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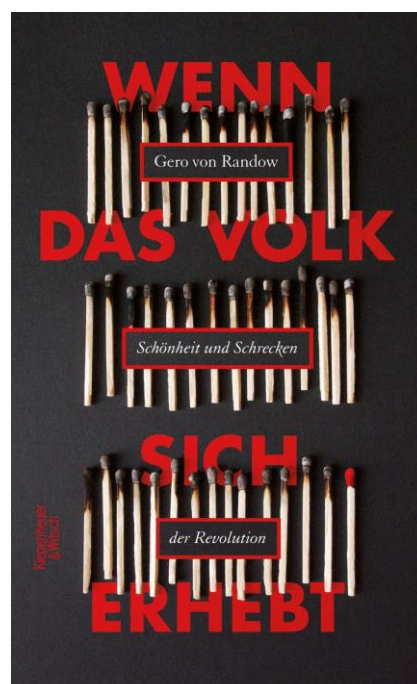
Gero von Randow
Wenn das Volk sich erhebt. Schönheit und Schrecken der Revolution

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Gero von Randow
When the People Rise. The Allure and Atrocity of Revolution

Translated by John Reddick



FOREWORD

The October Revolution in Russia occurred in 1917, exactly one hundred years ago.

Revolution! Such a powerful word. And one that has lost none of its magnetic appeal. It remains amongst the most commonly cited concepts in politics. In the summer of 2016 it was even chosen in all seriousness as his rallying cry by an American presidential candidate, 75-year-old US Senator Bernie Sanders, cheered on by his avid young supporters.

Unlike words such as ‘Kaiser’ or ‘proletariat’, the word ‘revolution’ points not only to the past, but also to the future – to uncertain and perhaps turbulent times that still lie ahead.

Is this optimism or pessimism? It is realism. Revolution has been declared dead so often that we can confidently expect it to keep on recurring.

Revolutions are mighty events. Huge masses of people stream through the streets, fill public squares, storm buildings, bring down their rulers, make history. This does not amount to a definition, it is simply a description – but one that identifies a key trait of revolutions: they are events based on passion (which is why this book, too, is driven by passion). The revolutionary masses feel both love and hatred at the same time. And the greater the resistance to their revolution, the more intense the love and the hatred become. In revolutions people become agitated not only in mind but also in body, and in consequence revolutions are, and indeed have to be, matters of passion. They are concrete events, not abstract ones. ‘Structures don’t take to the streets’ was a catchphrase of the rebels in Paris in May 1968; ‘Revolutions are festivals or they aren’t revolutions at all’ was another.

Revolutions are passionate affairs while they are in full flow, but they are no less so when they fail. Take the ‘Arab Spring’, for example. I am quite certain that we shall see further such wild swings from euphoria to depression in the future. Extreme enthusiasm, then utter misery. Two very different emotions, not only in the sense that one is positive and the other negative, but also because enthusiasm is always a more short-lived and intense emotion than disappointment. Enthusiasm carries people up and away, disappointment pulls them back down again.

There is a famous description by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel of the emotional impact of the French Revolution of 1789 on people of the time: ‘A

sublime passion prevailed at that time, an enthusiasm of mind and spirit coursed through the world as though a true reconciliation of the divine and the temporal had at last come to pass.’ Then once it was over, the dreamers fell back to earth.

This emotional element in revolutions has a far-reaching consequence by ensuring that they remain alive: novels, poems, songs, images, films pass on the passions experienced by one generation to other, later ones; even more importantly, these profoundly emotional experiences are revived and actualised, they are felt all over again.

Revolutions are communal experiences. They are communal acts of liberation, unfortunately often entailing communal acts of cruelty.

Their beauty is concentrated in their dramatic moment of liberation. In his 1969 book *An Essay on Liberation*, the social philosopher Herbert Marcuse, father figure of student rebellions, defined liberation as being ‘conceivable only as the way in which free people (or rather people in the process of freeing themselves) shape their life in solidarity, and build an environment in which the struggle for existence loses its ugly and aggressive elements’.

This amounts to an all-encompassing transformation of the emotions. The experience of communal strength replaces the sense of despair felt by individuals. In the words of Frédéric Lordon, another social philosopher, and one of the intellectual spokesmen of the ‘Nuit debout’ protest movement: ‘All collectives fighting for change experience this moment of cataclysmic excitement, of intense joy, fleeting though it may be, that follows their discovery of their own power, a power of which they previously considered themselves incapable.’

The violence that ensues on liberation is as terrible as the latter is beautiful. Revolutionary masses can turn in an instant into dynamic collectives capable of acts that no single individual would ever perpetrate. The presence of all the other enraged participants serves to lower the justificatory threshold that inhibits acts of violence.

One only has to pay careful attention to the revolutionary songs that are still sung today: many of them sing the praises of mob justice. ‘Les aristocrates à la lanterne!’, cries the Sansculottist song ‘Ça ira’, and Erich Weinert’s poem ‘Der rote Wedding’, set to music by Hanns Eisler, included the lines

We’re not just muttering, we’re on the boil,
For class struggle’s our motto,
and bloody our tune!

A bloody melody, then. Let's put it this way: if the world were so constituted that revolutions were superfluous, it would be a happier place; but as it stands it is outrageously unjust.

And the unjustness is plainer than ever before; not only that, but the depictions of it have become ever more shockingly graphic. First there was the printing press, then radio and television, and now it is the internet that is providing our vision of the world: the media are becoming 'hotter', to use the term coined by the Canadian media guru Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980); they are becoming more emotional, more fast-moving, more engaging: they get under our skin.

Revolutions are battles about language as well as about bodies; they are communicative events. Those in power, and the rebels aligned against them, both seek to organise and coordinate their activities; to disseminate ideas, practical information and calls to action; to disrupt the other side's channels of communication. Radio and television stations are among the traditional tactical targets of every uprising. The crucial role of the media in revolutions has been further intensified by the mobile internet, as became very clear during the so-called Arab Spring. The uprisings may have failed almost everywhere (though there will inevitably be re-runs), but it remains the case that due to its flexibility, international nature and universal availability, digital technology ultimately benefits the insurgent masses more than their oppressors.

We have by no means seen the last of this phenomenon: two tectonic plates, one called 'the possible' and the other called 'the real', grind away at one another in the unseen reaches of our world, thereby generating immense subterranean pressures. In what ways will these pressures find release?

In any event, the age of insurgencies, rebellions, uprisings and revolutions is not over. So whilst this book looks back at revolutions in the past, it is also intended as a pointer to potential eruptions in the future.

[...]

Chapter 2 Towards a Definition

The exchange has become legendary that is supposed to have taken place between Louis XVI and Duke François de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt on the evening of 14 July 1789, the day the Bastille was stormed. In his consternation the King is said to have exclaimed ‘Why, this is a revolt!’, to which his courtier replied ‘No, sire, this is a revolution.’

But what *is* a revolution? Let’s try a brief sketch, which will remain a little hazy for the time being. Its delineations should be clearer by the end of the book – but meanwhile, one thing is for sure: ‘revolution’ is one of those concepts that is fluid rather than fixed. It is like the concept ‘human being’: I am a human being, a stone is not – but there are problematic sub-categories (Neanderthals, embryos at the 4-cell stage, corpses).

Revolution implies upheaval. And in order to circumscribe the phenomenon, let’s start by discounting certain kinds of events, such as revolutions concerning industry, technology, fashion, sexuality and such like, even though such upheavals may well be related to the form of revolution that we are interested in: the Industrial Revolution gave rise to the working class, the technical revolutions that produced the printing press and the internet aided the spread of revolutionary movements. Modes of dress also change in revolutions – one only has to think of the Phrygian caps in the French Revolution, the ‘Kossuth’ beards of the 19th century Hungarian revolutionaries, the ‘Mao look’ of the 70s, the Che Guevara T-shirts; even the ‘sexual revolution’ has numerous links with the aspirations of the 1968 revolutionaries.

Feminism, too, could be termed a revolution. It undermines the patriarchal system, thereby altering the balance of power – and it very decidedly involves large masses of people. Moreover, feminism is intimately connected to various classic revolutions. The French Revolution has long been described, by men, as having been the work solely of men, but in truth women played a crucial role at several stages of the revolution. Indeed there were female voices at the time that drew the logical conclusion that ‘human rights for all’ necessarily implied the end of male privilege. Before the revolution had even ended, however, these voices had already been suppressed. During the final phase of Jacobin rule women were no longer allowed to sport revolutionary symbols or assemble in Jacobin clubs, and in 1793 the women’s rights campaigner Olympe de Gouges ended up on the guillotine.

The battle for women's rights also figured in the Russian Revolution – and was very definitely an element in the Tunisian Revolution. None the less, feminism does not belong among the kinds of revolution that I am concerned with in this book, any more than do the activities of high-tech enterprises in California seeking to turn society upside down by the application of radically new technologies. Both are undoubtedly political, aimed as they are at re-distributing power; but this book is concerned with a different kind of process: changes in state power structures which take the form of a series of social explosions, whether rapid or long-drawn-out; which would have been inconceivable without spectacular mass action; and which by the time they end have altered the societal landscape. This is admittedly a very provisional attempt at defining the concept of revolution – a makeshift, we might say, that we can forget about in due course once we have cast a clearer light on our topic.

Occasionally in history there have also been revolutions *within* the centres of power – but these are revolutions only in the figurative sense of the word, being no more than radical changes of direction undertaken by those in power for the purposes of modernisation. 'If there's going to be a revolution, then we would rather make it ourselves than suffer it', declared Bismarck, referring to the war against Austria in 1866, the outcome of which was a German national state dominated by Prussia. The notion of a 'revolution from above' was quite widespread at the time, and Friedrich Engels, a keen devotee of revolutionary theory, subsequently also adopted the term in reference to the events of 1866. Crane Brinton, the American historian of revolutions, cites as further examples of 'revolutions from above' Ataturk's reforms in Turkey, the Meiji Restoration in Japan, and the reforms enacted in Japan after the Second World War by US General Douglas McArthur. In Crane Brinton's view, all of these upheavals had a more powerful impact on society than the great revolutions 'from below' that he had examined.

The reforms of Peter the Great in the early 18th century could well also be called 'top-down' revolutions, and the term undoubtedly also applies to the brutal programme of modernisation and collectivisation carried out by the Soviet communists in the late 1920s. Their programme was intended to entrench for ever the power that had been won in the revolution of October 1917. We should not forget that for the historically very aware Bolsheviks, the French Revolution – which Lenin had repeatedly cited, with reference not least to the defeat of the Jacobins – was almost as close in time to them as the German November Revolution of 1919 is to us. The question of how power could best be maintained was one that the Bolsheviks incessantly asked themselves. That being so, the Stalinist revolution 'from above' is also pertinent to the topic of this book, precisely because it arose out of a revolution 'from below'.

None the less, the chapters that follow will focus almost exclusively on moments when a people rise up and make history.

The opposite of boring

What else might strike us? First, the fact that exclamation marks and the word ‘revolution’ go together very well: Revolution!

A revolution is always exciting. It makes for a conspicuous blob on the timeline. It is the very opposite of boring.

On 15 March 1968 an article appeared in the French daily newspaper *Le Monde* entitled ‘When France gets bored’. The writer bemoaned the fact that nothing was stirring in French politics despite the appalling circumstances prevailing in the world and within the country itself. Just a short time later school and university students were in revolt, the workers joined them, and for a short, historic period the state was totally paralysed. That’s how rapidly things can sometimes change.

But the events of May 1968 in Paris with all the mass demonstrations, and the general strike that lasted for weeks: did it amount to a revolt or a revolution? It certainly gave the powers-that-be a mighty shock, but it wasn’t able to bring them down. The rebellious students and workers did not challenge for power – the students because they couldn’t, the workers because they didn’t want to.

Many of the activists involved in the events in Paris *were* revolutionaries themselves, however, for they really did believe that the overthrow of the regime was imminent; and given their belief that a new world free of exploitation and oppressive working and living conditions was about to dawn, their belief that art, *joie de vivre* and uninhibited sexuality would soon reign supreme, it’s no wonder that such promises had a powerful effect on me, then a 15-year-old boy, and on so many of my friends and contemporaries. To us, the revolution was happening right there and then, it was an actual fact. ‘

The *actuality* of revolution: this was Lenin’s fundamental idea’, wrote the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukacs in 1924 – in other words at a time marking the beginning of a phase that historians would subsequently term a ‘stabilising period’, during which revolution became the very opposite of ‘actual’.

We can perhaps get a viable perspective on this if we don’t think of revolutions as being simply the product of a sustained developmental phase along a time-line, but as being latently in existence all the time within the virtual dimension

of history, so long as the grounds for rebellion continue to exist. And once certain conditions come to fruition, revolutions break through the barrier between the real and the unreal, and become manifest as actuality.

This is meant in a purely figurative sense, of course: revolutions take place in the real world and are not the materialisation of a nebulous potentiality existing somewhere in a world beyond. What we are trying to highlight here is the latentness of revolution, the fact that there are always people who envision a completely different order of things, and who are ready to act according to their convictions when they believe the time is ripe.

As we can see, it is no easier to define revolution than it is to catch hold of a bar of soap in the bath. Revolution is a maestro that teases us with tricks and surprises at every turn. Sometimes when it appears to be happening, it is in fact *not* happening, for instance in post-revolutionary situations, where nothing is left but the remnants of bright-coloured backdrops and the painted fighters they depict; and the reverse is also true: there are periods of apparent calm in history when revolutionary pressures are in fact building up.

Revolutions develop not in the glare of society's everyday minutiae, but in its hidden recesses, before at some point bursting forth into the real world with surprising, shocking immediacy, and then spreading and sweeping everything along with it like some mighty force of nature. On 24 October 1793 the German revolutionary Georg Forster wrote to his wife from Paris following the Paris revolutionaries' crushing of the resistance of the peasantry in western France: 'The lava of the revolution is in full majestic flow and will now spare nothing. Who could possibly stop it?' Descriptions of revolutions regularly make use of nature images of this kind – earthquakes, tidal waves etc.: like them, revolutions seemingly emerge out of nothing, they are stronger than any individual, 'like rivers, they grow ever wider', as Chateaubriand observed, a witness and melancholic opponent of the French Revolution. To quote Forster again: 'The revolution is like a hurricane – who can stand in its way? People whose energies are unleashed by it can do things that will be beyond the comprehension of horror-struck posterity.' Two weeks after writing this, Forster died of pneumonia in his Paris exile, 'abandoned and in wretched circumstances', as noted by Gustav Landauer, the editor of his letters. In 1919 Landauer, himself a revolutionary, was beaten almost to death in Stadelheim Prison in Munich, and then shot.

Such is the fate of men: they are mere shooting stars; revolutions are the comets – they smash their way into the course of history and change its direction; they destroy, and they create; they result in most cases in a new political order. When, following the overthrow of the Tunisian dictator Ben Ali, there were

popular calls for a constituent assembly, it was plain to everyone that this was a revolution, not merely a change of personnel at the top.

In revolutions the political process undergoes a radical change of direction – but the change is never exclusively political, for it is always a means to an end. But what end? There are numerous ends and aspirations, just as there are numerous different classes, strata, groups and cultures within any country. Every society needs a political formula that balances out conflicting aspirations, as there would otherwise be a permanent state of civil war. Revolutions kick out the prevailing political order and fashion another in its place; and in changing the political set-up, they necessarily have an impact on the structures of society as a whole.

The last shall be first

This is particularly the case when property rights are subjected to radical change, whether in whole or in part. Property not only denotes the relationship between a person and a thing, but also reflects the relationships between people as defined by the state. Property is an entitlement to power conferred by the state. Paragraph 903 of the German Civil Code states: ‘Insofar as it is permissible in law and not counter to the rights of third parties, the owner of a thing may deal with that thing as he or she sees fit and may bar others from involvement of any kind.’ Property is defined socially and – almost always – politically by the state. Revolutions challenge such definitions – for instance, the proposition that a ruling caste has first claim on the harvest, or on state revenues.

Changes of this sort rarely happen with great rapidity, even in cases where the overthrow of the old bastions of property is speedily effected (church / property owners / capitalists / party oligarchs / kleptocrats). A very long process is entailed when a revolution sets out to build a new social structure following the overthrow of the old.

In 1820, some three decades after the French Revolution – which he himself had witnessed – Henri de Saint-Simon wrote as follows: ‘The crisis that has gripped the body politic for the last thirty years has its roots in the radical social change that is currently taking place in the most civilised nations [...]. To put it more precisely, the crisis resides in the transition from a feudal and theology-based system to an industrial and knowledge-based one. The crisis will inevitable persist until this new system has fully taken shape.’ What Saint-Simon is saying here is that the revolution of 1789 unleashed a process of profound social

change. And he is saying something else, too – namely that it is not only the modes of production and distribution that are due for revolutionary renewal, but also the modes of putting the argument, the very nature of the discourse; that is clearly what he means when he speaks of the transition from a theological to a knowledge-based system. Revolutions are political, social *and* cultural: whatever else they may be, they are always *cultural* revolutions as well. Hence they always entail more than just a transfer of power, more than just a redistribution of privileges.

That being so, does the English Revolution of the 17th century qualify as a revolution at all?

It certainly does, even though it didn't immediately produce a new social order. The English Revolution was initially about restoring the rights of the landed gentry and parts of the bourgeoisie by re-establishing old institutions that had been set aside by the king. But as it developed, the revolution put politics into the public domain and laid the foundations for England to become a constitutional state. These initial foundations enabled a new, civil society to gradually take shape over a period of several centuries.

And what about the American Revolution?

In America the revolution consisted in a society freeing itself from its status as a British colony and reconstituting itself as an independent civil society, for the accomplishment of which it did not need to overthrow the social and political structures of the British, but instead it circumvented them with the elegant aplomb of the founding fathers (while destroying the pre-existing society of the indigenous Indians). The colonists constructed their society anew on the basis of religious beliefs they had brought over with them, ideas garnered from the Enlightenment, and their own political experience. They founded a modern kind of state, the mere existence of which immediately had a revolutionary effect on Europe. That, too, was a revolution, albeit an untypical one. Its truth lay in the famous statement in the Declaration of Independence of 1776: 'All men are created equal' – though this was a lie in respect of native Indians and blacks.

What about the revolution in Algeria?

In Algeria itself, the anti-colonial war of liberation that lasted from 1954 to 1962 is defined as a 'revolution'. Why might that be? Is it simply in order to lend validity to the *Front National de Libération* (FLN), the party that grew out of the leading faction in the anti-colonial struggle, and which serves as a political cloak for the clan that now controls Algeria? Is the term 'revolution' wheeled out simply to legitimise those who hold power? That is certainly how it is seen

by the young people whom I have met in Algeria, and who are quite sure that the real revolution in their country has yet to happen.

None the less, the defeat of the French *was* a revolution. In 1961 in his legendary book *The Wretched of the Earth*, the doctor and writer Frantz Fanon wrote: ‘No matter what aspect you look at – relationships between people, the re-naming of sports clubs, the groups encountered at cocktail parties or in the police or on the boards of state and private banks – decolonisation amounts quite simply to the replacing of one “specimen” of humankind by another.’ If one wanted to give a precise definition of decolonisation, so Fanon asserted, then one would only need to quote the well-known pronouncement ‘The last shall be first’.

Under the colonial regime the Algerians were ‘the last’ – but thanks to the revolution they are not ‘the last’ any longer.

The words quoted by Frantz Fanon come from the New Testament, and one doesn’t have to be religiously inclined to feel the magic of this promise, which is also at the heart of the appeal of Bob Dylan’s famous lines:

The line it is drawn, the curse it is cast
The slow one now will later be fast
As the present now will later be past
The order is rapidly fadin’
And the first one now will later be last
For the times they are a-changin’

When ideas such as this – which in the Bible refers to the Last Day, the Day of Judgement – are pushed to extremes, they can have lethal consequences. Ultras of every political and religious hue have embraced fanaticism because they believed in a ‘final battle’; and the prospect of an all-or-nothing scenario leaves no room for compromises. In the course of this book we shall encounter this phenomenon several times.

In South Africa, too, the last became the first. As for Cuba – well, let’s put it this way: until Fidel Castro’s revolution, Cubans were either the lowest of the low, or else dolled -up poodles of the USA. Since that time, Cubans have been ruled by Cubans, though the Afro-Cubans, the absolute lowest of the low in pre-revolutionary times, still remain at the bottom of the heap (as the Castro regime itself incidentally is self-critical enough to acknowledge). But the fact that Cuba is governed by Cubans is now an irreversible reality, and this will remain the case even if the barriers between Cuba and the United States are taken down. In that event rich Cubans might return from exile and assume power, amongst them undoubtedly people with scant regard for social justice, and others bent on

revenge; but – as I have frequently heard said in Cuba – ‘at least they will be Cubans and not gringos’.

Revolutions are decidedly not events where things remain the same afterwards as they were before. Indeed even when they fail, even when the counter-revolution wins the day, they have happened and cannot be undone. It is also the case, however, that when revolutions succeed, the outcome doesn't match the original aim, and has never yet done so. Revolutions always end in disappointment, in the triumph of reality over dreams, in melancholy. But the longing remains; for the dream never dies.

[...]

A tentative definition of revolution

Let us pause to take stock and ask where we have got to thus far. Revolutions are rousing events; they mobilise the masses; they destroy social and political structures in order to replace them ultimately with new ones, and as such represent historical turning points. They express something new, yet also entail a lie, and they give full rein to rage and violence, to beauty and terror. They bring forth leaders, but – alas – dictators as well. They do not translate dreams fully into reality, with the result that the dreams live on, but marked by disillusion. Such are our findings thus far – all of them admittedly only tentative as yet. Others will be added in the course of this book, and our intention is to make them ever more solidly founded. But the question remains: what are we actually looking for? Are we really looking for a single unifying theory that encompasses all revolutions? But here's the problem: no such theory exists, and no such theory is even conceivable.

The philosopher Florian Grosser very sensibly entitles his introduction to the subject ‘*Theories of Revolution*’ – not ‘*The theory of revolution*’; and in the course of the book he remarks that ‘heterogeneity’ is ‘a key characteristic of concepts and theories in respect of political revolution’. And Crane Brinton begins his book *The Anatomy of Revolution*, a standard work on the topic published in 1936, with the splendid sentence: ‘Revolution is one of the looser words’.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of ‘family resemblance’ may be helpful here. He argues that there are terms – such as the term ‘game’ – that group related objects under a single head without their inter-relatedness being amenable to strict

definition, to systematisation as in the form of a family tree. As in the case of games, perhaps the multifarious phenomenon of revolutions can also be best pinned down by means of different and competing theories rather than a single over-arching one.

This is not a characteristic specific to this phenomenon alone, but one that lies at the very heart of what we call 'history'. As has been pointed out by the philosopher Isaiah Berlin (who himself incidentally lived through the Russian Revolution as a child in St. Petersburg), there are too many different elements at work in history – groups of people large and small, economic factors, other factors of a geographical, political, cultural, religious, technological and emotional complexion – for any strict set of categories to be established, or, more especially, for any formal models to be constructed that would allow even the vaguest predictions to be made about the future. Furthermore, argued Berlin, historical situations show little resemblance to one another, so that there is almost never a sufficiently large body of similar events to allow us to extrapolate a single explanatory model. We are not going to take quite such a pessimistic view as this with regard to methodology, but we will happily take heed of Isaiah Berlin's warning not to subordinate everything to one all-encompassing theory. A marxist approach would of course be quite different: for marxism, history does not result from the interplay of discrete factors; instead, these so-called factors are always merely aspects of a coherent whole, which moreover has a specific essence. Marxism inherited this substantialist and totalising approach to history from Spinoza and Hegel. It is a bold approach, but it does not do justice to the teeming chaos of history.

Instead, let us adopt a pluralist approach. To think somewhat loosely in this way has the advantage that we can speak in the same breath of the English, American, French and even Russian revolutions, notwithstanding the fact that they differed very markedly from each other; after all, no less an authority than Crane Brinton based his *Anatomy of Revolution* on precisely these four extremely different upheavals.

But before we open up the concept of revolution *too* nonchalantly, let us at this point at least establish one leading principle. 'The word "revolutionary" should only be applied to those revolutions that have freedom as their objective' – thus wrote the mathematician Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet. The marquis, a liberalist participant in the revolution of 1789, clashed in a big way with the Robespierrists and died in the end as a result of poisoning, possibly at his own hand, though the truth remains unknown. Logically speaking, his pronouncement is self-contradictory, but we shall adopt its essential argument as our own, since in practice it enables us to exclude various phenomena even though they exhibit a certain similarity to revolutionary movements – jihadism and fascism, for example.

However much they may differ from one another, jihadist groups such as 'Islamic State' (IS), al-Qaida etc. are reminiscent of revolutionary movements because they, too, oppose corrupt elites and hold out to their people the promise of a new world full of propriety, virtue and social justice. Their ideology is one of radical social cleansing. It is often maintained that IS seeks to re-establish mediaeval conditions, but if any comparison with European history were called for, we might think more readily of the mid-16th century and the equally brutal reign of terror imposed on Geneva by the radical reformer and 'apostle of virtue', John Calvin.

Just like true revolutionaries, the jihadists, too, have allies, fellow activists and financiers in other countries; to a considerable extent their troops are international in origin; moreover, the peoples of various poverty-stricken countries are sympathetic to jihadism. I well remember a visit I made to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania at the end of 2001, where I saw young people going around in T-shirts glorifying the terror attack on the World Trade Center. Today, young men are joining IS who were radicalised in the 'Arab Spring'; others were put on the road to jihadism by the revolt against the discriminatory treatment of Sunnis under the former prime minister of Irak, Nouri al-Maliki, or by the surge of opposition to the repressive and rapacious Assad regime in Syria.

There would be grounds, therefore, for regarding jihadism as being in a very broad sense revolutionary. Just one thing is missing – that defining attribute asserted by Condorcet: 'freedom' is in no sense the jihadists' objective, unless it be an absolutist form of religious 'freedom' for the Sunnis. Jihadism is a doctrine of subjugation, and in particular it is a doctrine of patriarchy taken to the furthest possible extreme.

We would also stretch the concept of revolution much too far if we were to extend it to include fascism and National Socialism. It is true that there are some historians who speak in this context in terms of 'revolution', and Nazi groups both then and now routinely describe themselves as 'revolutionary'. But this view was scotched as early as 1939 by Sebastian Haffner, when he described the Nazis' victory as follows: 'Barricades are old hat, perhaps, but a true revolution surely has to display at least *some* evidence of spontaneity, rebellion, uprising, activity on the streets. No such thing was present in March 1933. What happened was conjured up from a *mélange* of the strangest elements, but the one component that was entirely missing was *any* act of courage, bravery or magnanimity on the part of anyone whatsoever.' And at another point Haffner writes: 'They may have always occasioned much loss of life and a temporary period of enfeeblement, but revolutions in other countries have in all cases led to a huge intensification in the *moral* energies of those on both sides of the conflict [...] The Germans of today have recourse to no such wellspring of energy; in its place, they have only their remembrance of shame, cowardice and weakness.'

If we look at the Nazis of today, they may indeed fancy themselves as ever so revolutionary – their repertoire including, as it does, killing innocent shopkeepers and setting fire to the houses of the weak and the frightened; but Nazis and fascists, like IS, seek freedom only for their own kind, and thus don't even begin to meet Condorcet's criterion.

Some remarks, finally, on the subject of 'conservative revolution'. Its exponents are not simply counter-revolutionaries. Idealogues such as Oswald Spengler, Ernst Jünger or Carl Schmitt are opponents not so much of revolution as of the status quo. Their ultimate intellectual goal is a fascist one, namely the rebirth of a nationalistic world that is long gone but which they have conjured up again in their imaginations, a world that they conceive of in terms of an increase in genuineness, not freedom; an increase in the sense of a shared identity, not in plurality. To describe this as 'revolutionary' would be to render the term far too wishy-washy and unspecific.

Furthermore, such people cannot really be described as 'conservative' either. Conservatives don't want to get rid of the status quo, but seek instead to preserve what is best in it (and in consequence they regard revolution with utter horror).

In his manifesto *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Edmund Burke, an opponent of the revolution, described conservatism – a political philosophy that he himself founded – in the following terms: 'instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree, and, to take more shame to ourselves, we cherish them because they are prejudices; and the longer they have lasted and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them. We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason, because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages.' Precisely on these grounds Burke warned that England should not be converted into a parliamentary republic modelled on the aspirations of the French revolutionaries.

We have now gone some way towards delineating the concept of revolution and identifying its characteristics. But the picture is still by no means complete. Revolution can also be a way of life, for instance – precisely the thing that appealed to me in my early youth, and for a long time afterwards as well. Even today I am not altogether free of this fascination. In order to examine this mode of life, and offer a critique of it, it makes sense to take a closer look at various individual revolutionaries.

[...]