

Part 2. HISTORICAL GLOBALISTICS

Revolutions and Historical Process*

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The article presents the analysis of the role of revolutions in historical process. It is shown why the revolutions were inevitable in the Modern era and what is their role in societal development as well as why the latter started to mismatch the existing political and social institutions. On the one hand, revolutions are considered as common phenomena for a certain stage of society's development, and on the other hand, the author analyses why and how the role of revolutions considerably changes in different periods of history as well as explains why revolutions from a driving force finally become an expensive and not productive social experiment. He also makes an attempt to elaborate some aspects of the theory of revolution (a revolutionary situation, role of society's ideology and psychology over certain periods etc.).

Keywords: *revolution, socialist revolution, world order, balance of power, geopolitics, nuclear arms race, anticolonial movement, the Third world, socialism, capitalism, new principles in international relations, right to self-determination.*

1. Introduction. Revolutions as Recurrent Phenomena

On the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the Russian Revolution of 1917 it makes sense to address the role of revolutions in history since it has changed significantly in the course of history.

One should also note that although revolutions are quite a dangerous and costly way to reform a society, by no means have they become an archaic phenomenon in the contemporary world.

The assessments of significance of revolution always depend on the party affiliation and are often quite opposite. Thus, the republicans, socialists and other radically-minded politicians and researchers considered revolutions both as an inevitable and a highly desirable event. Those who treated revolutions as catastrophes often considered them to be a mere turn of events. Meanwhile, the analysis of historical process shows that revolutions and generally the emergence of revolutionary sentiments, is a phenomenon that many societies have pass through and continue to undergo from time to time. Therefore, it becomes obvious that to a certain extent it is typical for a certain stage of societal development; yet, it would be incorrect to consider revolutions as absolutely inevitable.

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Although one can trace a certain regularity in the occurrence of revolutions, still we must realize that like other great historical events (*e.g.*, wars, economic crises) each revolution is unique and peculiar; moreover, if to consider every revolution individually one can reveal an operating significant subjective factor, a sequence of certain circumstances and a chain of events which would not have led to a revolution had they taken a different path. This is particularly obvious when one turns to revolutions in Russia.

If one treats revolutions as recurrent phenomena in the history of different societies, he may discover certain evident similarities already pointed by researchers. Actually there is no acceptable theory of revolution despite the fact that at least five generations of researchers studied it (see Goldstone 2014; Grinin, Issaev, and Korotayev 2016: 4–23).

Summarizing, one can point that as a rule the common features of revolutions and their possible outbreak in a society are associated, firstly, with a definite developmental level achieved by societies and emergence of certain phenomena and relationships within them; secondly, with peculiar socio-political structure and thirdly, with a particular crisis situation arising at a certain moment.

With respect to *the first point*, that is a number of actual objective factors defining a society's achievement of a certain level of development, it is worth pointing to the following factors:

1) a close relation between revolution and modernization, in other words, revolutions can be considered the result of rapid and abrupt changes in the course of development;

2) rapid demographic changes are closely associated with modernization and provide additional conditions for occurrence of revolution, including an increased share of young people in the population;

3) the process of urbanization and, as a consequence, the increase of urban population in the number and education which provide social base for revolution;¹

4) the emergence of a new ideology (ideologies), which is able to unite the discontent citizens.

As for *the second point*, revolutions often occur in the societies with archaic political structure (or with rather strong archaic features), that is it has been insufficiently modernized. Revolutions often turn either successful or failed attempts to achieve democratization of society (it is clear that such a desire also appears at a certain stage of development).² Sometimes several revolutions would occur during this movement. Meanwhile, revolutions hardly occur in the so-called consolidated democracies since there are other ways of resolving social contradictions.

Speaking about *the third point*, it is clear that revolutions are the result (albeit not obligatory) of the crisis situation as a consequence of some peculiar circumstances. All this may create a peculiar revolutionary situation, which we are going to discuss in more detail in the next section.

In the present article we examine only some of the mentioned phenomena while elsewhere we discussed other subjects in more detail.³

¹ For more details on these three points, see Grinin 2013, 2017b. See the subsequent sections for the fourth point.

² That was the case at least until 1945. Although later socialist revolutions did not deny the importance of democracy, but their main purposes were quite different. This may also refer directly to nationalist revolutions whose purpose was to gain independence.

³ In addition to the already mentioned facts, see also Grinin, Korotayev 2016.

2. A Glimpse of the Theory of Revolution

Thus, a revolution is a result of previous rapid development bringing significant changes in societies whose public mind is still incapable to adapt to transformations.

But the objective conditions are not enough for a revolution to start. It has become common knowledge that revolutions can occur in a crisis situation evolving into a revolutionary situation under certain conditions which we will speak about in more detail.

On the one hand, there is no unified view concerning the indications of revolutionary situation, on the other – the researchers have common ideas. In our opinion, a theory should distinguish between: a) general conditions for the emergence of a revolutionary situation; b) the emergence of crisis that may create a revolutionary situation, including changing social sentiments and balance of social forces; and c) a particular revolutionary situation in which objective, subjective, and purely random ‘constituents’ are combined in a peculiar combination.

Prerequisites for a revolutionary situation

Social contradictions far from always lead to revolutions and even revolutionary situations. But the latter cannot arise without deep social contradictions. So, we may distinguish the following prerequisites for the emergence of a revolutionary situation:

1) *The disintegration of society.* In other words, rigid social, national or class contradictions; the situation of a psychological confrontation ‘we – they’; history of confrontation, *etc.* According to Jack Goldstone, within the framework of the third-generation theories, the researchers also mentioned the ruling elite's rigid behavior as a factor eventually leading to revolutionary destabilization.

2) *Contradictions in the elite camp.* New ideology usually emerges just among a part of the elite. Some pro-revolutionary sympathies and affinity to struggle against the government, radical changes, *etc.* are required among certain strata or the elite representatives. Such sympathy for revolutionaries is easily traced in the history of Russian revolutions in the late nineteenth and especially early twentieth century, when academics, upper intelligentsia and even representatives of the upper middle class somehow helped revolutionaries, thus, being actually in opposition to government.

3) *A widespread of alternative ideology and readiness at least a part of society for serious transformations.* Besides, there usually appear alternative spiritual leaders, while the search for ‘truth’ and ‘fact’ strengthens along with actively circulating negative for government ideas and rumors; besides, the press (media) and other forms of public expression, ruthlessly criticize government, *etc.*

4) *Simultaneously, the government's authority (at least, sacred attitude towards it) and the regime's relatively liberal views gradually decrease.* Revolution can hardly occur if government manages to establish a rather efficient punitive regime (sometimes this may occur only due to external support, as it happened in Libya not long ago). Thus, the regime may lose its authority and become insufficiently repressive, act cautiously with respect to repressions, pardon or release oppositionists, *etc.* All this contributes to the rise both of legal and illegal movement against government, freedom of gradually increasing criticism on the part of the media and publicists.

This situation may preserve for a long time, since many points depend on the economic, external and internal political situation, as well as on an individual at the head of state.

The duration of the situation of disintegration can also depend on whether this is the first revolution in the country or not (since a defeated revolution can increase polarization).

A general revolutionary situation

A revolutionary situation can be general and particular. A revolution may hardly outbreak without the latter which in its turn can hardly appear without the former. But even a particular revolutionary situation by itself will fail to cause a revolution without a trigger (which is often a contingent event).

As has been already mentioned, revolutions are usually the result of a crisis situation emerging after military defeats, financial overheating, deteriorating financial situation for a part or the whole population, excessive degree of injustices, etc.

Thus, *the developing crisis situation is the first prerequisite for the emergence of a general revolutionary situation whose resolution defines government's or regime's destiny.*

It is clear that a persisting negative attitude to government and an explosion at a certain moment may be caused by the government's inability to resolve problems while everything is in their hands.

The second factor is *the government's failure to take adequate or decisive actions along with its dramatically decreasing authority.* This strengthens the positions of proponents of transformations (revolution).⁴ The analysts often mention this point. Thus, Samuel Huntington (1968) points that 'the former elite loses the will to rule and capacity to govern'. As we know Vladimir I. Lenin described this situation in the following way: 'the ruling classes cannot continue to rule in the old way' (Lenin 1981 [1920]: 69). Nevertheless, we should note that before the Russian February Revolution the situation, Lenin meant, was absent until the coup had actually started. Meanwhile, one observed inadequate actions and decreasing ability to efficiently govern (at least it was obvious in the strange change of prime ministers and ministers).

The third prerequisite is *the weakening elite and its reducing cohesion along with a significantly changing distribution of social and political forces in society.*

There should be formed a rather powerful camp of revolutionary proponents and those sympathizing them, as well as a vast stratum of people dissatisfied with authorities for whatever reason. Hereafter, there emerges a numerous camp of those who do not resist revolution or more exactly, the fall of the regime (the comprehension often comes after a revolutionary regime starts acting, and then the split in the society increases⁵). Meanwhile, the number of those supporting regime and authorities reduces. So the deepening crisis further reinforces the former party and weakens the latter. This may be hardly evident, but a hidden and informal regrouping of forces always undergoes in a society and can suddenly come out, and then revolution outbreaks. However, until the elite is consolidated it is very difficult to take the regime down.

The fourth prerequisite is *increasing popular discontent which exceeds the tolerable level.* Lenin defined the aggravation of people's poverty and misfortunes above the usual

⁴ Additionally, if the government that lost its authority shows weakness or compliance at the wrong time, this leads to increasing demands on the part of its opposition.

⁵ Actually in February 1917 the Russian supreme generalship supported the czar's demise, hoping that the starting revolution will strengthen the mood to continue the war (at least such an explanation was given by Admiral A. V. Kolchak, which is written in the records of his interrogations). The awareness of the mistake came some time later when the defensism policy was substituted with defeatist moods and immediate peace-making.

level as a prerequisite for revolution. This is a rather frequent but not universal phenomenon since the growing discontent above the acceptable level can be caused by other factors. In particular, there was no aggravation of need and disasters of people at the end of 2013 on the eve of EuroMaidan in Ukraine.⁶

A *particular revolutionary situation* either arises prior to a revolution, or is resolved in its favor. Yet, sometimes a particular revolutionary situation merges with the starting revolution, and sometimes it is rather clearly distinguished. Thus, actually, the first days of the February 1917 Revolution demonstrated the public unrest due to people's dissatisfaction with shortages in bread supply; only later did they turn into the revolution. Here the particular revolutionary situation slid into the revolution. On the contrary, the events of the Ukrainian EuroMaidan clearly fit a particular revolutionary situation consisting in the confrontation between activists and the authorities and only later the revolt started. Respectively, the slogans change in the course of the transition from one phase to another.

A particular revolutionary situation is bifurcational in its nature. It can or cannot evolve into revolution depending on various minor factors and points, on contingencies and coincidences. It is just in this context that a unique combination of contingencies may lead to a success or failure, and become fatal or decisive for revolutionaries and authorities. The fact that Nicholas II and Alexandra Fedorovna's daughters were ill with measles during the February revolution in 1917 was naturally a mere coincidence, which, however, strongly distracted the queen from the situation outside the palace. Perhaps, at some other moment she would have given it more importance and paid more attention to the events. In support of all the authorities throughout the world who 'missed' the start of revolution in due course we should also note that it is objectively very difficult to distinguish between the emerging particular revolutionary situation and ordinary protests. It often happens that demonstrations and other forms of confrontation alternate each other without any disastrous consequences for the authorities, and then one such event generates an outbreak and catastrophe for regime. Jack Goldstone speaks about an unstable equilibrium which can appear far from at once; so to predict an exact start of a revolution is as difficult as to predict an earthquake (Goldstone 2014).

A particular revolutionary situation is characterized by the following features:

1. *Concentration of accumulated discontent (its localization) in a certain region.*⁷

⁶ Jack Goldstone writes: 'Revolutions do not arise simply from mounting discontent over poverty, inequality, or other changes. Rather, revolution is a complex process that emerges from the social order becoming frayed in many areas at once' (Goldstone 2014). One can both agree and disagree with it. It is true that revolution is a very complicated process that happens due to the crisis of social system, but, firstly, one cannot agree that the system certainly decays in many spheres simultaneously. The political regime may be prosperous, but discontent with its evils, the weakness of the government, its mistakes, 'lack of talent', *etc.*, may provoke violent protests. Dissatisfaction of the general public in society cannot cause revolution in itself, but, as it has been mentioned, the wider dissatisfaction with any orders, institutions, circumstances, *etc.* is, the more probable, that revolution might occur, if the situation is not changed in a different way.

⁷ Samuel Huntington (1968) defines two types of revolutions according to the place of the start and further spreading of revolutionary events (a central collapse or an advance from the periphery). The latter type was observed, for example, during the Cuban Revolution, when the Castro brothers with a small group landed from the yacht 'Granma' on December 2, 1956 in the Orient Province, and the revolution triumphed in January 1959. All of the aforesaid about the emerging of the necessary situation at a certain place refers to both types of the outbreak of revolution.

Self-perception of social strata and groups is the most important point for the analysis of revolutions, since revolutions always appear to be a *manifestation of discontent* that exceeds an acceptable level; it also reveals discontent concentrated at a particular moment and place; the very possibility of such manifestation and concentration, as well as its channeling under someone's management, determines the probability of a crisis turning into a revolution.

But to create a particular revolutionary situation, that is to accumulate an abundant 'combustible material' in a society, one needs to 'burst a flame from a little spark'. In other words, we need this very 'spark', *a trigger*, that is, a cause, reason, or pretext generating discontent. It is not surprising that with accumulated discontent almost any event may become a trigger. But nevertheless, it far from always appears at right time and place. That is why revolutionaries often commit provocative acts in order to create a cause for protests.

2. *The emergence of the pretext that causes a sharp increase in protest moods* (by means of demonstrations, strikes, riotous disturbances, etc.).

3. The authorities' inability to adequately respond to starting protests and the final loss of supporters.

In other words, a particular revolutionary situation is associated with a number of situational aspects, thus, its emergence and unfolding into a revolution depends on whether all the components coincide and on a favorable situation for the opponents and protesters. It is clear that much depends on the parties' efforts, leaders' actions, the position of security agencies, and so on.

As for a possible escalation of a particular revolutionary situation into revolution and subsequent victory of the latter, here we should pay attention to several points.

1) *The position of the elite or (mainly) of its part.*

Goldstone rightly notes that 'revolutions can occur only when significant portions of the elites, and especially the military, defect or stand aside' (Goldstone 2014). However, we should clarify here that revolutions may well outbreak without support on the part of elites or with their neutrality, but they may hardly be a success in this situation. For the same reason, one cannot agree with Goldstone that 'indeed, in most revolutions it is the elites who mobilize the population to help them overthrow the regime' (Goldstone 2014). This hardly happens during most revolutions; for example, in February 1917, such direction was evidently absent.⁸ Rather, one should speak about counter-elites and the layer of outcast (uncommitted) by regimes, that is, about a part of society that feels unfairly pushed back from certain positions.

2) *The role of army.* The fourth-generation theories of revolution pay special attention to the role of armed forces and factors determining their support of rebel parts.

3) *External support of the revolution.*

3. Place and Role of Revolutions in Historical Process

Revolutions as a means to change society. Political history has been accompanied by revolutions for many thousands of years. The history of some regions, for example, Hellenistic states and Ancient Rome, as well as of many Eastern countries, can be described in revolutionary terms as a struggle between social and political groups for the distribution of resources and power (see, *e.g.*, Sorokin 1992, 1994; Nefedov 2007). But revolutions

⁸ For example, that was exactly what happened during the revolution of 2014 in Ukraine when the so-called oligarchs 'were stirring up the regime'.

became one of the leading driving forces of historical process only after the beginning of the modern era (see Grinin 1997; Semyonov *et al.* 2007; Travin and Margania 2004; Goldstone 2014).

Revolutions turn into a means to change society, its political and social order. Until recently (*i.e.*, until there were developed mechanisms for profound reforms and receiving feedback from various strata of society by peaceful and legal means) any regime was changed either by military force or by a (monarch's) hard-line dictatorship under the threat of violence.

The main difference between political crises and actions against government of the early modern period and the revolts in late-agrarian societies consists in the following: there emerges an aspiration to spread the action nationwide, to give it a prominent ideological character, and the most vivid difference is the goal to substitute existing regime for a new national-scale authority.⁹ Herewith, the upper urban strata, including the counter-elite and some of the elite ousted from power, form the core and the primary force of such a movement. But all these strata are united by a *new ideology* (we will talk about it later).

Thus, similar to productive forces of the early modern period which acquired an ability to persistent development, the revolutions from the means of struggle for power in certain societies (primarily in poleis, urban republics etc.) transform into a powerful (albeit quite destructive) tool of advance in most of societies.

Within several centuries revolutions became not only a widespread socio-political phenomenon but also an important mechanism for development and search for the new. As a result, many countries 'went through' revolutions, in some of them this happened earlier than in Russia, in others much later. Revolutions still remain the tool kit for solving social and political problems.¹⁰

Revolutions also became important and large-scale social laboratories to verify the validity of certain theories and ideas. Certainly, such experiments came at a high cost and still provided an opportunity to find the most stable forms and types of societal institutions in terms of future progress. At the same time, the gap between ideologies and practice became obvious. Hence, there emerged and strengthened a new mechanism of development (in particular, in societies that 'recovered' from revolutions) which consists in a deliberate reformation which if succeeded could reduce social tension, and what is more important, open horizons for society's development for decades. Reforms would also cost much but still they would turn much less costly than revolutions. That is why today it is difficult to consider revolutions in positive terms since their value and especially the risk of bringing a society to the wrong path (as it happened in October 1917 in Russia or in 1979 in Iran) significantly exceed potential advance. In other words, the same results (*i.e.*, improving quality of life and modernization of society) can eventually be achieved at a more peaceful pace, albeit at the cost of preserving an immoral regime but still without social upheavals.¹¹ Actually, in the mid-nineteenth century this was already mentioned by A. de

⁹ This is what differs revolutions, in particular, from the ideological mass popular movements in China in the Middle Ages and in the early modern period. But we should note that ideological movements can arise only in relatively literate societies, like it was China.

¹⁰ There are lucky societies that managed to avoid revolutions; however, there are few among historical nations, and much less among the great powers.

¹¹ Vladimir. Mayakovsky's mocking line from the poem 'Khorosho' [Good]: 'Gradually, little by little, by inch, by step, today, tomorrow, in twenty years' – in fact, strikes at the heart of revolutionaries.

Tocqueville who analyzed the ‘old’, that is, the pre-revolutionary (prior to 1789) regime in France. He concluded that ‘the revolution brought to an end suddenly, by a convulsive and painful effort, without transition, caution, or respect, what could have been accomplished by itself little by little in the long run’ (Tocqueville 2010: Chapter IX). The late-eighteenth century French Revolution despite all its high costs (including millions of lives lost during the Napoleonic wars) undoubtedly gave a significant impetus to transformations not only in France but also in Europe and in the whole world; however, current revolutions can hardly be considered a progressive impulse, yet they do cause international crises (Ukraine, Egypt, Tunisia are vivid examples here). This quite often makes a crisis cycle after which everything returns to the previous state. Moreover, the prospects of a successful revolution (again in terms of improving life and especially in eliminating the roots that cause it) are not guaranteed and sometimes are very small, indeed. So we should repeat again, there is a high probability that everything will be back in its place.

About great revolutions

Great revolutions follow the pattern ‘we will destroy this world of violence down to the foundations’, and after that there may come various options. So first there is a quantum leap in the destruction of old institutions, and then comes a rollback to more stable relations. There have been few great revolutions (the French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Chinese Revolution that started in 1925 and ended in 1949). Probably, the seventeenth-century English Revolution can be also included in this list.

The great revolutions generate alternative trajectories of development thus enriching social evolution. And still such revolutionary trajectories of development eventually appear dead end to a greater or lesser extent. The great seventeenth-century Revolution in England created a republican trajectory of development of the major power.¹² However, soon it would reach a deadlock. As a result of the Restoration of the Stuarts in 1660 and then the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the idea of establishment of republic in England was rejected. The same refers to the great French Revolution of the late eighteenth century, which failed to prove the vitality both of a republican system of government and of a complete abolition of estates. None of the revolutions of 1848–1849 can be regarded as great; but in general, the mass character of revolutionary actions and a rapid ‘spread’ of revolutions from one country to another allow characterizing those events as a great European revolution. The ideas of social revolution and society, which they tried to introduce in France in July 1848, not only frightened the bourgeoisie, but did not appeal to many strata of the European societies. Consequently, the revolutions of that period were defeated. The Russian Revolution revealed the direction for re-constructing society based on the ideas of egalitarian socialism and abolition of private property. Eventually, this direction of historical process also reached a dead end, although far from immediately.

Nevertheless, from the point of view of the world-historical development the impact of great revolutions is far from being senseless. On the contrary, according to Hegel's law of double negotiation their ideas and practices are widely implemented, but this became possible only because they managed to eliminate extreme radicalism in practice. Thus,

The latter are eager to do everything quickly and immediately, but sometimes this would bring countries to long and hard times. And when one compares what might be achieved in 20 or even 50 years he realizes that a peaceful path would be much more effective.

¹² Prior to that time the republics existed only in small states.

after the Glorious Revolution in England, there was established not a republic but constitutional monarchy which served a developmental model for the European societies during subsequent two centuries. The result of the Great French Revolution was introduction of constitutions in Europe and France, abolition or mitigation of serfdom in a number of countries, the peasant ownership of land was also strengthened, and significant changes took place in legislation and other spheres as well. Thus, due to the negation of extremes of the social revolution of 1848 (and the great French Revolution) along with the influence of these ideas, the European societies undergo significant changes: a path was opened to development of capitalism and partly to the formation of state's social policy, especially in Germany. Meanwhile, under the influence of socialist ideas of Russian Revolution and the USSR experience, democratic societies started to actively develop social policy and forms of social security and eventually reached the level of social welfare (although currently the growing inequality made some societies depart from it). As a result of revolution in China, a new combination of state regulation and private interests in economy emerged (not at once but only in the last decades of the twentieth century) which gave exceptional results for the economic advance of the PRC.

Thus, great revolutions may divert and even throw back a society that generated them, and still they realize the aspirations for historical development and certain changes, transformations and needs (though this is conducted in a distorted ideological way). Meanwhile, neighboring societies can benefit from such pace of developments since they can conduct appropriate changes under the influence of revolutionary events. In other words, it is a way to implement historical pattern when some societies' advance can be achieved at the expense of the others' failure.

Revolutions as a resolution of crisis

We should emphasize that if we consider the whole range of revolutions, it becomes clear that they are associated with *a definite stage of societal development*. Many aspects of particular revolutions (including the Russian one) acquire different features and get other evaluations. Revolutions can (and should) be also considered as a kind of societal crisis, more precisely as *the culminating point of existing and increasing crisis in society and its resolution*.

Let us bring this to a sharper focus. Some well-known approaches treat a society as a system (sometimes a social organism). In many respects this is a fruitful approach. But a society, especially the modernizing one, is a self-developing system which is destined to go through crises from time to time. One should note that these crises result from a long term growth.¹³ This growth occurs in many spheres of life of modernizing societies and involves increasing social self-consciousness (hence, ideologies obtain a crucial role during revolutions). But the growth is disproportionate – some spheres are ahead of others. From the systemic point of view a crisis in a system occurs when balance is disrupted. With respect to social strata and groups, this is manifested in the feeling of great discomfort and understanding that things go wrong and somebody should be blamed for this (usually a government or particular individuals that aggravated the situation in war, reform and

¹³ Therefore, crises emerge in any societies experiencing a rapid growth. But the manifestations of crises can vary. For example, in the early medieval period the rapid economic and socio-cultural development of territories of barbarian kingdoms led to the decentralization crisis of archaic monarchy, while a rapid territorial growth of the Roman Republic led to civil war and change of political regime.

etc.). This is accompanied with perceived growing injustice and violation of fundamental rules and customs (against the background of excessively growing disproportions) along with country's decreasing authority (which, by the way, also indicates increasing social self-awareness, since if appeal to history, people used to care less about it). The manifestations of such an improper situation in society's perception depend to a large extent on societal characteristics, time period and personalities, and particular situation.¹⁴

Revolutions as a stage of societal development

It bears repeating that crisis results from development, sometimes (and even quite frequently) of a rapid development and growth. Such growth should rely on increase in productive forces and population. Since a rapid growth became quite typical only in the early modern period, especially with the development of industry, it is clear that it is related to modernization involving different spheres of society. Hence, we observe an established connection between revolution and modernization (see, *e.g.*, Huntington 1968; Hobsbawm 1996; Boix 2011; Grinin 2013, 2017a). The slowing down growth may become a source of crisis (see below). Thus, revolutions result from the transition of societies and historical development in general to other directions implying a systematic economic growth and changes in respective relations and institutions. **Therefore, revolutions appear to be a search for the ways to ensure societies' continuous development in the situation when a society does not yet realize that a constant growth is not occasional and abnormal, but a necessary prerequisite for the existence of modern society.** *Revolution is one of the means to give abundant scope for constant change in a society and living in the situation of constant changes.* Initially emerging as a spontaneous phenomenon, this means may turn even more dangerous. Later there appear professional revolutionaries who aim at undermining the established regime, which is dangerous. Let us repeat that with the development of a society and unfolding historical process there were developed some other more effective (and more deliberate) means of maintaining conditions for a permanent change, namely: reforms, democratic institutions, creation of an archetype stimulating people to live in changing environment, along with sacralization of such institutions as education, science, market, human rights and groups, and so on.

If to follow the universal developmental logic of historical process, at its origin one may trace a search for opportunities to transform local and relatively small societies/ polities into large entities: first, states and later – empires. To create sustainable political for-

¹⁴ The idea that revolutions result from a strong imbalance within society has been developed especially within the framework of one of the approaches among the third-generation researchers (according to Jack Goldstone). These researchers analyzed societies as systems whose adequate functioning depended on the maintained equilibrium of interchange of matter, energy and information between the system and its environment, as well as between subsystems constituting a system. Within this approach, researchers not without reason argued that any critical disturbance destroying this equilibrium leads a society to a state of imbalance (Hagopian 1974) or dysfunction (Johnson 1968), which brings a serious risk of revolutionary destabilization. Besides, within this approach there were proposed a number of 'candidates' that can become the forces leading social systems to dysfunction/destabilization, for example: an uneven impact of technological growth and modernization processes on the needs of different subsystems in resources and on their actual supply with these resources, changes in distribution of power between the elites of different subsystems (Jessop 1972), violent changes in value systems resulting from the emergence of new religions or ideologies (Johnson 1968) or just asynchrony of the changes in different subsystems (Hagopian 1974).

mations there were needed powerful and stable institutions that were gradually formed. We also observe a number of centralization/decentralization cycles combined with the search for mechanisms and institutions to consolidate societies. In Europe these institutions took the shape of legitimate and sacred monarchism (which needed much time just to create the rules of inheritance), national states, social class or other forms of social structuring. Thus, historical process 'worked' here in the direction of establishing strong institutions supporting a society's stability under any perturbations and with states' constant external activity. This was also supported by quite conservative, archaic and far from constantly changing industrial and technological (as well as social) foundations of society (since the peasantry constituted the major part of population so the cultural level was archaic with low literacy rate). But with the change of production and technological basis, there started the process when strong, sometimes extremely strong societal bonds (*e.g.*, a particular dynasty's imperial power used to be the most important bond for a multinational state) gradually became an obstacle for the advance of a society which considered industry and trade as the most important means of solving financial and other problems and that had both to endure and develop them under conditions of international rivalry as well as to take care of the means of communication, education, *etc.* Hence, the most important and major achievements of historical progress (*i.e.*, well-organized autocracy, absolute monarchy and strong state-controlled classes, clear social hierarchy, totalitarian religion and others) suddenly began to hamper development (and progress, the idea of which began to form and strengthen). At the same time, there was some liberalization and humanization of relations – from absolute monarchy to absolute *enlightened* monarchy. Thus, these humanized relations prevented repressiveness and this was important for activating the revolution (see below).

Thus, the former institutions, including absolute monarchy and in many respects self-sustainable aristocracy (along with church that was state-sanctioned) became a brake for advance since the model of living and functioning had changed from a conservative to dynamic one. And since, as it has already been mentioned, those were very strong and powerful institutions and there were no other instruments to affect them (and no necessary historical experience) revolutions appeared to be the only way to destroy these institutions. But the revolutionary 'bitter pill' turned out to be too strong and dangerous, so the societies that passed through revolutions and feared their memories were eager to conduct preventive reforms. Thus, the accumulated historical experience, the elites' and states' emerging sense of self-preservation, new institutions established as a result of revolutions, reforms and evolution (in particular, local governments, constitutional monarchies, parliaments, new proceedings, the system of political parties and professional associations) – all these led to a situation when in a number of societies revolutions were eliminated as a means of social advancement and conflict resolution and replaced by more civilized forms.

But this happened only in the most developed societies while in other circumstances revolutions remained relevant. This primarily refers to those societies that evolved to the level when revolutions became possible while their political system did not change in tune with the times. As a result, these rapidly developing societies would experience a revolutionary collapse (as it happened in Russia). Yet, in some cases of more developed societies, if revolutions repeated, they were much less destructive. Thus, the revolution of 1870–1871 in France was less intensive than in 1848, yet its results were more stable. In

other words, *the path from great revolutions to 'velvet' ones was outlined*. England with its Glorious revolution of 1688 was the first to pave the way. Still many revolutions were far from 'velvet' but destructive and led to civil wars and severe hardships.

Anyway, having survived a whole epoch of revolutions many societies became somewhat immune to them (at least for a long period). This was due to the fact that there were created institutions that provided a society's adaptation to the situation of constant changes. However, the immunity to revolutions may weaken. In this case, when a severe crisis situation emerges revolutions may outbreak in completely modernized societies. The most striking examples here are the German and Austro-Hungarian monarchies, which were destroyed by the revolutions of 1918.

As already mentioned, revolutions come about at a certain stage of development when there emerge rigid obstacles and institutions impeding development. And these latter may include not only absolute monarchy, aristocracy or large feudal landholding but rigid institutions of exploitation as well. Moreover, if the exploited class grows rapidly in quantitative and qualitative terms (as it was with the working class in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) it is clear that the proletariat's struggle for rights and guarantees might become a part of revolutionary movement and even its leading part (as it happened in July 1848 and in 1871 in Paris). Only the adoption of relevant legislation and establishment of a more flexible system allowed removing the threat of proletarian revolution. To a greater extent this also refers to growing national self-consciousness among peoples deprived of own statehood and autonomy. National oppression together with legislation fixing inequality of peoples, languages, national religions, *etc.*, form strict relations which are usually very difficult to change (and, on the contrary, they can be strengthened by a purposeful state policy). Hence, nationalist revolutions emerge as a tool to change the situation which was observed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see Gellner 1983). Revolutions in the Austrian Empire in 1848–1849 and 1918–1919 were in many respects associated with dissatisfaction with national relations. Even in the United Kingdom which seemed to have already gone through revolutionary stage, a revolution (revolt) would break out in Ireland in 1919 precisely because it was impossible to solve the problem of Irish selfdetermination.

Thus, *in historical process the revolution generally provides an opportunity to forcibly change the situation of conflict between: a) certain rising forces (including growing self-consciousness) and b) existing rigid institutions and relations (including the consciousness of authorities and protecting them elites), which hinder further growth and self-determination of these forces*. Various spheres including political, national, religious, and social may generate revolutionary conflicts (*e.g.*, the Reformation transformed into the first revolution of Art Nouveau). Even a (quantitative and qualitative) growth of any social stratum, for example, students, can become a cause of revolutionary unrest. Thus, even democratic societies may be prone to revolutionary upheavals.

Revolutions in the world-system perspective

However, revolutions cannot be explained only within the systemic-approach framework through the analysis of a society as a basically self-sustaining system. One needs a different approach like the world-system one. Firstly, the transition to necessary constant development (as well as the idea of urgent modernization) could hardly spread in many societies were it not for international military-political rivalry and economic superiority

of other countries as its inevitable consequence. Since the military capabilities became dependent on technologies (gunpowder revolutions, shipping, routes of communication, infrastructure, *etc.*), the need for military and economic modernization became a dire necessity. The financial costs of such military modernization forced to search for sources in the development of trade and industry, improvement of education, *etc.* Hence, the role of the external factor was crucial. Other achievements, including medical, scientific, *etc.* were also borrowed.

Secondly, a gradually diminishing role of religious education and religious ideology and its substitution by the secular one inevitably led to import of ideologies including the revolutionary ones.

Thirdly, the distribution of contacts and knowledge led to the situation when more developed societies (*i.e.*, those which already passed through revolutions) started to be imitated. Revolutions start to be considered as an evitable and positively valued event. Thus, in a number of countries ideology outpaces the society's developmental level since it is borrowed as ready-made patterns. There emerges a gap between ideologists who take the guidance from advanced countries, on the one hand, and the opportunities of a particular non-vanguard society, on the other. As a result, there is observed a kind of frustration, besides, political regime and relations in the country are estimated as backward, useless and demanding a breakup, and thereby, the increasing tension and revolutionary sentiments are caused by propaganda. There also emerges an international, albeit small, but active class of ideologists-revolutionaries. And the ongoing modernization in societies increases the impact of new ideologies.

In other words, revolutions quite often occur in the societies that do not objectively reach the level when revolutions become inevitable; but since certain groups and media outlets are formed via ideologies and practices of revolutions borrowed from more developed countries, the social protests and discontent constitute an objectively higher social form than they should. In our opinion, the revolutions in the East of the early twentieth century are just of this kind.

Thus, it appears that ideologies can be exported and distributed to other societies. And hence revolutions are based on different kinds of ideology the revolutionary internationalism and revolutionary ideology become universal.

In brief, due to the world-system effect revolutions also involve peripheral countries which do not objectively attain the required developmental level. The situation is approximately similar to that with economic crises spreading to peripheral countries' industrial economies, the latter being still weak and hardly able to reach the crisis level on their own.

Fourthly, the World System's structure affects countries in different ways depending on their functional position. The penetration of new ideologies to dependent countries also creates some new situation there.

We should also note that since development is constantly proceeding in all societies being more intensive in the World-System core, there is an evident aspiration of societies lagging behind to catch up this core (yet, only some of them would actually succeed). However, such a race creates conditions for repeated revolutions in catching-up countries, especially if the latter fail to establish institutions capable of peaceful changing of the society.

On the other hand, a constant pressure of the core demanding democratic changes provides strong pressure on the ruling elite in these countries and a powerful support for those

forces seeking for forcible changes. Thus, we observe a *new wave of revolutions caused by the fact that the core societies stimulate the semi-peripheral societies' transformations.*

Finally, the world-system strongly affects the waves of transformation (waves of revolutions), when they are rapidly spreading from society to society (*e.g.*, as it was in 1848–1849 or the recent wave of the so-called ‘Arab Spring’) (for more details see Grinin 2012).

The external factor (*i.e.*, global events like world wars as well as the world-systemic factor) is also very important with regard to the emergence of a revolutionary crisis (in particular, by inspiring revolutionary actions).¹⁵

And the last important remark. If there emerge centers of revolutionary transformations that consider revolutions in other countries to be their most important objective, the opportunities of outbreak of revolutions and their success significantly increase. In many respects this is the result of specific technologies which take into account purposeful preparation of revolutionaries, *etc.* The USSR was such a center for a long time, and in recent decades the USA have become a center of the so-called ‘color revolutions’ (certainly there existed and do exist smaller centers, *e.g.*, those inspiring Islamic revolutions). Moreover, the domination of revolutionary ideologies, the propaganda proclaiming revolutions as fair and progressive, substantially weaken the authorities' and the regime's opportunities to resist revolutions.

Thus, *the world-system effect expands the scope of revolutions in the world involving the societies that are immature or are not ready for revolutions, and increases the chances of their success. To a certain extent, it is just the world-system effect that influences the fact that revolutions still remain the means of social transformations.*

Conclusion

An important thing related to the world-historical aspect of the influence of great revolutions is the emergence of new trajectories of historical development. The emergence of a new developmental trajectory brings new opportunities, increases competition as well as the divergence and convergence. However, the world historical role of revolutions decreases since the great and just large-scale revolutions that are able to change the developmental trajectory hardly occur.

Therefore, we see that the role of revolutions in historical process is changing. They have ceased to be a tool for paving the way of social progress and become a geopolitical means of increasing influence of certain forces and regimes or of imposing certain political forms. They used to be the means of social and political transformations that opened new horizons for historical process in general, while today they have become the means employed by elites to solve their short-term tasks; moreover, from the means of opening the way to modernization revolutions have turned into the upheavals leading societies to stagnation and degradation. Revolutions will hardly disappear, but their significance in terms of progress will be even less than today.

¹⁵ Note that the third-generation revolutionary theorists (following Goldstone's terminology [2015]) started to pay great attention to the impact of external factors (especially wars) as triggers of revolutionary destabilization. Meanwhile, the fourth-generation revolutionary theorists put particular emphasis on the long-term impact of external factors (when, *e.g.*, military rivalry could force a state to actively extract resources from social system). By the way, this is the case of the exhausted USSR.

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