political party, Lavalas, willing to build an armed struggle after the occupation, despite armed resistance from the urban masses in

deal with the political formations created by the subaltern classes, ranging from those limited to pressing their claims in a limited manner and in dependence upon the bourgeoisie all the way up to an integral and revolutionary way – are methods by which one can determine the level of political forces of the subaltern classes (52).

The third moment is the relation of military forces, which Gramsci breaks down further into military forces and politico-military forces, which become decisive for the subordinate social classes if and only when all three levels of relations of forces exist in the favour of the subaltern social classes and are seized upon by the social, political, and military actors they have constituted. Of course, oppressed people can take armed action without the social and political relations of forces being favourable. But these are always defeated and are easily dismissed as acts of terrorism (no matter the actual content of the armed act) if the political forces are not sufficiently capable of defending the armed actions. But if the social, political, and military relations of force are indeed favourable and sufficiently mature, then what it means for a situation to be seized upon is as follows:

The decisive element in every situation is the permanently organised and long-prepared force which can be put into the field when it is judged that a situation is favourable (and it can be favourable only in so far as such a force exists, and is full of fighting spirit). Therefore the essential task is that of systematically and patiently ensuring that this force is formed, developed, and rendered ever more homogeneous, compact, and self-aware (185).

What we have here, in an abstract and simple outline, is an historical-materialist analysis of how to determine if and how to make a revolution and under what conditions can the conscious intervention of the vanguard forces of the historically progressive classes be successful in providing leadership to a revolution. Revolution does not consist of the momentary numerical superiority of the masses in a mass strike or an insurrection – that is, momentarily favourable military relations of force – but relations

We support the people armed... but armed by who? At their own initiative and with their own resources, or backed and armed by the imperialists? What social classes and which political forces are animating the civil war from within Syria? Is this Syria's revolutionary situation? Or is the temporary military balance of power being propped up by imperialism?



of force that correspond to every level of relations of force. And for the political relations of force to be in the favour of the proletariat and its allies in countries under circumstances where bourgeois power extends beyond the formal institutions of government and State, its leading forces must do more than muster an army for a pitched battle and a day's victory.

This formulation is a sharp critique of the way insurrection came to be conceived within the Communist International, the worst expression of which was Trotsky's 'permanent revolution'. But it is also a much sharper formulation of how to perform a general analysis of a situation than that offered by Lenin. Lenin defined a revolutionary situation as one in which the ruling class could no longer go on ruling the same way, when the suffering of the masses had reached an intolerable level, and when, consequently, the masses burst into political activity (Lenin 1915). But this definition neither differentiates between structural or conjunctural crises, nor does it offer precision in the analysis of relations of forces that Gramsci's philosophy of praxis revealed to be necessary.

To fully appreciate how Gramsci's theory of revolution goes beyond Lenin's foundational but historically- and contextually-limited articulation, one must further understand Gramsci's theory of the

state and civil society. For the historically progressive forces to actually prevail in an objectively favourable situation, the question of leadership must be correctly posed and correctly answered; which brings us to Gramsci's concepts of hegemony, the role of intellectuals, and his conceptualization of the Party. With these concepts at hand, we can gain a fuller appreciation of Gramsci's idea of revolutionary strategy – the war of position.

Hegemony: Coercion & Consent

Beginning first with the question of hegemony: Dominant social groups maintain their power in two distinct ways: through domination / coercion, and through intellectual-moral leadership / consent. Dominant social groups dominate the classes with which they have an antagonistic relationship by liquidating or subjugating them through armed force (57); but they lead "kindred and allied groups" by providing moral and intellectual direction. So long as the productive forces still have room for greater development under a given mode of production, the dominant social groups can maintain their hegemony by making leadership primary and domination secondary. But an organic crisis – which consists of the shifting of the social composition of society, the classes and the relations among them – will engender crises in leadership as the dominant social groups rely more heavily upon coercion to subdue their an-

tagonists and even formerly allied classes.

What is Philosophy and who is the 'Organic Intellectual'

The place of intellectuals in ruling class hegemony is through diffusion of its moral and intellectual culture. Gramsci understands that there is not a direct correspondence between the ruling social groups and its intellectual functionaries, but that the latter are dependent on the former for their existence and serve them accordingly: "The intellectuals are the dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government," for which they are compensated. Gramsci includes the work of such intellectuals within the overall operation and power of the ruling class, not outside of it.

It should be said at this point that Gramsci sees each and every person as a philosopher, albeit whose capacity to think independently relates to the dynamics of the overall situation, the most important question of which is: Has a given class produced the political forces to think and act independently, and to what extent are these forces developed?

Gramsci sees each human being as a philosopher, since every person has a conception of the world. For Gramsci, there is no pure philosophy, but "various philosophies or conceptions of the world exist" (326). As for those philosophies that are disconnected from the people, elite intellectual cultures of and in support of the dominant social classes, Gramsci asks:

Is a philosophical movement properly so called when it is devoted to creating a specialised culture among restricted intellectual groups, or rather when, and only when, in the process of elaborating a form of thought superior to 'common sense' and coherent on a scientific plane, it never forgets to remain in contact with the 'simple' and indeed finds in this contact the source of the problems it sets out to study and to resolve? Only by this contact does a philosophy become 'historical', purify itself of intellectualistic elements of an individual character and become 'life' (330).

In contrast to these philosophies, "the philosophy of praxis does not tend to leave the 'simple' in their primitive philosophy of common sense, but rather to lead them to a higher conception of life... to construct an intellectual-moral bloc which can make politically possible the intellectual progress of the mass and not only of small intellectual groups" (333). Gramsci is clear in his position that for the communist movement such an intellectual elite – while its effect must be diffuse and hegemonic – is not an unorganized and undisciplined current. Rather it is the Party that is the "elaborator of new integral and totalitarian [i.e. unified and all-absorbing] intelligentsias and the crucibles where the unification of theory and practice, understood as a real historical process, takes place" (335). The need for such a unified if dynamic intellectual current leads Gramsci to clear reject parties on the "pattern of the British Labour Party" in favour of the Leninist/Bolshevik vanguard model. However, as we should see further below, the deeply democratic and pedagogical tasks of the communist party should not be overlooked in Gramsci's thinking.

The intellectual work of such an intellectual-moral bloc includes: (1) the repetition of its basic arguments; and (2) to raise the intellectual level of the masses and to raise new intellectuals directly out of the masses. These intellectuals raised from the ranks of the exploited and oppressed masses are what Gramsci called organic intellectuals, and small, 'independent' intellectual currents cannot take up the task of seriously cultivating this sort of leadership. This can only be taken up by the Party, or a Party of sorts.

The Party: the consciousness of a class

At this point it is worthwhile to briefly consider what exactly is a Party. Generally, the word Party invokes the idea of an electoral formation, united by a program sufficient to unite its functionaries, candidates, elected members, rank-and-file membership and sufficiently united to present itself to a wider electorate. But this is only a very specific form of a Party – the electoral Party – and not the general sort that Gramsci brings our attention to.

Gramsci's Modern Prince offers a general

historical theorization of parties in order to better situate the particular tasks of the party of the proletariat. The history of the political party is not the history of electoralism or the party construed in such narrow terms, but rather the history of the social classes themselves. With politics theorized at a superstructural level as being a reflection of contradictions in the fundamental structure of society, parties appear all throughout history where we find basic class contradictions in the structure of society. The history of political parties is not the history of its founders or leading intellectual thinkers, but rather the intricate network of relations with which the party is attached to and organizes its social class.

Gramsci argues that all parties have (1) a mass element "whose participation takes the form of discipline and loyalty, rather than any creative spirit or organizational ability (2) a cadre element, "the principal cohesive element," without which the former would "scatter into an impotent diaspora and vanish into nothing"; and (3) "an intermediate element, which articulates the first element with the second and maintains contact between them (152-3). This schematic outline of the Party form is offered as a matter of objective historical fact, one that the communist party must observe if it is to succeed in its task. The distinction with the Communist Party is that it represents a class whose historical mission is to abolish class distinctions altogether.

That Gramsci had a distinctly Leninist view on the party, but a Leninist view nonetheless, is evident from this hierarchical structuring of the Party and the tasks that it must be prepared to confront. Of particular interest to Gramsci concerning the various strata of the party is how these strata must be organized to guard against destruction. Gramsci argues that firstly, an iron conviction must prevail amongst the various strata that a solution has been found to the historical problems faced by its class. Gramsci's views on philosophy clarify that such an iron conviction is not based on dogma, but on the development of a philosophy of praxis that actually addresses the problems of the masses and adequately reflects the contours of the historical bloc. Without this 'iron discipline,' the intermediate strata cannot be formed. But this



The Black Panthers succeeded like no other revolutionary organization in its era – arguably in the whole of the twentieth century America – in the recruitment of this “mass element.” However, the breakneck speed of the organization’s growth overwhelmed its capacity to preserve the unity of its cadre – that “principle cohesive element” – when faced with repression and counter-intelligence.

philosophy of praxis, as we have seen in the foregoing analysis on philosophy, is not a simplified Marxism. Gramsci was a harsh critic of crude materialism and economism, and understood the dangers of such an articulation of Marxism included losing its connection with a top layer of intellectuals that it needed to bring under its hegemony (164).

Gramsci uses the metaphor of the “modern prince,” building on Machiavelli’s concept of the Prince, to stand in for the role required of the communist party to develop a national-popular will, not a will developed around an individual, but a collective will of the popular masses: “The protagonist of the new Prince could not in the modern epoch be an individual hero, but only the political party” (147).

The State and Civil Society

Returning to the question of the state and civil society, Gramsci’s definition of the State is not limited to “formal political society,” which includes the official organs of the State, but instead “the State

is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules” (244). In other words, a theorization of the State must include those organs of bourgeois power that are outside official bourgeois-democratic state organs – the mere “outer ditch” of bourgeois power – to include the exercise of bourgeois domination of civil society, where bourgeois power is constituted “in a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks” (238).

Therefore, based on the foregoing explication of Gramsci’s conceptualizations of the historical bloc, relations of force and the analysis of situations, philosophy, the organic intellectual, the Party, and the State and civil society, we can develop a fuller appreciation of Gramsci’s understanding of revolutionary strategy.

War of Position vs. War of Maneuver

Gramsci warned that “in political struggle

one should not ape the methods of the ruling class, or one will fall into easy ambushes” (232). Reflecting on the postwar situation in Italy, Gramsci warns in the prison notebooks of trying to counter the illegal private armed organizations of the ruling classes with similar commando-like tactics:

It is stupid to believe that when one is confronted by illegal private action one can counterpose to it another similar action – in other words, combat commando tactics by means of commando tactics... The class factor leads to a fundamental difference: a class which has to work fixed hours every day cannot have permanent and specialised assault organizations – as can a class which has ample financial resources and all of whose members are not tied down by fixed work (232).

Gramsci also dismisses the rapid war of movement / war of manoeuvre as a strategy for the proletariat by focusing on Luxemburg’s conceptualization of the

mass strike, wherein

the immediate economic element (crises, etc.) is seen as the field artillery which in war opens a breach in the enemy's defenses – a breach sufficient for one's own troops to rush in and obtain a definitive (strategic) victory... This view was a form of iron economic determinism, with the aggravating factor that it was conceived of as operating with lightning speed in time and space. It was thus out and out historical mysticism (233).

For the modern proletariat, however, it is the war of position that is the strategy for proletarian revolution – a protracted revolutionary strategy (more on the parallels with Mao's protracted people's war in Part II of this paper). With the failed attempts at proletarian revolutions in the early 1920s weighing heavily upon Gramsci's conscience, he recognized that "in the case of the most advanced States, where 'civil society' has become a very complex structure and one which is resistant to the catastrophic 'incursions' of the immediate economic element (crises, depressions, etc.," then the proletarian revolution must focus its strategy on carving out power within "the superstructures of civil society" which are "like the trench-systems of modern warfare" (235). In light of the ICM's failures, Gramsci had the hindsight to recognize and boldness to state "a crisis cannot give the attacking forces the ability to organize with lightning speed in time and in space; still less can it endow them with fighting spirit"

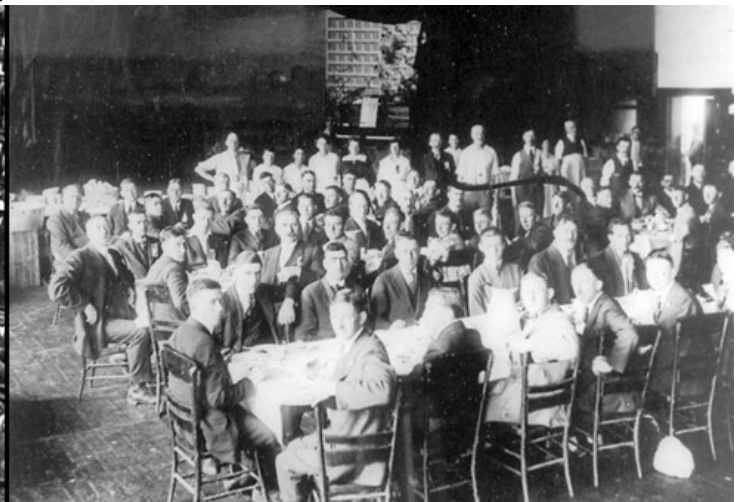
(235). This is an argument against spontaneity. It sometimes seems like "a fierce artillery attack seemed to have destroyed the enemy's entire defensive system, whereas in fact it had only destroyed the outer perimeter... The same happens in politics, during great economic crises" (235). Therefore, Gramsci warns, those elements of bourgeois civil society that constituted strong defensive ramparts must be closely studied. Gramsci's entire conception of philosophy and the role of the party is arguably worked out in relation to the ideological and cultural defensive ramparts of the bourgeoisie that must be ruptured.

Gramsci's sees the Russian revolution to have corresponded to a war of maneuver – a successful one at that. But he is concerned that to the extent that "1917 has been studied – [it has been only] from superficial and banal viewpoints" (235). Gramsci accuses Trotsky's formulation of the permanent revolution as constituting a "reflection of the theory of the war of maneuver" (236), which Gramsci views in hindsight as having been inappropriate for the postwar situation. Whereas Trotsky upheld the universality of the "frontal attack in a period in which it only produced defeats," Gramsci views the postwar situation as having been one wherein the shift to the war of position was necessary, a strategic shift which Lenin understood: "Illich understood that a change was necessary from the war of manoeuvre applied victoriously in the East in 1917, to a war of position which was the only form possible in the West"

(237).

Therefore, the war of position, undertaken and led by a proletarian revolutionary vanguard Party on the basis of the criteria outlined above, is the only strategic approach Gramsci viewed as feasible for revolution in the imperialist countries of his day. The task of future communist parties would have to be to identify the openings and necessary points of intervention within 'civil society' wherein the communist party could make its interventions and entrench itself for the long battle for 'terrain' within the matrices of bourgeois society. This isn't an argument for operating exclusively or even mainly within the hegemony of bourgeois society, such as through its institutions; but rather to rupture those institutions by building up a dual power of the popular classes.

In the face of the failures of European communist parties in the early 1920s, Gramsci recognized that a more formidable proletarian counter-hegemony was required in advance of an insurrectionary moment, and that only these advanced preparations could consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat post-revolution. Posed as such, revolutionary strategy can be understood as a continuous process of accumulating revolutionary forces that is punctuated with the rupture of revolution, or revolutions. In other words, a protracted war of position would have to precede the rapid war of maneuver. In revolutionary communist theory today, I believe that this conception bears some similarity with the protracted peoples war



During the Winnipeg General Strike in the summer of 1919, workers inspired by the Russian revolution completely took control of the city (image to left). While the local ruling elites and the Canadian government completely lost political power for a span of weeks within the city, the Citizens' Committee of One Thousand (image to right) – a secretive organization of Winnipeg's bourgeoisie created – was created to maintain the unity of its class and counter the revolutionary advances, and finally, facilitate the Canadian state's quasi-military repression of the strike in late June 1919.

strategies of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Canada – though much remains unclear to me about their strategic formulation – and especially that of the new Communist Party of Italy (nPCI). For the nPCI in particular, insurrection is conceptualized as necessary but only as a momentary tactical maneuver within a wider protracted popular war. Without intending to split hairs in the ICM today, we should seriously consider whether Gramsci's war of position is a more clear and correct articulation of what our tasks are in the imperialist countries today. Gramsci's strategic framework was specifically developed with the hegemony of the imperialist bourgeoisies in mind, and the term war of position has the added benefit of clearing up confusions and strawman arguments that are easy to make about the idea of PPW in an imperialist country. However, the working out of these ideas – Gramsci in comparison to Mao Tse-Tung's thought in particular and the modern conceptions of PPW in general – is the main object of Part II of this essay.

Concluding Thoughts: Is Gramsci a launching point for reconceptualizing communist strategy today?

The war of position is never actually applied to the context of Italy, or anywhere else in the imperialist countries, for that matter. Although, the PCI develops a substantial armed apparatus in the early 1940s before the fall of Mussolini, it is disarmed, and under American occupation and in the postwar period, the PCI played a leading role in Europe in blazing a trail of parliamentarism and reformism that comes to be known as 'Eurocommunism'. With the center of gravity of the international communist movement (ICM) having completed its shift to the third world by the end of world war two, the parties of the ICM in the imperialist countries never seriously take up Gramsci's ideas. Mao Tse-Tung is (rightfully) looked to as the leading strategic thinker in the International Communist Movement after 1960, this at a time when the name of Gramsci remained obscure for most communists

In Part II of this essay, I will explore what I believe to be the striking similarities between Gramsci's reconceptualizing communist strategy and that of Mao and

the Chinese revolution. The answers that each gives to the question of Marxism-Leninism's limitations in the 1920s are strikingly similar, however different and particularized to their very different contexts.

To reiterate, Gramsci's prison notebooks constitute a major rejuvenation of revolutionary Marxism, or the 'philosophy of praxis'. While upholding many of the applicable and valid elements of Marxism-Leninism, Gramsci substantially revises and breaks with elements of orthodoxy that proved disastrous and tragic in their application within the Comintern. Gramsci's theoretical contributions range from questions of historical materialism, the party form, state and civil society, philosophy, and revolutionary strategy, albeit in a fragmentary unity. Although Gramsci's prison sentence would claim his health and ultimately his life, it's doubtful that this level of theoretical development would have been possible without an extended period of solitude that he faced. All the other communist leaders of Gramsci's caliber would generally have been killed or too pre-occupied with the day-to-day tasks of developing the communist party to embark upon the huge and necessary intellectual project that Gramsci commenced. We owe it to the communist movement, to ourselves, and to the liberation of all oppressed and exploited peoples to return to Gramsci, and take what we must from his contributions. But first, let us consider Gramsci alongside Mao...

As the acute and momentary financial crisis of 2008 pulled the imperialist economies deeper into stagnation and the residents and citizens of those countries just a little bit closer to the long-running crises faced by the third world for decades, the hideous lie of neoliberalism has been exposed for what it is. No longer do the Fukayama and Thatcher's myths that capitalism is "the end of history" and that "there is no alternative" hold water. Instead, we are moving into an era where the ruling classes are propagating forms of apocalypse as inevitable and as "the end of history."

Rebellions are unfolding across the world; the masses are looking for, re-discovering, a solution to the capitalist problem of human civilization. Yet, while

the ideologies of the imperialist ruling classes predominate, the communist alternative has yet to be reasserted, recreated, reinvented.

Ironically, however, in contrast to forty years ago, when the objective conditions were not ripe for revolution in the imperialist countries, even if the subjective conditions were advanced, we are living in a period defined by the obverse: mature objective conditions, and the underdeveloped subjective factor. To understand this situation - to understand how bourgeois hegemony is exercised in our present day - we would do well to revisit the conceptual tools forged by Gramsci, assess what remains valid, and apply them wholeheartedly to these increasingly barbaric days of the late period of the capitalist epoch of human civilization.

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