THE · FUTURE · OF

REVOLUTIONS

RETHINKING RADICAL CHANGE IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

EDITED BY

JOHN FORAN

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This book is dedicated with love and affection to Kum-Kum, constant revolutionary, and to the next generation, already practicing their revolutions on both of us – Cerina and Amal.

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I

Introduction to the Future of Revolutions

John Foran

The twentieth century we depart appears in many ways the classic age of revolutions, in Theda Skocpol's sense of 'rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures ... accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below' (1979: 4). As we now enter headlong the era of globalization, the future of revolutions is beginning to receive sustained scholarly attention. This is, to be sure, an intrinsically creative and speculative sort of work, attempting to answer such questions as: Is the age of revolutions over? If so, why? If not, what might the revolutions of the future look like? This book, based on a very active collaboration among a group of scholars of revolution, attempts to debate and explore these and other crucial questions about the future of revolutions under conditions of globalization.

The conservative position is that the age of revolutions is – of course – over (Nodia 2000: 167–71; see also Snyder 1999). And even as they refused to accept the celebratory end-of-history thesis, by the mid-1990s many activists and citizens in both First and Third Worlds implicitly seemed resigned to the view summed up by the dispirited acronym TINA – 'There is no alternative' – originally uttered by a jubilant Margaret Thatcher.[1] In a vein more sympathetic to those who would still like to transform the world, Jeff Goodwin and Eric Selbin have debated these propositions, with somewhat different (though not diametrically opposite) conclusions. Focusing on the type of state that has been historically vulnerable to revolution, Jeff Goodwin sees a diminished stage in the future for sharp revolutionary conflict – though not other progressive social movements – with the passing of colonialism and indiscriminately

repressive dictatorships: 'The ballot box is the coffin of revolutionaries' (Goodwin 1998: 8). Eric Selbin, well known for his advocacy of agency-centered explanations of revolutions, has countered, a bit surprisingly, with an economic argument: 'as global gaps between the haves and have-nots increase and neoliberalism fails to deliver on its promise, revolution will be more likely' (1998: 2). To this he has added his characteristic emphasis on cultures of resistance, noting that revolutions have always promised new beginnings, tapped into timeless myths and inspired magical possibilities; thus he wagers confidently that people will continue to articulate compelling stories about change to enable them.

My own views (Foran 1997) coincide with Selbin in this far from settled debate, feeling as I do that North–South inequality will only continue to deepen on many levels with the 'triumph' of neoliberalism, and that the Third World left has not suffered a fatal or permanent blow in its political creativity with the collapse of what has till now passed for socialism. Moreover, both Goodwin (Goodwin 1997: 18, though see his 2001a discussion of Eastern Europe) and Selbin, as well as Mark Katz (1999: ch. 5), who has commented on this discussion, have not taken seriously enough the possibility that revolutionaries may take non-violent and/or democratic routes to power, and in fact have done so, in Guatemala in the 1950s, May 1968 in France, Allende's Chile, Jamaica under Michael Manley, Iran (both in the Mussadeq era and in 1978), Eastern Europe and China in 1989, and Chiapas, to name the most notable cases (it is of course true that none of these found lasting success, with the ironic exception of the restoration of capitalism in the socialist bloc).

I will elaborate throughout this introduction on the reasons I think revolutions will continue to be with us, just as the contributors to this volume will debate this open-ended question throughout its pages. The issues addressed by us here will include: What is the impact of globalization, for ill or good, on the prospects of revolution? Should we reconsider the forms revolutions may take in changing circumstances? How are political cultures – especially notions about radically democratic revolutions – evolving, and what role will the new technologies, particularly those associated with cyberculture, play in them? What relationship – if any – exists or might come to exist between the emergent global justice movement[2] and national revolutionary actors? Finally, what is the import of the world-shattering events of 11 September 2001? Addressing these matters necessarily raises the question of how we might think about and analyze the future, to which I will first turn.

How to Study the Future

It is of course true that we cannot know the future. Social scientists have nevertheless spent much time and effort making predictions of all kinds (see Hechter et al. 1995 for a sample of views). As Carlos Vilas puts it in his essay, it is risky to assess the probability of a revolution in any given situation, and the question can only be settled when and if the anticipated revolution occurs (see also Irish-Bramble 2000; and the essays by Nikki Keddie, Timur Kuran and Jack Goldstone in Keddie 1995 on this question). Vilas quotes Eric Hobsbawm to the effect that revolutionary situations are 'about possibilities, and their analysis is not predictive' (Hobsbawm 1986: 19). *Thinking about* the future, I submit, is different from predicting it, and seems both less presumptuous and potentially more liberating in freeing the thinker from the problems of prediction and in opening up insights that might provide clues as to how to achieve a better future. It was in this spirit that I convened this project.

It was therefore surprising to see how resistant the group initially was to speculating boldly beyond the present. To encourage this, I offered three ideas about the methods that might be useful in doing so. One is to base one's analysis on the past, as a number of us do in the chapters that follow. This means talking about past revolutions and trying to 'filter' them through what might be different about the present in order to make some conjectures about what the future might look like. This seems a well-grounded, clearly social scientific, way to proceed. A second, not unrelated approach, is to look at the future in terms of theories. We hold among us a variety of theories about revolutions – their causes, processes and outcomes. These are of course generated mainly through comparison of past cases. Here, one takes the elements of those theories and again filters what we take to be the characteristics of how the present may be changing, measuring these against the factors identified by our theories and projecting them into the future (I do this in Foran 1997). A third, rather wide open angle is achieved by simply applying our imaginations, sociological and otherwise, to the future and speculating with playful seriousness about what might come. Each will do this with different measures of theory, casework and imagination, into which, as Carlos Vilas notes, enter also our personal ideological biases, hunches, fears or wishes. It was my brief to the group to push beyond any reluctance they felt about engaging in this kind of thinking, because this is what is specifically different about this project. And I purposely made the length of the chapters shorter rather than longer so we could have many voices, more than one often finds in an edited volume, to get more perspectives about this.

Globalization: The Highest Stage of Capitalism?

In his classic 1916 account of imperialism, Lenin conceived it as the highest stage of capitalism, and dated its rise in words that echo eerily a century later: 'the beginning of the twentieth century marks the turning point from the old capitalism to the new, from the domination of capital in general to the domination of finance capital' (Lenin 1997: 46; Eric Selbin notes this echo in his essay too). Just as the years around 1800 gave us the dawn of industrial capitalism, and those around 1900 the dawn of imperialism (and eventually neo-colonialism), in the early years of the new millennium the dawn of globalization seems to be breaking. As imperialism represented for Lenin a special stage in capitalism (1997: 90), globalization may well represent a special stage in imperialism and neo-colonialism. It is, less controversially perhaps, the latest stage in the development of capitalism.

But what *is* globalization? There is no space here to enter into a long discussion of the vast and growing literature on this multi-sided phenomenon. It would be hard to do better than the list of features identified by David Harvey in *Spaces of Hope* (here paraphrased by myself):

1. Financial deregulation and the breakdown of the Bretton Woods trade system, begun by the US in the early 1970s as a response to stagflation and then generalized elsewhere from 1979 to 1985. Bretton Woods was a hierarchical global system largely controlled by the US; today's system is more decentralized (with other poles in Japan and Europe), coordinated through a market, and with a volatile financial sector.
2. A 'galloping' wave of technological innovation, akin to past advances but accelerated by the arms trade and international science. Many popular analyses see this as driving or constituting globalization.
3. The 'information revolution' is similarly viewed by many as *the* essence of globalization: new forms of media and communication are changing workplaces and allowing financial transactions to take place instantaneously, as well as generating entirely new needs and wants.

Other features include: (4) reduced costs of moving commodities and people; (5) the development of transnational corporate export processing zones (EPZs), new forms of flexible production and elaborate global commodity chains; (6) a constantly growing wage labor force, more exploited, diverse and divided than in the past; (7) migrations that have changed the face of the working class; (8) hyper-urbanization; (9) the loss by many states over control of fiscal policy to IMF structural adjustment programs (SAPs); (10) the rise of global ecological issues and problems; and (11)

culture coming to the forefront in unpredictable ways as processes of both homogenization and resistance speed up (Harvey 2000: 61–7).

To this admirable working list must be added an equally momentous political development: the collapse of socialism in the USSR, Eastern Europe and elsewhere in the 1990s, bringing with it the end of the bipolar antagonisms of the cold war and the opening of a new period of US military and (would-be) geopolitical hegemony. Several of the essays in this collection, including those of Doug Kellner, Noel Parker and John Walton, address various dimensions of this process directly, and all use it as the backdrop for their reflections on the future.

Moreover, in the first of three thematic conversations included in this book, the group debates the validity of Perry Anderson's characterization of the present state of the world economy, based on the propositions that (1) America leads the world's economy and that it dictates the terms for the rest; (2) European social democracy in power has paradoxically deregulated and privatized in ways that conservative governments had feared to do; (3) Japanese capitalism has fallen into a deep slump and along with South Korea is being gradually pressured to submit to deregulatory standards with increasing unemployment; (4) China is eager to enter the World Trade Organization (WTO) at virtually any price (accomplished in November 2001) and is itself, of course, inviting in foreign capital and weeding out state industry; (5) India is for the first time now willingly dependent on the IMF; and (6) the new Russian economy is the weakest link in the global market system but, in spite of catastrophic regression in production and life expectancy, there has been no popular backlash (Anderson 2000).

Two themes in the globalization literature deserve special mention in this introduction since they bear on the future of revolutions quite directly: the debate on the extent of world poverty, and the thesis on the declining significance of the nation-state. The first hinges on the degree to which globalization has reduced or exacerbated inequality and poverty worldwide in the last decade or so. It seems clear enough that North–South relations remain highly hierarchical and unequal, and several of the essays in this volume defend this proposition directly. Misagh Parsa, for example, claims that economic disparities are on the rise virtually everywhere in the world, noting that the assets of the three richest people in the world in 1998 exceeded the combined GNP of the twenty-five least developed countries, with a population of over 500 million; while the assets of the 200 richest people in the world in the same year exceeded the combined income of 41 percent of the world's people (data based on UNDP 1999: 38; see also Hawken 2000: 15; Singer 1999: 153; Galeano

1998: 28).[3] Valentine Moghadam also draws on the UNDP's *Human Development Report* to document increasing inequality, globally and within societies. World Bank studies suggest, at least by one estimate, that '*world* income inequality in the 1980s and early 1990s grew much more rapidly than domestic income inequality in the U.S. and the U.K. ... global inequality has grown [in the past twenty years] as much as it did in the 200 years [previous]' (Murphy 2001: 350, his emphasis, citing Milanovic 1999). Inequality has grown both within and between nations, in North and South, as 'The gap in per capita income between the industrial and developing worlds tripled from 1960 to 1993' (S. Anderson et al. 2000: 53, citing UNDP 1996: 2; on inequality in the US and elsewhere in the First World, see Hahnel 1999: 8–9). And poverty has grown in absolute as well as relative terms: 200 million more people entered absolute poverty between 1995 and 1999 (Brecher et al. 1999). As Robin Hahnel puts it:

> As best as I can tell, for every NIC (Newly Industrializing Country) there were 10 FEBs (countries Falling Ever-more Behind) during the neoliberal 'boom'. And for every wealthy beneficiary of rising stock process, rising profit shares, and rising high-end salaries, there were 10 victims of declining real wages, decreased job security, and lost benefits. The recent experiment in deregulation and globalization was indeed both 'the best of times and the worst of times'. But unfortunately it was the best of times for only a few, and the worst of times for most. At least that is what had been happening *before* the bubble burst in July 1997. (1999: 12, emphasis in the original)

Contributor Noel Parker makes an important connnection between the trend and its mediation by new technologies: 'there is plenty of evidence that inequalities of wealth and of power become both more marked and, through the effects of global communication, more *visible* under conditions of globalization.' While there remain important questions about the degree to which processes of globalization are the key causes, the general trend seems established: Chossudovsky (1998) and Murphy (2001) discuss the complexity of the data and confirm my conclusion here, with the former opening his survey thus: 'The late 20th century will go down in world history as a period of global impoverishment' (Chossudovsky 1998: 293). It is true that the link between poverty and inequality and globalization is complex and indeed disputed (compare Hahnel 1999: 111–5 with Ghose 2000), but if we consider the devastating consequences of Third World debt and structural adjustment for development, as John Walton does in this volume, the impact of globalization seems clear enough and should be borne in mind in the discussions that follow.

There is also a widespread assumption in the literature that globalization has weakened the power of nation-states. Though this is a complex

issue as well and even further from being settled, here I am more skeptical, and for reasons that bear on the future of revolutions. The world economy is changing, to be sure, as transnational companies develop ever greater capacities to escape the regulation of states, control the distribution of profits along commodity chains, and depress the wages of workers. This line of reasoning is then sometimes extended by scholars of revolution to the corollary that state power is no longer a worthwhile goal, undermining the logic and viability of revolutionary activity. This debate can be addressed on several levels, of which at least two are salient in these pages: whether state power is in fact waning irreversibly, and whether revolutionaries have shifted or therefore should shift the focus of their struggles.

The declining significance of the state is most often attributed to the loss by Third World states of control over fiscal policy to IMF structural adjustment programs, and the vulnerability of all states to the volatility of huge unregulated financial markets and the passing of sovereignty in trade matters to transnational bodies like the WTO that favor multinational corporations in economic disputes with nation-states. These new facts are indisputable, but some see in this situation of crisis a *renewed* role for states to play in trying to buffer their citizens against such forces, making the state a key potential locus of resistance to globalization – defending jobs, ethnic and cultural identities, the environment, welfare benefits and much more (Harvey 2000: 65; Evans 1995). As Farideh Farhi puts it in her essay:

> The state may no longer be perceived as the body to be 'taken over' and turned into an instrument of drastic social change. But the way it inserts itself into social, economic and cultural life and the way its institutional arrangements inhibit 'meaningful' as opposed to superficial or procedural democratic participation have become more and more crystallized as the focal point of political struggle in countries as varied as Iran, Indonesia, Peru, Mexico and so on.

Another approach is that of George and Jane Collier in this volume, who present the interesting thesis that there has been a shift from economic weakening of states through SAPs and trade agreements to strengthening a formally democratic law-and-order state with military and legal guarantees for foreign investors. This shift – or, perhaps better put, the addition of a second emphasis – in globalization strategies appears to be a response to the unrest unleashed by SAPs.

We should perhaps therefore not rush too quickly to conclude that the classic revolutionary goal of seizing state power is no longer relevant or viable. For Jeff Goodwin,

> Rather than uniformly diminishing states, in fact, globalization has been just as likely to spur attempts to employ and, if necessary, expand state power for the purposes of enhancing global competitiveness.... There is no reason to believe, in any event, that in the future people will accept the depredations of authoritarian states and shun revolutionaries on the grounds that state power 'ain't what it used to be'.

At the same time, new revolutionary movements like the Zapatistas *have* questioned this goal, reflecting their subtle understandings of the workings of political power in conditions of globalization: that creating democratic spaces for the free discussion of political, economic and cultural alternatives to globalization is a more suitable goal for revolutionaries than direct seizure of state power, and that linking the national liberation struggle to both local needs and global concerns might be the most effective – if even more daunting – coalition-building project for deep social transformation. I will say more about the Zapatistas below.

The Revolutions of the Future

Hopefully, these brief remarks suffice to indicate the timeliness of a call for reflecting on the future of revolutions in the era of globalization. It is time now to highlight some of the themes that this book addresses more specifically about how revolution may be changing in these emerging new circumstances.

Redefinitions

Jeff Goodwin rightly notes that the answer to the question of whether there will be more revolutions in the future depends on how we define the term. He sees in the future fewer 'movements seeking to radically recast national societies by seizing state power through extraparliamentary, though not necessarily violent, means' but more 'mass movements for social justice'. Jeffery Paige, after an extensive survey of definitions of revolutions, proposes a new one:

> A revolution is a rapid and fundamental transformation in the categories of social life and consciousness, the metaphysical assumptions on which these categories are based, and the power relations in which they are expressed as a result of widespread popular acceptance of a utopian alternative to the current social order.

He goes on:

> Does revolution have a future? The answer to this question depends on the definition chosen. If revolution means the violent seizure of state power though class-based revolts from below the answer is almost certainly no.... Prospects look very different, however, from the perspective of an alternative definition stressing changes in social categories and metaphysical assumptions.

He concludes:

> The line of argument presented here does not suggest that such a revolutionary transformation need necessarily be violent, based on worldwide class struggle, or involve seizures of sovereign power at the national or international level, although any or all of these things could occur. It could well be, on the other hand, that a deepening of the currents of human rights, the increasing assertiveness of the formally suppressed gender, ethnic, age and class groups and the rise of the global South may bring the world to a kind of revolutionary transformation in consciousness, lived social experience and power relations seen previously only in particular national societies.

Democracy and revolution

Redefining revolutions in this way opens up interesting debates about the relationship of democracy to radical social transformation. Jeff Goodwin and Misagh Parsa see formal democratization as decreasing the chances for revolutions by channeling discontent into legal arenas. In addition, both Farideh Farhi and Abdollah Dashti note the embrace of 'democracy' by the forces of globalization from above, and the rhetorical limits and demobilizing effects of this, the practical devaluation and diminishing of its liberatory content. But Farhi, Dashti and I engage in a common search for the democratic, non-violent roots of past and future revolutions, and Goodwin himself and Jeffery Paige are also interested in this for the future. There are differences: Farhi is focused on mass civil disobedience (Iran 1979; Eastern Europe 1989; Indonesia, Serbia and South Africa in the 1990s); Dashti on post-revolutionary participatory democracy; and I on electoral paths, among others, as in Chile under Allende, Guatemala in the Arbenz/Arévalo era, post-1994 Chiapas, El Salvador since the 1992 peace accords, Uruguay and Iran at present. Christopher McAuley, following Samir Amin and like Dashti, points hopefully to the prospects for a participatory democracy with special emphasis on protecting and extending the political participation and social well-being of rural populations; he sees the original Zapatismo of the first Mexican revolution as the best historical model of this practice, and parts of Asia and Africa as the most likely future sites for such revolutions. For him, autocentric development requires autonomous communities directly engaged in setting

their own agendas. The contributors to this volume express a common interest in the education of civil society through a Gramscian war of position. All of us are pushing away from the violent models of the past, even as some – most compellingly Adolfo Gilly – see violence as endemic to conflict in today's world.

New cultures, new technologies

These debates open onto the broader issues of culture and technologies in the revolutions of the future. As in other matters, Jeff Goodwin advances a healthy skepticism: 'mass support for revolution typically derives less from attractive visions of the future – although such visions have been important for intellectuals – than from a widely shared conviction that the status quo is simply unendurable.' In this he follows Jorge Castañeda:

> The most powerful argument in the hands of the left in Latin America – or anywhere else – has never been, and in all likelihood will never be, exclusively the intrinsic merit or viability of the alternative it proposes. Its strong suit is the morally unacceptable character of life as the overwhelming majority of the region's inhabitants live it. (1993: 254)

Adolfo Gilly's reading of the subaltern studies approach at first appears to confirm this view of the motivating imagery of resistance as backward looking, but ultimately concludes 'Such is the way an original discourse is forged in every revolution or rebellious movement, at once old and new and shared by all: not the preservation of the past, but the redemption of its hopes in the novelty, discourse and actions of the revolution.' The apparent contradiction is perhaps resolved by noting Gilly's emphasis on everyday life and experience, at once the stuff of a moral defense of past rights encroached upon and future-oriented imaginaries. Gilly reminds us of Walter Benjamin's rereading: 'For Marx, revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps things are different. Perhaps revolutions are the way that humanity, riding on this train, reaches for the emergency brake' (1990: 1232). Jeff Goodwin also invokes Marx to counterpose future and past practices in respect of culture: 'To paraphrase Marx, the socialist movements of the twenty-first century cannot draw their poetry from the past, but only from the future.' Farideh Farhi, Jeffery Paige, Abdollah Dashti and Christopher McAuley have all advanced visions of a more participatory culture based on their readings of the past. For Valentine Moghadam, this culture is becoming more feminist in the current conjuncture. In my own view, the most revolutionary cultures of the future will repose on a magical mixture of realism and utopianism, guaranteed