

# Violence to Velvet: Revolutions—1917 to 2017

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Revolutions have had a bad press. Ever since the Great 1789 French Revolution made the guillotine and terror household words, revolutionary “furies” have been an *idée fixe* for anti-revolutionaries and historians alike.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the 1917 Russian revolutions, above all the October Revolution, have been synonymous with violence: Bolshevik violence. In the course of the last century, whatever the sympathies of historians, politicians, or commentators, almost all have believed that violence was inherent in the Russian Revolutions and revolutions generally, exemplified by Russia’s ensuing savage civil war. Such assertions have often been polemical rather than analytical, although with the end of the Cold War more nuanced analyses have emerged.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Cold War paradigms linger, shaping misperceptions of what a revolution actually is and the potential for near non-violent revolution in an era that prizes peace.<sup>3</sup>

A teleology of violence has pervaded the language of analysis of the 1917 Russian Revolutions: *coup d’état*, insurrection, terror. “Bolshevism” has come to be synonymous with brutal dictatorship.<sup>4</sup> These conceptions have overshadowed the fact that violence did not *define* either the titular February 1917 Revolution or the Bolsheviks “coming to power” in October.<sup>5</sup> Above all, they have overshadowed the emancipatory thrust of October 1917, the real revolution, which entailed the “forcible overthrow of a government through mass mobilization . . . to create new political institutions.”<sup>6</sup>

The 1917 revolutions were not bloodless; far from it. The demonstrations initiated by striking Petrograd women textile workers on International Women’s Day were viciously suppressed, triggering revolutions that culminated in Russian women’s suffrage, civil marriage, divorce, and legal abortion.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, the October “armed insurrection” was virtually a “velvet

1. Arno J. Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton, 2000), xiv. For a critique, arguing that political demonstrations, not violence, were the driving force of the French Revolution see Micah Alpaugh, *Non-Violence and the French Revolution: Political Demonstrations in Paris, 1787–1795* (Cambridge, UK, 2015).

2. S. A. Smith, “The Historiography of the Russian Revolution 100 Years on,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 16, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 733–49.

3. Nick Hewlett, *Blood and Progress: Violence in Pursuit of Emancipation* (Edinburgh, 2016), 3, 10–11; Richard Bessel, *Violence: A Modern Obsession* (London, 2015), 7.

4. Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York, 1990), 361, 507, 789–90; Vladimir Prokhorovich Buldakov, *Krasnaia smuta: Priroda i posledstviia revoliutsionnogo nasiliia* (Moscow, 1997); Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has Declined* (New York, 2011), 241, 244, 330, 343, 556.

5. Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (New York, 1976).

6. Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2014), 6.

7. Sergei Nefedov, “Astoria,” *Novyi mir*, no. 10, October 2016, at [http://www.nm1925.ru/Archive/Journal6\\_2016\\_10/Content/Publication6\\_6456/Default.aspx](http://www.nm1925.ru/Archive/Journal6_2016_10/Content/Publication6_6456/Default.aspx) (last accessed June 7, 2017); Rochelle Goldberg Ruthchild, *Equality and Revolution: Women’s Rights in the Russian Empire, 1905–1917* (Pittsburgh, 2010), Chapter 7.

revolution” enacted in a very violent environment. The “storming of the Winter Palace” was not even a “Bastille.” Violence was unleashed by the counter-revolution that erupted in the immediate aftermath of the Bolsheviks ascending to power on October 25.<sup>8</sup> The ensuing civil war was extraordinarily savage; 10.5 million people died, eclipsing the two million Russian deaths in the First World War.<sup>9</sup>

The Bolsheviks were ruthless in defense of their revolution—in ruthless times. In the era of the Russian Revolutions political violence was an “epochal” norm.<sup>10</sup> The drowning in blood of the 1871 Paris Commune and the 1905 Revolution, and the carnage of the First World War, only confirmed Bolshevik convictions that there was no peaceful road towards socialism. Vladimir Lenin above all was clear on this: “Revolution is war.”<sup>11</sup> Lenin’s conviction that coercion was inherent in revolution sprang not from some latter-day Jacobinism but from his analysis of the modern “Leviathan”: hyper-militarized imperialism.<sup>12</sup> He unequivocally called for “imperialist war” to be turned into “civil war.”<sup>13</sup> In his *State and Revolution*, written on the eve of October, he declared the capitalist state “special bodies of armed men” that had to be “smashed” and replaced by a revolutionary counter-state.<sup>14</sup>

Lenin’s espousal of the Marxist credo that “force is the midwife” of history provided ammunition for the “cold warrior” explanation for Bolshevik violence: driven by ideology, the Bolsheviks waged fanatical class war in their utopian will to power.<sup>15</sup> However, a post-Cold War cohort of historians argue the Bolsheviks essentially adopted coercive “modern state practices” honed in the course of European colonialism and “total” warfare.<sup>16</sup> Illuminating as such perspectives are, by cataloguing Bolshevik practices under “modernity” they underestimate the degree to which the Bolshevik revolution was *sui generis*: it aimed to forge an anti-capitalist state resting on popular power as the launching pad for international socialism. The resultant rupture with the existing world imperial order unleashed savage counter-revolution and civil war.

8. Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power*, 308.

9. Jonathan Smele, *The “Russian Civil Wars,” 1916–1926: Ten Years That Shook The World* (Oxford, 2016), 3.

10. Ian Kershaw, “War and Political Violence in Twentieth-Century Europe,” *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 1 (February 2005): 108.

11. James Ryan, “‘Revolution is War’: The Development of the Thought of V. I. Lenin on Violence, 1899–1907,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 89, no. 2 (April 2011): 270.

12. Neil Harding, *Lenin’s Political Thought: Theory and Practice in the Democratic and Socialist Revolutions*, 2 vols. (London, 1983), 2:2–3, 229, 456, 574, 668.

13. V. I. Lenin, “On the Slogan to Transform the Imperialist War into Civil War,” September 1914 at [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/sep/00.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/sep/00.htm) (last accessed June 12, 2017).

14. V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletarian Revolution*, at [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev) (last accessed June 12, 2017).

15. Martin Malia, “Foreword: The Uses of Atrocity,” in Stéphane Courtois et al, eds., trans. Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), xix.

16. Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia’s Continuum of Crisis, 1941–1921* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 7, 284–88; David L. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914–1939* (Ithaca, 2011), 4, 9–10, 257, 310–11.

## Terror

The Bolsheviks did not initiate mass terror. Nevertheless, they waged unforgiving war against counter-revolution, domestic and international. Amidst administrative chaos, economic collapse, famine, forced grain requisitioning, and assassination attacks on Lenin and others, foreign military intervention was the catalyst for “mass Red Terror” against “White terror.”<sup>17</sup> With the crushing of the anticipated European revolutions, “the dictatorship of the proletariat” became the sole instrument for staving off “the dictatorship of the imperialist bourgeoisie.”<sup>18</sup> Leon Trotskii invoked the precedent of Jacobin terror to justify Red Terror “breaking the will of the foe.”<sup>19</sup> Fearful of losing power, Bolshevik “terror psychosis” took on a life of its own, escalating into ferocious “war” on peasant “banditry” in 1920–21.<sup>20</sup> Although Bolshevik leaders frequently condemned and occasionally punished Chekist lethal excesses, Chekist terror was “sacralized,” in the name of socialist “humanism,” “morality” and “justice.”<sup>21</sup> In Lenin’s “apocalyptic view,” in an era of “bestial” imperialist wars, it was either revolution or counter-revolution: there was no third way.<sup>22</sup>

Civil war savagery was “seared” into Soviet memory, paving the way for “unprecedented” Stalin-era violence.<sup>23</sup> Although there was “significant continuity” between civil-war and Stalin-era personnel and “repressive practices,” Stalinist violence was of a different order and intent: near-autarkic, forced-march industrialization, and militarization.<sup>24</sup> The immediate result was Joseph Stalin’s declaration of war on the so-called kulaks—“*kto kogo?*”—who would be “eliminated as a class,” and mass famine.<sup>25</sup> In 1937–38, fear of invasion raised the political temperature to white heat, unleashing secret, “excisionary violence” that, inter alia, finally erased the old Bolshevik internationalists.<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, Stalin’s “military-mobilizational” state was his only bulwark against Hitler’s genocidal onslaught.<sup>27</sup>

17. Tamas Krausz, *Reconstructing Lenin: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Balint Bethlenfalvy (New York, 2015), 233–44.

18. Harding, *Lenin’s Political Thought*, 202, 204–5.

19. Lev Trotskii, *Terrorism and Communism: A Reply to Karl Kautsky*. H. N. Brailsford, ed. Foreword by Slavoj Žižek. (London, 2007 [1922]), 50–51, 54.

20. Krausz, *Reconstructing Lenin*, 246–47; Petr Aleshkin and Iuri Vasil’ev, *Krestian’skie vosstaniia v Sovetskoj Rossii (1918–1922 gg)*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 2016), 2:108–51.

21. Krausz, *Reconstructing Lenin*, 239–40; James Ryan, “The Sacralization of Violence: Bolshevik Justifications for Violence and Terror During the Civil War,” *Slavic Review* 74, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 814–16; Julie Fedor, *Russia and the Cult of State Security: The Chekist Tradition, from Lenin to Putin* (New York, 2011), 17–19.

22. Harding, *Lenin’s Political Thought*, 203–5, 234.

23. Kershaw, “War,” 113.

24. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses*, 264, 269.

25. I. V. Stalin, “O pravom uklone v VKP (b): Rech’ na plenum TsK i TsKK VKP (b) v aprele 1929 g.,” in his *Sochineniia*, 13 vols. (Moscow, 1949), 12:37.

26. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses*, 1, 238, 279, 289, 295; Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator*, trans. Nora Seligman Favorov (New Haven, 2015), 140–41, 150–51, 153.

27. Viktor Veniaminovich Cherepanov, *Vlast’ i voina: Stalinskii mekhanizm gosudarstvennogo upravleniia v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine* (Moscow, 2006), 183.

## Road to Revolution

Civil war and Stalinist violence has obscured the non-violent political methods of the Bolsheviks in 1917.<sup>28</sup> “Patient” political persuasion was their primary weapon; not military force à la General Kornilov. In the wake of Kornilov’s abortive coup, Lenin even declared the Bolsheviks would do “everything to secure” the “peaceful development of the revolution.”<sup>29</sup> The Bolsheviks and their Left Socialist Revolutionary (SR) allies rode to power on the back of vast popular movements—workers, peasants, soldiers, and sailors—that were the driving forces of the revolutions. The Bolsheviks captured the elementary aspirations of desperate millions for an end to carnage, for land redistribution, and for food, in the simple slogan: “Peace, Land, and Bread”; aspirations Lenin in particular emphasized the Provisional Government could not satisfy.<sup>30</sup> They won a plebian political constituency with their call for “All Power to the Soviets!,” an active “civil society” that was the nucleus of an alternative state power.<sup>31</sup> In extreme circumstances, the political authority of the Provisional Government, like its autocratic predecessor, evaporated rather than being conspiratorially overthrown by armed force.<sup>32</sup>

Bolshevik tactics in the “July Days”—their opposition to a pre-emptive seizure of power because they lacked sufficient support in the soviets and the Provisional Government had still not exhausted its options—epitomizes their political approach.<sup>33</sup> In October, despite Lenin’s impatience, securing the support of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets was decisive for the Bolsheviks in their plan to overthrow the government. When the Bolshevik-led Military Revolutionary Committee of the soviets arrested the remnants of the government on October 24, ratified by a fractured soviet congress on October 25, the Bolshevik–Left SR dominated congress was filling the political vacuum left by an impotent regime. October 24–25, 1917 was a revolution, not simply a coup d’état (*perevorot*). It was the political culmination of a “process” unleashed in February: the armed insurrection crowned the replacement of

28. Jörg Baberowski and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, “The Quest for Order and the Pursuit of Terror: National Socialist Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union as Multi-ethnic Empires,” in Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick, eds., *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared* (Cambridge, Eng., 2009), 180–81, 204–5.

29. V. I. Lenin, “The Russian Revolution and Civil War: They Are Trying to Frighten Us with Civil War,” September 29, 1917, at [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/sep/29.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/sep/29.htm) (last accessed June 12, 2017); Lenin, “The Tasks of the Revolution,” October 9, 1917, at [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/oct/09.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/oct/09.htm) (last accessed June 12, 2017).

30. V. I. Lenin, “The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution (The April Theses),” April 7, 1917, at [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/04.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/04.htm) (last accessed June 12, 2017); Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power*, xxiv; 311.

31. Jussi Laine, “Debating Civil Society: Contested Conceptualizations and Development Trajectories,” *International Journal of Not-For-Profit Law* 16, no. 1 (September 2014): 64–65, at [www.icnl.org/research/journal/vol16iss1/index.htm](http://www.icnl.org/research/journal/vol16iss1/index.htm) (last accessed June 12, 2017).

32. Aleksandr Shubin, *Velikaia Rossiiskaia revoliutsiia: ot Fevraliia k Oktiabriu 1917 goda* (Moscow, 2014), 135–37, 411–12.

33. *Ibid.*, 250; Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power*, 12, 16; Harding, *Lenin’s Political Thought*, 154–55.

one form of state power by another, propelled by “mass movements.”<sup>34</sup> The October Revolution opened a fraught passage to massive socio-economic changes in Russia that would ricochet politically throughout the world for three quarters of a century.

### Emancipatory Politics

Not violence, but the political principles espoused by the Bolsheviks first resonated internationally. The audacious October Revolution was conceived by the Bolsheviks as an international, socialist revolution against war, underdevelopment, exploitation, and the imperialist capitalism that produced them.<sup>35</sup> An end to war was at the core of the Bolshevik appeal and its threat to the prevailing social order. The specter of millions of Russian peasant soldiers abandoning the Eastern Front under the banner of peace terrified the warring powers.<sup>36</sup> The Bolsheviks stuck to their anti-war guns: the day after they came to power Lenin issued their first decree: “The Decree on Peace,” which called for an “immediate . . . just, democratic peace . . . without annexations.”<sup>37</sup> Two weeks later, Trotskii declared war on “secret diplomacy,” publishing hitherto secret documents of the imperial powers.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the Bolsheviks were the Wikileaks of their time.<sup>39</sup>

The Bolsheviks strove to internationalize the October Revolution, in accordance with the classical Marxist conviction that a full-fledged socialist society could only be built on the foundation of highly productive industrial capitalism. Russia was famously the “weakest link in the imperialist chain,” which next needed to be torn asunder in Germany if the political revolution in semi-developed, agrarian Russia was to survive. The Bolsheviks were banking above all on socialist revolution in Germany as a bulwark against the military and industrial might of the imperial powers. To that end, in 1919 they established a political, not a military, instrument to internationalize the revolution: the Communist International.<sup>40</sup>

34. Shubin, *Velikaia Rossiiskaia*, 12–13, 410–12, 418; Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power*, 313–14. On October as a “coup” see: Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891–1924* (New York, 1997), 484–86, 491–92; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford, 2008 [1984]), 63–66, 68, 72; Stephen Kotkin, “1919 and the Russian Revolution: Sources, Conceptual Categories, Analytical Frameworks,” *The Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 2 (June 1998): 386, 397.

35. Harding, *Lenin’s Political Thought*, 150–51, 159–63, 199–200, 233–35, 320.

36. Lloyd C. Gardener, “The Geopolitics of Revolution,” *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 4 (September 2014): 737–50.

37. V. I. Lenin, “Report on Peace,” from the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, October 26, 1917, at [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/oct/25-26/26b.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/oct/25-26/26b.htm) (last accessed June 12, 2017).

38. Lev Trotskii, “Publication of the Secret Treaties,” *Izvestiia*, November 23, 1917, 4, at [soviethistory.msu.edu/1917-2/treaty-of-brest-litovsk/treaty-of-brest-litovsk-texts/publication-of-the-secret-treaties/](http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1917-2/treaty-of-brest-litovsk/treaty-of-brest-litovsk-texts/publication-of-the-secret-treaties/) (last accessed June 13, 2017).

39. Nicholas J. Cull, “WikiLeaks, Public Diplomacy 2.0 and the State of Digital Public Diplomacy,” *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 7, no. 1 (February 2011): 1–8.

40. Lev Trotskii, “Manifesto of the Communist International to the Proletariat of the Entire World,” March 6, 1919, at [soviethistory.msu.edu/1921-2/comintern/comintern-texts/manifesto-of-the-communist-international/](http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1921-2/comintern/comintern-texts/manifesto-of-the-communist-international/) (last accessed June 13, 2017).

Bolshevik internationalism reached out not only to the working classes of the industrialized world but also to the colonized peoples, whose aspirations for national self-determination they championed. Woodrow Wilson's famous "14 Points" principle of national self-determination was a riposte to Lenin's "Decree on Peace."<sup>41</sup> Where the Versailles peace treaties provided for selective self-determination or none at all, the Bolsheviks universalized this principle. Wilsonian betrayal of China's quest to be treated as an equal at Versailles led directly to China's May 4<sup>th</sup> Independence Movement and two years later the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party, inspired by October 1917 and the Bolshevik championing of colonial self-determination.<sup>42</sup> China was not alone. The Bolsheviks enjoined the Muslims of the Middle East and Asia as a "holy task" to "overthrow the imperialist robbers and enslavers."<sup>43</sup> Such anti-imperial cries, coupled with the formation of the Comintern, saw the proliferation of communist parties from Germany to the USA, from Indonesia to India. They were born in an ultra-violent era: a "second thirty years war," 1914 to 1945, that raged from Berlin to Beijing.<sup>44</sup> The communist parties in Europe and Asia were principally political organizations that, although schooled in "armed insurrection," were largely quelled by overwhelming counter-revolutionary violence before the Second World War.<sup>45</sup> Germany was the axis of anti-communist violence that engulfed Europe. Hitler's National Socialist "revolution" unleashed war on "Judeo-Bolshevism" that culminated in his genocidal "war of annihilation" against the Soviet Union.<sup>46</sup> Parallel anti-communist repression was unleashed in China by Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang, notably the 1927 Shanghai massacre that sparked a civil war lasting until Mao Zedong's victory in 1949; a legacy of October 1917 that thrives today.<sup>47</sup>

Soviet victory in the "Great Patriotic War" and the leading role that many communist parties played in the anti-fascist resistance boosted struggles for democracy, "anti-colonialism, nationalism and 'social humanism.'"<sup>48</sup> In the post-war years, many of these parties conducted armed struggle against the re-imposition of colonialism. The Cold War became hot war against political movements and states that derived from October: Korea (1950–1953), Algeria (1954–1962), the Congo (1960–1965), Indonesia (1965–1968), and Vietnam (1954–1975).

41. Alexander Anievas, "International Relations between War and Revolution: Wilsonian Diplomacy and the Making of the Treaty of Versailles," *International Politics* 51, no. 5 (September 11, 2014): 633–42.

42. Guoqi Xu, *China and the Great War: China's Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization* (Cambridge, Eng., 2005), 276–77.

43. "Appeal to the Moslems of Russia and the East," *Izvestiia*, December 7, 1917, 1–2, at [soviethistory.msu.edu/1921-2/the-muslim-east/the-muslim-east-texts/appeal-to-the-moslems-of-russia-and-the-east/](http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1921-2/the-muslim-east/the-muslim-east-texts/appeal-to-the-moslems-of-russia-and-the-east/) (last accessed June 13, 2017).

44. Domenico Losurdo, *War and Revolution: Rethinking the Twentieth Century*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London, 2015), 5–8, 301–7.

45. A. Neuberger, *Armed Insurrection*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London, 1970 [1928]).

46. Roger Markwick, "Communism: Fascism's 'Other'?", in R. J. B. Bosworth ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism* (Oxford, 2009), 337–69.

47. See Harold R. Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*, 2nd revised ed. (Stanford, 1961[1947]).

48. Kevin Hewson and Garry Rodan, "The Decline of the Left in Southeast Asia," *The Socialist Register* 30 (1994): 240–41.

### “Give Peace a Chance”

In contrast, growing opposition to the Vietnam War in the US and Europe in the mid-1960s was overwhelmingly characterized by mass, largely peaceful protests. The “Prelude to Revolution” in France in May 1968 was nothing like as incendiary as February 1917.<sup>49</sup> From Washington to London, Paris to Prague, mass demonstrations, teach-ins, and civil disobedience were the weapons of choice against batons and tanks.<sup>50</sup> As social rather than labor movements, driven by “visceral moral anger” against war rather than “ideology,” they mainly promoted alternative forms of social organization, political decision-making, life-style, and cultural values, rather than the overthrow of consumer capitalism.<sup>51</sup> Above all, they evinced the non-violent, anti-war sensibility that had come to prevail, at least in the “West.”<sup>52</sup> “Lennonism” rather than Leninism was the refrain in the 1960s that embodied what has been deemed the post-Enlightenment “humanitarian revolution” against violence in our age.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, the discrediting of war and political violence in the late-twentieth to early twenty-first centuries has seen the conception of revolution as a peaceful, mass, “velvet” process of social renewal and political transformation—the antithesis of violence—emerge. Human “Rights Revolutions” characterized the latter part of the twentieth century, especially in the US and western Europe, “strikingly” distinguished by “how little violence they employed or even provoked.”<sup>54</sup> The same might be said of Czechoslovakia’s 1968 “socialism with a human face” and Poland’s 1980–81 *Solidarność* (Solidarity) “revolution,” with this difference: they were short-lived experiments in participatory democracy, which aspired to the realization of the putative promises of democracy enshrined in communist party programs. They were movements which strove for a “civil” socialist society; not simply autonomy from a one-party state but for the democratization of state and society. In that sense, they briefly reprised the soviets and factory committees of 1917. Snuffed out by tanks and police, they proved a last chance for Soviet renewal.

In the wake of Mikhail Gorbachev’s failed *perestroika*, the fall of the walls in Soviet east central Europe, above all Czechoslovakia in 1989, gave rise to the so-called “velvet revolutions.” They too aspired to civil societies, but this time they repudiated a stale authoritarian state-socialism in favor of liberal democracy and consumer capitalism. The last bastions of authoritarian socialism, including the Soviet Union itself, relinquished power without firing

49. Daniel Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 2002).

50. Charles Chatfield, “At the Hands of Historians: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era,” *Peace and Change* 29, no. 3/4 (July 2004): 483, 489.

51. *Ibid.*, 484, 487, 493–94, 513–14.

52. James Sheehan, *The Monopoly of Violence: Why Europeans Hate Going to War* (London, 2008), xvii, 181–83.

53. Ian Turner, “The Significance of the Russian Revolution,” in Eugene Kamenka, ed., *A World in Revolution? The University Lectures 1970* (Canberra, 1970), 35; Pinker, *Better Angels*, 129–88.

54. Pinker, *Better Angels*, 480.

a shot (except Romania's Nicolae Ceaușescu), leading some to deny violence is “integral” to revolution.<sup>55</sup> These velvet revolutions have proved to be hollow, as have the so-called “colored Revolutions” in the Soviet successor states. In the main, former communist elites simply reconfigured themselves as oligarchs and presidents.<sup>56</sup> Unlike October 1917, there was no decisive political break.

## Twenty-first Century Socialism

The end of the Cold War and the seeming triumph of capitalism over communism has actually opened new possibilities for radical change, notably in Latin America, home of anti-communist coups d'état, Guevaraist guerrillism, and Castroist “humanism.”<sup>57</sup> “Twenty-first century socialism” has become the clarion cry of “New Left” governments elected in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador. While faced with many of the same socio-economic challenges as were the Bolsheviks, but not apocalyptic warfare, they have eschewed a “state-smashing” approach to revolution. Opting for “Gramscian hegemony” rather than Marxism-Leninism, radical electoral and participatory politics and popular-patriotic appeals have been the drivers of redistributive policies in all three countries. While denouncing imperialism and neoliberalism, this troika has generally refrained from using coercion against their adversaries, mobilizing civil society en masse to preserve their precarious political dominance instead.<sup>58</sup>

In North America and Europe, non-violent, mass political movements have resurfaced, particularly in the wake of the 2007–8 Global Financial Crisis (GFC). Anti-capitalism and class conflict have re-emerged, driven by the gross inequalities generated by neoliberal capitalism. “Occupy Wall Street” erupted in 2011 as the “99%” opposed to the “greed and corruption of the 1%.” With roots in 1960s US social and protest movements, “Occupy” was more akin to anarchism than Bolshevism: a “leaderless” “laboratory for participatory democracy.”<sup>59</sup>

It is in Europe and Britain, however, with their historical reservoir of socialist movements, that anti-neoliberal, party-political movements have begun to gain traction. Beleaguered Greece was first cab off the rank, with Syriza's upsurge; in Spain *Podemos* took wings; and the UK witnessed Jeremy

55. Vladimir Mau and Irina Starodubrovskaja, *The Challenge of Revolution: Contemporary Russia in Historical Perspective* (Oxford, 2001), 282–88, 336–37. Cf. Bessel, *Violence*, 55–57.

56. Graeme Gill and Roger D. Markwick, *Russia's Stillborn Democracy? From Gorbachev to Yeltsin* (Oxford, 2001), 205–26; David Lane, “‘Coloured Revolution’ as a Political Phenomenon,” in Stephen White and David Lane, eds., *Rethinking the “Coloured Revolutions”* (Oxon, 2013), 1–23.

57. Hewlett, *Blood and Progress*, 94–110.

58. Steve Ellner, “The Distinguishing Features of Latin America's New Left in Power: The Chávez, Morales, and Correa Governments,” *Latin American Perspectives* 39, no. 1 (January 2012): 96–114.

59. Heather Gautney, “What is Occupy Wall Street? The History of Leaderless Movements,” *The Washington Post*, October 10, 2011, at [www.washingtonpost.com/national/leadership/what-is-occupy-wall-street-the-history-of-leaderless-movements/2011/10/10/gIQAkwFjaL\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/leadership/what-is-occupy-wall-street-the-history-of-leaderless-movements/2011/10/10/gIQAkwFjaL_story.html) (last accessed June 13, 2017).

Corbyn's triumphal "Momentum" revolt within New Labour. Across the Atlantic, Bernie Sanders' avowedly "socialist" "political revolution" threatened the establishment presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton. Such party-political movements were a reaction to the complicity of center-left parties in implementing punishing solutions to the GFC, protecting the "1%," and for the 2003 invasion of Iraq despite vocal, massive public opposition. Militant, if predominantly peaceful, popular protests have fuelled the tide of neo-socialist movements, of which only *Syriza* and France's *Parti de gauche* have some roots in 1917.<sup>60</sup>

Obviously, such movements are in no way intent on Leninist "state smashing." Sanders' "political revolution" amounts to little more than encouraging more citizens to vote. *Podemos* has advocated a more democratic voting system based on "Autonomous Communities." Class certainly creeps into these movements' rhetoric—"the billionaire class" (Sanders), the "super rich" (Corbyn), a "financial casino" (Pablo Iglesias)—but not anti-capitalism; rather, all advocate "sustainable growth." Their approach to war making varies, however. Sanders has been inconsistent, supporting wars by Democrats but opposing wars by Republicans. Corbyn is a founder of "Stop the War," the "largest anti-war movement today in any NATO country," although neither he nor Iglesias advocate leaving NATO any longer. The cautious politics of these leaders does not vitiate the movements or the issues that motivate them. "Bernie or Bust" opposition to Clinton certainly opened "cracks" in the "hegemony of the two party system"; even more so has the election of authoritarian-populist Donald Trump to the US presidency.<sup>61</sup>

### Bloodless Revolution

The contemporary world faces many of the same issues that confronted Russia and Europe in 1917: endless war, authoritarian states, extremes of wealth and poverty, racial, national, and gender oppression. In a far more urbanized world, land reform does not have the same weight, but a new existential crisis has been added: global warming. This is not the "Age of Extremes," to invoke Eric Hobsbawm, wracked by total war, but planet Earth and the human species are faced with a stark choice. "Socialism or barbarism" was the alternative posed by Rosa Luxemburg in 1916. "Socialism or extinction" would be today's equivalent.<sup>62</sup> Apocalyptic as such a choice seems, none of the contemporary mass movements in the western world, socialist or otherwise, advocate political violence. On the contrary, in keeping with the predominant ethos of our age, they universally repudiate violence as a political weapon. Few look back to 1917 or the Bolsheviks for inspiration, but in their quest for alternative social organization and democratic decision-making, such movements unwittingly reprise the egalitarian, emancipatory, civil-society impulses bequeathed by the revolutions of 1917, stripped of the

60. Susan Watkins, "Oppositions," *New Left Review*, 98 (March-April 2016), 13–14.

61. *Ibid.*, 17–18, 22, 24.

62. See John Bellamy Foster, "Marxism and Ecology: Common Fronts of a Great Transition," *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine* 67, no. 7 (December 2015): 1–13.

garb of violence which was foisted on the meaning of revolution in another, infinitely more violent era and place. Nevertheless, they have yet to confront an enduring lesson from 1917: should “Twenty-first century socialism” really encroach on the prerogatives of the “1%” then it too might face “the furies” of state power.<sup>63</sup> Only a mass, democratic, counter-state can disarm such a threat with minimal, ethical, violence “in pursuit of emancipation.”<sup>64</sup> But this scenario presumes a massive social crisis in which established authority loses its legitimacy, “the essential precondition for the escalation of revolt into revolution.”<sup>65</sup>

63. Mayer, *The Furies*, 45–47.

64. Hewlett, *Blood and Progress*, esp. 101, 110, 164–73.

65. Mayer, *The Furies*, 35.