

REVOLUTION

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A revolutionary shift away from development is an idea whose time has come. It is indispensable to us as we face the current social and environmental crisis; it is urgent given the accelerated pace of destruction of the environment and people's livelihoods; and it is immediate in the sense that it is possible to practise it in the here and now. A new meaning of revolution must be capable of questioning radically the conceptual basis of development and moving beyond modernity.

The concept of revolution invokes a number of substantial political and cultural changes. Considering the French Revolution as the best known example, revolution is seen as indispensable to break away from an unfair order and to transform the institutions and forms of political representation, including the social and economic fabric of society. With different degrees and emphases, this concept was used to describe radical change in Mexico, Russia, China, and Cuba, among others.

The idea of revolution has also been instrumental in promoting conventional development practices. Such is the case of the industrial, technological, internet, and consumer revolutions. Such revolutions reinforced the core ideas of development even while achieving substantial changes in the structure of society.

More recent events confound the concept. In some regions there are still significant social movements defending traditional conceptions of revolution, for instance, as a means to break away from capitalism and move towards socialism. In Central and Eastern Europe, the exit from 'Real Socialism' was presented as a revolution, albeit in the opposite direction, towards market economies. Conversely, socialist revolutionary experiences, for example, in China or Vietnam, maintain such a discourse but their development strategies are functional to capitalism. And whereas Islamic revolutions reinforced the criticism of development by attacking its eurocentrism, they endorse economic growth.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Latin America witnessed a left turn with several governments describing themselves as revolutionary – Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua. But these countries they

adopted neo-developmental styles that fuelled economic growth through the intensive appropriation of natural resources.

Therefore, we are confronted with a variety of events that have been described as revolutionary, particularly referring to the political dimension, but also affecting cultural, economic, and religious aspects of society. In all of these cases, however, the basic components of development survived, such as economic growth, consumerism, the appropriation of nature, technological modernization, and democratic weakness. There is a paradoxical situation whereby classic revolutions such as in Russia or China, and recent revolutions such as twenty-first-century socialism in South America, whether secular or religious, all gravitated around the idea of development. Some of these revolutions showed positive results regarding political representation and social equality, but remained trapped in instrumental ends geared towards capturing the state (particularly the Leninist, Trotskyist, and Maoist versions). They all failed to promote alternatives to development.

This could be explained by the fact that all modern political traditions share the same background. Indeed, the idea of revolution matured along with other categories of modernity, such the state, rights, democracy, progress, and development.

The persistence of developmentalism has led many activists and academics to become disillusioned with revolutionary experiences, and to argue that the concept is no longer applicable to present-day realities, favouring instead a focus on local practices. Yet, this position creates an important hurdle, given that proposals for radical alternatives to development imply a set of revolutionary transformations.

Given that all of the current varieties of development are unsustainable, any radical alternative must question their shared conceptual bases in modernity. The radicalism involved in such effort requires a revolutionary practice and spirit. A revolution in the modern sense might foster, for example, a change in state regime, or replacing one variety of development with other. It thus becomes necessary to create a new interpretation of the idea of revolution capable of exceeding modernity and of imagining an alternative to its ontology.

This concept of revolution entails a rebellion vis à vis modernity, highlighting its limits while exploring alternatives to it; it summons an innovative imagination in order to outline and rehearse other rationalities and sensibilities, as well as an expanded politics involving multiple social sectors, practices, and experiences.

This understanding of revolution possesses substantive similarities

with the Andean idea of *pachakuti*. *Pachakuti* refers to the dissolution of the prevailing cosmological order, while installing a state of disorder that allows for another cosmovision to emerge. Therefore, a revolution in terms of *pachakuti* does not aim at destroying modernity, but at provoking the disorganization and dissolution of its structures while generating other understandings and effects. It involves a significant re-creation.

The practices of this kind of revolution have many antecedents. The experience of disorder and re-creation is nourished both by rational ideas such as the overwhelming evidence of the social and environmental crisis, as well as by affective, artistic, spiritual, and magical experiences. This revolution does not endorse monocultures but a diversity of expressions, is collective, and requires personal transformation, particularly in restoring the value of life – Mahatma Gandhi or Ivan Illich, *zapatismo* or *buen vivir*, offer models of this. Revolution in this sense allows for a rupture with utilitarian values, re-claiming multiple ways of assigning value – aesthetic, religious, or ecological, while accepting the ‘intrinsic value’ of the non-human world.

As development is a performative construct, constantly produced and reproduced by all of us through daily practices, this revolution interrupts that performativity. For instance, it suspends the commodification of society and nature. These and other features of modernity thus become disorganized, leading to an unavoidable and sometimes uncomfortable consequence: a revolution that breaks away both from capitalism and socialism.

This revolution's prefigured political practices intertwine synergistically, while disseminating throughout society, becoming concretized in actions, affects, and other styles of doing politics, particularly through the interstitial rebelliousness that stems from dignity and autonomy. This is a revolution with the co-participation of non-human actors, including animals and other living beings. It reinterprets the meaning of society. Consider the possibility of an ‘animal proletariat’.

This kind of revolution disorganizes the duality between society and nature, while allowing for the recreation of relational worldviews that re-embed society in nature and *vice versa*; it extends notions of ‘the subject’ to non-humans.

In sum, while modernity presents itself as a self-contained universal domain, hiding its limits and neutralizing the search for alternatives to it, this revolution disorganizes, exposes and fractures modernity's limits by opening them up to other ontologies. The revolutionary act consists in creating the conditions of possibility for new ontological openings.

Further Resources

Holloway, John (2003), *Change the World without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*. London: Pluto Press.

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