

Rereading October 1917

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Abstract: This essay is a rereading of the October Revolution. It does so via a detour through previous revolutionary epochs, the ones of the French Revolution, the Paris Commune all the way to the Bolshevik Revolution of the 1917. It also takes recourse into literature and poetry, which is associated with or produced during these intense political moments. It tries to draw a 'balance sheet' of Marxism-Leninism and its politics.

Keywords: revolution, French Revolution, October 1917, Lenin, Robespierre, Paris Commune

October '17, the October Revolution, the Soviet Revolution: these expressions have long resounded as the names of victory. Whether the event was greeted with joy or with concern, this much could hardly be doubted: the names of revolution and victory were conjoined. Revolutionary belief, in its modern form, was thus born. From that point onwards, an authentic revolution would be a victorious one. Everyone, advocate or adversary, needed to take this connection for granted.

The novelty of such a configuration has been forgotten. The nineteenth century certainly came to pass in the shadow of revolution, whether hoped for or feared. Yet among the events that laid claim to its name, none achieved a clear victory. Worse, none was brought to its conclusion. Each time, external forces either distorted its meaning or, more simply, put an end to it. The French Revolution alone suggested an idea of what a victorious revolution in Europe might be. Although it ultimately gave way to the Consulate and the Empire, its partisans and its adversaries admitted that it had, in any case, run its full course, for better or for worse. Wherever it had been present, it had left its traces. Some among them, in France, seemed ineffaceable.

As a result, the revolutionaries of the nineteenth century continued to turn towards the French Revolution. At the inception of action, it served as a model; in defeat and concomitant disillusionment, treasons, and melancholy, its memory offered a refuge of hope. The year 1848 inaugurated the mourning period. Less than a quarter century later, the Paris Commune initiated it again.

The reversal happens in October 1917. Not only can revolution henceforth be victorious; it alone may claim a total victory, transforming society as a whole. Excessively accustomed to expecting everything from a distant future, many of the revolution's partisans showed themselves to be suspicious of such an unexpected present. Professional revolutionaries, however, had been prepared for this shift. In their representations, victory had already changed status. Instead of being

positioned within the dihedral angle of mourning and hope, victory had become a goal, the realistic goal of a war waged in the strategy of class struggle. The Bolshevik party and the figure of Lenin embodied this conviction.

Admittedly, in October 1917 the materiality of the circumstances played a role. But in themselves, they are incapable of explaining the rupture. John Reed's narrative is symptomatic. It is as inexact as are most historians' narratives, whether those of Herodotus, Tacitus or Georges Duby; but it is no more so. It arranges the facts freely, yet it does not invent them. For the plot that he put forward to have been accepted, for public opinion to have believed that in ten days the world had been shaken, the ideal of revolution had to have been transformed before 1917.

To understand why, one must go back to 1848 and the mourning that this fateful period left behind it. Like all mourning, it required work. It is well known that in French letters, *Les Misérables*, *Sentimental Education* and *The Flowers of Evil* speak of revolution, each in a different way, as the missing object of subjects' desire. In parallel to novelists and poets, political discourse also made a contribution. Uniting parts and pieces, it wove together the flag of hope – until the defeat of the Commune led to a saturation effect. The Commune almost became one defeat too many for revolutionary Europe. The workers' movement almost closed in on itself forever in a ceremony celebrating both the dead and social gains, cast as just compensations.

Marx's *Civil War in France* acted as an impediment to this trend of thought. It was published in 1871 and soon became the first work by Marx to attract the attention of the international workers' organizations. During the last years of the nineteenth century, it only grew in importance. "You know how to win; you do not know how to use your victory," Hannibal had been told. Marx levels the same criticism at mass insurrections. Once the machinery of State power has been won and conquered, he says, the task is not to make it work differently; it is, rather, to destroy it. A genuine paradigm shift is discernible in this analysis. Marx is not concerned with determining the strategy that will make it possible to win; victory, he suggests, is not what is most difficult. Instead of problematizing the moment that comes before, he problematizes the moment after. He thereby changes victory itself. Not only does it cease to be a hope, becoming, instead, a goal; this goal is also far from being the most arduous of ends, once one grasps that capitalism becomes ever more fragile as it progresses. More than anyone else, Lenin pondered this new paradigm. *State and Revolution* exhibits the core of his reflection. Begun in September 1917, the book's composition is interrupted by the events of October. Yet these events themselves further the work by other means.

Lenin's attitude towards the taking of power depends entirely on the trust that he puts in his own doctrine.

Leninist discourse sets as its task the overcoming of the framework bequeathed by 1848 and the 1871 Commune. The system of compensations elaborated by the European Social Democrats is to be denounced. Far from constituting a victory in the making, a half-victory, or a resting point on the path to final victory, it only prepares the defeat of the workers' movement. It strives to make it bearable. In doing so, it accustoms the vanquished to their defeat. This is why one must always come back to victory; it is not the outcome of revolution but, rather, what structures revolution at each step. Victory is admittedly conceived as a goal; but it is also conceived as a point of departure, not arrival.

The memory of the French Revolution is therefore necessary but, as Lenin demonstrates, it is not sufficient. The memory of past heroism is even less sufficient. Alexander Herzen's importance must be recalled. He lived through the 1848 revolution in Paris and reports on it in his book, *From the Other Shore*. Now, he intimates, Paris is not and will never again be the capital of revolutions. As the days go by, he underlines the funereal character of the speeches and deeds. A memory is, precisely, only a memory, that is, a form of forgetting. The future is elsewhere. It is of Russia, of course, that Herzen thinks.

It is significant that this extraordinary text, written between 1848 and 1850, was translated into French only in 1871. Then it made a great impression on the public. But as early as 1850, the Russian, German and English versions were circulating in European revolutionary milieus. Lenin most certainly read it. He would have heard what was not said but rather suggested in it – namely, that a vanquished revolution is no revolution. If a people truly rises up, then no force can overpower it; wherever there has been a defeat, one must conclude that the people did not truly rise up.

Marxism-Leninism concludes, in this sense, that there is nothing to learn from the European revolutions of the nineteenth century, because they were all defeated. "Nothing will have taken place but the place," Mallarmé writes in the last years of the century. Lenin is not far from thinking the same thing. *Vae victis*, "woe to the vanquished," he might have added. In Western Europe, the vanquished of 1848 were ultimately satisfied with their social progress. This was observed in 1914; the proletarian workers did not hesitate to fight for a motherland or fatherland that they had been taught to view as generous. Pushing this point to cynicism, one might argue that the German, French and British syndicalist leaders acted as if they took their defeats to be more profitable than their victories. More exactly, they transformed

revolutionary victory into a scarecrow. They evoke it during their negotiations, to instil fear in the boss's sparrows, with the firm certainty that the straw and cloth dummy will never come alive. Marxism-Leninism asserts precisely the opposite.

In October 1917, the Soviet Revolution, as Lenin willed it, projects into empirical reality the overturning that he had conceived in theory. The European revolutionaries have their backs to the wall; they have a duty to achieve total victory, today, in a total social and political war. Military war, as commanded by the ruling classes, offers an occasion because, thanks to mass armies, it concentrates peasants and workers in a single gathering. Revolution and victory march together. As for victory itself, it concerns all fronts – military, economic, social, etc. This fact is the basis for the seizing of State power, which Lenin conceives as the source of all powers.

For the level of the State ought not to be neglected. It is not the revolution's last word; but without it, nothing is achieved. The Scholastics distinguished between the *adjutorium quo* and the *adjutorium sine quo non*: the means by which the goal is reached and the means without which the goal cannot be reached. One might cast the Leninist State as the *adjutorium sine quo non*, the next to last word, without which revolution, as the last word, could not come to pass. Mallarmé grieved for the defeated penult; by the name "dictatorship of the proletariat," Lenin honours the penultimate victory, which is the condition of the final one. Here it is not a question of assessing socio-political advances or regressions. What is at issue is much more serious: the very notion of revolution has changed. Before, it depended on intentions. What, it was asked, were Robespierre's intentions? One would turn to the work of historians, who, for their part, studied speeches and deeds. If it turned out that his intentions corresponded to the ideal of revolution, then Robespierre was revolutionary, no matter his success. The Marxist-Leninist does not neglect this inquiry; but for him it is insufficient. In order for Robespierre to deserve the title of "revolutionary," he must also have achieved State power. It is therefore the period of the Committee of Public Safety, and above all that of the Great Terror, that is decisive. The intensity of this period compensates for its brevity. During this time, Robespierre was victorious.

Historians influenced by Marxism-Leninism have expressed contempt for Danton and indifference for Marat. The reasons for this judgment have been alleged to lie in their respective programs. Wrongly, I hold. Another cause matters more: unlike Robespierre, neither Danton nor Marat fully exercised power. To this degree, they do not meet the major criterion. They are not victors.

In this light, one may understand Lenin's haste when, fully unaware of the actual data, he decides on the Russian situation upon arriving in April 1917. If the Bolsheviks do not take charge of the State apparatus, to undo its machinery, he reasons, they will accept the destiny of the eternally vanquished. The revolution will have missed its chance in Russia, yet again. As in 1905, as in February 1917. One might as well agree with Kautsky, restricting revolutionaries to the role of nurses, condemned to treating the wounds inflicted by their failure. The revolutionary not only has a duty to certain means; he also has a duty to an outcome.

Modern revolutionary belief thus discovers its axioms and its theorems. The theory of revolution may be entirely reduced to a theory of victory. That is, a theory of the seizure of State power. The twentieth century discovers the law of its itinerary there. Mao Tse-Tung fully unfolds its consequences. "Struggle, failure, new struggle, new failure, over again, until the final victory." Deleting the last words of this maxim, one rediscovers the wisdom of nations; the course of the humankind's history seems to be reducible to an alternating succession of struggles and failures. It is only with the addition of the motif of victory that one reaches revolutionary discourse. Victory functions as the revolutionary operator par excellence. The same logic is discernible in another formula, which is very strange when one ponders it: "Dare to struggle and dare to win." From this perspective, the European nineteenth century and the Chinese Boxers dared to struggle; they did not dare to win. The Bolsheviks, by contrast, made the decisive step in October 1917. Such that the twentieth century is – and will be – the century of victories. As early as 1957, Mao condenses the historical meaning of this century into the image of the paper tiger: "Was Hitler not a paper tiger? Was Hitler not overthrown? I also said that the tsar of Russia, the emperor of China and Japanese imperialism were all paper tigers. As we know, they were all overthrown. U.S. imperialism has not yet been overthrown and it has the atom bomb. I believe it also will be overthrown. It, too, is a paper tiger." (Speech at the Moscow Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties, November 18, 1957)

The three-part formula is well known: "Countries want independence, nations want liberation, and the people want revolution – this has become the irresistible trend of history." When examined closely, it defines a theory of types. To each type of warrior there corresponds a type of victory. Revolution represents the supreme stage; but two other types participate in the same "irresistible trend." Of course, the originality of Maoism is undeniable; nonetheless, there is no doubting its relation to Marxism and, ultimately, to Marx's text on the Commune. Although victory is defined and obtained differently for Lenin and for

Mao, it remains, for both, the cornerstone of revolution.

In the nineteenth century, revolutionary belief was founded on hope. Admittedly, victory determined the line of the horizon, thanks to which failures were not to drive humanity to despair. But the horizon itself could remain ungraspable; as long as it oriented the gaze, it accomplished its function. To take another analogy, revolutionary hope turned towards the revolution as a seafarer locates himself by means of the stars, without seeking to conquer them. The stars guide earthly creatures *because* they are inaccessible to them. The revolutionaries of the nineteenth century defined themselves by the force of their convictions, a force so strong as to relieve them of any need to expect victory. In the twentieth century, Marxism-Leninism changes the frame of reference. Victory alone now proves that the conviction was strong. October '17 adduces the experimental proof for this principle. The new frame of reference supplants the old, just as Galileo triumphs over Aristotle. In 1918, *The Proletarian Revolution and Kautsky the Renegade* completes the demonstration: because conviction is attested solely by victory, he who does not recognize victory where it has occurred proves, by that very fact, that he lacks conviction.

Beginning with the incessant celebration of October, Stalinism develops a kind of obsession with victory, as if this word had ultimately become the necessary and sufficient mark of fidelity. Rhetoric uses and abuses it, ending by reversing the relation: it should not be said that revolution is a victory but, rather, that every victory serves the revolution. From Michurin's experiments in agriculture to the exploration of outer space, the revolutionary treats nature as an adversary to be defeated. To vanquish illness by the latest medicine, to combat death by embalming, to overcome the distance between object and representation through socialist realism, to surmount the dead ends of love by Party camaraderie – the list of triumphs resounds symphonically. The equation “revolution = victory” is reversible: “victory = revolution.”

The outcome of the Second World War locks this arrangement in place. The victory over Nazism concludes, confirms and interprets the victory of October, which is revolution. All that is left is to triumph over victory and revolution themselves, in order to prove that neither matters in isolation. They matter by the link that binds them, and this link demands the Party and its leader. The equation “revolution= victory” and the symmetrical equation “victory=revolution” hold solely thanks to the equal sign. In moving from event to individuals, the sign must be approved, case by case, by the Party's supreme leader. Provided that he withholds the pen or crosses out the document, everything may be permitted. The Party alone decides, in the last resort, if the general equations allow one

to conclude that a certain individual is a victor and a revolutionary. The *dictum de omni et nullo* holds solely if the Party consents to it.

The Great Purges began during the preparation for the Seventeenth Congress of 1934. It is telling that it was also called the “Victors' Congress.” It was, in fact, to commit the October Revolution to the registry of the greatest victories of humanity. Looking back on his own biography, each of its participants would hold that his own last name belonged to those pages. Yet the whole world saw that nothing would be automatic. Trotsky embodied the disconnection between revolutionary faith and works to the highest degree. He had a right to present himself as one of the main artisans of the final victory. But without ever mistaking what he had accomplished, Stalin excluded him from victory and, by that token, from revolution. Trotsky's life and death depend on the frame of reference of October '17. They reflect its inverted image.

Wherever it reigns, the revolutionary belief of the twentieth century is founded on the axiomatics of victory. Yet this axiomatics no longer convinces anyone. From an empirical point of view, it was shattered by Khrushchev's secret speech. If Stalin was a criminal, could it still be said that the Soviet Revolution had won? Even granting that Lenin completed his political work, one would have to admit that it did not survive him. Did revolution depend, then, on the health of a single man? If so, Marxism-Leninism was reducible to a personal adventure. The Chinese Maoists developed an inverse thesis, yet its consequences were hardly different. According to them, Khrushchev's speech inaugurated the reign of the new tsars. That expression must be taken literally. In these conditions, revolution had been defeated, because the Tsarist Empire had been re-established under the mask of the USSR. From that point onwards, the chain of events resembles the novels of family decadence; as in Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*, the inheritance of October was abandoned, piece by piece, before being auctioned off. The bargaining between Gorbachov and Kohl that initiated the collapse of the Soviet Empire is well known.

Yet the trouble dates from further back. October is the moment when the Bolsheviks are reported to have seized power. But did they seize power? Was the victory of October a victory or simply the inception of a civil war? Whereas in July 1789, no one dreamed that the monarchy would meet its end, in October 1917, Lenin has a clear and distinct idea of what he will construct: a dictatorship of the proletariat, followed by the withering away of the State. Nonetheless, everything seems to suggest that instead of being enlightened by Marxism, he acknowledged its obscurities, one by one. Nothing on constitutional law; nothing on the penal system; nothing on the agrarian question; nothing on the

transmission of knowledge; etc. Even in the field of economics, the great theoretician had to unlearn what he believed he knew. To take only one example, the NEP sought to repair the consequences of the choices that followed directly from October '17. Whether the NEP succeeded or not, it attests, in any case, to the fact that Marxism-Leninism erred with respect to the questions that it supposedly mastered. In this sense, October is not the announcement of a future but the beginning of an immediate decline: that of Marxism-Leninism. It is not in the name of facts but, rather, in the name of doctrine that Lenin, getting off his train, initiates the October Revolution. Yet the doctrine does not withstand the test of the empirical processes that it itself unleashes. Stalin turns to terror to smother this accelerated aging. His successors end by being submitted to its effects, without attempting anything more.

Beyond Marxism-Leninism, it is revolutionary belief itself that is struck. The same scepticism may be in order when considering China. Did Maoism survive Mao? Was his victory truly victory? The revolution that he embodied allowed itself to be absorbed into the commodity-form. Even more clearly, the Cultural Revolution ends in defeat; in the twentieth-first century, neither society nor State power will hear of it. At best, it is granted that an authentic process did begin, but that the Gang of Four corrupted it. Yet the final result is the same. It authorizes only one alternative. Either the Cultural Revolution is not a revolution; but then Mao turns out to be counter-revolutionary. Or the Cultural Revolution is indeed a revolution; but then the axiom "revolution = victory" must be rejected, together with revolutionary belief.

In the French language, many have chosen the second of these possibilities. Among them, Alain Badiou stands out with all his authority. It is only just for me to linger on his account. In it, I observe the return of the axiom of the nineteenth century: "revolution = defeat." The Paris Commune, once again, becomes the major paradigm. Marx had seen in the Commune Titans climbing up to heaven; those who had some classical culture, as he did, knew that he thus alluded to a catastrophe. Zeus, the victor, hurled most of the Titans into the abyss. For Marxism-Leninism, the Commune is an admirable defeat, from which one must draw negative lessons, learning, thanks to it, how not to reproduce it. In the twentieth century, October is said to prove that this task has been accomplished. Yet in Alain Badiou's eyes, the Commune's true lessons are not negative but affirmative; defeat, far from disqualifying them, legitimates them. The *tactical* failure of the Commune bears witness to its *strategic* greatness.

A confirmation is sought in the Chinese Cultural revolution. Alain Badiou distinguishes two paths: that of Lin Biao, who is responsible for

the erroneous commands that led to massacres, and that of the Shanghai Commune, which was full of promises for the future. If one objects that the second path did not triumph over the first and that, to put an end to Lin Biao's errors, it was necessary to put an end to the Cultural Revolution itself and, at the same time, to put an end to the Shanghai effort, the answer is simple: the criterion of victory has no pertinence in politics.

Adequate or inadequate, this doctrine matters. It confirms the end of the revolutionary belief of the twentieth century. It breaks openly with Marxism-Leninism, abandoning its major axiom: "revolution=victory."

If it is no longer true that the distinctive sign of revolutionary authenticity is victory, then everything must be reconsidered. Defeat is not necessarily the price of insufficiency. Victory signifies nothing beyond the circumstances that enabled it. Revolution itself no longer orients thinking nor regulates action, either as goal or as horizon. In its old form, which was born in the nineteenth century, and in its modern form, which was born in the twentieth, revolutionary belief held to the thesis that the revolution alone allows for the passage from the old to the new. Preferring the notion of hypothesis to that of revolution, the new political doctrine openly breaks with the old belief.¹

Without necessarily accepting Badiou's doctrine, one must consider it as a revealing symptom. October or the Commune – the enemies of capitalism must choose. If they choose October, then they contradict themselves, since they adopt October's defining equation "revolution=victory", but in the long run, October has been defeated. According to its own principles, it should not be considered as a revolution. If on the other hand one chooses the Commune, then October and the events that its name condenses teach nothing, if not the contrary of what they claim to teach. What it announced as revolutionary was transmitted not by the Party's victory but precisely by the defeated, outside the Party: Blok, Mandelstam, Shalamov, namely poets, writers or artists.

Should one say that nothing took place in October '17, except the daring choice of a stubborn theorist? That is not my position. But the essential moment does not directly concern social and political transformation. It concerns, rather, the question of war.

It is well known that this question played a central role in the sequence that led from February to October. In February 1917, Tsarist power was slaughtered because the soldiers on the front and their

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1 Paradoxically, Alain Badiou thus reaches the proposition that I have developed in *Relire la révolution*: revolutionary belief is obsolete, insofar as it united revolution and victory. But his reasons and my own are utterly different.

families in Russia were convinced that they were being betrayed. The fighters thought that they had to free themselves of the nest of spies into which the imperial court had been transformed. The first soldier Soviets wanted not peace but commanders worthy of their name. Public opinion followed them. The Bolsheviks, who had opposed military involvement from the start, recommending a separate peace treaty, were a minority and isolated. By October, public opinion had changed. The fighters wanted to return to their homes; families longed for peace.

All the belligerents suffered a crisis during 1917. The French Army mutinies and the Russian soldier Soviets echo each other. Yet while in France, no constituted political formation relayed the revolt, the Bolsheviks, in Russia, knew how to transform it into a political strength. The fact that their position on war had not varied only contributed to their success. It is only then that their Party and the Soviets were united. The watchword "All power to the Soviets!" made it possible to turn a decision that belonged to Lenin's party (the refusal of external war) into a political decision that would be acceptable to all.

For it is indeed a question of politics. Lenin's daring consists in maintaining that, as far as politics is concerned, the military outcome of the war is of no importance. He thus consciously breaks with the position held by the Jacobins in 1793, because he believes that the two situations and the two types of war cannot be superposed. In 1793, the territories of the Republic and revolutionary politics could not be disjoined. The notion of *patrie* (*fatherland*) united them indissolubly. The terms *patriot* and *revolutionary* belonged to each other, since the patriot, at that time, had only one concern: driving the enemy beyond the border. By 1917, the notion of fatherland has been definitively corrupted by Tsarism; the occupied territories may have some practical importance, but politically they are insignificant. Most of them are the fruit of imperial expansion and the nationalism of Greater Russia, which Lenin rejects. The victory of the Revolution requires military defeat.

After the breaking of the German-Soviet pact, Stalin affirms the contrary. Mao Tse-Tung does likewise: defeating Japan militarily and expelling it from China is a revolutionary goal. In both cases, the victory of the revolution requires military victory. Lenin, on the one hand, and Stalin and Mao, on the other, seem, therefore, to be opposed. But it is not so. All three place themselves in the same upheaval initiated by Lenin. Contrary to what has all too often been said, they do not continue Clausewitz; rather, they break with him, proposing a new problematic. The Clausewitzian axiom may be recalled: *war is the continuation of politics by other means*. This principle has one defect. It obscures the lemma that must be derived from it: namely, that the "other means" that define

war are opposed to the fundamental means of politics, which, one must deduce, by implication, belong to peace. Lenin concentrates his efforts on exactly this point; he explicitly holds that peace, as the cessation of war, is the first means of politics. Why? Because peace gives one the chance to turn to another war, which is not a means of politics but, rather, politics itself: class struggle. In short, the Marxist-Leninist doctrine may be analyzed as follows:

- a) There are two wars: military war, on the one hand, and class struggle, on the other.
- b) Military war is one of the means of politics; far from being a means, class struggle constitutes politics.
- c) Even as there are two wars, so one must distinguish two types of peace: military peace, on the one hand, which puts an end to military war, and political peace, on the other, which puts an end to class struggle. Mao Tse-Tung calls this last term the final victory.
- d) Analogously, two victories are to be distinguished: military victory, won on the battlefield, and political victory, by which the proletariat defeats the bourgeoisie – temporarily or definitively. It can happen that political victory demands military victory; it can also happen that political victory demands that military victory be renounced.
- e) Military war becomes the means of politics only if it prepares for peace; military peace, in fact, in sealing off military war, opens the space in which class struggle may take place all by itself. Yet, depending on the circumstances, this peace can be reached by either military victory or military defeat.

In short, the Leninist problematic maintains that every theory of military war remains superficial as long as it does not imply a theory of peace, or rather two types of peace. Military peace alone is the adequate means of politics; war is the indirect means, through the intermediary of the military peace that war makes attainable. As long as political peace (the end of class struggle, the final victory, etc.) has not yet been reached, every military peace is only ever an armistice. As long as class struggle continues, in fact, military wars will be waged. It is only in appearance that the USSR's victory over Hitler and the Maoist Liberation Army's victory over Japan are opposed to the treaty of Brest-Litovsk that Lenin signed with the German Empire in 1918. The three events are of the same nature: they establish an armistice so that politics may have a free field. It is true that, in the three cases, the politics of class struggle ultimately assumes a grotesque form; but it is permissible to set that fact aside so as to isolate the pattern of the sequence. Then one sees that it adheres to clear and constant principles.

In this light, one can understand, inversely, why certain wars and certain states of peace betray the utter absence of politics. In the Near East and the Middle East, some make of war an absolute, instead of making of it a means of peace. Others have done likewise with respect to peace; they made it into an absolute, instead of making it into a means of politics. This is how the European Union reasons, for itself and for the rest of the world. It feigns not to know that every military peace is an armistice and that, as such, it has goals of peace that are none other than goals of war. It is the task of politics to determine these goals. In the name of absolute war, for some, and in the name of absolute peace, for others, both groups have simply sidestepped politics.

October '17, on the contrary, witnessed the provisional opening of a space in which politics seemed to believe in itself. Getting off his train, Lenin was acutely aware of each of the massive aspects of reality: external war; the separate peace treaty that was to come; the civil war that would most likely ensue; the immensity of the Empire; party convictions, etc. In a single instant, he transformed them into means subordinated to a main goal. In the light of the events, I lean towards believing that the instant was illusory. Yet within that instant, a spark of the real may be glimpsed. It concerns the triad *war, peace, politics*. October 1917 initiates the long and slow decline of revolutionary belief; but a new doctrine of war appears in embryonic form. Nowhere has it been established in a definitive manner. The consequences of its absence, however, may be observed. They are catastrophic.