

The Final Struggle¹

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1 Original in Spanish: "*La lucha final.*" In: **El alma matinal y otras estaciones del hombre de hoy.** (Obras Completas, 10th ed.). Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1987, 3:29-33. English edition (translated by the editors): VANDEN, Harry E.; BECKER, Marc B. (Eds.). **José Carlos Mariátegui: an anthology.** New York: NYU Press, 2011, 389-395. Transcribed by V. S. Conttren, July 2021.

I.

Madeleine Marx, one of the most restless women of letters and most modern in contemporary France, has gathered her impressions of Russia in a book bearing this title: *C'est la lutte finale...*² The sentence of singer Eugene Pottier³ acquires a historical highlight. "It is the final struggle!"

The proletarian revolution in Russia welcomes this cry—the ecumenical cry of the worldwide proletariat. The massive battle cry and hope that Madeleine Marx heard in the streets of Moscow, I have also heard in the streets of Rome, Milan, Berlin, Paris, Vienna, and Lima. It embodies all of the excitement of an era. Revolutionary crowds believe in engaging in the final struggle.

Is the final struggle truly engaged? For those sceptical creatures of the old order this final struggle is just an illusion. For the ardent fighters of the new order it is a reality. *Au-dessus la Mêlée*,⁴ a new and enlightened philosophy of history, suggests otherwise: illusion and reality. The final struggle of Eugene Pottier's stanza is both a reality and an illusion.

We are engaging, in effect, the final struggle of an era and a class. Progress, or human process, is accomplished in stages. Therefore, humanity has always felt the need to be close to a goal. Today's goal is surely not the goal of tomorrow;

2 English version: Magdeleine Marx, "This Is the Final Fight." In: **The Romance of New Russia**. New York: T. Seltzer, 1924.

3 Eugène Pottier was a French worker-poet and author of the famous proletarian song "L'Internationale" that became the anthem of the Soviet Union.

4 Romain Rolland, *Au-dessus de la Mêlée* (Paris: Ollendorff, 1915), (Above the Mêlée) was a pacifist manifesto against World War One.

however, for the theory of human progress, it is the ultimate goal. The messianic millennium will never come. People arrive only to leave again. It cannot, however, dispense with the belief that a new day is the final day. No revolution ever foresees the revolution that comes next, even though it contains the seeds of it. For people, as subjects of history, nothing exists but their own personal reality. They are not interested in an abstract struggle, but rather a concrete struggle. The revolutionary proletariat thus lives the reality of a final struggle. Humanity, meanwhile, from an abstract point of view, lives the illusion of a final struggle.

II.

The French Revolution had the same idea of its own importance. Its men also wished to inaugurate a new era. The convention wanted to be burned forever in time, to be the beginning of the republican millennium. Its members thought that the Christian era and the Gregorian calendar could not contain the republic. The anthem of the revolution hailed the dawn of a new day: "*Le jour de gloire est arrivé.*"⁵ The individualistic and Jacobin republic appeared as the supreme desideratum of humanity. The revolution felt it was final and insurmountable. It was the final struggle. The final struggle for freedom, equality, and fraternity.

Less than a century and a half has been enough to make this myth antiquated. "*La Marseillaise*" is no longer a revolutionary song. The "glory day" has lost its supernatural prestige. The very instigators of democracy are disenchanted by the presence of the parliament and universal suffrage. Another

5 The day of glory has arrived.

revolution is fermenting in the world. A collectivist regime is struggling to replace an individual regime. The revolutionaries of the twentieth century are about to summarily judge the work of eighteenth-century revolutionaries.

Proletarian revolution, however, is a consequence of the bourgeois revolution. The bourgeoisie has created more than a century of rapid capitalist accumulation, the spiritual and material conditions of a new order. The first socialist ideas were nested within the French Revolution. Later, industrialism gradually organized armies of the revolution at its plants. The proletariat, previously confused with the bourgeoisie on the same plane, then made their class demands. The fat breast of capitalist well-being increased socialism. The fate of the bourgeoisie is that it supplies ideas and people to the revolution against its power.

III.

The illusion of the final struggle is both a very ancient and extremely modern illusion. Every two, three, or more centuries this illusion reappears with a different name. And, as now, it is always the reality of an innumerable human phalanx. It possesses people to renew it. It is the motor of all progress. It is the star of all rebirths. When the great illusion sinks, it is because it has already created a new human reality. People then rest with their eternal concerns. It closes a romantic cycle and it opens a classic cycle. In the classic cycle it develops, stylizes, and degenerates a form that, fully realized, cannot contain the new forces of life. Only in cases where people's creative power is weakened does life sleep, stuck within a rigid, decrepit, outdated form. But the ecstasy of these

people or societies is not unlimited. The sleepy lagoon, the swampy quiet, is about to bubble up and overflow. Life then recovers its energy and momentum. India, China, and contemporary Turkey are living examples of these rebirths. The revolutionary myth has the potential to shake and revive these peoples in collapse.

The East awakes ready for action. Hope was reborn in its ancient soul.

IV.

Scepticism was satisfied with contrasting the unreality of large human illusions. Relativism does not comply with the same negative result and infertility. It starts by teaching that reality is an illusion, but it concludes by recognizing that the illusion is, in turn, a reality. It denies that there are absolute truths, but it realizes that people must believe in their relative truths as if they were absolute. People have a need for certainty. What difference does it make if the certainty people feel today is not the certainty of tomorrow? Without a myth people cannot live fruitfully. Relativistic philosophy proposes, therefore, to obey the law of myth.

Pirandello,⁶ a relativist, offers the example of adhering to fascism. Fascism seduces Pirandello because while democracy has become sceptical and nihilistic, fascism represents a religious and fanatic faith in the hierarchy and the Nation (Pirandello is a petit-bourgeois Sicilian who lacks mental fitness to understand and follow the revolutionary myth). The writer of exasperated scepticism does not love political doubts. He prefers violent, categorical, passionate, brutal assertions. The crowd, who is even more sceptical than the philosopher, more

6 Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936) was an Italian dramatist, novelist, and short-story writer.

than the relativistic philosopher, cannot dispense with a myth, cannot dispense with a faith. It is not possible to distinguish the subtle truth of the true past or future. All that exists for the myth is the truth. Absolute, unique, eternal truth. And, according to this truth, their struggle is really a final one.

The vital impulse of people answers to all the questions of life before the philosophical investigation. Illiterate people do not care about the relativity of this myth. It would not even be possible for them to understand it. But generally they do a better job of finding their own way than the writer or philosopher. Because they must act, they act. Since they must believe, they believe. Since they must fight, they fight.

Nothing is known about the relative insignificance of their efforts in time and space. Their instinct is to deviate from sterile questions. They have no more ambition than what everyone should have: to carry out their work and do a good job.

—*Mundial, Lima, 20 March 1925*