

## ***Rethinking Dual Power***

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### *Abstract*

Dual power as a strategic concept plays a central role in the conceptualization of the revolutionary situation in Russia during 1917, both in the sense of the characterization of a particular conjuncture as revolutionary, but also as strategic direction, acquiring after October 1917 canonical status. Although associated with a 'classical' insurrectionary sequence, later discussions of dual power placed more emphasis on the more complex, uneven and lasting character of any potentially revolutionary strategy, from Gramsci's distinction between war of movement and war of position to the debates on strategy in the 1970s. Recently, discussions of dual power have resurfaced in the context of the debates on the contradictions of contemporary attempts towards some form of 'left governance', but also in interventions by theorists such as Fredric Jameson. The aim of this presentation is to return to crucial moments of these debates in order to suggest it is necessary to move beyond thinking about dual power of either a typology of insurrectionary sequences or the simple articulation of parliamentary majority and movements from below. In this sense, instead of limiting it to the particular conjuncture of a revolutionary situation, it is better to think of a permanent dual power as an integral aspect of any potentially revolutionary strategy, or as a permanent trait of any politics of emancipation.

## *Introduction*

For a long period, the Left tended to be associated with resistance and struggle not political power or hegemony. Questions of strategy seemed like a luxury. Recently questions regarding political power, either governmental or from below, have returned to the forefront of the political and theoretical debate. In what follows, I attempt to revisit one crucial notion that we associate with Lenin and the Russian revolutionary sequence, a notion with relevance for contemporary debates.

### *1. Dual power as a condition for revolutionary transformation*

The notion of dual power plays a central role in Lenin's thinking on revolutionary politics. It is upon this conception of dual power that he formulates his conceptualization of the revolutionary situation and of the possibility of a broader process of revolutionary transformation after the first breakthrough caused by the February 1917 revolution. For Lenin the highly original character of the conjuncture and the possibility to move towards a broadening of the scope of the revolutionary process is exemplified in the emergence of a dual power situation.

The highly remarkable feature of our revolution is that it has brought about a dual power. This fact must be grasped first and foremost: unless it is understood, we cannot advance. We must know how to supplement and amend old "formulas", for example, those of Bolshevism, for while they have been found to

be correct on the whole, their concrete realisation has turned out to be different. Nobody previously thought, or could have thought, of a dual power.<sup>1</sup>

This conception emerges in a period of intense debate within the Bolsheviks. Lars T. Lih and Eric Blanc<sup>2</sup> have recently confronted the standard narrative that Lenin alone foresaw the revolutionary potential, insisted on socialist revolution and 're-armed' the Bolsheviks and have attributed this to later attempts to re-write the history and justify subsequent choices, either by Trotsky or by Stalin. According to their researches, demands for 'All power to the soviets' and a discussion on the need to escalate the revolutionary practices was already part of the debate. In this sense Lenin's positions were not received with the hostility suggested in the classical narrative. However, I still think that there is a certain distance or a difference in modality in the way Lenin perceives the conjuncture and in this sense some form of loneliness in regards to the rest of the Bolsheviks. Lenin seems to gradually abandon the conception of the democratic revolution that had been up to then the backbone of the strategy of the revolutionary movement in Russia, and to move towards the possibility of a seizure of power and the initiation of a socialist transformation process. There is no doubt that the conception of the 'democratic revolution' that the Bolsheviks shared included not only democratic demands but also broader class demands that pointed towards a transition program (and indeed the first proclamations of the new Soviet power after the October insurrection pointed towards full accomplishment of the demands inscribed in the context of the 'democratic revolution'). However, Lenin in a certain way thinks beyond simply broadening

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<sup>1</sup> LCW, 24, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Lih 2017; Blanc 2017.

the achievements of the February Revolution in the sense of actually accomplishing the democratic revolution, by means of a Constituent Assembly and the new possibilities opened for proletarian action. In contrast, Lenin insisted that there was the possibility for more profound revolutionary rupture in socialist direction, based upon the vanguard role of the proletariat in an alliance with the peasant rebellion and materialized in the revolutionary direction of the Soviets of workers and soldiers. The crucial premise in Lenin's argumentation was the expansion and radicalisation of the Soviets as the political form that expressed the defining proletarian orientation towards rupture and revolutionary transformation.

What is this dual power? Alongside the Provisional Government, the government of the bourgeoisie, another government has arisen, so far weak and incipient; but undoubtedly a government that actually exists and is growing—the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

This assessment is very important because it shows that Lenin was not thinking after the February Revolution in terms of an accomplished break or in terms of a political line to simply 'build' politically upon the results and the dynamics of the 'democratic revolution'. In contrast, he was thinking in terms of a revolutionary situation on progress, of a social and political sequence still in the making. Moreover, he stressed the explosive co-existence of two antagonistic tendencies, two antagonistic forms of power. On the one hand, the power of the Provisional Government and on the other hand the Power of the Soviets. The antagonistic character of the co-existence of these two forms of power was a reflection of the

antagonistic class character of each one. In this sense, dual power is a particular moment of an escalated form of class struggle. For Lenin, at that particular conjuncture, dual power represented a particular 'moment' of confrontation between two antagonistic tendencies and political projects, which could lead to one pole of the contradiction prevailing over the other, exactly because they represented not only antagonistic class alliances but also antagonistic practices of politics.

What is the class composition of this other government? It consists of the proletariat and the peasants (in soldiers' uniforms). What is the political nature of this government? It is a revolutionary dictatorship, i.e., a power directly based on revolutionary seizure, on the direct initiative of the people from below, and not on a law enacted by a centralised state power. It is an entirely different kind of power from the one that generally exists in the parliamentary bourgeois-democratic republics of the usual type still prevailing in the advanced countries of Europe and America. This circumstance is often overlooked, often not given enough thought, yet it is the crux of the matter. This power is of the same type as the Paris Commune of 1871.<sup>3</sup>

It is important that Lenin did not describe the power of the Soviets in terms that were commensurate or symmetrical to bourgeois exercise of power. In contrast, we are dealing here with a different and antagonistic form of power, a different practice of politics. This is stressed by his assessment of the main characteristics of the Paris Commune as a form of power.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

The fundamental characteristics of this type are: (1) the source of power is not a law previously discussed and enacted by parliament, but the direct initiative of the people from below, in their local areas—direct “seizure”, to use a current expression; (2) the replacement of the police and the army, which are institutions divorced from the people and set against the people, by the direct arming of the whole people; order in the state under such a power is maintained by the armed workers and peasants themselves, by the armed people themselves; (3) officialdom, the bureaucracy, are either similarly replaced by the direct rule of the people themselves or at least placed under special control; they not only become elected officials, but are also subject to recall at the people’s first demand; they are reduced to the position of simple agents; from a privileged group holding “jobs” remunerated on a high, bourgeois scale, they become workers of a special “arm of the service”, whose remuneration does not exceed the ordinary pay of a competent worker.<sup>4</sup>

I believe that this is an important point. Lenin takes up a line of reasoning that we also find in Marx and his confrontation with Paris Commune and writings such as *Civil War in France*. It is the conception that during a period of revolutionary transition the political form of the dictatorship of the proletariat is radically incommensurate and antagonistic to the bourgeois state. We are not dealing with the alteration of classes in control of the same state apparatus but with a new practice of politics and new form of the organization state power, aiming at the withering away of the state. Lenin in his very attentive reading of the texts of Marx and Engels in *State and Revolution* stressed this point:

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<sup>4</sup> CLW, 24, pp. 38-39.

The only “correction” Marx thought it necessary to make to the Communist Manifesto he made on the basis of the revolutionary experience of the Paris Communards.

The last preface to the new German edition of the Communist Manifesto, signed by both its authors, is dated June 24, 1872. In this preface the authors, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, say that the programme of the Communist Manifesto “has in some details become out-of-date”, and they go on to say:

*“...One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that ‘the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes’....”<sup>5</sup>*

However, what were the institutions that the Commune brought forward? In Marx’s conception, which Lenin studied attentively on the eve of the October Revolution, it is obvious that we are not dealing with a parallel or alternative state apparatus but with autonomous forms of working class organization, antagonistic to the bourgeois state. These forms of organization can contribute to a process of transformation that does not refer simply to the political forms but also –and above all– to the relations of production. As Étienne Balibar has suggested we can find here the core of a new and revolutionary practice of politics, one that represents a ‘rectification’ of the *Communist Manifesto*.

There is a double condition for this revolutionary transformation and only this enables to understand the role that it can immediately play in the transformation of the relations of production which lead to the disappearance of the relations of exploitation.

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<sup>5</sup> LCW, vol. 25, p. 419.

1. The first condition is the existence, *besides* the state apparatus of political organizations of a new type, mass political organisations, *political organisations of workers*, which control and subsume the state apparatus, even in its new form [...]

2. However, the second condition is even more important, because it is the condition of the preceding one: it is *the penetration of political practice to the sphere of "labour", of production*. In other words, it is the end of the absolute separation, developed by capitalism itself, between 'politics' and economics'. Not in the sense of an 'economic policy' that has nothing new, not even by the transfer of political power to workers, but *in order to exercise it as workers*, and without stopping workers, the transfer, *in the sphere of production of an entire part of political practice*. Therefore we can think that work, and before it social conditions, become not only a 'socially useful' and 'socially organised' practice, but a *political practice*.<sup>6</sup>

It is within this framework that Balibar stressed the importance of the Soviets. For Balibar the soviets were a dialectical form representing at the same time the possibility of a new form of state power and the mass organization of the subaltern masses in ways that transform the very practice of politics.

What made possible the seizure of power in the Russian Revolution, what enabled the Bolshevik *Party* to give tactical leadership to the seizure of power, was the existence of an unprecedented mass movement of workers, peasants and soldiers, and the fact that this movement found in the Russian revolutionary tradition the forms of organization which it needed: the 'Soviets'. This therefore is the double, dialectical aspect of the Soviets; *both*, in contradictory fashion, the

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<sup>6</sup> Balibar 1974, pp. 96-97.



embryo of a new State, of a new type of State apparatus, *and* the direct organization of the masses, distinct from *every* State, transforming political activity, on the scale of the most general questions (first of all that of war and peace) from the affair of specialists or representatives quite distant from the masses into an affair of the masses themselves. That is why the October Revolution was able to set about destroying the bourgeois State apparatus, both 'from above' and 'from below'. And that is why the Soviets are historically revolutionary, coming after the Paris Commune, and before other forms most of which are still to be invented.<sup>7</sup>

Returning to Lenin, we have to stress that his position was largely determined by the insistence that we have to discern the different social classes and blocs behind historical dynamics and developments and in particular to discern opposing and antagonistic class strategies within the same terrain. In this sense, the emergence of the Provisional Government alongside the Soviets is the expression of an open and active contradiction, the contradiction between two opposing social blocs and class strategies. The question regarding the relation to the Provisional government was not a tactical but a strategic one, because it represented a social bloc under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie and a form of power and political practice materializing this hegemony. Consequently, the question of tactic must be based upon an analysis of the relation of class forces. Moreover, this assessment of class dynamics prompted Lenin to insist on abandoning the earlier conception of the democratic revolution and see the potential for initiating something close to the dictatorship of the proletariat. The following excerpt from *Letters from Afar* exemplifies this

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<sup>7</sup> Balibar 1977, pp. 117-118.

The revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry has already been realised, but in a highly original manner, and with a number of extremely important modifications. I shall deal with them separately in one of my next letters. For the present, it is essential to grasp the incontestable truth that a Marxist must take cognisance of real life, of the true facts of reality, and not cling to a theory of yesterday, which, like all theories, at best only outlines the main and the general, only comes near to embracing life in all its complexity,<sup>8</sup>

In this sense, the very evolution of class struggle, in a highly original manner had brought forward new dynamics that made necessary a change in the way of thinking. The former conception of the democratic revolution under the vanguard of the proletariat came in confrontation with two important elements of the conjuncture. (a) The class project expressed in the Provisional Government, both in regards the political force that supported and the form and practice of politics it represented and (b) the emergence of an autonomous and antagonistic form power in the form of the Soviets. Consequently, Lenin could insist on the accomplishment of the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry (the essence of the 'democratic revolution' in its Bolshevik conception) and on the new and original character of the revolutionary dynamics opened by the intervention of the masses.

It is here that the originality of Lenin emerges. The importance of the Soviets was something widely recognized by all tendencies of the Russian revolutionary movement. However, Lenin's contribution was the insistence that since there was an open revolutionary crisis, these forms of autonomous

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<sup>8</sup> CWL, 24, p. 48.

proletarian organization were already establishing an antagonistic political form, an antagonistic set of power relations, in that particular Russian conjuncture. They were not simply forms of struggle and self-organization; they represented a novel form of political practice and a novel way to exercise power. It is particularly important that Lenin is referring to forms of organization that were the product of the collective action and ingenuity of the working class and not the result of an abstract theoretical construction. It is well known that the soviets were neither invented nor proposed by the Bolsheviks; rather they emerged as part of the dynamics of the 1905 revolution. What the Bolsheviks did was exactly that they incorporated the soviets in the particular strategy for proletarian hegemony.<sup>9</sup> Based on the experience of the struggles of the masses themselves Lenin came to suggest that the soviets represented an antagonistic new state form.

The proletariat cannot “lay hold of” the “state apparatus” and “set it in motion”. But it can smash everything that is oppressive, routine, incorrigibly bourgeois in the old state apparatus and substitute its own, new apparatus. The Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies are exactly this apparatus. [...]

The Soviets are a new state apparatus which, in the first place, provides an armed force of workers and peasants [...] Secondly, this apparatus provides a bond with the people, with the majority of the people, so intimate, so indissoluble, so easily verifiable and renewable, that nothing even remotely like it existed in the previous state apparatus. Thirdly, this apparatus, by virtue of the fact that its personnel is elected and subject to recall at the people’s will without any bureaucratic formalities, is far more democratic than any previous

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<sup>9</sup> On the attitude of Lenin and the Bolsheviks towards the soviets see Shandro 2007.

apparatus. Fourthly, it provides a close contact with the most varied professions, thereby facilitating the adoption of the most varied and most radical reforms without red tape. Fifthly, it provides an organisational form for the vanguard, i.e., for the most class-conscious, most energetic and most progressive section of the oppressed classes, the workers and peasants, and so constitutes an apparatus by means of which the vanguard of the oppressed classes can elevate, train, educate, and lead the entire vast mass of these classes, which has up to now stood completely outside of political life and history. Sixthly, it makes it possible to combine the advantages of the parliamentary system with those of immediate and direct democracy, i.e., to vest in the people's elected representatives both legislative and executive functions.<sup>10</sup>

What is interesting in this description of the role of the soviets by Lenin on the immediate aftermath of the October Revolution is a description of not just a form of exercise of power from the part of the working class and its allies. This description suggests something close to what Gramsci defined as a new hegemonic apparatus. It is at the same time a way to have a more democratic and less bureaucratic decision process, to combine direct and indirect democracy, to take advantage of knowledge and skills in society and above all to enable the working class to exercise its educational, formative, hegemonic role towards the other subaltern classes. It is in a certain way a description for a potentially integral form of a new state power.

What is important is that for Lenin this is something that is not just constructed after the fact, after the revolutionary event. Rather, it is something that emerges in the practice of the subaltern classes because of their struggles,

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<sup>10</sup> LCW, vol 26, pp. 102-104.

aspirations and collective ingenuity. Moreover, this offers the possibility for a new definition of the revolutionary situation. It is important that Lenin bases his estimate of the conjuncture and of the possibility of a revolutionary sequence not on some simplistic, mechanistic 'military' conception of the relation of forces but upon the degree of the emergence of new social and political forms, new forms for the exercise of power, new forms of antagonistic political practice. In this sense, Lenin is far from any conception of the revolutionary process as a coup. In this sense, the insurrection is the decisive moment when a revolutionary process that has already begun and has already elaborated its particular political form, its own potential state form, become the main form of state power. This is why Lenin in his entire struggle to persuade the other Bolsheviks on the need for an armed insurrection he never refers to some variety of a conspiracy. The 'art of the insurrection', to use Engels' phrase that Lenin often repeated, refers above all to the assessment of the relation of class forces. The decisive event was the change in soviets in the cities, with the important concentration of workers and the turn towards the Bolsheviks as an expression of the radicalization of the workers but also of soldiers who in a certain manner represented the radicalization of the peasantry. This change, along with the evolving peasant rebellion and the intensified of the contradictions between the different political currents, strengthened Lenin's position on the maturity of the situation for a revolutionary rupture.

To be successful, insurrection must rely not upon conspiracy and not upon a party, but upon the advanced class. That is the first point. Insurrection must rely upon a revolutionary upsurge of the people. That is the second point.

Insurrection must rely upon that turning-point in the history of the growing revolution when the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its height, and when the vacillations in the ranks of the enemy and in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolutionary strongest. That is the third point. And these three conditions for raising the question of insurrection distinguish Marxism from Blanquism.<sup>11</sup>

It is exactly because the actual vanguard of social transformation is the working class that its radicalism and militancy offers the possibility of a victorious insurrection that could also attract the other subaltern classes. The key aspect is the new relation of forces in the Soviets that creates the possibility for a victorious insurrection and a new form of state power. We are not simply dealing with the explosive co-existence of antagonistic dynamics that makes the exercise of state power impossible (the classical revolutionary sequence of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, above all the revolutions of 1848). It also includes from the part of the subaltern classes, the emergence of their own autonomous form of political organization as an antagonistic state form.

If the creative enthusiasm of the revolutionary classes had not given rise to the Soviets, the proletarian revolution in Russia would have been a hopeless cause, for the proletariat could certainly not retain power with the old state apparatus, and it is impossible to create a new apparatus immediately.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> LCW, vol. 26, pp. 22-23.

<sup>12</sup> LCW, vol 26, p. 104

There are two important points to be made here. One is that for Lenin there can be no actual revolutionary situation without the emergence of such forms of autonomous organization and politics. The other important point is that for Lenin it is not the workers' party that exercises power in a period of revolutionary transition. The party represents the most class-conscious and vanguard part of the class but it does not become state.

It is obvious that for Lenin the dual power situation was a limited one in terms of time. The crucial question was how to move forward towards class dictatorship, which at least initially was conceived by Lenin as based upon the soviets. However, this was not the only position inside the Bolsheviks. There were also other positions that defended the continuation of the dual power situation instead of proceeding with an insurrection. The famous Kamenev - Zinoviev position, was not simply a betrayal of the revolution; rather it was also a call for the prolongation and institutionalization of dual power:

The Soviets, which have become rooted in life, can not be destroyed. The Constituent Assembly will be able to find support for its revolutionary work only in the Soviets. The Constituent Assembly plus the Soviets--this is that combined type of state institutions toward which we are going. It is on this political basis that our party is acquiring enormous chances for a real victory.<sup>13</sup>

It is not that Zinoviev and Kamenev were counter-revolutionaries. They pointed to a legitimate and open question regarding the actual extent of Bolshevik influence in the working class and the subaltern classes and proletarian

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<sup>13</sup> Zinoviev/Kamenev 1917 (Bunyan and Fisher (eds.) 1934, p. 60).

hegemony (in the Bolshevik sense of proletarian leadership in the proletariat-peasantry alliance), pointing towards the possibility of a prolonged dual power situation bringing the proletariat to a better position within a revolutionary process that had already begun.

In the Constituent Assembly we shall be such a strong opposition party that in a country of universal suffrage our opponents will be compelled to make concessions to us at every step, or we will form, together with the Left S.-R.'s, non-party peasants, etc., a ruling bloc which will fundamentally have to carry out our programme. This is our opinion.<sup>14</sup>

Based on this assessment, they suggest that an armed insurrection would endanger the revolutionary process and lead to a defeat of the proletariat. Lenin's response, leaving aside the rhetoric is not just a rejection, but an attempt to answer this argument. If one tries to see more carefully Lenin's argument, he will see that is based on three points. One has to do with the urgent need to not let the bourgeois forces regain the initiative, especially through the commanding officers of the army. The second is that the Bolsheviks have already gained ground in the Soviets, a political dynamic that combined with the peasant rebellion and the massive turn of the soldiers to the Left, meant that the Bolshevik position is neither isolated, nor minority. However, the most important argument is one that has to do with the need to transfer power to the soviets. For Lenin, it was necessary to change the balance of forces inside dual power in order to make sure that the soviets, that represented not just the

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<sup>14</sup> Zinoviev/Kamenev 1917 (Bunyan and Fisher (eds.) 1934, p. 61).



interests of the proletariat but also the new practice of politics, become the main centre of power. Such an approach could ensure that representative institutions such as the Constituent assembly would function in a different way. In a certain way Lenin treats the duality of power as an open contradiction, one in which it is important to intervene in order to make sure that one pole becomes dominant, in this case the Soviets.

There is no way for our sad pessimists to turn. A renunciation of the uprising is a renunciation of the transfer of power to the Soviets and implies a “transfer” of all hopes and expectations to the kind bourgeoisie, which has “promised” to convoke the Constituent Assembly.

Is it so difficult to understand that once power is in the hands of the Soviets, the Constituent Assembly and its success are guaranteed? The Bolsheviks have said so thousands of times and no one has ever attempted to refute it. Everybody has recognised this “combined type”, but to smuggle in a renunciation of the transfer of power to the Soviets under cover of the words “combined type”, to smuggle it in secretly while fearing to renounce our slogan openly is a matter for wonder. Is there any parliamentary term to describe it?<sup>15</sup>

It is obvious that in Lenin’s thinking the main preoccupation was the decisive change in the balance of forces that a successful armed insurrection could bring about. Lenin did not deny the importance of the Soviets, of the need to combine them with representative democracy institutions, with the need to elaborate and establish proletarian hegemony. Rather, he was confident that even if the situation did not seem ripe enough, the change brought forward by the

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<sup>15</sup> LCW, vol 26, p. 200.

insurrection would also accelerate the process. However, the problem was that as with later developments in the revolutionary process, any attempt to turn such contingent and 'limit' decisions into theory could only lead to problems.

It is important to note that initially the thinking of Lenin was turned towards conception of the soviets as the main form of state power with many parties participating in them, something that was abandoned later. It is also important to note that the decision to dissolve the Constituent Assembly, a point that beginning with Kautsky's polemics has often been presented as the main evidence of the inherently antidemocratic character of Bolshevism, was in fact a realization of the inability of the Constituent Assembly to reflect the new dynamics that emerged. The soviets had become by that point the main form of power, representing the radicalization of the proletariat. Lenin's conception of proletarian hegemony also played an important role. For Lenin the crucial question was not the electoral majority, or even the majority among the subaltern classes. The crucial aspect was the degree of politicization and radicalization of the working class, expressed in the pro-Bolshevik majority in the workers-soldiers soviets (that is the forms of proletarian democracy in opposition to parliamentary democracy). If the revolutionary process is to be conceived as the emancipatory role of the working class, in its leading role in relation to the other subaltern classes and groups, then the political form of this process cannot be a simple parliamentary process, even in the form of the Constituent Assembly. Revolutionary transformation for Lenin is a question of proletarian leadership and hegemony, not of equal representation.

In mockery of the teachings of Marx, those gentlemen, the opportunists, including the Kautskyites, “teach” the people that the proletariat must first win a majority by means of universal suffrage, then obtain state power, by the vote of that majority, and only after that, on the basis of “consistent” (some call it “pure”) democracy, organise socialism.

But we say on the basis of the teachings of Marx and the experience of the Russian revolution:

the proletariat must first overthrow the bourgeoisie and win for itself state power, and then use that state power, that is, the dictatorship of the proletariat, as an instrument of its class for the purpose of winning the sympathy of the majority of the working people.<sup>16</sup>

However, the particular sequence of the Civil War and the attempt to defend the revolution against foreign aggression and the counterattacks and terrorism of the bourgeoisie led to the abandonment of the soviet system of power. Gradually the soviets ceased to be actual decision process and terrains for the expression of proletarian initiative and ingenuity. In contrast, the idea was the party was the actual power centre. However, this meant the revolutionary process was now considered as a process of transformation from above, not as experimentation and collective effort and participation. The gradual ossification and transformation into rituals of forms of organization that were supposed to represent the autonomous action, demands, aspirations of the working class and the process of proletarian hegemony over the other subaltern classes and groups, meant an actual loss of potential and dynamics regarding the revolutionary process. Moreover, it was a process that enabled the emergence

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<sup>16</sup> LCW, vol 30, p. 263

and reproduction of exploitative and oppressive social and political relations. Regardless of the different analytical perspectives regarding the theorization of exploitative and oppressive social relations in the Soviet Union, it is obvious that the transformation of the autonomous institutions of dual power into state rituals played an important role. In this sense, the warnings of Rosa Luxemburg retain their importance:

The socialist system of society should only be, and can only be, an historical product, born out of the school of its own experiences, born in the course of its realization, as a result of the developments of living history, which – just like organic nature of which, in the last analysis, it forms a part – has the fine habit of always producing along with any real social need the means to its satisfaction, along with the task simultaneously the solution. However, if such is the case, then it is clear that socialism by its very nature cannot be decreed or introduced by *ukase*. [...] The whole mass of the people must take part in it. Otherwise, socialism will be decreed from behind a few official desks by a dozen intellectuals.<sup>17</sup>

## *2. Discussions of dual power within the revolutionary movement*

In the writings of Trotsky on the Russian Revolution, we also find an attempt to theorize dual power. It is interesting that Trotsky, writing after the Revolution in contrast to Lenin whose basic theorization of dual power came in the form of a conjunctural political intervention, tends towards seeing dual power as a constitutive element of revolutionary situations in general

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<sup>17</sup> Luxemburg 1961, pp. 70-71.

This double sovereignty does not presuppose—generally speaking, indeed, it excludes—the possibility of a division of the power into two equal halves, or indeed any formal equilibrium of forces whatever. It is not a constitutional, but a revolutionary fact. It implies that a destruction of the social equilibrium has already split the state superstructure. It arises where the hostile classes are already each relying upon essentially incompatible governmental organizations—the one outlived, the other in process of formation—, which jostle against each other at every step in the sphere of government. The amount of power which falls to each of these struggling classes in such a situation, is determined by the correlation of forces in the course of the struggle.<sup>18</sup>

It is in this sense, that Trotsky can find forms of dual power in the English Revolution, the French Revolution and the Paris Commune. Trotsky theorizes it as necessary outcome of the complexity of the situation during each revolutionary process.

If the state is an organization of class rule, and a revolution is the overthrow of the ruling class, then the transfer of power from the one class to the other must necessarily create self-contradictory state conditions, and first of all in the form of the dual power. The relation of class forces is not a mathematical quantity permitting *a priori* computations. When the old regime is thrown out of equilibrium, a new correlation of forces can be established only as the result of a trial by battle. That is revolution.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Trotsky 2008, p. 150.

<sup>19</sup> Trotsky 2008, p. 155.

In this sense, we can say that Trotsky offers something closer to a general theory of dual power. Yet at the same time, Trotsky also thought that dual power should be a limited period, followed by the full establishment of a revolutionary class dictatorship. See for example his assessment of the February Revolution.

All the cards were mixed. Instead of a revolutionary dictatorship, i.e. the most concentrated power—there was established the flabby regime of the dual power, in which the feeble energy of the ruling classes was wasted in overcoming inner conflicts. Nobody had foreseen this regime.<sup>20</sup>

It is also interesting to see how Trotsky attempts to assess the dual power situation during the evolution of the 1917 sequence. On the one hand, Trotsky stressed the importance of moments that pointed towards the need to pass from the dual power situation to the revolutionary dictatorship. On the other hand, he criticized those that tended to say all too hastily that the dual power period was over, exemplified in his criticism of the positions of the Bolsheviks at the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Once we designate as a dual power that regime in which an essentially fictitious power lies in the hands of the official government and the real power in the hands of the soviet, then there is no reason to assert that the dual power is liquidated from the moment when a part of the real power passes over from the soviet to the bourgeoisie.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Trotsky 2008, p. 228.

<sup>21</sup> Trotsky 2008, p. 592

In contrast, Trotsky insisted that the process that led to the October insurrection was an expression of the active character of dual power.

The power was decentralized, scattered—in part concealed underground together with that weapon which the worker hid away after the July defeat. The dual power had ceased to be “peaceful,” contractual, regulated. It had become more concealed, more decentralized, more antithetic and explosive. At the end of August this concealed dual power again became active. We shall see what significance this fact acquired in October.<sup>22</sup>

Trotsky also stressed the importance of the experience of dual power in the politicization of proletarian masses and in the formation of forms of revolutionary practice.

The history of the Red Guard is to a considerable extent the history of the dual power. With its inner contradictions and conflicts, the dual power helped the workers to create a considerable armed force even before the insurrection. To cast up the general total of the workers’ detachments throughout the country at the moment of insurrection is hardly possible, at least at the present moment. In any case, tens and tens of thousands of armed workers constituted the cadres of the insurrection. The reserves were almost inexhaustible.<sup>23</sup>

Such questions re-emerge in the writings of Gramsci of that period. The experience of factory councils in Italy led Gramsci to really important insights regarding such institutions of worker’s democracy. In a manner similar to that of

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<sup>22</sup> Trotsky 2008, p. 593.

<sup>23</sup> Trotsky 2008, p. 757.

Lenin, Gramsci treats such institutions of proletarian self-organization as potential forms of a Worker's State.

The socialist State already exists potentially in the institutions of social life characteristic of the exploited working class. To link these institutions, coordinating and ordering them into highly centralized hierarchy of competences and powers, while respecting the necessary autonomy and articulation of each, is to create a genuine workers' democracy here and now – a workers' democracy in effective and active opposition to the bourgeois State.<sup>24</sup>

Gramsci's experience with the factory council movement was not only a confrontation with questions of dual power. It was also a formative experience regarding the form and functioning of hegemonic apparatuses for a potential proletarian hegemony. One can see elements of this conception in his complex conceptualization of the reabsorption of civil society by political society in the form of the regulated society. We will return to this point later.

Post WWII developments would also lead to the abandonment of a such a concept of a soviet-type of power and of the conception of dual power. This change was already evident in the acceptance of parliamentarism within the Popular Front strategy and later in the strange hybrid of one-party state parliamentarism of the 'People's democracies'. Moreover, especially after the 1960s the official line of the communist movement turned towards varieties of a democratic, parliamentary road to socialism. In certain cases, the politics of socialism were presented as the natural evolution of a real democratic

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<sup>24</sup> Gramsci 1977, p. 64



parliamentary process. In such a context, dual power was not part of the debate, with the exception of communist or councilist heterodoxies.

However, there will be a return of the notion of dual power in certain readings of developments in Latin America. One such an example is the work of René Zavaleta Mercado and his use of the notion of dual power to describe particular moments in Bolivian history and in particular the 1952 liberation and the the formation of the *Asamblea Popular* under the initiative of COB in May 1971. Zavaleta also used the notion of dual power to assess the situations in experiments such as the Chile of Allende. For Zavaleta dual power is a 'Marxist metaphor that designates a special type of state contradiction or state conjuncture of transition'.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, it seems more like the sign of a trope referring to complex situations that cannot be easily summarized in a definition. That is why Zavaleta preferred to refer not to dual power but to the 'duality of powers'<sup>26</sup> in order to theorize the complex and uneven character of such conjunctures, the 'qualitative contemporaneity of the before and after'.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, he offers one of the most interesting readings of the theorization of questions of dual power in the work of Lenin, Trotsky and Gramsci.

The notion of dual power will also re-emerge as part of the attempt to theorize the Chinese Cultural Revolution. However, in this form it referred more to the possibility of a revolution inside the revolution or in the form of the emergence of autonomous proletarian institutions in a contradictory relation to

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<sup>25</sup> Zavaleta 1974, p. 18

<sup>26</sup> Zavaleta 1974, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> Zavaleta 1974, p. 22.

the framework of the supposedly proletarian state, something exemplified in experiments such as the Shanghai Commune.<sup>28</sup>

One could also see a return of the notion in the neo-Leninism of certain groups of the revolutionary left after the experience of the broader 1968 turmoil and the return of a reference to insurrectionary politics, the 'hasty Leninism' that Daniel Bensaïd described in his *Impatient life*.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time it is important to see the ways that the notion of dual power returns to forefront also in as part of the debates of Eurocommunism. Although the main aspect of these debates was the rather ostensive insistence on the acceptance of bourgeois parliamentarism in a combination with forms of mass participation, some thinkers who will claim some form of left Eurocommunism such as Christine Buci-Glucksmann will speak about a potential 'dual power of long duration' as part of a strategy for hegemony

In contrast to the contemporary soviet 'model' with its constant attack to freedoms, its psychiatric hospitals, its blocking of any real dialectic of the masses, we know that working class hegemony means the recognition of its parties, the autonomy of trade unions, the biggest possible degree of democratic expansion of the base, the highest degree of freedom. However, this hegemony [...] also means the exit from a capitalist logic and to go beyond the strict framework of classical "bourgeois democracy". In this sense we cannot pose within the democratic transition on the one hand the elected assemblies and the

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<sup>28</sup> Jiang 2014

<sup>29</sup> Bensaïd 2013.

class struggle on the other. We must articulate, to think a constant rupture, a dual power of long duration.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, within the same debate, we find elements of a more strategic reservation in regards to the notion of dual power. For example, Nicos Poulantzas in his conceptualization of the democratic road to socialism as a combination of parliamentary majority by the Left and escalation of the autonomous struggles and movements of the masses will oppose such a strategy to any conception of dual. For Poulantzas any conception of dual power in fact refers to a frontal attack on the state conceived as a fortress,

According to this view of things, the State is not traversed by internal contradictions, but is a monolithic bloc without cracks of any kind. The struggles of the popular masses cannot pass through the State, any more than they can become, in opposition to the bourgeoisie, one of the constituent factors of the institutions of representative democracy. Class contradictions are located *between* the State and the popular masses standing outside the State. This remains true right up to the crisis of dual power, when the State is effectively dismantled through the centralization at national level of a parallel power; which becomes the real power (soviets).<sup>31</sup>

What is more Poulantzas considers this to be the limit of both Lenin and Gramsci, up to the point that he treats the Gramscian conception of the war of positions as

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<sup>30</sup> Buci Glucksmann 1977a, p. 153.

<sup>31</sup> Poulantzas 2000, p. 254.

a variation of the same strategy of state as fortress / revolutionary politics as dual power.

Of course, there is no disputing Gramsci's considerable theoretical-political contributions, and we know the distance he took from the Stalinist experience. Still, even though he is currently being pulled and pushed in every conceivable direction, the fact remains that Gramsci was also also unable: to pose the problem in all its amplitude. His famous analyses of the differences between war of movement (as waged by the Bolsheviks in Russia) in Russia) and war of position are essentially conceived as the application of Lenin's model/strategy to the 'different concrete conditions of the West, Despite his remarkable insights, this leads him into a number of blind alleys.<sup>32</sup>

### *3. Fredric Jameson*

Recently the notion of dual power returned in an intervention by Fredric Jameson. The theoretical and political architecture of this text is rather singular. Jameson begins by lamenting the relative lack of utopian thinking attributing this to the abandonment of the notion of revolution from the part of the left and to the complete political and ideological bankruptcy of social democracy. However, he suggests that there is an alternative in the form of the dual power strategy, insisting that he will follow this theoretical path. Here is the definition he offers of dual power.

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<sup>32</sup> Poulantzas 2000, p. 256.

The phrase is, of course, associated with Lenin and his description of the coexistence of the provisional government and the network of soviets, or workers' and soldiers' councils, in 1917 –a genuine transitional period if there ever was one– but it has also existed in numerous other forms of interest to us today. I would most notably single out the way organizations like the Black Panthers yesterday or Hamas today function to provide daily services-food kitchens, garbage collection, health care, water inspection, and the like-in areas neglected by some official central government. (If you like current Foucauldian jargon, you might describe this as a tension or even an opposition between "sovereignty" and "governmentality.") In such situations, power moves to the networks to which people turn for practical help and leadership on a daily basis: in effect, they become an alternate government, without officially challenging the ostensibly legal structure. The point at which a confrontation and a transfer take place, at which the official government begins to "wither away," a point at which revolutionary violence appears, will of course vary with the overall political and cultural context itself.<sup>33</sup>

Now, this is an interesting approach enlarging in a certain sense the notion of dual power to all forms of antagonistic emerging sets of social and political practices and forms of social and political organization. Jameson then turns to his own version of a dual power strategy. After presenting an argument according to which the sole use contemporary political parties are to help the waging of 'discursive struggles', struggles over the meaning and legitimacy of radical demands, he moves forward to search for the institution more suitable to play the role of dual power. Leaving aside the trade unions, because of the radical

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<sup>33</sup> Jameson 2016, p. 4.

changes in work, the professions and institutions such as the medical system, he come to the army, in the forms a an army of generalized conscription. With this starting point, he indeed proceeds to his own utopian conception of a collectively regulated society (I use the term in the literal sense, not the one found in Gramsci as a metonymy for communism). However, what is striking in this exposition is that however interesting, fascinating and intriguing is this communist utopia, in fact there is no theory of dual power and transition here. It is as there is a utopian leap into a condition *after* the event. What is more interesting is that this is accompanied by an almost explicit reference to an 'end of politics' position. In this sense, this represents the difficulty of thinking dual power, in the sense that the crucial point is the actual description of an alternative social and political configuration. However, the real difficulty has always been the transition. And it is here that we must further elaborate on the notion of dual power.

#### *4. Open questions regarding dual power today*

After this overview of theoretical and political interventions regarding the notion of dual power, there are still important questions that are open.

Does dual power refer simply to some particular conjuncture, a relatively specific moment, exactly before the full eruption of the revolutionary process and then seizure of political power or does it refer to a process of longer duration and a more profound process of transformation? Is it a tactical choice or it refers to the different modality of a politics of revolutionary transformation? Is it something that 'ends' with the 'revolution' or something that transcends the moment of rupture, in whatever way we define it?

Recent historical developments have given a new dimension and importance to such questions, especially in relation to contemporary experiences of left-wing governance. The question in particular is whether we can designate as 'dual power' processes where we can see the dialectical relation between left-wing governments and strong autonomous movements and forms of popular self-organization 'from below'. In such a perspective, it has been argued that the strong movements from below would perform a counterbalancing act in relation to the shortcomings and vacillations of left-wing governments, would act as defence against reactionary counterattacks and be the driving force for the passage to a process of socialist transformation. To give one of the most convincing examples of such an approach I would suggest the theorization of the Venezuelan revolution by George Ciccariello-Maher who has insisted that in the communal councils of Venezuela and their practice and activity, we can find elements of a contemporary form of dual power.<sup>34</sup> A similar line of reasoning can also be found in Álvaro García Linera's analyses regarding the dynamics that brought MAS and Evo Morales to power in Bolivia.<sup>35</sup>

There is no doubt that such thinking brings forward an important aspect of the contemporary reality of social and political antagonism. However, at the same time we have to deal with the problem that this strategy has never been fully implemented even in the most advanced Latin-American experiments. On the one hand, in these experiments we find a series of contradictions that refer to the actual extent of the transformation of the relations of production (including property relations) and the extent of the transformation of the dominant

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<sup>34</sup> Ciccariello-Maher 2007; 2013; 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Linera 2014.

developmental paradigm of an extractivist economy.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand we have the problem that despite the emergence of strong movements of popular power from below these processes never crossed that particular threshold of rupture where popular power from below becomes more determinate than the power of state apparatuses.

Moreover, if we look more carefully at this discussion regarding the possibility of modern forms of dual power, then we would see that there are three sides in a complex relation: 'Left governance', the State (even if we conceptualize it as the condensation of a relation of class forces) and the forms of popular power from below. In such an approach, 'duality of powers' becomes in fact an active contradiction and the direction in which its polarization would point becomes an open stake. On the other hand, attempts towards 'left governance' without the element of this dialectical relation with an active movement would be led to not only to tactical defeat but also to strategic displacement on the terrain of the adversary. On this aspect, see the case of Greece.

One way to deal with this question is to think of the state not as an instrument in the hands of the ruling class, but in a relational approach. Poulantzas's insistence that the state is the material condensation of a relation of class forces is important. However, we should not be read it as suggesting that the state can be easily transformed on the basis of the presence of the subaltern classes and their struggles and aspirations in its interior, or/and on the basis of the representation of the subaltern classes by some form of 'left governance'. The State is a *material* condensation and this means that it is a materialized,

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<sup>36</sup> Webber 2015.



solidified and institutionalized relation of forces. This is manifested in the class character of its apparatuses, its practices, the discourses and knowledges it produces and codifies. In this sense, the State represents a certain *excess of force* from the part of the ruling social bloc around the bourgeoisie. Even if we follow an even more 'enlarged' conception of the 'integral state', following Gramsci's definition, as political society + civil society, a definition that would indeed 'interiorize' social movements and subaltern collective practices in the broader framework of the integral state, we would still need to pay attention to the fact that the different practices and activities incorporated in this framework are neither symmetrical nor even. Consequently, even if we attempt to go beyond the 'inside/outside' distinction we would still need to take consideration of this asymmetry. Therefore, I would like to stress Althusser's observation, in the context of his theoretical elaboration on the state as a 'machine' that transforms class force to political power and law, that:

The relatively stable resultant (reproduced in its stability by the state) of this *confrontation* of forces (*balance of forces* is an accountant's notion, because it is static) is that *what counts is the dynamic excess of force* maintained by the dominant class in the class struggle. It is *this excess of conflictual force, real or potential, which constitutes energy A*, which is subsequently transformed into power by the state-machine: *transformed into right, laws and norms.*<sup>37</sup>

Such a reading of the State as a relatively stabilized and solidified class relation of forces (or a materialized unevenness between the different instances of the

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<sup>37</sup> Althusser 2006, p. 109.

integral state) is important. It implies that the extent and depth of the transformation of the state and the fortification and insulation of certain decision processes against the subaltern classes, makes even more urgent and necessary a reverse excess of force from the part of the subaltern classes, an excess of force that in no way can be limited to an electoral majority in favour of some form of left radical program. What is needed is an excess of 'force from below' against the strategy inscribed in the very materiality of the state. This has to do with the strength of the movement, the radicalism of demands, the extent and depth of the militancy and politicization of the subaltern classes, the degree of programmatic preparation, and the extent of forms of self-organization, self-management and self-defence.

However, I also think that we should not restrict our thinking only to this dimension of dual power. When Lenin refers to the soviets as an already constituted form of state power, he does not simply refer to the force and power of the movement at a moment of 'catastrophic equilibrium' before the decisive move that would modify the balance of forces in an irreversible way in favour of the working class. Even if we accept that some of his formulations at that specific time mainly refer to this, his position also points to another important question. This question refers to how it is possible to arrive at this modified balance of forces, namely the very fact (and process) of the emergence of these antagonistic social and political forms.

I believe that this can help us treat the question of the duality of powers also from another angle. In such a perspective, dual power becomes a way to think the extent of the emergence of a potential working class hegemony. It becomes an indication not only of a relation of forces in the class struggle, but

also of an active potential for transformation. Dual power then refers not only to the possibility for the seizure of power, but also for the liberation of the various forms of collective ingenuity of the subaltern masses. It is the evidence not only of a catastrophic equilibrium of forces but also of the extent of the emergence of forms of collective intellectuality in active rupture with dominant ideologies.

In this sense, the important aspect that Lenin brings forward in his approach to dual power is not so much a description of an acute political crisis but rather of a particular condition. It refers to a conjuncture when the working class is already in position to have its own autonomous political institutions but also alternative social forms and configuration antagonistic to the logic of capital. In this context, theorizing dual power (or to be more precise the duality of powers) does not refer to questions of tactics in the revolutionary process but to a necessary aspect of any process of revolutionary transformation. One might also find this element in Lenin's 'last battle' and his agonizing attempt to combine NEP with a 'cultural revolution' that would have enhanced new forms of political participation and intellectuality of the masses.<sup>38</sup> All this insistence, in texts such as 'On Co-operation'<sup>39</sup> on the need to understand NEP, to promote co-operative societies as a step towards socialism but also to bring forward a cultural revolution, are not only aspects of a top-down, 'revolution from above' attempt to induce change. The emphasis on education as 'cultural revolution', suggests, at least in my reading, an attempt to create again the conditions for that kind of autonomous initiative and participation from the part of the masses that was in a certain way the essence of dual power.

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<sup>38</sup> Lewin 1968.

<sup>39</sup> In LCW, vol. 33.

It is here that it would be useful to see the dialectical relation between the questions regarding the duality of powers and the Gramscian 'war of positions'.

Illich, however, did not have time to expand his formula-though it should be borne in mind that he could only have expanded it theoretically, whereas the fundamental task was a national one; that is to say it required a reconnaissance of the terrain and identification of the elements of trench and fortress represented by the elements of civil society, etc. In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks: more or less numerous from one State to the next, it goes without saying-but this precisely necessitated an accurate reconnaissance of each individual country.<sup>40</sup>

Gramsci defined the notion of the war of positions not only as part of the East/West divide, but also as part of his broader conceptualization of revolutionary strategy in a period of 'passive revolution', which is the way by which he defines the particular modalities of bourgeois power in a period when the bourgeoisie had left behind earlier 'Jacobin' views and was no longer investing in the mobilization of the subaltern masses, in sum the modality of the exercise of power in advanced capitalist social formations. Gramsci correlates the war of positions with a deeply dialectical conception according to which revolutionary rupture requires the accumulation of conditions necessary for it,

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<sup>40</sup> Gramsci 1971, p. 238 (Q7, §16). Note written in 1931.

avoiding at the same time any form of fatalism. The following except from a 1933 note exemplifies this.

The concept of "passive revolution" must be rigorously derived from the two fundamental principles of political science: 1. that no social formation disappears as long as the productive forces which have developed within it still find room for further forward movement; 2. that a society does not set itself tasks for whose solution the necessary conditions have not already been incubated, etc. It goes without saying that these principles must first be developed critically in all their implications, and purged of every residue of mechanicism and fatalism. They must therefore be referred back to the description of the three fundamental moments into which a "situation" or an equilibrium of forces can be distinguished, with the greatest possible stress on the second moment (equilibrium of political forces), and especially on the third moment (politico-military equilibrium).<sup>41</sup>

In this sense, both the strategy of a war of position and the tactic of the United Front do not refer to an abandonment of a dual power strategy. Rather they represent an elaboration and expansion of its scope, with war of position becoming a necessary aspect of any attempt towards revolutionary change. It refers the dialectic of the formation of conditions for hegemony after the confrontation with the defeat of the revolution in the West and the realization of the limitations of any attempt towards simply reproducing the Russian strategy. Moreover, it is important to note Gramsci's warnings against 'statolatry' and his insistence that a well-developed civil society would also be an integral part of the

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<sup>41</sup> Gramsci 1971, pp. 106-107 (Q15, §17).

political form of socialist transformation. In my reading this also points towards the direction of a more strategic character of a dual power of long duration.

The term "statolatry" is applied to a particular attitude towards the "government by functionaries" or political society, which in everyday language is the form of State life to which the term of State is applied and which is commonly understood as the entire State. The assertion that the State can be identified with individuals (the individuals of a social group), as an element of active culture (i.e. as a movement to create a new civilisation, a new type of man and of citizen) , must serve to determine the will to construct within the husk of political society a complex and well-articulated civil society, in which the individual can govern himself without his self-government thereby entering into conflict with political society-but rather becoming its normal continuation, its organic complement. For some social groups, which before their ascent to autonomous State life have not had a long independent period of cultural and moral development on their own (as was made possible in mediaeval society and under the absolute regimes by the juridical existence of the privileged Estates or orders), a period of statolatry is necessary and indeed opportune. This "statolatry" is nothing other than the normal form of "State life", or at least of initiation to autonomous State life and to the creation of a "civil society" which it was not historically possible to create before the ascent to independent State life. However, this kind of "statolatry" must not be abandoned to itself, must not, especially, become theoretical fanaticism or be conceived of as "perpetual". It must be criticised, precisely in order to develop and produce new forms of State life, in which the

initiative of individuals and groups will have a "State" character, even if it is not due to the "government of the functionaries" (make State life become "spontaneous").<sup>42</sup>

Despite Gramsci's reluctant acceptance of a more 'statist' practice, as a temporary and transitory measure, this passage exemplifies not only his deeper apprehension and critique of Stalinism but also his insistence that autonomous political forms of the subaltern must be an integral aspect not only of the pre-revolution period but also of 'socialist construction'.

Christine Buci-Glucksmann has stressed the importance of the conclusions that Gramsci draws from his elaboration of the notion of passive revolution but also of the possibility of a 'passive' element also in the transition process:

From these reflections upon the passive transition of the State, Gramsci draws two conclusions:

1. If the class is to avoid being replaced by the state it must gain hegemony (ideological, cultural, political) both *before* and *after* the seizure of power; this implies the existence of non-state institutional forms which encourage a dynamic development of the base and generate mechanisms for the 'socialisation of politics',
2. This new interpretation of transitional processes in terms of the dialectic of hegemony and domination goes to confirm the specificity of the transition typical of the West. The opposition between the respective strategies of the war

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<sup>42</sup> Gramsci 1971, pp. 268-269.

of manoeuvre and the war of position, between East and West, refers to a kind of *proportionality* that exists between the different aspects of the social complex. In contrast to the situation in the East, where the state was everything and civil society was but primordial and gelatinous, we have the situation of the most advanced states, where civil society has become 'a very complex structure and one which is resistant to the catastrophic "incursions" of the immediate economic element (crisis, depressions etc.)'<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, in contrast to certain readings, the Gramscian notion of the war of position is not counter-posed to a dual power strategy. In contrast, it is a strategy towards dual power, towards the possibility of a revolutionary situation. As Peter Thomas has stressed:

Lenin and Trotsky redeployed this insight, as counsel to the Communist Parties in the West to recognise the specificity of the class struggle in their social formations, characterised by a formidable defensive apparatus of the enemy that the Tsarist regime in Russia had lacked. A revolutionary assault on the state in this context could not occur in the form of an immediate war of movement; but neither would it occur by postponing such a moment through a protracted *defensive* war of position, such as that pursued by the remnants of the Second International. Rather, an *offensive* war of position conducted by means of 'an unprecedented concentration of hegemony' had become the very form of an assault upon the foundations of the integral state. 'The truth is that one cannot choose the form of war one wants', as Gramsci later noted, particularly when one begins from a subordinate position. 'War of position' in Gramsci's conception, just as for Lenin and Trotsky, was not a programmatic strategy that he

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<sup>43</sup> Buci-Glucksmann 1977b, p. 220-221.



recommended be adopted by the proletariat. Rather, he recognised it as a technique of nascent 'biopower' deployed by the bourgeoisie, and to which the proletariat, subalternly confined in bourgeois civil society, was constrained to respond with a realistic political strategy.<sup>44</sup>

Building autonomous institutions of the working class and its allies, institutions of struggle, resistance, self-management, 'cultural revolution', potential people's power 'from below'; transforming the 'common sense' and creating new forms of the 'national-popular' and new forms of culture; creating the United Front as the 'Modern Prince', as a laboratory for the production of strategies, programs and new forms of mass political intellectuality; all these are in fact the conditions of a strategy for dual power and revolutionary transformation. They designate the contradictory coexistence and contemporaneity not just of antagonistic political projects but also of antagonistic social and political forms and configurations.

In such a perspective, dual power acquires a broader meaning. It refers to processes, practices and activities before and after the 'moment' of the revolutionary seizure of power, in whatever mode we define it. Whatever the form and manner of the political rupture, after a necessary contradictory period of dual power, this condition of dual power or of a duality of powers will continue and it will remain a necessary condition for the advancement of revolutionary transformation.

Moreover, it points to another crucial aspect of dual power, namely that of the emergence of alternative forms of social organization. This aspects cannot be found in the original 'soviet' conception of dual power, yet the history of the

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas 2009, p. 150.

workers' movements points also to the importance of antagonistic social practices emerging within the frame of struggles. Self-management experiments, occupations of productive facilities, provision of basic needs from the part of autonomous initiatives (social clinics, self-managed health networks, social kitchens, social pharmacies, autonomous initiatives of solidarity),<sup>45</sup> alternative forms of distribution, alternative media and educational practices, all these do not represent just means to deal with urgent exigencies. They are also experiments in organizing social life in a radically different way. They are learning process in the exercise of power in an antagonistic way.

Marx insisted<sup>46</sup> that we could not talk about a socialist mode of production but for a conflictual and contradictory period where relations of production of the capitalist mode of production would coexist with relations and forms of an emerging communist mode of production. Consequently, the transition period is one of the coexistence and conflict of antagonistic social, economic and political forms.<sup>47</sup> In sum the very essence of dual power.

History has shown the limits of any conception of revolutionary power as the power of the Party in its identification with the State. The uneven and contradictory experience of the Chinese Cultural Revolution has shown that any potential revolutionary transition would also need multiple 'revolutions within the revolution' and the constant unleashing of popular initiatives. In this sense, the existence of autonomous organizations of the subaltern classes and forms

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<sup>45</sup> One can see this dynamic in the broader solidarity movement in Greece during the period of the economic crisis and the EU-IMF-ECB austerity programs. On that see Rakopoulos 2014, Rakopoulos 2016 and Cabot 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Marx 1875.

<sup>47</sup> Balibar 1977.

popular power from below will be decisive within the process of revolutionary transformation.

Such an approach also has to do with the specific nature of any potential revolutionary process. Part of the tradition of the Left and of the revolutionary movement has been the idea that transformation is the process of the implementation of programs conceived as 'blueprints for the future'. In contrast to such an approach, I think that it is much more important to think of the process of transformation as a process of constant collective experimentation. I do not deny the importance of thinking in terms of necessary utopias as archaeologies of the future, in the sense suggested by Fredric Jameson. However, the very change in relations of production, social forms and ideologies, and the transformation of the many pervasive effects of the dominance of the value form, means that this transformation should not be considered simply a process of 'implementation of a program'. Rather, we should think of it as the liberation of collective forms of experimentation and forms of collective ingenuity at all levels of social praxis. Such an approach entails not only 'programs' but also the very 'traces of communism' emerging in these struggles and collective practices of the subaltern classes before and after the 'revolutionary moment'. Gilles Deleuze makes an important observation when discussing Kleist and Kafka, an observation that can be considered as a description of a politics for communism:

Programmes are not manifestos - still less are they phantasms, but means of providing reference points for an experiment which exceeds our capacities to foresee<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Deleuze and Parnet 2007, p. 48. I owe the discovery of this passage to Tassos Betzelos (2013).

In this sense, dual power is indeed not a phase but a permanent modality of revolutionary politics, the permanent need for struggle, autonomous organization, and collective experimentation. Dual power is the permanent struggle for hegemony.<sup>49</sup>

This does not leave aside the question of rupture, or what has traditionally been described as 'seizure of power'. Indeed, recent experiences suggest that any process of actual social transformation requires indeed a major change in the articulation of state power and the materialization (and institutionalization) of radically different forms of the exercise of power. It cannot be limited to gaining an electoral majority and running the state as it is. Such an approach would include limitations to private property, the establishment of forms of worker's control, the nationalization of major sectors of the economy and the democratic control of the judiciary and the repressive apparatuses. However, I insist that this is not enough, hence the insistence on a 'permanent dual power' strategy.

However, all these should not be seen as referring to some moment in the future. They do not have to do with exceptional circumstances or the distance 'moment' of the revolution. They also define the current practice of any politics of a communist perspective and the need to avoid any instrumentalist approach to questions of movement, politics and organization. This implies the collective effort for movements, trade unions and collective forms of organizing that do not limit themselves to immediate demands but also attempt to have a broader transformative perspective. It suggests that we need movements that are also

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<sup>49</sup> Kalampokas 2013.

knowledge sites. It points to the direction of forms of workers' democracy and new forms of participation, collective decision-making and mass politicization. It means extensive experiments with self-management and alternative forms of organization of production. It requires the constant attempt to reclaim public space and create new alternative public spheres. There is an entire spectrum of contemporary collective practices that have emerged in movements such as forms of self-organization and coordination of movements, occupations of various forms, solidarity networks and practices, practices of radical anti-fascism, experiments in self-management and not for profit provision and distribution of goods and services. We should consider these practices as experiments to the direction new forms of dual power and as learning processes for dual power and in some cases as embryonic forms of dual power.

In such a perspective that is based on the centrality of potential new forms of dual power, is antagonistic to important aspects of the contemporary political practices of what we tend to define as 'Left'. These include the parliamentary conception of politics, the bureaucratic mentality in regards to movements, the disregard towards experiments of self-management, the reproduction of rigid hierarchies, gender stereotypes and forms of division of manual and intellectual politics.

In this sense, indeed the revolution lasts a long time...

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