
On the Marxian Notion of Revolution

Kavous Ardalan, Ph.D., Professor of Finance School of Management Marist College Poughkeepsie, New York 12601-1387 U.S.A.

Fax: (845) 575-3640

Tel: (845) 575-3000 Ext.2989

E-Mail: Kavous.Ardalan@Marist.Edu

Abstract: *It is commonly believed that Marx's prediction that communist revolution will take place in advanced capitalist countries is wrong. This paper argues that Marx is not wrong but is misunderstood. This is because Marx's view of revolution is long run in historical terms that has a specific outcome. However, other scholars' view of revolution is shorter run in historical terms that has no specific outcome. These scholars consequently use their own view of revolution in judging Marx's prediction about communist revolution and arrive at their conclusion. That is, they start with a misguided premise, which leads them to misunderstand Marx's prediction, and arrive at their wrong conclusion.*

Keywords: *Marxism, Revolution, Revolutionary Outcomes, Controversy, Historical Materialism, Communism*

1. Introduction

It is commonly believed that Marx's prediction that communist revolution will take place in advanced capitalist countries is wrong. This paper argues that Marx is not wrong but is misunderstood. This is because Marx's view of revolution is long run in historical terms that has a specific outcome. However, other scholars' view of revolution is shorter run in historical terms that has no specific outcome. These scholars consequently use their own view of revolution in judging Marx's prediction about communist revolution

and arrive at their conclusion. That is, they start with a misguided premise, which leads them to misunderstand Marx's prediction, and arrive at their wrong conclusion.

Cohan (1975) provides the following quotation from Mills (1963): "The social scientists study the details of small-scale milieus; Marx studied such details too, but always within the structure of a total society. The social scientists, knowing little history, study at most short-run trends; Marx, using historical materials with superb mastery, takes as his unit of study entire epochs." (Mills 1963, p. 12) (Cohan 1975, p. 57).

Emphasis on the content of revolutionary change is the feature of virtually all conception of revolution. In Marxism, revolution resolves the contradiction between the forces and relations of production, destroys the bureaucratic and military institutions of the old regime, overthrows the rule of the exploiting classes, and removes all the social and cultural obstacles to the objective process of historical development.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the expressions made by the scholars who believe that Marx's prediction that communist revolution will take place in advanced capitalist countries is wrong. Section 3 shows that Marx is not wrong but is misunderstood. For this purpose, Subsection 3.a emphasizes that Marx defines revolution such that it characterizes a specific outcome. Subsection 3.b shows that, despite the fact that other scholars define revolution in various ways, their definitions of revolution do not characterize any specific outcome. Subsection 3.c shows that some scholars even limit the occurrence of revolution to modernization. Subsection 3.d points out that other scholars' concern is with causes of revolutions, i.e., shorter run in historical terms, which is in contrast to Marx's concern with both causes and

outcomes of revolutions, i.e., longer run in historical terms. Section 4 is the conclusion.

2. Criticisms of Marx's Prediction

It is commonly believed that Marx's prediction that communist revolution will take place in advanced capitalist countries is wrong. It is claimed that Marx is wrong because communist revolution has not taken place in advanced industrial countries.

Zagorin (1973) states that the inadequacies of Marxist theory of revolution have been conclusively revealed when Marx's prediction ". . . that revolutions would occur in the most advanced countries of the West did not come true, and, instead, socialism triumphed in the backward peasant societies of Russia and China." (Zagorin 1973, p. 34).

Cohan (1975) emphasizes that "It is a very difficult problem when we consider which countries have undergone Communist-led revolutions for they have not been the technologically and economically advanced societies." (Cohan 1975, p. 59).

Salert (1976) notes that "Non-Marxists point to the fact that there have been no socialist revolutions in advanced capitalist societies as conclusive refutation of the theory. As a bonus, they sometimes also point out that the only socialist revolutions that have occurred have taken place in underdeveloped countries." (Salert 1976, pp. 113-114).

Sanderson (2005) states that Marx thought that the socialist revolution against capitalism would occur in the world's most industrially-advanced societies. However, this theory has been falsified. This is because no socialist revolution has ever, even

remotely, been experienced by advanced capitalist societies; “. . . on the contrary such revolutions have occurred in overwhelmingly agrarian societies, first in Russia in 1917, and then later in China and other parts of the Third World. The peasantry, far more than the working class, has been the social class most central to revolutionary change.” (Sanderson 2005, p. 65).

The above statements constitute a sample of criticisms directed at Marx’s prediction that the communist revolution will take place in advanced capitalist countries. They claim that communist revolution has taken place in countries that have been non-advanced capitalist countries, such as China and Russia.

However, such criticism is based on the assumption that communist revolutions have already taken place. As will be noted below, Marx defines a communist revolution as a revolution whose outcome is a communist society. That is, until a communist society is actually constructed as a result of a revolution, that revolution cannot be called a communist revolution, including those that have taken place in China and Russia. Therefore, it is premature to criticize Marx’s prediction.

3. How Marx Is Misunderstood

This section shows that Marx is not wrong but is misunderstood. For this purpose, Subsection 3.a emphasizes that Marx defines revolution such that it characterizes a specific outcome. Subsection 3.b shows that, despite the fact that other scholars define revolution in various ways, their definitions of revolution do not characterize any specific outcome. Subsection 3.c shows that some scholars even limit the occurrence of revolution to modernization. Subsection 3.d points out that other scholars’ concern is with causes of revolutions,

i.e., shorter run in historical terms, which is in contrast to Marx's concern with both causes and outcomes of revolutions, i.e., longer run in historical terms.

That is, scholars who criticize Marx have a shorter-run view of revolution and that their conception of revolution does not characterize a specific outcome. Based on this view, these scholars believe that social changes that have taken place in China and Russia are communist revolutions. This is in contrast to Marx's view of revolution, which provides both a longer-run view of revolution, and a specific characterization for the outcome of revolution. According to Marx, the long-run outcome of a communist revolution is a communist society. Therefore, a revolution cannot be considered a communist revolution until a communist society is constructed as a result of that revolution. This means that it is too early to consider the social changes that have taken place in China and Russia as communist revolutions. In other words, it is premature to reject Marx's prediction.

3.a. Revolution as Defined by Marx

This subsection emphasizes that Marx defines revolution such that it characterizes a specific outcome. Marx viewed the history of humans as consisting of five consecutive stages or epochs. According to Marx, in long-run historical terms, a revolution takes place between any two consecutive epochs. For instance, the bourgeois revolution takes place between the feudal epoch and the capitalist epoch. This means that, in long-run historical terms, when the feudal epoch is well-established then the bourgeois revolution takes place such that it establishes the capitalist epoch.

By the same token, in long-run historical terms, when the bourgeois epoch is well-established then the communist revolution takes place such that it establishes the communist epoch. Therefore, for a revolution to be a communist revolution it is necessary for the revolution to establish the communist epoch. In other words, a revolution cannot be regarded as a communist revolution if it has not established the communist epoch. This means that a social change, such as those taken place in China or Russia, cannot be regarded as a communist revolution until such a social change can lead, in long-run historical terms, to the establishment of the communist epoch. That is, until the communist epoch is well-established, it is not possible to state whether a social change, such as those taken place in China or Russia, has indeed been a communist revolution. It is too early to conclude that a social change, such as those taken place in China or Russia, has indeed been a communist revolution. Since no communist epoch is established, at this time in history, no social change, such as those taken place in China or Russia, can be regarded as a communist revolution. Therefore, it is too early to use the current evidence, i.e., social change as taken place in China or Russia, to reject Marx's prediction that communist revolution will take place in advanced capitalist countries.

Gurr (1973) informs that Marx finds revolutions to occur essentially as a result of economic change. More specifically, revolutions occur as a result of the development of contradictions between productive forces of society and the relations of classes to production. Human history consists of a succession of inevitable stages of economic organization, which culminates when the bourgeois capitalism gives way to the classless society of the workers. Revolution takes place during transitions among stages. The following is Marx's own summary:

“In the social production of their means of existence men enter into . . . productive relationships which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The aggregate of these productive relationships constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis on which a juridical and political superstructure arises. . . . The mode of production of the material means of existence conditions the whole process of social, political and intellectual life. . . . At a certain stage of their development the material productive forces of society come into contradiction with the existing productive relationships, or, what is but a legal expression of these, with the property relationships within which they had moved before. From forms of development of the productive forces these relationships are transformed into their fetters. Then an epoch of social revolution opens. With the change in the economic foundation the whole vast superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. . . . A social system never perishes before all the productive forces have developed for which it is wide enough; and new, higher productive relationships never come into being before the material conditions for their existence have been brought to maturity within the womb of the old society itself. . . . In broad outline, the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal and the modern bourgeois modes of production can be indicated as progressive epochs in the economic system of society. Bourgeois productive relationships are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production.” (Gurr 1973, pp. 376-377).

Salert (1976) explains the Marxian theory of revolution in very simple terms as follows. The relations of production are dependent on productive forces. The productive forces can grow only to a certain point within a given system of relations of production. “Once that point is reached, a new and higher system of productive relations must develop if the productive forces are to continue developing. . . . It is this transition between types of relations of

production that constitutes a revolution in Marxist theory.” (Salert 1976, pp. 100-101).

Cohan (1975) states that “. . . for Marx, a social revolution is a change in the mode of production with consequent change in all subordinate elements of the social complex. Revolution refers to the movement, or transition, from one particular epoch to the next epoch.” (Cohan 1975, p. 59).

So, for instance, the transition from feudalism to capitalism is marked by bourgeois revolution. In other words, the bourgeois revolution is defined as the revolution that transforms the feudal society into the capitalist society. That is, the bourgeois revolution is not any social change that takes place in a feudal society. Rather, the bourgeois revolution is only that revolution that transforms the feudal society into the capitalist society. This means that the bourgeois revolution is defined only when a feudal society is transformed into the capitalist society. In other words, the Marxian notion of revolution is an ex-post concept. This means that if there is a revolution in a feudal society, this revolution can only be called the bourgeois revolution if the revolution has resulted in the construction of a capitalist society. That is, the revolution can be called the bourgeois revolution only retroactively after a capitalist society has already been constructed.

In the same way, the transition from capitalism to communism is marked by the communist revolution. In other words, the communist revolution is defined as the revolution that transforms the capitalist society into the communist society. That is, the communist revolution is not any social change that takes place in a capitalist society. Rather, the communist revolution is only that revolution that transforms the capitalist society into the communist society. This means that the communist revolution is defined only

when a capitalist society is transformed into the communist society. In other words, the Marxian notion of revolution is an ex-post concept. This means that if there is a revolution in a capitalist society, this revolution can only be called the communist revolution if the revolution has resulted in the construction of a communist society. That is, the revolution can be called the communist revolution only retroactively after a communist society has already been constructed.

Revolutions which have been called “communist revolutions” have not proven yet to have resulted in the construction of a communist society, without which the occurrence of a Marxian communist revolution cannot be confirmed. Therefore, it is premature to conclude that “communist revolutions” have occurred in non-advanced capitalist countries, such as China and Russia, and that Marx has been wrong.

That there has been no communist revolution in advanced capitalist countries does not mean that there will be none. The absence of communist revolutions in advanced capitalist countries, at this time, does not automatically reject Marx’s prediction. It does not mean that Marx’s prediction is wrong, but simply that insufficient time has elapsed.

In the rest of this section, it will be shown that other scholars – who have claimed that a “communist revolution” has already occurred, and have concluded that Marx’s prediction has been wrong – have a different view of revolution, define revolution differently, and focus on shorter-term aspects of revolution than Marx. Such scholars – based on their own view, definition, and focus – approach the thoughts and writings of Marx, and as a result misunderstand the thoughts and writings of Marx, and finally arrive at a wrong conclusion.

3.b. Revolution as Defined by Other Scholars

This subsection shows that, despite the fact that other scholars define revolution in various ways, their definitions of revolution do not characterize any specific outcome. Any definition of revolution reflects the view of the scholar who defines it and in turn the definition specifies the realm of inquiry of the scholar.

Willer and Zollschan (1964) appreciate the definition of “revolution” as is succinctly defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (1961) as follows: “A complete overthrow of the established government in any country or state by those who were previously subject to it; a forcible substitution of a new ruler or form of government.” (Willer and Zollschan 1964, p. 127). They later add that “We shall concentrate on those species of revolutions which have a fundamental impact on the structure of government and the society as a whole.” (Willer and Zollschan 1964, p. 127).

Stone (1966) in his discussion of the definition of revolution, with reference to Earle’s (1943) quotation of Clausewitz’s (1908) definition of external war, notes that such definition is equally applicable to internal war, civil war, or revolution: “War is not only a political act, but a real political instrument; a continuation of political transactions, an accomplishment of them by different means. That which remains peculiar to war relates only to the peculiar nature of its means.” (Earle 1943, pp. 104-105) (Stone 1966, p. 161).

Kraminick (1972) informs that Amman (1962) defines revolution “. . . by the breakdown of a state or central government’s

monopoly of power, and the establishment of counter claims to power.” (Kraminick 1972, p. 36).

Zagorin (1973), in his discussion of the definitions of revolution, notes that Eckstein (1965) substitutes for “revolution” the term “internal war,” defined as “. . . any resort to violence within a political order to change its constitution, rulers, or policies.” (Eckstein 1965, p. 133) (Zagorin 1973, p. 27).

Zagorin (1973) also notes that Marxists and some non-Marxist define revolution as the “. . . movements with goals involving far-reaching changes in social structure, class domination, institutions, and ideology. . . . In effect, it accepts only the greatest revolutions as revolutions.” (Zagorin 1973, p. 27).

Zagorin (1973) further notes that Johnson (1964, 1966) conceives a revolution as “. . . violence directed toward one or more of the following goals: a change of government (personnel and leadership), of regime (form of government and distribution of political power), or of society (social structure, system of property control and class domination, dominant values, and the like).” (Zagorin 1973, p. 28).

Zagorin (1973) furthermore notes that according to Barrington Moore (1966) revolution is “. . . placed within the historical process as a decisive point of conflict having significant systemic consequences.” (Zagorin 1973, p. 40).

Gurr (1973) defines revolution as “. . . a species of abrupt change.” (Gurr 1973, p. 361). He informs that “revolution” is defined differently based on different theoretical views, as follows:

a. A motive or objective of a group of people: “Individuals, groups, and organizations are said to be ‘revolutionary’ if they are (thought to be) committed to accomplishing sweeping, fundamental changes.” (Gurr 1973, p. 361).

b. A style or form of action: “Concerted action aimed at transforming a social system or overthrowing a regime is sometimes called ‘revolution,’ without reference to its impact or outcome.” (Gurr 1973, p. 361).

c. An outcome of action: “The immediate outcome of violent conflict is sometimes the criterion for ‘revolution.’ If the ‘outs’ succeed in displacing the ‘ins,’ a revolution has occurred; otherwise, the actions of the would-be revolutionaries are described as a ‘rebellion,’ ‘uprising,’ ‘putsch,’ or some such term.” (Gurr 1973, p. 361).

d. Changes contingent upon action: “Seizure of power may be distinguished from the subsequent attempt to achieve revolutionary goals; ‘revolution’ is regarded as the struggle toward or the attainment of those goals.” (Gurr 1973, p. 362).

Gurr (1973) adds that “. . . the revolutionary motive is to change fundamentally the patterns of authority, that is, to change the basic institutions and procedures of society. Its satisfaction usually requires a substantial change in the values of society, a change in the operating norms of institutional life, and replacement of the elites who manage institutions.” (Gurr 1973, p. 384).

Aya (1979) informs that Lasch (1971) has defined revolution as “. . . an attempt . . . to seize state power on the part of political forces avowedly opposed not merely to the existing regime but to the

existing social order as a whole.” (Lasch 1971, p. 319) (Aya 1979, p. 43).

Aya (1979) also informs that Huntington (1968) has defined revolution as a “. . . rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies.” (Huntington 1968, p. 264) (Aya 1979, p. 47).

Eckstein (1980) provides the following definitional notions: “(1) Collective political violence involves destructive attacks by groups within a political community against its regime, authorities, or policies (derived from Gurr 1970, pp. 3-4). (2) Revolutions are the extreme cases of collective political violence, in regard to (a) their magnitude (scope, intensity), (b) targets (the political community or ‘regime’), (c) goals (degree and rapidity of change desired), and (d) the extent to which there is conflict between elites and counter-elites.” (Eckstein 1980, p. 137).

Goldstone (1982) informs that “. . . one group of theorists, the natural-history school, defined revolution narrowly. They examined only the great revolutions . . .” (Goldstone 1982, p. 189). “. . . later theorists . . . the . . . general-theory school sought to include revolutions within the framework of more common events. Grouping great revolutions with peasant revolts, riots, unsuccessful revolutions, and sometimes civil wars, . . .” (Goldstone 1982, p. 189). “. . . a third generation of theorists, the structural-theory school, has sought to avoid either too narrow or too broad a definition. They have insisted that although the various forms of collective political violence are in some sense similar, they are still different kinds of events, and develop from quite different circumstances. Thus they have separated these events into distinct

clusters – successful revolutions, unsuccessful revolutions, revolutionary coups, etc.” (Goldstone 1982, p. 189).

Roxborough (1989) defines a revolution “. . . as a violent overthrow of a state resulting in a transformation of the central coercive institutions of the state (i.e. the armed forces).” (Roxborough 1989, p. 99).

Foran (1993) informs that Skocpol (1979) provides the following definition: “Social revolutions are rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below.” (Skocpol 1979, p. 4) (Foran 1993, p. 3). Foran (1993) further informs that Skocpol (1982) revises her definition of social revolutions as “. . . rapid, basic transformations of a country’s state and class structure, and of its dominant ideology.” (Skocpol 1982, p. 265) (Foran 1993, p.10).

Sanderson (2005), in his discussion of the definitions of revolution, notes that Wilbert Moore (1963) defines revolution “. . . as a form of change that involves violence, that engages a large portion of the population, and that produces a transformation of the overall structure of government.” (Sanderson 2005, p. 1).

Sanderson (2005) also notes that Dunn (1972) defines revolution “. . . as a form of change that is massive, violent, and rapid.” (Sanderson 2005, p. 1).

Sanderson (2005) furthermore notes that Goldstone (1991) prefers to use the alternative concept of “state breakdown.” He defines a state breakdown as a society’s government undergoes a severe crisis such that its capacity to govern is severely crippled. Only some state breakdowns lead to revolutions, which are

fundamental transformations of social and political institutions. Many state breakdowns result in limited social and political changes, which are not fundamental enough to be regarded as revolutions. “Indeed, Goldstone uses the concept of state breakdown in preference to that of revolution because his interest in political crisis and change is broader than that indicated by the term revolution.” (Sanderson 2005, p. 2).

Sanderson (2005) in addition, notes that Tilly (1978, 1986, and 1993) is even more general than Goldstone (1991) and uses the term “collective action” to identify a wide variety of socio-political conflict. “These include not only revolutions and rebellions but also strikes, revolts, civil wars, and the like. At the level of explanation, Tilly has formulated an overall theory quite abstract by design, that is intended to apply to all of these conflictive phenomena.” (Sanderson 2005, pp. 2-3).

Cohan (1975), based on various approaches to the subject, specifies various aspects of revolutionary change, as follows:

- “1. The alteration of values or the myths of the society
2. The alteration of the social structure
3. The alteration of institutions
4. Changes in the leadership formation, either in the personnel of the elite or its class composition
5. Non-legal or illegal transfer of power
6. The presence dominance of violent behavior made evident in the events leading to the regime collapse.” (Cohan 1975, p. 31).

Cohan (1975), in his discussion of the definition of revolution, note that “. . . the theorists who have considered the phenomenon of revolution have differed about what revolutions are, . . .” (Cohan 1975, p. 1). And he adds that “. . . the usage of the term is varied enough to have provided very different meanings in each of the

many works. (Cohan 1975, p. 8). He further adds that “Crane Brinton began his own book with the thought that ‘revolution is one of the looser words.’” (Cohan 1975, p. 9). He concludes that “. . . among social theorists and social scientists no universally satisfactory conceptual definition has been agreed upon.” (Cohan 1975, p. 9).

Salert (1976) finds out from reviewing the literature on revolution that scholars do not adhere to a single definition of revolution. This means that general theories of revolution may not be at all comparable since . . . an event constituting a revolution in one theory may not be considered revolutionary in others.” (Salert 1976, p. 5). However, to resolve the confusion over the meaning of revolution “The theorist needs only choose his preferred definition and proceed with the task of analyzing the nature of those events denoted by the term.” (Salert 1976, p. 7).

Some scholars have a totally different view of revolution from Marx and they interpret Marx’s “revolution” based on their own meaning of “revolution.” That is, whereas Marx specifies the outcome of any of the revolutions that he defines, other scholars make no such determination. For instance, Marx specifies that the outcome of the bourgeois revolution is capitalism. However, other scholars are in no way that specific. In contrast to the other scholars who have a relatively shorter-run view of the consequences of revolutions, Marx has a much longer-run view of the consequences of revolutions. According to Marx, a communist revolution is a revolution that, in the long run, results in the construction of a communist society. According to this view, social changes which have taken place in China and Russia, at this time, cannot be considered communist revolutions, because communist societies have not been constructed as a result of their occurrence. Other scholars with their shorter-run view of revolution and with their lack

of specification of the outcome of revolution consider social changes which have taken place in China and Russia as communist revolutions and consequently reject Marx's prediction.

3.c. Revolution as Limited to Modernization

This subsection shows that some scholars even limit the occurrence of revolution to modernization. That is, they believe that revolutions are a modern phenomenon. In contrast, according to Marx revolutions occur during transitions between epochs throughout the history of humankind.

Zagorin (1973) informs that Huntington (1968) argues that revolution is associated with modernization. His argument is that social and economic changes – such as urbanization, industrialization, the spread of literacy, of education, and of communication facilities, and so on – result in heightened political consciousness, the attraction of new groups into politics, and the increase in political demands. Traditional societies that embark on the process of modernization usually lack the political institutions and organizations that are needed for bearing these heavy strains. Consequently, there is an imbalance between socio-economic growth and political capacity. This results in instability, disorder, and, in some cases, revolution. “Accordingly, in Huntington’s view, revolution is an aspect of modernization. It is very unlikely to occur either in highly traditional societies or in highly modern ones and is least probable in both democratic and communist political systems because of the capacity of each to absorb new groups.” (Huntington 1968, chapters 5-6) (Zagorin 1973, p. 47).

Zagorin (1973) also informs that Halpern (1966) “speaks of ‘the revolution of modernization,’ which he calls ‘the first revolution in

history to set a new price upon stability in any system of society; namely, an intrinsic capacity to generate and absorb continuing transformation.” (Halpern 1966, p. 179) (Zagorin 1973, p. 47).

Rejai (1980) insists that “. . . revolutions have been among the most conspicuous facts of the twentieth century, . . .” (Rejai 1980, p. 100).

Goodwin (1997) emphasizes that “. . . state-centered approaches are exceptionally valuable for understanding social revolutions. This follows, at least in part, from the fact that revolutions themselves are unusually state-centered phenomena. . . . In other words, no states, no revolutions.” (Goodwin 1997, p. 12). He poses the following questions: “Why is social revolution, unlike many other forms of social conflict, a peculiarly ‘modern’ phenomenon? Why, in other words, have social revolutions occurred with considerable frequency during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, yet seem not to have occurred at all before the seventeenth?” He then provides as the answer: “. . . the international state system itself.” (Goodwin 1997, p. 12).

Sanderson (2005) emphasizes that “. . . social revolutions are distinctly modern phenomena, occurring only within the past two centuries. They did not occur in pre-modern times, and their probability of occurrence in our current ‘postmodern’ world seems significantly diminished.” (Sanderson 2005, p. 166).

As was noted, while some scholars view revolutions as a modern phenomenon, Marx viewed revolutions as occurring between any two epochs in the history of humankind. Whereas these other scholars limited the occurrence of revolution to the modern period, Marx expanded such occurrence to the entire history of humankind. In contrast to the other scholars who have a relatively shorter-run

view of revolution, Marx has a much longer-run view of revolutions. Other scholars, with their short-term views, observe the social changes which have taken place in China and Russia and conclude that communist revolutions have taken place and hence Marx's prediction is wrong. However, according to Marx's view, which is longer-run, one needs to wait and see if indeed communist societies will be constructed as a result of these revolutions before concluding that Marx's prediction is wrong.

3.d. Causes of Revolutions vs. Outcomes of Revolutions

This subsection points out that other scholars' concern is with causes of revolutions, i.e., shorter run in historical terms, which is in contrast to Marx's concern with both causes and outcomes of revolutions, i.e., longer run in historical terms. Other scholars' focus is on the causes of revolution and therefore they ignore long-range consequences of revolutions. However, Marx's focus is both on the causes and long-range consequence of revolutions.

Eckstein (1965) classifies theories of internal wars according to the phases through which such wars pass. "They include problems about their preconditions, the way they can be effectively waged, the courses they tend to take, the outcomes they tend to have, and their long-run effects on society." (Eckstein 1965, p. 136).

Eckstein (1965) adds that in the literature on internal wars, "... the later the phase, the less there is to read ... and ... almost nothing careful and systematic has been written about the long-run social effects of internal wars, Little more is available on the determinants of success or failure in internal wars. A fair amount has been written about the dynamic processes of revolutions, But

in regard to etiology, to ‘causes,’ we are absolutely inundated with print.” (Eckstein 1965, p. 136).

Zagorin (1973) observes that “Previous efforts to establish a theory of revolution have concentrated primarily on causation. Other problems, such as the classification of revolutions, the investigation of the dynamic processes involved in revolutions, and the study of the long-range consequences of revolutions, have been neglected by comparison.” (Zagorin 1973, p. 29).

Gurr (1973) considers that the analysis of the relation between revolution and social change may be approached in three ways. (1) The definitional approach: It regards revolution as an abrupt social change with fundamental change in patterns of belief and action. It deals with procedures of definition, specification of types, and the contingent categorization of historical cases of revolution. (2) The etiology approach: It is principally concerned with identifying types of change or sets of preconditions that are necessary, sufficient, or probabilistically leading to political violence in general, or revolution in particular. (3) The instrumental approach: It searches for social changes which are consequent to revolution, or lesser forms of violence. The research in this area is almost non-existent. “Marx forecasts a progression of revolutionary struggles culminating in classless utopias.” (Gurr 1973, pp. 359-360).

Aya (1979) focuses his scholarly work on “... the political crux of revolutions: namely, an open-ended situation of violent struggle wherein one set of contenders attempts (successfully or unsuccessfully) to displace another from state power.... This means placing the weight of analysis on . . . basic political processes, social power balances, and contests for control of the state.” (Aya 1979, p. 40).

Aya (1979) appreciates the work of Tilly (1978), according to which “At base, revolutions are always contests for state power. They involve the seizure (or attempted seizure) of control over a governmental apparatus – understood as the principal concentrated material means of coercion, taxation, and administration in society – by one class, group, or (more likely) coalition from another.” (Aya 1979, p. 44).

Eckstein (1980) states that “... I will emphasize one theoretical problem, that of ‘etiology’ ... That problem has certainly held center-stage since about 1960, while the study of other phenomena (the ‘process’ of revolution, issues of prudent action by authorities or rebels, determinants of outcomes, problems of post-revolutionary rule) have waxed and waned.” (Eckstein 1980, p. 137).

Gurr (1980) informs that Eckstein (1965) observed that “almost nothing careful and systematic has been written about the long-run social effects of internal wars.” (Eckstein 1965, p. 136). Gurr (1980) adds that “In the fifteen years since 1965 a modest body of empirical findings on conflict outcomes has accumulated, most of it concerned with one of three issues: the policy impact of American protests and riots of the 1960s; the socio-economic consequences of some twentieth-century revolutions, ... and the impact of military coups d’etat on development in the Third world.... Beyond that, one finds an assortment of middle-range hypotheses about how this or that aspect of one kind of open conflict influences a particular kind of outcome. (Gurr 1980, pp. 238-239).

Other scholars are focused on causes and short-term consequences of revolution. Accordingly, they interpret the Marxian notion of revolution from the point of view of causes and short-term consequences of revolution. In this way, they do not pay attention to the “long-range consequences” of revolution, which is an important

component of the Marxian notion of revolution – e.g., the long-range consequence of bourgeois revolution is capitalism, or the long-range consequence of communist revolution is communism. Other scholars, based on short-term consequences of social changes which have taken place in China and Russia, conclude that communist revolutions have already taken place and they have taken place in non-advanced capitalist countries of China and Russia rather than the advanced capitalist countries, which were the predictions of Marx.

In general, revolutions do not necessarily accomplish what they initially set out to accomplish. This also applies to social changes which have taken place in China and Russia, which other scholars have called “communist revolutions.” These social changes, in the long-run, will not necessarily establish communism. Hence, according to the outcome-oriented Marxian notion of revolution, such revolutions are not necessarily communist revolutions, and therefore they do not contradict Marx’s prediction that communist revolutions will take place in advanced capitalist countries.

Aya (1979) emphasizes the unpredictability of the outcome of revolution by saying that “To make historical sense, any viable conception of revolution must take into account that those who initiate, lead, provide mass support for, and ultimately benefit from revolutions are often very different groups of people.” (Aya 1979, p. 45). He further adds that “. . . politics in history is a game with many players, no one of whom calls all the shots all the time.” (Aya 1979, p. 48).

Aya (1979) also emphasizes that revolutions cannot be defined in terms of the ideologies of their key contenders. This is because these aims oftentimes did not exist when the process of revolution started. What might seem to have been the wished-for political

victory are indeed the unplanned, unintended, even unforeseen consequence of a collective fight that resulted in the control of the state and public policy by contenders who did not plan on seizing (let alone holding) power at the outset or became revolutionaries in the process of revolution. After radical revolutionaries gained power, their renovation or reform programs were improvised and revised in practice. In other words, radical plans for radical changes were usually the products than the precursors of revolutions. Conversely, reformist programs after the start of the revolution became the ideology of revolutionaries. “All of which considerations make dubious any effort to classify historical revolutions by the stated intentions of outstanding protagonists.” (Aya 1979, pp. 45-46).

Sanderson (2005) emphasizes that accomplishments of revolutions are limited at best. This is largely due to the objective conditions of state building that revolutionaries face once they win. A successful revolutionary coalition is generally composed of groups with opposing interests and must rebuild the state. A strong tension and struggle between groups ensues over which part of the coalition will determine the future. The rebuilding of the state, regaining control, restoring order, and restructuring society with many difficulties and contradictions emerge as paramount, such that the ideologies of revolutionaries become excessively strained beyond any expectation. Consequently, revolutionaries are led to accomplish very different tasks and construct quite different regimes from those they originally and ideologically intended.” (Sanderson 2005, pp. 139-141).

Goldstone (1994) believes that “Communist ideology, . . . has played a limited role in inducing revolutions.... In Russia, communism became a major force only after the fall of the old regime.... Communism’s major effect has... been... to provide an

ideology for reconstruction after the old regime has fallen. Whether, given the examples of the Soviet Union and Cuba, this ideal of reconstruction will continue to be influential remains unresolved, but seems unlikely.” (Goldstone 1994, p. 14). He further explains that “Indeed, the particular problems revolutionaries face in seizing and holding power and the manner in which they choose to solve them contribute more to the final shape of post-revolutionary society than does the ideological banner under which they proclaimed the revolution.” (Goldstone 1994, pp. 14-15).

This section noted that other scholars who do not share the Marxian definition of revolution use their own definition of revolution in the interpretation of Marx’s prediction about the occurrence of communist revolution in advanced capitalist countries, consequently misunderstand Marx, and in this way they arrive at their wrong conclusion.

4. Conclusion

This paper started with the observation that it is commonly believed that Marx’s prediction that communist revolution will take place in advanced capitalist countries is wrong. It argued that Marx is not wrong but is misunderstood. This argument was supported by noting that Marx’s view of revolution is long run in historical terms that has a specific outcome. The argument was further supported by noting that other scholars’ view of revolution is shorter run in historical terms that has no specific outcome. The argument was concluded by noting that these scholars consequently use their own view of revolution in judging Marx’s prediction about communist revolution and arrive at their conclusion. That is, they start with a misguided premise, which leads them to misunderstand Marx’s prediction, and arrive at their wrong conclusion.

References

- Amman, Peter, (1962), "Revolution: A Redefinition," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 77, March, 36-53.
- Aya, Roderick, (1979), "Theories of Revolution Reconsidered: Contrasting Models of Collective Violence," *Theory and Society*, 8:1, July, 39-99.
- Clausewitz, Carl von, (1908), *On War* (new and revised edition), 3 vols. Trans. Colonel J.J. Graham, ed. Colonel F.N. Maude, London, England: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, and Company.
- Cohan, A.S., (1975), *Theories of Revolution: An Introduction*, New York, New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- Dunn, John, (1972), *Modern Revolutions: An Introduction to the Analysis of a Political Phenomenon*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Earle, Edward Mead, (ed.), (1943), *Makers of Modern Strategy*, Princeton, New Jersey.
- Eckstein, Harry, (1965), "On the Etiology of Internal Wars," *History and Theory*, 4:2, 133-163.
- Eckstein, Harry, (1980), "Theoretical Approaches to Explaining Collective Political Violence," in Gurr, Ted Robert, (ed.), *Handbook of Political Conflict: Theory and Research*, New York, New York: Free Press, Chapter 4, pp. 135-166.
- Foran, John, (1993), "Theories of Revolution Revisited: Toward a Fourth Generation," *Sociological Theory*, 11:1, March, 1-20.
- Goldstone, Jack A., (1982), "The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 8, 187-207.
- Goldstone, Jack A., (1991), *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*, Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
- Goldstone, Jack A., (1994), *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies*, Second Edition, New York, New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishing.

- Goodwin, Jeff, (1997), "State-Centered Approaches to Social Revolutions: Strengths and Limitations of a Theoretical Tradition," in Foran, John, (ed.), *Theorizing Revolutions*, London, England: Routledge, Chapter 1, pp. 9-35.
- Gurr, Ted Robert, (1970), *Why Men Rebel*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Gurr, Ted Robert, (1973), "The Revolution-Social-Change Nexus: Some Old Theories and New Hypotheses," *Comparative Politics*, 5:3, April, 359-392.
- Gurr, Ted Robert, (1980), "On the Outcomes of Violent Conflict," in Gurr, Ted Robert, (ed.), *Handbook of Political Conflict: Theory and Research*, New York, New York: Free Press, Chapter 6, pp. 238-294.
- Halpern, Manfred, (1966), "The Revolution of Modernization in National and International Society," in Friedrich, Carl J., (ed.), *Revolution*, New York, New York: Atherton Press, 178-214.
- Huntington, Samuel P., (1968), *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.
- Johnson, Chalmers, (1964), *Revolution and the Social System*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Johnson, Chalmers, (1966), *Revolutionary Change*, Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown and Company.
- Kraminick, Isaac, (1972), "Reflections on Revolution: Definition and Explanation in Recent Scholarship," *History and Theory*, 11:1, 26-63.
- Lasch, Christopher, (1971), "Epilogue," in Aya, Roderick and Miller, Norman, (eds.), *The New American Revolution*, New York, New York.
- Mills, C. Wright, (1963), *The Marxists*, New York, New York: Penguin.
- Moore, Barrington, (1966), *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press.

- Moore, Wilbert Ellis, (1963), *Social Change*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Rejai, Mostafa, (1980), "Theory and Research in the Study of Revolutionary Personnel," in Gurr, Ted Robert, (ed.), *Handbook of Political Conflict: Theory and Research*, New York, New York: Free Press, Chapter 3, pp. 100-131.
- Roxborough, Ian, (1989), "Theories of Revolution: The Evidence from Latin America," *London School of Economics Quarterly*, 3:2, 99-121.
- Salert, Barbara, (1976), *Revolution and Revolutionaries: Four Theories*, New York, New York: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Co., Inc.
- Sanderson, Stephen K., (2005), *Revolutions: A Worldwide Introduction to Political and Social Change*, Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers.
- Skocpol, Theda, (1979), *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Skocpol, Theda, (1982), "Rentier State and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian Revolution," (including comments by Nikki Keddie, Eqbal Ahmad, and Walter Goldfrank), *Theory and Society*, 11:3, 265-303.
- Stone, Lawrence, (1966), "Theories of Revolution," *World Politics*, 18:2, January, 159-176.
- Tilly, Charles, (1978), *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley.
- Tilly, Charles, (1986), *The Contentious French*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Tilly, Charles, (1993), *European Revolutions, 1492-1992*, Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Willer, David and Zollschan, George K., (1964), "Prolegomenon to a Theory of Revolutions," in Willer, David and Zollschan,

George K., (eds.), *Social Change*, Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, Chapter 5, pp. 125-151.

Zagorin, Perez, (1973), "Theories of Revolution in Contemporary Historiography," *Political Science Quarterly*, 88:1, March, 23-52.