

Revolutions have long been contested as a social phenomenon in both real life and academia. This discussion becomes even more relevant when it comes to “social revolutions.” There have been several baseline assumptions about revolutions and social revolutions that require further examination before they can be confirmed as correct. In this paper, I propose to isolate one particular form of revolution, social revolutions, in order to identify key dynamics and challenges of this form. To do this, I will reconstruct the concepts of the “social question” and of “revolutions,” and once those foundational concepts have been worked out I will have delimited the concept of “social revolutions.” This paper will thus open up the examination of the political specificities of lived experiences of these peculiar revolutionary “moments of madness,” as identified by those moments where “anything is possible”¹ (Zolberg, 1972). Drawing on my ongoing research project, this paper presents some of my findings on social revolutions and my argument that social revolutions are one of the few moments when aspirations of human emancipation from relations of domination, repression, exploitation, and oppression are actually possible.

Skocpol (1979) writes that social revolutions are the moment when “rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below”². Taking this into consideration and by examining social revolutions, I want to argue that rather than acting as a transformation or the moment, when the “political” or “ruling” elites accommodate the masses and respond to them, social revolutions are the moment when the masses are in control of the political community and are beginning to ask critical social questions that do not have any easy answers. To begin, I will focus on the meaning of “social question,” then I will examine revolutions as a specific form of collective political action, and finally I will focus on social revolutions as a specific type, form, or even period, of revolutions. Ending with the political possibilities and potentialities that thus remain in the socio-political phenomena of social revolutions, I will argue that social revolutions are quite unique phenomena and thus, this paper will identify what makes social revolutions different from other revolutionary moments³. What is unique in this paper is its identification of “social revolutions” with the “social” question. Critical political implications of this paper are to be found in the refinement of the understanding of possibilities that exist within the “political realm.” In short, during a revolution, the lived experience of the revolution is itself a life-changing process for the people who have inserted themselves as the political community, and in case of the social revolution this lived experience is even more life changing since the people integrate themselves as the balance of power within any given political community.

Section 1: What is the social question?

To begin this paper, I want briefly address the foundational concepts necessary for the discussion of the “social revolutions.” I will define the “social question,” examine the concept of “revolutions,” and the final section, using the previous sections, will fill out the concept “social revolutions,” as its own unique type of phenomena. Thus, specifying what it means to ask the “social question,” implies understanding that in many ways the social question is a set of questions that are at the heart of human society. For example, Marx states that “to be radical is to grab things by the root”⁴. That is, I want to suggest that to ask the social question means to closely observe human behavior and attempt to reconstruct both the reasons and the behaviour itself through the determinant dynamics at play, in short, to examine the “root” of all human behaviour.

Admittedly, these specific questions are key to understanding all forms of human

¹ (Zolberg, Aristide R., 1972, 183).

² (Skocpol, Theda, 1979, 4).

³ See, e.g., (Comninel, George C., 2003, 153); (Nearing, Scott, 1926); (Kautsky, Karl, 2004); (Davidson, Neil, 2015); (Marx, Karl, 1992a).

⁴ (Marx, Karl, 1992d, 251).

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behaviour, as they allow us to understand the social-political phenomena that sets limits and determines possibilities in the social totality. Similarly to Marx, but for the very opposite theoretical reason, Aristotle suggests that there may be a specific dynamic at the root of most, if not all, social phenomena. On the one hand, Aristotle is an unusual place to start this inquiry, for while he does ask the “social question,” he quickly answers it and assumes that his answer is the “natural one.” That is, Aristotle moves from pointing to the social question to naturalizing the conditions that had to arise for the social question to be asked in the first place. On the other hand, maybe starting with Aristotle is right for that very reason. Consider the following section from *The Politics*,

That one should command and another obey is both necessary and expedient. Indeed some things are so divided right from birth, some to rule, some to be ruled. There are many different forms of this ruler-ruled relationship, and the quality of the rule depends primarily on the quality of the subjects, rule over man being better than rule over animals; for that which is produced by better men is a better piece of work; and the ruler-ruled relationship is itself a product created by the men involved in it ⁵.

The question and the answer presented by Aristotle is about the relationship that exists between the rulers and the ruled, however he concludes his thought processes by attempting to naturalize this relation. The point is, of course, that it is impossible to naturalize this relationship. And it must be stressed that any attempt to naturalize that which is most unnatural, as if it is so “divided right from birth” is beyond problematic, and we must move forward from this limitation. It is here that we can also mention Aristotle’s definition of political community, which does not seem to include the aforementioned relations of rulers and ruled. For example, slaves and women are excluded, and Aristotle would also argue to that it is necessary to exclude the peasant-citizen labourer of Athens, who contemporaneously with Aristotle, actually were in control of the political community. Rather, for Aristotle the political community is precisely predicated on the exclusion of those who are ruled from the political community, which in both Aristotle’s terms and in historical actuality, forms the community of rulers. As Simone de Beauvoir says the “only... solution” in a situation of oppression for the “oppressed” is the “revolt,” and thus the oppressed must “deny the harmony of that humanity from which an attempt is made to exclude them, to prove that they are a human and that they are free by revolting against the tyrants.” Beauvoir continues and gets us beyond Aristotle: “In order to prevent this revolt, one of the ruses of oppression is to camouflage itself behind a natural situation since, after all, one cannot revolt against nature” ⁶. In other words, any attempt at naturalization must be called out and understood as an attempt to deceive and falsify. Rather than be viewed as natural, ruling is by its nature a historical and consequently “unnatural” relationship. This is the very nature of asking social questions: why is it natural that some rule and some are ruled; how is it that some oppress and some are oppressed?

Marx, like Beauvoir ⁷, calls the social question. For instance when Marx discusses capitalism, he does not do so through the lens of the capitalist, but rather by questioning why and how is the actual relationship between classes, and how class struggle has constituted

⁵ (Aristotle, 1992, 1254a17).

⁶ (Beauvoir, Simone de, 1976, 83).

⁷ Here I am also thinking of how she develops her phenomenological description of lived experience in the *Second Sex* (2010), there her argument is clear, to paraphrase, the question of woman is a social question. That is, there is no “feminine essence” nothing biological, historical, social, metaphysical, psychological, economic, etc., that can explain “woman.” Woman is not an ontological phenomena, outside of the actual existing women that have been formed by the lived experiences one “becomes” a woman, as “one is not born a woman.” Indeed, there is nothing natural to woman. Rather Beauvoir’s argument is a political one, the “structured processes” of male power, as found in both the state and society is what creates the entity “woman.” These structured processes form and maintain the creatures of man and women, limiting both men and women through the relations of force therein that are a foundational part of human reality, and thus this is clearly a mediated relationship between men and women and amongst men and amongst women. Beauvoir, does not leave her analysis there either, her point is that through these relations that determine human reality, other relations of ruling exist. Thus, how society and the state deal with women is structured through struggles to impose male power, and struggles against that imposition, along with other relations of ruling, and the state’s role insofar as it exists, and co-exists with male power, is to maintain that same power beside all the other ones, which are themselves engendered by their historical dynamics. Again, Aristotle would seem to be clear about all this, especially given his care to naturalize the rule of men over women, interestingly enough one of his biggest complaints against the social revolution of Athenian democracy was the claim that Democracy led to “uppity women, slaves children, and pets [even!].” In this he was similar to Plato but then again, they thought this way because they were men; (Beauvoir, Simone de, 2010, 5).

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each relationship, thus as Lukács⁸, identifies Marx is always-already taking the standpoint of the Proletariat, there is no natural ground⁹. It is of course deeper, for Marx is one of the few thinkers whose conscious consistency was against anything that “debased humanity”¹⁰, and thus for Marx, nothing debased humanity more than relations of ruling that have emerged out of human but inhumane relationships. Thus, Marx, “all humans make their own history but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen...”¹¹, the relations of ruling that Aristotle identifies, are the circumstances that limit humans from making their own history. That is, as “all hitherto existing society is the history of ...” “struggles” to oppress and “struggles” against oppression¹², Marx is clear that humans cannot stop themselves from asking the social question until they have reached total human emancipation¹³.

Thus, to truly ask the critical social question requires us to pose difficult radical questions. To give an example, that is actually relevant to the topic of the paper, during the English Revolution of the seventeenth century, there was an episode of uprising known as the English Civil War (1640-1649) wherein the ex-peasants, urban poor, labouring peasants, and generally lower classes of England made their voices heard. So loud and clear were their voices, that in one actual meeting they asked the social question. In one of those rare moments when genuinely competing ideas and forces actually met in debate at a Church in Putney England in, the “Putney debates” as they became known laid out a rupture in the political community. It was the rulers and the ruled that met in the guise of the New Model Army and its cohort of leaders was split between the landed aristocracy led by Oliver Cromwell, soon to be Lord Protector and ender of the Social revolutionary English Civil War, and the Levelers, a loose collective that had no clear political project, but whose interest in the question of political community. In this case, the social question was directly asked by a colonel in the New Model Army, a Colonel Thomas Rainsborough, who stated: “I desire to know how this comes to be a property in some men and not in others”¹⁴. This simple question is a perfect example of the social question, getting to the roots of human reality and by doing so, preventing the naturalization of any aspect of ruling and of being the ruled. Why does property exist? What is male power? Racial power? State power? These questions are the set of inquiries that are at the heart of human history, and they have special significance when they are asked, as Rainsborough did, during revolutionary times. For the rulers, it is that time more than ever that the voicing of the question can have the most drastic effect, for it carves away at the ruler’s “natural” lives. It might be possible that at the moment when the social question is voiced during a revolution, may itself lead to the very definition of a “social revolution” for it is the moment when the ruled can be most effective in their efforts against the rulers. We are then moved to ask - what is a revolution?

SECTION: 2: What is a revolution?

Samuel Huntington suggests that a Revolution is “...a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies”¹⁵. Although Huntington’s assertion is useful, a number of problems can still arise from it, and it is necessary to remain

⁸ (Lukács, Georg, 1971).

⁹ See for example, “The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producers determines the relationship of domination and servitude...the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social edifice” (Marx, Karl, 1991, 927). TO be clear, if Marx is a reductionist it is in political reductionism, i.e., that the social relations of force that permeate society, the relations of ruling, are both the first and last instant at all times. See; (Wood, Ellen Meiksins, 1995); for this “renewal of historical materialism”; (Comninel, George C., 1987); is also useful.

¹⁰ (Marx, Karl, 1992d, 251).

¹¹ (Marx, Karl, 1973c, 146).

¹² (Marx, Karl, 1973a, 67).

¹³ (Marx, Karl, 1992c, 216-222, 226,233-234).

¹⁴ (Wootton, David, 1986, 296).

¹⁵ (Huntington, Samuel P, 2006 264).

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aware of them. First of all, it appears that there is some “rapid change,” and this rapid change has an impact on more than one level or direction within the “political community.” However, this “rapid change” is never directly tied to any one political relationship, and may affect various changes in the totality of everyday life. Finally, “rapid change” is in its nature a violent rupture within the political community, as well as a rupture in the relations of the ruling founding the political community. On the other hand, it may not be that all relations of ruling within any given revolution are questioned, since revolution is the general form of a social revolution, and the social question in a revolution may only be questioned in one simple way, which remains a primary difference between a social revolution and a revolution. Furthermore, as Huntington suggests, a revolution is a social phenomena, and it is too much to expect –and shoddy science– to assume that one social phenomena automatically equals another. That a revolution also be a “transition,” would on some level seem to indicate a confusion, as we shall see, unfortunately shared by many.

My attempt, and the reader will have to judge how successful I am, is not to assume that any one social phenomena (which are complex already) equal any other. Nonetheless that sets of phenomena can be grouped together, as similar to each other, without unduly altering the meaning of the concept, i.e., over the many millennia of human existence, history, our history, insofar as any social question exists, will entail similar solutions to the similar problems. Of course, any definition will necessarily determine meanings, but the hope is that this work is precise enough to clarify through delimitation. In that regard, my argument is that both revolutions and social revolutions are specific sets of social phenomena, in fact social revolutions are a specific set of a set of social phenomena (being a specific form of revolution themselves). To be clear, while the term “revolution” can be taken and utilized in many different contexts and for many different reasons, I am simply trying to exhume the very specific set of socio-political phenomena that has accrued in human reality, when discussing revolutions. I will also leave it up to my readers to decide if this limitation alters either my argument or the implications of my argument, and if it does or does not is this to the detriment of my argument or not. To recapitulate, neither revolutions nor social revolutions are “transitions,” technological changes, the emergence of capitalism, or many of the other trappings that the definitions of these phenomena have tended to include over the years.

The precise nature of revolutions’ violence is thus explored below, but Huntington’s definition was a good place to start. While at all times and in all cultures change is a constant, what has changed, or shifted, the “Threshold”¹⁶ of a social phenomena of a revolution would be too broad to make it a transition. Admittedly then Huntington thus may not be an ideal place to start as his argument stresses that a revolution is a transitory stage undergone through countries that are attempting to modernize¹⁷. Thus, that there have been many studies that attempt to define a revolution through its “transitory” nature or the fact that problems of modernization would seem to be related to revolutionary crises, would indicate to many that revolutions are thus a modern phenomena. On the one hand, Wolin’s qualification of the Athenian experience of democracy, the political community of the labouring peasant-citizen, was as not only a revolution, but as a social revolution would indicate the range of non-

¹⁶ For “thresholds,” please see Robert Dahl’s work on Polyarchy.; (Dahl, Robert, 1989); (Dahl, Robert, 1971). The discussion on page 6 (1989) is key, in Dahl’s work it is democracy that has thresholds that can be reached, on the other hand, for me, my point is that revolutions themselves, must hit thresholds of different social phenomena to then be regarded as revolutions. My key takeaway is that consequently, not every social phenomena, and as can be seen not every “political crises” hits that threshold, and thus not every social phenomena of revolution can be considered as hitting the threshold of social revolution either.

¹⁷ (Huntington, Samuel P, 2006). Furthermore, I do not want to get drawn into a discussion on stagism, but my assumption is that stagism is an unhelpful heuristic to read human history. Rather, what could be more useful is not assuming either unilinear nor teleological developments of human history. Since it is true that history has developed in certain ways, the historical outcome cannot be in doubt, rather the necessity for any given outcome over another should not be assumed. For instance, Edmund Leach’s anthropology may be instructive against stagist assumptions. That is, Leach, while employing the heuristic of Weberian ideal types, actually shows that typical tension between ruled and ruler in any given society. For Leach the tension that is maintained and molded by the state, can in the absence of the state lead towards emancipation from other forms of ruling if they are thus allowed to develop. The point being that there are always different possibilities when examining historical resolutions to the “social question,” thus, history should never be assumed, but rather to understand each passing moment contains multiple possibilities, granted history is precisely contingent upon itself, but this given still does not preclude possibilities that are lost to history CF.; (Wood, Ellen Meiksins, 1995); (Conninell, George C., 1987); see also, (Fried, Morton H., 1967).

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modern phenomena that can be considered revolutions¹⁸. On the other hand, while capitalism has changed the political community, it has exacerbated but not eliminated relations of ruling. Consequently, one still has to believe that a revolution is possible at any moment, whether in a political community with or without capitalism, wherever a political community is exclusive rather than inclusive and where exclusive moreover, the political community specifically tends to exclude the ruled in the form of the poor, women, and slaves. But when the revolution is tied to transitions alone, it raises a spectrum of problems, since what if revolutions are neither the cause nor the precipitant of a significant social change in the long view of the social configuration. What if something changes and no revolution is present, then did the epochal change occur? Or a revolution occurs, but no deeper social change passes, then did the revolution not happen? As can be seen, Huntington is quite useful, but it might be necessary to keep ambiguous how much change is effected and the kinds of change incited by a revolution, without rushing into discussions of transitions, modernizations, or a process of shifting “modes of production,” since too many conditions would have been placed on revolutions as phenomena.

Rather, the minimum that one can expect in a revolution can be summarized through Hagopian’s definition as:

...an acute prolonged crisis in one or more of the traditional systems of stratification (class, status, power) of a political community, which involves a purposive, elite-directed attempt to abolish or to reconstruct one or more of said systems by means of an intensification of political power and recourse to violence¹⁹.

Nevertheless, it is evident that a revolution may not be “elite-directed” or necessarily “abolish or to reconstruct one or more of said systems,” assumptions that would seem to imply and maintain a certain certitude of either outcome or intent, which may not be warranted. The end result will probably tend towards some form of elite circulation is a truism, if for the very reason that political systems are almost always “elite directed”²⁰. That is, a political community, in cases where the “elite” exist, the ruling powers, state, gender class, and race, etc., will tend towards being the political community of the self-same elite, especially if the ruled are not strong enough to make themselves the political community against the elite. In other words, if the political community is not taken away from the elite, elite circulation can be assumed. Moreover, some form of reconstruction, reform, or abolishing may be attempted, but these may not necessary be components of a revolution. Alternatively, they could appear as components of the counter-revolution’s consolidation and stabilization. This raises the questions - what is the minimum of a revolution? If a crises has emerged, how can we identify what kind of crises it is? Hagopian offers some useful forms of crises, by specifying that the crises are violent, similar to Huntington’s view, and that the crises appear to take place on the level that the political community is itself at.

The baseline of a specific kind of political crises that includes “recourse to violence” may provide a good starting point. Here it is necessary to ask, what are the specific crises that allow us to further complete this definition? It appears that crises could take many forms, but do all political crises become revolutions? What is the social phenomena that identify

¹⁸ (Wolin, Sheldon, 1996a); (Wood, Ellen Meiksins, 2008); (Finley, Moses I, 1973);(Wood, Ellen Meiksins, 1989). David McNally has been making some recent conference presentations on the labouring/Peasant-citizen and their revolution in Athens.

¹⁹ (Hagopian, Mark N, 1974, 1).

²⁰ (Hagopian, Mark N, 1974, 53). It is worth quoting Hagopian’s belief in elite circulation in full, for he is quite instructive in how elites, wishing to regain ground lost in a revolution, see themselves and their roles in society. Exclusion, and some form of ruling is normal, and acceptable.

Human society fluctuates between the two extremes of a completely closed and a completely open society, which themselves are never encountered in reality. A completely open society would in effect reconstitute itself every day as a perfect social mobility or circulation of the elite would proceed without interference from considerations of past achievements, wealth, or status. A completely closed society, ... would assign individuals their social position from cradle to grave. Barring these two unrealistic solutions, human society is still confronted by a dilemma: social utility demands the utmost competence in the elite, as well as a measure of stability. Unfortunately, the scheme that would continuously reinvigorate the elite with new elements without disturbing social stability has not as yet been discovered. Some societies have for an extended period run upon a kind of golden mean between stability and change, but Pareto doubts that they can be successfully emulated. At any rate, circulation of the elite will occur because it must, and it will take one of two forms. The more normal method can be termed “piecemeal circulation,” though Pareto did not himself employ this phrase. Here the decadent elements of the old elite are gradually and almost individually replaced by more vigorous recruits from below.

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revolutions, and what specifies this form of a political crisis? I suggest that this identification is not tied to something as complex as a transition between one political, economic, or technological form of society. Rather, following Huntington's argument, it can be seen that a revolution is just a shift in the political community which has been directly affected by the influx of the excluded into the political community. Again, not to endorse Huntington's connection of modernization and revolution, but it is interesting that one of his definitions of modernism, would itself seem to be the "rise of mass politics"²¹, and as he goes on to argue:

The political essence of revolution is the rapid expansion of political consciousness and the rapid mobilization of new groups into politics at a speed which makes it impossible for existing political institutions to assimilate them. Revolution is the extreme case of the explosion of political participation²².

In fact, the next key issue at stake is identifying whose political participation (the ruled, and not the rulers) is capable of inciting such an influx. Hagopian uses Pareto to suggest that the participation that is afforded in a revolution is that of a "newer stronger" elite, versus an "older, corrupt and decrepit" elite. A revolution, thus for Hagopian, is just the same old phenomenon that occurs between factions of elites against each other.

Unfortunately, for both social stability and for the incumbent elite, circulation frequently slows down to a point where the elite becomes more and more a closed caste which haughtily rejects the new men who wish to enter its ranks. Pareto states: "It is not only the accumulation of inferior elements in a social stratum that is harmful to society, but also the accumulation in the lower strata of elite elements which are prevented from rising. When simultaneously the upper strata are full of decadent elements and the lower strata are full of elite elements, the social equilibrium becomes highly unstable and a violent revolution is imminent." Violent revolutions in the Paretian conception are the reverse of erratic catastrophes; as a form of circulation of the elite they exercise a vital social function. For if circulation is not achieved in either piecemeal or revolutionary fashion, society will die (i.e., it will lose its national independence or simply disintegrate). Accordingly, Pareto is willing to excuse much of the violence and terror of revolutions because they are merely "external symptoms indicating the advent of strong and courageous people to places formerly held by weaklings and cowards"²³

Is the blockage of a rising elite and their fight for political participation then a sufficient threshold for a revolution? It may be doubted. The reason that I am spending so much time on this corner of political science, and the idea of equilibrium or elite circulation studies is precisely because it is the opposite of my interest in recapitulating revolutions²⁴. Rather, it might be a more fertile direction to consider how revolutions are moments that go beyond elite-circulation, but we still need to evaluate what form this crises takes. Huntington's argument is on the one hand that there is some type of threshold reached where those that are excluded from the political community force their way into the political community. On the other hand, with the definition of modernization including the rise of mass politics, I wonder if the specific political crises of a revolution is not the moment that involves the eruption of the excluded into the political community.

That a revolution is linked to some form of mass politics cannot be doubted. For example, Anthony Giddens²⁵ suggests that "A series of events is not a revolution unless a mass social movement is involved. ... Revolution involves the threat or use of violence on the part of those participating in the mass movement"²⁶. This is thus a good summation of where we have thus arrived, with a direct statement of the "mass politics" and "violence" at root in revolutions. Giddens continues

Revolutions are political changes brought about in the face of opposition from the pre-existing authorities, who cannot be persuaded to relinquish their power without the threatened or actual use of violent means. ...we can define a revolution as the seizure of state power through violent

²¹ (Huntington, Samuel P, 2006 93).

²² (Huntington, Samuel P, 2006 266).

²³ (Hagopian, Mark N, 1974, 53).

²⁴ For more on equilibrium studies and elite circulation, see Hagopian (1974), Huntington (2006),; (Edwards, Lyford Paterson, 1965); and; (Brinton, Crane, 1957).

²⁵ It is thanks to; (Calvert, Peter, 1990, 4); that I was directed to Giddens (1993)'s succinct and insightful phrasing.

²⁶ (Giddens, Anthony, 1993, 620).

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means by the leaders of a mass movement, where that power is subsequently used to initiate major processes of social reform²⁷.

Giddens thus ends in a place, where we might not want to follow, as “major processes of social reform,” may or may take place at the same time, or at the end of a revolution, as a necessary co-relation might be too much. However, he is quite clear in his definition, and in fact delimits revolution in ways that are useful, for a final example, he writes “This condition [collective mass violence] serves to exclude instances in which either a party comes to power through electoral processes, or a small group, such as army leaders, seize power”²⁸. Giddens has certainly helped paint the picture of the type of political crises brought about by the very participation by the masses in the political community, the mass collective political action, wherein before it was either muted or non-existent in the political community, now it is somewhat clarified. Although Giddens is clear, a “small group” or “electoral process” cannot bring about a revolution, the question of electoral process, is intriguing given part of the way that Bolivarian Revolution has developed, especially after 1998 and the first election of Chávez and all of the other consequently electoral battles, are somewhat intriguing indicators of an electoralism not often found in revolutions.

Furthermore, Leon Trotsky, who really helps us understand this form of political crises, insofar as it becomes the inclusion of the excluded into the political community.

The most indubitable feature of a revolution is the direct interference of the masses in historic events. In ordinary times the state, be it monarchical or democratic, elevates itself above the nation, and history is made by specialists in that line of business - kings, ministers, bureaucrats, parliamentarians, journalists. But at those crucial moments when the old order becomes no longer enduring to the masses, they break over the barriers excluding them from the political arena, sweep aside their traditional representatives, and create by their own interference the initial groundwork for a new regime²⁹.

The point is clear that revolutions would appear to be the moment when mass action overflows into the political community and that this is the precise form of crises that occurs within revolutions, in other words, a coup d'état or other form of crises of elite-circulation are not revolutions. These political crises do not contain the emergence of mass collective action, but rather include moments of crises between rulers, and will tend to avoid mass action. Unlike a revolution, other political crises are not centred on the ruled, though revolutions contain inclusion, it is not simply the inclusion of not just any group, but rather the poor, women, blacks, other racialized people, and colonized, into the political community.

Being granted entrance into the political community is not necessarily going to end the political community qua politics, although for the “elites” it may appear that way. It is not necessarily so. The Levelers in their demands may have preferred to not leave any property qualification, or at least very low property qualification, but they also made no pretense towards either women’s emancipation or fomenting an anti-slave movement in England³⁰. Nevertheless, one cannot doubt the ferocity and radical nature of the leveler’s claims on the political community and the effect that their further development may have had on the British polity. In fact, their effects might have been positive, if they had not been destroyed by Cromwell’s counter-revolutionary coup. The claims on inclusion in the political community can become quite radical, although they may also simply be inclusive to a point, and thus not interested in ending the political community itself. The extent of inclusion and can only be resolved through historical investigation.

What is then the connection between mass action and violence? Mao Zedong notes the following about type of violence associated with revolution.

... [a Revolution] is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous,

²⁷ (Giddens, Anthony, 1993, 620).

²⁸ (Giddens, Anthony, 1993, 620).

²⁹ (Trotsky, Leon, 2008, xv). I owe the quote to; (Goodwin, Jeff, 2001, 9).

³⁰ Again, the side of history I would want to come down upon, is indeed that of the Levelers, and the contemporaneous group, the Diggers (or the “True Levelers”) but to be clear, I am not sure the Levelers were themselves truly “levelers” or whether for many, the bad reputation preceded their own understanding of their fight. The Levelers and Diggers were part of a social revolutionary moment, they were a social revolutionary movement.

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restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another. A rural revolution is a revolution by which the peasantry overthrows the power of the feudal landlord class³¹.

On the one hand, it is not necessary to expect a revolution to be the moment of one class overthrowing another, and where mass action may lead to that outcome, but also it may not. All that we may be certain of is that there will be an eruption of mass politics, and this is the very nature of a political crises. While Mao was discussing a specific political crisis, the early twentieth century dynamics of China, the essential aspect to be drawn from this is that not all revolutions may actually achieve the “overthrow of one class by another.” On the other hand, it becomes clear that Mao is specifically discussing the peasant revolt that he was working towards in China at the time, wherein he did want to overthrow the landlords, but not all revolutions would take the same form. In short, Mao, may or may not attempt to limit revolutions to only being the overthrow of one class by another, but it may be more useful to assume that he was discussing the specific Peasant question as raised in 1927 China. Nevertheless, Mao’s point is instructive so far as it confirms that a revolution is a violent political crisis.

Huntington’s identification of the very nature of the crises offers a key distinction and helps narrow our definition, summing up the travels we have thus undertaken.

Revolution, as we have said, is the broad, rapid, and violent expansion of political participation outside the existing structure of political institutions. Its causes thus lie in the interaction between political institutions and social forces. Presumably revolutions occur when there is the coincidence of certain conditions in political institutions and certain circumstances among social forces. In these terms, the two prerequisites for revolution are, first, political institutions incapable of providing channels for the participation of new social forces in politics and of new elites in government, and, secondly, the desire of social forces, currently excluded from politics, to participate therein, this desire normally arising from the group’s feeling that it needs certain symbolic or material gains which it can achieve only by pressing its demands in the political sphere³².

In this instance, the misidentification of “new elites” is correct insofar as the change afforded by a revolution is not profound, then there may be the inclusion of elite factions that had been sideswiped by others, or similar groups of elite may take hold of the state once the crises has settled. Alternatively, any combination of elites may attempt to settle the revolution through force and at the same time attempt to claim the revolutionary mantle. Insofar, as the masses organize themselves in the revolution, they may not achieve too much, but at times, simple “displacement” can win desired reforms.

Nevertheless, Huntington points to a specific claim that revolutions arise when “social forces ... excluded from politics [desire] to participate therein.” It might be useful to keep in mind EP Thompson’s claims about the same social forces, as Thompson quite distinctly overcomes equilibrium studies, in his studies of mass history³³. What is particularly interesting about Thompson’s insistence is that he was writing about a period absent of social revolutions, and revolutionary moments, rather, the edges of equilibrium studies fray with his description of the political community.

I would hesitate before I described this [eighteenth century England] as a class culture But one cannot understand this culture, in its experiential ground, in its resistance to religious homily, in its picaresque flouting of the provident bourgeois virtues, in its ready recourse to disorder, and in its ironic attitudes towards the Law, unless one employs the concept of the dialectical antagonisms, adjustments, and (sometimes) reconciliations, of class. When analyzing gentry-plebs relations one finds not so much an uncompromising ding-dong battle between irreconcilable antagonists as a societal 'field-of-force'. I am thinking of a school experiment (which no doubt I have got wrong) in which an electrical current magnetized a plate covered with iron filings. The filings, which were evenly distributed, arranged themselves at one pole or the other, while in between those filings which remained in place aligned themselves sketchily as if directed towards opposing attractive poles. This is very much how I see eighteenth-century society, with, for many purposes, the crowd

³¹ (Zedong, Mao, 1927).

³² (Huntington, Samuel P, 2006 274).

³³ (Thompson, E. P., 1978b). But more than this piece, see also,; (Thompson, E. P., 1978c); (Thompson, E. P., 1968); (Thompson, E. P., 1993).

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at one pole, the aristocracy and gentry at the other, and until late in the century, the professional and merchant groups bound down by lines of magnetic dependency to the rulers, or on occasion hiding their faces in common action with the crowd. This metaphor allows one to understand not only the very frequent riot situation (and its management) but also much of what was possible and also the limits of the possible beyond which power did not dare to go³⁴.

Thus in regards to studies of revolution, one could keep no worse in mind than Thompson's society, where the "magnetic fields of force" push and pull society in certain ways. The resistance during the 1700s happened when no possibility of Social revolution occurred, but on the other hand, what had set back the resistance of those who were ruled in England was their defeat in the late 1640s, a strength that only started to be fully recovered in the years with the emergence of the Luddite army more than a hundred years later. Thompson's point is that the intervening period was not empty of class struggle, and if most forms were less than cognizant of the profundity of the social question, these years were filled with struggle. The point being that when "mass politics" erupts, where before it was muted or absent, Thompson would still push us to think about how any given society has dynamics that render and sunder it, and that furthermore, under a revolution the magnetic pull of the masses overflows the containers that usually stopper it. The discussion of societies in equilibrium is one of the nodal points when it comes to how the social question animates the examination of both revolution and social revolution. In a revolution, one pole is the masses, exerting magnetism on the other poles and players. On the other hand, in a social revolution, the magnetism of the masses would sweep every part of the community towards it.

Moreover, as Thompson points out while there were many backward struggles³⁵, in England during the eighteenth century. Thompson suggests that these magnetic poles of mass action could have led towards other possibilities, including revolution, had they been able to develop, but either internal backwardness and lack of organization, or more importantly, external counter-revolution were preventing fuller development. But moving on from that, there can be no assuming the idea that a revolution always implies to be the overthrow of once class by another makes no scientific sense. For the claim of a revolution depending on a transition in class societies, directly depends on how one understands and defines class struggle. If the assumption is that a revolution occurs viz. a rising class, then the class struggle has been misunderstood. Marx's point is not simply the displacement of one ruling class by another³⁶, rather as shall be under discussion with "social revolutions" the point is specifically, that there is a cessation of all forms of exploitation, domination, repression, oppression, which becomes possible through the (simple) way that simply by asking about the question of exclusion the masses could ask other questions. Accordingly, a revolution is the overflowing of the masses, of whatever form, into the political community, whereas a political transition may be effected in the political community, but maybe be not, sometimes elite circulation (simply) occur, if the counterrevolution proves stronger, or the attempt at revolution fizzled out before any (real) revolutionary change can occur.

In so far as a revolution is the development of the eruption of some form of mass politics, where the masses tend to be excluded from the political community, the counterrevolution is the attempt to close the gateway to avoid with ever-increasingly seriousness, the side effects of mass-politics and the magnetism thereby implied. The end of the revolution is the return to the displacement of the masses from the political community, i.e., for the elites, the end, must confirm their rule once more. Thus, the role of the counter-revolution is to precisely guide the masses, whether with the carrot or the stick. Brinton

³⁴ (Thompson, E. P., 1978b, 151).

³⁵ Backward, in the Maoist sense of political consciousness that some groupings of the masses may be either indifferent, or worse, against mass organization with the goal as organization to raise the social question. (Thompson, E. P., 1978b, 136, 163).

³⁶ Marx and human emancipation, versus rising classes (Comminel). In vulgar Marxist circles, it is common to see historical materialism as a science of rising classes, of stagism, of technological changes, of teleological, and unilinear studies. (Wood, Ellen Meiksins, 1995) certainly "renews" the possibility of historical materialist understandings of the world. Comminel's work (especially,; (Comminel, George C., 2010b); (Comminel, George C., 2000b); (Comminel, George C., 2013);) would seem to suggest that while Marx himself may have gotten caught up in antiquated and vulgar applications of historical materialism, but at the same time it is through Marx's work that one can follow the function of a renewed historical materialism as well. See Comminel's discussions; (Comminel, George C., 1987, 53-75, 116-119, 141-166); for Marx's errors, the rest of Comminel's book is taken up with working out some of Marx's strengths.

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suggests that the revolution eats its young and much of his focus is on the ever-tightening political developments of revolution, the possible escalating radicalism that moves inwards, that is becomes more radical with each passing development of the revolution. While the elite hangs on and then retreats, Brinton and the “natural histories” correctly suggest that for revolution to succeed it must get rid of the moderates as well. The end of the revolution can be the result of many things, for example fatigue, however such a fatigue would be not with the revolution itself as much as the counter-revolution and any other counter revolutionary tendencies.

Another question to ask concerns the state and its functions, that is, if a revolution occurs where a state exists, what does the state do in this dynamic? For the normal conservative framework of the state, when faced with a revolution the tendency of the state is, as normal per state function, to attempt to contain any conflicts. Thus, it is not enough to simply think about “seizing state power” without also understanding the need to also move against the state. In fact, the state is a much bigger presence than theories of equilibrium might assume. The very nature of the state is to be the institution of institutions that holds the ultimate repository of social power, and is thus always interested in maintaining the status quo, i.e., the rule of the natural rulers. As such, it is not a neutral party. The state is never a neutral party and this is never more obvious than during revolution, where its conservative nature becomes clear and, sometimes, even more insidious. For example, Cromwell, a brilliant tactician, as well as Napoleon, are seen as the continuation of the revolution, however it is unclear whether they actually were an *epic* leader of revolution or its very end. In some ways, they were still a representation of those who had made the revolution, but in other ways their power allowed the state some stability in its transition away from the revolution. The state’s role in any form of revolution, unless it is completely ruptured by the revolution, is towards counterrevolution, either consciously through elements of the state, or it may be confined to the preservation of equilibrium.

Nevertheless, the state may also be affected by the revolution. In fact, at times, the revolution alters the very source of power at the heart of the state. If the political community experiences the interjection of the masses at its very heart, a claim could be made that the state’s core role in society, to be the institution of institutions, has been affected by the revolution. Moreover, the eruption of the masses can also displace the state power that had previously existed. Such displacement can bring into being a new state, as Athenian democracy did, or it might try to end the state, but either a revolution develops and flourishes or it does not flourish and as such does not develop. However, given history, sometimes there can be features of uneven and combined development ³⁷, as both phases and waves of revolutions. Phases, because the revolution can go deeper than it would seem at first, especially to the ruling class who see depth where it does not exist, or the revolution can fizzle out, or be put down, quite rapidly. Waves, because at times both internationally and intra-nationally revolution would seem to pass through wavelengths of human development ³⁸. For instance, the UCD development of revolutionary moments, take 1905 and 1917 Russia, or 1789 France, then England and Haiti a few years after. Thus, while there is no precise logical development for revolutions, there are aspects across time and space that can be relevant when historical development is analyzed.

To sum up, revolutions are moments when there is a specific form of a political crises, and the masses appear on the stage becoming a political force that all must respond too. While they may be triggered by wars, civil wars, coup d’état’s, and other political crises, revolutions are not simply any political crisis. Rather revolutions are a specific moment when the masses

³⁷ Please note, while learning from the Trotskyist debate around UCD and Capitalist development, I am using the term to simply mean any form of developmental dialectic – not only the “economic” (political) relation of capitalist development in the international sphere. Rather I am interested in the movement of history itself, the uneven and combined developments of different social phenomena across the human totality. That is. I assume that UCD is the form of any dialectical movement, especially if the movement is a social phenomena being described. One can only assume that if dialectical change is true, and if any social phenomena is a repetitive occurrence, this dialectical repetition occurs through the UCD of the process that the change bears across both social spaces and social times.

³⁸ Although, there is no space in this paper to develop this line of inquiry, please see; (Wertheim, Willem Frederik, 1974); and; (Katz, Mark N, 1997); for their insightful analysis.

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begin speaking for themselves, and become a strong push/pull in the political community, insofar as the mass movements can be sustained. Revolutions come into existence where mass politics did not exist, or if they did then they were muted enough that the moment of revolution remains a quantitative difference for the masses. As we have achieved a degree of clarity with regards to the concept of “revolutions,” presently we shall turn to the paper’s purpose of and begin to answer its key question - “What are Social Revolutions?” In contrast to revolutions, a social revolution is the further development of the violent crises where the masses do not simply become a political force around which the other participants in the political community orbit, but rather are the moments/phases where the masses control the political community in a way that forces the other members of the political community to follow them.

Section 3) What is a Social Revolution?

In the previous two sections we covered the “social question” and attempted to thus clarify some thresholds of revolution, in that a revolution is the “displacement of mass politics” into the political community, a form of a specific political crises. Following the previous conceptual development, I suggest that “social revolutions” are themselves a specific form of the particular political crisis where mass politics spill into the political community, and the crises of mass politics enters a new phase where the masses control the political community. Thus, social revolutions, like revolutions, are attenuated with violence. The social phenomena of revolutions has been narrowed down, from simply always entailing an active, eager, and maybe inconsistent, but quite present “force field of the masses,” to being the emergence of the full magnetic control of the masses over society and the state, not just any form of a political crisis, but rather an even more specific form of the phenomena. In social revolutions, the level of control by the masses in the political community remains unprecedented. George Comninel’s 2003 chapter on “Historical materialist sociology and revolutions” suggests that, “Social revolutions, then, might be seen to result from the capacity of the common people of a society – whatever its specific class character – to advance their own ideas and interests as a result of a fundamental political conflict dividing the dominant class”³⁹. What differentiates revolutions from the more profound outcome of social revolutions is the move as the major player in the political community to being “the only game in town”⁴⁰, able to “advance their

³⁹ (Comninel, George C., 2003, 94). Although Comninel does misread the dynamic of both the French Revolution and the English Civil War, for he believes that all revolutions, (and social revolutions?) must begin with the invitation by the elite to the masses. The fact that this was the precipitant of both configurations, is then most likely by accident fitted into the “normal” operation of a revolution, he would stress the need for a revolution to follow some sort of unconscious political crises precipitated by the involvement of the masses in other political crises. It can be assumed that neither spontaneity nor mass organizational work can begin the consequence of revolution. He thus mistakes the aristocratic assumption that a social revolution, a revolution even must be called into being by the ruling classes, mass politics can never be the initiative of the masses. On the other hand, Comninel would probably be comfortable with the assessment that mass politics could at the very least, theoretically not be touched off by another political crises, but may suddenly erupt as the ever-present social conflict that Thompson’s “class struggle without class” concept allows for, overtaking the political community, in a revolution quite clumsily, and with no great strength of complete control, the ruled can displace the rulers. Political crises go beyond elite circulation, and neither an existence of a political crises such as the crises between different elites, outside of the political crises generated by revolutionary moments, nor sometimes even, the invitation to act by one set of elites, makes a revolution. Rather, both revolutions and social revolutions, are the *dialectical leaps* of historical development rarely afforded mass politics, but can and have occurred in both the past and the present. In the first case, revolutions allow for the masses to insert themselves as a political force, and with a political strength that is not ignorable. On the other hand, in the second instance, social revolutions then are the control, and the levels of control that are afforded by the *next* leap, that of the masses becoming “the only game in town” (see below). It must be pointed out that for the English masses this slow process was cut quite short by Cromwell. In one example, that may prove the rule, or it might break the rule, is that of Venezuela, which was touched off as a *primary* revolution, and also quite directly as a *social revolution*, before any breaks within the ruling class occurred. In fact the constant eruption of the masses, in both electoral, but more important through everyday construction of the Bolivarian Revolution, especially after Chavez’s election, is unfathomable if we were looking for previous breaks in the ruling classes of Venezuela before 1989. The neoliberal restructuring of Venezuelan elite, had opened a gap between their politics and the politics of the Venezuelan masses, long before the elites collapsed, but which had gone largely unnoticed from 1983 through the final and opening eruption of 1989 that was the beginning of the Venezuelan Revolution. The percipients of and the actual Bolivarian revolution will get examined in my other presentation for this conference.

⁴⁰ Juan Linz & Alfred Stepan’s (1996) work addresses democracy and without wanting to discuss democracy, I think their description of the consolidation of democracy can help us understand the threshold of social revolution as well. But the difference between consolidation and non-consolidation of democracy would suit a threshold of “social revolution as well.” Linz and Stepan’s baseline is useful, “we mean by a consolidated democracy a political situation in which, in a phrase, democracy has become “the only game in town “ And to which they clarify: “a

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own” agenda, the masses develop themselves and their capabilities. Furthermore, for the few historical forms of this type of revolution, the threshold of a social revolution must include this very control of the political community. In fact, while in earlier instances the mass disruption went only to the extent that it facilitated a political crisis, in a social revolution the existence was no longer the crisis, but rather the counter-revolution’s existence becomes the political crisis for the social revolution. Clearly we have only begun, this section will specifically explore “social revolutions” by tying previous discussions together with other analyses which specify this phenomena, before leading to the conclusion ⁴¹.

Theda Skocpol’s work can certainly clarify some aspects of social revolution. Her argument reveals several difficulties that one has to confront when attempting to precisely answer what social revolution is:

But within this matrix, social revolutions deserve special attention, not only because of their extraordinary significance for the histories of nations and the world but also because of their distinctive pattern of sociopolitical change.

Social revolutions are rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below. Social revolutions are set apart from other sorts of conflicts and transformative processes above all by the combination of two coincidences: the coincidence of societal structural change with class upheaval; and the coincidence of political with social transformation” ⁴².

I agree that there is a “distinctive pattern of sociopolitical” phenomena that establish both revolutions and social revolutions, but admittedly, Skocpol’s claims are weakened when she attempts to connect the success and the assumption of a social change to the political cries of revolution. Success, as has been suggested viz. the discussion of transitions, is less important, than the consequent maintenance and sustained repetition of the revolutionary moment. I also would want push on Skocpol’s limit to social revolutions as being “accompanied and in part carried though” by the masses, for as clarified with Comminel, social revolutions are controlled by the masses. Moreover, social change, due to the rise of mass politics, in of itself, is not a political program. The Levelers may have sounded too radical to Cromwell and the rest of the Whigs, but this does not mean that the levelers would have necessarily completely changed the British Commonwealth had Cromwell not crushed them. What is true though, their rising political control may have eventually disrupted the ruling of the commonwealth qua property, but it was only before Cromwell that the question was raised ⁴³, and thus the claim of a sustained social revolution, following Cromwell can be laid to rest, for Cromwell crushed the revolution. On the other hand, aristocrats would not have been satisfied with their continued challenge and thus in the longer term would have increasingly been worried about deeper changes, the more that any challenge to their rule was left unanswered.

Indeed Skocpol’s discussion about the English Civil War and the larger process of the English revolution in the seventeenth century is instructive but not for the reason that she wants. For she is not incorrect in writing, that “though the English revolution was certainly a successful revolution it was not a *social* revolution,” but Skocpol is incorrect in her reasoning why ⁴⁴. As stated, Cromwell’s success was the success of the counter-revolution over the masses. Nevertheless, the longer term dynamic in the English commonwealth (the political

narrower definition of democratic consolidation, but one that nonetheless combines behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional dimensions,” moreover, they continue: “Democracy becomes the only game in town when, even in the face of severe political and economic crises, the overwhelming majority of the people believe that any further / political change must emerge from within the parameters of democratic formulas”. Again, without wanting to discuss the relation between Social revolution, and democracy, I think not if we imagine the term “Social Revolution” in place of “Democracy” but rather their insights into *consolidation* serve to identify certain thresholds of social revolution, see,; (Linz, Juan J. and Alfred C. Stepan, 1996, 5).

⁴¹ In my other presentation for the Revolutions conference in Winnipeg during the last weekend in September, I will be presenting on the Bolivarian Revolution. My argument is that the Bolivarian Revolution (1989-present day) is a social revolution. Most people date the Bolivarian Revolution with Hugo Chávez’s election in 1998, but according to my research, Venezuela has been undergoing an active revolution since 1989. I will not be discussing this example further in this paper, but in the other paper and presentation, I will show using the research discussed here, the thresholds that have been maintained, broken, and created in the Bolivarian revolution.

⁴² (Skocpol, Theda, 1979, 4).

⁴³ Cf.; (Wood, Ellen Meiksins, 2012); (Wood, Neal, 1984); (McNally, David, 1989a; Wood, Neal; Ellen Meiksins Wood, 1997); (Comminel, George C., 2000a); (Brenner, Robert, 2003).

⁴⁴ (Skocpol, Theda, 1979, 141, but see 141-144 for her argument).

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community) was not based on any transition through revolution, no matter how much the British proclaim the noble *glorious revolution* of 1688, it was a specific type of consolidation of the aristocracy (which mirrored the earlier consolidation in rural England by the 1640s (although the same period of the social revolutionary period of the English Revolution, this consolidation of rural England by the aristocrats was not itself the social revolution). That is, the English commonwealth, as constituted from the early 1500s through the late 1688s, barely changed. The Monarchy was faced with the Aristocrats outside of Parliament, and the Aristocrats as represented by the Parliament of aristocrats, both before and after 1688. Nevertheless, 1688 was a resolution for the aristocrats of whether the Monarchy or the rule of “common-law” was to be the guarantor of property, and was not a transition, but was rather the resolution of tensions that had existed since the early emergence of the commonwealth in the early 1500s. Indeed, the transition that did occur (simultaneously, it must be admitted, but not necessarily the cause of the ECW), was the generalization and consolidation of the landed Aristocracy’s capitalist market of leases in the early 1640s ⁴⁵. The basic structure of the English commonwealth long preceded the ECW, and long post-dated the resolution of the Glorious Revolution. Skocpol is thus correct in assuming that the Glorious Revolution was not a social revolution, as it did not actually include social change, but is incorrect as assuming that there was no social revolutionary moment during the English revolution, as unlike the Glorious revolution, the ECW does reach that threshold. Instead, based on the facts of the social actors in the ECW, the gentlemanly-aristocracy and the Monarch were opposed to the peasants, ex-peasants, urban mobs, New Model Army soldiers who made up the majority of the levelers of the early and late 1640s. The crushing of the same “collective actor” is what negates the possibility of 1688 being a social revolution. The social change of the 1640s was not allowed to flourish, but it was that period that marked the social revolutionary phase of the English Revolution *pace* Skocpol.

The question to we are forced to ask next is - what is the point of a social revolution then? Rather than argue that a social revolution must be successful, as Skocpol does, I want to move away from the notion that tries to exact a standard definition of what a social revolution must be. Instead, I prefer to follow the approach that examines the threshold that can define our standards of social revolution. Specifically, social revolution is the only moment that one can find when the masses themselves have control of the political community, and through this control find themselves attempting to address the social question. On the other hand, Jack Hardy’s chapter in the collective (1926) work, *The Law of Social Revolution* ⁴⁶, which discusses slave rebellions is inconclusive. Since if the slaves work to end slavery as a human condition, than for Hardy, perhaps it could then be considered a slave social revolution reflective of their purposes. Alas, until that end is achieved, Hardy would seem to suggest that as “Personal freedom was the [only] objective of all the rebels. They had no idea of delivering a blow at the institution of slavery” ⁴⁷. While obviously true, attempting to free only myself, ends up not truly freeing me Hardy is not clear enough on the very possibility and the real fear of any rulers, or slave-masters, and that any form of slave revolt would challenge the very nature of slavery qua slaves. For even if claim my freedom in rebellion, maybe you will as well, since slavery is always predicated on force and coercion ⁴⁸. then by the very nature of slaves revolting, would call into question the relationship predicated on force, and may allow other slaves to see in some slaves achieving freedom, the freedom for all slaves. Admittedly then, if

⁴⁵ (Skocpol, Theda, 1979, 142).

⁴⁶ (Nearing, Scott, 1926). This remains a very curious, but still not a flawless text from the decades after Kautsky, after the First World War. It is interesting because the text remains in-between for us, it was written after October 1917, but was before the full disaster of Stalinism had begun, it emerged a few years after the horrifying “third way” of fascism had fully entered into liberal democracy, but was still a decade before the true devastation of fascism lay waste to the world. Thus, this text is a unique record of the debate on the left/liberal spectrum about the rise of fascism and the failure of liberal democracies (or some such) from the prevention of the emergence of the liberal democracy’s hard side in fascism, a debate that was still raging on while this text was produced. Just as a revolution is collective behaviour, so to was this book a collective endeavor, and thus chapters were individually but collaboratively written, with the conclusion being a collective chapter, and a text in-between authors.

⁴⁷ (Nearing, Scott, 1926, 20).

⁴⁸ (Nearing, Scott, 1926, 14). Also see,; (Fried, Morton H., 1967); for a stimulating discussion of the institution of slavery, its origins, and the human societies that have contained this institution, in short, the force relationships at its heart.

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the mass politics that takes hold of the political community is maintained and deepened, this form of political community could be considered successful.

However, and this cannot be overstated, success cannot be the very condition of social revolutions as they have not been historically successful, rather “elite circulation” is more common. Revolutions end. At some point, the social revolution ends, sometimes due to fatigue or generational missocialization, but more often due to repression. Once the social revolution is over, some of the reforms or benefits may remain, except for the experience of fear with regards to the rulers, and the fear of the ruled, since the social revolution’s very condition of success would be the cessation of the existence of rulers through the creation of a political community of the ruled against the rulers. The improbability of this situation negates the need for the component of success to be an inherent part of the definition of social revolution. Rather than relying on the threshold of success to define a social revolution, the study of a social revolution implies that the question of success is more of temporal and spatial length, where the continued institutional mobilization and maintenance of basic control of the political community offers ways of examining success in a social revolution. In short, the point is that insofar that the masses do not have control in the political community, the social revolution has finished.

The key point here is that the political crisis of a revolution is not always a social revolution, and mass action does not mean that the masses have genuine control of the political community, rather “simply” that it has effected the political community in a manner that does not allow the political community to exist with “politics as normal.” On the other hand, a social revolution goes beyond with a deepening of the political crises and a widening of the displacement of a revolution, where both society and the state are altered from being the domains of the rulers as the ruled displace them. It must be pointed out that this displacement is not simply the circulation and creation of a “new elite,” but the replacement of the elite with a different social group, the ruled. Aristotle notes that democracy is the one political community different from all others, since in democracy the poor rule and not the rich, even if the poor are a minority and the rich are a majority. Thus, only if the poor rule is the threshold of democracy achieved. The same can be observed in a social revolution, where the bar is set equally high. Skocpol’s take on “social revolutions” picks up on the idea of “who carries through” these changes. Specifically, those who “carries through” any social and political changes may be “class based revolts from below” which “lead” the political community, and thus truly contain the focus of a “social revolution” as opposed to any other revolution. On the other hand, a “Social Revolution” is a phenomenon where the masses take control and become the source of force, instead of being content to act within the bounds of the political community.

Since we have successfully eliminated “transitions/successes” from the concept of revolution, the next step in the discussion of “social revolutions” should be an attempt to examine potential transitions of either a political or economic form into another. While this will prove to be a problematic stance, we will explore this direction further by using some of Marx’s more programmatic statements. I would argue that in his discussion of a social revolution, as part of his preface to the Grundrisse, Marx’s attempt at a summary of his research does a disservice to the Grundrisse and his life’s work. Although this was supposed to be his most direct statement on the method of historical materialism, Marx unfortunately turns away from his usual carefully argued political implications (i.e., calling of the social question) to the incorporation of a materialism that barely maintains its historical nature, and truly lacks the political analysis that Marx in general keeps.

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or - this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms - with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure. In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political,

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religious, artistic or philosophic - in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production. No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society. Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation. In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society. The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production - antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism but of an antagonism that emanates from the individuals' social conditions of existence - but the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation⁴⁹.

The final part of this section takes up some of Marx's claims in this long passage, moving from a discussion of the "forces of production," to the tasks of a revolution and its stages. But here, the reliance on the metaphor of history's motor force through the forces, rather than the relations of production, is what unfortunately, marks Marx's small aporia. Intriguingly, the passage from the third volume of *Capital*, referred to before⁵⁰ does a better job of laying out the precise nature of class relations, as relations of power, and struggles around the very nature and existence of property, or in the phrase "producers of surplus," and the "appropriators." Alas, in the preface, Marx is not as careful as he tends to be, as here he ticks off the stages, and he fails to comprehend, the non-teleological, multi-linear, contingent aspects of human history, that break the hold that teleological, unilinear, and given understandings of history. Although these are interesting points, it is not clear how scientific they are, given the qualitative lack of room for analysis of class struggles to develop. As a result, Marx does not make a careful enough analysis available so that one is left not discussing social revolutions as transitions or transformations, whether political or economic.

A key aspect found in Neil Davidson's definition of social revolution is his response to a quote, taken from Steven Pinkus, but he accepts what Pinkus gets wrong and negates what Pinkus gets right. In that sense, Davidson in attempting to follow Marx has not fully processed the scientific *leaps* that Marx actually does make, even at the times when Marx is flawed in his analysis, he pushes beyond, but not Davidson.

Revolutions must involve both a transformation of the socioeconomic orientation and of the political structures. That transformation must take place through a popular movement, and the transformation must involve a self-consciousness that a new era has begun. [Pinkus, as quoted in Davidson]

These assertions about the character of social revolutions involve elements that are entirely arbitrary. I accept that they "must involve ... transformation of the socio-economic orientation and of the political structures," but why "must" these transformations also be achieved by a self-conscious popular⁵¹.

Where Pinkus is clear is where he states that "Social revolutions" "must take place through a ["self-conscious"] popular movement." Where Pinkus fails, in his assumption that revolutions must "involve a transformation." Davidson, is thus correct to question Pinkus, but upside down in his questioning. In fact, Pinkus' challenge that a revolution, must have a "self-conscious popular movement" would indeed differentiate a revolution from a social revolution, for the "self-conscious" aspect would make a positive threshold for social revolutions over "mass politics" that is not "self-conscious." Rather as Davison insists that "a revolution must involve transformation of the socio-economic orientation and of the political structures," in a

⁴⁹ (Marx, Karl, 1992a, 425-426).

⁵⁰ (Marx, Karl, 1991, 927). For a better example, the quote referred to from *Capital 3* included above may be, as Comminel says, a clearer "striking condensation of the central themes of historical materialism"; (Comminel, George C., 1987, 168).

⁵¹ (Davidson, Neil, 2015, 112).

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way beyond the very fundamental level of success that we have already established as the threshold, would seem to limit the negative identification of social revolution itself in several different ways. The most egregious being Davidson's devotion to stagism⁵², which is as useless as his reliance on the "forces of production" meme that Marx unfortunately utilized.

Consequently, utilization of "forces of production"⁵³ precludes anything of any real interest in the more explicitly political focus on "relations" that of class struggle over social property relations between producers and appropriators in any given social system, this focus offers a renewal of the practice of historical materialism⁵⁴. Discussion of the overt productive forces and their rise and fall, is not as relevant as assumed and places no focus on the actual social struggles around property and thus how production is fit into property relations. The point being that the slippage into "forces of production" is unfortunate, for both the early Marx and the late Marx do better. Similarly, while the Communist Manifesto features the same tragic flaw⁵⁵, the singular theme of Marx's life was the precise notion of class struggle, which in the examples given in the Communist manifesto was quite clearly set between the rulers and the ruled⁵⁶.

That neither "forces of production" or transition can be part of the threshold of social revolutions is a practical beginning, and in this instance Karl Kautsky's definition of social revolutions may also be useful. He begins with the passage we just examined by Marx, specifically Kautsky's claims are that a revolution is not simply an economic (or political) transition, even if Marx could be making that claim, in certain places.

Marx, in his introduction to the Critique of Political Economy, defines social revolution as a more or less rapid transformation of the foundations of the juridical and political superstructure of society arising from a change in its economic foundations. If we hold close to this definition we at once eliminate from the idea of social revolution "changes in the economic foundations," as, for example, those which proceeded from the steam engine or the discovery of America. These alterations are the causes of revolution, not the revolution itself⁵⁷.

Here Kautsky is suggesting that a focus on "economic relations" is not sufficient. Writing from within the stage of the struggle of reform or revolution in the early 1900s, Kautsky does see deeper into the issue, even if later he repudiates this early work with his derisions on the social revolution in which the Bolsheviks took part. His focus is between the alignment of reform and revolution. For example, in an intriguing way it appears to be similar to Georges Lefebvre majestic development of the social revolutionary reading of the French Revolution. What is also curious is that Kautsky's examples of revolution and reform are structured on the social relationships that have through mass action, and ended in either revolution or reform. Consider Kautsky's following statement:

The contrast between reform and revolution does not consist in the application of force in one case and not in the other. Every juridical and political measure is a force measure which is carried through by the force of the State. Neither do ally particular forms of the application of force, as, for example, street fights, or executions, constitute the essentials of revolution in contrast to reform. These arise from particular circumstances, are not necessarily connected with revolutions, and may easily accompany reform movements. ...

⁵² Cf.; (Davidson, Neil, 2015, 114). Which means, even if unnecessary stages are presumed, the very notion of stages is only valid if considered as shifting forms of modes of exploitation, but even then their historical development cannot be assumed, except for the chains of linkages that lead to today's political society.

⁵³ At best, the "division of labour in society", at worst the technological and adaptive pressures that exist under capitalism, assumed to have existed throughout history. That is, the impossibility of capitalist market pressures existing before the rise of market dependency as the origin of capitalist social relation

⁵⁴ Cf.; (Wood, Ellen Meiksins, 1995).

⁵⁵ In fact it has two tragic flaws: a "forces of production" and alongside, a "rising class" narrative, which fortunately again, do not negate, Marx's correct application of his analysis of social relations of property throughout both the *Communist Manifesto* or the rest of his work.

⁵⁶ If Marx had followed up those insights in his discussion of social revolution, more clearly it might even be that as a study of a social revolution, Marx's claims in the Civil War in France are even more beneficial. Unfortunately, this is not the space to truly follow Marx's suggestions, but through the direct definition of social revolution, at this time, one must keep in mind Marx's arguments about the complete and necessary audacity that the Paris Commune undertook itself, for as he suggested in the Gotha Program, "every step of a real movement is more important than a dozen programmes" (Marx, Karl, 1974, 340).

⁵⁷ (Kautsky, Karl, 2004, 6).

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The reference to street fights and executions as characteristic of revolutions is, however, a clue to the source from which we can obtain important teachings as to the essentials of revolution⁵⁸.

In other words, what is “normal mass politics” is completely different in non-revolutionary and revolutionary times. What is quite intriguing here is how Kautsky ends his argument, just a page later.

Between the two [reform and revolution] lay the conquest of political power by a new class, and in this lies the essential difference between revolution and reform. Measures which seek to adjust the juridical and political superstructure of society, to changed economic conditions, are reforms if they proceed from the class which is the political and economic ruler of society. They are reforms whether they are given freely or secured by the pressure of the subject class, or conquered through the power of circumstances. On the contrary, those measures are the results of revolution if they proceed from the class which has been economically and politically oppressed and who have now captured political power and who must in their own interest more or less rapidly transform the political and juridical superstructure and create new forms of social co-operation⁵⁹.

This essentially outlines his argument. Below we will further interrogate how EP Thompson plays with the dynamic between those who “give reforms” and those who “get” them. The main reason that I favor a degree of resistance to Davidson’s stagism is that here Kautsky paints a picture of history, that historians like EP Thompson and Georges Lefebvre fill in. History is not the development of stages, but the times when the rulers win, or the times when the ruled almost achieve, or rarely do achieve, the end of ruling. History has yet to truly achieve any form of progress, and in fact, Kautsky would seem to be arguing that progress can only be made if the oppressed wrest control from their oppressors. On the other hand, Kautsky, would also incorrectly, seem to agree with a “rising classes” understanding of revolution, where reform or revolution would often seem to be the possibilities of that rising class.

In short, Kautsky makes some intriguing claims about how reform and revolution are an ever-involving social dynamic, and about the need to organizationally build a social revolution from a movement that pushes social reforms through wresting power.

The conquest of the governmental power by an hitherto oppressed class... is accordingly the essential characteristic of social revolution in this narrow sense, in contrast with social reform. Those who repudiate political revolution as the principal means of social transformation or wish to confine this to such measures as have been granted by the ruling class are social reformers, no matter how much their social ideas may antagonize existing social forms. ... It is not the striving after social reforms but the explicit confining of one’s self to them which distinguishes the social reformer from the social revolutionist. On the other hand, ... a social revolution [is] when it proceeds from an hitherto socially oppressed class. Such a class is compelled to complete its political emancipation by its social emancipation because its previous social position is in irreconcilable antagonism to its political domination. A split in the ranks of the ruling classes, no matter even if it should take on the violent form of civil war, is not a social revolution⁶⁰.

Nevertheless, Kautsky is clear and delimits revolutions for us, they may cause elite circulation, but they are not elite circulation. Kautsky’s claims will lead directly to Aristide Zolberg’s construction of the possible, for Kautsky is clear that social revolution deepens from and with any social reform, which broaden out what is possible.

Zolberg’s emphasis is not on social reform versus social revolution, but rather he focusses on the endless infinite in the social totality, the possibilities that bubble out of a revolution, and perhaps his approach works better for social revolutions. Zolberg begins by asking: “If politics is “the art of the possible,” what are we to make of moments when human beings living in modern societies believe that “all is possible?”⁶¹ Moreover, the fact that “anything is possible” is precisely predicated on the existence of a layer of “collective behavior”⁶². That is, revolutions open up a space in the political community and free up many varied possibilities, although Zolberg does not correctly follow up on the cogent claims made. That is, Zolberg would seem to see revolutions in moments that could be revolutionary but end up

⁵⁸ (Kautsky, Karl, 2004, 7).

⁵⁹ (Kautsky, Karl, 2004, 7-8).

⁶⁰ (Kautsky, Karl, 2004, 8).

⁶¹ (Zolberg, Aristide R., 1972, 183).

⁶² (Zolberg, Aristide R., 1972, 183).

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resolving into non-starters, for example, Zolberg lists among “moments when all is possible,” 1848, 1871, 1945, and 1968. This is both useful and possibly misleading, in my reading, only 1871 and potentially 1848, could be considered revolutionary moments, whereas the liberation of France, and 1968 could have led to revolution but clearly did not. Henri Lefèbvre, as quoted by Zolberg, leads the way in this “limitless” possibility that can only occur once the ruling elites have been removed from the political community, but Zolberg does not appreciate Lefèbvre’s point. This is unfortunate, for where Lefèbvre is clear, Zolberg’s assumption that the moments of 1848 (and 1968) matched the revolutionary opening that 1871’s Paris Commune offered, misreads what was different for 1871 from 1968 and 1848. Similarly, although it was not a revolution, Beauvoir’s identification of the possibilities in France in 1945 post-liberation⁶³, do match the rise in various possibilities in all four epochs, even if only the Paris Commune truly embodied Lefèbvre’s identification of the possibilities below. Zolberg’s analysis of the “art of the possible,” as Lefèbvre suggests the Paris Commune started to achieve:

The insurrection of March 18 and the great days of the Commune that followed constituted an unlimited opening toward the future and the possible, without care for the obstacles and the impossibilities which barred the way. A fundamental spontaneity ... sets aside secular layers of sediment: the State, bureaucracy, institutions, dead culture.... In this movement prompted by the negative, and therefore creative, elements of existing society-the proletariat-, social action wills itself and makes itself free, disengaged of constraints. It transforms itself in one leap into a community, a communion in whose midst work, joy, pleasure, the achievement of needs-and first of all social needs and the need for sociability-will never be separated. In the wake of economic 'progress,' man will free himself of economics. Politics and political society will disappear by merging into civil society. The political function, as a specialized function, will no longer exist. Daily life will be transformed into a perpetual festival. The daily struggle for bread and work will no longer make sense⁶⁴.

Thus, the dynamic becomes more than just “anything that is possible,” but rather something different, working towards the ending and erasure of relations of ruling, which is a key component of Lefèbvre’s analysis of the brief period of difference after March 1871, and are missing in the other periods that caps Zolberg’s reconstruction of France’s history. Nevertheless, Zolberg’s analysis clarifies so much about the possibilities of the “Moments of madness.”

Thompson offers a more profound historically accurate portrayal of how to interpret moments with no social revolution in sight, and yet moments where the social question is asked, and where other “possibilities”, as Zolberg calls them, still remain.

In the eighteenth century resistance is less articulate, although often very specific, direct and turbulent. One must therefore supply the articulation, in part by de-coding the evidence of behaviour, and in part by turning over the bland concepts of the ruling authorities and looking at their undersides. If we do not do this we are in danger of becoming prisoners of the assumptions and self-image of the rulers: free labourers are seen as the 'loose and disorderly sort', riot is seen as spontaneous and 'blind'; and important kinds of social protest become lost in the category of 'crime'. But there are few social phenomena which do not reveal a new significance when exposed to this dialectical examination. The ostentatious display, the powdered wigs and the dress of the great must be seen also - as they were intended to be seen - from below, in the auditorium of the theatre of class hegemony and control. Even 'liberality' and 'charity' may be seen as calculated acts of class appeasement in times of dearth and calculated extortions (under threat of riot) by the crowd: what is (from above) an act of giving' is (from below) an act of getting'⁶⁵.

Although Thompson’s work is not specifically about a social revolution, it still contains quite a lot to recommend it, as a basis towards the examination of social revolution. Thompson traces out instances when the social question is asked and yet the moment does not become a social revolution. One of the possible reasons for the lack of a social revolution is that the rulers successfully countermanded the drive towards the fulfillment and avoided or otherwise muted the emergence of mass politics. But at the same time, Thompson’s approach to history shows that historical developments were not necessary or teleological, but rather contingent on fighting any attempt to naturalize relations of ruling. As such, Thompson fully substantiates

⁶³ For example,; (Zolberg, Aristide R., 1972, 185-186, 196, also see 184-202).

⁶⁴ (Zolberg, Aristide R., 1972, 190).

⁶⁵ (Thompson, E. P., 1978b, 150).

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Kautsky's problematic interpretation of social developments, for reform can be an "act of giving" and/or it may be an "act of getting". Moreover, in Thompson's reconstruction of history, the "politics of the possible" are quite brought to light.

Prior to concluding with a recapitulation of this paper's argument, I want to examine George Comninel's short essay on the "Historical Materialist Sociology and Revolutions," since much of Comninel's work is Thompsonian, and he provides a quick lesson on what historical materialist sociology looks like and how it would examine revolutions. Comninel, as part of the Political Marxist theorization of the "renewal of historical materialism," offers a type of master class on how historical materialism views the world through an examination of social relations of property, that is of power relations. One of Comninel's major themes is the recognition of history as non-unilinear without necessary transitions, other than in the loose sense that history has a traceable development, Comninel thus clarifies many of the themes that we have been puzzling over in this paper. Comninel is not convinced that a revolution or a social revolution could be transitional phenomena, in the sense that social transformations *only* –or at all- occur through revolutions. Instead, he is concerned with reconstructing the concept of social revolutions through the social history of the French Revolution and its impact on Sociology. At the same time, he detangles the need to assume a type of revolution called "bourgeois revolution" ⁶⁶ when it comes to the historical materialist understanding of revolution. He is quite successful in his short paper since he manages to succinctly question and sum up ways that compliment Henri Lefèbvre's examination of the importance of 1871 in social revolutionary studies.

One of Comninel's key claims lies in the importance of the French Revolution in the development of historical sociology ⁶⁷, he thus develops his interpretation of the revolution based on Georges Lefebvre's ⁶⁸ "Social interpretation of the French revolution". Comninel is clear that the French Revolution did not start as a revolution, rather he argues that the French revolution was pre-revolution, an "intra-class conflict" amongst the ruling and while a directly political crises, it was, at this early point, not a revolution ⁶⁹. This type of non-revolutionary political crises at some point became a revolution, when the masses upsurged, but before then? The upsurge began when the sans-culottes were "invited" into the political community ⁷⁰. The examination of a "progressive" deepening of the conflict from a "civil war" into a revolution, and eventually into a social revolution, is precisely "the social interpretation" of the French revolution ⁷¹. Comninel's following point is thus necessarily foundational to the study of social revolutions:

Lefebvre recognized that it was the aristocracy who opened the revolution through their challenge to the monarchy. The bourgeoisie opened their phase of the revolution not as a capitalist class, but through growing opposition to the threatened dominance of the aristocracy, especially with respect to state offices. The political conflict between these social groups in turn created the space for the people of Paris to become politicized, as they came to see the aristocracy as opponents to 'the Nation', and instead identified with the bourgeois leaders of the Third Estate as its advocates. When, in July 1789, the urban crowds rose up and seized the Bastille while searching for arms with which to 'save the Nation', they not only thrust the bourgeoisie unexpectedly into power, but sent shock-waves across France. In the weeks that followed, the

⁶⁶ Here, bourgeois does not necessarily mean capitalist, and is an unfortunate ahistorical tendency to read capitalism back into bourgeois politics. The point being that no matter how one looks at it, capitalist consolidation and capitalist development are synonymous with "primitive accumulation" and thus are at all times a net loss, and not a net gain for the lower classes. Even if the idea is to clear the ground of feudalism, what emerges may be the same or worse for peasants and is not an outcome searched for. For peasants and for the urban poor, capitalist development entails a loss of possibility through the rise of market dependency that the market can never quantify. Thus, the idea that mass politics is involved with the emergence of capitalism is absurd, except against the very development of that social relationship.

⁶⁷ See for example,; (Comninel, George C., 2003, 86).

⁶⁸ Lefebvre refers to Georges Lefebvre and not Henri Lefèbvre, who is quoted in the paragraphs above.

⁶⁹ (Comninel, George C., 2003, 92).

⁷⁰ (Comninel, George C., 2003, 94).

⁷¹ Several pieces by Comninel pull out many of the advantages of this interpretation. His longer work (1987) points out that it was not a revolution but a civil war before the political conflict of the urban mobs and the peasants shifted the ground under the (non-capitalist) monarchy, the (non-capitalist) landed aristocracy, and the (completely non-capitalist) bourgeoisies clearing the ground for renewing the "complex" social interpretation of the French Revolution, along with the other shorter pieces are instrumental for understanding his view as suggested here. Also see,; (Comninel, George C., 1989); (Comninel, George C., 1985).

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final social group of participants – the peasantry – rose up in their own local attacks upon the symbols of aristocratic privilege, and the obligations imposed by them⁷².

Comninel is quite precise in so far as neither the social revolution nor the revolution of the French Revolution allow for the developing struggle between the two distinct but related elite groups, even though the social revolution and the revolution itself occur almost simultaneously. Comninel continues in a similar vein when he offers a degree of clarity with his development of the concept of social revolution.

...the Revolution opened as a sort of civil war within the dominant class. It is not a difference in class interests that divides the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, but their status difference as it may (or may not) relate to their common social interests. In this conflict, the bourgeoisie as a group did not gain ascendancy over the advocates of privilege on their own, but only through the involvement of the popular social groups in both Paris and the countryside⁷³.

In other words, the revolution occurred through the invitation of the feuding remnants of the feudal state, landed class, urban elites, and monarchy of non-elite elements, who quickly took things into their own hands. This had been a different form of political crisis that was neither revolutionary or social revolutionary. In particular, this could be considered “elite circulation struggles,” a decidedly non-popular (as in not of the masses) movement which came into its own force quite easily.

Comninel argues that the defining specificity of the revolution’s mass politics was the quick identification of a separation of the masses from various form of elites from ruling in the political community:

The popular movement, particularly in Paris, did not merely support one of the two sides in the political struggle, but came increasingly to identify its own interests and objectives in the form of affordable subsistence and the practice of direct democracy. The political course of the Revolution, then, follows from the complex interaction between these different social groups, each with its own agenda. The radical course of the Revolution emerges from the conjunction of interests between successively more democratic and republican bourgeois politicians and the popular movement. With each spasm of popular uprising, the revolutionary leadership moved to the left, increasingly narrowing the shared basis of their social interests until the Jacobins in power can be recognized as essentially professional politicians and administrators, and having driven away successive waves of bourgeois more readily identified with property interests. In the end, however, not even the incorruptible Robespierre shared the interests of the popular radicals, and the people did not rise up to save him when the leadership swung back to the right in Thermidor. Recalling that the revolutionary struggle in England also had the form of a civil war within a dominant class, the striking parallels between these two revolutions – so often attributed to the character of bourgeois revolution – can now be seen to lie instead in the similarity of the complex politics created by the opening of a political space for popular radicalism by contending groups within the dominant class⁷⁴.

What this point by Comninel suggests is that the difference between the early periods of the French revolution and the English Civil War are minimal, and the greater distinction lies in the fact of varying struggles, resolutions, and counter-revolutions obtained⁷⁵. It should still be noted that the English Civil War was as “topsy turvy,” if only since “The resort to popular support as a means of defeating the crown became not only an issue in its own right, but in some ways the defining issue of the Civil War”⁷⁶. To sum up, the English Civil War, and the period of the French Revolution, were different moments and revolutionary movements, but similarly the development of mass politics in the political community, and at the same time, a situation of social revolution which attempted to break the hold of natural rulers in the political community took hold in both places, more than a hundred years apart. Building on this, Comninel correctly asserts that in this “topsy turvy” mode the rulers are no longer secure in their rule because of the displacement afforded by mass actors, and as with a revolution, in a

⁷² (Comninel, George C., 2003, 94).

⁷³ (Comninel, George C., 2003, 94).

⁷⁴ (Comninel, George C., 2003, 94).

⁷⁵ Not even to mention that fundamentally, the English had a very different ‘economic’ formation with the market of leases, that existed in the English countryside, which was precisely lacking in France, and which had nothing to do with France’s urban elite, or any other social grouping in France at the time.

⁷⁶ (Comninel, George C., 2003, 94).

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social revolution the rulers no longer rule.

For Comninel, what is strikingly different about the political community undergoing a social revolution is that other possibilities begin to be achievable. In this sense, he is echoing Zolberg and also being more substantial, as he stated in (2010a) in reference to raising “the social question ... a distinctive radical politics emerged”⁷⁷, and thus the cost of human emancipation becomes totalized.

The struggles for human emancipation must have, at their core, ... struggle[s] to end ... alienation. This [the social relation of property] is not, however, the only form of alienation through which humanity has been, and continues to be, oppressed. Ultimately, the realization of full human freedom requires the elimination of our collective subordination to any form of sovereign power – we must not be subjected to some “other” that is constituted as more than “us”⁷⁸.

A social question of property relations may have finally been resolved with the *glorious revolution*⁷⁹, which was the continuation of the English Commonwealth, but it was not the raising of the social question of property as Rainsborough had asked less than forty years prior to 1688. In his 2003 work Comninel was even more on point, writing that capitalism and “modern society” do not “mark... the end of human history”. Rather, humans can develop “... a further, qualitatively different form of society,” and a “revolutionary...” leap where revolution, not only means the “transformation [of the political community] as a concrete objective and subject of histor[y],” but also the creation of institutional behaviour against “bureaucracy” and “authoritarianism,” through an attempt at “writhing away of the state” alongside altering conditions of ruling within society, which is the precise promise of a social revolution⁸⁰. Even if circumstances such as these are rare, the root behaviour of social revolutions has been cataloged, and the possibility remains that humans can imagine society without relations of ruling.

Conclusion) Nearing and moving beyond singularity in social revolutions

Nearing, and the “The Labor Research Study Group”’s challenging work from 1926 *The Law of Social Revolution*, examines social revolutions through a lens similar to what I purpose in this paper. Nearing argues that a social revolution “involves or implies a rapid change in the social status or social outlook,” and at the same time invokes the fact that:

... it is a movement of one group against another, of an oppressed or exploited group in its effort to replace _the oppressing group. ... So is every social change, no matter how drastic, by which an oppressing or exploiting class ameliorates the conditions of the exploited class. This is the essential difference between social revolution and social reform: the driving force in the former case lies in the exploited group, while the driving force in the latter case lies in the exploiting group⁸¹.

This approach attempts to define social revolutions differently, for they are not the actions of those that represent another, nor do they bring change because one is pushed to reform by the demands by mass politics, or in avoidance of mass politics, but rather because the very nature of the concurrent mass politics is a key component of social revolution, the self-directed and acted amelioration of social injustice through the addressing of the social question.

Recalling Hardy’s discussion of slave rebellions, would also appear to support Nearing’s definition of social revolution, although Hardy’s chapter would work against the grain if we recall his argument. Nevertheless, for Nearing and *pace* Hardy, as the amelioration of ending slavery for those caught up in slavery is of in-itself a human good, then categorically a slave

⁷⁷ (Comninel, George C., 2010a, 61).

⁷⁸ (Comninel, George C., 2010a, 77).

⁷⁹ It is of course, immaterial if the period of the “English Revolution” was a revolution or not, the name suggests it was, but was it? Certainly, the Civil War could have developed into a revolution given time, but on the other hand, was the *Glorious Revolution* of 1688, the displacement of the masses into the political community? I am not so sure, any analysis would have to work forwards and backwards from the English Civil War and its end in Cromwell. I could certainly believe that there was some mass action leading up to the *Glorious Revolution*, but whether the English masses supported it, or even displaced the political community enough to discuss a “revolutionary moment” is doubtful.

⁸⁰ (Comninel, George C., 2003, 87).

⁸¹ (Nearing, Scott, 1926, 4).

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rebellion should be considered a social revolution. Even if slavery in general is never fully abolished, the very nature of a slave rebellion, a slave revolution, calls into question the existence of slavery, even if this calling the question is not done with full consciousness, and even if this impulse is never fully acted on. The only answer for the slave is to end their condition of slavery, which is not far from the suggestion that all forms of human slavery must end.

For, as Nearing points out, “a social revolution is...” for their purposes “the employment of direct action by an exploited group or class, in a successful effort to displace the exploiting group or class, and to bring about rapid changes in social habits and outlook”⁸². This expectation would not be too limiting, if the question of success is similar to the definition produced by this paper’s previous discussion. In particular, this becomes relevant if one is not trying to parse revolutions, and social revolutions, through transitions, nor through the metaphor of one rising class displacing another in a great chain, none of which conditions make it easy to then specify what is unique about social revolutions. Rather Nearing and the study group produced a clear statement on conceptualizing social revolutions through the process of tying together the raising of the social question and revolutions qua revolutions. Admittedly, there is no constant stream of struggle at all times and in all places, but one must imagine that, as Thompson pointed out about the Eighteenth century, where a social revolution was absent, and mass politics were subterranean but not absent, that the “social question” was consistently asked⁸³. Nearing et al edge towards that understanding, but are not sufficiently clear about it, as they claim, “Social revolution... has been and is a part of the entire social process under a class society. It will remain a factor in social economy as long as the world continues to live under...exploitation”⁸⁴. Which is a truism, but they would also suggest that “economic pressure... has ever been a potent revolutionary spark”⁸⁵, which is also true, but at the same time is a limited proposition⁸⁶. It is limited because we leave nothing to historical contingency, but simply assume that the worse someone is, eventually, they will move to change, an assumption that may not be assumed.

Thus, as this argument proposes, it would never seem to be too premature to assume the actual full displacement of the rulers, and while they remain few, Nearing points out that “Social revolutions are recurrent phenomena in a class society”⁸⁷. In short, the crucial question of “why some are ruled and some rule” is bound to occur any time and place that ruling exists. Moreover, as rare as this occurrence might be, it is the always-already existing flipside of the existence of rulers: the ruled, and their needs, as long as rulers rule, so too this question will exist. Hence, while this view cannot presume the length of either the revolutionary epoch, or the possibilities involved, “all is possible” under a revolution, even if too few social revolutionary moments have been sustained beyond the first few instances of this form of social power.

The social question not only inquires about property and class relations, but rather the

⁸² (Nearing, Scott, 1926, 6).

⁸³ The same holds true in Beauvoir’s examination of *The Second Sex*, although, perhaps her complaint is similar to Marx’s in that UCD of women’s emancipation is weak (in the sense that as she says, women will never kill all the men, and thus end male power, precisely in the way that while Marx shows the possibility to end class relationships, he knows that it will decidedly not happen overnight) that continuous historical defeat does not lend itself to show the possibility of human emancipation through collective struggle, in fact, more always needs to be done.

⁸⁴ (Nearing, Scott, 1926, 248).

⁸⁵ (Nearing, Scott, 1926, 249).

⁸⁶ In fact, many scholars argue something similar, Skocpol being one quite astute observer, Tilly and Tarrow, Davis’s J-Curve, they all point to similar things. Misery does not breed revolution, revolutionary moments, or revolutionary subjects. However, the endless discussions about Marx’s supposed misery fixation, or any form of an imposition of an accelerationist fantasy on Marx are less than useful. Social suffering is a continuum of experiences in the totality, but any assumption that more suffering is more revolution, is the exact opposite of Marx’s point about supporting positive social reforms, achieved through self-organization and the developmental dynamics of UCD there in. The desire of accelerating human suffering is always the exact opposite of Marx’s ethical reading of the social totality, and which is also the assumption of a form of social sadism. Most would seem to recognize the desire to end exploitation in Marx and in social revolutions, but this is that which always remains unnamed, for behind the assumption of an acceleration of misery as Marx’s sufficient cause in-itself to drive a revolution, would assume that Marx is not interested in total human emancipation, and in fact misses the very point of Marx’s claims. One does not have to be the suffering poor to be both suffering and poor. The masses can organize (and probably much better) if they are not starving or living in pure misery.

⁸⁷ (Nearing, Scott, 1926, 2, 245).

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social question is broader, and as Beauvoir clearly shows - "women are a social question". Fanon and other anti-racism theorists make similar claims, in the sense that the ruled, Black, colonized, or otherwise "racialized" person desires to end their very condition of racialization. Anytime and in any form, the social question is raised it is both ontological and not, as humans are never naturally ruled. It is not ontological because there is no human being outside of the social totality encapsulating the human form, there is no human essence and no human nature. However, it is ontological, as humans create their social totality, humans are historical creatures and what we do does exist, through us and through our endeavors. In this case, if a social revolution exists, then for further development it must seek to answer all "social questions" that have been raised through the actual-existing relations of ruling, class, gender, race, slavery, etc. As Marx correctly points out in several places, not the least of which the Preface critiqued earlier, "humanity asks no questions that it cannot answer." It may be possible to have a social revolution that answers only one question, but then that revolution would have prematurely limited itself and probably lead to mass fatigue given the lack of total human development enabled. As Kautsky suggests, the resolutions offered will tend towards entropy rather than infinity, or as Hagopian insists, a simple dynamic of elite circulation will occur. Instead of opening up to the infinite possibilities where everything is possible, human reality, remaining limited and tainted by power, is never dimmer and further from hope for us then when it is without a social revolution.

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