

READING INTERROGATIONS #8
SOCIOLOGY 929: ENVISIONING REAL UTOPIAS
APRIL 3, 2008
CHAPTER 8 RUPTURAL TRANSFORMATION

1. Ricardo Donaire

The analysis of the ruptural transformation strategy is based on the analysis of various scenarios concerning the possible evolution of the material situation of a median person after transition to socialism. It tries to show that, even under the most optimistic conditions, such a strategy would seem to be implausible.

Why is this method of analysis adopted? Considering that the socialist movement has more than a century and a half of revolutionary experiences of all kinds, would it not be much richer an analysis based on the taken stock of these historical experiences? Otherwise, do not we run the risk of falling into a speculative analysis? **[There are two issues in play here: (1) I would like to lay out the logic of the conditions in which a strategy is a plausible means to accomplishing an emancipatory goal. This is not the same as explaining the specific conditions for any given historical instance of the strategy, particularly since most examples where ruptural strategies were adopted did not in fact lead to emancipatory ruptures. (2) I want the analysis to be relevant to conditions of advanced capitalist societies within which a stable and robust capitalism exists. The problem with relying on historical experience is that there are no examples of anything more than marginal revolutionary movements in developed capitalist economies – that is, there are no examples of a working class that has been formed as a revolutionary class in developed capitalism. A theoretical model is the only one possible. This model, however, can contribute to clarifying the necessary conditions for ruptural strategies even in other contexts. For example, this model may help to clarify why crisis conditions are important for plausible ruptural strategies, since this changes the time horizon curves.]**

Historical evidence seems to show us a great variety of features among ruptural transformations, considering different social structures in which those changes occurred, various kinds of class alliances that carried them out, different ways of accessing to state power, different ways of achieving people's arming, different degrees of popular support, different degrees of organization of counter-revolutionary forces, different results regarding the possibility of carrying out radical transformations, various lengths of time in power, etc.. Is it possible to reduce this variety of situations to the few outlined alternative scenarios? **[I think it is possible to reduce this complexity to a few scenarios. For example, in most historical cases of ruptural transformations that have occurred under the banner of "socialism" (whether or not they were actually socialist is a separate matter) occurred in the context where some exogenous factor explains the collapse of the repressive capacity of the state – usually war. This is most clearly the case for the Russian and Chinese revolutions. The former would not have happened in the absence of WWI and the latter in the absence of WWII. What war does is**

dramatically change the problem of transition troughs and the reasonable expectations about future trajectories. This model can help pinpoint the specificity of conditions under which the transition trough problem is weakened as a constraint on ruptural transition. (Also notable, of course is that neither revolution adopted an internally democratic structure of accountability, so it was not subjected to the same kind of defection problem.)]

Moreover, these alternatives are based on an analysis of the material situation of a median person (at the very least, only two possible situations are differentiated: middle and working class persons) without considering the diversity of material interests involved. **[It is true that this is a simplification. The question is whether an inclusion of a model with more heterogeneous interests would make a ruptural strategy more plausible and stable or even less plausible. I think heterogeneity of interests makes ruptural strategies *under democratic processes* less likely.]**

On the one hand, these material interests do not seem to be possible to be reduced to an average since they are related to positions which are not only quantitatively but qualitatively different: how to calculate the average between an employee and an employer? **[The “median person” was meant to be the median person who is in population of potential supporters of socialism – thus not capitalists. The simple model is based on a polarized class model – workers and capitalists, and the median person is the median worker. That needs to be made clearer in the text.]**

On the other hand, material interests are not only limited to the particular situation of each individual, but they are also related to **broader social fractions and classes which transcend individuals**: how to calculate the average between the situation of a certain individual and the larger group to which he or she belongs if both of them do not necessarily coincide?. **[I am not sure what precisely you mean when you talk about the material interests of a “larger group” as distinct from the interests of the people within that larger group. I am posing the question of under what conditions are people likely to robustly support a ruptural transition to socialism, since it is the support of people that constitutes the basis for the class coalitions behind a ruptural strategy. My argument is that the transition trough is a challenge to the popular support for socialism. How does invoking the idea of a distinction between the material interests of individual workers and the material interests of the class undermine this point?]**

Finally, these material interests are expressed into a variety of degrees and forms of consciousness and organization of the different groups, is it possible to establish an average between these forms of consciousness and organization?

Returning to the original question about the method, is not there a danger of falling into an abstract analysis that do not take into account particular determinations?

2. Catherine Willis

Evaluating the transition trough in ruptural transformation seems very subjective. These “hypothesis about the future” (5), while not empirically determined are certainly central in helping people formulate their opinions on the actions that they will support. I believe that the resulting opinions will also affect the transition outcomes and the entire process of

negotiating democratic changes (we are less likely to embrace changes whole-heartedly if we believe that there might be a strategic about-face or if we feel that others are only fighting for themselves). To what extent then is ruptural change dependant on the development of an ideology or communal belief that supports these changes? Is this set of beliefs only necessary for this form of transformation, or also for the others? **[The Transition trough argument certainly does suggest that ideology may play a crucial role, at least insofar as it is capable of robustly affecting people's beliefs about these alternative paths. It is tempting, because beliefs do figure strongly in this, to imagine that with the right ideology anything could be possible – if people could only believe in the optimistic path then they would be willing to stay the course and this would make the transition possible, etc. The problem, however, is whether such a set of beliefs could be robustly sustained over a long and deep transition trough? This is not just a question of individualism or communally oriented beliefs, because a deep and prolonged transition trough is bad for the collectivity, not just oneself. Given that in fact there are huge uncertainties about these trajectories, the empirical question is whether or not it is possible to sustain confidence of the upward part of the curve in the face of prolonged decline and transition disruption.]**

Second, I would like to discuss the scenario presented in this chapter, in which changes occur through the state and are “supported by a substantial majority of the population” (2). I think that a society in which a substantial majority of the population supported a ruptural strategy in the pursuit of a robust socially empowered state would be a very different society to begin with. In response to the question set out in the introduction (1): “under what conditions could we imagine that there would be broad support for a ruptural strategy against capitalism?” I would suggest that this large amount of support would likely exist after different types of interstitial and symbiotic changes had occurred. If this was the case, the rupture would not be a rupture with the world we currently know, but one that is already quite transformed. Furthermore, my reaction is that if there was broad support for a ruptural strategy, there would be broader support for a non-ruptural strategy or a series of “limited forms of ruptures” (1) which would not entail as devastating a transition trough (3). **[I am not sure that it follows that if there is broad support for a ruptural strategy there would be even broader support for a nonruptural strategy. It could be that many people believed that without a rupture then they would be unable to push forward their socialist vision and so they would not support reformist strategies believing that they would fail to accomplish their goals. This, after all, is the central argument in support of rupture: only a rupture will enable us to move beyond capitalism.]**

Lastly, I need a little clarification on the concept of ruptural change. When does ruptural cease to be ruptural in the case of limited forms of rupture? Could these not be seen as mere reform? (Is changing an electoral system ruptural?). If a government has broad support for the changes it brings about are these still ruptural? **[Even though I use the expression “partial rupture” I am a little uncertain about whether or not this is really a good use of terms. The idea of “rupture” is captured by formula “Smash first, build later”. So, an abrupt change in a specific institutional site – abolishing all private health insurance and replacing them with a government program – would have a somewhat ruptural character, and because of this there certainly would be disruptive element, but still, if the broader socio-economic institutional framework were still in place,**

then I am not sure this really would have the same kind of logic as the revolutionary system-rupture that I discuss in this chapter.]

Aside: In last week's readings -Elements of a Theory of Transformation- there was an issue that I couldn't quite put my finger on until I read this chapter. In this chapter, the ability of the "classical revolution" to create democratic egalitarian socialism is questioned, even though it is not doubted that it could still be an effective ruptural strategy. I would be really interested in including in chapter seven another element that would help us define more specifically transformation towards democratic egalitarian socialism, rather than transformation in general.

3. Eduardo Cavieres

My sense is that the reason to situate "ruptural transformation" in first place of order in the book, is to signal its weaknesses that are pretty evident considering the historical experience (although pointing out some hypothetical future scenarios). I am left wondering if the book should have a "ruptural transformation revisited", or if this chapter should be expanded and placed at the end.

I think that the way it is presented brings out again the essential question whether we are thinking in utopias that do not go beyond transforming capitalism into a more just and equal system; or if we are thinking in alternatives that require the replacement at some point of capitalism. If that is the case, rupture should be considered eventually as an essential step. **[I do not think that "replacement" logically implies rupture – metamorphosis is logically possible, in which a system gets replaced by the cumulative effect of interstitial changes and symbiotic changes. Of course this could hit an insurmountable obstacle that could only be overcome by destruction, but I don't think this is logically entailed by the very idea of replacement.]**

Even if we think in other forms of transformations, due to the fact that history is not linear and that capitalism has created a huge ability to overcome crisis and to absorb alternatives to reinforce itself, it is reasonable to think that other forms of transformation will require at some point of ruptural strategies (Isn't this what Gramsci says when he talks about the war of position and the war of movement?).

So, I do agree that ruptural transformation is not likely to work under every context, or actually, under most contexts. However, I do think that under specific circumstances, as those hypothetically proposed through the forms of institutional designs we have reviewed, not only ruptural strategies might work but they might be actually necessary to give sustainability to those designs. In that case, I would rather think that what is required is to predict what are the conditions needed for a ruptural transformation to take place (as the ones reviewed in the text) and what are the possible actions to be taken in order to face the negative consequences that will be produced and how the institutional designs we have seen may help to overcome them. **[I agree with you that if a rupture is actually necessary, then we do need to theorize the conditions for it to be successful in producing emancipatory transformation (rather than just destruction of existing institutions). In very general terms we might want to distinguish the conditions for a plausible launching of a ruptural strategy from the conditions for the transformative**

success of the strategy. The conditions for a launch may be a prolonged and deep crisis: the crisis needs to be deep enough for people to believe that they must radically transform the status quo, and it must be prolonged enough that the time horizon for a transition trough has credibility. The condition for its success is probably that substantial elements of the alternative have already been constructed within the existing society as a result of a trajectory of interstitial and symbiotic transformations so that the tasks of institution building are tractable. Something along those lines is how I would approach the issue.]

4. Molly Noble

Ruptural Transformation through Capitalism

Why do you assume that ruptural transformation needs to work through “ordinary democratic processes of the capitalist state?” Or rather, why preclude “insurrectionary violent assault and overthrow of the state” if for no other reason than your fourth justification for discussing ruptural strategies (pg 1) – especially in light of political development going on in other parts of the world (namely south America) that could potentially create spaces for ruptural transformation outside the process of the capitalist state. **[I am not meaning to assume that in all cases in the world ruptural strategies work through democratic means. There are two reasons I make this assumption for purposes of clarifying the logic of ruptural strategies: (1) In developed capitalist countries with effective states an insurrectionary strategy could not possibly succeed, at least so long as capitalism continues roughly along its current trajectory (i.e. periodic economic disruptions but no massive and prolonged economic collapses, etc.). So, in these kinds of societies, if there is to be a ruptural strategy it would have to work through democratic processes. (2) Insurrectionary strategies for ruptural transformation, where they have occurred, have not resulted in radical democratic egalitarianism (or a socialism of social empowerment). There are many reasons for this, and it is certainly not possible to demonstrate categorically that a violent revolutionary overthrow of an existing power structure necessarily results in authoritarian antidemocratic structures. Nevertheless, that is the historical record, and there are reasons why this is not so surprising: for example, the concentration of capacity for violence within an insurrectionary movement and the importance of discipline in such a strategy makes it extremely difficult not to use violence as a way of resolving internal disputes and conflicts, and this tends to generate a repressive orientation towards institution building.]** Also, based on my current understanding of political processes, I find it hard to believe that a ruptural transformation of the state would follow a socialist party’s control of the state. Even if a socialist party were to gain control under the most optimal conditions it seems our institutions are organized in such a way as to block ruptural transformation regardless of who has control of the state. It seems that social reproduction is embedded in the structure of the state so as to preclude the possibility of ruptural transformation through existing state institutions. **[You may, of course, be right about this, but if so, this may mean that ruptural strategies to create a emancipatory democratic egalitarian alternative to capitalism are simply impossible: if they attempt to work through the existing state structure they will fail because those structures would make ruptures impossible; if they work outside of the existing state structures**

they will fail because either they would lead to nondemocratic outcomes or because they would be marginalized.]

Median Person/Trough as Black Box

I'm a little unclear about what you mean by "median person" and since you use this median person as the basis for the hypothetical trajectory of material conditions during different phases of transformation I think it would help to specify your conception of this median person. **[I pick the median person because if a socialist transition is to be sustained through a democratic process it requires at a minimum that 50% of the population support the process. The median person indicates this 50% break point – 50% of the population does worse than this person, 50% does better. The idea, then, is that in the transition trough a large majority of the population is materially worse off than they would be in the absence of the transition, but also after the transition is weathered, a large majority is better off (that is the "optimistic scenario"). All of this is based on the idea that whatever else we mean by democracy it must mean that a majority of the population support the party in power.]** I also might argue that basing the trajectory of material conditions on a single unit of analysis oversimplifies society and doesn't take into account inequality. **[You are right, of course, but the question is this: would adding these complexities make a ruptural transformation more plausible or even less plausible. My strategy here is make a series of assumptions that are actually favorable to the possibility of ruptural transition and then show how even under favorable conditions it is unlikely to be sustainable. Heterogeneity of interests and strong inequalities in the trajectories through the transition, I think, only make the task more difficult because the coalition is likely to become increasingly fragile.]** Although you briefly discuss how a person's economic status will determine their material well-being throughout the different stages of transformation, you do not take this into account in your formulation of the possible trajectories of material-well being. This may seem like a minor point but I would argue that since the success of a ruptural transformation will likely be contingent on length and degree of economic hardship during the trough, and that a person's material well-being prior to the trough will correspond to the degree of economic hardship felt, that any prediction about the future should reflect differing trajectories based on the current stratification of material well-being. **[This is what I try to capture in the two-class model later on where the trajectories of middle and working class are specified.]** That being said, the trough would not merely be a period of economic hardship. I imagine much political and social activity would occur during this time making the trough the pivotal test of the solidarity behind supporters of the ruptural transformation. The indeterminacy of what will happen with during the trough coupled with primacy of the trough period to determine the eventual outcome of the transformation I question the ability and value in trying to even make a moderate prediction about the outcome. **[But don't we have to attempt such a prediction if we are to argue for a strategy? And making such predictions with clear assumptions might also help clarify what needs to be combined with the strategy in order for it to be plausible. We know that revolutionary movements are often filled with wishful thinking and unrealistic expectations, and while this may motivate people for a while, it is unlikely to provide a solid basis for the long term, in my judgment.]**

5. Charity Schmidt

I generally enjoyed this chapter, as I thought it was thought provoking. However, I'm not convinced that ruptural transformation is wholly implausible. Erik even provided useful replies to those who say the transition trough would be too severe in the "rejoinders" section....

That being said, I believe this week's discussion on ruptural transformation might be complimented by a discussion on the relativity of the concept "standard of living." The ways in which we define the concept are themselves a product of capitalist relations and values. This concept can range from having secured food, shelter, education and healthcare to having two cars and a television in every room of your McMansion. Therefore, a shift away from capitalism requires a re-assessment of what standards of living and material comfort mean. This is also complicated by the reality that many of the things considered integral to a basic standard of living (in the highly capitalist societies at least) often generate or exacerbate social harms. Examples include individual ownership of cars and SUVs, overabundance of food, overconsumption of goods causing overproduction of pollutants, etc. So, perhaps part of weathering the trough, is redefining it. If we are willing to keep the current standard of living as expected in countries like the U.S. as the status quo, we may be doomed to fail, since the transition trough may require those who have been benefiting from capitalism to concede some luxuries while the rest of the world can catch up. **[You are absolutely right about this. Indeed, consumerism and consumerist culture is one of the central bases for the critique of capitalism. The question in play here is whether or not it is possible to mute these consumerist values and preferences in such a way that the transition trough problem would cease to be a binding constraint. Weathering the trough does require redefining it, but this cannot be done by fiat, it has to be done through some endogenous process, and I am not sure how that could occur through a ruptural strategy. Perhaps the cumulative effect of interstitial and symbiotic strategies might undermine consumerism, but the temptations of high consumption under inequalitarian conditions are extraordinary and difficult to resist even if it is empirically the case that this does not enhance happiness or fulfillment in life.]**

Additionally, the concept of continuous material growth for all, without complementary environmentally friendly technological advances, is also a dangerous one, and needs to be incorporated into the discussion. Perhaps the recent growth in popular support towards addressing environmental concerns will provide a space for the materially comfortable to accept more economic hardship, and thus support a transition to socialism throughout the trough. **[Very few people who are economically well off even if they are environmental champions are prepared to make deep personal cuts in their standards of living for environmental goals – witness Al Gore, for example. This does not mean that they are hypocrits exactly, just that they have ordinary personal preferences. I am not saying that dampening consumerism is impossible, but that it is very unlikely to be the result of voluntary abdications of consumption possibilities. This is, I think, one of the ways that inequality stabilizes capitalism: it creates envy and emulation for life styles that drive the system forward.]**

Although I do believe that ruptural transformation is still possible (and potentially the best path to achieve the type of deep democracy and institutional change we aspire to if we want

to achieve it before any tremendous catastrophes for humanity simply squelch the potential), the underlying assumptions presented in this chapter point to specific challenges to consider. One being that any ruptures that are made via the existing state have the potential to reinforce that apparatus or use the existing undemocratic means to justify the ends. To avoid this requires immediate transformations of state institutions and the reinforcement of civil society. It is these changes, however, that often attract serious critique and shouts of authoritarianism (example: when Chavez and his supporters took over the state through democratic means, each step towards deep institutional change, such as reforming the supreme court, the emergency powers of national decrees, or the nationalization of natural resources, became media fodder for the opposition). **[But some of these measures were threats to democracy. Remember there is a long history of “reforms” of constitutions championed by strong leaders in the name of democracy which ultimately erode mechanisms of democratic accountability. I don’t think the skepticism in Chavez’s political reform package can be seen as simply right wing slander. Emergency powers of national decrees by an unchecked leader are a recipe for authoritarian rule. This is precisely what Putin has done in Russia as well: replaced elected governors with appointed governors, expanded the capacity for presidential decrees, dealt with opposition within his party by insisting on strong party discipline, etc. This does not mean that the popular programs of land reform and cooperatives, and the like, are all merely manipulations of the masses either – this is a complex and contradictory situation. But authoritarian-statist projects often combine concentration of state power in the hands of a personal leader along with popular-egalitarian policies. The stable institutional configuration that results from this is not, however, grounded in social empowerment.]** I suppose there is no question related to this point, just a reminder of the challenges that existing state structures and elites present to ruptural transformation.

Another challenge deserving considerable discussion is the difficulty of building a transition to socialism based upon material interest. While perhaps necessary in order to generate broad support, its quite problematic. If we use the U.S. example, there are many individuals/groups that share the same material interests, yet very diverse ideological interests. How do promoters of socialism advance their goals of improving the material welfare of all while walking an ideological tightrope? For example; I would argue that the majority of members of the Michigan Militia are working class folks who suffer from capitalism, want to improve their standard of living, and want more local control (over the economy, schools, etc). In a material interest sense, they share the same struggle as those who want socialism, however, their idea of how to attain these goals (i.e. their ideology) is quite different in important ways. While supporters of socialism may view the state as a mechanism to improve social conditions, Militia folks see it generally as an impediment to advances in their livelihood. How do we embrace necessary alliances based on material interests while promoting our socialist ideology? **[My argument is a little weaker than saying that the coalition for socialism is based on material interests. Rather what I am saying is that a deep and prolonged transition trough under democratic conditions is likely to erode the cohesion of that coalition so long as there is credibility to the rival political claim that abandoning the socialist path will reverse the trough. I agree that nonmaterial motives are essential for any robust challenge to capitalism and effective struggle for socialism, but it doesn’t follow from this that by themselves they can**

provide a sufficiently durable basis of solidarity to weather a long transition trough, especially given the uncertainties and conflicts that will occur under those conditions. There is a very big possibility for a cynicism trap to emerge along with the transition trough since there will always be instances of people taking advantage of the situation for personal interests, etc.

6. Julian Rebon

I couldn't understand why this chapter is so short. I agree that ruptural transformation it's very difficult to happen in a development and liberal democratic countries. However, a ruptural transformation, in the revolutionary form, could be an important emancipatory resource for the people of undevelopment &/or non-democratic countries or social groups dominated despotically in development and democratic countries. These cases represent the majority of the world population. **[You are correct that my skepticism about ruptural strategies is largely anchored in my concern for transforming advanced capitalist societies, and certainly that is the premise of my counterfactual trajectories in the diagrams. I should make those scope conditions much clearer in the exposition. I have less to say, I think, about the plausibility of ruptural strategies in underdeveloped countries or in authoritarian regimes. Even though the historical track record of attempts at revolutionary ruptures is pretty dismal – the in destroying existing structures, but in building democratic egalitarian alternatives, it is certainly presumptuous for me to dismiss that possibility. There is better reason to be skeptical of ruptural strategies by “social groups dominated despotically in development and democratic countries”. We would have to look at specific cases to really make a judgment on this, but I am not sure exactly what a ruptural strategy for social empowerment would mean in this case.]**

Theoretically we think that reformist emancipatory process would be faced by the ruling class overthrow of democratic government with military coups (Chile 73, Venezuela 2003, Spain 1936 are real examples of this problems). In this case ruptural strategies could be an alternative to face the reaction and to keep the emancipatory project. **[The arguments I present against the plausibility of ruptural strategies in developed capitalist democracies do not imply that a reformist government would not use force to protect itself against counterrevolution – i.e. against a ruptural counter-strategy by the ruling class. The question in these cases is whether the reformist regime democratically elected would be in a better position to withstand this armed attack from the right *if it embarked on a ruptural strategy once in power* – i.e. mass expropriation of means of production, foundational transformation of the legal basis for social power and economic organization, and so on. This is not at all obvious. Would Allende have been better able to counteract the coup if he had shifted to a ruptural strategy? Now, it is possible that Allende would have been in a better position to resist the coup if the democratically elected regime had pre-emptively radicalized its transformative strategy and embarked on a ruptural path. The idea is that the masses would have been so powerfully mobilized by this that the military would not have been able to successfully attack the regime – or at a minimum that the military would have**

fragmented in its attempt to do so. Perhaps. But this is certainly not obvious, and the ruptural radicalization could also have more deeply fractured the political base for the regime in ways that would have meant that it could not survive democratically.]

Why would the dominant class, peaceful, leave his privileges? Nothing in the history of the socialist struggles support this thesis. In this sense, surprise me the absence about the military relation forces level (Gramsci) in his analysis. This is not necessary the use of “violence” but necessarily the existence of a strategy political-militar” (Gandhi is an excellent example). **[The issue of whether or not a democratic-egalitarian project of social transformation needs to be defended against violent reaction/opposition is not the same as whether or not a ruptural strategy of transformation would succeed. A strictly reformist strategy – interstitial or symbiotic -- may also need a strategy for defending itself against violent attack. Ruptural strategies are likely to provoke even sharper counterrevolutionary movements than radical reformist strategies, so you would need to explain why they would be in a better position to successfully counter the counterrevolution.]**

In short, in my opinion the chapter it's not the enough development in order to the relevance of the problem analyzed.

If I accepted the axioms of your ideal (abstract) model of analysis, I would agree with you about the transition material difficulties. Nevertheless, I consider that are important the two objections for you mentioned.

In some groups no material profit could be compensate worst material condition. For example in countries with ethnic or nationality oppression (zapatism in Mexico nowadays); the cultural recognition could compensate for the material problems. In some cases, the political and cultural recognition the workers and poor, or new freedoms and opportunities to the intellectuals, new rights to no dominants forms the sexualities and to the woman, could be work in the same wave. I agree with you that this “compensation” is not for ever.

Finally, if agree with your thesis about the absence of the long term process of intensifying crisis in the capitalism it's true that the crisis is the necessary wave of regulation and expansion of the system. In this sense, some regional crisis could be use in order to building a ruptural transformation with less cost material of transition. **[I think this is an important consideration: While we can no longer, with confidence, predict any long term tendencies for crisis intensification, we can, with confidence predict the erratic, periodic occurrence of serious crises, and these could create windows of opportunity for ruptural strategies because the transition costs under those circumstances might be significantly lower. This depends, of course, on the character of the crisis – how deep and long it is and how credible the transition trough predictions are to the relevant actors. But still, the prospects of periodic crises does create a space for more ruptural approaches.]**

7. Rodrigo Salgado

A first question: you assume that in developed capitalist countries with functioning liberal democratic institutions, a ruptural strategy for socialism would have to work in significant ways through the ordinary democratic processes of the capitalist state. This theoretical model that you present here argues against the sustainability of the ruptural transformation is applicable just for the developed countries where correctly works liberal democratic institutions? Or can be applicable for not developed countries where these institutions may not work correctly? **[The specific model I propose is geared to developed capitalist societies with stable liberal democracies – that is what provides for the descriptions of the various curves. The basic idea of a transition trough problem, however, does not depend on the existence of liberal democratic states: any long term ruptural strategy faces this problem. The difference in non-liberal democratic contexts is 1) that there may be fewer credible alternatives to ruptural strategies, 2) the predicted trajectories into the future might look quite different, 3) the problem of mobilizing a democratic majority for a ruptural challenge might be less important because the ruptural strategy doesn't directly confront the "test" of electoral competition.]**

Second, you stress that more limited forms of rupture in particular institutional settings may be possible, but you don't develop this idea. What this idea exactly means? It can involve violent means in a very short scale? **[Ruptural is not the same as "violent". Ruptural means a radical disjuncture in power relations and institutional structures. In the US if we created a national health insurance system funded by taxes and passed a law prohibiting private health insurance this would constitute a ruptural change in the healthcare system: the private insurance industry would be cut out of the process and an entirely new institutional design put in place. Now, I am in fact unsure if this is a partial version of a wide system-level ruptural strategy – I am not entirely clear on the underlying principle here. But in any event it is not about violent overthrow vs legal-democratic processes.]**

I think your analysis bases in the assumption that a ruptural strategy is to be a central part of the construction of a robust socialism of social empowerment, only if it is supported by a substantial majority of the population, and can express (satisfies) the material interests of most people. Only considering these two aspects is sufficient to reject this strategy? Thinking the ruptural transformation in terms of class struggle analysis, aren't the moral, ideological and the countercultural aspects as important as the material ones? **[These moral/cultural aspects may be even *more* important and yet the whole process could be derailed by the problem of disruption to material interests. Without the moral commitments you couldn't even get a ruptural strategy off the ground – it could never even be launched by a political party without widespread solidarity grounded in a high level of cultural and moral commitment. But over time a deep and prolonged transition trough would still be likely to be corrosive of that solidarity, especially if the solidarity involves complex coalitions.]**

8. Hanif Nu'Man

In your ruptural strategy you state that if it is to be a central part of the construction of a robust socialism of social empowerment, then it would have to be supported by a substantial majority of the population. How do you propose informing a majority of the population? I believe the majority of the people are not aware of the ideological elements of socialism, much less how it will benefit their lives (if that is what you are suggesting it will do). What mechanisms can be used to counter the information apparatus currently in place that subdues the masses and keeps them thinking that a better life is on the horizon. **[In the analysis of this chapter I am assuming that over an extended period of time there has been political mobilization and social movements which have gradually built up a political coalition for the ruptural strategy through some unspecified process. The logic of the chapter is to say: look, let us suppose that we have somehow or other solved the very tricky problem of transforming the core ideology of a majority of the population so that we actually can elect a ruptural socialist party. This itself may be impossible, of course, and I certainly do not have a good theory about how this could be accomplished, but let us suppose that this happened. Even then, the chapter argues, a ruptural strategy would still be problematic. This is what a theoretical model tries to do – explore the implications of specific kinds of causal processes by making certain assumptions. The issue of the plausibility of a ruptural strategy would not even come up if it was also impossible to break through the ideological obstacles within existing capitalism. Or to state the problem in slightly different terms: anyone who supports a ruptural strategy will have to deal with two different kinds of problems: first, how to convince the broad mass of the population to support the goals of a rupture (this is your problem of ideology), and second, how to carry out a rupture once that ideological problem has been sufficiently solved. In this chapter my strategy is to examine the second problem only.]**

9. Sung Ik Cho

In this section of ruptural transformation, I think, what makes the discussion of ruptural transformation incomplete is the absence of theories of crises, although it is already acknowledged. Without discussing possible scenarios of crises, expected trajectories for ruptural transformation seem still to be based on too unrealistic assumptions. Although it is hard to theorize all possible causal factors of crises, can it be possible to lay out several distinctive patterns of probably crises? For example, the difference between an economic crisis like a financial crisis leading to a political crisis and a legitimacy crisis leading to wholesome systematic reforms. **[I agree that it would be worth exploring the strategic context of ruptural strategies under different expectations of future trajectories – which is basically what a crisis theory tries to do. I am not so sure the issue is whether the crisis is generated by financial disruption vs overproduction or some other mechanism – although perhaps this could be central. It seems to me that the more telling question is twofold: 1) how long and deep is the crisis, and 2) are there credible responses within the existing system to the crisis to ameliorate the effects of the crisis. Ruptural strategies become more credible when 1) the crisis has “no end in sight”, and 2) it has sharp longlasting effects on the lives of people which cannot be**

counteracted. Even these two conditions would not necessarily sustain a ruptural strategy unless there was credibility to the alternative, but it would make that task easier.] Or, are there different conditions for ruptural transformation between developed countries and developing countries? Under the developed countries, it might be possible that limited ruptural transformation would probably occur through existing democratic representative institutions. But I am not sure whether developing countries building democratic and capitalistic institutions would go through the same pathway of ruptural transformation.

Another question is more fundamental. What would be an example for ‘the limited ruptural transformation’? I guess that a trajectory toward ruptural transformation through democratic institutions is considered as a type of the limited ruptural strategy. **[I was thinking of “limited” more in the sense of sectoral ruptures, or ruptures in specific institutional clusters, rather than in the basic structure of power and class relations. But as I have indicated in other comments, I am not so sure how much sense this makes.]** But this seems to me unrealistic. Given the fact that current capitalism is sustained and protected under the democratic political system, I cannot imagine how much the post-crisis political process aiming to change capitalist system can be implemented and supported under the democratic institutions. Is it possible to think of the economic ruptural transformation with the continuation of political institutions? **[In a way you are stating precisely what is the problem: It may not be possible to “think of the economic ruptural transformation with the continuation of political institutions” precisely because of the way these institutions would continually undermine the ruptural strategy, but it may also be impossible given the robustness of liberal democracy, to imagine a ruptural strategy outside of those institutions, or a ruptural strategy directed against the state itself (i.e. “smash the state”).**

10. RODOLFO ELBERT-

1. In the whole book there is an emphasis on the possibilities of socialism in developed countries. In my opinion, the delimitation of the discussion to this kind of countries can affect the argument in this chapter. If we think of socialism as an international process can we avoid a transition trough? How do the limits posed by Wright to the discussion (developed countries, or one developed country) affect the way we can think about the ruptural strategy as an international process? **[The focus on developed capitalist liberal democracies certainly is a limitation, and ruptural strategies *might* be more relevant elsewhere – although that would have to be shown rather than just proclaimed. The book as a whole, however, is not meant to be exclusively concerned with socialism-as-social empowerment in the North. Some of the key examples come from the South, and the critique of capitalism is also equally applicable to the South.]**

2. In the introduction one of the reasons for discussing a ruptural strategy is that it could be applied to individual institutions. This is an interesting idea, but there is no development about it in the chapter. What examples can be given? **[As I have indicated I am not so sure that this makes sense. There is, of course, an analog to a transition trough in a massive reorganization of a given institution – say the healthcare system or the**

education system or something else. But I am not sure that these should be understood as partial version of the strategic logic of rupture within a theory of system-level transformation.]

3. The chapter assumes that the ruptural strategy will be achieved through the existing democratic institutions (assumptions 1 & 2). I think that any ruptural strategy is accompanied by a mass activism that might or might not lead to a violent take over of the state. Both Russia in 1917 and Chile in 1973 went through a process of grassroots democratization that itself questioned the existing democratic institutions (whether or not that led to a violent take over of the state). So, how one can rule out in advance the possibility that the grassroots activism generated by the “socialist process” will not itself lead to a transformation (or elimination) of representative democracy? **[I agree with you that any plausible socialist process within a bourgeois democracy would generate all sorts of grass roots activism – indeed, that is a big part of what the transition is trying to accomplish: an activated society with deepened forms of social power in all sorts of sites. So an explosion of activism is certainly likely. It is another matter whether this implies that it would involve a mobilization against representative democracy, let alone its elimination. It is pretty hard to imagine that happening without that triggering a fracturing of the coalition itself, for if a majority of the population is mobilized behind the socialist project why would they want to eliminate representative institutions (as opposed to supplementing them with new organs of direct democracy).]** In other words, a ruptural strategy could be supported by the majority of the population but still **question the institutions of representative democracy.** **[What might be questioned is the *exclusive* role of representative democracy, but given that the socialist project was launched through representative democratic elections, and given that a system of representation would still be needed, then it does not seem like that a real majority would want to eliminate those institutions, although a fraction might.]**

4. I don't understand what are the basis (theoretical or historical) to assume that a transition through under the better circumstances for socialism will be worse than an economic crisis under capitalism. **[I don't assume that a transition through is necessarily worse than any imaginable crisis within capitalism. My assumption is that the longer and deeper it is the more precarious will be the coalition supporting it so long as there is a credible possibility for a return to the capitalist trajectory]** If we can question this assumption, we can question the following: the political coalition of supporters for a democratic ruptural transition to socialism is likely to become increasingly fragile over time if the transition through is deep and prolonged (p.5). Why would people revolt against socialism only because of their material interest if they do not revolt against capitalism only on this base? (e.g. the great depression). **[The critical difference between a crisis within capitalism and a trough generated in the exit from capitalism lies in the plausibility of alternatives and counterfactuals: The background condition for the transition through problem is an experience with a stable liberal capitalism – that is, developed capitalist countries and no cataclysmic crisis – so that there is a credible alternative to the transition that is rooted in people's experience: that is the counterfactual path in the diagram. In the context of a great depression in an otherwise stable capitalism the alternative being posed is a purely theoretical one – it is an alternative argued for by**

ideologically committed socialists, but it is not part of the lived experience of the potential supporters. It therefore faces considerably greater credibility arguments.]

5. Surprisingly, there is no discussion of the distributive effects of the first socialist measures: What would be the economic consequences of income distribution? If the big companies are expropriated, one would assume that the working and middle classes would get an economic benefit of that expropriation. In other words: even if the economic situation as a whole might be worst, maybe the particular situation of the working class does not include a transition trough? **[Expropriating those companies will only benefit people if the corporations continue to produce at the same level with the same efficiency, supplies, economic integration, etc. You cannot eat the machines. This is precisely the transition trough problem: the expropriation of the firms disrupts contracts, supply chains, trust, credit markets, etc. , and this means that production declines drastically.]**

11. Guillaume Neault

‘Ruptural Transformation’ is a relatively short chapter, but its content is explosive. My objective in this interrogation is two-fold: 1) I seek clarification of some terms 2) I wish to raise a few questions that will be valuable to our discussion. My first question relates to the revolutionary subject! What set of countries would be included under ‘developed capitalist countries’ (page 1)? I get the impression, from the text and figure 8.1, that the theoretical framework of the chapter speaks mostly to ‘advanced liberal-democratic countries.’ For instance, I believe that Chinese or Indian people would not perceive that the projected line on figure 8.1 captures adequately their future standard of living. **[What do you think their expectations are? Do you think the projected capitalism line in China is more steeply rising for the median person? Or what?]** My second question relates to timing. Let us say that there is some interest in electing socialist governments, must we look at socialism as a concerted political action *across* countries? On the one hand, Przeworski’s figures have nothing to say about a fundamental aspect of ruptural transformation – political strategy! They chart the gradual increase of material welfare over time. This is somewhat embarrassing, as we have established that a ruptural transformation can occur only through representative democracy. I imagine that his figures must be restricted to a country unit of analysis. **[Yes – the Przeworski story assumes that socialism is something enacted to a significant extent through states, and while this may occur simultaneously across a number of states, it is nevertheless a state-centered process. This is true even if the model of socialism is decentralized and socially empowered, since the state is pivotal to defining the rules of the game under which that happens. It could be, in the manner of some Troskyst views, that socialism-in-one-country is impossible, so that the possibility of the “optimistic path” of the transition trough depends upon multiple countries embarking on the transition, but still the immediate site of rupture and transition is within state-bounded territories. Perhaps at the far end of the transition the state boundaries can begin to dissolve, but that is another story.]** My next question relates to the three paths toward socialism. I understand that you define the agenda in terms of possible socialist trajectories, but I think an additional path, called “bellicose path” (war between anti-socialists and pro-socialists) is also a possibility. Wars, in fact, might be the

faits d'armes of the 21st century. **[I have deliberately ignored the possibilities of civil wars between pro/anti-socialists or wars between socialist and antisocialist states. War only makes the transition troughs deeper and longer, so if the transition trough creates a powerful barrier to ruptural struggles even in the absence of war, then the barrier would be even worse if civil war is the likely result. That is: the prospect of civil war would be another reason not to embark on the ruptural path, or at least a reason why it is unlikely to be embarked upon through democratic means.]**

12. Pablo Dalle

I must say that I enjoy the chapter. It analyses the material conditions of possibilities of a ruptural strategy for constructing a democratic egalitarian socialism. I was very interested in this trouble and remained me many times I had wanted to explain why socialism should be a desirable economic and political system than capitalism. I have ever believed that socialism should be more efficient than capitalism. The chapter gives me conceptual tools to interpret the process of transition to socialism. Nevertheless, I think it ends too pessimistic. Although it analyses different trajectories, it points out that the economic decline which would probably generate the ruptural transformation makes it implausible. I would like to discuss why I do not agree with this point of view.

My criticisms of the analysis are based in two assumptions of the conditions for a ruptural strategy. First, referring to the necessity to work with the functioning liberal institutions, I think that a radical democratic project has a particular interest in deepening democracy. So that, in this process the social empowerment engages in the political radical project could use democratic institutions and means of present democracies but it should exceed them. Neither the state nor the political parties are static apparatus, the social empowerment should transform them *vis a vis* the economics structures. This is part of the socialist compass, transforming institutions, structures and mechanisms experimenting by proof and error. In fact, the radical democratic project towards an emancipatory project do not need only popular support, it needs popular participation in the democratic institutions. **[I agree completely with this point: part of the transformation of a transition to socialism involves a transformation of the state itself – introducing new democratic forms (like participatory budgets and other forms of popular assemblies) and making the existing elements more democratic (electoral reforms of various sorts). Some of these innovations can be forged directly in civil society or in workplaces without the state being directly involved: demanding works councils as a form of social empowerment within work can be a demand of workers. But of course, a serious socialist party in power could do much to facilitate these transformations in all sorts of ways – requiring works councils; providing facilities for neighborhood assemblies and articulating their deliberations to city policies, etc. So, when I say the process uses the institutions of liberal democracy I do not mean to suggest that those institutions are unaffected by the process. These are important as part of the process of social empowerment, but it is not clear how they would reduce the problem of the transition trough.]**

Secondly, in relation to the material conditions of the ruptural strategy, I do not agree with the idea of analyzing the trajectory of the standard living of the median person. I think that it is more important to evaluate the popular supporting of the democratic egalitarian socialism the capacity of the radical strategy to avoid the relations of exploitation and domination. By this way, different segments of exploited classes in capitalism would feel attracted to participate in this project and also defend it during the hard times of transitional period. Moreover, taking into account the expansive definition of material interests, I am not sure that these segments of classes would be **better in capitalism than in socialism.**

[Remember: the issue here is not capitalism vs socialism, but capitalism vs the transition to socialism. Now you also say here that the important point is not the standard of living by the relations of exploitation and domination. This is a nice empirical claim. You could make a transition diagram for domination and exploitation in which there would not be a trough, perhaps: domination immediately declines through the very process of transformation, not just the outcome of transformation. That was very clearly seen in the movie on the Bruckman factory we watched here a couple of days ago. And the same could be said about exploitation, although that is a little less visible than domination as such. But the question still remains: for the majority of the population – and a robust democratically animated ruptural transition requires a substantial majority – how much weight does the domination/exploitation advantages of the transition have relative to the material standard of living? If the trough is deep and long, would reduced domination be sufficient to stay the course? And if you add heterogeneity into the mix (as in my two class model), would this make the trade-offs even worse?]

13. Ruth Sautu

Why to think of sacrifices instead of majority self-interest? How to show the advantages of a society that does destroy/waste human and material environmental resources in conspicuous consumption?

How to break down the extended belief that capitalism is the only system of economic management able to produce economic prosperity? **[The issue in play in this chapter is not mainly whether people believe capitalism is the only system that can produce prosperity. My transition trough graphs in fact assume that people believe socialism will actually be better at prosperity – eventually the median person's material standard of living is higher in socialism that it would have been in capitalism. But this doesn't change the fact that the transition involves a considerable disruption and decline –and that can be called "sacrifice" even if it is in the self-interest of the majority. The problem here is time horizons.]**

14. Santiago Rodríguez

I really enjoyed the chapter and your proposals are very interesting. I send my comments.

First, the capitalist ideology and strategies encourage confrontation between the middle and the working classes emphasizing their opposite interest. As part of a socialist rupture strategy is it possible to infuse conflict within the capitalist class? **[Very nice point. This is in fact part of what symbiotic strategies do: it creates conflicts within the capitalist class because some segments of capitalism are advantaged and others harmed by the symbiotic strategies. Social capitalism can work this way too (social capitalism as one of the pathways in chapter 4), for example when unions control pension funds and use them to reward capitalist firms that respect labor rights – this pits those firms against anti-labor firms.]**

The second question is how to include the middle class in the socialist project? If this class has a high material standard of living it would not want to lose a privilege position in the social structure. **[I think there are a number of ways in which the middle class can be drawn into a socialist agenda: first, social justice considerations are in fact relevant to the moral concerns of the middle class. Many people have these moral commitments and if they believe socialism would actually work and further these concerns, then at least some middle class people will support socialist ideals. Second, there is a wide range of harms from capitalism laid out in chapter 2 that impact on the middle class, not just workers: risks, commodification, environmental destruction, unproduction of public goods, hyper-competitiveness, etc. So while in the narrowest of material interests socialism might not serve their interests, in terms of their all-things-considered interests it might.]**

Third, in the first moment the socialist path takes the capitalist institutions, why to use them without modifying? Should socialists' institutions imitate the efficiency of the capitalists' ones? **[A socialist transformation – especially a ruptural one – immediately challenges and transforms capitalist institutions. This is what social empowerment means. So part of the problem of the transition trough is precisely that it is triggered by the assault on capitalism. The efficiency issue is a tricky one, for efficiency is surely an important consideration for socialist production – perhaps even more deeply than in capitalism (i.e. efficiency in the sense of minimizing inputs for a given output). Socialism should be very concerned with labor productivity, for this concerns the reduction of necessary labor and the enhancement of “free time” – time freely disposable by people for their purposes. And it is concerned with resource efficiency for environmental reasons. But all of this is not *capitalist* efficiency, since socialist efficiency would try to fully take into account all social and economic negative externalities in defining the costs of production, which capitalist efficiency ignores.]**

15. Tod Van Gunten

I think there's more to be said on the issue of capitalist crisis and its role in potentially facilitating ruptural transformations. In essence, my comment is a variant of the second objection that Erik discusses. His response to this is that “in the absence of a

compelling theory of the mechanisms that generate such intensification [of crises]” it is pure speculation to entertain this question. I disagree: I don’t think a theory of increasing intensification of crisis is necessary to entertain the possibility that severe medium-term “downturns” or crises are possible under capitalism and might play a role in ruptures. It seems to me that accelerating intensification is not necessary if a crisis is sufficiently intense and/or prolonged. Given uncertainty, if socialism appears to be a viable option, actors may choose to support it even if they believe that, in the long run, capitalist accumulation would get back on track: in this case, it depends on the length of the capitalist crisis relative to the length of the transition trough as well as the rates at which economic well-being will improve in the different scenarios. **[You correctly indicate that a ruptural; strategy in a developed capitalist country would depend on the length of the capitalist crisis relative to the transition trough. But there is another problem, which can be called the “you have nothing to lose but your chains” problem: Although of course this is a bit of excessive rhetoric, the idea here is that given the risks of a revolutionary(ruptural) strategy, people are more likely to participate when they have “nothing to lose.” This means that even with a capitalist crisis with a fairly long decline, a modern welfare state can guarantee that people have quite a bit to lose besides their chains. When you add to this the inherent uncertainty about the projected trajectory of the socialist alternative, most people would probably be hesitant in weighing costs and benefits even if they believed eventually that socialism would be better.]** Under more general assumptions, Erik’s model could become a pretty complex optimization problem where the outcomes wouldn’t be at all obvious. So in other words I think that:

1. the question is not whether capitalist crises will inevitably intensify, but whether capitalist crises of relative large levels of intensity and duration will tend to occur periodically
2. if they do tend to occur, the predicted outcomes will become very sensitive to the parameter values in Erik’s setup: the slope of the capitalist and socialist curves, the depths and lengths of the crises, etc. **[In the “etc” there are some pivotal issues, especially the confidence with which people believe in these curves.]**

So will crises of this sort occur? In addition to the flaws in the classical “acceleration of crisis” theory, one reason to be skeptical is that in developed countries we haven’t seen crises of this magnitude for decades (the depression of the 30’s was probably the last time, though some people might want to argue about the 1970’s). In developing countries we have seen crises of significant intensity (Mexico in 1994, Argentina in 2001-2) but they have been relatively short from the standpoint of the theory of ruptural transformations. On the other hand: first of all, it bears mentioning that we are currently witnessing the beginning of a financial crisis in the US that many have predicted to be the worst since the depression. This is not to say that one would expect the current recession to be truly-rupture inducing, but just to remind to us that the crises are real, and that if we imagine the conditions we are currently experiencing magnified by a factor of four or five, say, we might be in the realm of “severe and prolonged capitalist crisis.” Secondly, as I’ve ranted about at earlier points in the semester, it’s also possible that various exogenous factors including peak oil, water scarcity, climate change or pandemic-induced instability, etc. could lead to prolonged crisis. Again, none of these are solid predictions but they are real possibilities. I think to *not* think about them seriously would be remiss. **[There is another general issue in play here: How should time, resources and energy be allocated to**

different strategic approaches by activists, socialists, etc. during the historical moments that are not propitious for ruptural strategies. Let us assume that eventually, in some unknown future period, there will be a “prolonged crisis”. The question then is: what is the optimal strategy in the pre-crisis period? Here is the dilemma (perhaps): You cannot wait until a prolonged crisis hits before embarking on the organizational and political tasks needed for a viable ruptural strategy. But in noncrisis conditions, ruptural strategies themselves have no credibility for the reasons laid out in this chapter, so to build the relevant organizations, nonruptural strategies need to be adopted in that period – especially interstitial and symbiotic strategies. Do such strategies enhance the capacity for ruptural strategies “when the time is ripe”? How should we think about these temporal problems given the uncertainty of the trajectory of capitalism itself?

16. Edo Navot

I know that this chapter is extremely controversial, perhaps the most controversial chapter, for us. I suppose it's a good thing that, at least among the radicals who go to sociology graduate school in Madison, there is still some revolutionary optimism. Here are my two cents.

I agree that it's a little funny to be talking about ruptural transformations in the 21st century, but I think much of our feeling of silliness in talking revolution today is that we're talking in the United States. Yes, the probability of revolution at any point in the future in the United States is zip to nil but that doesn't mean that ruptural transformative strategies are dead all over the world. There is significant ferment in Latin America, at least, and ruptural transformation seems much more feasible there. Anyway, should anything resembling a revolutionary movement arise, I think that our role as American radicals will most probably not be to sow seeds for transformation at home but to raise hell here in order to constrain (as much as possible) the U.S. government from undermining a revolution wherever else it may be happening. **[Absolutely right.]**

Also, I think the set of three assumptions employed in this chapter are appropriate only for a sub-set of the questions about ruptural transformation. While the entire set of questions is too big for us, I think the range of possibilities that is considered in this chapter is too constrained. I'm not convinced that we should exclusively think about ruptural strategies that “...have to work in significant ways through the ordinary democratic processes of the capitalist state,” (1). The reasoning for this assumption is that violent insurrection tends to produce authoritarian post-revolutionary regimes. Of course, insofar as revolutionary violence does produce authoritarian regimes, it is an undesirable strategic choice. But I don't think this is a necessary connection. The Spanish revolution, for instance, was not violent until counter-revolutionary forces (consisting, we should note, of fascists as well as Communists) interceded. **[That is a crucial “until”: this means that the violence of the Spanish process was a state response to violent challenge. This was fundamentally the same as police force using to uphold the law and it was not violence directed at overthrowing the state itself.]** And the original rationalization for violent revolution for Marx was that even if the original rupture is peaceful, we must expect that the reaction will be violent and therefore we must arm ourselves. I think this demonstrates

two problems with the assumption of working within democratic processes. First, insofar as a counter-revolution will almost surely be armed, a movement dedicated to democratic processes as the centerpiece of its endeavor will suffer strategically. **[Not necessarily: a democratic regime *potentially* has the coercive power of the state at its disposal to resist counter-revolution. What is the alternative? I suppose an alternative would be that the socialist-revolutionary party has its own autonomous military force independent of the state and capable of challenging a united military if, when it is elected, the state-military turns against it? But is this plausible? Would any liberal democratic state tolerate a political party that builds up that kind of military power? My argument about the use of democratic institutions means that the ruptural party would not have an autonomous military capacity in the wings, and thus its ability to weather any violent counterrevolution would hinge on the loyalty of the state-based military/coercive forces. If it loses that solidarity the game is over. What could Allende have done? I think the choices are something like these: (a) retreat in the period before the coup, acknowledging that the agenda could not survive, or (b) attempt directly to appeal before the Coup to the loyalty of the common soldiers and fire or imprison the plotting officers (apparently this – or something like this -- was considered), or (c) some other strategy that would have split the military. But a united military that wants to overthrow a democratic regime probably will win; it isn't clear what kind of ruptural strategy would be plausible in such cases.]** Second, I think the scholarly task at hand should be to investigate the specific historical instances in which a non-democratic (violent and non-violent) uprising – like the Spanish revolution – did not give rise to authoritarian post-rupture regimes, and contrast these instances with democratic ruptures that suffered from violent counter-revolution – like Allende's Chile – and see what lessons we have to learn from each type of case.

I do agree with the second and third assumptions, and would add that broad popular support strikes me as an equally crucial condition for creating a non-authoritarian post-ruptural society (or perhaps only the negative is true, that a rupture without popular support will necessarily produce an authoritarian society).

Finally, I don't know how realistic it is to think about the possibilities for ruptural strategies in non-crisis conditions. I don't know enough about the history of revolutions to say this definitively, but I can't think of any ruptural revolutionary strategy that didn't come at the heels of social crisis with some economic roots. **[There are some cases – the Cuban revolution did not occur in any real economic crisis, but of course it was a revolution against a dictator not an attempt at rupture within liberal democratic institutions.]** The opportunity for seizing power in ruptural strategy, especially with the robust nature of contemporary advanced capitalist states, simply isn't there if a crisis doesn't already exist. That means that only the situation diagrammed in 8.5 is a realistic scenario in which to think about rupture (except I think the downward slope of the pre-trough economy should have already taken a dramatic downward slope, or been declining slowly for a long time). **[My comments on Tod's interrogations is relevant here.]**

Marx dedicated (at least) the last 25 years of his life to thinking about political economy in order, in part, to understand the conditions for crisis that will pave the way to revolutionary moments. I think it's telling that Marx devoted so much to thinking about political economy and the crisis dynamics of capitalism but addressed matters of collective

action and revolution not as a scholar, but only as an activist in the International and elsewhere. My guess is that the reason for this is that the nature of revolutionary change is such that it depends so deeply on contingent matters that it is nearly impossible to theorize in a meaningful way...

17. Wes Markofski

Chapter 8 provides a provocative argument about the dim prospects for a systemic ruptural transformation of capitalism under current conditions and raises a number of key challenges faced by ruptural strategies. The most clearly elaborated challenge is the idea of a transition trough that would reduce economic well being in the short term under any realistic conception of possible trajectories following a rupture with capitalism. But there are also arguments about the unlikelihood of broad democratic egalitarian outcomes to arise out of a “classical revolutions” (2) strategy, about an improvement in material conditions for the majority of people under socialism being a necessary condition of (democratic and egalitarian) socialism’s long term stability, and the necessity of working through the existing institutions of representative democracy to initiate ruptural transformations, which also implies the necessity of broad middle (and of course working) class inclusion in a socialist coalition. These are all interesting arguments.

One implication of Wright’s overall skepticism about ruptural strategies seems to be that it makes *major crises in capitalism* an increasingly important element of one’s theory of transformations (7). **[Really only in a theory of ruptural transformation – there is no necessary implication of massive crisis being a conditions for interstitial transformation, and while some degree of economic disruption may be a conditions for advances in symbiotic transformations, this is a weaker constraint than on ruptural strategies.]** Perhaps ruptural strategies are impossible without crisis conditions that cause people’s material conditions under capitalism to decrease significantly for a broad range of the working and middle class, thus reducing the transition trough problem and destabilizing popular opposition to radical changes. Even leaving behind Marx’s intensification of capitalist crisis thesis, the likelihood of periodic crises in capitalism leaves the door open for the potential relevance of ruptural strategies under crisis conditions (although Wright seems skeptical about the likelihood of capitalist crises with sufficient intensity to make rupture more viable). Some other points:

What would a ruptural strategy working through existing representative democratic machinery look like in America? Given the centrism of the Republican and Democratic parties and the well-documented difficulties of even socialist parties in Europe to sustain long term commitments to radical changes (those that would be considered ‘ruptural’), what would such a strategy look like in the US context? The possibility of ruptural change through democratic means under existing conditions does indeed look rather bleak. **[You have of course raised a question about the premise of the specific models I have discussed – namely that a political party in the US could ever even have a socialist program and get elected. I have assumed that it has a socialist program and through some unspecified quirk of history which opens up a “window of opportunity” it gets elected. It then tries to implement its program aggressively. The trajectories are what happens.]**

What does ‘rupture’ *mean*? Would the initiation of the universal basic income proposal be considered a rupture with capitalism, even though it doesn’t directly transform property relations or market mechanisms? Does ‘rupture’ mean that people committed to socialist democratic egalitarian positions control the state, or does it mean the initiation of particular radical institutional changes? **[I don’t know how comprehensive a set of transformations are needed for them to count as “ruptural”. It used to be that this was captured by the formula “expropriation of the means of production” – the state taking over the banks, large corporations, and other “commanding heights” of the capitalist system, and then reorganizing those institutions through some new devices – socially empowered democratic control in my conception of socialism or state ownership in terms of older statist ideas of socialism. Basic income is much less comprehensive than that, and since I think it is compatible with on-going private ownership of the means of production it would not necessarily precipitate the transition trough problems – capital flight, disinvestment, collapse of supply chains, etc.]**

Is the ‘socialist fantasy path’ really a fantasy? Does the transition trough problem overestimate the downturn in material well-being during ruptural strategies? Or are the harms suffered by dominated people under capitalism such that, even given a society-level downturn in economic production and material well-being, a majority of people might still find themselves under better material conditions than they were in under capitalism? **[As I noted in an earlier comment, this is the “nothing to lose but your chains” problem: the economic disruption is likely to be sufficient that no amount of redistribution would lead to an instantaneous improvement in the material standards of living of the majority in the rich developed democracies, and most people would have a lot of lose besides their chains in the process.]**

18. Roxana

I send you my doubt

I think your theory was influenced by the strong American capitalist ideology. You say “Few people today imagine that a revolutionary overthrow of the state **in the developed capitalist countries** is a plausible strategy of social transformation”. I don’t agree with the idea that just “few people” think that. There are a lot of people all around the world thinking that. Then, all the analysis of alternatives strategies has this point of departure. **[It may be that there are many people in the world today who believe that the revolutionary overthrow of the state is a plausible strategy, but my statement referred specifically to the case of the developed capitalist countries. I do not think that there are many people in the EU, Japan, Australia, the US, etc. who believe that the state a) should be overthrown through a revolution, or b) could be overthrown. Are you disagreeing with the claim for the developed capitalist world?]**

There were a lot of state transformations in History. A reformist strategy needs a special economy. Particular, Capital enough to share between all the social forces is included in the strategy. You will need better salaries, unemployment benefit, Minor intensity of work,

reduction of the labour day. The dominant class actually couldn't do that. **[But these are the conditions of the developed capitalist countries, which is why in Przeworski's words – following Gramsci – there exists a material basis for consent. These conditions are pretty robust, which doesn't mean that at some point in the future they might erode or that they provide such a material basis for everyone.]**