

**On the Prospects for Social Revolution
in the Industrialized Democracies of the West**

Patrick M. Regan
Department of Political Science
Binghamton University
PO Box 6000
Binghamton, NY 13902-6000
Internet: pregan@binghamton.edu

Social revolutions have been the focus of considerable scholarly attention over the past quarter century. The theoretical linkages that lead to revolution generally consist of some variant of either relative deprivation, inequality, class conflict, or political mobilization, though a more recent trend is to model the decision to participate in revolts from the perspective of a rationally calculating actor. Most of the empirical work, moreover, has involved an examination of the likelihood of revolution in either a group of developing countries, or eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. However, generalizing our understanding of revolutions beyond these categories of countries has yet to be attempted, though Goldstone hints that the present-day United States exhibits some of the factors consistent with historical causes of revolution, and that we "ignore the past at our peril".¹ This essay poses two questions: a) whether there is a potential for social revolution in the industrialized countries of the West, and b) whether we might be able to evaluate the conditions under which any such revolutionary movement might gain momentum. In essence this is thinking about the unimaginable.

There are two things striking about this theoretical inquiry. First, one of the virtues of sound theoretical reasoning should be that it is widely applicable, and second, one of the objectives of political science as a scientific endeavor should be our ability to predict social changes. So if what appears to be a rather coherent body of theoretical work contributes broadly to our understanding of the workings of the political world, then it should offer insights into what the world of politics will hold. This is particularly relevant given the recent events in the former Soviet Union and the upsurge of right wing militia violence in America. Not only did the discipline of political science as a whole thoroughly miss one of the greatest political events of this century, but the Soviet Union, a highly industrial and relatively modern country, has undergone a social revolution of some magnitude as the world observed with amazement.

The Soviet Union has experienced a sweeping revolution despite the claim by Huntington that modern societies will not experience revolutions.² If a country as large and seemingly as strong as the Soviet Union can succumb to revolutionary pressures, then why should we expect that other highly industrial countries are immune to such political mobilizations? Given a lack of theoretical reasoning to suggest such immunity, we probably should not. Nor might democracy be the saving grace, for as Huntington argues, political democracy is not the vaccine to prevent revolutions, even though Goodwin and Skocpol posit that the ballot box has been the "coffin of revolutionary movements".³ But predicting the onset of a revolution is suppose to be akin to predicting the next earthquake, something long sought after yet rarely if ever achieved.⁴ Tilly, however, sets this out as a critical challenge to social scientists.⁵

However, the theoretical thrust of this work departs from those who attempt to predict the specific onset of a revolution, or those who seek to demonstrate the mechanisms that lead to a specific level of protest.⁶ Trying to predict the actual level of protest, the timing of its onset, or the point at which protest gives way to successful revolution is a worthwhile endeavor, particularly in highly volatile countries. But this research targets a much broader level. Rather than focusing on the point at which social dislocations give rise to revolutionary movements, I pose the question of whether the theoretical linkages that tie social and structural factors to revolutionary politics are generalizable to the industrial West, and if so, can we use this knowledge to evaluate the potential for revolution in this category of countries. I am concerned not so much with when it will happen, but whether it is thinkable. If revolution is not thinkable in the industrialized democracies, then Fukuyama's concept of the end of history may be applicable across the political, economic, and social strata of societies.⁷ But if revolution can be considered possible -- even likely -- then the results of this inquiry could have profound social and political implications.

But why might one raise doubts about the apparent stability in the industrialized world? Two factors stand out: a) increasing cleavages among ethnic and racial groups, and b) changing patterns in social and economic dislocations. These two trends are of course linked, and a cursory look at each should suffice to make the issue clear.

In the realm of socio-economics nearly one out of ten members of the workforce are officially unemployed in many of the leading industrial countries.⁸ Those without double-digit unemployment figures have structural unemployment resting at about seven percent of the workforce. The number of underemployed, moreover, leaves countless additional workers falling far short of their potential. Industrial output has been declining in many of these countries, or marginally increasing in others.⁹ The effects of recent efforts to "privatize" the world's economic infrastructure appear to have quite starkly favored the wealthy at the expense of the poor and middle classes. At the same time the ability and willingness of states to temper the effects of these difficult economic times has come under increasing strain. Access to education, furthermore, is becoming increasingly difficult, with the better off being able to purchase their way into university, while the less fortunate go without.

Moreover, the extent of these structural problems is often masked by aggregate data and exacerbated by racial and ethnic cleavages, with urban areas and minority groups suffering much more severely. For example, in spite of the upward mobility of many African Americans in the United States, urban centers tend to be populated overwhelmingly by members of this racial group. And it is in these urban areas where unemployment is highest, educational facilities the poorest,

teenage pregnancy most prevalent, and drug abuse nearly epidemic. The twenty years of hopeful optimism resulting from President Johnson's "Great Society" is giving way to hopelessness and despair. This confluence between racial and ethnic tensions, on the one hand, and socio-economic dislocations on the other are not confined to the United States. The budding neo-nazi movement in Germany is testament to the resentment felt by the majority for minority ethnic groups. Other examples such as the North Africans in France and the Blacks and Pakistanis in England are evident throughout Europe. In short, the conditions that are theoretically linked to revolution, it would appear, are prevalent in the most modern countries of the world. And if the conditions associated with revolution are in place, then it makes sense to ask whether there is theoretical potential for revolution, and if not, why not.

I will start by outlining the theoretical logic that has guided much of the study of social revolutions over the past 30 years, and from that discussion I will articulate a model that should account for both the political stability and instability in this subset of the global community. The proposed model will be a result of a synthesis of these past three decades of research; in many ways it is not new, simply reformulated and recast in a manner that helps to illuminate the issues at hand. However, from this model we should be able to speculate about the future stability in the industrialized world.

But before rushing ahead it is necessary to put my own scientific house in order by defining revolution. What is meant by revolution has been the subject of intense debate¹⁰, and a coherent, operational definition is critical for analytical clarity. Most definitions of revolution incorporate among other dimensions, time, class, and violence, with a consequent realignment of social, economic, and political bonds.¹¹ Although to some degree each of these factors is inherent in a social revolution, the rigidity of these criteria may be overly restrictive for 21st century political change, particularly in the industrial part of the world.¹² I will conceive of social revolution as a sweeping and rapid transformation in the social and economic structures around which a society is organized, with these changes resulting from mass political action.¹³ The state apparatus need not be swept from the hallowed halls, but the relationship between the state and the social structures of society must undergo a fundamental transformation. This may be a class-based phenomenon, as some would argue as necessary, but it need not be so. Nor is large scale violence a necessary component of the process, as most others would seem to suggest.¹⁴ While violence may be associated with revolutionary politics in most historical cases, it is not a necessary condition for revolutionary change, particularly in modern industrial societies where participatory forms of

government can accommodate -- and possibly facilitate -- sweeping changes without violence.¹⁵ This was made evident by the recent revolutions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Before one casts a skeptical eye toward this conceptual definition, some justification is in order. As has been suggested, revolution is generally conceived as part of the process of -- or one method of achieving -- political, economic, and social development.¹⁶ If the general thrust of this assertion is correct, then there would appear to be limited theoretical justification for maintaining a definition of revolution that is inconsistent with the outcome to which it contributes. When Huntington argued that revolution "will not occur in highly modern societies" he apparently could not conceive of a form of development beyond that achieved by the industrialized democracies of the West.¹⁷ But there is no reason to think that a highly modern, highly developed society must necessarily stagnate on those two dimensions. The "end of history" is at best only a catchy phrase¹⁸. If revolution and development are as intertwined as earlier suggested, and if there is the theoretical potential for change, then there must be the theoretical potential for revolution. Furthermore, if the concept of development has evolved in the quarter century since Huntington penned his classic work, then one might reasonably expect that the concept of revolution might need to change as well -- at least as it pertains to the industrialized part of the world.

A Theoretical Model of Revolution

As indicated at the outset, the theoretical linkages tying social-economic conditions to revolutionary behavior consist mainly of relative deprivation, inequality/class conflict, and mobilization. Structural factors and systemic conditions have also been tied to the onset of revolutions, though for heuristic purposes this three-fold typology serves as a useful organizing tool.¹⁹ In following with much of this literature I will briefly outline the central components of each argument as if the process were primarily monocausal. From this I will bring together these seemingly disparate pieces and articulate a model that portends to not only account for instability within society, but also stability.

a)Relative Deprivation

The place to start is with relative deprivation. Davies argued that a gap between value expectations and value achievements would account for the onset of revolutionary behavior.²⁰ If recent trends led to the expectation of a continued increase in the satisfaction of economic and social needs, any sharp or sudden decline from that trend line would result in an intolerable gap between expectations and achievements. Gurr outlined the social determinants of relative

deprivation and made more explicit the criteria with which to evaluate the desires and achievements of a social group. Tanter and Midlarsky, furthermore, find some empirical support for the hypothesis that a "revolutionary gap" contributes to the onset of revolution, though others are unable to confirm the basic tenets of the theory. However sound the theoretical logic behind relative deprivation the level of analysis problem is bound to confound empirical testing.²¹

The concept of relative deprivation as a cause of revolution is grounded in the relationship between frustration and aggression, and has antecedents that go far beyond those mentioned above. DeTocqueville and Marx each related the onset of revolution to the gap between what people are led to expect, and what they are subsequently able to achieve. For Marx it was a long historical process in which the labor class was continually impoverished by the exploits of the capitalists, leading eventually to the rising up of the proletariat to overthrow the bourgeoisie. De Tocqueville on the other hand, argues that the French revolution was precipitated, in part, by economic and social advancements that left the French masses expecting more, all-the-while the industrialization process was leading them toward increasing immiseration.²² Critical components of any such argument revolve around whether: a) relative deprivation constitutes either a necessary and/or sufficient condition to cause the masses to revolt, b) whether this hypothesized gap is indeed perceptible, and c) how to make the theoretical linkages between an individual level phenomenon and collective behavior.

b) Inequality

There is a rather strong body of work linking patterns of inequality to revolutionary behavior, positing that it is the gap between the haves and the have-nots that will account for the onset of revolution. Structural inequality has been linked to the mass political violence characteristic of revolutionary movements in the developing world, though the evidence is mixed as to whether it is income or land inequality that is of greatest importance.²³ The inequality -- either land or income -- generates discontent among those who go without, resulting in large-scale political violence which if successful can lead to revolution. As with evidence pertaining to relative deprivation as a cause of revolution, inequality as an explanation rests on strong theoretical foundations though the evidence is mixed, possibly a result of unreliable data sources.²⁴

The difference between relative deprivation and inequality as an explanation for revolutions may seem subtle at first, but the underlying causal mechanisms are profoundly different. In the former instance the perceived deprivation is a psychological process where judgment is made relative to ones own expectations. The aggregation of these individual perceptions and frustrations

leads to a social movement intent on revolutionary change. The mechanisms of inequality work differently. Rather than an individual judging their situation relative to their own expectations and achievements, inequality is judged relative to others within society. Neither explanation is inconsistent with the other and both are likely to be evident concurrently. But those who argue for inequality as the causal mechanism are implicitly positing that issues of social and economic justice generate the motives behind revolutionary movements.

c) Mobilization

Those who view mobilization as the key to revolution tend to minimize the importance of inequality or relative deprivation-type factors, arguing that these conditions are, for the most part, always present.²⁵ Given that there are structural "reasons" for expressing discontent, it is the ability to mobilize resources that determines revolutionary behavior. To Tilly this is conceived as groups contending over political issues, while Huntington²⁶ argues that it is the incongruity between political mobilization -- meaning political modernization -- and political institutions that results in revolution.

DeNardo and Lichbach have formalized the decision to participate in revolutionary politics, and both have strengthened the logical arguments outlining the mobilization thesis. DeNardo demonstrates that revolutions require, among other things, revolutionary strategies; strategies require strategists that not only articulate alternatives, but also mobilize the masses. Lichbach, furthermore, uses a game theoretic approach to show that a rational person will not rebel against inequality.²⁷ But if a rational person will not rebel against situations they find intolerable, then we can deduce from Lichbach's findings that either revolution is an irrational behavior, or that revolutionary strategists are required to mobilize the masses and in doing so change the expected payoff from participation in revolutionary violence. Overcoming the collective action problem appears to be a critical link in mobilizing mass action, with selective incentives appearing to be a necessary ingredient²⁸, though others dismiss the role of the collective goods problem in social movements altogether²⁹. In essence DeNardo's analysis suggests one way to conceive of a solution to the collective goods puzzle, that revolutionary strategists are able to deflect some of the costs associated with participation in revolutionary politics and therefore change the potential payoff to the masses.

Of course each of the above descriptions is not only an over simplified version of the theoretical logic, but as Goldstone correctly demonstrates, each is an overly simplified explanation of the process that leads to revolutions.³⁰ In isolation, the social dislocations associated with inequality or

deprivation are insufficient to lead to the mobilization of the masses behind a revolutionary agenda. To address the central thesis of this essay a major synthesis is necessary.

Toward a Synthesis

Each of these theoretical threads in the fabric of revolutions tend to be supported by some empirical evidence. And as one would expect in the social sciences, there also seems to be an equal amount of counter evidence for each hypothesized relationship³¹. But the theoretical logic, as well as some of the evidence, for each approach is strong enough to suggest that a clear understanding of the causes of revolution will require a synthesis of the basic arguments underlying each model.

Working from the perspective that mobilization is a key aspect of the revolutionary process, we are forced to look at the issues and processes that facilitate the mobilization of the masses. To do that we will have to work from the issues around which mobilization occurs to the mobilization itself. If we can establish the social conditions that are necessary for political mobilization then we should be able to integrate them with the necessary organizational and structural conditions for revolution, and ultimately articulate a model of revolution that is applicable across the spectrum of countries. As Tarrow points out, social movements mount challenges to elite authority out of which revolutions may give rise³²; without some form of social movement, talk of revolutionary politics is beyond the pale.

But regardless of how great the strategists or how capable the mobilizers, if the masses are content with their lot in life it is unlikely that they will rise up in pursuit of the unknown when the status quo is acceptable. Some form of discontent is a necessary condition for revolution. And the logic behind arguments that undergird relative deprivation and inequality are coherent enough to provide that necessary condition -- as might be the related concept of economic stress, as Goldstone demonstrates. But as the advocates of mobilization point out, discontent is rampant yet revolution is rare. It is clearly not as straightforward as to suggest that with sufficient discontent, efforts to mobilize the masses will be either spontaneous or successful. The mechanisms that lead from discontent to mobilization remain largely obscure and are more complex than we have heretofore been led to believe. For example, Gurr suggests that if the scope and intensity of relative deprivation are sufficiently acute then the masses will rise up in revolt.³³ But the clarity of the deprivation argument gives way to a more opaque process of mobilizing, organizing, and directing the revolutionary fervor so critical to the onset and success of revolutionary politics. Assuming that discontent is rather ubiquitous, if mobilization was a simple process then revolution would be a relatively common occurrence. But it is not.

DeNardo's work is critical here. To move from issues that cause discontent to the mobilization of support for revolutionary behavior, strategists and alternatives are necessary. The former requires good organizers, the latter political philosophers. Two factors are particularly important: a) not all people are equally risk prone, and b) without alternatives a hopeless situation remains hopeless and devoid of achievable goals. Articulating alternative conceptions of social organization and developing strategies by which to change the structures of society is risky business. The ruling coalition has a strong incentive to repress those who advocate revolutionary politics, and in general it is not the masses who are most willing to take the risk involved in the organizational process. A core group of revolutionary strategists are necessary. But here again, strategists are not sufficient to mobilize the public; some reasonable alternatives must be presented to the discontented if they are to gamble their fate on some attempt at change. As Lichbach showed, a rational person will not revolt against inequality.³⁴ But if there is an acceptable alternative with some reasonable probability of success, then mobilization becomes possible. And as more people become mobilized, more will become aware of their plight; the perception of inequality and deprivation becomes more widespread and further converts participate in revolutionary behavior -- be it violent or not.

At this juncture we can see that discontent works through strategists who organize and political philosophers who articulate alternative conceptions of society. And if the two intervening factors are sufficiently strong then mobilization is possible, maybe even likely. El Salvador, Nicaragua, Eritrea, Vietnam, Peru, and Poland all have had traces of large-scale mobilizations against the ruling coalition. Some have been more successful than others, but the mobilization of discontented masses around some alternative form of social organization seems to be quite common. On the other hand, there are a great number of societies where the conditions for discontent appear to be quite evident, yet efforts to mobilize the masses are tentative and ineffective. Two questions still remain: a) why aren't alternatives and strategists as ubiquitous as the conditions contributing to discontent? and b) why are successful revolutions so rare?

If the strategists and alternatives derived unimpeded from the wellspring of discontent, then we would expect revolutions to be much more common than they are. Therefore, either the level of discontent is insufficient to generate mass upheaval, or the articulation of alternatives and the development of strategies are constrained by the ruling elite. When focusing on the developing part of the world there appears to be ample evidence to suggest -- even if anecdotal -- that the conditions for discontent are ubiquitous, while in the industrial world this would appear to be an accelerating trend (see below). We therefore need to examine the role of repression as an impediment to

organizing. Repression plays a significant role in the willingness to and ability of strategists, organizers, and philosophers to articulate alternatives and mobilize support.

The risky nature of being a revolutionary is in large part related to the efforts by the elite to repress their initiatives. The success of a revolutionary organization is often tied to the ability of the organizers to shelter the masses from the repressive policies of the elite.³⁵ Successful repression, therefore, reduces the opportunities for strategists and suppresses the articulation of alternative conceptions of how society might be organized. As I argued earlier, the structural factors that lead to discontent work through the strategists to facilitate the mobilization of the masses. If repression is an effective tool to stifle the development of a revolutionary organization and the articulation of alternatives to the status quo, then the prevalence of repressive practices should help account for the relatively low incidence of revolution. Under the brutal thumb of the ruling elite few revolutionary organizations can gather the momentum required to allow for large scale mobilization. But this does not add much to our understanding of the likelihood of revolutions in the industrial democracies of the west, where overt and violent repression is hardly the norm.

Repression in the industrialized West can be subtler than the brutality so often visible in many developing countries. The marginalization of individuals or groups, official and unofficial harassment, and the denial of access to information and resources, can be equally or more effective at suppressing organizers than the torture and killings endemic in many parts of the world. To a large degree this is carried out by identifying potential revolutionaries with alternatives held in disdain by the general public. Communism, both in practice and in myth, has been sufficiently ideologically laden to serve this purpose over the past 50 years. The dominant alternative model for change will play a large role in not only the ability to repress strategists, but also in the extent to which the individual feels relatively deprived or perceives inequality. If the dominant model that is held up as an example runs counter to the beliefs of the mass public, then the extent to which repression is tolerated will be high, reducing the likelihood that any alternative will be given suitable consideration. Furthermore, the criteria for judging relative deprivation or inequality will be based on perceptions of conditions where the model is in practice.

To put this into contemporary terms, most alternative models for the organization of Western societies have been based on Marxist ideologies, with variants -- Maoist, Leninist, Trotskyite -- each proclaiming to hold the key to social nirvana and the ultimate overthrow of the imperialist West, yet each is viewed as politically repressive and economically inept. Rarely, if ever, is a voice heard from a revolutionary movement that proclaimed guiding principles other than some form of

Marx's Communist Manifesto. A communist revolution, moreover, seems to have been viewed by most in the West as the least likely way to save us from our own ills. This distrust of the communist path permitted the wholesale purge of those who attempted to articulate alternatives, as well as those who strategized and organized. The more despicable the existing alternative the easier this task of repressing those who might facilitate the mobilization process. Furthermore, in such a climate the repression need not be as overt as witnessed in much of the developing world. The label of "a communist", either officially or unofficially, could suffice to restrict the capabilities of those willing to take the risks, and if the risk takers are constrained, the masses will be extremely hesitant. The McCarthy era and the resulting "red files" in the United States serve as poignant examples, but the effect was much more widely felt.³⁶

A brief historical anecdote illustrating the role of political philosophers, elite repression, and the ability to organize around alternative conceptions of society may be helpful at this point. Probably the most widespread revolutionary movement in modern times has been those guided by communist principles. While in practice the lofty goals of this movement were never achieved, in principle the outlines were well articulated. But the communist revolutionary movement did not start with Lenin, nor can the architectural design be tied solely to Marx and Engels. The Saint Simon and the Owenite movements laid the foundation for the articulation of a society organized around the social needs of the masses upon which Marx and Engels were able to build the tenets of the Communist movement. Had Saint Simon and Owens been repressed at an early stage, and had Owens been prevented from carrying out his "social experiments", the philosophy of Marx and Engels might never have seen the light of day.

The legitimacy of the political system also plays a significant role in the mobilization process. When popular support for a political system is high, we would expect the ability to mobilize support against the system to be quite low. If public discontent can be justified and/or rationalized by recourse to the system, rather than revolt against it, the mass public might be willing to endure greater levels of deprivation or inequality. In support of this Gurr finds that system legitimacy has a direct and inverse relationship with the extent of collective violence.³⁷

Legitimacy is a function of how closely state policy represents societal preferences for, say, order versus participation. In a political culture that demonstrates a strong preference for order over participation, some repressive policies may be tolerated, as might be increased levels of social discontent. Different societies may have stronger or weaker preferences for order or participation, and different states may be more amenable to these societal predilections. Those that deviate widely from the dominant political culture are more apt to sacrifice legitimacy.³⁸ From this

perspective legitimacy is not necessarily a characteristic of any particular type of regime, and even though no democracy has yet experienced a revolution³⁹ democratic governments are not immune to the revolutionary process based solely on their claims to legitimacy. The mechanisms that allow the discontented to channel their frustration through the system should help to reduce the tendency for the masses to mobilize against the elite, but this cannot be without limits. If the discontent is sufficient enough and the mobilization successful enough, then the system may be used to change the social and economic organization of society. In a sense the public could keep the best components of the social-political system and discard the rest. To some degree this is what Fukuyama was referring to by his claim to the end of history. The liberal democratic political system may be stable, but its stability may permit -- even facilitate -- sweeping transformations in the social and economic fabric of society.

In sum we have issues that breed social discontent -- relative deprivation and inequality -- working through the articulation of alternatives and the development of strategies to facilitate the mobilization of the masses against the policies of the elite. Each is a necessary condition for successful revolution. But the ability of the elite to repress the expression of alternatives and prevent the activities of the strategists impedes the causal process and diminishes the likelihood of revolution. Furthermore, if the dominant model for change is antithetical to the ideals of the mass public, it will increase the ability to and effectiveness of elite repression, as well as influencing perceptions of deprivation or inequality. An unacceptable model for change, therefore, inhibits the mobilization process. System legitimacy, moreover, works as a counterbalance to efforts at mobilizing the masses to oust the ruling coalition.

A unique aspect of the model just presented is that it portends to account for both the onset of revolutionary politics as well as the political stability in industrialized countries. For a given level of mass discontent the existence of an antithetical ideological foe may serve to temper perceptions of deprivation and inequality and inhibit the ability of anti-system forces to mobilize. In the industrial world where overt repression is less tolerated, stability can be ensured by external factors. This is consistent with those who argue that the international system influences revolutionary politics.⁴⁰ However, in a country where overt and violent repression is an "acceptable" course of action, mobilization is minimized by internal factors.

Prospects for Revolution in the West

Having reasoned through the logic that guides our understanding of revolutionary politics, and having proposed a theoretical model that synthesizes the state of our knowledge -- as well as our

hunches -- regarding the causal process that leads from social tranquility to social upheaval, let me now engage in a bit of informed speculation. What are the prospects for social revolution in the industrialized West? Is Goldstone correct in his implicit suggestion that the West might be subjected to revolutionary pressures reminiscent of our recent past? Ultimately answers to this query must await empirical examination, but to address these questions more anecdotally I will briefly examine trends on a number of social indicators, the ability to organize and articulate alternative conceptions of society, and the external environment in which these domestic political struggles would unfold.

a) Social Indicators

Without excessively reiterating my earlier synopsis of current economic and social conditions in western countries, let me increase the level of specificity, somewhat, for analytical purposes. Of the major European countries in 1994, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Spain all had official unemployment rates of over 10 percent, with Spanish unemployment climbing to 22 percent. Belgium, Germany, and Sweden, on the other hand, all have unemployment rates between 8.5 percent and 10 percent of the workforce. Of these countries only Germany has been able to sustain economic growth levels above the annual rate of inflation during the period 1983-1992, and currently it seems that only the UK has achieved any marked level of economic growth over the past year.⁴¹ Furthermore, according to data collected by the British government and reported in their annual publication, Social Trends, trends in the distribution of wealth in Britain are moving from the poor to the wealthy. This is a trend confirmed by data from the United States, and presumably is a fairly consistent trend across the industrialized West. The good news on the economic front is that nearly across the spectrum of countries inflation has been kept low.⁴²

But these figures, in and of themselves, do not convey much. When comparing current data to the recent past, however, it becomes clear that these difficult economic times are becoming a structural reality. In the European Community as a whole the number of unemployed has jumped from less than 3 million people in 1972 to over twenty two million today. The post 1981 period appears to be a watershed where the level of structural unemployment reached upwards toward double-digit figures.⁴³

This shift in wealth and employment patterns comes at a time when direct transfer payments to the socially dislocated have also come under increasing strain, and in many instances the level of welfare provisions have been cut substantially. This is probably most evident in the United States

where the federal government has shifted much of the burden for social assistance down to the state level, which in many cases are unable to cope with the increased demand.

As Goldstone points out, the path out of this increasing social dislocations is increasing productivity to a sustained level that surpasses inflation; a task that in recent times appears difficult to achieve.⁴⁴ But even in light of this anecdotal evidence that large groups of people are becoming increasingly relatively deprived, and that the distribution of wealth is becoming increasingly unequal, these are clearly not sufficient conditions for a social revolution. To evaluate those prospects more fully we must examine the role of international politics and revolutionary organization.

b) The International Environment and Revolutionary Ideas

Much has been made about the role of system structure on the incidence of international conflict⁴⁵, and recent events in the former Soviet Bloc give some indication of the effect of system change on domestic conflict. It comes as no surprise that the previously subjugated peoples of Eastern Europe rose up against their repressive regimes the moment the Soviets removed the threat of intervention, nor that the formal Soviet empire splintered with the loss of central control. One result of this upheaval appears to be the discrediting of the Communist model. But what affect might the discrediting of communism as a form of social organization have on stability in the West?

Oddly enough, the demise of the Soviet Union may have removed the constraints that have contributed to the stability of the western democracies during what appears to be a period of wrenching economic and social dislocations. Although communist parties have been a strong force in some European countries, and Socialist parties have formed ruling coalitions in others, the identification of an individual or group with the Soviet Union has generally served to be sufficiently repressive to prevent large scale or efficient organization. The most glaring examples of this can be seen in the United States and Great Britain. But with the downfall of the Soviet regime, and the subsequent discrediting of the "communist way", much of that has changed.

Strategists can now plan, philosophers articulate alternatives, and organizers organize without the ever constant -- and quite effective -- charge of being in the "employ of the Soviets" hanging over their heads. The lack of an ideological enemy of the social order could make possible the articulation of new conceptions of social organization, something akin to the budding experiments with socialist movements in the nineteenth century. These new social philosophies, moreover, need not socialist in orientation. Theoretically, anyway, the development and dissemination of new ideas

for social organization could contribute to perceptions of deprivation and inequality.⁴⁶ At the same time that alternatives come to light and perceptions begin to change, the relaxed political atmosphere should permit organizers to more effectively incur the risk of political mobilization, and through this, the calculations of the mass public regarding the expected outcome from participation in the movement. While each part of the causal process is necessary for the development of a revolutionary movement, none is a sufficient condition for revolution.

This would of course not be an overnight phenomenon. Just like the precursors in thought for the Communist revolutions took generations to bear fruit, the requisite philosophical experimentation necessary to articulate strategies and alternatives for revolutionary change would require time, though the process may have been made possible by the relaxation in international tensions. The role of the ruling coalition could become critical in determining whether future political change takes on a revolutionary or evolutionary nature. If the coalition is adaptable and adequately mirrors the preferences of the bulk of society, then they may retain the legitimacy required to steer an evolutionary course. If not, the theoretical roots of revolution seem to exist.

Whether to look right or left for the genesis of revolutionary ideas is an open question. Although it is far too early to speculate about what any potential alternatives for change might look like, it should be clear that at this juncture the slate is clean. One might be mistaken, however, to assume that any future revolutionary-type politics must come from the left, or that any new ideas about socio-economic organization must be based on current models. The recent visibility of the various militia groups in the United States points to not only the potential volatility, but also the character of some of the potential groups leading a charge.

Democratic Processes and the Evolutionary Path to Change

There are as many reasons to doubt that industrial democracies could succumb to revolutionary pressures as there are to suggest the theoretical potential. Since the premise of this essay revolves around the notion of evaluating this potential before we might have to comment such changes in an ex post manner, examining the forces working toward evolutionary change would be time well spent. Two general themes will guide this excursion: a) that the nature of political parties in democratic societies will steer any change toward an evolutionary path, and b) that revolutions result from shocks to the system that throw relationships out of equilibrium; without the shock, change will only be evolutionary.

One defense against the revolutionary thesis might be that the political processes that underlie democratic politics will be flexible enough to forestall any movement toward radical change. This

may be entirely correct. The logic of the argument follows that political parties, sensing popular disaffection with the status quo would be able to adapt to the will of the public. Down's work quite clearly buttresses this proposition.⁴⁷ Political parties, it is argued, will move toward the center of public preferences, and if this is so, then political parties, not mass movements will guide the changing socio-economic landscape. We would then expect incremental change, not revolution. At first blush the logic of these arguments seem sound enough to obscure the prospects for revolutionary pressures, but on closer inspection there still appears to be countervailing forces at work.

These countervailing forces are driven by two factors: a) that political parties may be the conduit for change, and b) that political parties may be too cumbersome to adapt to changes in mass preferences. The first point is an integral part of the argument outlined above -- that revolutionary change may be facilitated by the democratic process itself -- and need not be addressed further at this stage. However, the idea that parties may not be able to adequately shift with societal preferences could be crucial to any eventual outcome.

To a large degree Downs was right. Successful political parties have generally tended to shift toward the center of the political spectrum. Witness the Democratic and Republican parties in the US, and the Labour and the Tory parties in Britain. But these parties have also become large organizations that have developed entrenched interests in the current distribution of resources. However, as Olsen has demonstrated, large distributional coalitions are inefficient at providing a collective good, they increase the complexity of government, and they seek to limit the diversity of membership.⁴⁸ If Olsen's logic of collective action is correct, then we might not expect to see the established political parties moving toward the center of mass preferences, but rather a flourishing of small vanguard parties that champion new causes. The new organizations, or parties, may be able to provide the selective incentives necessary to woo people from the center of the spectrum out closer toward the peripheries.⁴⁹

The second point that should be raised is that change is a result of shocks that move the system out of stable equilibrium. Without the shock the status quo will only change in increments. Fair enough. It is unlikely that any wellspring of discontent will slowly grow to reach a critical mass at which point normal politics gives way to revolution. The nature of the status quo is generally such that large deviations are rare, absent some shock to the system. But the shock need not be a result of internal phenomenon, such as a severe economic crisis.⁵⁰ External shocks may also move the system out of equilibrium, even though the shock may affect a different part of the revolutionary calculus. The demise of the Soviet Union, the antithetical force in the politics of Western

Industrialized Democracies for the past three quarters of a century, is in essence a shock to the system. The West has organized much of its society in active resistance to the Soviet threat for the better part of the last half of the century, and the sudden removal of that threat has caught most of the attentive public by surprise. Suddenly the status quo itself may be an open question.

Conclusion

As this argument stands it is merely an attempt to link our theoretical understanding of the causes of revolution to the prospects for social stability in a domain that remains heretofore unchallenged. In light of the recent "surprises" that resulted from the breakdown of the Soviet empire, this seems like a worthwhile endeavor. But at this stage it is simply speculation based on apparently sound reasoning and anecdotal -- and admittedly impressionistic -- evidence. Before anything more definitive could be proclaimed, rigorous empirical testing would be required, even though in the near-term severe problems for research design exist. Most importantly, for any test of hypotheses there would be no variation on the outcome variable -- there have been no revolutions in the countries to which this essay is addressed. Furthermore, it may be too soon to develop reliable measures on the necessary indicators for the articulation of alternatives and political strategizing. In short, any near-term testing would rely primarily on counterfactual argumentation, something that leaves us far short of definitive answers. But until that time arrives, the argument presented here suggests that the theoretical potential for revolution does exist in the industrialized West, and that it would be unwise to assume away that potential based on some notion that the end of history is at hand.

And for the truly cautious, one closing thought may be worthwhile. As any homeowner in an industrial democracy is all too aware, insurance companies -- those whose job it is to insure against loss for a given level of risk -- exclude coverage for damage incurred as a result of war, acts of God, and revolution. To the God-fearing the Apocalypse is sufficient grounds to exempt the insurance companies; acts of war are far too common in this world to hold an insurance company liable. But why would they insist on exemption from damage resulting from revolutions, if industrial democracies were immune from such events?

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- ¹. Goldstone, J. A. *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 497
- ². Huntington, S. P. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968). One might draw a similar inference from the theoretical arguments of Goldstone (1991a), who posits that the onset of revolution is tied to population pressures. The industrialized democracies of the West generally have stable populations and therefore should be immune from the revolutionary pressures outlined by Goldstone.
- ³. Huntington, *Ibid*, p. 275; Goodwin, J. and T. Skocpol (1989) "Explaining Revolutions in the Contemporary World". *Politics and Society*. Vol 17: pp. 489-509
- ⁴. Eckstein, Harry (1990) "More about Applied Political Science." *PS: Political Science and Politics*. 23:54-56.
- ⁵. Tilly, C. "Revolutions and Collective Violence". In *Handbook of Political Science*, vol. 3, *Macropolitical Theory*, ed. Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975), p. 183.
- ⁶. Examples of attempts to predict the onset of revolutions include: Gurr, T.R. and M. I. Lichbach (1986) "Forecasting Internal Conflict: A Comparative Evaluation of Empirical Theories". *Comparative Political Studies*. 19:3-38; Francisco, R. A. (1993) "Theories of Protest and the Revolutions of 1989". *American Journal of Political Science*. 37 no. 3: p. 663-680. For an example of efforts to demonstrate the level of protests see: Muller, E. N., H. A. Dietz, and S. E. Finkel (1991) "Discontent and the Expected Utility of Rebellion". *American Political Science Review* 85:1261-82.
- ⁷. Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992).
- ⁸. See, Economist 'Economic and Financial Indicators', January 7, 1994
- ⁹. *Ibid*
- ¹⁰. Goldstone, *op cit*, note 1; Huntington, *op cit*; Gurr, T. R. (1970) *Why Men Rebel*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970); Tilly, C. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978); Skocpol, T. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Hagopian, M. N. *The Phenomenon of Revolution*. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1975).
- ¹¹. *Ibid*, Skocpol and Hagopian; Sztompka, P. *The Sociology of Social Change*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).
- ¹². McCaughin, C. (1976) "An Ahistoric View of Revolution". *American Journal of Political Science*. 20 no. 4:637-51.
- ¹³. Sztompka, *op cit*, p. 305
- ¹⁴. Gurr, Tilly, and Skocpol, *op cit*, note 10; Midlarsky, Manus (1988) "Rulers and the Ruled: Patterned Inequality and the Onset of Mass Political Violence". *American Political Science Review*. 82 no. 2:491-509.
- ¹⁵. See Sztompka, *op cite*, p. 305
- ¹⁶. See Huntington, *op cite*, note 2; or McCaughin, *op cite*, note 12. This, however, is not a universally accepted conclusion. For instance, Goldstone (1991), *op cite*, note 1, strongly disagrees that revolutions are part of the development process, while Sztompka (1993:301) argues that in the wake of revolutions societies are revitalized, and "in this sense revolutions are the sign of social health".
- ¹⁷. *Ibid*, p. 265
- ¹⁸. Fukuyama, *op cite*, note 7. Although Fukuyama refers to the primacy of liberal democracy over other forms of political governance as the "end of history", he appears to have a difficult time conceiving of alternative forms of social and economic organization coexisting with liberal democratic principles.

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- ¹⁹. For relative deprivation see: Gurr, op cite, note ; Davies, J. C. (1962) "Toward a Theory of Revolution". *American Sociological Review*. 6 no. 1: 5-19; for issues of inequality and class conflict see: Midlarsky, op cite, note 14 , Midlarsky, M. and K. Roberts, 'Class, State, and Revolution in Central America', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 29: 163-93, Muller, Edward N., and Mitchell A. Seligson (1987) "Inequality and Insurgency". *American Political Science Review*. 81 no. 2:425-51. For discussions on mobilization see: Tilly, op cite, note 10, Huntington, op cite, note 2, and DeNardo, J. *Power in Numbers*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985). And for structural factors see: Skocpol, op cite, note 10, and Goldstone, op cite, note 1. This categorization is necessarily abbreviated, mainly for stylistic purposes. For instance the work of Goldstone (1991a & b) demonstrates that population and economic strains are of critical import. However, a lot can be summed up in my brief typology that is useful at this stage. See Moshiri, F. "Revolutionary Conflict Theory in an Evolutionary perspective". In *Revolutions of the Late Twentieth Century*. eds. Jack A. Goldstone, Ted Gurr, and Farrokh Moshiri, (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991) for an overview that adopts a similar approach.
- ²⁰. Ibid
- ²¹. Gurr, op cite, note 10; Tanter, R., and M. Midlarsky (1967) "A Theory of Revolution", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*; Miller, A. H., L. H. Bolce, and M. Halligan (1977) "The J-Curve Theory and the Black Urban Riots: An Empirical Test of Progressive Relative Deprivation Theory". *American Political Science Review*. 71:964-82.
- ²². de Tocqueville, A. *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, Translated by Stuart Gilbert, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955).
- ²³. See Russett, Bruce M. (1964) "Inequality and Instability: The Relation of Land Tenure to Politics". *World Politics*. 16 no. 3: 442-54; Midlarsky and Roberts, op cite, note , Midlarsky, op cite, note , Muller and Seligson, op cite, note , Aristotle, *Politics*, Translated by Ernest Barker, (London: Oxford University Press, 1946). For the debate between land or income inequality see Midlarsky or Muller and Seligson.
- ²⁴. Brockett, C. D. (1992), "Measuring Political Violence and Land Inequality in Central America", *American Political Science Review*, Vol 86(1): 169-78
- ²⁵. Tilly, op cite, note 10
- ²⁶. op cite, note 2
- ²⁷. DeNardo, op cite, note 19 ; Lichbach, M. I. (1990) "Will Rational People Rebel Against Inequality? Samson's Choice". *American Journal of Political Science*. 34 no. 4: 1049-76.
- ²⁸. Lichbach, M. I. (1994) "What Makes Rational Peasants Revolutionary: Dilemma, Paradox, and Irony in Peasant Collective Action". *World Politics*, Vol 46:pp 383-418
- ²⁹. Tarrow, S. *Power in Movements: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*, (New York: Cambridge, 1994).
- ³⁰. op cite, note 1
- ³¹. Most of the above cited works serve as clear examples of the debates over both theory and evidence in the revolutionary puzzle. A reading of any number of them will demonstrate the disparate findings associated with each theoretical approach.
- ³². op cite, note 29, pp. 4 and 25.
- ³³. Gurr, op cite, note 10
- ³⁴. Lichback, op cite, note 27
- ³⁵. Denardo, op cite, note 19
- ³⁶. Whitfield, S. J. *The Culture of the Cold War*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Ginsberg, B. *The Captive Public: How Mass Opinion Promotes State Power*. (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

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- ³⁷. Gurr, T. R. (1968) 'A Causal Model of Civil Strife: A Comparative Analysis Using New Indices', *American Political Science Review*, 4: 1104-24
- ³⁸. I'd like to thank Allan Stam for the core of these ideas.
- ³⁹. Events in the Weimar Republic may be the exception to this statement.
- ⁴⁰. eg. Skocpol, op cite, note 10
- ⁴¹. Economist, 'Where to Live: Nirvana by Numbers', January 7, 1994
- ⁴². Her Majesty's Printing Office (1993) *Social Trends*, London; US Government Printing Office, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, Washington, 1993, sec. 14
- ⁴³. Statistical Office of the European Community (SOEC) (1988) *Eurostat Review 1977-1986*, Luxembourg; (1983) *Eurostat Review 1972-1981*, Luxembourg
- ⁴⁴. Goldstone, op cite, note 1
- ⁴⁵. Vasquez, J. *The War Puzzle*, (New York: Cambridge, 1993)
- ⁴⁶. Yack, B. *The Longing for Total Revolution*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); Taylor, M. (1989) "Structure, Culture and Action in the Explanation of Social Change". *Politics and Society*, Vol 17: pp 115-162.
- ⁴⁷. Downs, A. (1957) *The Economic Theory of Democracy*
- ⁴⁸. Olsen, M. *The Logic of Collective Action*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982)
- ⁴⁹. Lichbach, op cite, note 28
- ⁵⁰. Goldstone, op cite, note 1