

On Revolutions

by [Robert Bruce](#) (September 2020)



Burning Heads, Maciej Hoffman, 2010

Marxism was always a cold fish. It needed a spirit of Russian fanaticism to stir lifeless axioms into great deeds and the desperate attempts of succeeding generations of intellectuals to create an existentialist or Freudian Marxism simply highlighted the fact that their spiritual nourishment came from other sources. Lenin, pushing the bare mind of German science to extremes it could never satisfy, once ventured that only a grasp of dialectics was necessary to be initiated into the cult (it was a science after all), but nothing about his own personality suggested he believed it, and in practice it

would have denied its adherents that most satisfying of elixirs. A good Marxist needed hatred before he left the salon and, fortunately for him, the bourgeoisie was already a detestable figure. Artists and reactionary aristocrats had already put the work in and, given so many Marxists were aspirant writers, it is no surprise they ended up taking their cue from Nietzsche whose broadsides against the herd morality of Europe's nascent democracies had a charm surplus value could not compete with. One must of course be on the side of the workers, but what happens when they have coloured televisions? The Frankfurt School neatly squared the dilemma by calling them 'bourgeoisie' and this turn of the knife required no great originality of thought. Oscar Wilde had said the same thing and, however whimsically it was conceived, the *Soul of Man under Socialism*, with its disparagement of the dignity of labour and its contempt for the respectable poor (one can pity them but one can never admire them), has always been closer to the heart of Marxist intellectuals than any of their eponymous heroes' lumbering tomes. It is, in a word, bohemian, and conspicuously amoral. Before the sixties, the audience for this kind of frivolity was modest but after decades of expanding and cheapening university education, most advanced nations had created a vast intellectual proletariat. Karl Mannheim had a sensitive enough antenna to warn of the consequences of this democratising of pursuits of the mind, and the popular vocabulary of sixties activists pointed to the problem. In that promiscuous decade, everyone was his own genius or, to use a term which has not lost its magic, *creative*. It never quite convinces even now, and there was enough of a dissonance in the last century to create cleft personalities in spades. Shut off from the baubles of the ancient regime they sought their acclamation from the mob.

As Hoffer noted, genuinely creative men of words gravitate towards order and the mediocre can maintain their status only by inciting a permanent instability which levels all distinctions. It is scarcely a surprise that a passion for

destruction soon became ubiquitous, particularly in countries where the status markers of academic distinction were in short supply. 18th century Scotland was graced by clever men and enough sinecures in Old Corruption to keep them occupied. Tsarist Russia fudged the balance and is an abject example of what befalls any country that produces more intellectuals than it can absorb. It was too clever by half and the name of their largest movement, the nihilists, said it all. The sheer violence of this era of self-immolating young men is frequently overlooked but the accompanying moral panic was enough to prompt Joseph Conrad's famous psychological portrait of the terrorist man of letters. The Secret Agent pullulates with his rage and its depiction of the violent narcissism behind it has never lost its force.

To break up the superstition and worship of legality should be our aim. Nothing would please me more than to see Inspector Heat and his likes take to shooting us down in broad daylight with the approval of the public. Half our battle would be won then; the disintegration of the old morality would have set in in its very temple. That is what you ought to aim at. But you revolutionists will never understand that. You plan the future; you lose yourselves in reveries of economical systems derived from what is; whereas what's wanted is a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life. That sort of future will take care of itself if you will only make room for it. Therefore, I would shovel my stuff in heaps at the corners of the streets if I had enough for that; and as I haven't, I do my best by perfecting a really dependable detonator. —Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*

It is a grim picture, and Conrad's special talent was to see that none of this was the by-product of a redeeming altruism. The political is almost entirely personal, and his fanatics are nowhere more dismissive of their tame comrades when they allow themselves to be carried away by 'reveries' of

social and economic transformation. They wish to sever every sentimental bond and, in this sacred endeavour, even Nechayev's criminal—for him 'the only true revolutionary'—stands condemned as lacking the 'essential despair.' [\[1\]](#) Small wonder such violent self-absorption should appeal to clever misfits. Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber was by all accounts obsessed with the Secret Agent, and if his dark journey of the soul reaped a more bitter harvest than most, the personality trait is a familiar one, and left its imprint on the development of Marxist thought.

Consider ideology, a key term in the Marxist schema, and in its original usage, a pejorative word denoting a false system of ideas which serves the interests of the ruling class. Ideology in this sense, is the distorted epiphenomena of more fundamental causes and is to be sharply distinguished from scientific theories which apprehended the laws of historical necessity. Marx famously could only rescue his theory from the charge that it itself was an ideological rationalization by enlisting some dubious Hegelian tropes, but by 1905 even Lenin, an admirer of the nihilist Chernshevsky, was talking of Marxism as an *ideology*, no longer conceived as something causally determined *but as the projection of a will*. The Nietzschean facelift is unmistakable and the growing preoccupation with the *act* of revolution hinted at similar priorities. Initially the violent theatre was a dispensable side effect of the cause, and revolution in any case did not necessarily imply a violent seizure of power so much as a radical social transformation which could be attained by peaceful means. Even Marx himself acknowledged at times that in countries like Britain, this could be achieved through democratic politics and, as the fledgling welfare states delivered tangible benefits, a spirit of peaceful gradualism came to permeate the workers movement. For most bourgeoisie theoreticians, by contrast, a certain joy of the knife was essential, and the increasing immiseration of the proletariat, 'the worse the better,' was as much a wish projection as a

premise of cod-economic science. Rosa Luxembourgn's dialectic of spontaneity and organisation, with its almost mystical invocation of 'consciousness raising' struggle amongst the masses and her vitriolic attacks on blue collar trade union bosses, is atypical of this tendency. Let it be remembered that her enduring popularity rests as much on her violent martyrdom as her (comprehensively refuted) theories on monopoly capitalism and imperialism. It is an aesthetic rather than scientific impulse and was bound to cast a shadow over the nominal destination of all political action. Socialists nominally yearned for a well-fed democracy, but It is remarkable how many earnest left-wing intellectuals were troubled by the brooding thought that their utopia would be a colossal bore. In George Bernard Shaw this tension is palpable. In Kojève, it is all consuming—even if he kept the old deity in place. In more substantial men of action it followed its natural logical course to fascism, the most successful of Marxist heresies.

Beginning his career as a marginal Marxist thinker, Sorel's criticism of the reifying character of orthodox Marxism and its tendency to paralyse vital impulses led him to view Marxism not as a scientific theory but as an energizing 'myth' whose 'truth' was simply a function of its ability to move men to great deeds. All of which, needless to say, begged the question—*what deeds? which causes?* In the case of Sorel's political journey, this was a live question: his defection from the Socialists to Charles Marraus proto fascist Action Francais was followed by a stampede of French syndicalists and Maurassists into the Circle Proudhon, the prototype of a Left fascism which was to become so common in the 1930s. So much of our contemporary understanding of fascism is a product of laboured Marxist analysis that we still find it difficult to recognise these elements of kindredness between the extreme left and right, but they were obvious at the time. Contrary to heroic Marxist mythology, the Conservative Revolutionaries whose ideas provided the fascist-Nazi movement with much of

its ideological cement, were more hostile to Bourgeois civilisation than to communism, and both were fascinated by the idea of a violent relief from the mediocrity that our own therapeutic morality is busily hoarding up. What is most striking, moreover, is the extent to which the trendy postmodernism ushered in by the sixties' counterculture has its philosophical roots in this proto-fascist thinking. The influence of Martin Heidegger on the French leading lights of Postmodernity is too obvious to require much elaboration, but the influence of French surrealist George Bataille, whose philosophy is marked by an obsession with virility, combat and the seeking out of violent death, has not received the attention it might have merited, especially in view of his influence on that hero of the American academy, Foucault. Here was a man so amoral that he made Noam Chomsky shudder but, when he met his end via San Francisco's seedy bathhouses, his hard-earned death was treated as pious martyrdom. Bad enough, but he wasn't just a masochist, he was a sadist and was happy enough to see other members of the 'gay community' hanged off cranes if the executioners chanted *Death to America*. And who was his greatest philosophical idol? No less a man than the Marquis de Sade who spiced up his libertinism with a good deal of raping. The temptation to excuse these inconvenient details as the personal flaws of someone whose social gospel of free love stands aloft from these desecrations is evidently widely shared amongst voyeuristic American intellectuals, but it is prudent surely to ask why the urge resurfaces. Dostoyevsky did not pluck his characters from a void. Stavrogin is closely modelled on young men like Nikolay Speshnev who, in his cultivated egotism, achieved precisely the effect on polite Russian society that Conrad's anarchists desired. In *The Possessed*, Stavrogin rapes a mentally disabled child to prove he was beyond Good and Evil. The act didn't need to be justified. This blissful 'moral carnality' was the supreme justification of his life, and you get a measure of how important this wallowing in spiritual grandiosity can be in the speech codes of clever criminals. When Ian Brady was asked

at the end of a force-fed European life sentence what he got from it all, he responded in a manner any intellectual would understand— 'Existential experience.' The language has an anaesthetising banality to it and we are all the worse for it. If he hadn't inherited such sterile neologisms, he might have just said he enjoyed molesting and murdering children, and there at least we would have had a clear marker. Throw in the debased vocabulary and we have a *continuum*. It's an ominous throwaway term and its strategic intent is clear. Repeat it often enough and the most unimpressive deprivations can destroy a life. Everyone is a victim and, as Nietzsche saw only too well, they are the worst haters. This lack of perspective is pardonable amongst children but, given a child might destroy the world if he could, it is better to push them into the workplace than ennui ridden safe spaces where deferred humiliations mount. This is the macropoint that is frequently overlooked in the amusing parodies on trigger warnings. It overlooks a colossal miscalculation in social policy while all the fascinating psychological studies on the effect of social media overlook the essential point that decades of soft Marxist indoctrination has prepared us for it. If you doubt it, consider the notion of structural violence. It is original sin in atheist drag and works the same spell—*everyone* is guilty. Why not wage war on unrepentant sinners? In America, where mushy talk of self-actualisation has been in vogue for a while, this inversion of the Puritan ethic has had disastrous results and accounts for its peculiar political polarisation. Liberals (it is a confusingly vast designation to Europeans like me) don't just disagree with conservatives, they *hate* them, and have largely replaced debate with ill-lettered exorcisms. If I believed as they did, I would reproach myself for not drawing the obvious conclusions.

In the sixties, there was just enough distance from the war for this aestheticisation of cruelty to become *de rigueur* again, and the 'necessary murder' made a lugubrious comeback.

Few books were more influential amongst the radical intelligentsia than Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* which, shorn of its superficial political content, amounted to an endorsement of violence as therapy. Norman Mailer's *The Executioner's Song* was an ode to the murderer of two clerks while pointing to a suitably petit bourgeoisie scapegoat. And all this in a decade when the vocabulary of a bleak nihilism was mainstreamed into the banal catchphrases of everyday democratic speech (think 'lifestyle,' 'charisma,' and 'values'). The infatuation with terrorists that took root in that puerile decade was an early warning sign of where it would lead and how much comfort is it in any case to say that most people don't have the moral fibre to act out these fantasies. The thought is bad enough. Fellow travellers are almost as repulsive as the tawdry men of action they admire for in their desensitised herd morality they provide the absolution which all fanatics need. It is a treason of the mind and a searing microaggression to boot. The significance of Antifa, that revolting form of outdoor relief for America's feeblest generation, should not be overlooked in all this. Their convictions have already been formed by the nihilism soft-pedalled by the greying tenured hacks who swoon on young people's 'passion' as if shrill rage is its own virtue and do we not after all commend a man if he has the courage of his convictions?

But what if the best lack all conviction and the worst are full of passionate intensity?

Besides that first order problem, pointing out that Marxists don't understand the role of markets is an exercise in futility.

Postscript

On Necessary Distinctions

Like so many student radical icons, Daniel Cohn-Bendit exchanged violent street theatre for trendy pedagogy and his biographical reflections on his experiences in an experimental kindergarten in Frankfurt in the seventies [leave little](#) to the imagination.

Germany's Green Party leader regrets campaign to 'legalise paedophilia'

The head of Germany's Green Party has expressed regret about a two-decade-old political pamphlet containing calls to legalise some forms of pedophilia.



Green MEP Daniel Cohn-Bendit claimed in a 1975 book that he interacted sexually with children while working at a kindergarten.

'My constant flirt with all the children soon took on erotic characteristics. I could really feel how, from the age of five, the small girls had already learnt to make passes at me. It's hardly believable. Most of the time I was fairly defenceless.'

Later he added: 'It has happened to me several times that a few children opened the flies of my trousers and started to stroke me. I reacted differently each time, according to the circumstances, but their desire confronted me with problems. I asked them: 'Why don't you play with each other, why have you chosen me and not other children?' But when they insisted on it, I then stroked them. For that reason, I was accused of perverted behaviour.'

Go figure.

In an age where our public virtue is exhausted by a kitsch sentimentality about a childhood we have profaned, Cohn-Bendit's nauseating comments are particularly shocking and have come back to haunt his career in a way that was barely conceivable in earlier decades. As late as 1986, the German Green Party passed a resolution advocating the

legalisation of non-violent sexual relations between adults and children. This clear endorsement of paedophilia was only pushing the premises of the counterculture to its logical conclusion, and it is these that provide the real problem. Perverts are every society's misfortune but to give them an ideological warrant is a much bigger problem. For all his cringing exculpations, Cohn-Bendit's contextual explication (to use the favoured Tariq Ramadan formulae) only restates the problem. Elaborating a particularly unpromising and ill-advised line of defence in *Der Spiegel*, Cohn-Bendit was at pains to point out that he did not have the courage of his convictions, and that he was, in a provocative fashion, just trying to provoke bourgeois conventions: 'One of the problems in the kindergarten was in our opinion that conservatives acknowledged children's sexuality in a shamefaced way, whereas we wanted to support children to develop it without constraint.'

To read these lines is to be reminded of the wise proverb against digging in holes, but if Cohn-Bendit is a particularly repulsive specimen of the greying sixty-eighters—the lesser evils become more and more difficult to find. And how far in any case are Cohn-Bendit's weasel words removed from the animating logic of sex education, the brainchild of another odious intellectual with sinister intentions?[\[2\]](#) The Catholic church at its worst could not compete with the moral sewer enveloping Antifa, and to judge by the Irish experience the most morbid priest would be hard pushed to compete.

REVEALED: Antifa has a pedophile problem



Across the globe, it's been discovered that many organized antifa groups have trouble with pedophilia in their ranks.

I have always mistrusted men who swoon at the passion of young people—there's an unmistakable creepiness to it and

it's a very chattering class vice. The poor by contrast have a well-formed antenna even if it is prone to malfunction when the philology is defective. In a notorious incident in Wales a hapless paediatrician overestimated local literacy levels and his house was firebombed.

[\[1\]](#) Thus— “Thieving was not a sheer absurdity. It was a form of human industry, perverse indeed, but still an industry exercised in an industrious world; it was work undertaken for the same reason as the work in potteries, in coal mines, in fields, in tool-grinding shops. It was labour, whose practical difference from the other forms of labour consisted in the nature of its risk, which did not lie in ankylosis, or lead poisoning, or fire-damp, or gritty dust, but in what may be briefly defined in its own special phraseology as “Seven years’ hard.” Chief Inspector Heat was, of course, not insensible to the gravity of moral differences. But neither were the thieves he had been looking after. They submitted to the severe sanction of a morality familiar to Chief Inspector Heat with a certain resignation.

[\[2\]](#) Georg Lukacs, Hungarian Commissar for Culture in Bela Kun’s Red Republic.

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