

I Want to Believe

I Want to Believe

Posadism, UFOs, and
Apocalypse Communism

A.M. Gittlitz

PLUTO  **PRESS**

First published 2020 by Pluto Press
345 Archway Road, London N6 5AA

www.plutobooks.com

Copyright © A.M. Gittlitz 2020

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material in this book. The publisher apologises for any errors or omissions in this respect and would be grateful if notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or editions.

The right of A.M. Gittlitz to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN	978 0 7453 4076 0	Hardback
ISBN	978 0 7453 4077 7	Paperback
ISBN	978 1 7868 0619 2	PDF eBook
ISBN	978 1 7868 0621 5	Kindle eBook
ISBN	978 1 7868 0620 8	EPUB eBook

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental standards of the country of origin.

Typeset by Stanford DTP Services, Northampton, England

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	vii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x

Introduction	1
--------------	---

PART I: THE TRAGIC CENTURY

1. Commentaries on the Infancy of Comrade Posadas	19
2. Revolutionary Youth or Patriotic Youth?	24
3. The Death Throes of Capitalism	34
4. The Origins of Posadism	42
5. Where are we Going?	56

PART II: THE POSADIST FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

6. The Flying International	73
7. The Role of Anti-Imperialist and Revolutionary Militants, the Role of Trotskyists, the Program, and Tasks During and After the Atomic War	79
8. The Macabre Farce of the Supposed Death of Guevara	89
9. Flying Saucers, the Process of Matter and Energy, Science, the Revolutionary and Working-Class Struggle, and the Socialist Future of Mankind	104
10. The Accident	111
11. Hombrecitos	122
12. Volver	129
13. What Exists Cannot Be True	137
14. Arrival of Comrade Homerita to the House	146

PART III: NEO-POSADISM

15. Historical Sincerity	161
16. Why Don't Extraterrestrials Make Public Contact?	166
17. UFOs to the People	177
18. On the Function of the Joke and Irony in History	189
<i>Timeline</i>	201
<i>Notes</i>	208
<i>Index</i>	245

Introduction

In the midst of barbarity, a new political opening has emerged. Since 2016 tens of thousands have participated in marches, blockades, and occupations against US Border Patrol and ICE agencies, especially their concentration camp detention centers. Many of the detainees of these centers are Central Americans forced to flee violence and poverty caused by US-backed dictators and climate catastrophe – a capitalist ecocide which also mobilized millions worldwide in the “climate strikes” in September, 2019. That fall and winter antiauthoritarian uprisings brought fire to the streets of Hong Kong, Haiti, Puerto Rico, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Ecuador, and Chile in a spreading heatwave of often ill-defined rage.

That same month, thousands gathered in the Nevada desert outside the secret US Air Force military installation at Groom Lake with a far clearer mission. They had been mobilized by the Facebook event “Storm Area 51 They Can’t Stop Us All” – its stated intent to gather a critical mass capable of overwhelming the military to rescue the extraterrestrial pilots believed to have been held there since the 1949 Roswell flying saucer crash. Ironical as the movement was, millions signed up to its central demand: *Let us see them Aliens!*

This book, about subjects many regard as marginal, cultish, weird, and silly (UFOs and Trotskyism), is written in the belief there is something valuable in these confused insurgent desires. They represent a flash of hope amidst the climate crisis, massive displacement of refugees, the return of ethnonationalist myths, fascist strongmen, and senseless nuclear proliferation. As the political center breaks down, a new generation interrogates the neoliberal mantra that “*There Is No Alternative*” – the concept that history has dead-ended in bourgeois democracy. Hoping the dialectical process cannot possibly be at its conclusion, growing numbers of today’s youth sift through history’s dustbin seeking figures tossed before their time, or, at least, some comic relief from the atrocious daily news cycle.

This desperate dumpster dive has uncovered the works of J. Posadas – the working-class Argentine revolutionary who led Latin American

Trotskyism in the fifties and sixties with a program of staring down capitalism and imperialism into and after nuclear war. When that “final settlement of accounts” never came, his movement faded into an irrelevant cult until his death in 1981. For decades he was remembered only by a few rival Trotskyists for his extreme catastrophism and other bizarre features, most notably his appeals to solidarity with extraterrestrials and dolphins. In the 2000s, with the youth returned to the streets to protest globalization and imperialist wars, rumors of Posadism spread among leftist trainspotters in remote regions of the internet, emerging into the meme mainstream during the political chaos of 2016. Today he has been rehabilitated as one of the most recognizable names in the Trotskyist canon, at times even rivaling the inventor of the historical dustbin himself: Leon Trotsky. To this generation of semi-ironic revolutionaries Posadas is the folkloric forefather of cosmic socialism, a Patron Saint of maniacal hope against rational hopelessness, whose futurist strain of apocalyptic communism and radical xenophilia represents a synthesis of barbarism and socialism, tragedy and farce.

Although the more orthodox Leninist aspects of his program are usually ignored, his unlikely reincarnation perhaps foretells an imminent reencounter between the masses and ideas which, like first contact with aliens, have been long-regarded as equally ridiculous, impossible, or insane: mass action, revolution, and communism.

Alien invasion, after all, is less science fiction premise than historical fact. In the sixteenth century generations of indigenous Argentinians circulated stories of strange ships appearing in the distance. No known craft matched their shape, size or the way they swiftly glided from their unknown homeland for unknown purposes. Word had it that one landed in the interior decades ago. Locals fought them off, taking heavy casualties from their futuristic weaponry before zipping away in retreat. Suddenly what appeared to be their mothership hovered on the Rio de la Plata horizon, and a small fleet of landing craft approached the shore. Despite rumors of their hostility, the Querandí greeted them like kin with bushels of meat and fish. More strangers arrived once they saw it was safe. Over the next two weeks the gifts continued as the visitors constructed a base camp with a name alluding to the hospitable climate of this new world: *Buenos Aires*.

Grateful as the newcomers must have been, they offered nothing in the way of reciprocity. After two weeks the welcoming delegation decided to stop coming, and the alien commander, a syphilitic Prince unable to leave his bed, sent messengers to the native camp demanding that the supplies continue. It was an insult beyond any excuse of cultural unfamiliarity, an act of dominance and war implying that the strangers were to be given tributes as gods. The messengers returned to Buenos Aires badly beaten.

Knowing a reprisal would follow, the Querandí gathered every tribe in the area to overwhelm the small village and repel the invaders. They soon learned that the legends of their superior firepower were true. After decimating their hosts, the visitors went back into their strange ship to drift further up the river and repeat the process again and again, their mud city left to disintegrate in the rain.¹

The conquistadors soon determined that they had little interest in the vast expanses they named *Argentina*, after the Latin word for the silver they failed to find there. Only after centuries of plundering the treasures of the western Incan empire did the Spanish turn back to the Argentine *pampas*, prairies expansive and fertile enough to feed all of Europe. They established a neo-feudal colony run by *caudillo* warlords and their *gaucho* knights overseeing *hacienda* plantations staffed by native peons and African slaves. Throughout the nineteenth century a mercantile bourgeoisie based in the Buenos Aires ports overthrew the Spanish aristocracy and battled the caudillos for unitary rule. Their slogan was “liberty, equality, and fraternity,” their symbol a floppy red hat, both appropriated from the French Revolutionaries in testament to the rationality and enlightenment that justified their rule. They further demonstrated their liberalism by abolishing slavery and conscripting the freed men as soldiers to further subjugate the caudillos and cleanse the remaining native tribes from the pampas.

By the second half of the century, Argentina was open for business, it just lacked workers. Word spread among the dispossessed of Europe of an opportunity to double their annual wages reaping a second harvest in the southern-hemispheric summer. They arrived by the millions – only the United States received a larger immigration wave. At first the miserable conditions and lack of housing kept their stays seasonal, but as Buenos Aires expanded, and political and economic turmoil in Europe deepened, many put down roots.² These Europeans not only

brought their labor power, but their own interpretation of the “enlightenment” pretenses on which the country was founded. The main *liberty* granted was the freedom to either work for the emerging capitalist class or the freedom to starve. These workers were certainly not *equal* to their wealthy bosses who lived in luxury while doing comparatively no work at all, and the relationship between these classes was better described as constant, violent struggle than *fraternal*.

The economic crisis in the 1890s worsened the already bleak conditions of life for Argentine workers cramped into *conventillo* tenements and toiling in small shops without standards for pay, safety, or security. Inspired by the Paris Commune of 1871 that aimed to complete the egalitarian tasks of the French Revolution, and the 1886 riots in Chicago for an eight-hour day that led to the executions of several anarchists, they overcame divisions of language, ethnic origin, and religion to organize the Argentine Regional Workers’ Federation (FORA) in 1901. It was the first centralized union in the country, dedicated not only to better pay, shorter hours, and lower rents, but to an entirely new way of life free of hierarchy and exploitation. Unlike the recently organized and tiny Socialist Party, they did not seek to negotiate a social peace between the ruling class and the workers or win state power through elections, but instead an anarchist and communist revolution that would leave the region classless, stateless, and governed cooperatively by a spirit of solidarity and mutual aid their alien predecessors so casually exterminated.

In our apocalyptic era it’s hard to remember that a century ago capitalism seemed like humanity’s revolutionary coming-of-age rather than its senile final hours. The industrial revolution advanced humanity so much in the nineteenth century that novelists and poets began to imagine what incredible feats were in store for the next. The combination of new science and speculative fiction created an imaginative sandbox for a not-too-distant future where humanity would no longer be bound by necessity, mortality, or even the Earth itself. Mary Shelley mused that electricity would be able to revive the dead. Jules Verne imagined US civil war engineers creating a rocket capable of travelling to the moon. Advanced telescopic lenses surveyed the face of our neighboring planets for the first time. When what appeared to be a system of artificial canals was observed on Mars, widespread panic spread that humans were not exceptional. H.G. Wells was one of the first to explore

this modern neurosis in his 1897 novel *The War of the Worlds* – what if our Martian neighbors landed in Surrey and treated the British as they had their colonial subjects?

The novel became one of the most popular books worldwide, inspiring dozens of similar works. Among these was *Red Star*, in which a young Russian participant in the 1905 anti-Tsarist uprising is abducted to Mars. Unlike Wells' Martians, this civilization was both technologically and *socially* advanced. Factories were fully automated, erasing scarcity and the need for money since anyone could consume as much as they wanted. All non-automated labor was done voluntarily for the good of society. Everything was shared, including life itself – young Martians donated their blood to the elderly to greatly extend their lifespan.

Red Star's author Alexander Bogdanov was no mere fabulist. He participated in the 1905 uprising as a member of an organization dedicated to creating socialism on Earth – the Bolshevik Party. After 1905 Bogdanov was one of its most prominent and well-respected figures for his broad and innovative writing on politics, science, and philosophy. However, his utopianism put him at odds with a more conservative figure in the party, Vladimir Lenin.³

At a party retreat in 1908 the two sat down for game of chess on a Caprese terrace overlooking the Mediterranean. The setting was meant as a respite from the harsh and clandestine life of anti-tsarist militancy. But, as they played, the game took on the tensions between the two leaders. Bogdanov argued the party should stay underground, agitating the workers towards class consciousness and offering a positive vision of the fantastic new reality they could create once the means of production was entirely in their hands. Philosophically, he believed the collaboration inherent to the labor process of the industrial capitalist factory would break down the authoritarian structures of feudal and capitalist society, setting the stage for an intersubjective conception of reality. Under this new socialist epistemology, many likeminded Russian futurists believed, science and religion would merge to fulfill the most fantastic messianic prophecies of literally abolishing death and traveling to the heavens.⁴ Lenin countered that the party should instead be monolithically organized with a clear hierarchy of responsibilities and move towards legality by seeking representation in the Russian parliament, and suggested Bogdanov was essentially a mystic who should leave the politics to him and stick to sci-fi.⁵

Bogdanov won the game but lost the party. The next year Lenin published a polemic calling Bogdanov's materialist religion crypto-idealist and his socialist epistemology solipsistic.⁶ Reality was objective, material, and best understood by a vanguard party of professional revolutionaries led by a militant intellectual core. The cultural revolution Bogdanov proposed could only occur after the party seized state power and revolutionized production *on behalf* of the ignorant masses. What the text lacked in philosophical or scientific soundness it made up for in the confidence of its brutal denunciation, so scandalizing Bogdanov that he was marginalized from Bolshevik leadership.

Undeterred, Bogdanov continued his work with a mass education project dedicated to the creation of a "proletarian culture" autonomous from the state or party, the *Proletkult*. Even though Russia had an incredibly backwards economy and industrial proletariat compared to Western Europe, let alone *Red Star's* Mars, Bogdanov believed socialism could be breathed into existence with the help of a politically imaginative mass party. And, of course, the inevitable breakdown of the capitalist world order.⁷

One appreciative reader of Bogdanov was the iconoclastic Leon Trotsky, who had his own unique ideas about the transition to socialism.⁸ Like the Bolsheviks and all other social democrats, he believed feudalism evolved into capitalism and then communism through a series of definite stages. For most socialists this meant revolution should be anticipated in the countries where capitalism was the most advanced, but Trotsky believed that workers and peasants in backwards countries could have a revolution that pushes it past the stage of liberal democracy to the sudden expropriation of the state and economy from the bourgeoisie – proletarian dictatorship. There was a glimpse of this in 1905 when initially anti-Tsarist demonstrations in some Russian cities led to advanced formations of insurrectionary proletarian struggle throughout the empire – workers councils, or *soviets*, outside of and against the state. Trotsky called the internal social effect and its external radiation "permanent revolution," a "constant internal struggle [in which] all social relations are transformed ... the economy, technology, science, the family, customs, develop in a complex reciprocal action which doesn't permit society to achieve equilibrium."⁹

It was an unorthodox theory for the time, and many socialist leaders thought it overly optimistic. But Trotsky understood that capitalism's

global reach meant a crisis in one corner of the world would be felt in the other – a phenomenon that became all too clear when the assassination of an Austrian duke in a Balkan backwater spiraled into the largest war in the history of the world. Decrying the war as a senseless slaughter, Lenin and a small circle around him called for workers to strike, soldiers to mutiny, and the imperialist war turned into a civil war.¹⁰

Many socialists largely agreed with the internationalist sentiment, but, believing the working class was not ready to discard its nationalist ties, most voted to support the war. After just two years, industrial capitalism had transformed the traditional imaginary of warfare as quaint cavalry charges in green pastures into a previously unimaginable hellscape of constant shelling, underwater navies, bizarre flying contraptions, asphyxiating clouds of poison gas, massive bombs capable of imploding mountains, and gargantuan cannons to send the bombs flying to distant cities. Europe became a vast no-man's land of mangled corpses disintegrating into the mud alongside the war's patriotic pretenses. Nonetheless, the mad butchers churning the meatgrinder could only conceive of new offensive schemes, as if resolution could only be achieved by reducing entire cities and populations to smoldering tangles of shredded flesh and metal.

As the absurdity of the war dragged into its third year mutinies and strikes spread in France and England, but nowhere with more intensity than Russia in February of 1917. As rumor spread among the starving masses that the already unpopular aristocracy, apparently under the sway of a drunken mystic, was planning to redouble their failing war efforts, they filled the freezing squares demanding bread in scenes that resembled 1905. This time the armed forces of the state joined them. The palace was seized, the royal family detained, and a provisional government established. The majority of it was socialist, almost all of them still believing their task was to transfer power from the monarchy to the bourgeoisie who would continue industrialization and war under liberal democracy.

That April Lenin arrived from exile to St. Petersburg. For his heroic prediction that the war would lead to revolution, a crowd of his professional militants and citizen admirers gathered to meet his arriving train like disciples awaiting the messiah. Faithful as they were, none expected Lenin to tell them to throw all caution to the winds of history and push the revolution farther. The bourgeoisie were too terrified

of the workers to be trusted, he said, so power should be taken from them, their war ended, the police abolished, and the transitional government replaced with a dictatorship of the proletariat led by the soviet councils. It was a revolution that, once successful, would not only end the eastern front of the war but spread throughout Europe and the world. His fellow Bolshevik leaders were appalled, many wondering aloud if he had become a Trotskyist, an anarchist, a German agent, or simply gone insane. Even Bogdanov called the *April Theses* “the raving of a madman.”¹¹ Lenin pressed forward nonetheless, and in the coming weeks, as his ideas of expropriating the bourgeoisie proved massively popular among the people, he won the support of his party.

In May Trotsky also arrived back from exile, and suddenly found himself in total agreement with Lenin. For him socialism was always a two-sided coin – on its tail a humanistic and critical approach to economics seeking land reform and civil liberties. But its most potent thinkers, the ones whose heads would be added to the canonical totem of profiles, were able to transform that technocratic pragmatism into wild-eyed millenarianism at the crucial moment to preach a violent revolution in service of imminent utopia. With Tsarist forces regrouping and the war still in a grim stalemate, Trotsky and Lenin organized an insurrection to seize power in October. A dictatorship under the Bolsheviks was established, peace negotiated with Germany, and the socialists who decried it as a coup were removed from power. “You are miserable, isolated individuals,” Trotsky shouted at them as they walked out of a post-revolutionary congress. “You have played out your role. Go where you belong: to the dustheap of history!”¹²

The revolution’s foes, however, would not go there quietly. Russia descended into a vicious two-year civil war. Trotsky commanded the Red Army to a victory that cost millions of lives, as well as the libertarian pretenses of the revolution. The police force for whose abolition Lenin had previously called was replaced with another, which enacted a *Red Terror* to counter the White Terror of the Tsarists. Initially their main targets were counterrevolutionary saboteurs, but as the war continued, socialists to the left of the Bolshevik dictatorship were rounded up and executed by the hundreds. Its culmination came in 1921, when an anarchist group of sailors denouncing harsh war rationing and suppression of peasant and worker strikes led a mutiny at the naval fortress at Kronstadt. Trotsky sent the Red Army to suppress the rebellion,

resulting in the slaughter of thousands of its participants. It was a risk Trotsky had foreseen before 1917, and now defended – the dictatorship of the proletariat turned into the dictatorship of a vanguard party *over* the proletariat.

Successful as they were in combat against all enemies, the true failure of the Bolshevik permanent revolution was outside their control. The proletariat in wealthy Western Europe, many believing the time was still not right to push towards communism, had failed to follow their example. The Soviet Union emerged from war impoverished and isolated, but still certain capitalism was in its “death throes” and the resumption of the revolutionary wave would restart at any moment.

The Bolsheviks initiated a mass industrialization program to restart production and move towards self-sustainability as they waited. On a visit to Russia in 1920, H.G. Wells, although a critic of Marxism, was impressed by the progress towards a communism Lenin recently defined as *soviets plus electrification*,¹³ and the inspiration Lenin apparently drew from his work. Wells recalled Lenin praising *The Time Machine* for helping him realize “that human ideas are based on the scale of the planet we live in ... If we succeed in making contact with other planets, all our philosophical, social and moral ideas will have to be revised, and in this event these potentialities will become limitless and will put an end to violence as a necessary means to progress.”¹⁴

Rapid post-war modernization spread enthusiasm for a technosocialist future to the grassroots of Soviet society. Particularly popular was the promise of space travel. Cosmist and rocket science pioneer Konstantin Tsiolkovsky promised it would be possible to travel to space in a matter of only a few years. An explosion of popular science magazines, science fiction books, and films followed, all speculating upon what life in space would be like, and what incredible things we might learn from the alien civilizations surrounding us. At the space hysteria’s peak, a near-riotous gathering of workers believing a manned trip to the moon was imminent was suppressed by Moscow police.¹⁵

Soon Tsiolkovsky and his fellow cosmists and immortalists were repressed as well, their utopian visions thought to conflict with the practical goal of achieving Soviet stability. Lenin ordered Bogdanov’s Proletkult absorbed into the state ministry of education, forcing him to find another venue for actualizing his futuristic vision of socialism. He opened a clinic devoted to proving the viability of the parabiosis

practiced by the Martians in *Red Star*. He died after making himself a test subject, sharing his healthy blood with that of a sick patient, who eventually made a full recovery.

When Lenin died in 1924, his preferred successor was Leon Trotsky. In his final days of illness, however, Josef Stalin succeeded in maneuvering to marginalize Trotsky as a loyal “left opposition” to a Communist Party and International (the Communist Third International, or Comintern) increasingly under his control. By the end of the decade Trotsky was exiled, and forced to move from country to country under pressure from Stalin’s agents in the international movement. Eventually he made it safely to Latin America, where he started a *Fourth* International to weather the storm of Stalinism, fascism, imperialism, and the world war that would inevitably occur between them. He knew it would be small in membership and resources but, believing that war would level the global order, the new organization represented a spectral hope for the return of international and interstellar revolution.

Raised in the era when the Bolshevik revolution echoed throughout the world, Posadas discovered Trotskyism as an alternative to the counter-revolutionary positions of social democracy and Stalinism. An adept union organizer and propaganda-pusher, he climbed the ranks of the Fourth International to become Secretary of the Latin American Bureau. Emboldened by the Cuban revolution in 1959, he split his sections into his own International based on the Latin American workers’ movement and emerging guerilla struggles.

This was the peak of Posadas’s influence, and it overlapped with the most ardent period of the space race, when the few soviet cosmists to have survived the Gulags propelled humanity to new heights with the launch of Sputnik. In no other era were the destructive and creative urges of humanity so obviously aligned as when intercontinental ballistic missiles designed to destroy distant cities were instead pointed upwards to take humanity to new heights, and one could credibly read golden-age science fiction about utopian space colonies while huddled in a fallout shelter.

As Posadas plotted his dramatic split in the fall of 1961, another small group dedicated to changing the world gathered for an informal conference in Green Bank, West Virginia. It was convened by Frank Drake, an astronomer and astrophysicist pioneer of the emerging science of

the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI). Eleven scientists were chosen from the emerging field, among them five Nobel Prize winners, chemists, neuroscientists, and astronomers.

He greeted them at the opening of the conference with an equation scrawled on the chalkboard:

$$N = R_* fp ne fl fi fc L.$$

N meant the number of civilizations in our galaxy with whom we could plausibly communicate. If their work was to have any meaning, the multiplication of a conservative estimate of each term would produce a value for N greater or equal to one. The first three or four terms were matters of exobiology, a new field of speculative science studying the possibility of life forming on other planets based on what is known about how it formed on Earth: The average rate of star formation per year (R_*), the fraction of those stars with planets (fp), the average number of the planets that develop an ecosystem (ne), and the fraction of those planets that develop life (fl). With little debate they determined, based on the vastness of the galaxy and the unlikelihood that Earth is wholly anomalous, that there are were many inhabited planets.

The next term, the fraction of that life that become intelligent (fi), was more philosophical – what does it mean to be intelligent? In his history of SETI, *Five Billion Years of Solitude*, Lee Billings described how neuroscientist John Lilly made a convincing argument that intelligence could be common on inhabited planets based on some of his unique research:

He recounted his various attempts to communicate with the dolphins in their own language of clicks and whistles, and told stories of dolphins rescuing sailors lost at sea. He focused on one case in which two of his captive dolphins had acted together to rescue a third from drowning when it became fatigued in the cold water of a swimming pool. The chilled dolphin had let out two sharp whistles in an apparent call for help, spurring the two rescuers to chatter together, form a rescue plan, and save their distressed companion. The display convinced Lilly that dolphins were a second terrestrial intelligence contemporaneous with humans, capable of complex communication, future planning, empathy, and self-reflection.¹⁶