

The Development and Extension of Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution

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Introduction

This pamphlet consists of three articles from the press of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) and our American section, the Spartacist League/U.S. “The Development and Extension of Leon Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution” was originally published as a four-part series in the SL/U.S. press (*Workers Vanguard* Nos. 901-904, 26 October-7 December 2007). It has also been published in Spanish in the press of our Mexican section, the Grupo Espartaquista de México (*Espartaco* No. 29, April 2008). “Rearming Bolshevism—A Trotskyist Critique of Germany 1923 and the Comintern” was published in *Spartacist* ([English-language edition] No. 56, Spring 2001). *Spartacist* is the ICL’s theoretical and documentary repository, published in English, Spanish, French and German. “Down With Executive Offices of the Capitalist State!” published here in slightly edited form consists of sections from the *Spartacist* article, “Maintaining a Revolutionary Program in the Post-Soviet Period” (*Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 60, Autumn 2007), which reported on the most recent international conference of the ICL. We also publish here (reprinted from the same issue of *Spartacist*) an excerpt dealing with the question of executive offices from the main document adopted at that conference.

These articles together constitute an introduction to the historically founded principles and program of Trotskyism, the continuity of revolutionary Marxism in our time. Because they illustrate core elements of our program, built on the fight for complete and unconditional independence of the proletariat from all the parties and agencies of the capitalist class enemy, they illuminate the political gulf between the ICL and all the opportunists who falsely claim to be Marxists and to represent the historic interests of the working class. The understanding that the revolutionary working class cannot reform the capitalist state to serve its own interests but must smash that state power and create its own state—a workers state—is fundamental to our outlook. In contrast, our political opponents on the left practice what Trotsky described as “the actual training of the masses to become imbued with the inviolability of the bourgeois state” (*Lessons of October*, 1924).

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Cover graphic: Bolshevik slogans were prominent among banners celebrating May Day in Petrograd, 1917. Among those pictured: “For the Arming of the People/Long Live the International,” “Russian Social Democratic Labor Party [Bolsheviks] of Kronstadt Proletarians.” Inset: Leon Trotsky in Moscow shortly after the Russian Revolution.

Cover credits: Novosti (main photo), Basil Blackwell Inc. (inset)

The Development and Extension of Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution

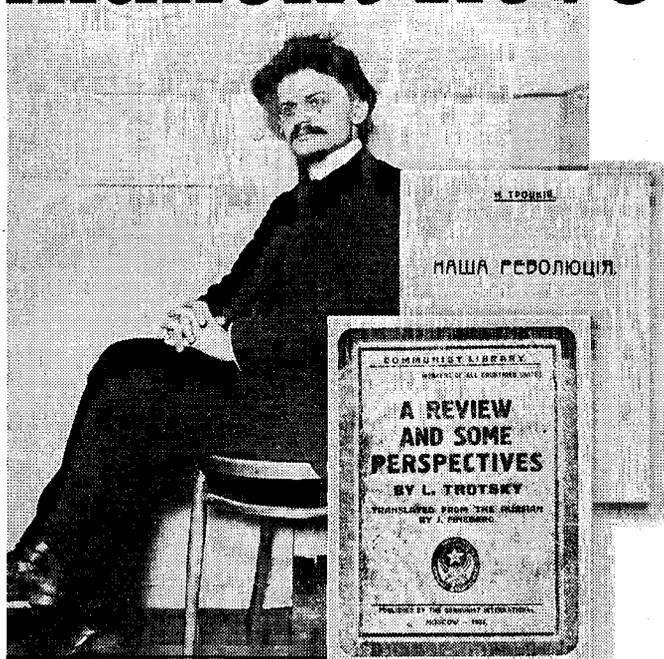
This month marks the 90th anniversary of the Russian Revolution led by the Bolshevik Party of V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky. The October Revolution was the defining event of the 20th century.

PART ONE

Spurred especially by the carnage of World War I, the working class took state power, establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. In doing so, the multinational proletariat of Russia not only liberated itself from capitalist exploitation but also led the peasantry, national minorities and all the oppressed in driving out feudal tyranny and imperialist bondage.

The young workers state carried out an agrarian revolution and recognized the right of self-determination of all nations in what had been the tsarist prison house of peoples. The soviet regime took Russia out of the interimperialist world war and inspired class-conscious workers in other countries to try to follow the Bolshevik example. The Third (Communist) International, which held its inaugural congress in Moscow in 1919, was founded to lead the proletariat internationally in the struggle for socialist revolution.

The October Revolution was a stunning confirmation of the theory and perspective of permanent revolution developed by Trotsky. In his 1906 work *Results and Prospects*, Trotsky projected that because Russia, despite its economic backwardness, was already part of a world capitalist economy that was ripe for socialism, the workers could come to power there before an extended period of capitalist development. Indeed, the workers would *have* to come to power if Russia was to be liberated from its feudal past. At the heart of the Bolsheviks' success in 1917 was the coming together of Trotsky's program of permanent revolution with Lenin's single-minded struggle to build a programmatically steered and tested vanguard party against all manner of reconciliation with the capitalist order.



Basil Blackwell Inc.

Leon Trotsky in jail in aftermath of 1905 Revolution. Trotsky's 1906 *Our Revolution* (top inset) included *Results and Prospects*, which explained theory of permanent revolution and was republished under title shown (bottom inset) in Moscow in 1921.

Just before *Results and Prospects* appeared, the 1905 Russian Revolution had shaken the tsarist empire to its foundations and brought to the fore an intense debate over the future course of revolutionary developments. Russia was an imperialist power but also the weakest link in the imperialist chain, saddled with an absolutist monarchy, an encrusted landed aristocracy and a huge Russian Orthodox state church.

The young, vibrant bourgeoisies of 17th-century England and 18th-century France had stood at the head of the urban and rural populace in bourgeois-democratic revolutions that swept away similar feudal-derived fetters on modern capitalist development and would give rise to an industrial proletariat.

But the late-emerging Russian bourgeoisie—subordinated to foreign industrialists and bankers, tied by a thousand threads to the aristocracy—was weak and cowardly, fearful that it, too, would be swept away should the worker and peasant masses rise up against the tsarist autocracy.

Addressing this contradiction, Trotsky argued, as he later summarized in the August 1939 article "Three Conceptions of the Russian Revolution" (also known as "Three Concepts"):

"The complete victory of the democratic revolution in Russia is inconceivable otherwise than in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat basing itself on the peasantry. The dictatorship of the proletariat, which will inescapably place on the order of the day not only democratic but also socialist tasks, will at the same time provide a mighty impulse to the international socialist revolution. Only the victory of the proletariat in the West will shield Russia from bourgeois restoration and secure for her the possibility of bringing the socialist construction to its conclusion."

As the Bolsheviks anticipated, the October Revolution inspired proletarian upheavals in Europe, particularly Germany, as well as anti-colonial and national liberation struggles in Asia and elsewhere. But despite the revolutionary ferment, the proletariat did not come to power in any of the advanced capitalist countries of the West. Russia, bled white



Archambault/U.S. News & World Report



Espartaco

Combined and uneven development in Mexico: GM plant in Matamoros (left), peasants plowing cornfield using horses and wooden implements in the state of México, May 2007.

by imperialist war and the bloody Civil War that erupted a few months after the Bolsheviks took power, remained isolated. Conditions of great material scarcity produced strong objective pressures toward bureaucratism. The failure to consummate an exceptional opportunity for socialist revolution in Germany in 1923 allowed a restabilization of the world capitalist order and led to profound demoralization among Soviet workers. This facilitated a political counterrevolution and the rise of a privileged bureaucratic caste around Joseph Stalin.

In late 1924, Stalin promulgated the dogma of "socialism in one country." This flouted the Marxist understanding that socialism—a classless society of material abundance—could only be built on the basis of the most modern technology and an international division of labor, requiring proletarian revolutions in at least a number of the most advanced capitalist countries. Stalin and his henchmen suppressed proletarian democracy and, over the years, transformed the Communist International from an organizer of the world socialist revolution into its antithesis, strangling revolutionary possibilities abroad in hopes of convincing world imperialism to leave the USSR alone. The Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet workers state and the Comintern did not go unopposed. Taking up the Bolshevik banner of revolutionary proletarian internationalism, Trotsky and his supporters fought against the nationalist dogma of "socialism in one country."

Decades of Stalinist treachery, lies and bureaucratic mismanagement eventually opened the gates to the imperialist-sponsored forces of capitalist restoration, culminating in the counterrevolutionary overthrow of the Soviet degenerated workers state in 1991-92. The workers state erected by the October Revolution no longer exists. But it remains vital for class-conscious workers and leftist intellectuals to study the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the world proletariat's greatest success and imperialism's greatest defeat ever.

From Tsarist Russia to Post-Apartheid South Africa

Trotsky formulated his theory in regard to tsarist Russia. But history would demonstrate that the conditions that made Russia ripe for the proletarian seizure of power in 1917 would be replicated in their broad outlines in even more backward colonial and semicolonial countries, as imperialist

capitalism extended its tentacles into ever more remote regions of the globe. This was seen decisively in China, where a young urban proletariat had emerged in the years during and after World War I. But unlike the Bolshevik Revolution, the Chinese Revolution of 1925-27 went down to bloody defeat. The crucial reason, as we will detail later in this article, is that the proletariat was subordinated to the bourgeoisie instead of fighting for power in its own name and leading the mass of the peasantry. Drawing the lessons of that defeat, in *The Third International After Lenin* (1928) and *The Permanent Revolution* (1930), Trotsky generalized the theory of permanent revolution to all countries of belated capitalist development in the imperialist epoch.

The validity of this revolutionary perspective has been repeatedly demonstrated in the decades since. Dozens of former colonies have achieved independent statehood, including through heroic and protracted national liberation struggles. But none have managed to defy the laws of Marxist materialism: Short of the dictatorship of the proletariat there can be no liberation from the yoke of imperialist domination and mass poverty. And across Latin America, revulsion over imperialist-dictated neoliberal austerity measures has been channeled into support for a new layer of bourgeois nationalist populists, from Hugo Chávez in Venezuela to Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico. Despite their "anti-imperialist" and even "socialist" rhetoric, the bourgeois nationalists are committed to defense of the capitalist order, which necessarily means subordination to the world imperialist system.

Or look at post-apartheid South Africa. Unusually in this period in which the apologists for imperialist exploitation have officially decreed communism to be dead, tens of thousands of South African working-class militants continue to rally around the red banner of the hammer and sickle, the emblem of the Soviet workers state that issued out of the October Revolution. But the South African Communist Party (SACP) tramples on the lessons of the October Revolution, centrally the need for a vanguard party intransigently opposed to all wings of the bourgeoisie and committed to the struggle for proletarian state power and revolutionary internationalism.

In 1994, the election of a government led by the African National Congress (ANC) of Nelson Mandela marked the end

of decades of white-supremacist rule. In the name of the martyrs of Sharpeville and Soweto and the many thousands of others who had given their lives in the struggle against apartheid, the ANC proclaimed a new era of emancipation in which the black and other non-white masses would no longer be consigned to segregation, degradation, murderous repression and grinding poverty. But the reality is that the ANC-led government presides over *neo-apartheid capitalism*, based on the same social foundations as the former regime: the brutal exploitation of the overwhelmingly black proletariat by a tiny class of fabulously wealthy white capitalist exploiters (though now including a few black front men).

The SACP, a longtime ally and component of the ANC, hailed the advent of a "national democratic revolution" that would grow over into socialism. The Communist-influenced leadership of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)—formed in bitter labor struggles that demonstrated the immense social power of the black proletariat and heralded the death knell of apartheid rule—joined the SACP in a Tripartite Alliance with the bourgeois-nationalist ANC. Thirteen years on, the bourgeois Tripartite Alliance government breaks workers strikes and unleashes cops on rebellious township youth. The black African masses are no nearer to social and national emancipation, much less socialism.

Russia on the Eve of the 1905 Revolution

In his book *1905* (written between 1908-09), Trotsky described Russia's enormous contradictions at the start of the 20th century: "The most concentrated industry in Europe based on the most backward agriculture in Europe. The most colossal state apparatus in the world making use of every achievement of modern technological progress in order to retard the historical progress of its own country." Investment from Europe (primarily France) had created a new urban proletariat in large-scale, state-of-the-art industrial concentrations in St. Petersburg, Moscow and the Urals. While this industrial proletariat constituted less than 10 percent of Russia's population, it was concentrated in economically strategic enterprises. The percentage of Russian workers

employed in factories of more than 1,000 employees was higher than in Britain, Germany or the United States. Yet the tsarist autocracy, the counterrevolutionary gendarme for all of Europe's ruling powers, rested on a landed gentry that lived and breathed in a prior epoch.

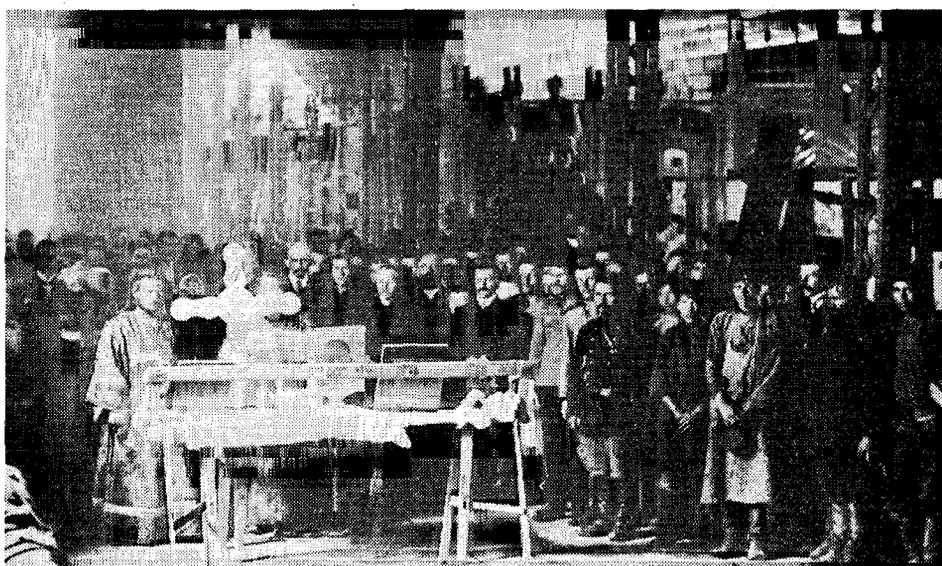
Such conditions of "combined and uneven development" make the proletariat a uniquely revolutionary force in even the most backward capitalist countries in the imperialist epoch. Russia would not, and could not, simply repeat the experience of ascendant capitalism in England or France. Trotsky explained in "Three Conceptions of the Russian Revolution":

"The development of Russia is characterized first of all by backwardness. Historical backwardness does not, however, signify a simple reproduction of the development of advanced countries, with merely a delay of one or two centuries. It engenders an entirely new 'combined' social formation in which the latest conquests of capitalist technique and structure root themselves into relations of feudal and pre-feudal barbarism, transforming and subjecting them and creating a peculiar interrelationship of classes."

The immediate prelude to the 1905 Revolution was the defeat of Russia's Pacific Fleet at Port Arthur in Manchuria in late 1904 by nascent Japanese imperialism. This emboldened bourgeois liberals to timidly urge greater civil liberties. But down below, larger forces were stirring. These came spilling out on the morning of Sunday, 9 January 1905. When a January 3 strike over firings at the massive Putilov metal works in St. Petersburg began to spread, a legal labor organization led by Father Gapon, a radical Russian Orthodox priest, tried to dissipate the growing class confrontation by organizing a procession to humbly petition the tsar for reforms, including an eight-hour day, the separation of church and state and a constituent assembly.

Dressed in their Sunday best, well over 100,000 workers with their families set off for the Winter Palace, the seat of the autocracy. In what came to be known as Bloody Sunday, the tsar ordered troops to open fire. Over 1,000 were slaughtered and almost 4,000 wounded. Russia exploded. By October 1905, a massive series of strikes culminated in a general rail strike and the formation of the Petersburg workers council (soviet), which elected Trotsky as its chairman in November.

In an attempt to quell the upheaval, the tsar issued the October Manifesto, granting a constitution and a limited legislature. The bourgeoisie, terrified of the independent power of the proletariat, eagerly embraced the Manifesto and joined the camp of open counterrevolution. At the same time, the tsar unleashed the Black Hundreds reactionaries in a nationwide pogrom against the Jewish population. Some 4,000 Jews were murdered and 10,000 maimed. This attempt to derail the revolution was courageously combatted by a broad range of socialist organizations that formed armed defense guards. Industrial workers, especially the mainly Russian rail workers, played an important role in defending Jews. Significantly, in St. Petersburg there



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Orthodox church service at plant in the Urals at turn of 20th century. Tsarist regime, factory owners sought to inculcate religious conservatism among workers to undercut growing labor unrest.



Marxists Internet Archive

Left: Georgi Plekhanov, founder of Russian Marxism. Right: V. I. Lenin (seated at center) and Julius Martov (seated at right) with other leaders of League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, St. Petersburg, 1897.



Vezenberg and Co.

were no pogroms because the working class showed its determination in advance to defend the Jewish population.

In Moscow, a general strike grew into an armed uprising of the proletariat, with pitched battles on barricades all over the city. Lenin considered the Moscow insurrection of December 7-19 the high point of the revolution. The determination of the insurrection undermined the loyalty of the tsar's troops. It took over a week to put down the insurrection and crush the workers' fighting units. Over 1,000 were killed, followed by a campaign of arrests and executions.

The experience of the St. Petersburg Soviet was of historic importance. Originating as a joint strike committee composed of delegates elected from their factories, the soviet soon began to act as an alternative center of power. After the soviet was crushed, Trotsky and other of its leaders used their trial as a platform to disseminate revolutionary ideas.

The Petersburg Soviet existed for 50 days, the Moscow barricades far less than that. But the impact of the 1905 Revolution was world historic (see "The Russian Revolution of 1905," *WV* No. 872, 9 June 2006). It sent fear into the hearts of the European ruling classes and galvanized the revolutionary wing of international Social Democracy (as Marxists called themselves at the time). It spurred anti-colonial movements throughout Asia and resonated through the workers movement internationally, including in the U.S., where the revolutionary syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was founded that year. In Russia, crucially, it illuminated the programmatic differences between the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP), which would end up on opposite sides of the barricades in 1917.

Plekhanov and the Origins of Russian Marxism

Organized Russian Marxism originated in 1883, centering on Georgi Plekhanov's break from the dominant populist current to form the small Emancipation of Labor group in exile. The Narodniks (populists) were often heroic in their pursuit of a revolution against tsarist autocracy. Valiant but futile efforts to "go to the people" and reach out to the benighted peasant masses were followed by courageous but no less futile acts of terror against tsarist officials.

The Narodniks followed a tradition that stretched back to the 1825 Decembrist rising by military officers who sought to emulate modernized bourgeois Europe. But the Russian populists of the second half of the 19th century did not wish to follow the West European model of capitalist develop-

ment. Instead, they envisioned a uniquely Russian socialism based on the *mir*, the traditional communal peasant land. But while the peasantry had a history of spontaneous, volatile explosions of collective rage, its outlook and aspirations were those of the petty proprietor, not the coherent and collectivist class interests of the urban proletariat. Moreover, as Plekhanov demonstrated in his seminal Marxist polemic against populism, *Our Differences* (1884), the peasant *mir* had already begun to disintegrate under the impact of capitalist market relations.

In fighting to popularize Marxism among radical intellectuals of his day, Plekhanov produced a Russian translation of Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*, which outlined the proletariat's role as the most revolutionary class in history. "The history of all hitherto existing society," declared the *Manifesto*, "is the history of class struggles." Classes are defined by their relationship to the means of production. Capitalism created dynamically expanding and globally organized means of production and commerce. But the private ownership of those socially organized means of production and the barriers imposed by the bourgeois nation-state became in their turn shackles on the development of the productive forces.

The proletariat's place in production—and the fact that it has only its own labor power to sell—makes it the only class with both the material interest in liberating and expanding socialized production based on a collectivized economy and the social power to carry out this revolution. Plekhanov anticipated that capitalist development would soon lead to the emergence of a significant industrial working class. About "the rising proletariat," he declared:

"They, and they alone, can be the link between the peasantry and the socialist intelligentsia; they, and they alone, can bridge the historical abyss between the 'people' and the 'educated' section of the population. Through them and with their help socialist propaganda will at last penetrate into every corner of the Russian countryside. Moreover, if they are united and organized at the right time into a single workers' party, they can be the main bulwark of socialist agitation in favour of economic reforms which will protect the village commune against general disintegration.... *The earliest possible formation of a workers' party is the only means of solving all the economic and political contradictions of present-day Russia.* On that road success and victory lie ahead; all other roads can lead only to defeat and impotence."

—*Our Differences* (1884), reprinted in
Selected Philosophical Works, Vol. 1

Plekhanov succeeded in winning some of the best of the populists to Marxism. Among the formative figures in the Emancipation of Labor group was the former Narodnik Vera

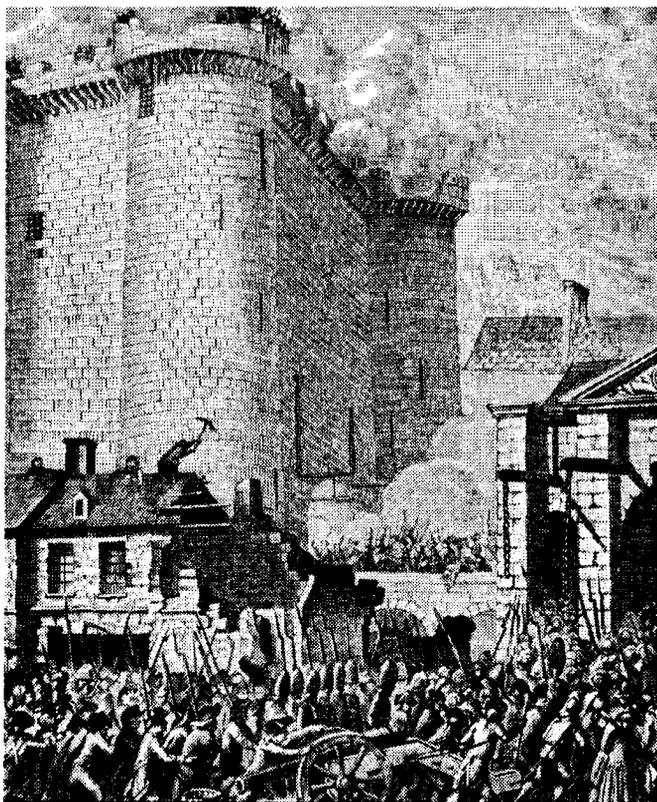
Zasulich, who was hailed throughout Europe for her heroism in attempting to shoot the St. Petersburg chief of police in 1878. Other Narodniks eventually consolidated into the main party of bourgeois liberalism, the Constitutional Democratic Party (Cadets), and the petty-bourgeois Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs).

The Marxist propaganda circles in Russia connected with Plekhanov turned to mass agitation in the mid 1890s, when a young Lenin and Julius Martov first came to the fore. At the same time, a reformist wing developed. This tendency, dubbed Economism by Plekhanov, limited its agitation to elementary trade-union demands while passively supporting bourgeois liberal efforts to reform tsarist absolutism. Beginning around 1897-98, Economism became the dominant tendency among Russian Social Democrats. Hostile to orthodox Marxism, the Economists were loosely associated with the reformist current around Eduard Bernstein in Germany.

The 1903 Bolshevik-Menshevik Split

In 1900, the second generation of Russian Marxists (represented by Lenin and Martov) coalesced with the founding fathers (Plekhanov, Pavel Axelrod, Zasulich) to return Russian Social Democracy to its revolutionary traditions as embodied in the original Emancipation of Labor program. The revolutionary Marxist tendency was organized around the paper *Iskra* (Spark), and Lenin became its organizer. *Iskra* provided, for the first time, an organizing center for a Russian Social Democratic party, one from which Lenin directed work in Russia to win over local Social Democratic committees from Economism or, if necessary, split them.

Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* (1902) was a scathing



14 July 1789: Depiction of storming of Bastille prison and garrison by Parisian working people at onset of Great French Revolution.

polemic against the Economists' attempt "to *degrade* Social-Democratic politics to the level of trade union politics!" Against this, Lenin argued that the workers party must not act as a labor auxiliary to bourgeois liberalism but as a "tribune of the people." Such a party must agitate against injustice among all layers of the population and render the proletariat conscious of the need to become the ruling class and to reconstruct society on socialist foundations. By the time of the RSDLP's Second Congress in July-August 1903, the Economist tendency was a small minority.

Though the Iskraits walked into the Congress with a solid majority, beneath the seeming unity were considerable differences between the "soft" Martov, who favored a greater role for non-Iskraits in a unitary party, and the "hard" Lenin. These differences exploded over the first paragraph of the RSDLP's rules defining who was a member. Martov's draft defined a party member as one who "renders it regular personal assistance under the direction of one of its organizations." For Lenin, membership was defined "by personal participation in one of the Party organizations." This narrower definition was motivated by a desire to exclude opportunists and weed out dilettantes attracted to the RSDLP precisely because of its loose circle nature. With the support of the Economists and the Jewish Bund, Martov's formulation carried. But when the Economists and the Bund walked out of the Congress, Lenin's "hards" gained a slight majority. (Bolshevik is derived from the Russian word for "majority," while Menshevik comes from "minority.")

The decisive split came over the election of a new *Iskra* editorial board. When Lenin's proposal carried, Martov and his followers refused to serve on the editorial board or Central Committee. Plekhanov supported the Bolshevik faction but soon broke with Lenin and threw in his lot with the Mensheviks, who thus regained control of *Iskra*.

Lenin would spend the years between the 1903 split and the 1905 Revolution (and afterwards) waging a fierce struggle against those within the Bolshevik faction—as well as those outside it, such as Trotsky, who opposed Lenin in the split—who sought to reconcile the two factions. While the political differences between Lenin and Martov were unclear to most in 1903, their significance quickly grew. The logic of the factional struggle drove the Mensheviks further to the right, leading to reconciliation with the defeated Economists. Alexander Martynov, formerly the main exponent of Economism, became the Mensheviks' main theoretician.

As we elaborated in the 1978 Spartacist pamphlet *Lenin and the Vanguard Party*, the 1903 split did not represent Lenin's final break from the Social Democratic concept of the "party of the whole class," in which all political tendencies claiming the banner of socialism, from avowed reformists to revolutionaries, coexist. Nonetheless, 1903 marked the *beginning* of such a break, the first step in the construction of a vanguard party led by a cadre of professional revolutionaries.

The 1905 Revolution, though it was defeated, became "the laboratory in which all the fundamental groupings of Russian political life were worked out and all the tendencies and shadings inside Russian Marxism were projected," as Trotsky would put it in his article, "Three Conceptions of the Russian Revolution." Trotsky observed:

"Precisely because of her historical tardiness Russia turned out to be the only European country where Marxism as a doctrine and the social democracy as a party attained powerful development even before the bourgeois revolution. It is only natural that the problem of the correlation between the struggle

for democracy and the struggle for socialism was submitted to the most profound theoretical analysis precisely in Russia."

Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution

The Mensheviks, the Bolsheviks and Leon Trotsky put forward three distinct conceptions of the coming Russian Revolution. Pointing to Russia's backwardness, the Mensheviks insisted that the working class could only be an appendage to the liberal bourgeoisie, which was supposedly striving to establish a democratic republic. In early 1905, Martynov codified this orientation to the liberal bourgeoisie in his pamphlet, *Two Dictatorships*. The Mensheviks' chief tactician, Pavel Axelrod, spelled this out at the 1906 RSDLP "Unity Congress":

"The social relations of Russia have ripened only for the bourgeois revolution.... In the face of the universal deprivation of political rights in our country, there cannot even be talk of a direct battle between the proletariat and other classes for political power.... The proletariat is fighting for conditions of bourgeois development. The objective historical conditions make it the destiny of our proletariat to inescapably collaborate with the bourgeoisie in the struggle against the common enemy."

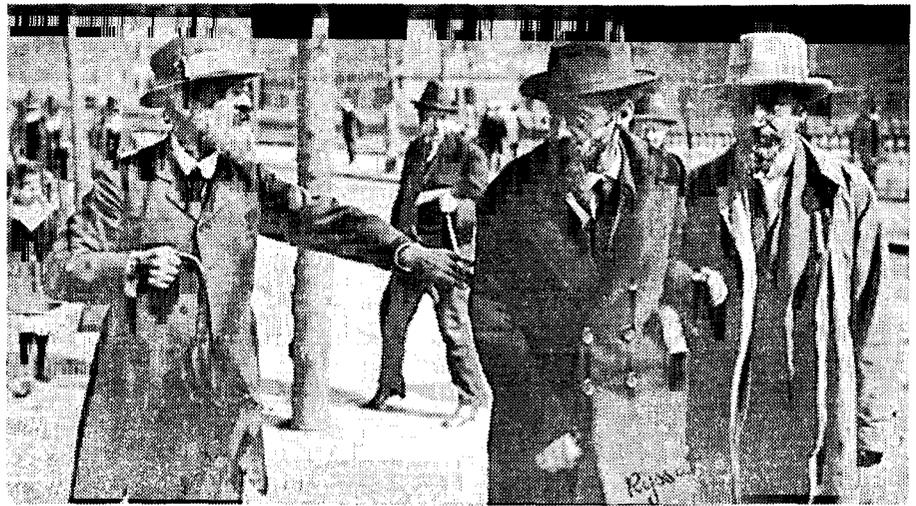
This basic line was upheld by all the Menshevik leaders, including Plekhanov. "They should not have taken to arms," was his epitaph on the 1905 Moscow insurrection (quoted in Lenin, "Lessons of the Moscow Uprising," 29 August 1906). "We must cherish the support of the non-proletarian parties...and not repel them from us by tactless actions," Plekhanov stated, to which Lenin pointedly replied that "the liberals and landlords will forgive you millions of 'tactless' acts but will not forgive you a summons to take away the land." Quoting the above exchange, Trotsky explained in "Three Conceptions of the Russian Revolution":

"Plekhanov obviously and stubbornly shut his eyes to the fundamental conclusion of the political history of the nineteenth century: whenever the proletariat comes forward as an independent force the bourgeoisie shifts over to the camp of the counterrevolution. The more audacious the mass struggle all the swifter is the reactionary degeneration of liberalism. No one has yet invented a means for paralyzing the effects of the law of the class struggle."

For his part, Lenin accepted that the struggle for political freedom and the democratic republic in Russia was a necessary stage that would not undermine "the domination of the bourgeoisie" (*Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, 1905). But, crucially, Lenin had no illusions about some "progressive" character of the Russian bourgeoisie, categorically ruling out that it could consummate its own revolution:

"They are incapable of waging a decisive struggle against tsarism; they are too heavily fettered by private property, by capital and land to enter into a decisive struggle. They stand in too great need of tsarism, with its bureaucratic, police, and military forces for use against the proletariat and the peasantry, to want it to be destroyed.... 'The revolution's decisive victory over tsarism' means the establishment of the *revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry*."

Lenin wrote of such a dictatorship: "At best, it may bring about a radical redistribution of landed property in favour of the peasantry, establish consistent and full democracy,



Labour History News Service

From left to right: Menshevik leaders Pavel Axelrod, Julius Martov and Alexander Martynov, Stockholm, May 1917.

including the formation of a republic, eradicate all the oppressive features of Asiatic bondage, not only in rural but also in factory life, lay the foundation for a thorough improvement in the conditions of the workers and for a rise in their standard of living, and—last but not least—carry the revolutionary conflagration into Europe."

In his 1906 article, "The Proletariat and Its Ally in the Russian Revolution," Lenin argued that "the crux of the Russian Revolution is the *agrarian* question." He knew, as Trotsky observed in "Three Conceptions," that "in order to overthrow czarism it was necessary to arouse tens upon tens of millions of oppressed to a heroic, self-renouncing, unfettered revolutionary assault that would halt at nothing. The masses can rise to an insurrection only under the banner of their own interests and consequently in the spirit of irreconcilable hostility toward the exploiting classes beginning with the landlords."

For Lenin, the formula of the revolutionary democratic dictatorship remained algebraic. His outlines for a joint revolutionary dictatorship were not terms for an epoch of class peace but battle plans for an episode of class war extended to the international arena. The destruction of the Romanov gendarme would inspire European workers to take state power. They would then support the proletariat in Russia in doing the same.

Lenin's formula was irreconcilably opposed to the Mensheviks' tailing of the bourgeoisie. But it was inherently contradictory, projecting a dictatorship of two classes with conflicting interests. History would demonstrate that the tasks Lenin envisioned for the democratic dictatorship could only be carried out by the *dictatorship of the proletariat* resting on the peasantry, while the *formula* of the democratic dictatorship would be used by others to justify support to the bourgeois Provisional Government in 1917.

Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, initially formulated in collaboration with the Social Democrat Alexander Parvus just before the 1905 Revolution, was distinct from those of both the Mensheviks and Lenin, but far closer to the latter. Like Lenin, Trotsky saw that the Russian liberal bourgeoisie had no revolutionary capacities, declaring in *Results and Prospects*:

"A national bourgeois revolution is impossible in Russia because there is no genuinely revolutionary bourgeois democ-

racy. The time for national revolutions has passed—at least for Europe.... We are living in an epoch of imperialism which is not merely a system of colonial conquests but implies also a definite régime at home. It does not set the bourgeois nation in opposition to the old régime, but sets the proletariat in opposition to the bourgeois nation.”

In contradistinction to Lenin, Trotsky argued that the peasants could not play the role of an independent partner, let alone leader, in the revolution. Trotsky observed that peasant uprisings in Europe had brought down regimes, but this had never resulted in governments of peasant parties. In *Results and Prospects*, he noted that it was always in the towns where the first revolutionary classes arose that later overthrew feudalism. “If the proletariat does not tear power out of the hands of the monarchy nobody else will do so,” he declared. He emphasized, “*The proletariat in power will stand before the peasants as the class which has emancipated it.*” Later, Trotsky expanded his point in “Three Conceptions”:

“Finally, the peasantry is heterogeneous in its social relations as well: the kulak stratum [rich peasants] naturally seeks to swing it to an alliance with the urban bourgeoisie while the nether strata of the village pull to the side of the urban workers. Under these conditions the peasantry as such is completely incapable of conquering power.”

Subsequent Stalinist falsifications to the contrary, the difference between Lenin and Trotsky was not over whether the bourgeois-democratic tasks of the revolution could be skipped, or whether an alliance between the workers and peasants was necessary, but over the specific political form of that alliance. Trotsky stated: “The very fact of the proletariat’s representatives entering the government, not as powerless hostages, but as the leading force, destroys the borderline between maximum and minimum programme; that is to say, it places collectivism on the order of the day” (*Results and Prospects*). He wrote:

“It is possible for the workers to come to power in an economically backward country sooner than in an advanced country....

“In our view, the Russian revolution will create conditions in which power can pass into the hands of the workers—and in the event of the victory of the revolution it must do so—before the politicians of bourgeois liberalism get the chance to display to the full their talent for governing.”

At the same time, Trotsky stressed: “Without the direct State support of the European proletariat the working class of Russia cannot remain in power and con-

vert its temporary domination into a lasting socialistic dictatorship. Of this there cannot for one moment be any doubt. But on the other hand there cannot be any doubt that a socialist revolution in the West will enable us directly to convert the temporary domination of the working class into a socialist dictatorship.”

Karl Marx’s “Revolution in Permanence”

In developing his theory of permanent revolution, Leon Trotsky drew on the conclusions reached by Karl Marx following the defeat of the democratic revolutions in Europe in 1848-49, when he raised the formulation “revolution in permanence.”

In their March 1850 “Address of the Central Authority” to the Communist League, Marx and his co-thinker Friedrich



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Above: Barricades in Moscow during 1905 Revolution. Inset: 11 December 1905 issue of *Izvestia*, paper of Moscow Soviet, calls for armed uprising. Below: Leaders of St. Petersburg Soviet during 1906 trial. Inset: First edition of Petersburg Soviet’s *Izvestia*, 17 October 1905.



Basil Blackwell Inc.

Engels predicted that in a coming resurgence of revolutionary struggle, petty-bourgeois democrats would play the same treacherous role that the German liberal bourgeoisie had played in 1848. The 1848-49 revolutions were democratic uprisings aimed at bringing about political democracy and destroying feudal remnants. In Germany, this included the need to demolish the barriers that splintered the country into numerous small princely states and the Kingdom of Prussia and thus hindered the development of a national capitalist economy.

But what became clear as the revolutionary upheaval gripped Europe was that the bourgeoisies feared the prospect of an armed and mobilized proletariat more than they resented the remaining impediments to their domination presented by the landed nobility. The revolutionary masses were betrayed when the forces of the liberal bourgeoisie made their peace with the aristocracy.

Marx's main point was that the proletariat must fight independently for its own aims against the petty-bourgeois democrats:

"While the democratic petty bourgeois wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible, and with the achievement, at most, of the above demands, it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, the proletariat has conquered state power, and the association of proletarians, not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world, has advanced so far that competition among the proletarians in these countries has ceased and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians."

Marx and Engels also recognized that without a revolution in Britain, Europe's most industrially advanced country at the time, an isolated French or German revolutionary regime would soon be crushed by an alliance of British finance capital and the Russian tsarist army.

Notwithstanding the treachery of the bourgeoisie, the German proletariat was still too weak in 1848-49 to take power. As Trotsky later put it in his book *1905*, "Capitalist development had gone far enough to necessitate the destruction of the old feudal relations, but not far enough to advance the working class, the product of the new production relations, to the position of a decisive political force. The antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie had gone too far to enable the bourgeoisie to assume the role of national leadership without fear, but not far enough to enable the proletariat to grasp that role."

In his March 1850 Address, Marx commented, "That, during the further development of the revolution, petty-bourgeois democracy will for a moment obtain predominating influence in Germany is not open to doubt." But the petty-bourgeois democracy showed itself to be incapable of taking power. In 1852 Marx wrote in his classic work, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: "The peasants find their natural ally and leader in the *urban proletariat*, whose task is the overthrow of the bourgeois order." In a 16 April 1856 letter to Engels, Marx stated emphatically: "The whole thing in Germany will depend on whether it is possible to back the Proletarian revolution by some second edition of the [16th century] Peasants' war. In which case the affair should go swimmingly." Lenin in 1918 pointed to this letter as a remarkable anticipation of the Bolshevik Revolution, and an exposure of the Mensheviks' fake-Marxist schema for a supposedly inevitable bourgeois-led "first stage" of the Russian Revolution.

The German bourgeoisie was indeed incapable of carrying

out a democratic revolution. With the further rapid development of industrial capitalism, the main body of the German bourgeoisie formed an alliance with the Prussian landed nobility (the Junkers), which laid the basis for a "revolution from above" under the guiding hand of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. Confronted with the power of the more advanced British and French bourgeois states, the reactionary Bismarck came to understand that only the industrial/financial bourgeoisie could transform Germany into a comparably advanced state and thereby ensure the survival and prosperity of the old landed classes as well. Thus the Prussian monarchy presided over the modernization and national unification of Germany through a *non-democratic* bourgeois revolution. As Engels wrote in the late 1880s:

"A person in Bismarck's position and with Bismarck's past, having a certain understanding of the state of affairs, could not but realise that the Junkers, such as they were, were not a viable class, and that of all the propertied classes only the bourgeoisie could lay claim to a future, and that therefore (disregarding the working class, an understanding of whose historical mission we cannot expect of him) his new empire promised to be all the stabler, the more he succeeded in laying the groundwork for its gradual transition to a modern bourgeois state."

—*The Role of Force in History* (1887-88)

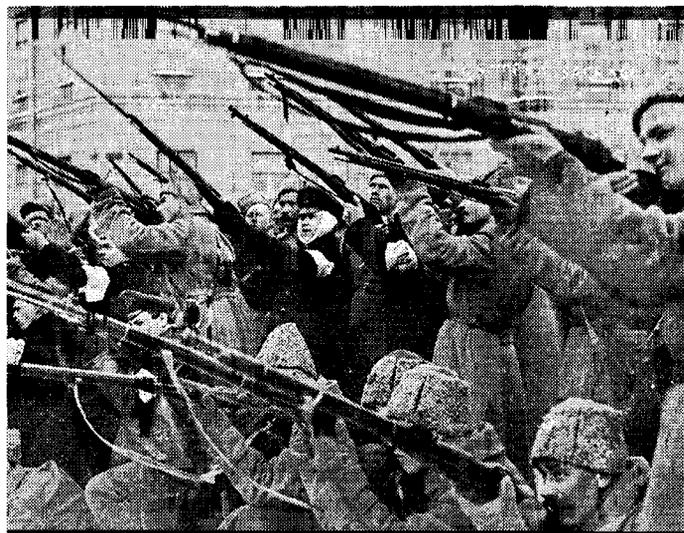
A similar development took place around the same time in Japan, where a section of the old warrior caste ousted the feudal regime in 1867-68 to build up the Japanese military and enable it to stand up to the encroachments of the Western powers. In the following decades, an industrial bourgeoisie and modern imperialist power were created in Japan. By the turn of the century, entry to the small club of imperialist powers that continues to dominate the world today had been shut to other emergent bourgeoisies. (For more on this, see "The Meiji Restoration: A Bourgeois Non-Democratic Revolution," *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 58, Spring 2004.)

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Petrograd, February 1917. Left: International Women's Day protest touched off February Revolution; banner demands increased rations for soldiers' families. Right: Revolutionaries take aim at Petrograd police headquarters.

PART TWO

Mensheviks and Stalinists have long portrayed the February Revolution, which overthrew the Russian tsar, as the opening of a necessary "first stage" of the Russian Revolution. In fact, the February Revolution resolved none of the radical-democratic tasks of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" outlined by V. I. Lenin in 1905.

In a 9 January 1917 "Lecture on the 1905 Revolution," Lenin had already dropped any mention of his 1905 formula. His speech reflected the development of the class struggle in Russia on the eve of World War I, an interimperialist war. After the 1907-10 years of reaction, the proletariat had raised its head again. By the first half of 1914, the level of strike activity had reached heights not seen since 1905. And this time, some 80 percent of the politically active workers were behind the Bolsheviks.

In his speech, Lenin spoke of 1905 in the terms of Trotsky's permanent revolution: "In reality, the inexorable trend of the Russian revolution was towards an armed, decisive battle between the tsarist government and the vanguard of the class-conscious proletariat." Like Trotsky, he now argued that the coming revolution "can only be a proletarian revolution, and in an even more profound sense of the word: a proletarian, socialist revolution also in its content.... Only class-conscious proletarians can and will give leadership to the vast majority of the exploited."

World War I had a profound impact on Lenin's thinking. The Second International had collapsed into social-chauvinism, with most of its sections supporting their own national bourgeoisies in the war. This led Lenin to generalize the split course with the Russian Mensheviks, which he had made definitive in 1912. He concluded that opportunism was not a vestigial or localized phenomenon; rather, as he laid out in his monumental study, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), the superprofits derived from the imperialists' exploitation of the colonies provided a material basis for an opportunist, pro-capitalist layer in the workers

movement. Lenin fought for a complete break internationally from all reformist and centrist currents and raised the call for a Third International. Against the social-chauvinists and social-pacifists, he called for a policy of revolutionary defeatism against all the warring bourgeoisies and raised the slogan: Turn the imperialist war into a civil war!

The war had cut across the upsurge in class struggle in Russia, as an initial burst of patriotism inundated the proletariat. But the reactionary mood did not last too long. The horrors of the war spoke louder than all the priests and patriots. Russia was to see five and a half million soldiers killed, wounded or captured. Women slaved in munitions plants for pitiful wages while a "shower of gold" rained on war profiteers.

The February Revolution was triggered by a strike of mostly women textile workers in Petrograd (as St. Petersburg was renamed after Russia went to war with Germany) on International Women's Day, demanding increased war rations. Street clashes with the forces of "order" resulted in numerous casualties. But in the end, the tsar could find no loyal troops and was forced to abdicate. Soviets (councils) were immediately elected in the factories and army garrisons and at the front. In the provinces, police and state officials were arrested or sent packing. In the capital, the autocracy had been overthrown by the workers, but the government that emerged was a *bourgeois* government.

Trotsky remarked in his *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932) that the February Revolution represented the awakening of the peasant-based army. The first wave of army delegates elected to the soviets consisted heavily of literate petty bourgeois who largely supported the peasant-based Socialist-Revolutionaries (SRs). The war thus gave the SRs as well as the reformist Mensheviks, who represented urban petty-bourgeois layers as well as a section of the workers, a massive but historically accidental initial preponderance in the workers and soldiers soviets.

Even as street fighting was still raging in Petrograd in February, the Provisional Government was formed with the aim of erecting a constitutional monarchy. Meanwhile, within the soviets, the SR and Menshevik delegates, loyal to bourgeois republicanism, held the insurgent workers and peasants in

check and desperately appealed to the bourgeoisie to take political power. But the masses were hostile to the bourgeoisie and looked to the soviets. That made these organs, despite their treacherous leadership, the de facto power in the country. Thus the paradox of the February Revolution: the workers, many of them inspired by the Bolsheviks, carried out the revolution, yet the government that came out of it was bourgeois.

The February Revolution resulted in a situation of *dual power*. As Lenin described in "The Dual Power" (April 1917), "Alongside the Provisional Government, the government of the *bourgeoisie*, another government has arisen, so far weak and incipient, but undoubtedly a government that actually exists and is growing—the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies." This situation could not persist—one class or the other would have to rule.

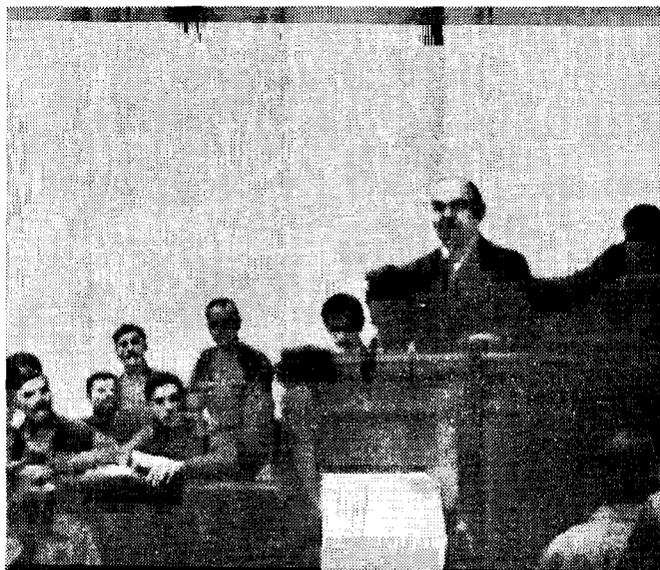
Lenin Rearms the Bolsheviks

Meanwhile, the Bolshevik Party, with Lenin still in exile in Switzerland, was being steered on a conciliationist course under J. V. Stalin and Lev Kamenev, who were veteran Bolsheviks. Taking over the Bolsheviks' central organ, *Pravda*, upon their return from Siberian exile in March 1917, Stalin and Kamenev used Lenin's old formula of the "democratic dictatorship" to trample on Lenin's uncompromising opposition to the liberal bourgeoisie. The 15 March issue of *Pravda*, the first to list Stalin and Kamenev as editors, came out for support to the bourgeois Provisional Government "in so far as it struggles against reaction and counterrevolution." Turning sharply against the Bolsheviks' revolutionary defeatism, *Pravda* declared to Russian soldiers that "every man must remain at his fighting post" and that "all 'defeatism,' or rather what an indiscriminating press protected by the tsarist censorship has branded with that name, died at the moment when the first revolutionary regiment appeared on the streets of Petrograd." *Pravda* also called for the merger of the Menshevik and Bolshevik parties.

In his report to a March 1917 Bolshevik party conference, Stalin sounded like the Menshevik Georgi Plekhanov denouncing the December 1905 Moscow insurrection for antagonizing the bourgeoisie. Stalin stated: "It is not to our advantage at present to force events, hastening the process of repelling the bourgeois layers, who will in the future inevitably withdraw from us. It is necessary for us to gain time by putting a brake on the splitting away of the middle-bourgeois layers" ("Draft Protocol of the March 1917 All-Russian Conference of Party Workers"). He also declared, "Insofar as the Provisional Government fortifies the steps of the revolution, to that extent we must support it; but insofar as it is counterrevolutionary, support to the Provisional Government is not permissible."

To the Mensheviks' offer of fusion raised at this conference, Stalin responded, "We must do it. It is necessary to define our proposal for a basis of union." The Menshevik and SR leaders were jubilant, but there were numerous protests from Bolshevik cadres. As the worker-Bolshevik Alexander Shlyapnikov, a Central Committee member, put it: "The indignation in the party locals was enormous, and when the proletarians found out that *Pravda* had been seized by three former editors arriving from Siberia they demanded their expulsion from the party" (quoted in Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*).

Lenin was reading *Pravda* with alarm. Even before he



P.I. Volkov

Lenin addressing Petrograd Soviet, April 1917.

returned from exile on April 3, he warned in his "Letters from Afar" that the Provisional Government was a bourgeois government and that the slightest support to it meant support of the imperialist war. When he finally arrived and gave his famous speech atop an armored car at the Finland Station, its effect on the Bolsheviks was electrifying. In the face of the official delegation of social-patriots sent to greet him, he spoke in honor of the German revolutionary Marxist leader Karl Liebknecht, who had been imprisoned for his opposition to the war and had denounced those "socialists" who supported their own bourgeoisies as guilty of class treason. For Lenin, any support to the Provisional Government was a *split issue*.

In his "April Theses," Lenin explained that it was only "owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organization of the proletariat" that power had been allowed to pass into the hands of the bourgeoisie at this stage ("The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution," April 1917). "The country is *passing* from the first stage of the revolution," wrote Lenin, "to its *second* stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants." When *Pravda* published Lenin's "Theses" on April 7, not a single other Central Committee member signed them.

In a rejoinder published in the next day's *Pravda*, Kamenev used much the same language to denounce Lenin's "April Theses" that the Stalinists would later use against Trotsky's permanent revolution: "As for Comrade Lenin's general scheme, it appears to us unacceptable, inasmuch as it proceeds from the assumption that the bourgeois-democratic revolution is *completed*, and builds on the immediate transformation of this revolution into a socialist revolution." Quoting Kamenev's statement, Lenin replied in "Letters on Tactics" (April 1917):

"After the [February] revolution, the power is in the hands of a *different* class, a new class, namely, the *bourgeoisie*....

"To this extent, the bourgeois, or the bourgeois-democratic, revolution in Russia is *completed*.

"But at this point we hear a clamour of protest from people who readily call themselves 'old Bolsheviks.' Didn't we always maintain, they say, that the bourgeois-democratic revolution is completed only by the 'revolutionary-democratic dic-

tatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry'?..."

"My answer is: The Bolshevik slogans and ideas *on the whole* have been confirmed by history; but *concretely* things have worked out *differently*...."

"The person who *now* speaks only of a 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' is behind the times, consequently, he has in effect *gone over* to the petty bourgeoisie against the proletarian class struggle; that person should be consigned to the archive of 'Bolshevik' pre-revolutionary antiques."

Stalin receded into the shadows, confining his criticism of the "April Theses" to their "impracticality" while quietly siding with the conciliators. Kamenev, later joined by Zinoviev, led the charge against Lenin, right up to their open strikebreaking against the revolution when they publicly denounced Bolshevik plans for an insurrection on the eve of October.

Lenin concluded in an article written after he won a majority of the Bolshevik All-Russian Conference in April to his side: "Only assumption of power by the proletariat, backed by the semi-proletarians, can give the country a really strong and really revolutionary government" ("A Strong Revolutionary Government," May 1917). Lenin had in effect adopted the program of Trotsky's permanent revolution.

Trotsky and Lenin Reunite

At the same time, Trotsky had come to recognize the correctness of Lenin's bitter struggle from 1903 on to build a disciplined, programmatically solid vanguard party. In the period before the 1903 split between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks at the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) Second Congress, Trotsky had earned the nickname of "Lenin's cudgel." But in 1903, Trotsky balked at Lenin's insistence on a hard party of professional revolutionaries. However, he also opposed the Mensheviks' orientation to the liberal bourgeoisie.

Trotsky declared himself to be outside both factions. He worked closely with the Bolsheviks in the 1905 Revolution, but in the years that followed, his attempts to unify all factions cut against Lenin's fights to sharply differentiate revolutionaries from opportunists and inevitably led Trotsky into episodic rotten blocs against the Bolsheviks. This came to a head in 1912, after the Bolsheviks' final split with the Menshevik faction, when they constituted themselves as a separate party. In August 1912 Trotsky took the lead in organizing a conference with "pro-party" Mensheviks in Vienna—what became infamous as the "August Bloc"—which sought to reverse the split.

Once the February Revolution had taken care of tsarism and brought the supposedly "democratic" bourgeoisie to power, the

majority of the Menshevik leadership joined the bulk of the Second International in adopting a line of "defensism" toward its "own" ruling class. Under the impact of the war and Lenin's scathing polemics against his conciliationist efforts, Trotsky was increasingly drawn toward Lenin's insistence on a complete break with opportunism.

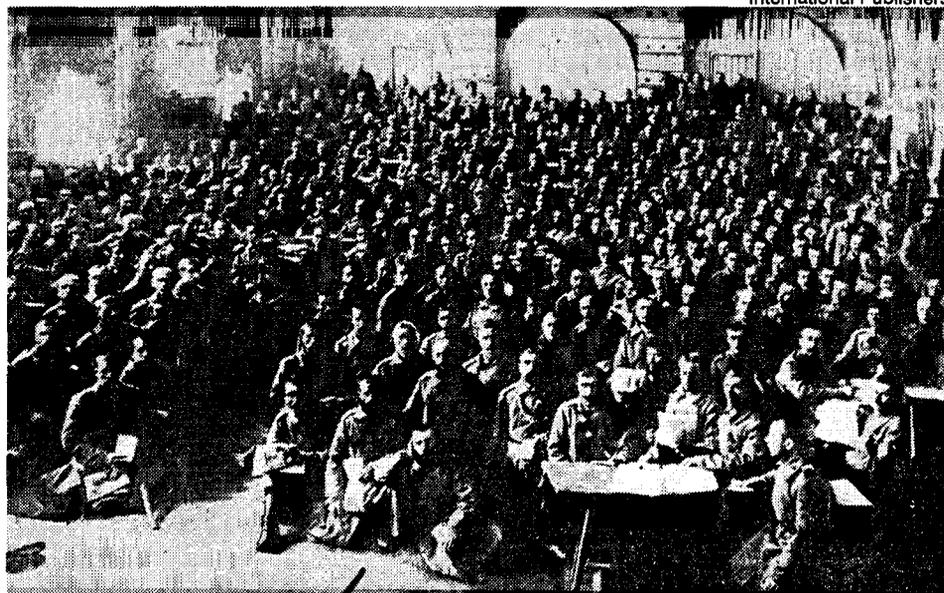
Thus in 1917, Trotsky and Lenin were in agreement on the decisive questions of the party and the class character of the revolution. Upon his return from exile on May 4, Trotsky did not immediately join the Bolsheviks but worked with them while in the leftward-moving *Mezhrayontsi* (Inter-Borough) organization, which he steered toward fusion with the Bolsheviks. The fusion was consummated at the Bolsheviks' Sixth Congress which began in late July. As Lenin later acknowledged, once Trotsky had recognized the impossibility of unification with the Mensheviks, "from that time on there has been no better Bolshevik" (quoted in Trotsky, *The Stalin School of Falsification* [1937]).

Throughout the events of 1917, Lenin pounded on the need for a proletarian seizure of state power. After the first Provisional Government was brought down in a firestorm of outrage over its pledge to continue the hated imperialist war, a new government was formed in early May. SR and Menshevik leaders formally accepted ministerial portfolios. Lenin explained that the Russian bourgeoisie had "resorted to a method which for many decades, ever since 1848, has been practised by the capitalists of other countries in order to

Right: Provisional Government cabinet of ministers including Prince Lvov (bottom left), Alexander Kerensky (bottom, third from left) and Pavel Miliukov (bottom, second from right). Below: First session of Moscow Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, February 1917.



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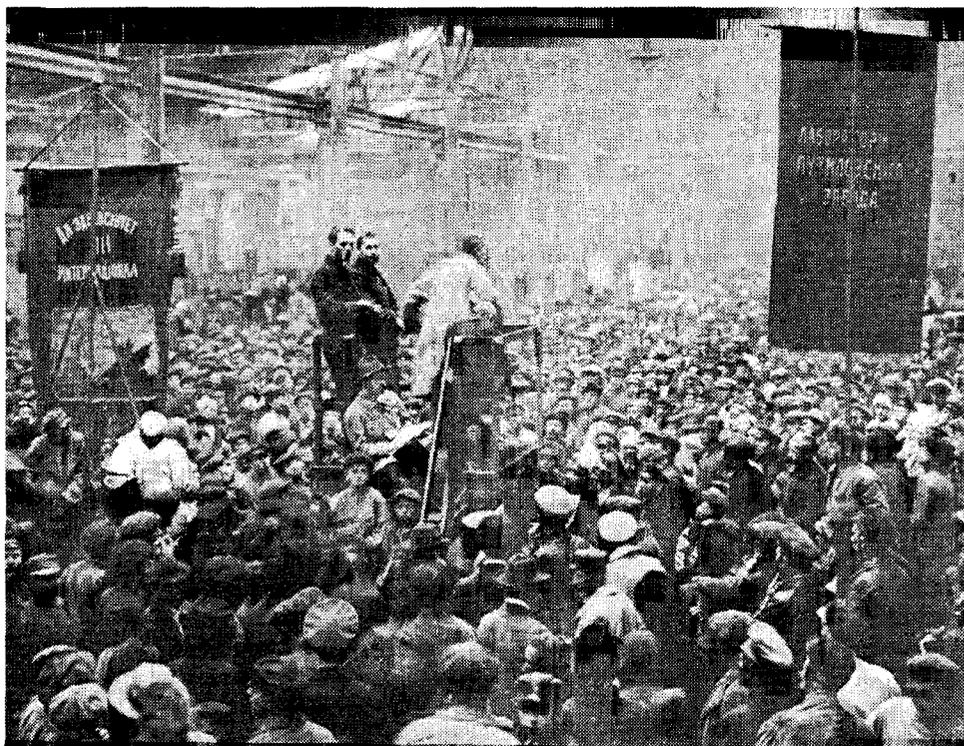
fool, divide and weaken the workers. This method is known as a 'coalition' government, i.e., a joint cabinet formed of members of the bourgeoisie and turncoats from socialism." He went on:

"The simpletons of the Socialist-Revolutionary and Menshevik parties were jubilant and fatuously bathed in the rays of the ministerial glory of their leaders. The capitalists gleefully rubbed their hands at having found helpers against the people in the persons of the 'leaders of the Soviets' and at having secured their promise to support 'offensive operations at the front,' i.e., a resumption of the imperialist predatory war, which had come to a standstill for a while."

—"Lessons of the Revolution" (August 1917)

In his classic work *The State and Revolution* (September 1917), Lenin retrieved the writings of Marx and Engels on the question of the state from under a mountain of social-democratic obfuscation. Pointing to the key lesson Marx drew from the experience of the 1871 Paris Commune, when the Parisian proletariat held power for nearly three months before being bloodily crushed, Lenin cited Marx's statement in *The Civil War in France* (1871) that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes." Lenin explained: "Marx's idea is that the working class must *break up, smash* the 'ready-made state machinery,' and not confine itself merely to laying hold of it."

Lenin revived Marx's understanding that the proletariat cannot maintain an alliance with, let alone lead, the peasantry unless the workers wield *state power*: "The proletariat needs state power, a centralised organisation of force, an organisation of violence, both to crush the resistance of the exploiters and to *lead* the enormous mass of the population—the peasants, the petty bourgeoisie, and semi-proletarians—in the work of organising a socialist economy."



Workers at Petrograd's Putilov metal works, a bastion of Soviet power during Bolshevik Revolution. Banner at left proclaims: "Long Live the Third International."

Having already dropped his earlier formula of a "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry," Lenin explicitly asserted that the state could not represent two different classes:

"The essence of Marx's theory of the state has been mastered only by those who realise that the dictatorship of a *single* class is necessary not only for every class society in general, not only for the *proletariat* which has overthrown the bourgeoisie, but also for the entire *historical period* which separates capitalism from 'classless society,' from communism. Bourgeois states are most varied in form, but their essence is the same: all these states, whatever their form, in the final analysis are inevitably the *dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*. The transition from capitalism to communism is certainly bound to yield a tremendous abundance and variety of political forms, but the essence will inevitably be the same: *the dictatorship of the proletariat*."

When the Bolsheviks led the proletariat to power in October 1917, they gave flesh and blood to the Marxist understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Comintern and the Colonial Revolution

The October Revolution had an electrifying effect internationally. It was felt most immediately among the workers of the other warring European powers, especially Germany. But the tidal wave it set off reached far beyond Europe, including throughout the colonial world.

Prominent among those drawn to the banner of Communism were students and other intellectuals who wanted to overcome profound social oppression, autocratic government and subservience to imperialism in their own countries and had become disillusioned in the capacity of their own weak, corrupt bourgeoisies to achieve anything resembling the Great French Revolution of 1789-93. But the early Communist International (CI) was still breaking new ground when it addressed the question of the relationship of Communist parties in the colonial world to bourgeois-nationalist movements. The Bolsheviks expected workers revolution in the imperialist centers to by and large resolve the colonial question.

The Comintern's early work on the national and colonial question was largely aimed at drawing a hard programmatic line between the Communists and the chauvinist cesspool of the Second International. Before World War I, there had been a spread of attitudes on the colonial question within the Second International. On the left wing were many who solidarized with the colonial victims of their "own" rulers. But these Kautskyan "parties of the whole class" also included right-wing elements who championed the "civilizing" mission of imperialism (and were sometimes openly racist toward "lesser" peoples overseas and at home). Once the war broke out, the pro-war Socialist leaders acted as recruiters



Muravei-Guide

Group of delegates to Fourth Comintern Congress, 1922. Nikolai Bukharin is leaning against Gregory Zinoviev at lower right; CCP leader Chen Duxiu is in middle of photo, above and to left of Zinoviev.

for the imperialists' efforts to defend and extend their colonial empires.

Lenin drew the sharpest line against such social-chauvinism. He insisted, "Repudiation of the right to self-determination, i.e., the right of nations to secede, means nothing more than defence of the privileges of the dominant nation" ("The Right of Nations to Self-Determination," 1914). A working class in bloc with its own rulers against oppressed nations and the colonial masses would never make a socialist revolution.

The "21 Conditions" adopted at the Second CI Congress in 1920 demanded that the Communist parties in the imperialist countries support "every liberation movement in the colonies not only in words but in deeds" and carry out "systematic propaganda among their own country's troops against any oppression of colonial peoples." At the same time, the Second Congress "Theses on the National and Colonial Questions" warned against subordinating the colonial proletariat to the bourgeoisie, stating: "The Communist International must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement, even if it is in its most embryonic form."

The Second Congress had not yet assimilated the significance of the changes wrought by the world war. Before 1914 there had been virtually no industrial development in the colonial and semicolonial countries, whose economies were built around agriculture and the extraction of raw materials for the benefit of the imperialist powers. But with the disruption of international trade and the emphasis on war production in the belligerent powers, countries such as China and India experienced substantial industrial growth and the rapid development of a militant, young proletariat. The war choked off the supply of consumer goods and capital from the West European powers, giving a powerful impetus to local capitalist industry.

Unlike India, China was not an outright colony. The Chinese Revolution of 1911, led by Sun Yat-sen's bourgeois-

nationalist movement, had overthrown the decrepit Qing (Manchu) dynasty, which was beholden to the imperialist powers. However, the country was soon riven by warlordism and remained prostrate before the Western and Japanese imperialists, chopped up into "spheres of influence." On the other hand, by 1919 there were some 1.5 million industrial workers, concentrated in large enterprises in a few urban centers (see "The Origins of Chinese Trotskyism," *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 53, Summer 1997). These changes gave the Chinese proletariat great potential social power; however, by themselves they did not answer the question of whether this proletariat, a tiny minority in a country of extreme social backwardness, could become politically conscious and contest for state power. By the time this

question was posed pointblank in 1925-27, the Comintern had begun its qualitative degeneration.

The "Anti-Imperialist United Front"

At its Fourth Congress in November-December 1922, the CI introduced the slogan of an "anti-imperialist united front" in its "Theses on the Eastern Question." This went beyond the correct consideration of *common actions* against imperialism with bourgeois forces in the colonial and semicolonial world and mooted a *political bloc* with such forces on the basis of a minimum program of democratic demands.

While remaining critical of the colonial bourgeoisie, the Theses were ambiguous on the key question of the proletariat's relationship to it: "The proletariat supports and advances such partial demands as an independent democratic republic, the abolition of all feudal rights and privileges, the introduction of women's rights, etc., in so far as it cannot, with the relation of forces as it exists at present, make the implementation of its soviet programme the immediate task of the day." Implicitly the Theses posed a Menshevik, "two-stage" program for the colonial revolution, with the first stage being a democratic struggle against imperialism.

Though the Theses were vague about the work of Communist sections in the backward countries, the Congress delegate from the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), Tan Malaka, openly defended his party's prior entry into the bourgeois-nationalist Islamic League (Sarekat Islam). The PKI's practice clearly ran counter to the Second Congress insistence on the political independence of the proletariat from the bourgeois nationalists. And where the Second Congress had stressed "the need to combat Pan-Islamism and similar trends, which strive to combine the liberation movement against European and American imperialism with an attempt to strengthen the positions of the khans, landowners, and mullahs, etc.," the Fourth Congress Theses instead neutrally asserted, "As the national liberation movements grow and mature, the religious-political slogans of pan-Islamism will be replaced by political demands."



Imperial War Museum

Leon Trotsky, then Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs, with Adolf Joffe arriving at January 1918 Brest-Litovsk talks with Germany.

Well before the Fourth Congress, CI chairman Gregory Zinoviev had declared at the First Congress of the Toilers of the Far East that a “division of the program of the Communist Parties into a minimum program and maximum program...must be considered valid in the immediate future particularly for the countries of the Far East, to the extent that the next stage of development of these countries is the democratic overturn and the independent—political and economic—class organization of the proletariat” (“Theses on the Tasks of Communists in the Far East,” January 1922).

When Bolshevik Central Committee member and future Left Oppositionist A. A. Joffe was commissioned as the head of a Soviet diplomatic mission to negotiate with Sun Yat-sen’s Guomindang (Nationalist Party—GMD), he sought to hew to the principled stance adopted at the Second Congress as against the policies then being pushed by the emissary of the CI’s Executive Committee (ECCI) in China. In a 22 July 1922 letter to the Russian Communist Party Politburo, Joffe asserted:

“Our policy in China, as throughout the world, must above all else pursue the goals of world proletarian revolution.... In internal Chinese politics, conduct a line for the national liberation and unification of China and the creation of a united, truly independent and free-democratic (soviet?) Chinese republic.... Support the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) even more [than Sun Yat-sen], not fearing its open closeness with the Embassy. Irrespective of the weakness of this party, to regard its *complete independence* as necessary, and the efforts of certain agents of the CI ECCI to fuse this party organization with the party of Sun Yat-sen as *completely incorrect*.”

—translated from *Bol'shevistskoe rukovodstvo, Perepiska* [Bolshevik Leadership, Correspondence], 1912-1927 (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1996)

The ECCI agent to whom Joffe referred was G. Maring (Henricus Sneevliet), a Dutch Communist who had engineered the PKI’s entry into Sarekat Islam. In August 1922, Maring strong-armed the young CCP into a partial entry into the GMD. Maring was supported by the ECCI. Lacking an alternative to Maring’s course, and in an effort to pressure Sun Yat-sen to act against the imperialists in China, Joffe signed a January 1923 “non-aggression pact” with the GMD that foreswore attempts to introduce communism into China. That August, a Politburo motion by Stalin assigning Mikhail Borodin as Political Adviser to Sun stated: “To instruct com-

rade Borodin in his work with Sun Yat-sen to be guided by the interests of the national liberation movement in China, *and not at all be distracted by aims of planting communism in China*” (emphasis added). Stalin got his way. At its third national conference that year, the CCP voted to turn the partial entry into a full entry and resolved that the “GMD should be the central force of the national revolution and should assume its leadership.”

By the time of the Fourth Congress of the CI, Lenin was increasingly sidelined by illness, and an anti-Trotsky “Troika” (triumvirate) of Stalin, Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev coalesced and came to the fore in the Soviet Communist Party and the CI. All five members of the CCP Central Committee had initially *opposed* entry into the GMD. Their objections should have been fully discussed and debated inside the Comintern. But these differences were kept secret from opponents of the bureaucratic clique then congealing at the top of the Soviet state and Comintern.

Even so, Trotsky opposed the Troika’s line on entry into the GMD when it came up for a vote in the Politburo in 1923 and thereafter. While Trotsky kept his overt opposition to the Troika within the Politburo, he at the same time distinguished himself publicly by warning the Communists of the East against blending their programs into the nationalism of parties like the GMD. He opposed the concept of two-class “worker-peasant” or “farmer-labor” parties promoted by Zinoviev and Stalin for the U.S., Poland and other countries—to disastrous effect—and insisted that the Guomindang was a bourgeois party.

“Socialism in One Country”: A “Theory” of Betrayal

When Lenin recovered from a stroke in the fall of 1922, he was horrified to learn that the pressures of the growing bureaucratic layer in the Soviet state and party were finding increasing expression within the Politburo. He collaborated with Trotsky to beat back a proposal pushed by Stalin and others to weaken the state monopoly of foreign trade—a crucial bulwark of the collectivized economy. Lenin later resolved to consummate a bloc with Trotsky to have Stalin removed as General Secretary at the 12th Party Congress in April 1923, in no small part due to an abusive policy pursued by Stalin and his cohorts toward non-Russian nationalities in the Caucasus that smacked of Great Russian chauvinism. But Lenin was again struck down by illness in March 1923, after which Trotsky pulled back from a sharp fight. With the Troika in charge, the 12th Congress made a special agenda point to welcome into its ranks the old Economist and Menshevik, Alexander Martynov.

Martynov would become central to the Troika’s fight against Trotsky over China. It was Martynov, for instance, who coined the characterization of the GMD as a “bloc of four classes” (workers, peasants, petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie), which was used to justify the CCP’s liquidation into that bourgeois-nationalist party. As Trotsky later noted in “Who Is Leading the Comintern Today?” (September 1928):

“Martynov not only wormed his way into the party, but he became one of the chief sources of ‘inspiration’ in the Comintern.... They have come closer to him and they have stooped to him—solely because of his struggle against ‘Trotskyism.’ For this he did not need reeducation. He simply continued to fight ‘permanent revolution’ just as he had done for the previous twenty years.”

A few months after the 12th Party Congress came the defeat of the 1923 revolution in Germany, which had enormous worldwide consequences. The failure in Germany was due to the incapacity of the Communist International under Zinoviev and the lack of a sufficiently steered Communist Party in Germany: the German KPD adapted to the Social Democracy and, in October, even entered Social Democratic-led regional *bourgeois* governments (see "Rearming Bolshevism: A Trotskyist Critique of Germany 1923 and the Comintern" on page 30). The postwar revolutionary wave, already receding by 1921, was stopped and the global bourgeois order stabilized. In Soviet Russia, the workers had been intensely following the course of the German workers revolution. Its defeat had a huge demoralizing effect on Soviet workers, prolonging the isolation of the workers

state and helping pave the way for the usurpation of political power from the proletariat by the nascent Soviet bureaucracy.

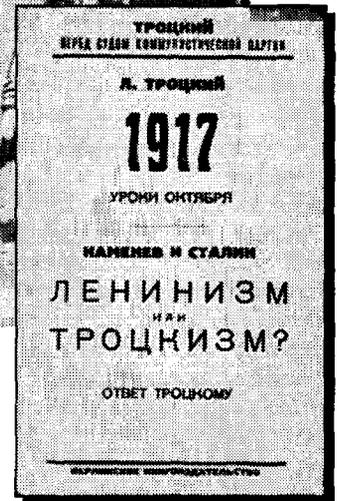
The elections to the January 1924 13th Party Conference were rigged to allow only three representatives of the loose grouping of oppositionists associated with Trotsky, despite their broad support in the urban centers and in the Red Army. "Trotskyism" was condemned as a heresy antithetical to Leninism. Lenin died on January 21, the day after he learned the outcome of the Conference. After January 1924, the people who ruled the USSR, the way the USSR was ruled and the purposes for which the USSR was ruled had all changed. In the fall of 1924, Stalin generalized the conservative bureaucracy's aversion to the proletarian, revolutionary, internationalist program of the October Revolution with his "theory" that socialism—a society based on a qualitatively higher level of productivity, in which classes have disappeared and the state has withered away—can be built in a single country, and in economically devastated Russia at that.

"Socialism in one country" was a program of retreat and a false promise of the stability for which Soviet society ached after years of war, revolution and privation. It crystallized the mood of conservatism that affected not only the Soviet party but the young Communist parties of the West in the face of the restabilization of world capitalism. It flew in the face of the theory and practice of not only Lenin and the Bolshevik Party but of Marx and Engels, who had always been explicit that socialism would prevail only as a world system.

"Socialism in one country" was the banner under which countless revolutionary opportunities were betrayed by the Stalinists. But the transformation of the CI from an instrument for world socialist revolution into an agency for diplomatic maneuvers did not happen overnight. During the 1920s, first Zinoviev and later Stalin experimented with various coalitions with bourgeois forces, eventually leading to the murderous sabotage of the Second Chinese Revolution of 1925-27. By 1933, Stalin's Comintern could not be awakened by what Trotsky called "the thunderbolt of Fascism"—



Wide World
J.V. Stalin, Alexei Rykov, Lev Kamenev and Zinoviev in Moscow, 1925. Inset: Pamphlet titled *Trotsky Before the Court of the Communist Party* includes Trotsky's 1924 *Lessons of October* and speeches by Kamenev and Stalin titled "Leninism or Trotskyism?"



the victory of Hitler's Nazis without a shot being fired by the powerful German workers movement. When this catastrophe, brought about directly by Stalin's policy, did not give rise to outrage inside the ranks of the Third International, nor even any significant internal dissent, Trotsky concluded that the CI had proved itself utterly dead as a force for revolution. By 1935 it had explicitly codified a program of class collaboration (the Popular Front) and played an aggressive counter-revolutionary role in the Spanish Civil War in order to prop up bourgeois rule. The Stalinized Comintern was indeed, as Trotsky described it, "the great organizer of defeats."

ICL Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program

The Declaration of Principles of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) is a concrete expression of our purpose: to build national sections of a democratic-centralist international which can lead the struggle for worldwide socialist revolution. This important document, which was adopted at the Third International Conference of the ICL in early 1998, was published in the four language editions of *Spartacist* and additionally in ten other languages.

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PART THREE

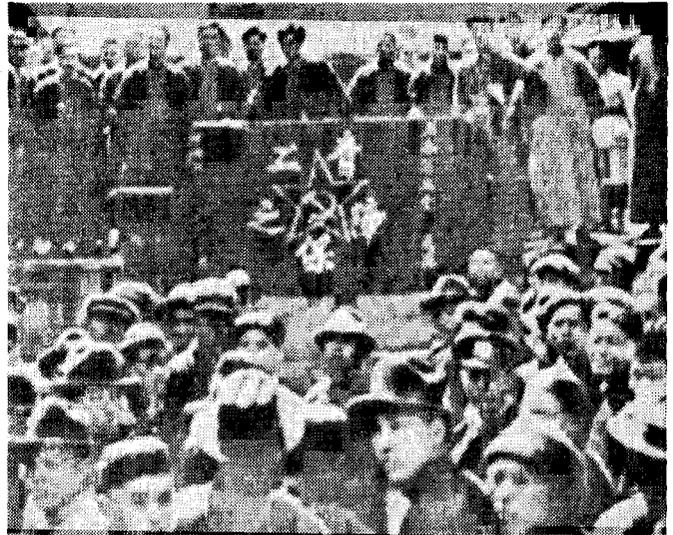
It was in the wake of the catastrophic defeat of the Second Chinese Revolution of 1925-27 that Leon Trotsky generalized his theory and perspective of permanent revolution, which had been borne out by the Russian October Revolution of 1917, to other countries of belated capitalist development. In the period between 1923 and 1925, the Chinese proletariat had not yet emerged as a contender for power. At this time, Trotsky correctly stood for Soviet military aid to the bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang (GMD) and for a military bloc between the GMD and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) against the warlords, who were agents of one imperialist power or another. His prognosis for colonial revolutions in this period still had the tentative quality of the 1920 Communist International (CI) Second Congress "Theses on the National and Colonial Question," which did not exclude the possibility of a radical bourgeois regime arising for a time in China.

Even as he warned the embryonic Communist movements of the East against adapting to nationalism, Trotsky stated, "There is no doubt that if the Chinese Guomindang party manages to unify China under a national-democratic regime then the capitalist development of China will go ahead with seven-mile strides" ("Perspectives and Tasks in the East," April 1924, reprinted under the headline "Communism and Women of the East" in *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 60, Autumn 2007). But in contrast to the Troika of J. V. Stalin, Lev Kamenev and Gregory Zinoviev that stood at the head of the Soviet Communist Party and the CI, Trotsky opposed the CCP's entry into the Guomindang. He insisted that the Chinese Communists maintain their independence and not merge political banners with the bourgeois nationalists.

The Second Chinese Revolution began with the Shanghai Incident of 30 May 1925, when British troops fired into a demonstration protesting repression against strikers, killing 12. In response, a general strike was called in Shanghai, which quickly spread. British goods were boycotted and Chinese longshoremen in Hong Kong bottled up the port. The GMD drove out the local warlord in Canton, but the growing general strike made a clash between the Chinese bourgeoisie and the proletariat inevitable. In 1925, up to a million workers participated in strikes, many of them directly political in nature. Two years later, Chinese unions counted three million members.

Sun Yat-sen, the founder of Chinese nationalism, had died in 1925. His successor, General Chiang Kai-shek, launched a coup in Canton in March 1926 to crush the proletariat and roll back the CCP's positions within the GMD. In May, Chiang ordered the CCP to turn over a list of its members in the GMD. Key CCP leaders renewed their calls for the party to exit the GMD. But the CI representative, Mikhail Borodin, declared that Communists should do "coolie service" for the GMD and this nationalist party was even admitted to the Comintern as a "sympathizing" section. Only Trotsky voted against this, in the Russian Politburo. The "two-stage revolution" propounded for China by Stalin's Comintern was a rehash of the Mensheviks' servile position in 1917 when they supported, and then entered, the bourgeois Provisional Government—with the added twist that the CCP was liquidated wholesale into the bourgeois Guomindang.

The decisive political events took place the following year in Shanghai. As Chiang's army approached in March, over



Kelley & Walsh

Public meeting of Shanghai General Union during workers' takeover of city, Spring 1927.

500,000 workers staged a general strike, which turned into an insurrection. The workers stormed the police stations and drove the warlords out of the city. The proletariat had Shanghai in its hands, but Stalin ordered the CCP to give Chiang a triumphant welcome as he entered the city on March 26. Two days later Chiang declared martial law. On March 31, as these events were unfolding, Trotsky demanded that the CCP organize soviets and initiate a revolutionary struggle for power. But that same day Stalin & Co. ordered the CCP to hide its weapons. Stalin had ordered a surrender, and Chiang would take no prisoners.

On April 12, Chiang staged a massive coup—tens of thousands of Communists and trade unionists were slaughtered. The Comintern then turned to the Guomindang's "left" faction based in Wuhan and had the CCP enter a coalition government there. But the "left" GMD quickly turned its guns on the CCP and reunited with Chiang.

Faced with Trotsky's scathing criticisms of Stalin's conciliatory policies, as the 15th Congress of the Russian Communist Party opened in December 1927, Stalin cynically called an uprising in Canton. Having fought against Trotsky's call to form soviets at the height of the proletarian upsurge, Stalin now attempted to conjure up a Canton "soviet" out of thin air. The Communist workers, despite their heroic efforts, never had a chance. After the massive defeat in Shanghai, the bulk of the working masses remained passive. The Canton Commune added an estimated 5,700 fatalities to the terrible toll of 1927.

The defeat of the Second Chinese Revolution had a profound impact on the CCP. Retreating to the countryside, the party turned away from the proletariat, transforming itself into a peasant party both in composition and political outlook. When the 1949 Chinese Revolution overthrew capitalist rule, it did so under the leadership of a Stalinized, peasant-based party that established a bureaucratically deformed workers state, in which the proletariat was excluded from political power.

Permanent Revolution and the Joint Opposition

A political assessment of the catastrophic defeat of the 1925-27 Chinese Revolution was indispensable, and it was carried out by Trotsky. From March 1926 on, his attention

had been focused on China. When he submitted a report to the Politburo on military-diplomatic dangers in the Far East that month, he again proposed that the CCP leave the Guomintang instantly. As noted by the Marxist historian Isaac Deutscher in *The Prophet Unarmed* (1959), Trotsky held that “it was the diplomat’s business to make deals with existing bourgeois governments—even with old-time warlords; but it was the revolutionaries’ job to overthrow them.” This was a declaration of war by Trotsky, the beginning of his direct intervention into Comintern policies in China.

In September 1926, Trotsky argued in “The Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang”:

“The petty bourgeoisie, by itself, however numerous it may be, cannot decide the main line of revolutionary policy. The differentiation of the political struggle along class lines, the sharp divergence between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, implies a struggle between them for influence over the petty bourgeoisie, and it implies the vacillation of the petty bourgeoisie between the merchants, on the one hand, and the workers and communists, on the other.”

Up until that year, Trotsky had sought to evade the bureaucracy’s charge that the theory of permanent revolution was his original sin against Leninism. But now the question of permanent revolution vs. the Menshevik/Stalinist dogma of “two-stage” revolution posed the very fate of the Chinese proletariat. As Trotsky would write in a footnote in *The Permanent Revolution* (1930): “I found myself compelled to return to this question only at the moment when the epigones’ criticism of the theory of the permanent revolution not only began to nurture theoretical reaction in the whole International, but also became converted into a means of direct sabotage of the Chinese Revolution.”

For most of the period when the dispute over China raged, Trotsky’s Left Opposition was in a political bloc with the Leningrad-based opposition of Zinoviev, who, along with Kamenev, had fallen out with Stalin in late 1925. In “A Critical Balance Sheet: Trotsky and the Russian Left Opposition” (*Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 56, Spring 2001) we observed: “Trotsky and Zinoviev-Kamenev shared a theoretical opposition to ‘socialism in one country’ and an opposition to the pro-peasant economic policies of the Stalin/Bukharin bloc. But they differed on the concretes of Comintern policy.”

Within this Joint Opposition there were significant differences over China. Zinoviev had been the chairman of the Comintern until he was removed in October 1926 and thus had heavy responsibility for its early policy in China, including the decision to enter the Guomintang. The Zinovievites opposed the demand raised by Trotsky that the CCP leave the GMD, even after the latter had begun openly carrying out counterrevolutionary policies. And the public line of the Joint Opposition was that of the Zinovievites.

In early 1927, as part of his accommodation with Zinoviev, Trotsky supported the call for a “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry,” a slogan he had rejected

two decades earlier in the Russian context. Likewise, the September 1927 platform of the Joint Opposition declared: “Trotsky has stated to the International that on all the fundamental questions over which he had differences with Lenin, Lenin was right—in particular on the questions of the permanent revolution and the peasantry.” And by the time the Joint Opposition publicly called for the CCP to leave the Guomintang in the fall of 1927, the question was moot, as all wings of the GMD had turned on the Communists.

It was not until September 1927 that Trotsky unambiguously asserted: “The Chinese revolution at its new stage will win as a dictatorship of the proletariat, or it will not win at all” (“New Opportunities for the Chinese Revolution”). In a 1928 letter to Left Oppositionist Evgeny Preobrazhensky, Trotsky acknowledged:

“From April to May 1927 I supported the slogan of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry for China (more correctly, I went along with this slogan) inasmuch as the social forces had not as yet rendered their political verdict, although the situation in China was immeasurably less propitious for this slogan than in Russia. After this verdict was rendered by a gigantic historical action (the experience of Wuhan) the slogan of the democratic dictatorship became a reactionary force and will lead inevitably either to opportunism or adventurism.” (our translation)

Trotsky summed up a cardinal political lesson of the defeat of the Second Chinese Revolution in “The Political Situation in China and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Leninist Opposition” (June 1929):

“Never and under no circumstances may the party of the proletariat enter into a party of another class or merge with it organizationally. An absolutely independent party of the proletariat is a first and decisive condition for communist politics.”

Zinoviev and Kamenev capitulated to Stalin at the December 1927 15th Party Congress. Some 1,500 Oppositionists were soon expelled and allowed re-entry only on condition of denouncing permanent revolution. This Congress marked the end of the Joint Opposition and sent shock waves into the Left Opposition itself, some of whose members reconciled themselves to the nationalist dogma of “socialism in one country.” Preobrazhensky declared, “We, the old Bolsheviks



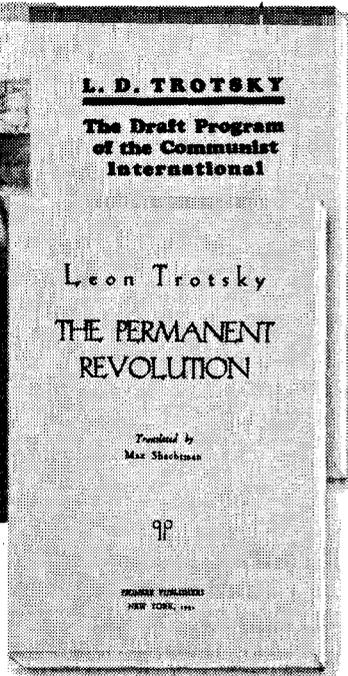
Basil Blackwell Inc.

Trotskyist Left Oppositionists in Siberian exile demonstrate on anniversary of October Revolution, 1928. Banner on left reads: “Turn the Fire to the Right—Against the Kulak, Nepman and Bureaucrat.”



Crapouillot

1928: Leon Trotsky with Natalya Sedova and son Leon Sedov in exile in Alma Ata, where Trotsky wrote his critique of the draft program of the Comintern and started work on *The Permanent Revolution*.



in opposition, must dissociate ourselves from Trotsky on the point of permanent revolution" (quoted in Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*).

Trotsky Rearms

In rising to the unprecedented challenge of fighting against the bureaucratic usurpation in the Soviet Union and its catastrophic consequences in China, Trotsky had to grow as a Leninist party leader. A letter left for Trotsky by Adolf Joffe upon his suicide played a key role in stiffening Trotsky's resolve in the struggle to forge the International Left Opposition. (The Stalinists had denied Joffe permission to travel abroad to seek medical treatment.) In his 16 November 1927 letter, Joffe asserted:

"I have always believed that you lacked Lenin's *unbending will*, his *unwillingness to yield*, his readiness even to remain alone on the path that he thought right in the anticipation of a future majority.... *Politically you were always right*, beginning with 1905, and I told you repeatedly that with my own ears I had heard Lenin admit that even in 1905, *you, and not he*, were right....

"But you have often *abandoned your rightness* for the sake of an overvalued agreement or compromise. This is a mistake."

In his dying words, Joffe confirmed that Lenin had explicitly acknowledged the correctness of the theory of permanent revolution advanced by Trotsky for Russia in 1905. Joffe wrote this just as Trotsky grasped the global validity of permanent revolution. Once and for all Trotsky absorbed Lenin's "policy of irreconcilable ideological demarcation and, when necessary, split, for the purpose of welding and tempering the core of the truly revolutionary party," as he put it in *The Permanent Revolution*, which was framed as a polemic against Karl Radek, one of the former Oppositionists who had capitulated to Stalin.

The programmatic founding document of the international Trotskyist movement was Trotsky's "The Draft Program of the Communist International—A Criticism of Fundamentals" (published in English in *The Third International After Lenin*), a critique of the Stalin/Bukharin draft program submitted to the Sixth CI Congress in 1928. Trotsky sharply drew the

lessons of the defeat of the Second Chinese Revolution, linking the fight against the bureaucratic degeneration of the Russian Revolution with the defense of permanent revolution as the core of the program for the colonial and semicolonial world. He branded the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" slogan a "noose for the proletariat" and emphatically affirmed that permanent revolution had "been completely verified and proven: in theory, by the works of Marx and Lenin; in practice, by the experience of the October Revolution."

In "Summary and Perspectives of the Chinese Revolution" (also included in *The Third International After Lenin*), Trotsky noted that in the brief time that Communist workers held power in Canton, their program included

workers control of production, nationalization of large industry, the banks and transportation, "and even the confiscation of bourgeois dwellings and all bourgeois property for the benefit of the toilers." He asked: "If these are the methods of a bourgeois revolution then what should the proletarian revolution in China look like?"

Trotsky explained permanent revolution as the *antithesis* of "socialism in one country":

"It is precisely here that we come up against the two mutually exclusive standpoints: the international revolutionary theory of the permanent revolution and the national reformist theory of socialism in one country. Not only backward China, but in general no country in the world can build socialism within its own national limits."

—*The Permanent Revolution*

In his November 1929 introduction to the first Russian edition of *The Permanent Revolution*, Trotsky noted, "The socialist revolution begins on national foundations—but it cannot be completed within these foundations. The maintenance of the proletarian revolution within a national framework can only be a provisional state of affairs, even though, as the experience of the Soviet Union shows, one of long duration. In an isolated proletarian dictatorship, the internal and external contradictions grow inevitably along with the successes achieved. If it remains isolated, the proletarian state must finally fall victim to these contradictions."

Hundreds of young



RGASPI

Chen Duxlu, Chinese Communist Party founding leader, in 1922.



Winstar



no credit

Left: Workers take over Shanghai as Chiang Kai-shek's forces approach city, 1927. Right: Tens of thousands were massacred following Chiang's 12 April 1927 coup in Shanghai.

CCP cadre studying in Moscow were won to the Left Opposition. But it was not until after the beheading of the proletariat in April 1927 that CCP leaders in China like Chen Duxiu learned of Trotsky's fight. By then Chen, the founding leader of Chinese Communism, had been made the scapegoat for the bloody disaster Stalin's class collaborationism had wrought. Though isolated, Chen still had many defenders among the top party cadre, who shared his view that liquidation into the Guomindang had been behind the defeat. They had heard of factional fights in the Russian party but had no idea what they were about. When they finally read Trotsky's critique of the Stalinist betrayal in China, Chen and many others were won to Trotskyism. While Chen had implemented the Comintern's disastrous line, he had thought through his mistakes, which made him a better communist.

Many Chinese Trotskyists were killed by Stalin's regime. By the late 1930s, to consolidate his position atop the bureaucracy that had usurped control of the Soviet party and state, Stalin had murdered or otherwise eliminated virtually every one of the surviving "old Bolshevik" cadres.

In China, the Trotskyists sought to maintain roots within the urban working class under extremely onerous conditions. On top of Chiang's counterrevolutionary terror came the murderous occupation of China by Japanese imperialism. As we noted in "The Origins of Chinese Trotskyism" (*Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 53, Summer 1997): "The 1930s did see some sporadic workers' economic struggles in Shanghai and Hong Kong, in which the Trotskyists played leading roles. However the general prostration of the working masses, whose trade unions and other legal organizations had been smashed, took a great political toll."

SACP's "Two-Stage" Menshevism

In the aftermath of the Chinese debacle, the Stalinized Comintern proclaimed the imminence of the world revolution and embarked on its sectarian, pseudo-leftist "Third Period" course, abjuring united fronts with other workers organizations and building "red trade unions" in counterposition to the existing unions led by social democrats and others. The Third Period was driven largely by the domestic circumstances faced by the Soviet bureaucracy. A threatened counterrevolutionary rising by the wealthier peasants (kulaks) led Stalin to break from his rightist, conciliatorist

policies, which were articulated particularly by his ally Nikolai Bukharin. Stalin now borrowed from the Left Opposition's program of collectivization and planned industrialization—albeit carried out by the bureaucracy in an arbitrary, adventurist manner and at breakneck pace. This turn facilitated the capitulation of leading Oppositionists like Radek and Preobrazhensky.

But the Stalinist bureaucracy never wavered from its nationalist dogma of "socialism in one country," and in the countries of belated capitalist development, it deepened and codified the stagist, liquidationist line that led to the betrayal of the Chinese Revolution. This was recently brought home at a congress in July 2007 of the South African Communist Party (SACP), where a document submitted by the party's leadership quoted the following passages from a resolution of the 1928 Sixth CI Congress:

"Our aim should be to transform the African National Congress into a fighting nationalist revolutionary organization against the white bourgeoisie and the British imperialists, based upon the trade unions, peasant organizations, etc., developing systematically the leadership of the workers and the Communist Party in this organization [we repeat: *"developing systematically the leadership of the workers and the Communist Party in this organization"*].... The development of a national-revolutionary movement of the toilers of South Africa...constitutes one of the major tasks of the Communist Party of South Africa."

—Political report of the SACP's 11th Congress Central Committee as tabled before the 12th Congress (brackets and emphasis in original)

In harking back to the Comintern Sixth Congress, the SACP leadership today offers a fig leaf of historical legitimacy for its continuing subordination to the bourgeois-nationalist African National Congress (ANC) and for the SACP's participation in the capitalist ANC-led Tripartite Alliance—a nationalist popular front that came to power in 1994, signaling the end of apartheid rule. This is the "orthodoxy" not of Lenin's Bolshevism but of Stalinist betrayal. In South Africa, where the capitalist class is white (now including a handful of others), the fundamental class divide is hugely distorted by the lens of racial color. The SACP uses this historic characteristic of South African society to much more openly and shamelessly advance its class-collaborationist alliance with the ANC.

It was necessary for revolutionary Marxists to give *military*

support to the ANC in its struggle against the white-supremacist apartheid regime, in the same vein that the Second Congress of the Comintern called for supporting national liberation struggles against the imperialist powers. But the Stalinists mandated *political* support to what was a petty-bourgeois nationalist movement. Today the bourgeois ANC and its SACP partner administer neo-apartheid capitalism, enforcing the brutal exploitation of the mainly black proletariat on behalf of the white South African Randlords and their senior partners on Wall Street and in the City of London. Today as before, the struggle for national liberation can be a powerful motor force for socialist revolution in South Africa. But the precondition for victory is the political independence of the proletariat from all wings of the bourgeoisie.

To justify its participation in the government, the SACP has to pretend that the Tripartite Alliance is not a bourgeois government. The SACP claims that “the post-1994 democratic state is not inherently capitalist, it is, in fact, a sharply class-contested reality” and that the workers can somehow achieve “hegemony” or control over that state. To maintain any claim to the mantle of communism, the SACP leadership has to falsify the experience of the October Revolution. In “Lessons of the Bolshevik Revolution” (*Umsebenzi* online, 6 November 2002), the SACP states:

“We have to move away from the illusion, in our circumstances, of the ‘total’ seizure of power, or of the ‘complete’ rupture with the global system. We also have to move away from the idea that there is a Chinese Wall between the tasks of the national democratic revolution, and the tasks of advancing towards socialism.... We need to approach the ongoing national democratic revolution to liberate the black majority, Africans in particular, as a complex, dialectical process that must, necessarily, have anti-imperialist, non-capitalist features if it is to succeed at all.

“There are the lessons which we believe can be derived, in part, from the great Bolshevik Revolution and its consequences.”

What the SACP denounces as an “illusion” is the proletarian seizure of power and the “complete” overthrow of the yoke of global imperialism, as part of a fight for world socialist revolution. To mask the class nature of the South African capitalist state and to cover over its own hostility to Bolshevism, the SACP leadership holds out the promise that the

“national democratic revolution” is something that grows over organically into socialism. In 1917, the bourgeois Provisional Government in Russia did not grow over into a socialist regime but was overthrown by the Bolshevik-led proletarian insurrection. Only when the bourgeois state was smashed and replaced by soviet power—the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry—was it possible to fulfill the tasks of the democratic revolution. Trotsky himself debunked this “growing over” conception in 1931, when, as now, it was a justification for ostensible socialists giving political support to bourgeois formations:

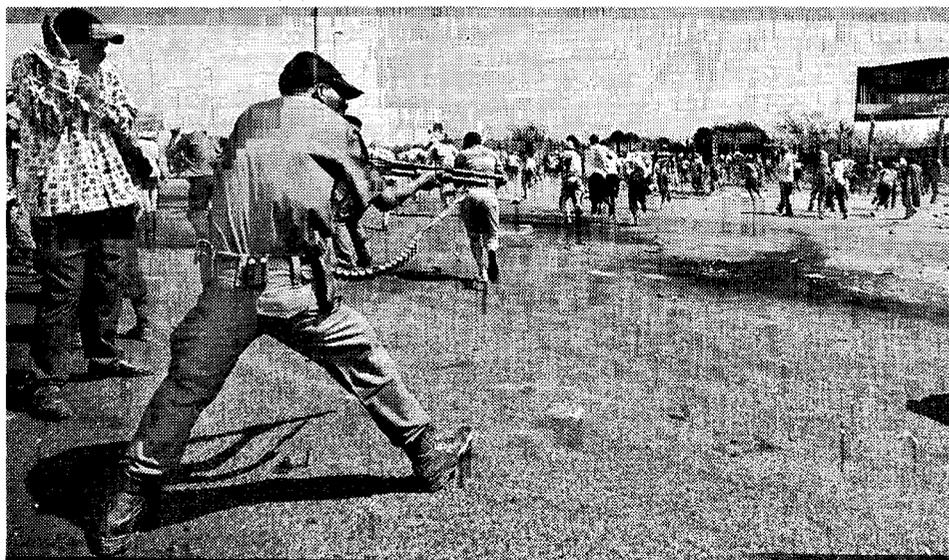
“It is not the bourgeois power that grows over into a workers’ and peasants’ and then into a proletarian power; no, the power of one class does not ‘grow over’ from the power of another class, but is torn from it with rifle in hand. But after the working class has seized power, the democratic tasks of the proletarian regime inevitably grow over into socialist tasks. An evolutionary, organic transition from democracy to socialism is conceivable only under the *dictatorship of the proletariat*. This is Lenin’s central idea.”

—“The Spanish Revolution and the Dangers Threatening It,” 28 May 1931

The proletariat’s pursuit of its class interests requires not only organizational independence from capitalist parties like the ANC but also political *opposition* to them. Spartacist South Africa, section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), raises the call to break with the Tripartite Alliance and to forge a Leninist-Trotskyist party that fights for a black-centered workers government. This does not mean placing in power a labor government that administers capitalism, like the British Labour governments, but a revolutionary struggle that overthrows the capitalist order.

South African reality starkly demonstrates the need for permanent revolution. The proletariat is brutally exploited in the mines and factories. In the countryside, millions of black people are relegated to desperate poverty in what were formerly the bantustans, while productive land is owned overwhelmingly by white farmers who depend on black laborers toiling for next to nothing. The AIDS pandemic that continues to ravage South Africa demands a fight for quality public health care, including access to free anti-retrovirals, and a struggle against the destitution as well as the religious and anti-woman

backwardness that have fueled the spread of the disease. The extent of AIDS throughout sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere and the need to marshal all available scientific resources, especially in the advanced industrialized countries, to combat it demand breaking from the narrow framework of bourgeois nationalism. Adequate housing for millions in the townships and shantytowns, electricity and clean water for the entire population, free quality education, the eradication of *lobola* (the bride price) and female genital mutilation: these desperately needed measures require the socialist transformation of the economy and society under a dictatorship of the proletariat, fighting to promote socialist revolution internationally.



Werner Beukes/SAPA

Black South African cops fire at Soweto residents, 3 September 2007.

PART FOUR

In generalizing and extending the concept of permanent revolution following the defeat of the Chinese Revolution of 1925-27, Leon Trotsky explained in *The Permanent Revolution* (1930):

“Does this at least mean that every country, including the most backward colonial country, is ripe, if not for socialism, then for the dictatorship of the proletariat?... Under the conditions of the imperialist epoch the national democratic revolution can be carried through to a victorious end only when the social and political relationships of the country are mature for putting the proletariat in power as the leader of the masses of the people. And if this is not yet the case? Then the struggle for national liberation will produce only very partial results, results directed entirely against the working masses. In 1905, the proletariat of Russia did not prove strong enough to unite the peasant masses around it and to conquer power. For this very reason, the revolution halted midway, and then sank lower and lower. In China, where, in spite of the exceptionally favourable situation, the leadership of the Communist International prevented the Chinese proletariat from fighting for power, the national tasks found a wretched, unstable and measly solution in the régime of the Kuomintang.”

As in Trotsky's time, there are today a number of especially backward countries—e.g., Afghanistan, East Timor, Rwanda—in which there is not a modern, concentrated proletariat with sufficient social weight to lead the oppressed masses in carrying out the tasks of permanent revolution. Even so, as we noted in regard to the modernizing intellectuals and military officers of the pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in the 1980s, radicals have much to learn from the struggles of Georgi Plekhanov a century earlier, notwithstanding the vast differences between contemporary Afghanistan and tsarist Russia. Despite the fact that the Russian proletariat in the 1880s was also a relatively insignificant social force, Plekhanov fought to forge a core of Marxist revolutionaries through polemical and ideological struggle (see Part One of this article). What is crucial is to develop a Marxist-internationalist framework, linking the struggle for social modernization and liberation to the class struggles of the proletariat in more advanced countries outside their own countries' boundaries.

Afghanistan's tiny proletariat is dwarfed by a far more numerous Islamic clergy, and the small urban population is surrounded by a sea of nomadic herdsmen and landless peasants beholden to the khans. In April 1978, a coup brought the PDPA to power, touching off a reactionary Islamist revolt backed by the CIA. It was at the behest of the PDPA that the Soviet Red Army intervened in December 1979. The International Communist League—then the international Spartacist tendency—declared: Hail Red Army in Afghani-



Socialist Workers Party memorial meeting for Leon Trotsky, New York, 28 August 1940.

stan! Extend social gains of the October Revolution to the Afghan peoples!

We understood that the entry of the Soviet Army posed the chance to not only defeat the imperialist-sponsored reactionary cutthroats but to incorporate Afghanistan into Soviet Central Asia, where the masses lived a modern existence light years beyond that of the Afghan peoples. The withdrawal of Soviet troops by the Gorbachev regime in Moscow in 1988-89 was a historic betrayal that not only ushered in bloody *mujahedin* rule in Afghanistan but also opened the floodgates to capitalist counterrevolution in East Germany and then the Soviet Union itself.

Likewise in desperately poor Nepal, where Maoist forces have waged a peasant-guerrilla struggle aimed at replacing the monarchy with a bourgeois coalition government, the proletariat is relatively insignificant. However, Nepalis have for decades crossed into India to live and work, becoming a part of what is now a rapidly growing proletariat in India; hundreds of thousands of Nepalis work elsewhere in Asia. A proletarian revolution in India would have a massive immediate effect on Nepal and other neighboring countries, posing a struggle for a socialist federation of the subcontinent. Crucial to such a proletarian-internationalist perspective is the fight for workers political revolution in the Chinese deformed workers state, a fight that must be premised on the unconditional military defense of China against imperialism and domestic counterrevolution.

The Algerian Independence Struggle

Today in South Africa and in many semicolonial countries such as South Korea, the role of the peasantry is no longer the crucial question it was in Russia in 1917 or in China in 1925-27. Nonetheless, historical experience since then has

confirmed the theory of permanent revolution for such countries, which are characterized by combined and uneven development.

Those countries that underwent “democratic” or anti-colonial revolutions that did not result in the overthrow of capitalist rule remain bourgeois states mired in backwardness and dominated by imperialism. A case in point is the Algerian independence struggle against France in the 1950s and early '60s, one of the most radical and heroic of the colonial revolutions of the postwar period. From the first military operation by the National Liberation Front (FLN) in November 1954, it took more than seven years, at a cost of over one million dead, for the Algerian masses to drive the colonial rulers out of their country. The Algerian proletariat played an important, though not politically independent, role in this national liberation struggle. Together with the bourgeois-nationalist FLN, the UGTA union federation called a number of powerful strikes, including a massive general strike in July 1956.

When independence was finally achieved in 1962, it placed in power the FLN, which was committed to maintaining capitalism with a domestic ruling class lording it over its “own” people. Various leftists, uncritically promoting the FLN’s “socialist” rhetoric, played a direct role in helping to consolidate an anti-working-class bourgeois regime in independent Algeria. The Algerian Communist Party liquidated into the FLN in 1956, and its successor organization was outlawed as soon as the FLN came to power. Yet the Stalinists continued to serve in the FLN machine after independence as propagandists, administrators and UGTA bureaucrats. Revisionist “Trotskyist” Michel Pablo was a top economic adviser to the FLN government of Ahmed Ben Bella and was instrumental in chaining the working class to the capitalist government.

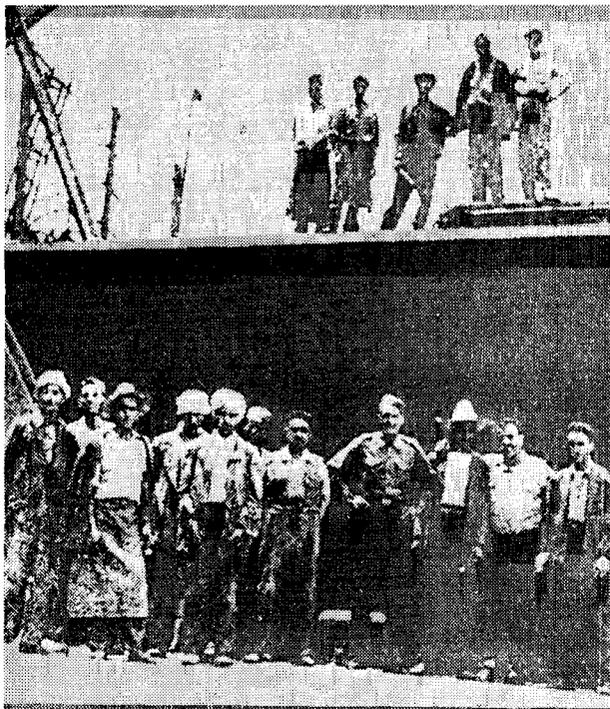
The FLN banned strikes by public sector workers and imposed an iron grip over the organized working class. The

FLN demobilized thousands of women who had courageously fought against French colonialism and enforced the subjugation of women, including through references to Islamic law. The Berber ethnic minority, whose militants had played an exceptionally prominent role in the independence struggle, were subjected to vicious repression. FLN rule paved the way for a brutal military dictatorship and the rise of a mass Islamic fundamentalist movement committed to the enslavement of women, the reversal of modernization efforts and savage terror against workers and minorities.

The Cuban Revolution

However, following World War II there were also several revolutions in the backward countries that destroyed capitalist class rule and overthrew the yoke of imperialist domination. When Mao Zedong’s peasant-based People’s Liberation Army seized power from the collapsing Guomindang in 1949, the state that resulted was not a “New Democracy” based on a “bloc of four classes”—the parlance of the Stalinist Communist Party (CCP)—but a dictatorship of the proletariat, albeit bureaucratically deformed from its inception. Stalinist-led social overturns in Yugoslavia, North Korea and North Vietnam (extending to the South in 1975) also resulted in bureaucratically deformed workers states. Similar social overturns also occurred in the postwar “People’s Democracies” established under the aegis of the Soviet Red Army elsewhere in East Europe and in East Germany.

Michel Pablo, then head of the Fourth International that had been founded under Trotsky’s leadership in 1938, seized on the postwar social overturns to repudiate the central importance of a conscious revolutionary leadership and argue for the liquidation of Trotskyist organizations into various Stalinist and social-democratic parties. This revisionism led to the destruction of the Fourth International in 1951-53. In the early 1960s, the leadership of the U.S. Socialist Work-



Alger Républicain



Henissart

Left: Algerian dock workers on strike against 30 June 1955 arrest of union leaders by French colonial police. Right: Mass demonstration in Algiers, December 1960, under outlawed FLN flag in defiance of continued French rule.

ers Party (SWP), which had broken with Pablo in 1953, embraced similar revisionist conclusions in its adulation for the petty-bourgeois Castroite leadership of the Cuban Revolution (see "Genesis of Pabloism," *Spartacist* No. 21, Fall 1972).

Fidel Castro led a force of petty-bourgeois intellectuals and peasant guerrillas, the July 26 Movement, who were temporarily estranged from the bourgeoisie and independent of the proletariat. Under ordinary conditions, the rebels, after their overthrow of the corrupt, U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship in January 1959, would have followed in the footsteps of countless similar movements in Latin America, wielding radical-democratic rhetoric to reassert bourgeois control. But with the old capitalist state apparatus shattered, in 1960-61 the Castro regime nationalized U.S.-owned and domestic capitalist holdings, creating a deformed workers state. The existence of the Soviet Union was crucial in this development, providing not only a model for the Castro regime but, more importantly, economic assistance and a military shield that helped stay the hand of the U.S. imperialist beast just 90 miles away.

It was only as a result of exceptional circumstances—the absence of the working class as a contender for power in its own right, hostile imperialist encirclement and the flight of the national bourgeoisie, and a lifeline thrown by the Soviet Union—that Castro's petty-bourgeois government was able to eventually smash capitalist property relations (see "Cuba and Marxist Theory," *Marxist Bulletin* No. 8). Similar circumstances allowed for the creation of deformed workers states in Yugoslavia and elsewhere by Stalinist-led petty-bourgeois forces following World War II.

Our tendency, originating as the Revolutionary Tendency (RT) in the SWP, was born in a struggle to defend the Trotskyist program against the Pabloism of the SWP majority. Painting Castro as an unconscious Trotskyist, the SWP argued:

"Along the road of a revolution beginning with simple democratic demands and ending in the rupture of capitalist property relations, guerrilla warfare conducted by landless peasant and semiproletarian forces, under a leadership that becomes committed to carrying the revolution through to a conclusion, can play a decisive role in undermining and precipitating the downfall of a colonial or semicolonial power. This is one of the main lessons to be drawn from experience since the second world war. It must be consciously incorporated into the strategy of building revolutionary Marxist parties in colonial countries."

—SWP Political Committee, "For Early Reunification of the World Trotskyist Movement," *SWP Discussion Bulletin* Vol. 24, No. 9 (April 1963)

In direct counterposition, the RT upheld Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution and asserted:

"Experience since the Second World War has demonstrated that peasant-based guerrilla warfare under petit-bourgeois leadership can in itself lead to nothing more than an anti-working-class bureaucratic regime. The creation of such re-



Le Bolchévik

Above: Ernest Mandel (left) and Michel Pablo abandoned Trotskyism in favor of tailing Third World nationalists. Pablo became a top economic adviser to FLN government of Ahmed Ben Bella (far right), shown here with Fidel Castro in Cuba, 1962.



Bettmann

gimes has come about under the conditions of decay of imperialism, the demoralization and disorientation caused by Stalinist betrayals, and the absence of revolutionary Marxist leadership of the working class. Colonial revolution can have an unequivocally progressive significance only under such leadership of the revolutionary proletariat. For Trotskyists to incorporate into their strategy revisionism on the *proletarian* leadership in the revolution is a profound negation of Marxism-Leninism no matter what pious wish may be concurrently expressed for 'building revolutionary Marxist parties in colonial countries.' Marxists must resolutely oppose any adventurist acceptance of the peasant-guerrilla road to socialism—historically akin to the Social Revolutionary program on tactics that Lenin fought."

—"Draft Resolution on the World Movement,"
14 June 1963; reprinted in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 9
and most recently in *Spartacist* (English-language
edition) No. 58, Spring 2004

The Cuban Revolution demonstrated yet again that there is no "third road" between the dictatorship of capital and the dictatorship of the proletariat. In this sense, it confirmed the theory of permanent revolution. But the Cuban Revolution was a far cry from the Bolshevik-led proletarian socialist revolution that took place in Russia in November 1917. In Cuba, as in the other deformed workers states, the road to further socialist development was blocked by the political rule of a parasitic and nationalist bureaucracy. Upholding the anti-revolutionary Stalinist dogma of "socialism in one country," the Castro regime has been hostile to the struggle for world revolution. Instead, it has promoted "progressive" bourgeois formations from the Allende popular-front government in Chile in the early 1970s, which resulted in a bloodbath of the workers, to the national-populist regime of Venezuela's Hugo Chávez today.

As was the case with the degenerated Soviet workers state, what is necessary in Cuba and the other remaining deformed workers states is the shattering of the bureaucracy through a proletarian political revolution that establishes democratic organs of working-class rule based on revolutionary internationalism. Trotskyists base this perspective on the unconditional military defense of the workers states against

imperialist attack and domestic capitalist counterrevolution.

To the limits of our modest forces, the ICL fought in East Germany and in the USSR to rally the working class to defeat the forces of capitalist restoration and to oust the disintegrating Stalinist regimes, which had undermined the workers states and in the end capitulated to imperialist-backed counterrevolution. Today we raise the same program in regard to China, Cuba, Vietnam, North Korea and fight for socialist revolutions in capitalist countries from the Third World to the imperialist centers of the U.S., Japan and West Europe.

Permanent Revolution vs. Populist Nationalism

The counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union and the East and Central European workers states had disastrous effects for the people of those societies and was a world-historic defeat for workers and the oppressed internationally, with the balance of forces dramatically altered in favor of imperialism. The working people of the former workers states have been plunged into mass poverty, ethnic bloodletting and other horrors. In the imperialist centers, the capitalist rulers have taken the ax to workers' hard-won gains, accompanied by widespread attacks on immigrants and minorities. With a military force far surpassing that of any other country, U.S. imperialism in particular has been riding roughshod over the peoples of the Near East and elsewhere, while imperialist-dictated austerity measures have driven the masses of the Third World further into misery.

The profound retrogression in consciousness resulting from the destruction of the USSR has led even militant workers and radical youth to dismiss the Marxist program of proletarian revolution as, at best, a pipe dream. Instead, many leftists look to the resurgence of bourgeois-populist nationalism in Latin America, exemplified by Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, as the road to, in Chávez's words, "21st century socialism." Among those promoting such illusions is Cuban writer Celia Hart, a supporter of the Castro regime and self-

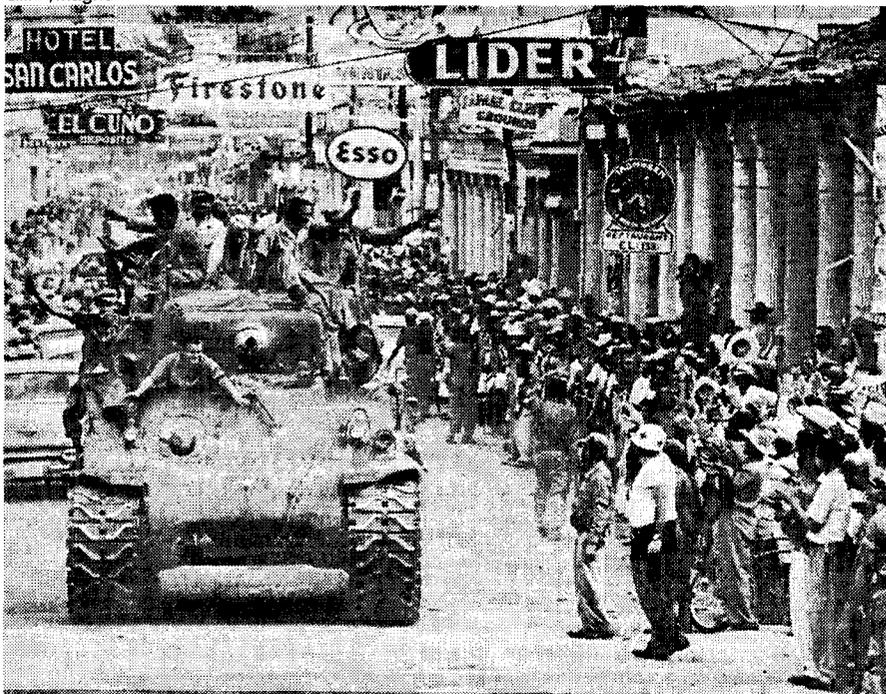
styled Trotskyist, who in a recent interview with the fake-Trotskyist Argentine *El Militante* (translated by CubaNews online, 6 July 2007) lavishes praise on "Venezuela's revolutionary process, which is increasingly moving to a radical left."

Hart asserts that "many Cubans who stopped talking about socialism" are "seeing that Venezuela talks quite naturally about socialism and want to follow suit, never mind the strange ways some people want to call it these days, namely 21st Century Socialism, saying that it can be attained without expropriating the local capitalists and so forth." Speaking of Chávez's call for "socialism," Hart adds: "It's like seeing how the Permanent Revolution thesis of that Russian in 1905 comes to life a century later."

Similarly, Mexican leftist Guillermo Almeyra, in an article titled "Trotsky in the 21st Century" in *La Jornada* (19 August 2007), a newspaper that supports the bourgeois-nationalist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), claims: "The attitude of poor countries like Venezuela or Cuba in their solidarity aid is inscribed, consciously or not, in that course of thought by Trotsky which Lenin shared." In his "defense" of permanent revolution, Almeyra, a former Pabloite who now "critically" supports the PRD, recasts Trotsky's fight for the continuity of Lenin's Bolshevism into a tale of "democracy" vs. "the monolithic party" and concludes by warning against "dogmatic" and "Talmudic" followers of Trotsky today.

Knowingly or not, Hart and Almeyra echo the SWP line that Castro was an unconscious Trotskyist. To say this of Hugo Chávez is truly breathtaking. Since his election as president in 1998, Chávez has diverted some of the huge profits the Venezuelan bourgeoisie has gleaned from skyrocketing oil prices to provide enhanced social services for the plebeian masses. Meanwhile, the government has increased taxes on foreign oil companies, which continue to rake in profits. The social measures under Chávez, and the fact that he boasts of his *zambo* (mixed African and indigenous) heritage, have earned him the contempt of the lily-

Glinn/Magnum



Castro's petty-bourgeois rebel forces enter Havana, New Year's Day 1959. Right: Cuban militiaman guards expropriated U.S. oil refinery, 1960.

Wide World





First issue of Spartacist in 1964 stressed need for Leninist vanguard party, opposed SWP's Pabloite revisionism.

white oligarchy. He has also incurred Washington's wrath for his friendship with Castro's Cuba and his pointed denunciations of the arrogant U.S. imperialists. In the event of a U.S.-sponsored coup attempt, as in 2002, we call for the military defense of the Chávez regime.

But Chávez is no socialist. He has moved to tighten the straitjacket of capitalist state control over the Venezuelan workers movement and, as even Hart admits, is not about to countenance the expropriation of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie. As we noted in "Venezuela: Populist Nationalism vs. Proletarian Revolution" (WV No. 860, 9 December 2005):

"When Castro's rebel army marched into Havana on 1 January 1959, the bourgeois army and the rest of the capitalist state apparatus that had propped up the U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship collapsed in disarray. By the time Castro declared Cuba 'socialist' in 1961, the Cuban bourgeoisie and the U.S. imperialists and their CIA and Mafia henchmen had all fled and every bit of capitalist property down to the last ice cream vendor had been expropriated. In contrast, Chávez came to power and rules *at the head of* the capitalist state, the Venezuelan bourgeoisie is alive and kicking, and the imperialists continue to carry on a thriving business with Venezuela, White House threats and provocations notwithstanding."

Hart and Almeyra turn permanent revolution on its head in order to justify their support to bourgeois populists, who are no less the class opponents of the victory of the workers and urban and rural poor than neoliberal politicians. The programmatic essence of permanent revolution is the struggle for the *class independence of the proletariat* from all wings of the semicolonial bourgeoisie—no matter how "progressive" or "anti-imperialist" their proclamations. That struggle can be realized only through forging revolutionary, internationalist workers parties in opposition to all variants of bourgeois nationalism. The ICL fights to reforge the Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution.

The Modernization of Capitalist Spain

Despite substantial industrial development in recent decades, Brazil, South Korea and the so-called "tiger" economies of Southeast Asia have not been able to escape from imperialist subjugation. However, there are a handful of countries on the periphery of Europe that have managed—at great human cost and in the context of wars, counterrevolutions and other major world developments—to develop from backward agrarian societies to modern capitalist states as part of the European imperialist consortium. For example, in the period before World War I Finland was an economic backwater, with a siz-

able oppressed peasantry, that had been part of the Russian tsarist empire. But the attempt to consummate a proletarian revolution following the Bolshevik victory in Russia was drowned in blood by the imperialist-backed Mannerheim military dictatorship, and capitalist Finland was subsequently integrated into imperialist Europe.

Spain before World War II was a prime example of combined and uneven development where the tasks of permanent revolution were manifest. A large peasantry was brutally exploited by a landowning class, derived from the old feudal nobility, that heavily overlapped with the urban bourgeoisie. The powerful Catholic church, which exercised a

monopoly in the education of children, was the country's largest landowner and also had substantial investments in industry and finance. Furthermore, then as today the Spanish state contained within its boundaries such oppressed nations as the Basques and Catalans. Amid the social backwardness, there also existed a raw, combative working class made up in good part of peasant youth who retained close ties to their families in the countryside.

The Spanish Civil War of 1936-39 posed pointblank the possibility of proletarian revolution. But this opportunity was betrayed by the Stalinists, Socialists and anarchists who were the mainstay of the bourgeois Republican government, a popular front that was also treacherously supported by the centrist POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unification). Through its disarming and suppression of the revolutionary proletariat, mainly at the hands of the Stalinists, the popular front paved the way for the victory of the right-wing forces of Generalissimo Francisco Franco, who subsequently ruled Spain with an iron fist for nearly four decades.

Developments in Spain between the 1930s and the 1980s, at both the economic and political levels, were to a large degree determined and conditioned by the changing international situation. Following the end of World War II, the U.S. forged a political and military alliance (NATO) with the West European capitalist governments as part of the imperialist

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Cold War against the Soviet Union. By allying itself with American imperialism, the Franco regime broke Spain out of its former international isolation. (The country had not even been allowed to join the United Nations at its founding.) In 1953, Washington scrapped a UN-sanctioned economic embargo of Spain in exchange for U.S. military bases there. Spain became a recipient of U.S. government loans and, more importantly, began to increase its economic ties to the rest of West Europe.

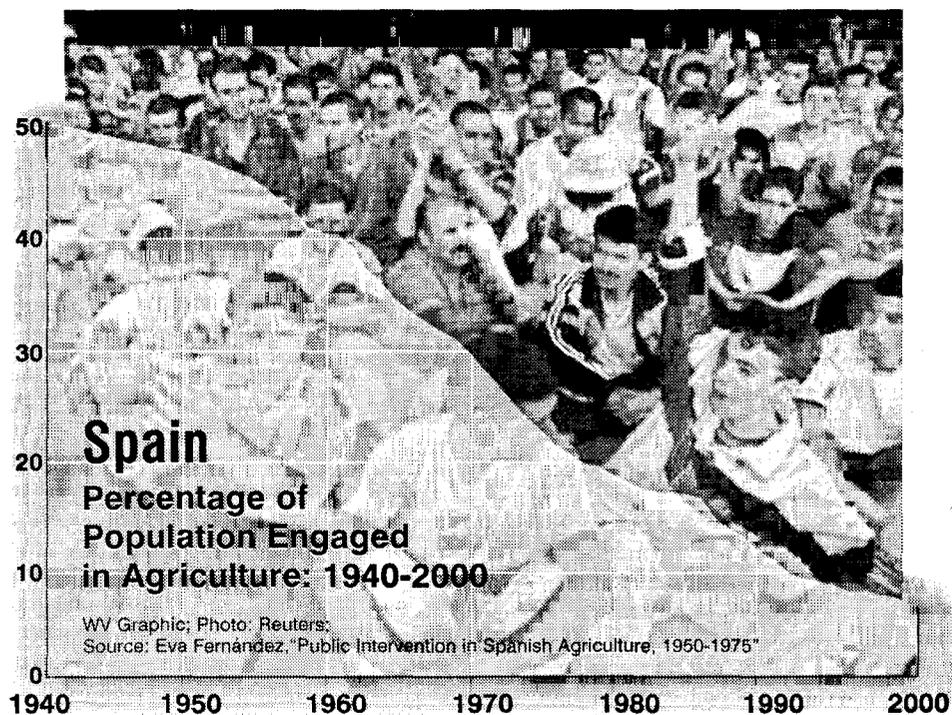
Beginning in the 1960s, Spain experienced a rapid rate of economic growth that would eventually lead to a predominantly urbanized and culturally cosmopolitan society with an annual per capita gross domestic product (\$25,300) not much below that of Italy (*Economist, Pocket World in Figures, 2007*). In *The Economic Transformation of Spain and Portugal* (1978), American economist Eric N. Baklanoff summarized the international factors underlying what was called the Spanish “economic miracle”: “For it was the international economy, and most especially the European Economic Community and the United States, that presented Spain with surging markets for its products, sent it free-spending tourists by the millions, invested in its factories and real estate, and employed a goodly share of its ‘surplus’ manpower.” Private foreign investment climbed from \$40 million in 1960 to nearly \$800 million in 1973. Attracted by Spain’s relatively cheap labor, American, German and British capitalists concentrated their investments in manufacturing, especially the automobile and chemical industries.

The economic boom of the 1960s-early ’70s led to the effective liquidation of small peasant farming. The agricultural labor force declined from 5.3 million in 1950 to 2.9 million in 1975 and then to 2.4 million in 1980. Small family holdings, dependent on manual labor and draft animals, were increas-



Marxist.com

Pseudo-Trotskyist Alan Woods (far left) of International Marxist Tendency promotes “21st Century Socialism” of bourgeois nationalist Hugo Chávez.



With rapid rate of economic growth beginning in 1960s, percentage of Spanish people engaged in agriculture underwent steep decline. Today, immigrants, including from North Africa, such as those pictured above in a 2002 protest, form core of Spain’s agricultural workforce.

ingly replaced by larger, mechanized farms. The share of the labor force engaged in agriculture declined from 48 percent in 1950 to 13 percent by 1990 (Carlos Prieto del Campo, “A Spanish Spring?”, *New Left Review*, January-February 2005). Today, Spain’s agricultural labor force consists primarily of immigrants from North Africa and elsewhere.

Following Franco’s death in 1975, Spain experienced a massive wave of labor strikes that raised both economic and political demands. At this point the Spanish ruling class and its senior partners in Washington and the capitals of NATO Europe recognized that the only way to restore social and political order was to work out a deal with the country’s reformist workers parties, which had been outlawed under the Franco regime. In late 1977, in exchange for their parties’ legalization and the promise of “democratization,” the Communist and Socialist leaders demobilized the workers movement, thereby ending the greatest threat to bourgeois rule in Spain since the end of the Civil War. Groomed by the West German Social Democracy, the Spanish Socialist Workers Party has since become a bulwark of a stable bourgeois parliamentary order. Clearly the perspective of permanent revolution in regard to the historic tasks associated with the bourgeois-democratic revolution no longer applies to Spain.

Ireland is another European country that was historically marked by socio-economic backwardness, including a primarily agrarian economy and a dominant role played by the Catholic church in society. Moreover, a significant proportion of the Irish Catholic nation constitutes an oppressed minority in the Ulster Protestant-dominated Northern Ireland statelet, which is part of the British imperialist state.

Addressing the intense national conflict between these two geographically interpenetrated peoples, we wrote in “Theses on Ireland” (*Spartacist* No. 24, Autumn 1977): “Ireland, like

other situations of interpenetrated peoples as in the Middle East and Cyprus, is a striking confirmation of the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution." The Theses made clear that in cases of interpenetrated peoples, there can be no democratic and equitable solution to the national question within the framework of capitalism: "In such circumstances the exercise of self-determination by one or the other people in the form of the establishment of their own bourgeois state can only be brought about by the denial of that right to the other." While opposing the national oppression of the Irish Catholics in the North, we also oppose the forcible reunification of Ireland, which would mean the oppression of the Ulster Protestant population in a Catholic-dominated state. The Spartacist League/Britain, section of the ICL, demands the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland and calls for an Irish workers republic within a federation of workers republics in the British Isles.

However, subsequent discussion within the ICL concluded that to refer to permanent revolution in this context was theoretically confusing, conflating a democratic solution to the national question in an advanced capitalist society with the historic tasks of the bourgeois revolution. For well over a century, Ireland has been integrated into the economy of the British Isles, with a large fraction of the Irish proletariat working in the factories and construction sites of London and other cities. And in recent decades, Ireland's membership in the European Union has played a large part in the country's further economic development.

The concept of permanent revolution is *not* about the relationship of proletarian revolution to democratic questions in general. In many advanced capitalist countries there exist reactionary institutions inherited from the feudal past—e.g., the monarchy in Spain, Britain and Japan; the privileged role of the Vatican in Italy—which play a very important role in maintaining the present-day bourgeois order. In the U.S., the institutionalized oppression of the black population—a strategic question for proletarian revolution—is a legacy of chattel slavery. In all of these cases, only proletarian socialist revolution can eliminate national, racial and ethnic oppression. This underlines the need to forge Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard parties that act as a tribune of the people.

For Proletarian Internationalism!

As Trotsky laid out in *The Permanent Revolution*:

"The completion of the socialist revolution within national limits is unthinkable. One of the basic reasons for the crisis in bourgeois society is the fact that the productive forces created by it can no longer be reconciled with the framework of the national state.... The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena. Thus, the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word; it attains completion only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet."

From Mexico to South Africa and elsewhere, many leftists point to the tremendous military and economic might of the U.S. to claim that a workers revolution would inevitably be crushed by the imperialists. No one would deny that the U.S. and other capitalist powers represent a formidable obstacle to proletarian revolutions. But the imperialist countries are class-divided societies with deep discontents and insoluble contradictions, necessarily leading to class and other social struggles. In the course of sharp class struggle and through the instrumentality of a revolutionary party that patiently educates the working class in the understanding not only of

its social power but of its historic interests, the workers will become conscious of themselves as a class fighting for itself and for all the oppressed against the capitalist order.

The preconditions for a revolution will be different in different parts of the world. When these are met, the situation in any particular country and in the world will be different than it is today, and the consciousness of the working class will have changed significantly. Our struggle to forge Leninist vanguard parties is based on the understanding that when such parties become rooted in the working class, this will reflect a qualitative change in the political consciousness of the proletariat.

The struggles of the proletariat in the semicolonial world are integrally intertwined with those of the workers in the imperialist centers. A proletarian revolution in Mexico would have a massive impact on the multiracial U.S. proletariat, whose growing Latino component is a human bridge between the struggles of workers in the U.S. and of those in Latin America. A revolutionary proletarian upsurge in South Africa would resonate powerfully among working people and youth throughout the world, especially but definitely not only the black people who form a strategically important layer of the working class in the United States and in Brazil. A South African workers revolution would also touch off struggles throughout the continent by destroying the regional gendarme of sub-Saharan Africa. Conversely, a proletarian seizure of state power in one of the imperialist countries would have enormous revolutionary repercussions in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In the 1994 *WV* series, "South Africa Powder Keg" (reprinted in *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 12 [February 1995]), we wrote:

"For the moment South Africa is a weakened link in the chain of the world capitalist system binding the neocolonies of the Third World to the imperialist states of North America, West Europe and Japan. It is necessary to mobilize the forces of the proletariat to *break* that chain at its weakest links, and then fight like hell to take the battle to the imperialist centers, seeking allies against the vicious enemy of all the oppressed—international capital. Thus, the fight to build a South African Bolshevik Party is inseparable from the struggle we in the International Communist League are waging to reforge an authentically Trotskyist Fourth International."

The fight for world socialist revolution is certainly not easy. But what is truly impossible is for the subordination of the working class to the class enemy to result in anything but the continuing vicious cycle of defeats and demoralizing sellouts. ■

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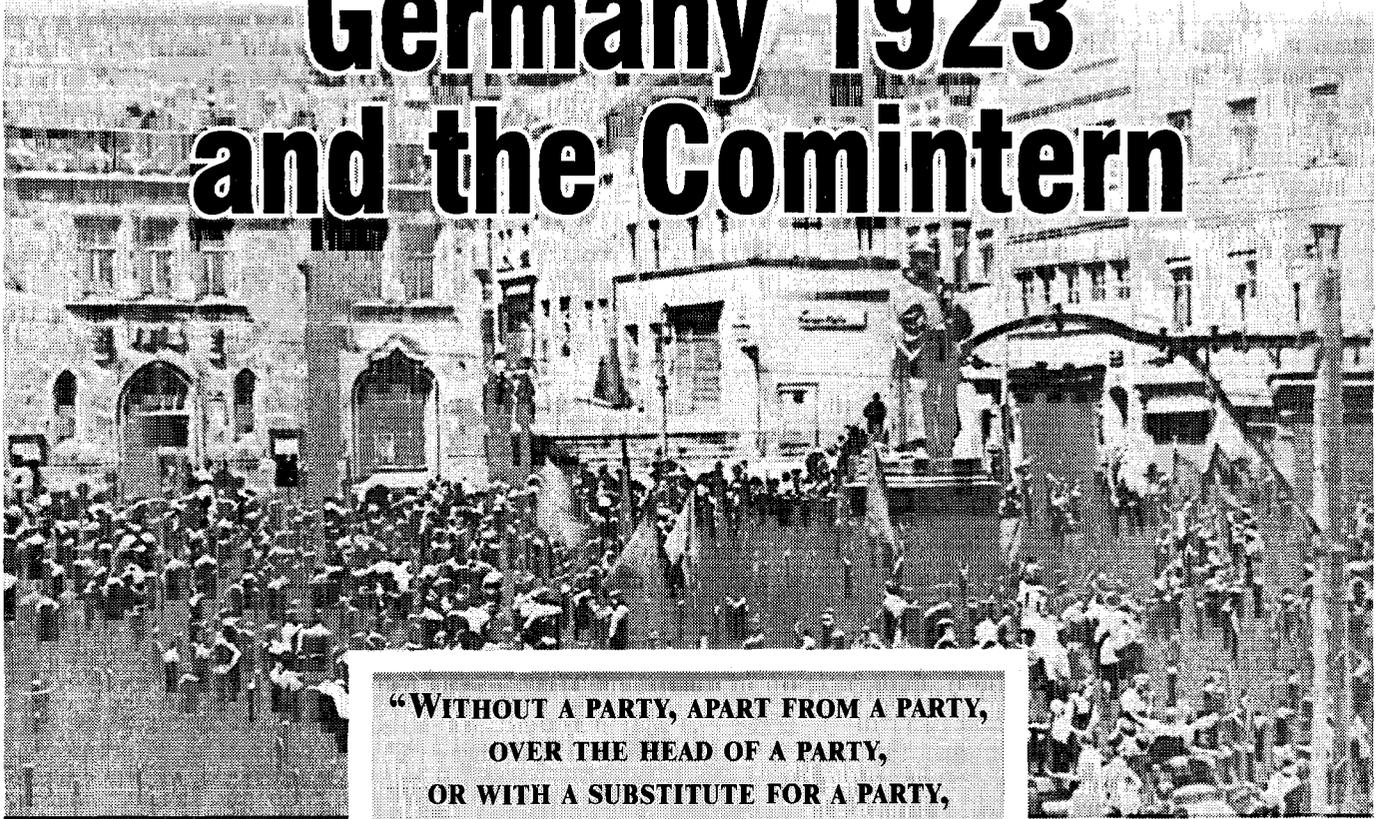
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CUBA AND MARXIST THEORY

Selected Documents on the Cuban Question

Rearming Bolshevism

A Trotskyist Critique of Germany 1923 and the Comintern



**“WITHOUT A PARTY, APART FROM A PARTY,
OVER THE HEAD OF A PARTY,
OR WITH A SUBSTITUTE FOR A PARTY,
THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION
CANNOT CONQUER.”**

LEON TROTSKY, *LESSONS OF OCTOBER*

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The aborted German Revolution of 1923 marked a decisive point in the history of the workers movement internationally following the Russian October Revolution of 1917 and the end of the First World War. Though proletarian unrest and upheavals had swept Europe in the aftermath of the war, proletarian state power remained confined to the old tsarist empire (minus Finland, the Baltic states and Poland). The modern industry created by foreign investment in the prewar period in Russia had been devastated by World War I and the bloody civil war which followed; the world's first workers state found itself suspended above a largely rural, peasant economy.

Founding the Third (Communist) International (Comintern, or CI) in 1919 as the necessary instrumentality to achieve world socialist revolution, the Bolsheviks fought with all possible means and determination to spread the revolution to the advanced industrial countries of Europe. In August 1920, having beaten back an invasion by the Polish army under the nationalist Jozef Pilsudski, the Red Army

followed the retreating Poles across the border in a bold move to achieve a common border with Germany. Soviet Russia's defeat on the outskirts of Warsaw marked the farthest westward march of Bolshevism.

Germany, with its large, pro-socialist proletariat, appeared to offer the best opportunity to spread the revolution. From the founding of the German Communist Party (KPD), the Bolshevik leadership, beginning with Lenin himself, intervened heavily into the KPD. Lenin was only too aware that the young KPD had broken very late from the Social Democracy and had only partially assimilated Bolshevik politics.

Defeated in the first interimperialist war, Germany was in a state of ongoing political and economic crisis. Beginning with the working-class upheaval that led to the overthrow of Kaiser Wilhelm II in November 1918, the country was continually racked by protests, strikes and semi-insurrectionary risings. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) of Scheide-
mann, Ebert and Noske, which supported Germany during

lution to the advanced industrial countries of Europe. In August 1920, having beaten back an invasion by the Polish army under the nationalist Jozef Pilsudski, the Red Army

followed the retreating Poles across the border in a bold move to achieve a common border with Germany. Soviet Russia's defeat on the outskirts of Warsaw marked the farthest westward march of Bolshevism.

Regional gathering of KPD youth organization in Eisleben, spring 1923. Germany, with its highly organized, pro-socialist working class, offered best opportunity to extend Bolshevik Revolution internationally.

the imperialist slaughter, went on to become the crucial bulwark of the Weimar Republic that replaced the monarchy. The SPD politically disarmed and demobilized the revolutionary proletariat, then aided and abetted the bourgeois counterrevolution in bloody repression.

Providing a crucial left cover for the outright treachery of the SPD was the centrist and highly heterogeneous Independent Socialist Party (USPD), which split from the SPD in April 1917 and initially included the Spartacist group of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. The USPD's right wing, which included Karl Kautsky, Rudolf Hilferding and Eduard Bernstein, were social-pacifists during the war. Kautsky, in particular, was quite skilled in using Marxist rhetoric to mask their firm commitment to *reforming* the bourgeois order. The Spartacists split from the USPD only in December 1918. The USPD split again in October 1920 as two-thirds of its active membership voted to join the Communist International, giving the KPD for the first time a real mass base in the proletariat. But later history would show how incomplete was the KPD's split with Kautsky's centrism on the level of program and theory.

The French occupation of the Ruhr in January 1923 provoked a political and economic crisis in which the potential for proletarian revolution was manifest. A clear indication of this was that the SPD—though strengthened by its reunification with Kautsky's rump USPD in 1922—lost control over the mass of the German working class. The principal mechanism through which the Social Democracy chained the proletariat to the bourgeois order was its leadership of the trade unions. Amid the severe economic dislocation and hyperinflation of 1923, the unions were unable to function; they became paralyzed. The workers deserted them as well as the SPD itself in droves. But the KPD leadership failed the test of revolution. Having reined in the revolutionary strivings of the working masses earlier in 1923, it climbed down without a fight on the eve of a planned insurrection in October.

Instead of organizing the struggle for proletarian power, the KPD leadership under Heinrich Brandler operated on the false view that the party's influence would increase in linear fashion. In a revolutionary situation, timing is critical. There are no "impossible" situations for the bourgeoisie; if a revolutionary party does not act, the bourgeoisie *will* regain control. Such was the outcome in 1923 in Germany.

At bottom, the KPD banked on the illusion that the left wing of the Social Democracy could be induced into becoming a "revolutionary" ally. This strategy was codified in the misuse of the "workers government" slogan, which for the KPD had come to mean something other than the dictatorship of the proletariat—increasingly, a coalition government with the SPD on the basis of the bourgeois parliament. This was an opportunist and self-defeating revision of the understanding of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks that a workers government would be achieved by the overthrow of the bourgeois state apparatus and the forging of a new state power founded on workers councils (soviets). The KPD's abuse of the workers government slogan was endorsed by the Comintern under the leadership of Zinoviev, and found its culmination in October 1923 in the entry of the KPD into coalition governments with the SPD in the states of Saxony and Thuringia. In the event, the "red bastions" in Saxony and Thuringia simply melted away when they were challenged by the German army; the KPD's entry into these bourgeois provincial governments was the prelude to the party's calling off an insurrection which the Comintern had prodded it into planning.

The defeat had enormous consequences, and not only in Germany. For the imperialists it meant a stabilization of the bourgeois order. In Soviet Russia, the workers had looked forward expectantly to the German workers revolution; the debacle in October unleashed a wave of disappointment and demoralization that was seized upon by the nascent Soviet bureaucracy to usurp political power from the proletariat in January 1924. Toward the end of that year, Stalin drew his balance sheet on the German events, promulgating the nationalist dogma of building "socialism in one country." As Trotsky stated a few years later: "From 1923 on, the situation changed sharply. We no longer have before us simply defeats of the proletariat, but routs of the policy of the Comintern" (*The Third International After Lenin* [1928]). The default of the Comintern led ultimately to Hitler's accession to power in 1933 without a shot being fired.

As the German events unfolded in 1923, Lenin was already seriously ill. Zinoviev, who then headed the Comintern, vacillated, while Stalin said that the KPD ought to be restrained. It was only in August that Trotsky realized a revolutionary situation existed in Germany, and it was he who demanded that the KPD and Comintern organize a struggle for power. But Trotsky's approach at the time was largely administrative, centered on fixing a date for the insurrection. He approved of the KPD's entry into the governments of Saxony and Thuringia, with the view that this would provide a "drillground" for revolution.

It was not until later that Trotsky grappled with the underlying political reasons for the failure. In a series of writings beginning a few months after the October debacle, Trotsky undertook a critical evaluation of the political problems of the German events, leading to his 1924 work, *The Lessons of October*. Trotsky drew an analogy between the German events and the Russian October, noting that a section of the Bolshevik Party leadership, including Zinoviev and Kamenev, had balked at organizing the seizure of power in 1917. Trotsky detailed the series of fights which Lenin waged after the outbreak of revolution in February 1917 in order to rearm the party. It was only these fights which made the victory in October possible. The fundamental issue in dispute was "whether or not we should struggle for power." Trotsky asserted:

"These two tendencies, in greater or lesser degree, with more or less modification, will more than once manifest themselves during the revolutionary period in every country. If by Bolshevism—and we are stressing here its essential aspect—we understand such training, tempering, and organization of the proletarian vanguard as enables the latter to seize power, arms in hand; and if by social democracy we are to understand the acceptance of reformist oppositional activity within the framework of bourgeois society and an adaptation to its legality—i.e., the actual training of the masses to become imbued with the inviolability of the bourgeois state; then, indeed, it is absolutely clear that even within the Communist Party itself, which does not emerge full-fledged from the crucible of history, the struggle between social democratic tendencies and Bolshevism is bound to reveal itself in its most clear, open, and uncamouflaged form during the immediate revolutionary period when the question of power is posed point-blank."

—Trotsky, *The Lessons of October*

Uncovering the Roots of the 1923 Defeat

The Lessons of October was part of the process through which Trotsky rearmed Marxism against the Stalinist bureaucratic perversion—beginning with the 1923 Russian Opposition and deepening fundamentally with his 1928 critique of Stalin/Bukharin's "Draft Program of the Communist International," the core of *The Third International After Lenin*.

Trotsky, however, deals with the actual events in Germany only in broad outline in *The Lessons of October*. It is no substitute for a concrete analysis of the events, as Trotsky himself later noted:

“They [the Brandlerites] accuse us of not yet having provided a concrete analysis of the situation in Germany in 1923. That is true. I have already many times reminded the German comrades of the necessity to produce such a work.... I formed my picture of the German situation just as I did of the Russian situation in 1905 and 1917. Of course now, after the fact, above all for the sake of the young generation, it is necessary to theoretically reconstruct the situation, facts and figures in hand. The Left Opposition should do this work and it will do it.”

—Trotsky, “Principled and Practical Questions Facing the Left Opposition,” 5 June 1931 (*Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1930-31*)

There have been few serious efforts to carry this out, notable among them an exchange between Walter Held and Marc Loris (Jan van Heijenoort) in the American Trotskyist press in 1942-43. The actual architects of the 1923 defeat engaged in massive coverup. Zinoviev blamed it all on KPD leader Brandler, while Brandler and his supporters sought to alibi themselves by claiming there had never been a revolutionary situation. Brandler’s alibi was later picked up by historian and Trotsky biographer Isaac Deutscher, and subsequently by the British Labourite journal *Revolutionary History* and every variety of de facto reformist. As for Brandler’s factional opponents, the KPD “lefts” organized around Zinoviev’s tools, Ruth Fischer and Arkady Maslow, they were just as incapable of charting a revolutionary course in 1923. Fischer’s later account in *Stalin and German Communism* (1948) is just as self-serving as (and even more mendacious than) Brandler’s.

In an attempt to get to the bottom of the apparent opportunist bulge on Trotsky’s part in supporting entry into the Saxon and Thuringian governments, the International Communist League undertook an investigation and discussion of the Germany events. A highlight of this discussion was an educational presentation given in 1999 by a leader of our German section, as well as discussion at two meetings of the ICL International Executive Committee and the publication of two international bulletins which included English translations of documentation from German-language sources.

The sources in the English language for studying the 1923 events are sparse. Documentation in German is much more abundant, but it is no easy task to cull what is useful from mounds of coverup. Often it is what is *not* said that is significant. Thus, a comrade who searched through issues of the KPD newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag) for the first six months of 1923 found exactly one reference to socialist revolution—and that was in a resolution of the Comintern Executive Committee (ECCI)—and none to the dictatorship of the proletariat!

Our study of the Germany 1923 events indicated that far from acting as a corrective to the parliamentarist appetites of the KPD leadership, the ECCI under Zinoviev was deeply complicit in its course. The CI-endorsed entry into bourgeois coalition governments with the SPD in Thuringia and Saxony was theoretically prepared by the discussion at the 1922 Fourth Congress of the Communist International, which included such coalition governments as possible variants of a “workers government.” The Spartacist tendency has always been critical of the obfuscationist Fourth Congress resolution; from our inception we have insisted that a workers government can be nothing other than the dictatorship of the proletariat. Our recent study showed that the

Fourth Congress resolution was directly inspired by and an implicit codification of the revisionist impulse that would shipwreck the German Revolution.

This article is intended as a *contribution* toward the theoretical reconstruction of the Germany 1923 events which Trotsky pointed out was necessary for the rearming of future generations of revolutionaries. Certainly, with the passage of over 75 years, some of the events are difficult to reconstruct. We think we have uncovered the essentials, but we are under no illusion that we have the whole picture.

The Aborted 1923 German Revolution

In late 1922, the Weimar government failed to make reparation payments to France, in the form of requisitions of coal and other basic commodities, as dictated by the Versailles Treaty of June 1919, which had been designed by the imperialist victors of World War I to strip their defeated rival of its economic and military strength. This prompted the Poincaré government to occupy the Ruhr in January 1923. The German government, then under Chancellor Cuno, adopted a policy of “passive resistance”—civil disobedience toward the French and Belgian occupation authorities. Rightist paramilitary groups, maintained by conservative industrialists both with private funds and government funds siphoned from the army budget, quickly infiltrated the Ruhr. There they carried out provocative, though largely ineffectual, guerrilla warfare against the French troops.

The occupation triggered massive financial chaos in Germany, not only impoverishing the working class but ruining the lower middle classes. Under armed guard, the French bourgeoisie extracted its blood-sucking reparations, crippling the rest of German industry. Inflation took off on a scale that is hard to believe. The value of the German mark depreciated from 48,000 to the U.S. dollar in May to an astronomical 4.6 million in August! From 6 percent in August, unemployment increased dramatically to 23 percent in November.

Hugo Stinnes and other Ruhr industrialists organized a series of protests against the occupation, preaching the necessity for national unity against the French. A de facto national front stretched from the fascists on the right to the SPD. The KPD, while initially quite contradictory, gradually fell into line. The Social Democrats issued statements solidifying with Ruhr businessmen arrested by the French, while SPD propaganda sought to utilize anger over the French occupation to justify the SPD’s criminal support to German imperialism in World War I. But it was not lost on the proletariat that Stinnes’ appeals for “equal sacrifice” were sheer hypocrisy. The economic malaise was manipulated by the capitalists to attack the unions. The rapid depreciation of the mark made German goods dirt-cheap on the world market and enabled the industrialists to make a killing in profits, while the trade unions were utterly incapable of defending the standard of living of the workers in the face of hyperinflation. The initial intoxication of the workers with “national unity” did not last long.

The Communist International moved quickly to mobilize its European sections to respond to the French provocations in the spirit of proletarian internationalism. A few days prior to the occupation of the Ruhr, a conference of delegates from West European Communist parties meeting in Essen passed a resolution denouncing the Versailles Treaty and the threatened occupation.

In the Ruhr, fraternization with the French troops was an important component in drawing a political line against the

German nationalists (and Social Democrats), and the KPD youth achieved some success in such efforts. The French Communists, working with the Communist Youth International, vigorously campaigned against the occupation; propaganda was distributed to soldiers in both French and Arabic. In one case, French troops tried to protect striking German workers from German cops, and several of the French soldiers were shot. After a massacre by French troops of workers in Essen, *Die Rote Fahne* published a letter of solidarity by French soldiers who were collecting money for the families of the slain workers. The KPD also ran a big solidarity campaign when French miners went on strike.

The CI-initiated campaign stiffened the German party. When Cuno called for a vote of confidence on his "passive resistance" policy in the Reichstag on January 13, the KPD parliamentary fraction demonstrated and voted against him. The KPD issued an appeal titled "Smite Poincaré and Cuno on the Ruhr and on the Spree [Berlin's river]," a principled statement of opposition to both French and German imperialism.

But the KPD did little to organize independent proletarian resistance to the depredations of French imperialism. Strikes and protest actions in the Ruhr, appealing to fellow proletarians in France and especially in the French army of occupation, might well have led in a revolutionary direction and sparked broader international workers' struggle. The KPD was far from such insurrectionary intentions. A manifesto issued by the party's Eighth Congress in late January/early February 1923 revealed that it was already accommodating to the SPD's defense of the Versailles-dictated postwar European capitalist order. The KPD effectively called for a "workers government" to pay the imperialist debt:

"The workers government will propose negotiations to France; it will state honestly and openly what portion of the debts imposed on it by the bourgeoisie the working people can pay. The workers government will appropriate from the capitalists assets as security for the payment of these debts, thus providing a guarantee that its words express an honest intention. In this way the workers government will assist the German workers in bearing the burdens that the bankrupt imperialist bourgeoisie has laid on them, until the French proletariat assists them in breaking the chains of Versailles."

—Manifesto on "The War in the Ruhr and the International Working Class," Eighth Party Congress, 28 January-1 February 1923, *Dokumente und Materialien zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* [Documents and Materials on the History of the German Workers Movement] Dietz Verlag, 1966

As anger at the French occupying forces heated up, the KPD bent to nationalist pressures, describing Germany as a virtual colony, with France the "main enemy." In February 1923, Brandler's lieutenant Thalheimer claimed that the German bourgeoisie had acquired "an objectively revolutionary role...in spite of itself." Sliding over to a defensist posture toward the German bourgeoisie, Thalheimer asserted, "The defeat of French imperialism in the world war was not a communist aim, its defeat in the war in the Ruhr is a communist aim" (quoted in E. H. Carr, *The Interregnum, 1923-1924* [1954]). It fell to internationalist-minded Czech Communists like Neurath and Sommer to refute Thalheimer's patriotic arguments. Writing in the KPD's *Die Internationale* (1 April 1923), Sommer denounced Thalheimer's thesis as "a magnificent flower of national Bolshevism" (quoted in *The Interregnum*), referring to the banner under which some German leftists had earlier advocated a "war of national liberation" together with the German bourgeoisie against the Entente powers. In a 22 September 1920 speech at the Ninth Party



French soldier guards coal during Ruhr occupation. 23 January 1923 *Die Rote Fahne* published KPD statement, "Smite Poincaré and Cuno on the Ruhr and on the Spree," a principled declaration of opposition to both French and German imperialism.



Ullstein Bilderdienst

Conference in Moscow, Lenin had sharply condemned "national Bolshevism" as a "contrary-to-nature bloc," warning: "If you form a bloc with the German Kornilovists [right-wing militarists], they will dupe you."

On 13 May 1923, a strike wave began in the Ruhr city of Dortmund, a major industrial center. Starting as a strike over wages by miners at one pit, it quickly spread to include probably 300,000 strikers, about half the miners and metal workers in the Ruhr. There were pitched battles with the cops and demonstrations of over 50,000 workers. Workers militias, the so-called Proletarian Hundreds, took over the street markets and shops for the "control commissions," which enforced price cuts.

But the KPD, which had real influence among the proletariat in the area, did nothing for four days! And when it did intervene, it was to counsel the workers not to raise political demands but simply to settle for a wage increase of 52 percent, which was quickly eaten up by the skyrocketing inflation. Reporting on the German situation to a September 21-25 meeting of the Russian, German, French and

Czechoslovakian CPs in Moscow, Brandler literally *bragged* how the KPD had kept the Ruhr strikes within the bounds of economic demands. He claimed that fascistic elements worked in the Proletarian Hundreds with the aim of turning the wage struggles into a struggle for power, supposedly as a provocation to invite repression by the bourgeoisie. While there were some fascists operating in the Ruhr, this was a militant proletarian stronghold. Brandler in effect labeled any worker who wanted to fight for power an agent of reaction.

Just as the proletariat was beginning to break from nationalism, an overt appeal was made to the most backward, outright fascistic elements. On May 29, in an unvarnished appeal to nationalism, *Die Rote Fahne* published a statement titled "Down With the Government of National Disgrace and Treason Against the People!" In June, at an enlarged ECCI meeting in Moscow, Karl Radek made his notorious speech eulogizing the German fascist Schlageter, who had been executed by the French in the Ruhr. Schlageter had fought against the Bolsheviks in the Baltics and then against the workers in the Ruhr. The KPD's embrace of the "Schlageter line," endorsed by Zinoviev, set off a campaign of appeals to the German nationalists, including joint public meetings and "debates" with the fascists. This campaign undoubtedly had a chilling effect on the initiatives toward fraternization with the French soldiers, though fraternization apparently continued throughout 1923.

The KPD was adapting to both the nationalist right and the Social Democrats. In the universities, KPD leaders fraternized with Nazi students. However, among the proletariat the KPD played the "anti-fascist" card, whose real thrust was to look to the SPD for a bloc against fascism (which is how the entry into the Saxon and Thuringian governments was later motivated).

The "Schlageter line" was eagerly assented to by the KPD "lefts"—indeed, Ruth Fischer was a regular speaker at these "debates," which continued until the Nazis broke them off. At one such meeting Fischer declared, "Whoever cries out against Jewish capital...is already a fighter for his class

[*Klassenkämpfer*], even though he may not know it" (quoted in Werner Angress, *Stillborn Revolution—The Communist Bid for Power in Germany, 1921-1923* [1963]). Despite their shrill denunciations of the party leadership, the Fischer-Maslow "lefts" had no more impulse than Brandler to struggle for power. Both factions were mainly concerned with cliquish maneuvering to ingratiate themselves with Zinoviev.

Despite the KPD leadership's efforts to pour water on the flames of class struggle, the working masses were breaking by the thousands from the Social Democracy to the KPD. This is attested to in a 1936 account by Arthur Rosenberg, who had been in the KPD in 1923 and was elected to the *Zentrale* (the resident leading body) in 1924 as a supporter of the Fischer group. Rosenberg noted:

"In the course of the year 1923 the power of the SPD steadily decreased. The Party passed through a crisis which was reminiscent of that of 1919. The Independent Trade Unions especially, which had always been the chief support of Social Democracy, were in a state of complete disintegration. The inflation destroyed the value of the Union subscriptions. The Trade Unions could no longer pay their employees properly nor give assistance to their members. The wage-agreements that the Trade Unions were accustomed to conclude with the employers became useless when the devaluation of the currency made any wages paid out a week later worthless. Thus Trade Union work of the old style became unavailing. Millions of German workers would have nothing more to do with the old Trade Union policy and left the Unions. The destruction of the Trade Unions simultaneously caused the ruin of the SPD....

"The KPD had no revolutionary policy either, but at least it criticized the Cuno Government loudly and sharply and pointed to the example of Russia. Hence the masses flocked to it. As late as the end of 1922 the newly united Social Democratic Party comprised the great majority of the German workers. During the next half-year conditions were completely changed. In the summer of 1923 the KPD undoubtedly had the majority of the German proletariat behind it."

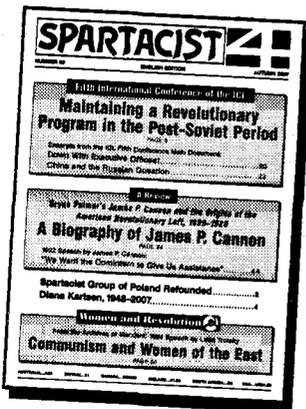
— Arthur Rosenberg, *A History of the German Republic*

Probably the most comprehensive English-language book on this period is Angress' *Stillborn Revolution*. Even Angress, who manifestly does not believe that a workers insurrection was possible in 1923, acknowledges that the KPD was

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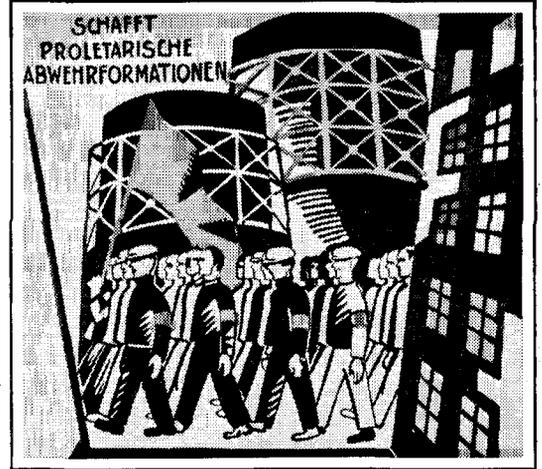
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gaining strength and refers to the “diminishing hold which the Social Democratic Party was able to exert on its rank and file.”

If ever there was a revolutionary situation, this was it. But while the KPD had several hundred thousand revolutionary-minded workers at the base, the leadership lacked the appetite to mobilize the proletariat to take power. When the situation was at its hottest, Brandler declared in *Die Rote Fahne* (2 August 1923): “We must fight the battles to which we are destined by history, but we must always keep in mind that we are at the moment still the weaker. We cannot as yet offer a general battle, and we must avoid everything which would enable the enemy to beat us piecemeal” (quoted in Angress).

Brandler maintained this position long after the events of 1923. Today this same piece of “wisdom” is the sum and substance of what the British social democrats of *Revolutionary History*, a “non-party” publication supported by a spectrum of pseudo-Trotskyist individuals and groups, have to say about 1923. In an issue of *Revolutionary History* (Spring 1994) devoted to “Germany 1918-23,” Mike Jones claimed that Trotsky’s fatal mistake in 1923 was that he supposedly “underestimated the hold of the SPD over millions of workers. He underestimated the material strength of reformism, of bourgeois democracy, and so on, amongst the German workers.” This, of course, is the time-honored technique of opportunists, who always blame defeats on the “immaturity of the masses,” alibiing the misleaders.

With the SPD’s hold on the masses weakened, the KPD did little to expose the reformists and press its own political advantage. One of the grossest expressions of this conciliationism came in an article in *Die Rote Fahne* on 21 January 1923, which appealed to the SPD for “Burgfrieden”—civil peace—among the workers. “Burgfrieden” was the call of the *Kaiser* in 1914, demanding that there be no class warfare within Germany as the bourgeoisie went to war against its imperialist rivals! In Saxony, the KPD gave backhanded support to the government of left SPDer Erich Zeigner. When cops shot into a demonstration of workers and unemployed in Leipzig in June, killing several, Brandler refused to do anything about this and instead asked for...a commission of inquiry! Just as pathetically, on the CI side Zinoviev and



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Police confront demonstrators as general strike begins against Cuno government, Berlin, 11 August 1923. KPD poster from 1923 calls for building workers’ defense organizations (“Proletarian Hundreds”).

Radek demanded that the KPD withdraw support from Zeigner unless...he appointed a new police commissioner. All sides clearly feared a political collision with the SPD “left” leaders who administered Saxony.

From August to October

The government was toppled in August by the “Cuno strike,” begun by Berlin printers who refused to print any more money. The KPD-influenced *Betriebsräte*, the factory councils, pushed this into a virtual general strike, over the objections of the trade-union tops. But the party lacked any offensive policy, never going beyond the framework of a militant strike. The strikers had demanded Cuno’s resignation. When that happened, the workers streamed back to their jobs, against the wishes of the KPD. The KPD called for a “workers government” but did not call for establishing *organs of dual power* that would serve as a bridge to proletarian rule.

The Cuno government was replaced with Gustav Stresemann’s “great coalition,” which included four SPD ministers. For Mike Jones and *Revolutionary History*, the Stresemann/SPD coalition put an end to any revolutionary possibilities which “could” have existed earlier in the year. But by no means did Stresemann’s government stabilize the situation to the extent Jones would have us believe. Stresemann himself wasn’t so confident upon taking office; hence his statement that “we are the last bourgeois parliamentary government.” There was still an expectant mood among the German masses in October 1923, as Victor Serge, who worked in Berlin as a Comintern journalist, later testified:

“On the threshold...*Losschlagen!* *Losschlagen* means strike the blow you had been holding back, trigger off action. This word is on everyone’s lips, on this side of the barricade. On the other side, too, I think. In Thuringia, outside semi-clandestine meetings where a Communist is due to speak, workers—whom he doesn’t know—plant themselves in front of him. A railwayman asks, coming straight to the point: ‘When shall we strike? When?’

“This worker, who has traveled 50 miles by night to ask this question, understands little about matters of tactics and timing: ‘My people,’ he says, ‘have had enough. Be quick about it!’”

—Victor Serge, “A 50 Day Armed Vigil” (February 1924), reprinted in *Witness to the German Revolution* (2000)

In early October, the KPD entered the SPD governments in Saxony and Thuringia as coalition partners, supposedly with the aim of utilizing its ministerial posts to get arms. Naturally, nothing of the sort happened. General Müller, demanding that the Proletarian Hundreds be disbanded, marched on Saxony. Now himself a minister, Brandler pegged the organizing of an uprising to gaining the support of the Social Democrats at a conference of Saxon workers organizations held in Chemnitz on October 21. Brandler put forward a motion for a general strike, which was supposed to be the spark for the insurrection. But when the SPD delegates objected, Brandler simply backed down. And that was the end of the German Revolution, except for some fighting in Hamburg, where several hundred Communists seized a number of police stations and acquitted themselves well before being compelled to retreat.

Who ever heard of Communists organizing a revolution where the Social Democrats were given veto power? Historian Evelyn Anderson noted astutely:

“The Communist position was manifestly absurd. The two policies of accepting responsibility of government, on the one hand, and of preparing for a revolution, on the other, obviously excluded each other. Yet the Communists pursued both at the same time, with the inevitable result of complete failure.”

—Evelyn Anderson, *Hammer or Anvil: The Story of the German Working-Class Movement* (1945)

Russia 1917 vs. Germany 1923

Trotsky never based his evaluation of the KPD's fatal vacillations in 1923 on the view that autumn represented the high point for revolution. Autumn was already late. In May 1924 Trotsky wrote:

“True, in the month of October a sharp break occurred in the party's policy. But it was already too late. In the course of 1923 the working masses realized or sensed that the moment of decisive struggle was approaching. However, they did not see the necessary resolution and self-confidence on the side of the Communist Party. And when the latter began its feverish preparations for an uprising, it immediately lost its balance and also its ties with the masses.”

—Trotsky, introduction to *The First Five Years of the Communist International*

Within the Russian Political Bureau it had been Lenin's assignment to monitor the German party; Trotsky had responsibility for the French. Lenin suffered a debilitating stroke in March 1923. Trotsky realized Germany had entered a revolutionary situation only in August. The Russian Political Bureau met on the 23rd of that month, with Brandler in attendance, to discuss the perspectives of the German party. Zinoviev was vacillating and equivocal, as was Radek. Stalin, as Trotsky was only to discover some years later, had been urging that the Germans be restrained, writing to Zinoviev and Bukharin: “Of course, the fascists are not asleep, but it is to our interest that they attack first.... In my opinion, the Germans must be curbed and not spurred on” (cited in Maurice Spector's 11 January 1937 introduction to *The Lessons of October*). The PB appointed a standing committee to mobilize support for a German revolution, and initiated a campaign for solidarity that had an electrifying effect on the Red Army and on the Soviet populace more broadly. Scarce grain reserves were accumulated in the cities to be shipped to Germany at the critical moment. But the Political Bureau continued to dither about whether the KPD should set course for an immediate insurrection. Fischer and Maslow were summoned to Moscow and finally in September it was decided that the KPD should set the date for the seizure of power. Brandler was honest about his doubts regarding this

course and his own abilities—he specifically said that he was no Lenin and asked that Trotsky be sent to Germany to lead the revolution. Evidently Brandler was hoping that Trotsky could conjure up soviets and a revolution out of the ground.

German considerations were increasingly becoming subordinate to the vicissitudes of the factional struggle within the Russian party. By this time, Trotsky was being sidelined by the leading troika of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin. But the troika could hardly be seen to oppose proletarian revolution in Germany, and went along with Trotsky in setting the date. Zinoviev also went part way toward meeting Trotsky's demand that Fischer and Maslow be kept in Moscow to dampen the disruptive potential of the German “lefts” during the insurrection (Maslow stayed in Moscow, while Fischer was allowed to return). But the troika could not risk giving Trotsky a chance to lead the German Revolution; they insisted Trotsky's presence was required in Moscow.

Behind Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev stood the burgeoning bureaucratic apparatus of the Russian party and state. In a few months the troika would smash the anti-bureaucratic opposition and seize political power for the bureaucracy at the January 1924 party conference. But in the summer and early fall of 1923 the door was still open for Trotsky to fight for a Comintern intervention that would have made the critical difference in politically arming the KPD to take advantage of the revolutionary opportunity. Unfortunately, Trotsky lacked the political understanding and information as to the KPD's actual practice in Germany. His approach at the time was largely administrative.

What was required in 1923 was a political rearming of the German Communists, akin to what Lenin had carried out in the Bolshevik Party upon his return from Switzerland in April 1917. In the early period following the February Revolution Stalin, Kamenev and other elements of the Bolshevik leadership returning from internal exile had overturned the early decision of the Bureau of the Central Committee and committed the party to a policy of extending critical support to the bourgeois-democratic Provisional Government formed after the abdication of the tsar “in so far as it struggles against reaction or counter-revolution.” In his April Theses, Lenin argued strongly against this capitulatory line, opposing any support to the Provisional Government or rapprochement with the social-democratic Mensheviks, and calling for all power to the soviets and for arming the workers. Without this crucial fight, as well as further struggles against those like Kamenev and Zinoviev who flinched at organizing the insurrection, the October Revolution would never have happened.

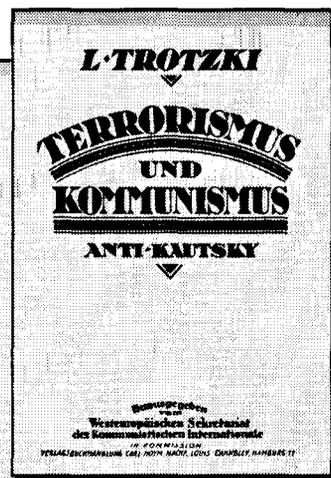
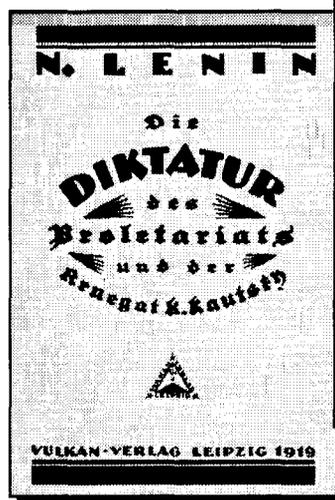
In particular, Lenin stressed the need for crystal clarity on the nature of the state. Even the most “democratic” bourgeois republic is an instrument for maintaining the rule of a minority of exploiters over the masses of exploited. Socialist revolution means the smashing of the existing state apparatus—whose core is the army, police, courts and prisons—and its replacement with a new one based on organs of proletarian rule, soviets, which would repress the capitalist class, thus constituting the dictatorship of the proletariat. This perspective was realized in the October Revolution, opposed even by left-wing Mensheviks like Martov.

Following the October Revolution, the German left social democrat Karl Kautsky took the Bolsheviks to task for liquidating the Constituent Assembly in his 1918 polemic, *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*. Kautsky claimed that this bourgeois parliamentary body was a higher form of democracy than the soviets. Lenin, who had been forced to break



Frederick A. Praeger

Karl Kautsky, pre-eminent theoretician of the Social Democracy and later the centrist USPD. The key polemics against Kautsky's anti-Bolshevik revisionism were written not by the German Communists but by Lenin and Trotsky.



off work on *State and Revolution* in order to lead the October Revolution, used the leftover material in his 1918 reply to "the renegade Kautsky." Lenin illustrated that despite Kautsky's "left" pretensions and his professed enthusiasm for soviets, Kautsky's fundamental affinity lay with the Menshevik Martov and his horror at the idea of the soviets as the vehicle for proletarian state power:

"The crux is: should the Soviets aspire to become state organisations...or should the Soviets not strive for this, refrain from taking power into their hands, refrain from becoming state organisations and remain the 'combat organisations' of one 'class' (as Martov expressed it, embellishing by this innocent wish the fact that under Menshevik leadership the Soviets were *an instrument for the subjection of the workers to the bourgeoisie*)?..."

"Thus [for Kautsky], the oppressed class, the vanguard of all the working and exploited people in modern society, must strive toward the 'decisive battles between capital and labour,' *but must not touch* the machine by means of which capital suppresses labour!—*It must not break up* that machine!—*It must not make use* of its all-embracing organisation *for suppressing the exploiters!*..."

"This is where Kautsky's complete rupture both with Marxism and with socialism becomes obvious. Actually, it is desertion to the camp of the bourgeoisie, who are prepared to concede everything except the transformation of the organisations of the class which they oppress into state organisations."

—Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, October-November 1918 (*Collected Works*, Vol. 28)

This polemic between Lenin and Kautsky over the October Revolution foreshadowed what was about to happen in Germany. When Kaiser Wilhelm was forced to abdicate as a result of the November Revolution of 1918, the working masses set up workers and soldiers councils in an attempt to follow in the path of the proletariat of Russia. The SPD was desperate to liquidate these councils and replace them with the National Assembly, a bourgeois parliament. The newly formed KPD was for all power to the workers and soldiers councils. The Independents, the USPD, led by the likes of Kautsky and Rudolf Hilferding, claimed to be for *both* the National Assembly and the workers councils, demanding that the latter be incorporated into the Weimar constitution. The USPD proved of great utility to the SPD in getting the National Assembly accepted, after which it was relatively easy to dismantle the councils.

With no communist organization yet in existence, the working masses radicalized by the war had poured into the

USPD. Although thoroughly reformist in deed, the USPD's Marxist phraseology made it even more dangerous than the SPD, for it served to dupe more advanced workers who saw through the SPD. In the midst of the burgeoning revolution, the Spartakusbund of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht finally quit the USPD and joined with some smaller groups of independent radicals to form the KPD. The failure to break earlier with Kautsky's centrism shipwrecked the 1918 German Revolution. The German Communists never really assimilated the importance of the Bolsheviks' intransigent political split with all varieties of reformism and centrism.

In September 1918, as Kautsky's attacks on the October Revolution went unanswered in Germany, Lenin wrote to the Soviet envoys in West Europe:

"Kautsky's disgraceful rubbish, childish babble and shallowest opportunism impel me to ask: why do we do nothing to fight the *theoretical* vulgarisation of Marxism by Kautsky?"

"Can we tolerate that even such people as Mehring and Zetkin keep away from Kautsky more 'morally' (if one may put it so) than *theoretically*."

—Lenin, "Letter to Y.A. Berzin, V.V. Vorovsky and A.A. Joffe," 20 September 1918 (*Collected Works*, Vol. 35)

Lenin urged the envoys to "have a detailed talk with the Left (Spartacists and others), stimulating them to make a statement of *principle*, of *theory*, in the press, that on the question of dictatorship Kautsky is producing philistine Bernsteinism, not Marxism." It was Lenin and Trotsky, and not any of the German leaders, who wrote the main polemics against Kautsky, from Lenin's *The State and Revolution* (1917), *Renegade Kautsky* and "Left-Wing" Communism (1920) to Trotsky's *Terrorism and Communism* in 1920 and *Social Democracy and the Wars of Intervention in Russia, 1918-1921* (*Between Red and White*) in 1922.

The German Communist leaders could not defeat Kautsky, the pre-eminent prewar leader of German "Marxism," because they had never broken decisively from his conception of the "party of the whole class" and the parliamentarism of the old SPD. The prewar Social Democracy had increasingly accommodated to the autocratic legal structure of the Wilhelminian Reich. One expression of this was the SPD's submission to a law—which remained in effect until 1918—mandating an official police presence at all publicly announced meetings, which included local branch meetings and even party congresses. As documented by Richard Reichard in *Crippled from Birth—German Social Democracy*



Willy Romer

Armed workers occupy Berlin newspaper district, January 1919.

1844-1870 (1969), this meant that the cops could instantly shut down any SPD gathering if they heard something they didn't like.

Marxist revolutionaries fight for the right to carry out their activities legally under capitalism. But to accommodate *a priori* to what the bourgeois state deems "legal" is to give up the struggle for proletarian revolution. Even in the most "democratic" capitalist countries, it required an illegal party organization and press for Marxists to be able to tell the truth about their own imperialist governments during World War I. Yet for the Brandler leadership of the KPD, the Leninist conception of the vanguard party and the whole experience of the Bolsheviks, including the necessity to set up a parallel illegal organization, were not appropriate for "civilized" countries like Germany. The KPD leadership oscillated between the opportunism and parliamentarism of Brandler and the idiot ultimatism of Fischer and Maslow, unable to organize the fight for power and decisively break the hold of the SPD on the working class.

In 1923, the KPD blurred the lines which Lenin had clearly demarcated between a bourgeois state and a workers state. Absent was any call for the building of soviets, or workers councils, that would be the organs of workers rule. Instead, KPD propaganda emphasized the building of a "workers government," which a resolution at the KPD's Eighth Congress in late January and early February 1923 made clear was "neither the dictatorship of the proletariat nor a peaceful parliamentary advance toward one," but an "attempt by the working class, within the framework of and initially employing the instruments of bourgeois democracy, to pursue proletarian politics, based on organs of the proletariat and mass movements of the workers" (*Dokumente und Materialien*). In May, a resolution was cooked up in a meeting with the ECCI, supported by Fischer's "lefts," which was in principle no different, projecting that "the workers government can issue out of the existing democratic institutions."

This was the heart of the problem: the KPD leadership—both wings—expected political power to devolve to them through the mechanism of the *bourgeois* state. What was absent was any concept of seizing power and the need for organs of proletarian rule to serve as a basis for that power. Soviets or some equivalent body would have to replace the

existing state power in a process which would inevitably entail a military conflict.

When the Communists accepted ministerial portfolios in Saxony and Thuringia in October, this only reinforced existing parliamentarist prejudices. If this was indeed already a workers government, then presumably extraparlimentary revolutionary struggle, the formation of workers councils and armed workers militias, would be totally superfluous. The vast majority of workers had no clue that an armed uprising was in the offing. To be sure, no leadership in its right mind would telegraph in advance the date of an insurrection. But in Russia in 1917 the proletariat clearly understood that the Bolshevik program was to take power based on the soviets.

In *The Lessons of October*, Trotsky defended the advice of the CI in 1923 not to call for soviets, but to rely instead on the factory councils. Trotsky argued that the factory councils "had already become in action the rallying centres of the revolutionary masses" and that soviets formed at that stage in the struggle would be organizationally redundant. Moreover, as Trotsky explained in revisiting this question in his 1931 article "Workers Control of Production," after 1917-18 the word "soviet" had become "a synonym for the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks, and hence a bugbear on the lips of Social Democracy.... In the eyes of the bourgeois state, especially its fascist guard, the Communists' setting to work creating soviets will be equivalent to a direct declaration of civil war by the proletariat" (*The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany* [1971]).

The *Betriebsräte* (factory councils) were established by the SPD government under a February 1920 law as a substitute for the workers and soldiers councils that had been dismantled. The SPD wanted to keep the factory councils—which were to be elected in all enterprises with more than 50 employees—under the thumb of the union bureaucracy, so they were charged with enforcing the provisions of contracts negotiated by the unions. The month before the legislation was passed, tens of thousands demonstrated against it; the protest was fired on by the Berlin police, who killed 42.

However, in the years that followed the *Betriebsräte* increasingly became the locus of militant struggle. So-called "wildcat" (or unauthorized) conferences of factory councils

took place on a regional and even national level. These were dominated by the KPD, and generally boycotted by the SPD. Our own research on the extent to which the working masses embraced the factory councils is somewhat inconclusive, although there is considerable evidence that they were becoming much more of a factor in 1923. Trotsky's argument for the factory councils as instruments for a proletarian insurrection was a realistic revolutionary perspective in 1923. They were becoming potentially far more representative than simply factory-based organizations: factory councils were linking up with each other and also working with the Proletarian Hundreds and the control commissions that regulated distribution and prices of food, which were particularly widespread in the Ruhr.

The problem is that the KPD did not seek to invest these embryonic forms of proletarian dual power with revolutionary content. Even after the Comintern had prodded the KPD leadership into agreeing to organize an armed uprising, there is no evidence whatsoever that the factory councils were anything beyond militant strike committees. That could have been a starting point—indeed, the Russian soviets originally emerged from strike committees in 1905—but the KPD never sought to imbue the proletariat with the consciousness that it needed to create organs of workers rule. There was nothing along the lines of “All power to the *Betriebsräte*.” Nor were the Proletarian Hundreds conceived of by the KPD leadership as instruments to overthrow and supplant the bourgeois state, but more as adjuncts to that state. In Gelsenkirchen, a city in the Ruhr effectively controlled by the KPD, the Communists asked the local government to assign a police officer to instruct the workers militias! In Saxony, the KPD proposed that the SPD government integrate the workers militia into the police force. Likewise, the KPD strategy toward the control commissions was to try to get them “legalized” by local governments.

The Military Question

As the saying goes: victory has many fathers, defeat is ever an orphan. In *The Lessons of October*, Trotsky observed that had Lenin not been present to drive the Russian Revolution forward to victory, “The official historians would, of course, have explained that an insurrection in October 1917 would have been sheer madness; and they would have furnished the reader with awe-inspiring statistical charts of the Junkers and Cossacks and shock troops and artillery, deployed fan-wise, and army corps arriving from the front.”

Any number of writers, some of a leftist persuasion, claim to prove that revolution was impossible in Germany in 1923. The historian Helmut Gruber, arguing that “the proletarian hundreds were not intended as a match for the army or police but as a counterweight against rightist paramilitary units,” concludes that a “force of 250,000 well-trained and heavily armed men was a match for an uprising even with a broad popular base. In this case, as in others, the Russians obscured the danger by discovering homologues to their October Revolution” (Gruber, *International Communism in the Era of Lenin* [1967]).

Thus, as this tale goes, the German workers were hopelessly outgunned and outmanned; the sober-minded KPD leader Brandler understood this, but allowed himself to be bullied by the Russians, whose mistake was to believe that the experience of the October Revolution was relevant. And if revolution was impossible, then logic dictated that the only alternative was change through parliamentary reform,

to which the mass of the German proletariat was ostensibly reconciled.

Yet the German proletariat was mobilized by the thousands with arms in hand in 1923, ready to take power. The workers had access to tens of thousands of small arms they had buried in the fields after the war, while their militias were composed of front-line World War I veterans who were quite experienced fighters. But the idea that an insurrection required disciplined units of men armed not only with rifles but with machine guns and heavy weapons proved totally beyond the ken of the KPD leadership.

The Reichswehr was an all-volunteer and highly motivated force, with many drawn from the ranks of the Freikorps—later euphemistically renamed “defense associations”—fascistic paramilitary units financed by big industrialists and experienced in counterrevolutionary butchery. The army carefully screened out communists, socialists and Jews and preferred to recruit from rural areas. The army could not be easily split, but its small size—limited to 100,000 men under the terms of the Versailles Treaty—made it little more than a good-sized police force. It would not be adequate to put down a determined national proletarian insurrection.

By 1923 much of the Freikorps had been integrated into the regular army. There were also the “Black Reichswehr”—illegally recruited adjuncts to the army, generally of dubious fighting ability—and the fascist bands. As Trotsky noted, the forces of the fascists were monstrously exaggerated and to a considerable degree existed only on paper, as was demonstrated by the ease with which Hitler’s “Beer Hall Putsch” in Bavaria was dispersed in November. Stalin and Radek had overstated the strength of the fascists as an excuse to avoid organizing an insurrection. This is not to say the fascists were negligible, but neither was this 1931, when Hitler had a hundred thousand stormtroopers.

Insurrectionary Turmoil in the Weimar Republic

The Weimar Republic had brought not some mythical stable parliamentary democracy, but five years of insurrectionary and semi-insurrectionary movements, with sizable clashes between armed workers and the state. In January 1919 and again that spring, there were massive confrontations between insurgent workers and the SPD government,

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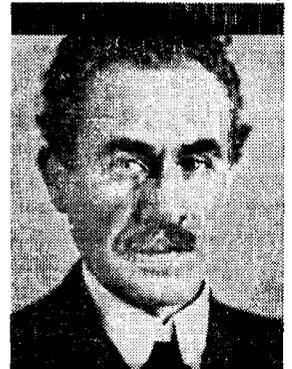
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German revolutionary leadership was beheaded by bourgeois reaction and its SPD bloodhounds in 1919. From left: Rosa Luxemburg agitates against war preparations, 1907; Karl Liebknecht tells Berlin workers, "The main enemy is at home," January 1919; Eugen Leviné (top right); Leo Jogiches.

which acted on behalf of the bourgeoisie to crush the threat of revolution. The USPD played a critical role in the first month following the abdication of the Kaiser, joining the government and thereby helping to lull the proletariat while the counterrevolutionaries regrouped their forces. The workers fought bravely in these early insurgencies, but lacked an authoritative revolutionary party to coordinate struggle on a national level. The government was able to isolate these struggles on a local level and pick them off one by one.

Reichswehr and Freikorps troops occupied Berlin in January 1919 and again in February. A punitive expedition was dispatched to depose the workers and soldiers council in Bremen, where a workers republic had been declared. Then came the turn of central Germany, where government troops occupied one town after another, in many cases after heavy fighting. Many thousands were killed during street battles. When a five-day strike broke out in Berlin on March 3, SPD defense minister Noske issued shoot-to-kill orders to the army, which was equipped with aircraft and artillery. Some 1,200 people were killed. Troops were also sent to Halle that spring to break a general strike. In the Ruhr there were militant strikes in the mines, at their peak embracing three-quarters of the workforce, which raised not only economic demands but called for acceptance of the workers councils, the arming of workers against the Freikorps, and recognition of the Soviet Union. The last major battle in 1919 was the suppression of the Bavarian commune, where a thousand were killed in the fighting and well over a hundred revolutionaries were murdered.

The new Communist Party had little sense of how to operate in a volatile situation where there were rapid surges of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces. Where the Bolsheviks took the necessary step of sending Lenin into hiding during the reactionary July Days in Russia in 1917, when the SPD government unleashed the Freikorps in 1918-19, the KPD did not take sufficient precautions to protect its leadership. Within the first few months of the founding of the KPD,

Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Leo Jogiches were all murdered. In June, Eugen Leviné was shot by a firing squad for leading the defense of the Bavarian Soviet Republic.

On 13 March 1920, a general named Von Lüttwitz marched Freikorps troops into Berlin and sought to install a right-wing military government under the Prussian civil servant Kapp. The army officers behind the Kapp Putsch blamed the Social Democrats for the national humiliations of the Versailles Treaty and particularly its provision limiting the size of the army. The SPD government fled Berlin and appealed to the Reichswehr command for intervention. Not surprisingly, the army did nothing to oppose the Kapp Putsch. Finally, the conservative SPD head of the trade unions, Karl Legien, called for a general strike.

The powerful actions of the proletariat completely smashed the attempted putsch. After two days, the Kapp government was powerless, and after two more days it was gone. Legien tried to call the strike off, but the more combative sections of the proletariat were not to be restrained. Workers dug up the weapons they had hidden after the suppression of the 1919 uprisings. Workers militias sprang up, often under the leadership of the USPD lefts or the KPD, and a 50,000-strong "Red Army" was formed in the Ruhr. Highly decentralized and improvised, it was nevertheless capable of dispersing Freikorps brigades and even Reichswehr units. This highlighted the potential of an armed proletariat to equip themselves with weapons and overcome the army. As one writer described it:

"Meanwhile Reichswehr units in the area (largely unreconstructed Free Corps) demonstratively welcomed the new regime; and General von Watter, regional commander in Münster, misjudging the situation, set some of his units in motion toward areas where an insurrectionary spirit was suspected. The armed workers responded aggressively. At the town of Wetter on March 15 a Free Corps detachment was surrounded (largely by workers from Hagen) and, after several hours of battle, forced to surrender. The same night, insurgent forces surrounded another detachment of the same Free Corps in another town, receiving its surrender the next morning.

Through such victories, and by disarming the citizens' guards of the smaller towns, the workers' forces soon acquired a proper arsenal of small arms. The example was followed elsewhere. On March 16 a larger Free Corps unit was badly mauled by a workers' army while trying to march out of the district; two days later, the Westphalian part of the Ruhr was entirely free of Reichswehr troops, all having been disarmed by the workers or withdrawn from the area. There remained troops in the Rhenish part of the Ruhr and a large body of security police in Essen; but when the latter city fell on March 20, after a three-day battle, no regular armed forces were left in the district."

—David Morgan, *The Socialist Left and the German Revolution* (1975)

The upshot of the workers' suppression of the Kapp Putsch was the Bielefeld Accords signed on 24 March 1920 by bourgeois politicians, the unions, the two social-democratic parties, and two representatives from the KPD. These accords included a call on the state to disarm and liquidate the counterrevolutionary bands and to purge civil servants "disloyal" to the republic. The Red Army was to give up its weapons, except for some workers who would supposedly be incorporated into the local police. In exchange, the Reichswehr was supposed to stay out of the Ruhr. But when the workers surrendered their arms, government forces marched into the Ruhr, together with the Freikorps units—which had been dissolved...into the army! A virtual White Terror ensued; throughout Rhineland-Westphalia, working-class neighborhoods were pillaged and burned out and entire families were shot. It was a bloody lesson in what comes from trusting the "neutrality" and "evenhandedness" of the bourgeois state.

Although the KPD later claimed that its two representatives had no mandate to vote for the Bielefeld Accords, KPD propaganda during the early 1920s was saturated with similar appeals to the bourgeois state to outlaw fascist and monarchist groups, purge the civil service of reactionaries, constitute a police force out of "trade-union-organized workers," etc. This was a touching display of confidence in the bourgeois state. The Law for the Protection of the Republic—passed in 1922 after a far-right hit squad assassinated Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau, a prominent Jewish politician—was used overwhelmingly against the left. The false conception that the state could somehow be rendered "neutral" by passing "progressive" laws undermined the necessary understanding on the part of the working class that it must take its

defense into its own hands and that the state would have to be overthrown by the armed proletariat itself.

The March Action and the "Theory of the Offensive"

By the time the March Action erupted in 1921, the KPD had become a mass party. In October 1920, the USPD had split at its Halle Congress over acceptance of the Comintern's famous 21 Conditions, which were designed to draw a sharp line against the centrists and specifically called for the exclusion of Kautsky and Hilferding. Speaking against affiliation were Hilferding and Martov; answering Hilferding was Zinoviev, whose impassioned four-hour speech won the day. Brandler, notably, *opposed* the USPD split. The left wing of the USPD, about two-thirds of the active membership, fused with the KPD to form the United Communist Party (VKPD), though the party reverted to the name KPD after several months.

In March 1921, strikes, stop-work meetings and plant occupations rolled across the Mansfeld coal fields in central Germany in response to police provocations in the mines, and the miners flocked to the banners of the VKPD. On March 16 the Social Democrats Hörsing, governor of Saxony, and Severing, Prussian minister of the interior, sent troops and police to suppress the workers. What was in order were defensive tactics, which if successful might permit the proletariat to then go onto the offensive. But the VKPD leadership replied to the government's provocation with a call for armed resistance. In some areas, the workers heeded the call and fought heroically, but even then the fighting was sporadic and by no means generalized. Elsewhere, the call went unanswered. A call for a general strike a week later was similarly unsuccessful, leading to physical fights in many places between a Communist minority and workers under the influence of the Social Democrats.

The VKPD eventually called off the action. Casualties were heavy and thousands were arrested. In *Stillborn Revolution*, Angress estimates that the VKPD probably lost half its membership, and according to official party figures it never fully recouped these losses, even with rapid recruitment in 1923. Most importantly, its trade-union base was significantly weakened.

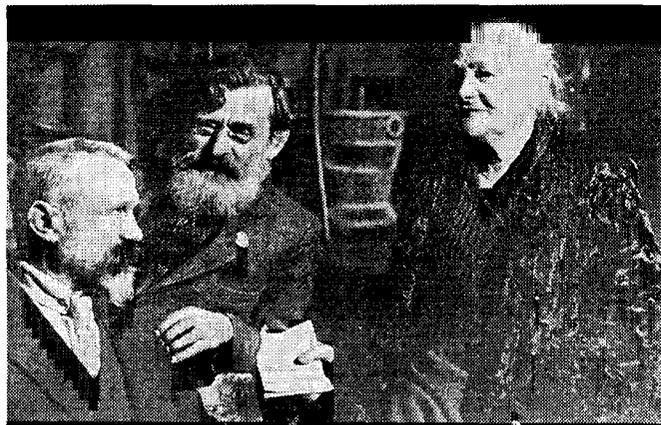


Bundesarchiv



Der Spiegel

Skyrocketing inflation was brutal attack on living standards of workers and petty bourgeoisie. Housewives wait in line to buy food (left); sign outside store says, "22,000 marks rent is not affordable—therefore total clearance sale!! Prices as marked no longer apply. We accept any offer whatsoever!!"



Dietz Verlag

Some leaders of International Red Aid, Comintern's international defense organization, at CI Fourth Congress in 1922: (from left) Julian Marchlewski, Felix Kon, Clara Zetkin.

At the time of the March Action the KPD was headed by Ernst Meyer, who had replaced Paul Levi in February. Levi, a brilliant but opportunist dilettante, had resigned as VKPD chairman after the *Zentrale* refused to endorse his actions at a January conference of the Italian Socialist Party. While adhering to the Comintern, the Italian leadership under Serrati had refused to accept the twenty-first condition of membership—the need for a break with the reformists. Levi had stood with Serrati. Now, in his pamphlet *Our Road: Against Putschism* (3 April 1921), Levi slanderously asserted that the March Action was a “putsch.” In fact, the workers in Mansfeld had responded en masse to a clear provocation by the SPD cop Hörsing. While many of Levi's other criticisms of the March Action were correct, he went *public* with his attacks on the VKPD leaders—going so far as to compare them with Hitler's crony General Ludendorff—at a time when the party was under fire from the class enemy. Showing no sense of solidarity with the party, as Lenin noted, Levi “tore the party to pieces” (Clara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin* [1934]). For this cowardly and spiteful act of indiscipline, Levi was rightly expelled from the party. For a period he had his own organization, but it was only a brief way station en route to returning to the SPD via the USPD.

Just prior to the March Action, the Comintern had sent Hungarian Communist Béla Kun to Germany. Only two years earlier, Kun's disastrous liquidation of the Hungarian Communists into a common party with the social democrats had helped doom the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Now Kun was a prominent advocate of the “theory of the offensive,” insisting that a Communist party must be always on the offensive against the bourgeoisie. This so-called theory was upheld by the VKPD leadership of Meyer, Brandler and Thalheimer and by the “lefts” like Fischer and Maslow.

The Russian Politburo was split down the middle in the discussion on the March Action. This occasion marked a growing political rapprochement between Lenin and Trotsky following the deep rift that had developed between them over the trade-union dispute at the 1921 Tenth Party Congress. They won over Kamenev, thereby gaining the majority on the Politburo. Zinoviev and Bukharin (then a candidate member of the PB) supported the March Action, as did Karl Radek, the CI representative to Germany. For a period of time, the two sides met in separate caucuses, indicating a pre-factional situation.

Eventually the Russian delegation to the 1921 Third Comintern Congress reached agreement on a compromise motion. At the Congress Lenin and Trotsky defeated attempts by the German lefts and others to water down the motion by amendments aimed at gutting the resolution of any criticism of the March Action. The central slogan of the Third Congress was “To power through a previous conquest of the masses!” It marked a recognition that the political and organizational resources of the Communist parties were not yet sufficient for an immediate conquest of power. Lenin devoted much time and attention to the Organizational Resolution, which sought to distill the essence of how the Bolshevik Party functioned and to convey it to the young parties of the CI. Lenin was particularly concerned that these points be grasped by the German party, insisting that the report be written in German and that a German comrade be assigned to make the presentation at the Congress.

An interesting account of this period, which exposes the absurdity of the claims made later that to obtain arms the KPD had to enter the Saxon government, is contained in *From White Cross to Red Flag, the Autobiography of Max Hoelz: Waiter, Soldier, Revolutionary Leader* (1930). A self-taught worker, Hoelz organized a Red Army in the Vogtland area bordering Czechoslovakia during the Kapp Putsch and established an army of 2,500 partisans in central Germany during the March Action. Albeit on a small scale, Hoelz and his militia boldly armed themselves by disarming cops and soldiers and requisitioning munitions from local factories. Hoelz was an impulsive, primitive communist who generally did not wait for instructions before acting, but a smart leadership would have sought to utilize him for his obvious talents as a military leader.

After the March Action, Hoelz was sentenced to life imprisonment, serving seven years before being released under the terms of an amnesty act. Campaigning for his freedom, the Comintern saluted Hoelz in a 25 June 1921 resolution as a “brave fighter in revolt against the capitalist system,” while noting: “Max Hoelz did not act wisely. White terror can only be broken by the mass proletarian uprising, which alone guarantees the victory of the class. But his action sprang from his dedication to the proletarian cause and his hatred of the bourgeoisie.”

At his trial, Hoelz turned the tables on his accusers, saying that the real defendant was bourgeois society. Hoelz had become a pacifist after four years in the army during the war, but his experiences quickly convinced him that you couldn't change anything through words or empty appeals to the bourgeoisie for justice. He had of course resorted to force, he said, but that was nothing compared to the wanton and gratuitous orgy of violence carried out by the perpetrators of the White Terror. The cruelties exacted by the bourgeoisie would harden the workers and make them less soft-headed. Hoelz scoffed at the prosecutor's claim that change could come through elections, asserting: “What happened in 1918 in Germany was no revolution! I recognize only two revolutions: the French and the Russian” (*Hözl's Anklagerede gegen die bürgerliche Gesellschaft* [Hoelz's Prosecution Speech against Bourgeois Society] [1921]).

Brandler was tried a couple of weeks before Hoelz. The contrast was striking: with reprehensible cowardice and lack of solidarity, Brandler denied having anything to do with calls for an armed uprising and sought to save his own skin by pinning the blame for violence on Hoelz and members of the ultraleft Communist Workers Party (KAPD). Brandler

assured the prosecutor that workers rule was compatible with the bourgeois constitution: "I say: the dictatorship of the proletariat is possible even under the German constitution!" He added, "Since 1918 the possibility of determining the fate of Germany through armed uprisings has increasingly diminished." Dissociating himself completely from other targets of state repression, Brandler told the court: "In the KAPD, many think that this prolonged method of seizing power can be achieved through sabotage and individual terror. We expelled them from the party in 1919" (*Der Hochverratsprozess gegen Heinrich Brandler vor dem ausserordentlichen Gericht am 6. Juni 1921 in Berlin* [The High Treason Trial of Heinrich Brandler before the Special Court on 6 June 1921 in Berlin] [1921]).

This is illuminating as to the mindset of the KPD leadership after the March Action. Having burned their fingers, yesterday's enthusiasts for the "permanent offensive" like Brandler, Thalheimer and Meyer now genuflected before bourgeois legalism and respectability. At an August 1923 meeting of the Russian Politburo, Trotsky said trenchantly of the German leadership: "What they have over there is the mindset of a whipped dog after the experience of the failure of its March [Action]" (Recording of discussion "On the International Situation" at the 21 August 1923 session of the Politburo of the CC of the RKP(b), *Istochnik*, May 1995 [our translation]).

In 1919 and 1920 there was no mass communist party that could take advantage of the revolutionary opportunities. In 1921 the Communists mistook a very powerful, but sectionally limited, outburst of class struggle for an insurrectionary situation. But the generalized radicalization precipitated by the Ruhr occupation and a mass Communist Party presented a pre-eminent opportunity to struggle for power. As Anderson noted:

"In 1923 a situation had developed in Germany in which 'anything was possible.' In 1923 the people—and by no means only the industrial working class—had become insurrectionist and the time had really come for that 'offensive strategy' which two years previously had failed so miserably. The situation had changed decidedly.

"But the Communist Party, too, had changed. Unluckily its change had worked in exactly the opposite direction. For fear of repeating the 'ultra-left' mistakes of 1921, the Communists had reversed their policy so thoroughly that they were quite incapable of taking action when the time for action came at last."

—*Hammer or Anvil*

The Origins of the "Workers Government" Slogan

The KPD's blurring of the line between the dictatorship of the proletariat and a parliamentary coalition of workers parties stretched back at least to the time of the Kapp Putsch, described by Lenin as "the German equivalent of the Kornilov revolt," the attempted military overthrow of Kerensky's Provisional Government in Russia in August 1917. The Bolsheviks made a military bloc with Kerensky's forces, but opposed any political support to the government. Following Kornilov's repulse, Lenin, as he had before the July Days, challenged the parties of petty-bourgeois democracy, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, to break from their liberal bloc partners and take power on the basis of their majority in the soviets. Lenin explained:

"The compromise would amount to the following: the Bolsheviks, without making any claim to participate in the government (which is impossible for the internationalists unless a dictatorship of the proletariat and the poor peasants has been realised), would refrain from demanding the immediate transfer of power to the proletariat and the poor peasants and from employing revolutionary methods of fighting for this demand."

—Lenin, "On Compromises," September 1917
(*Collected Works*, Vol. 25)

Lenin's point was this: since the Bolsheviks were then a minority of the proletariat, they would forswear revolutionary violence to overthrow a government formed solely of the reformist parties. But Lenin did not imply that such a government was a workers government, nor did he offer to give it political support, much less join it.

The Bolshevik tactic of a military bloc but no political support was also indicated in response to the Kapp Putsch. However, the KPD initially refused to join the general strike

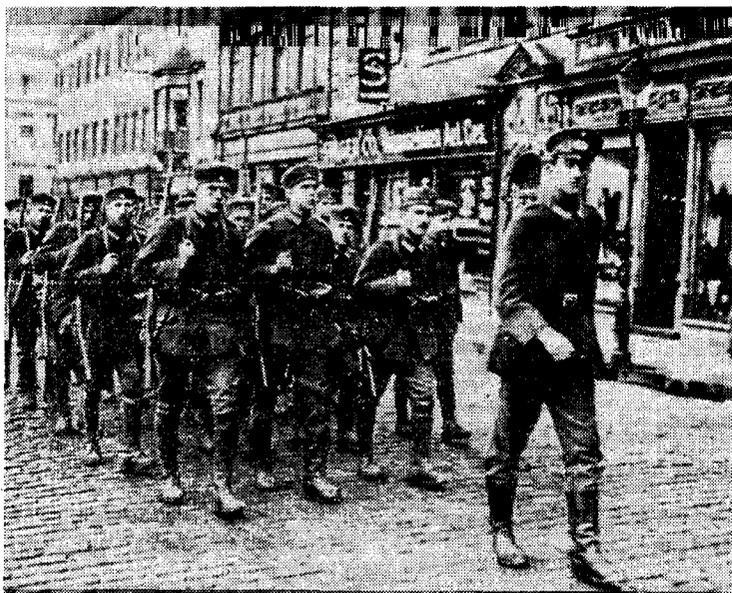
Peter Giersich



Max Hoelz, audacious organizer of numerous small-scale proletarian military actions during 1919-21. Armed workers move into battle in the Ruhr after Kapp Putsch, Dortmund, April 1920 (right).

Robert Sennecke





Der Spiegel



Militärverlag der DDR

Reichswehr sent into Freiberg in Saxony to put down proletarian unrest, 1923 (left). Workers' barricades in Hamburg during 1923 uprising.

against the putsch and when it reversed its sectarian line a day later, it flipped to an opportunist posture toward the reformists. Thus, when Legien proposed a government based on the ADGB trade-union federation, the SPD and USPD after the putsch collapsed, the KPD announced that it would be a "loyal opposition" to such a "socialist government" if it excluded "bourgeois-capitalist parties." It asserted:

"A state of affairs in which political freedom can be enjoyed without restriction, and bourgeois democracy cannot operate as the dictatorship of capital is, from the viewpoint of the development of the proletarian dictatorship, of the utmost importance in further winning the proletarian masses over to the side of communism."

Citing this passage in an appendix to "*Left-Wing Communism—An Infantile Disorder* (April-May 1920), Lenin stated that the "loyal opposition" tactic was in the main correct, explaining it as "a compromise, which is really necessary and should consist in renouncing, for a certain period, all attempts at the forcible overthrow of a government which enjoys the confidence of a majority of the urban workers." But Lenin also noted:

"It is impossible to pass over in silence the fact that a government consisting of social-traitors should not (in an official statement by the Communist Party) be called 'socialist'; that one should not speak of the exclusion of 'bourgeois-capitalist parties,' when the parties both of the Scheidemanns and of the Kautskys and Crispiens are petty-bourgeois-democratic parties."

Lenin insisted that it was thoroughly wrong to pretend that reformist swindlers like the leaders of the SPD and USPD could "go beyond the bounds of bourgeois democracy, which, in its turn, cannot but be a dictatorship of capital."

This lesson was never absorbed by the KPD leaders. The Legien proposal was in any case scotched because of opposition from the USPD's left wing (which was already drawing close to the KPD). But it is evident that the KPD leadership's idea of the "loyal opposition" tactic differed from Lenin's and was more akin to Stalin and Kamenev's line in March 1917 of political support to the bourgeois Provisional Government "in so far as it struggles against reaction or counter-revolution."

When USPD leader Ernst Däumig (who later joined the

KPD) denounced Legien's proposal at a March 23 mass meeting of the Berlin factory councils, rejecting cooperation with the "compromised right-wing" SPD, it was Wilhelm Pieck, a leader of the KPD, who spoke and rebuked Däumig *from the right*:

"The present situation is not ripe enough for a council republic, but it is for a purely workers' government. As revolutionary workers, a purely workers' government is exceedingly desirable. But it can only be a transitional phenomenon.... The USPD has rejected the workers' government, and has thereby failed to protect the interests of the working class at a politically advantageous moment."

—quoted in Arthur Rosenberg, "The Kapp Putsch and the Working Class" (excerpted and translated by Mike Jones from *Geschichte der Weimarer Republik* [History of the Weimar Republic] [1961])

Clearly, as early as the spring of 1920 at least some KPD leaders viewed a social-democratic parliamentary government as a halfway house to workers rule.

Following the fusion with the left wing of the USPD, the VKPD found itself holding the balance of power between the SPD and USPD, on the one hand, and the right-wing bourgeois parties on the other, in regional parliaments (*Landtags*) in Saxony and Thuringia. After the November 1920 elections to the Saxon *Landtag*, the KPD decided to support the formation of an SPD/USPD government and voted for the budget, which of course included funding for the police, the courts and the prisons. The budget vote constituted a vote of *political confidence* in this capitalist government.

"*Left-Wing Communism* has been willfully misinterpreted and misused over the years by fake leftists to justify opportunist maneuvering. But in this work as well as in his intervention in the Third Congress discussion on the united front, Lenin sought to imbue the young Communist parties of the West with the understanding that the conquest of power had to be prepared through a patient and methodical struggle to win the proletariat to the program of communism, including through the use of intelligent tactics aimed at exposing the social-democratic misleaders.

In spite of Lenin's sharp criticism of the KPD in "*Left-Wing Communism*, in November 1921 *Die Rote Fahne* published "Theses on the Relationship to Socialist Governments."

The theses asserted that such “socialist governments” were the “immediate result” of mass proletarian struggles “at a stage when the proletariat lacks the consciousness and power to establish its dictatorship.” The KPD promised to facilitate such governments and “defend them against bourgeois rightists, just as it actively defends the bourgeois republic against the monarchy.” This statement of “lesser evilism” blurs any distinction between a *military bloc* with bourgeois democrats against right-wing reactionaries and *political support* to bourgeois democrats in the form of the Social Democracy. The theses did stop short of advocating KPD entry into a regional government. But there was an inexorable logic posed here: If one could support a capitalist government from the outside, then why not join it in order to “push it to the left”? It didn’t take long before debates on exactly this issue broke out within the KPD.

The Comintern, notably Zinoviev and Radek, played a role in this, not only approving the decisions of the KPD but actively driving forward such a perspective. In a 10 November 1921 letter expressing “serious reservations” about the KPD theses, Radek explicitly laid open the possibility of entering an SPD government:

“The Communist Party can join any government with the will to struggle seriously with capitalism.... The Communist Party is not an opponent in principle of participation in a workers government. It stands for a soviet government, but in no way does this specify how the working class will achieve one. It is just as likely that a soviet government will be won by force in a revolution against a bourgeois government as that it can arise in the unfolding struggle of the working class in defense of a democratically attained socialist government that honestly defends the working class against capital.”

—cited by Arnold Reisberg, *An den Quellen der Einheitsfrontpolitik: Der Kampf der KPD um die Aktionseinheit in Deutschland 1921-1922* [At the Sources of United-Front Politics: The KPD’s Fight for Unity in Action in Germany 1921-1922] (1971)

The thrust of this was duly incorporated in KPD statements. An 8 December 1921 circular asserted that “The KPD must say to the workers that it is willing to facilitate, by all parliamentary and extra-parliamentary means, the coming into being of a socialist workers government, and that it is also willing to join such a government if it has a guarantee that this government will represent the interests and demands of the working class in the fight against the bourgeoisie, will seize material assets, prosecute the Kapp criminals, free the revolutionary workers from prison, etc.” (Political Circular No. 12, 8 December 1921).



Europäische Verlagsanstalt



SED-Parteiarchiv

KPD factional antagonists: Heinrich Brandler, Ruth Fischer. Neither Rights nor “Lefts” had perspective of struggling for proletarian state power.

The same month a CI resolution, later appended to the “Theses on Comintern Tactics” adopted at the CI’s Fourth Congress in 1922, endorsed a KPD decision to “support a homogeneous workers government that is inclined to take up with some degree of seriousness the struggle against the power of the capitalists” (*Protokoll des Vierten Kongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale*, Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale [1923] reprinted by Karl Liebknecht Verlag [1972]). In January 1922, the ECCI advised the KPD to publicly declare its willingness to enter a “workers government of struggle against the bourgeoisie” (Reisberg). The change in terminology from “socialist workers government” to “workers government” was aimed at leaving open the possibility of bringing in the Catholic trade unions!

The KPD couched its opportunist policy toward SPD/USPD governments as an application of “united-front tactics.” But the real issue here was that the KPD leaders were not prepared to take power through leading the proletariat to smash the bourgeois state and replace it with organs of workers power. The KPD leaders (as well as Zinoviev/Radek) saw the reformist and centrist leaders not as obstacles—the last line of defense of the disintegrating capitalist order—but as potential (if vacillating) revolutionary allies. Their policy was, in essence, “Make the SPD lefts fight!” This is reflected in an article by August Kleine (Guralski), a Comintern representative to the KPD who was known as a “Zinoviev man”:

“Overcoming the right wing of the SPD and USPD, the strengthening of their left wing and control of the socialist government by the organized working class are the prerequisite for the struggle of the masses for vital reforms.

“These are simultaneously the preconditions that we pose for our entry into the socialist government. *But carrying out these demands means the creation of a workers government.*”

—“Der Kampf um die Arbeiterregierung” [The Fight for a Workers Government] *Die Internationale*, 27 June 1922

Such views did not go unchallenged inside the KPD. One example was Martha Heller, a correspondent from Kiel, who was quoted as follows in an article by the right-wing KPD leader Paul Böttcher:

“Suddenly everything we hitherto held to be the common beliefs of all Communists has disappeared. Revolution, mass struggle to smash the bourgeoisie’s apparatus of economic and political power is magicked away, and we obtain the class government of the proletariat simply by casting votes, by accepting ministerial posts.”

—“Falsche Schlussfolgerungen: Eine Replik zur sächsischen Frage” [Wrong Conclusions: A Response on the Saxony Question] *Die Internationale*, 18 June 1922

In the summer and fall of 1922, a major debate raged within the KPD over the Saxon *Landtag*, where the KPD held the balance of power. In July, the *Zentrale* took a position to vote for the provincial budget. The *Zentrale* subsequently reversed its position when the SPD refused to pass a face-saving amnesty bill, but the KPD’s parliamentary fraction dragged its feet. It wasn’t until late August that the SPD provincial government was brought down.

But even as the KPD voted to bring down the government, it looked to new elections scheduled for November to potentially increase the number of KPD deputies and create “the possibility of expanding the basis of the government through the entry of the Communist Party into the government.” The KPD drafted a proposal laying out “ten conditions” for entry into a “workers government” with the SPD, which later became the basis for negotiations. The results of the

November elections were 10 deputies for the KPD, 42 for the SPD, and 45 for the right-wing parties. Shortly thereafter, the SPD sent a letter to the KPD inviting it to "join the government, while recognizing the Reich and State constitutions" (Reisberg, citing *Vorwärts* No. 535, 11 November 1922). This proposal precipitated a split in the KPD leadership; the issue was then thrown into the lap of the Comintern at the 1922 Fourth Congress.

Where the sharp differences within the German party had been openly fought out at the Third Congress, this was not the case in 1922. In the interim, Lenin had suffered his first stroke, and the main Comintern operatives in Germany became Radek and Zinoviev, much to the detriment of the KPD. Lenin's ill health prevented him from playing more than a limited role at the Fourth Congress. There was no agenda point to address the dispute over Saxony and the KPD's parliamentary tactics more generally. These matters were only referred to obliquely in the Congress sessions.

The question of entry into the regional *Landtag* was taken up at a consultation between German and Russian delegates (which apparently included Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin and Radek). According to the East German historian Arnold Reisberg, documentary reports on the conversation have not been preserved. From the memoirs of some of the participants and from what came out in the wash following the October 1923 debacle, it seems evident, however, that the Russian delegation spiked the proposal favored by the majority of the KPD leadership to enter the Saxon government. A 5 April 1924 letter by Zinoviev to Clara Zetkin notes that the Russian comrades were unanimously opposed to the entry. Similar statements were made by Zinoviev and others at the January 1924 ECCI post-mortem on the German events. However, we do not know the political parameters of the Russian intervention, though it undoubtedly saved the KPD from overtly crossing the class line at that time. The meeting was never reported into the Fourth Congress. There was never a real discussion inside the KPD (or CI) to correct the ominous parliamentarist bulge of the German party, and the KPD went into the critical events of 1923 politically disarmed.

The 1922 Fourth Comintern Congress

The beheading of the German party leadership in 1919 brought its every weakness to the fore. The KPD tended to polarize between staid, plodding parliamentarists like Meyer, Zetkin, Brandler and Thalheimer on the one hand and petty-bourgeois demagogues like Fischer and Maslow on the other. Zetkin's recollections of Lenin from this period are particularly interesting, since her memoirs (unlike those of the mendacious Ruth Fischer) do not purport to have Lenin agreeing with her about everything. According to Zetkin, Lenin had little use for the Fischers and Maslows: "Such 'leftists' are like the Bourbons. They have learned nothing and forgotten nothing. As far as I can see, there is behind the 'left' criticism of the mistakes in carrying out the united front tactics, the desire to do away with those tactics altogether." He told Zetkin that he considered Fischer to be a "'personal accident,' politically unstable and uncertain." But if such people got a hearing from revolutionary workers inside the KPD, said Lenin, it was the fault of the party leadership:

"But I tell you frankly that I am just as little impressed by your 'Center' which does not understand, which hasn't the energy to have done with such petty demagogues. Surely it is an easy thing to replace such people, to withdraw the revolutionary-minded workers from them and educate them politically. Just because they are revolutionary-minded workers,

while radicals of the type in question are at bottom the worst sort of opportunists."

—Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin* (1934)

In Lenin's one speech to the Fourth Congress, he emphasized the importance of the Third Congress Organizational Resolution. He worried that the resolution was "too Russian," by which he did *not* mean (as has often been misrepresented) that it was irrelevant to West Europe but rather that it was difficult for the young Communist parties to grasp. He urged that they "study in the special sense, in order that they may really understand the organisation, structure, method and content of revolutionary work." Lenin believed that the Communist parties—the German party in particular—had not yet assimilated the Bolshevik revolutionary experience. Tragically, he was proven right.

The "Workers Governments" Discussion

The discussion at the Fourth Congress on the "workers government" slogan took place mainly under Zinoviev's ECCI report. Neither Lenin nor Trotsky were at the session. In his opening presentation, Zinoviev reasserted his statement at an expanded ECCI plenum several months earlier that the workers government was simply a popular designation for the dictatorship of the proletariat. But when he was challenged by Radek and Ernst Meyer, Zinoviev retreated. The ensuing codification in the "Comintern Theses on Tactics" is deliberately obfuscationist and at times self-contradictory, incorporating different political thrusts. The theses recognize *five* possible varieties of "workers governments," grouped in two categories:

"I. Ostensible Workers Governments:

- "1) *Liberal* workers government, such as existed in Australia and is also possible in the near future in England.
- "2) *Social-democratic* workers government (Germany).

"II. Genuine Workers Governments:

- "3) Government of the workers and poorer peasants. Such a possibility exists in the Balkans, Czechoslovakia, etc.
- "4) Workers government with participation of Communists.
- "5) Genuine revolutionary proletarian workers government, which, in its pure form, can be embodied only through the Communist Party."

—*Protokoll des Vierten Kongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale*

(This is our translation from the German. The English-language *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International* [Ink Links, 1980] is not reliable; here, for example, it omits the classification of workers governments into two categories.)

The schema of a sliding scale of "workers governments" ranging from the not-so-good to the very-good-indeed was taken by the KPD leadership as an endorsement of its conciliation of and submissiveness to the left Social Democrats. The theses also state that "The Communists must under certain circumstances declare their willingness to form a workers government with non-Communist workers parties and workers' organizations. However, they may do so only if there are guarantees that the workers government will really wage a struggle against the bourgeoisie."

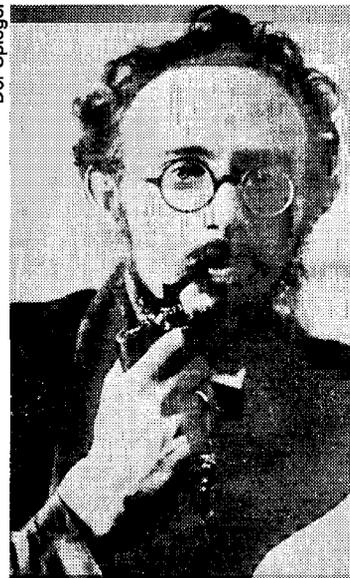
Zinoviev tried to delimit the conditions in which the workers government could be realized: "It can only be adopted in those countries where the relationships of power render its adoption opportune, where the problem of power, the problem of government, both on the parliamentary and on the extra-parliamentary field, has come to the front." But in situations where the question of power is being raised on the streets—i.e., a prerevolutionary situation—the most fatal mistake is to



Inter-Verso

German delegation is received by Zinoviev in Moscow, 1924. Banner reads, "Five Years of the Proletarian General Staff of the World Revolution, 1919-1924." Karl Radek (right) eulogized fascist Schlageter, executed by French occupation authorities, kicking off campaign of KPD appeals to German nationalists.

Der Spiegel



confuse the workers as to the class nature of the state.

What delegates were really concerned about was whether the Communists could join a coalition government with the Social Democracy. In that regard, Zinoviev asserted:

"A third type is the so-called Coalition government; that is, a government in which Social-Democrats, Trade Union leaders, and even perhaps Communists, take part. One can imagine such a possibility. Such a government is not yet the dictatorship of the proletariat, but it is perhaps a starting point for the dictatorship. When all goes right, we can kick one social-democrat after another out of the government until the power is in the hands of the Communists. This is a historical possibility."

—*Fourth Congress of the Communist International, Abridged Report of Meetings Held at Petrograd and Moscow, Nov. 7-Dec. 3, 1922* (London, CPGB, undated)

This nonsense is a gross denial of the lessons of the October Revolution. Zinoviev's whole conception assumes that the other side—the social democrats and the bourgeoisie—are incapable of thinking. In practice, things worked out quite differently in Germany a year later, as they were bound to. As soon as the KPD announced its coalition with the SPD in October 1923, the Reich government took immediate steps to suppress it militarily. Correspondingly, the idea that there exists a halfway house between the dictatorship of the proletariat and that of the bourgeoisie constitutes a revision of the Marxist-Leninist understanding of the state. The working class cannot simply "take hold" of the existing state machinery and run it in its own class interests. The bourgeois state must be overthrown through workers revolution and a new state—the dictatorship of the proletariat—must be erected in its place.

It did not take the German developments in October 1923 to demonstrate the dangers of coalition with the social democrats; the Comintern already had experienced several such disastrous experiments. In Finland in 1918, a pro-Bolshevik minority in the social-democratic party proclaimed a dictatorship of the proletariat before even forming its own Communist organization. What ensued was a massive bloodbath of the Finnish proletariat by General Mannerheim's forces in league with German imperialism. In the spring of 1919, soviet republics were proclaimed in Hungary and Bavaria. The Hungarian Soviet Republic was formed on the basis of a reunification of Béla Kun's small Communist forces with the Social Democracy. In Bavaria, the government included

the Independents and even a section of the SPD, some of whose ministers then organized a punitive expedition to crush the revolutionary government. Eugen Leviné heroically led the defense against the reactionary onslaught. But both the Bavarian and Hungarian Soviet Republics were soon drowned in blood.

Much of the Fourth Congress discussion suffered from trying to base programmatic generalizations on historical speculations. But tactics are concrete, and depend on particular circumstances. Two Polish delegates, Marchlewski and Domski (a Polish "left" who was aligned with Ruth Fischer) spoke particularly well on this point. Marchlewski said:

"I would like to speak a few words on the slogan of the Workers' Government. I believe there has been too much philosophical speculation on the matter. ("Very true," from the German benches.) The criticism of this slogan is directed on three lines—the Workers' Government is either a Scheidemann Government or a coalition government of the Communists with the social traitors. It finds support either in Parliament or in the Factory Councils. It is either the expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat, or it is not. I believe that philosophical speculation is out of place—for we have practical historical experience. What did the Bolsheviks do in 1917 before they conquered power? They demanded 'All Power to the Soviets.' What did this mean at that time? It meant giving power to the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries who were in the majority in the Soviets. It meant at that time a Workers' Government in which social traitors participated, and which was directed against the dictatorship of the proletariat. But this slogan was a good weapon of agitation in the hands of the Bolsheviks."

Domski observed:

"Comrade Radek has solaced me in private conversation that such a government is not contemplated for Poland (Comrade Radek: I never said that). Oh, then Poland will also have to bear the punishment of this sort of government. It is thus an international problem. Comrade Radek says that the workers' government is not a necessity but a possibility, and it were folly to reject such possibilities. The question is whether if we inscribe all the possibilities on our banner we try to accelerate the realization of these possibilities. I believe that it is quite possible that at the eleventh hour a so-called workers' government should come which would not be a proletarian dictatorship. But I believe when such a government comes, it will be the resultant of various forces such as our struggle for the proletarian dictatorship, the struggle of the social-democrats against it and so forth. Is it proper to build our plans on such an assumption? I think not, because I believe that we should insist on our struggle for the proletarian dictatorship."

—*Fourth Congress Abridged Report*

As the old Comintern saying went, the German party was the biggest, but the Polish party was the best.

Trotsky Drew the Lessons

In a December 1922 report on the Fourth Congress, Trotsky made the following analogy in introducing the Saxony question:

"Under certain conditions the slogan of a workers' government can become a reality in Europe. That is to say, a moment may arrive when the Communists together with the left elements of the Social Democracy will set up a workers' government in a way similar to ours in Russia when we created a workers' and peasants' government together with the Left Social-Revolutionaries. Such a phase would constitute a transition to the proletarian dictatorship, the full and completed one."

—*The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Volume II

This analogy is totally inappropriate. The Left Social Revolutionaries entered the government *after the proletarian seizure of power* and on the basis of soviet power, whereas in Germany the question concerned a regional bourgeois parliament in a capitalist state! Trotsky explained that the CI had opposed the KPD entering the Saxon *Landtag* at that time. But he added:

"In the Comintern we gave the following answer: If you, our German Communist comrades, are of the opinion that a revolution is possible in the next few months in Germany, then we would advise you to participate in Saxony in a coalition government and to utilize your ministerial posts in Saxony for the furthering of political and organizational tasks and for transforming Saxony in a certain sense into a Communist drill-ground so as to have a revolutionary stronghold already reinforced in a period of preparation for the approaching outbreak of the revolution."

Trotsky's "drillground" conception assumed that the major battalions of the German proletariat were ready to break *decisively* from the bourgeois order and embark on the course of insurrection under Communist leadership. In other words, he assumed exactly what still had to be forged, tested and tempered. When the KPD did enter the governments in Saxony and Thuringia the following October, Trotsky defended this in several speeches, including a 19 October report to the All-Russian Union of Metal Workers and another two days later to the Conference of Political Workers in the Red Army and the Red Navy (*The Military Writings and Speeches of Leon Trotsky, How the Revolution Armed*, Vol. V [New Park Publications, 1981]). Trotsky may not have been aware of the degree to which the KPD had sunk into parliamentarism, but the tactic he defended could only have reinforced such appetites.

Trotsky began to evaluate the reasons for the defeat almost immediately. Though the German events did not figure as a central issue in the fight of the 1923 Opposition, Trotsky made a preliminary statement in a December article:

"If the Communist Party had abruptly changed the pace of its work and had profited by the five or six months that history accorded it for direct political, organizational, technical preparation for the seizure of power, the outcome of the events could have been quite different.... Here a new orientation was needed, a new tone, a new way of approaching the masses, a new interpretation and application of the united front...."

"If the party surrendered its exceptional positions without resistance, the main reason is that it proved unable to free itself, at the beginning of the new phase (May-July 1923), from the automatism of its preceding policy, established as if it was meant for years to come, and to put forward squarely in its agitation, action, organization, and tactics the problem of taking power."

—Trotsky, "Tradition and Revolutionary Policy" (December 1923, later published as part of *The New Course*)

Trotsky drew a parallel between the routinism of the KPD leadership and the conservatism of the newly crystallizing bureaucratic stratum in the Soviet Union. Stigmatized as a "new boy" because of his more recent adherence to the Bolshevik Party, Trotsky ridiculed the "old Bolsheviks" (like Kamenev) who stood on the ground of what Lenin called the "antiquated" formula of the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" in order to oppose Lenin's April Theses in 1917.

Trotsky's re-evaluation of the German events led him to an implicit self-criticism of his earlier, administrative stress on the need to set a date for the insurrection. In June 1924, he wrote that "a sharp tactical turn was needed" from the moment of the occupation of the Ruhr:

"The question of setting a date for the uprising can have significance only in this connection and with this perspective. Insurrection is an art. An art presumes a clear aim, a precise plan, and consequently a schedule.

"The most important thing, however, was this: to ensure *in good time* the decisive tactical turn toward the seizure of power. And this was not done. This was the chief and fatal omission. From this followed the basic contradiction. On the one hand, the party expected a revolution, while on the other hand, because it had burned its fingers in the March events, it avoided, until the last months of 1923, the very idea of organizing a revolution, i.e., preparing an insurrection."

—Trotsky, "Through What Stage Are We Passing?", 21 June 1924 (*Challenge of the Left Opposition*, 1923-25)

The importance of such a turn and the necessity to politically combat and overcome the conservative, Menshevik resistance in the party to this turn is developed most fully in *The Lessons of October*.

Where Trotsky tried to address the root cause of the German defeat, for Zinoviev the main point of the ECCI plenum convened in January 1924 to discuss the October debacle was to amnesty his *own* role and scapegoat Brandler. (The Polish Communists submitted a letter sharply criticizing the ECCI's failure to take any responsibility for the German disaster.) In his pamphlet *Probleme der deutschen Revolution* (Hamburg, 1923) and again at the plenum, the infinitely flexible Zinoviev had taken to again asserting that the workers government meant the dictatorship of the proletariat and cynically attacked the Brandlerites for denying this. Having personally signed the order for the KPD to enter the governments of Saxony and Thuringia, Zinoviev couldn't very well criticize Brandler for that. Instead he insisted that Brandler had not conducted himself as a Communist minister should...in what was a bourgeois government! Leadership of the KPD was soon turned over to Fischer and Maslow. And compounding the October defeat, the majority line in the ECCI pushed by Zinoviev argued that the revolutionary moment had not passed but rather was impending, a position that could only be disorienting.

At the January 1924 ECCI plenum, Radek submitted a set of theses whose purpose in part was to alibi the leadership of Brandler (and Radek himself) in the 1923 events. Trotsky, then ill, was not at the plenum. Radek contacted him by telephone in an effort to get his support. Although he later acknowledged that he had placed too much confidence in Radek in agreeing to have his name appended to a document which he had never read, Trotsky explained that he had endorsed the theses on the assurance that they recognized that the revolutionary situation had passed. In a March 1926 letter to the Italian Communist Amadeo Bordiga, Trotsky stressed that "I lent my signature because the theses affirmed that the German party had let the revolutionary situation lapse

and that there began for us in Germany a phase that was favorable not for an immediate offensive but for defense and preparation. That was for me the decisive element at the time.”

Since Radek had been allied with Brandler on Germany, and Trotsky was associated with Radek in the 1923 Opposition, Trotsky’s signature on Radek’s theses made it easy for Zinoviev and later Stalin to attack him as a “Brandlerite.” This was, of course, an entirely cynical game. Trotsky opposed scapegoating Brandler, not out of political solidarity, but because he knew the Comintern leadership was also complicit and that Fischer and Maslow were no better. Trotsky’s differences with Brandler were spelled out in a number of speeches and writings. This was well known in the upper circles of the Russian party, but less so among European Communists. Trotsky was compelled several times to repeat the explanation he had made to Bordiga, including in a September 1931 letter to Albert Treint and one in June 1932 to the Czech Communist Neurath.

Trotsky’s Later Writings

In his later writings, Trotsky fully recognized that the “workers government” (or “workers and peasants government”) slogan had been, in the hands of the degenerating Comintern, a theoretical opening for the most monstrous opportunism. In the Transitional Program (1938), Trotsky wrote:

“This formula, ‘workers’ and farmers’ government,’ first appeared in the agitation of the Bolsheviks in 1917 and was definitely accepted after the October Revolution. In the final instance it represented nothing more than the popular designation for the already established dictatorship of the proletariat....

“The chief accusation which the Fourth International advances against the traditional organizations of the proletariat is the fact that they do not wish to tear themselves away from the political semi-corpse of the bourgeoisie. Under these conditions the demand, systematically addressed to the old leadership: ‘Break with the bourgeoisie, take the power!’ is an extremely important weapon for exposing the treacherous character of the parties and organizations of the Second, Third and Amsterdam Internationals. The slogan, ‘workers’ and farmers’ government,’ is thus acceptable to us only in the sense that it had in 1917 with the Bolsheviks, i.e., as an anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist slogan, but in no case in that ‘democratic’ sense which later the epigones gave it, transforming it from a bridge to socialist revolution into the chief barrier upon its path.”

However, to our knowledge, Trotsky never explicitly repudiated the Fourth Congress formulations on the “workers government” slogan.

That resolution has since been used as a theoretical opening for pseudo-Trotskyist revisionism of all stripes. In a series of articles in Max Shachtman’s *Labor Action* in October-November 1953, Hal Draper cited the Fourth Congress discussion in an attempt to argue that a “workers government” need not be a workers state. The purpose of this was to embellish the Attlee Labour government elected in Britain in 1945. In the early 1960s, Joseph Hansen of the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP) likewise drew on the 1922 CI discussion to buttress his claim that the Castro regime in Cuba was a “workers and farmers government.” This was in the service of the SWP’s uncritical enthusing over the Castroite leadership of the Cuban deformed workers state. Hansen even extended the label to the neocolonial government of Algeria under Ben Bella, using it as a theoretical basis to extend political support to bourgeois populist and nationalist regimes.

Hansen’s revisionist apologias filled up a whole *Education for Socialists* bulletin (April 1974) on the “Workers and Farmers Government.” In addition to the Fourth Congress



Interfoto

Hitler’s attempted 1923 putsch in Bavaria was easily suppressed by government. But German proletariat’s failure to solve crisis of bourgeois rule by revolution allowed bourgeoisie to hand power to Nazis in 1933, unleashing genocide and world war.

theses, Hansen also seized on the following guarded speculation by Trotsky in the Transitional Program:

“One cannot categorically deny in advance the theoretical possibility that, under the influence of completely exceptional circumstances (war, defeat, financial crash, mass revolutionary pressure, etc.), the petty-bourgeois parties including the Stalinists may go further than they wish along the road to a break with the bourgeoisie. In any case one thing is not to be doubted: even if this highly improbable variant somewhere at some time becomes a reality and the ‘workers’ and farmers’ government’ in the above-mentioned sense is established in fact, it would represent merely a short episode on the road to the actual dictatorship of the proletariat.”

Just as the Stalinists (and other opportunists) abused Lenin’s “Left-Wing” Communism to justify the most grotesque class-collaborationist betrayals, clever revisionists like Hansen sought to impute to Trotsky their own reformist capitulation to non-proletarian forces.

The Revolutionary Tendency (RT)—predecessor of the Spartacist League—waged a sharp struggle within the SWP against the leadership’s capitulation to Castro. In an 11 June 1961 document titled “A Note on the Current Discussion—Labels and Purposes” (*SWP Discussion Bulletin* Vol. 22, No. 16 [June 1961]), James Robertson, one of the leaders of the RT, pointed to the link between terminology and political appetite:

“And over the Cuban question the same underlying issue is posed—what do you *want*, comrades? Take the use of the transitional demand ‘the workers and peasants government.’ It is transitional right enough, that is it is a bridge, but bridges go *two* ways. *Either* the workers and peasants government is the central demand of the Trotskyists in urging the workers and peasants to take power into their own hands through their mass organizations—i.e., the struggle for soviet power (this is the use the Cuban Trotskyists put it to); *or* it is a label to apply from afar to the existing government and thus serve, not for the first time, as an orthodox sounding formula to side-step the consummation of proletarian revolution and to justify revolution ‘from above’ by leaders ‘one of whose principal difficulties is imbuing the working people with a sense of revolutionary social responsibility.’

"In short, is the Cuban revolution to pass forward over that bridge to soviet power or is an American SWP majority to go backwards?"

Indeed, the SWP's adaptation to Castro marked its descent into centrism and, a few years later, reformism.

In the course of fusion discussions with the Communist Working Collective (CWC) in 1971, which had broken to the left from Maoism, we discovered that they had similar misgivings about the Fourth Congress (see *Marxist Bulletin* No. 10, "From Maoism to Trotskyism"). The comrades in the CWC were very familiar with Lenin's writings on the state. They knew that in the imperialist epoch there were only two types of state, the dictatorship of the proletariat and the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, corresponding to the two fundamental classes—what then was this vague "workers government" in between? The convergence of views over this augured well for a solid revolutionary regroupment!

In the early 1930s, Trotsky wrote quite a bit about the urgency of applying the united-front tactic against the Hitlerite fascists. Yet the "workers government" à la Zinoviev, i.e., a KPD/SPD government, is *never* an element in Trotsky's propaganda. His formulations on the state are likewise much sharper and clearer than in 1923. Trotsky is categorical, for example, that the cops are the class enemy, even if they are under Social Democratic influence:

"The fact that the police was originally recruited in large numbers from among Social Democratic workers is absolutely meaningless. Consciousness is determined by environment even in this instance. The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state, is a bourgeois cop, not a worker."

— "What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat," 27 January 1932 (*The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*)

Seeking to justify their invariable electoral support to the Social Democracy, latter-day centrists and reformists acclaim the "workers government" as the highest form of the united front. In contrast, Trotsky wrote in "What Next?":

"Just as the trade union is the rudimentary form of the united front in the economic struggle, so *the soviet is the highest form of the united front* under the conditions in which the proletariat enters the epoch of fighting for power.

"The soviet in itself possesses no miraculous powers. It is the class representation of the proletariat, with all of the latter's strong and weak points. But precisely and only because of this does the soviet afford to the workers of diverse political trends the organizational opportunity to unite their efforts in the revolutionary struggle for power."

But against the fetishists of the united front, Trotsky stressed that soviets "by themselves" were not a substitute for a communist vanguard in leading the struggle for power:

"The united front, in general, is never a substitute for a strong revolutionary party; it can only aid the latter to become stronger...."

"To avow that the soviets 'by themselves' are capable of leading the struggle of the proletariat for power—is only to sow abroad vulgar soviet fetishism. Everything depends upon the party that leads the soviets."

The Fight for New October Revolutions

The last serious examination of the German events in the Trotskyist movement was an exchange in the pages of the American SWP's *Fourth International* in 1942-43 between the German Trotskyist Walter Held ("Why the German Revolution Failed," December 1942 and January 1943) and Jean van Heijenoort, using the pseudonym Marc Loris ("The German Revolution in the Leninist Period," March 1943). The exchange has the merit of attempting to situate the KPD's problems in 1923 in the political weaknesses which plagued

the German party from its inception. Held viewed the utterly justified expulsion of Paul Levi in 1921 as the definitive error which doomed the 1923 German Revolution to defeat, even seeing in Levi's expulsion the seeds of the Stalinist bureaucratic degeneration of the Comintern. Van Heijenoort skewered Held for his support to Levi. At the same time, van Heijenoort wrongly sneered at Held's correct criticism of Trotsky for failing to carry out Lenin's instructions to wage a fight against Stalin at the Russian Twelfth Party Congress in 1923. Held did believe there were revolutionary possibilities in 1923, and he despised Brandler. Held also correctly condemned the KPD's entry into the governments in Saxony and Thuringia—though not acknowledging that Trotsky himself supported this.

One's appreciation of the history of the workers movement very much correlates with programmatic outlook. All manner of fake Trotskyists view the events of 1923 through a prism distorted by social democracy. Pierre Broué's *Révolution en Allemagne 1917-1923* (1971) uncritically supports the CI's Fourth Congress line on the "workers government." A pamphlet published by the German Workers Power group (Arbeitermacht) on the November Revolution claims that the Ebert-Scheidemann regime—butchers of Liebknecht and Luxemburg—was a "workers government," albeit of a "non-genuine" type. Pierre Frank, a longtime leader of the United Secretariat (USec), wrote a polemic denouncing Zinoviev for correctly asserting (on occasion) that a workers government meant the dictatorship of the proletariat.

These groups mystify the fact that a parliamentary regime headed by a social-democratic party is a *capitalist* government, not a "workers government" or a "reformist government." This is in line with their own politics of operating as pressure groups on the mass reformist parties. The perfection of this social-democratic outlook was the Allende Unidad Popular government in Chile in the early 1970s—a bourgeois coalition of Allende's Socialists, the Communists and some smaller capitalist parties—which lulled the working masses with suicidal illusions in the "constitutional" military, and paved the way for Pinochet's bloody coup.

Brandler himself moved sharply away from Leninism, becoming a leader of the Communist Right Opposition and hardening up around social-democratic politics. In an exchange with Isaac Deutscher, Brandler oozed with the smug satisfaction of a provincial German social democrat who had nothing whatsoever to learn from the Bolsheviks:

"Only now do I realize how tremendous was the treasure of ideas which the German workers' movement acquired by its own exertions and quite independently. We were so impressed by the achievements of the Bolsheviks that we forgot our own. Take Lenin's *Imperialism*, which is quite correctly regarded as a standard work. Already at the 1907 International Congress in Stuttgart, and at other conferences at the end of the previous century, most of the ideas which Lenin developed in his *Imperialism* were already being debated, mainly by Kautsky."

—*New Left Review* No. 105, September-October 1977

Lenin's *Imperialism* was a polemic *against* Kautsky, whose theory of "superimperialism"—today resurrected by the "anti-globalization" crowd—is premised on the lie that national antagonisms can be transcended within the framework of capitalism and therefore interimperialist war is not inherent in the capitalist system. It was in counterposition to such social-pacifism and social-chauvinism that Lenin launched the struggle for the Third International!

As for the British Labourite *Revolutionary History*, the editorial in its 1994 issue on Germany couches its anti-



VAAP photos

Leon Trotsky in 1917. Petrograd demonstration, June 1917, raises Bolshevik slogans: "Down With Counterrevolution! Down With the Ten Capitalist Ministers! All Power to the Soviet of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants Deputies!"



revolutionary thesis in a series of questions:

"Was this series of events a failed revolutionary opportunity? Was the upsurge aborted into a bourgeois republic by the treachery of Social Democracy and the failure of the revolutionary left? Was a liberal bourgeois republic a possibility? Were the glaring mistakes of the Communists a result of their own ineptitude, or due to the meddling of the Communist International? How far were the policies of the German Communist Party swayed by the Soviet preference for an alliance with right wing German militarists, a coalition of the two outsiders excluded from the Versailles system? Could more have been gained out of the situation than what finally emerged? Was the later triumph of Hitler made inevitable by the events of this time? If the German Communist Party had not been established, and the working class had maintained its organisational unity, could Hitler's victory have been prevented?"

Where *Revolutionary History's* line of reasoning leads is clear, even if it is necessary to read between the lines, as is usually the case with this "non-party" journal. The line goes something like this: the proletarian revolution did not triumph in Germany in 1918-23 and only sectarians and madmen could think it was in the offing; in the Soviet Union, where in 1917 the revolution did triumph, the Bolshevik leadership soon proved to consist mostly of misguided fanatics and frauds. What's left for *RH*, then, but to lament the split of the proletarian revolutionary forces from the Second International? At all costs they seek to deny the fact that Hitler's rise to power was the result of the SPD's craven attachment to the Weimar Republic, combined with the Communist Party's inability to decisively put an end to it in 1923. Fascism, the brutal oppression imposed by imperialism on the colonial masses, interimperialist war, racism—in the eyes of a social democrat, these are not the necessary outgrowths of the rotting bourgeois social order but unfortunate aberrations which episodically mar the orderly, democratic bourgeois norm.

At bottom, what they all call into question is the validity of the October Revolution and the attempt of the Bolsheviks to extend that revolution internationally. Brandler's line was always one of "Russian exceptionalism," i.e., maybe Lenin's program worked in Russia but it had no applicability in Germany with its ostensibly more "cultured" working class,

allegedly wedded to the framework of parliamentary democracy. With the destruction of the Soviet Union, revisionists have "discovered" that Lenin's program didn't work in Russia either, that the Soviet workers state was a "failed experiment." That's why all of the reformists end up today in the camp of the "anti-globalization campaign," beseeching the imperialists to be "responsible" and "humane."

Fake leftists like Workers Power and the USec moved far to the right through their support to the counterrevolutionary forces that destroyed the Soviet Union and deformed workers states in East Europe in 1989-1992. Championing the "democratic" credentials of the imperialists and their chosen counterrevolutionary henchmen, they helped destroy the world's first workers state, condemning the proletariat of East Europe and the former USSR to the penury dictated by the imperialist stranglehold on the world market. This underlies the commitment in practice of these fake Marxists to the parliamentary reformist sandbox of bourgeois "democracy," tailing right-wing social democrats like Labour's Tony Blair in Britain or, in countries like Italy or France, popular-front coalitions of reformist workers parties and openly bourgeois parties.

The October Revolution remains our compass. It demonstrated how a revolutionary party rooted in the proletariat can win the working masses away from the reformist class traitors and lead them to power. The critical factor was the subjective element—the revolutionary party. That was the difference between Russia in 1917 and Germany in 1923.

The strategic task posed for German communists is to break the proletariat from the Social Democracy. As Trotsky rightly concluded, that could have been done in 1923. The obstacle was neither the objective situation nor the "omnipotence" of the Social Democracy; it lay with the failure to pursue a revolutionary line, particularly in the critical time period. Here the programmatic weaknesses of the German party, reinforced rather than corrected by a Comintern that itself was beginning to degenerate, proved decisive. We seek to critically assimilate the lessons of 1923 in order to strengthen our international party for the revolutionary struggles that lie ahead. ■

Executive Offices...

(continued from page 56)

comrade, pointing to the practice of early Communist parties in running local administrations, even wrote that if we won a majority in a municipal council, we should take executive office or risk being seen as "abstentionist." A comrade responded sharply: "Our position is not *abstention*, it's *opposition*. Please be very clear, we're not *neutral*, we're *opposed* to the executive of the capitalist state." The comrades who initially argued against changing our line eventually saw that their argument skirted dangerously close to reformism, and in the end the conference voted unanimously for the new position.

A polemic by the Internationalist Group (IG) provides a crude rehash of the worst arguments in favor of running for executive office. The IG's article, "France Turns Hard to the Right" (*Internationalist* supplement, May 2007), deals with the April-May 2007 French presidential elections, where the flagship French section of the fake-Trotskyist "United Secretariat of the Fourth International" (USec) ran a candidate and then, after he was eliminated in the first round of voting, called to elect the candidate of the pro-capitalist Socialist Party. In the name of "fighting the right," in 2002 the USec even called to re-elect France's right-wing bourgeois president, Jacques Chirac, against his opponent, the fascist Jean-Marie Le Pen. Citing our new position as summarized in an article on the French elections (*Le Bolchévik* No. 179, March 2007, translated in *Workers Vanguard* No. 890, 13 April 2007), the IG ludicrously charges that our policy of refusing to run for president or other executive office "reveals a parliamentary cretinism similar to that of the Mandeliste pseudo-Trotskyists"—because we recognize a difference between parliamentary and executive positions!

The IG shows touching faith in the capitalist state and its democratic trappings. Marxists have always distinguished between executive offices, which by definition entail administering the bourgeois state, and legislative positions like parliamentary deputy, which communists can use as a tribune to help rally the masses against the bourgeois order. Not so the

IG, which obliterates that distinction in favor of one between "democratic" and "anti-democratic" bourgeois institutions. They write: "We are also opposed to the existence of a second, supposedly higher, legislative chamber as inherently anti-democratic. Should we therefore also refuse to run candidates for the Senate?" To base participation in elections on how democratic the institutional facades of the capitalist state are is truly parliamentary cretinism. Does the IG think the lower chambers of bourgeois parliamentary republics are truly democratic institutions? If they think the French Senate is undemocratic, they should look at the Russian tsarist Duma, which the Bolsheviks effectively utilized to propagate their revolutionary program. As far as the IG is concerned, communists can run "for whatever post." Judge? Sheriff? Indeed, if it's OK to run for Commander-in-Chief of the imperialist military, why not for local sheriff?

As our conference document states: "The problem with running for executive offices is that it lends legitimacy to prevailing and reformist conceptions of the state." If you run for such offices, workers will understand that you cannot but be aspiring to administer the capitalist state. For the IG, running candidates for president or mayor "in no way implies that they intend to occupy these positions within the framework of the bourgeois state." After all, "In the unusual case in which a revolutionary candidate had enough influence to be elected, the party would already have begun building workers councils and other organs of a soviet character. And the party would insist that, if elected, its candidates would base themselves on such organs of workers power and not on the institutions of the bourgeois state." With this line, the IG leaves open, and certainly does not disavow, the possibility of not only running for executive office, but taking such office in a revolutionary situation, as in the Saxon and Thuringian bourgeois governments in 1923. And what if a "revolutionary candidate" wins a municipal post like mayor in a local party stronghold in the absence of a nationwide social crisis that poses the question of proletarian power? This was the not-so-unusual case with the early Bulgarian and French Communist parties, among others, which controlled hundreds of such local administrations. The IG is mum on what

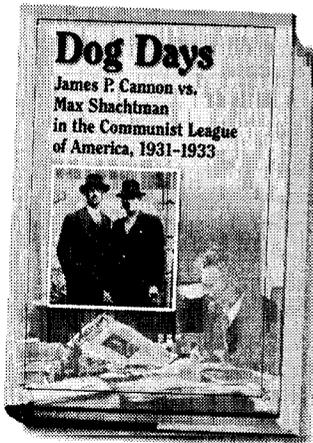
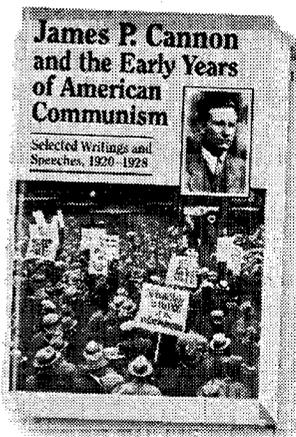
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its winning candidate should do in such circumstances.

The IG upholds the tradition not of Lenin but of Karl Kautsky. Amid the revolutionary upheaval that swept Germany at the end of World War I, the Kautskyites claimed to support both the workers councils and the bourgeois provisional government, the Council of People's Representatives, which they joined in November 1918. They thus played a key role in co-opting and defeating the revolutionary upsurge. It is precisely in revolutionary times that illusions in the capitalist state are most dangerous. After Lenin laid out the Marxist perspective of the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeois state in *The State and Revolution* (1917), he was furiously attacked by social democrats who accused him of going over to anarchism.

The IG—whose core cadre defected from our Trotskyist organization in 1996 in pursuit of their opportunist orientation toward various Stalinists, Latin American nationalists and other petty-bourgeois milieus—sees our new position as further evidence of our break with “the continuity of genuine Trotskyism.” What they mean here, without saying it, is that in 1985 we ran Marjorie Stenberg, now an IG supporter, as the Spartacist candidate for mayor of New York (see, for example, “Vote Spartacist!”, *Workers Vanguard* No. 390, 1 November 1985). The IG's line that it could accept executive office in certain “unusual” cases, as we have noted elsewhere, “is not in ‘continuity’ with our earlier position of ‘run but do not serve.’ It is, rather, a rightist resolution of the contradiction inherent in that line” (“The IG and Executive Office: Sewer Centrism,” *Workers Vanguard* No. 895, 6 July 2007).

In a document written during our pre-conference discussion, one comrade drew a useful analogy between the past practice of Marxists running for executive office and Lenin's pre-1917 slogan of a “revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” (RDDPP) for tsarist Russia. Noting that “some policies can serve revolutionaries for a long time before they are ultimately revealed in the development of the class struggle to be unfit,” the document continued:

“Lenin had not been a class traitor when he wielded that defective slogan against the Mensheviks and Liberals. And nor had Trotsky, Cannon, or we ourselves, crossed the class line in seeking to oppose Menshevism with a latently defective policy. “But after the successful 1917 Revolution and the strangled 1927 Chinese Revolution, the earlier ‘latent’ defect of Lenin's RDDPP formula took on an overt, conscious and redirected character. To uphold it then against Trotsky's program of permanent revolution was a betrayal. And the same can be said of clinging to a past practice inherited from our predecessors that had not yet had its built-in defect revealed. We had the responsibility, and now we have the benefit, of learning from the disastrous consequences of the German (and Bulgarian) failures of 1923. To deny the connection between the Comintern's unfinished break from social-democratic ministerialism evident in Bulgaria and Germany 1923, and the ECCI's [Executive Committee of the Communist International's] *simultaneous promotion* of campaigns for executive office, is to be willfully blind.”

Or, in the IG's case, willfully confusionist and centrist.

Historically speaking, the idea that communists should campaign for administrative positions in the state of the ruling class they want to overthrow is grotesque. The fact that this is defended in the workers movement today is a measure of the success of democratic duplicity, directly reflecting the political strength of the capitalist order. History is littered with examples of self-professed Marxists who have gone over to directly administering the capitalist state against workers and the oppressed. An example is the British Labourite Militant Tendency (now Socialist Party), which was the employer

of over 30,000 Liverpool municipal workers when it controlled the local council there in the mid 1980s. At one point, these “socialist” bosses actually threatened to lay off the entire workforce, claiming this was a “tactic” to deal with a budget crunch imposed by the central (Tory) government. More recently, a leader of the Brazilian USec group accepted a portfolio as minister of agriculture in the bourgeois Lula government, thus taking direct responsibility for evicting militant activists of the Landless Peasants Movement.

During our discussion on executive office, one comrade noted a crucial distinction between capitalism and previous class societies like feudalism. Those societies were marked by clear class and caste relationships that defined one's place in the social order. Capitalism disguises the nature of its class exploitation behind concepts like “the market,” “supply and demand” and, especially in the more advanced industrial world, the trappings of “democracy” that supposedly afford equal rights and opportunities to exploiters and exploited alike. Our task as communists is to tear off this mask and expose the reality of a brutal social system that is nothing other than the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

We print below a section of the ICL Fifth Conference document, “Maintaining a Revolutionary Program in the Post-Soviet Period,” February 2007.

* * *

A necessary element of maintaining our revolutionary continuity is to assimilate the lessons of the struggles in the international workers movement through cadre education and critically reviewing the work of our revolutionary predecessors. This is vital to formulating programmatic positions for today. We stand on the first four Congresses of the Communist International. But we are not uncritical of the early CI and from the early years of our tendency expressed reservations over the resolutions on the “anti-imperialist united front” and “workers government” at the Fourth Congress. “A Trotskyist Critique of Germany 1923 and the Comintern” (*Spartacist* No. 56, Spring 2001) investigated the mistakes of the KPD and CI leaderships that led to the abortion of the German Revolution. In *Lessons of October*, Trotsky pointed out how the Bolshevik Party, under the leadership of Lenin, overcame the resistance of the Kamenevs, Zinovievs and Stalins who flinched when the question of power was posed. In Germany, however, the politics of capitulation triumphed and a revolutionary opportunity was wasted, with disastrous consequences. This work by Trotsky may have been in part a personal self-critique: Trotsky had been a component part of the CI leadership that bore its share of responsibility for the German debacle. However, neither Trotsky nor his supporters ever carried out a systematic and thorough review of the CI and KPD intervention into the events of Germany in 1923 nor did they criticize the flawed resolution on workers governments at the Fourth Congress. This resolution opened the door for the KPD's policy of joining the provincial governments in Saxony and Thuringia in 1923, which Trotsky had wrongly supported as being a “drill ground” for revolution. But the maneuver in Saxony and Thuringia simply reinforced existing prejudices about the bourgeois state. If these were indeed “workers governments,” as the masses had been told, then presumably extraparlimentary revolutionary struggle, the formation of workers councils and workers militias, would be totally superfluous. The 1923 fiasco is a clear example of how cutting corners programmatically, rather than taking a straightforward

Leninist position on the state, will lead to disaster.

The Fourth ICL Conference voted a line that communists could run for executive offices like president or city mayor, provided we declare that we don't intend to assume such offices. Comrade Robertson challenged this line at the 2004 SL/U.S. conference. He noted the contradiction between our principled refusal to run for county sheriff in the U.S. and the fact that we say we can run for sheriff of U.S. imperialism. Our attitude should be "Down with executive offices!" Running candidates for executive office is counterposed to the Leninist understanding of the state. The executive office discussion should critically review early Comintern practice, where its sections ran candidates for executive offices and regularly assumed positions as mayors of municipalities, or in the case of Germany even had ministers in bourgeois regional governments. We see no difference in principle between national, regional or local capitalist governments—bourgeois institutions of local government are part of the mechanisms of the capitalist state which must be destroyed and replaced with organs of workers rule, i.e., soviets.

The fundamental line between reform and revolution is the attitude toward the bourgeois state, i.e., the reformist view that one can take hold of the existing state apparatus and administer it in the interests of the workers, versus the Leninist understanding that the capitalist state apparatus must be smashed through proletarian revolution. The problem with running for executive offices is that it lends legitimacy to prevailing and reformist conceptions of the state. There is a rotten history of social-democratic and Stalinist reformists administering the state in the interest of capitalism. The executive authority commands the "armed body of men" who are the core of the state apparatus; the revolutionary shattering of that state inevitably entails reckoning with the executive. Even in the great bourgeois revolutions in England and France, the Cromwellians and Jacobins who established a base in parliament had to get rid of the king and set up a new executive organ.

The Dreyfus case in the 1890s provoked a serious social crisis in France. It also polarized the French workers movement, with some socialists failing to understand the need to defend the Jewish military officer Dreyfus against bourgeois reaction and anti-Semitism. To defuse the social crisis and liquidate the Dreyfus case, the new prime minister (*président du conseil*) called for the socialist Alexandre Millerand to be seated in a government of bourgeois Radicals and republicans, with the butcher of the Paris Commune, General Galliffet, as minister of war. Millerand obliged, entering the Waldeck-Rousseau cabinet as minister of trade and industry in 1899. Millerand's betrayal, supported by Jean Jaurès, divided the French Socialists. Characteristically, the Second International gave an ambiguous answer to ministerialism. At the Paris Congress in 1900 a compromise motion by Kautsky won. This motion criticized Millerandism...except when it was a matter of national survival: "The fact that an isolated socialist enters a bourgeois government cannot be considered as the normal beginning of conquering political power, but only as a forced, transitional and exceptional expedient. If in a particular case the political situation requires this dangerous experiment, it is a question of tactics and not of principle." An amendment put forward by Guesde that sought to forbid participation under any circumstances was rejected. The revolutionary wing of Social Democracy including Lenin and Luxemburg vehemently opposed Millerandism. Luxemburg wrote, "The entry of a socialist into a

bourgeois government is not, as it is thought, a partial conquest of the bourgeois state by the socialists, but a partial conquest of the socialist party by the bourgeois state" ["The Dreyfus Affair and the Millerand Case." 1899].

The early American Socialist Party had no understanding of the importance of the issue of the state. The reformist wing, including such vulgar chauvinists as Victor Berger, indulged in the practice of running municipalities, which more militant socialists derided as "sewer socialism." Although more left-wing, Eugene Debs had illusions that the existing capitalist state could be used to advance the cause of the proletariat and argued that the task of the Socialist Party was "to conquer capitalism on the political battlefield, take control of government and through the public powers take possession of the means of wealth production, abolish wage-slavery and emancipate all workers" ("The Socialist Party and the Working Class"). Debs' campaigns for the American presidency set a pattern that was later followed by the American Communists and Cannon's Trotskyists.

The Second International could not resolve the issue of executive offices because it was not revolutionary. Lenin's Bolshevik Party demonstratively showed its total hostility to ministerialism through its intransigent hostility to the popular-front Provisional Government. However, Lenin sharply distinguished between assuming executive office, which necessarily means administering capitalism and hence class betrayal, and the revolutionary utilization of parliament. Referring to the Bolshevik work in the tsarist Duma, Lenin noted: "At a time when nearly all 'socialist' (forgive the debasement of the word!) deputies in Europe have proved chauvinists and servants of chauvinists, when the famous 'Europeanism' that once charmed our liberals and liquidators has proved an obtuse habitude of slavish legality, there was to be found in Russia a workers' party whose deputies excelled, not in high-flown speech, or being 'received' in bourgeois, intellectualist salons, or in the business acumen of the 'European' lawyer and parliamentarian, but in ties with the working masses, in dedicated work among those masses, in carrying on modest, unpretentious, arduous, thankless and highly dangerous duties of illegal propagandists and organizers" ("What Has Been Revealed by the Trial of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Duma Group").

However, the Comintern never pursued the issue of Millerandism to a satisfactory conclusion. The Second Congress "Theses on the Communist Parties and Parliamentarism" contain contradictory language on the appropriateness of Communists running municipal councils. Thesis 5 notes correctly that "the bourgeoisie's institutions of local government...are in reality organizations similar to the mechanism of the bourgeois state, which must be destroyed by the revolutionary proletariat and replaced by local soviets of workers' deputies" (*Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920* [Pathfinder, 1991]). But Thesis 13 states that Communists who "hold a majority in institutions of local government" should "organize revolutionary opposition against the central bourgeois government." This provision was proposed particularly in connection with the "model" of the Bulgarian Communists and served as a justification for the practice of running municipal councils. Administering local councils has historically been used as a mechanism by which the bourgeoisie has co-opted reformist parties into the capitalist order, as was the case with the post-WWII Communist Party in Italy. Our opposition to running for and holding executive office

applies equally at the local and national level. While some of the early leaders of American Communism drew a distinction between running for legislative and executive office, sometime after the formation of the United Communist Party in 1920 this differentiation ceased to exist. In 1921 the Communists ran a campaign for mayor of New York City and from 1924 onward ran in every presidential election. The Socialist Workers Party ran for president from 1948 onward. The French CP ran a campaign for president in 1924 and numerous campaigns for mayor. In Germany the KPD ran Ernst Thälmann for president in 1925 and then again in 1932. The shrill Third Period rhetoric notwithstanding, the KPD's electoral campaign for president in 1932 as well as its campaigns for the Reichstag (parliament) in the early 1930s were not a staging ground for extraparliamentary struggle but in fact a noisy disguise for the bankruptcy of the CI and the KPD, which refused to engage in united fronts with the Social Democrats and mobilize workers militias to smash the Nazis. Notably when the Nazis marched on KPD headquarters in Berlin on 22 January 1933 the Communist leaders ignominiously refused to mobilize the workers to defend Karl Liebknecht House, instead telling them to appeal to the Prussian police while calling on them to vote KPD in the Reichstag elections scheduled for March. By then the KPD had been banned by Hitler. Hitler was allowed to take power without a shot being fired. When the Comintern passed over to the popular front a couple of years later, this resolved any remaining pretensions that the CI drew a line on the question of the state.

While Trotsky of course sharply denounced the policy of the popular front, he did not come out in opposition to running for executive office. In 1940, expressing concern that the SWP was adapting to the pro-Roosevelt trade-union bureaucracy, Trotsky proposed that the SWP launch its own campaign for president or fight for the labor movement to run such a campaign. When the SWP did nothing to implement this, he proposed that they consider critical support to the CP candidate, Browder, in the context of the Stalin-Hitler pact where the CP had come out against Roosevelt. We also need to review our own past practice, including the fact that we have run candidates for such local offices as mayor.

In arguing against running for executive office, we do not want to preclude giving critical support to other workers

organizations in appropriate instances where they draw a crude class line. This was the case in Trotsky's proposal around Browder. When a Leninist organization gives critical electoral support to an opponent, it is clearly not because we think it will apply the same principles as we do. Indeed, otherwise one could never extend critical support to a mass reformist party, because on winning an election inevitably they will seek to form the government, i.e., administer capitalism. The point in such instances is to demonstrate that despite the claims of such parties to represent the interests of workers, in practice they betray these interests.

The discussion at the Fifth ICL Conference is extremely important. In adopting the position against running for executive office, we are recognizing and codifying what should be seen as a corollary to Lenin's *The State and Revolution* and *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, which are really the founding documents of the Third International. This understanding was attenuated by the time of the Second Congress of the CI, which failed to draw a distinction between parliamentary and executive office in pursuing electoral activity. Thus we are continuing to complete the theoretical and programmatic work of the first four Congresses of the CI. It is easy enough to pledge that you won't take executive office when the chance of winning is remote. But the question is: what happens when you win? Cannon's SWP never really addressed this issue. The stakes are high. If we cannot arrive at a correct answer of how to deal with executive offices we will inevitably bend in the direction of reformism when the issue is posed.

Our earlier practice conformed to that of the Comintern and Fourth International. This does not mean that we acted in an unprincipled way in the past: the principle had never been recognized as such either by our forebears or by ourselves. Programs do evolve, as new issues arise and we critically scrutinize the work of our revolutionary predecessors. In particular, our study of the German events of 1923, as well as of the defects of the Proletarian Military Policy, has prepared the position we are taking here, which represents a deepening understanding of the relationship of communists to the bourgeois state. To continue the past practice of running for executive office, now that this has been revealed as defective, would be opportunism. ■

International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

International Center: Box 7429 GPO, New York, NY 10116, USA • Web site: www.ici-fi.org

Spartacist League of Australia: Spartacist League
GPO Box 3473, Sydney, NSW 2001, Australia

Spartacist League/Britain: Spartacist Publications
PO Box 42886, London N19 5WY, Britain

Trotskyist League of Canada/Ligue trotskyste du Canada:
Box 7198, Station A, Toronto, Ontario M5W 1X8, Canada

Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands: SpAD, c/o Verlag
Avantgarde, Postfach 2 35 55, 10127 Berlin, Germany

Ligue trotskyste de France: Le Bolchévik, BP 135-10
75463 Paris Cedex 10, France

Trotskyist Group of Greece: Box 8274, Athens 10010, Greece

Spartacist Group Ireland: PO Box 2944, Dublin 6, Ireland

Lega trotskista d'Italia: Walter Fidacaro, C.P. 1591
20101 Milano, Italy

Spartacist Group Japan: Spartacist Group Japan, PO Box 49
Akabane Yubinkyoku, Kita-ku, Tokyo 115-0091, Japan

Grupo Espartaquista de México: Román Burgos, Apdo.
Postal 302, Admón. Postal 13, CP 03501, México, D.F., Mexico

Spartakusowska Grupa Polski: Jan Jędrzejewski, Skr. 148
02-588 Warszawa 48, Poland

Spartacist/South Africa: Spartacist, PostNet Suite 248
Private Bag X2226, Johannesburg 2000, South Africa

Spartacist League/U.S.: Spartacist League, Box 1377 GPO
New York, NY 10116, USA

International Communist League's Fifth International Conference:

Down With Executive Offices of the Capitalist State!

At its Fifth International Conference in early 2007, the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) reconsidered the earlier practice in the Marxist movement of running candidates for executive offices, such as mayor or president. The conference resolved that we categorically oppose running for executive positions in the capitalist state. The wide-ranging discussion on this question before and during the conference made clear that this is not simply a matter of electoral tactics but goes to the root of the Marxist view of the bourgeois state as an instrument of class oppression. As stated in the relevant section of the conference document, reprinted on page 53, "In adopting this position against running for executive office, we are recognizing and codifying what should be seen as a corollary to Lenin's *The State and Revolution* and *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, which are really the founding documents of the Third International.... Thus we are continuing to complete the theoretical and programmatic work of the first four Congresses of the CI [Communist International]."

The understanding that the proletariat cannot lay hold of the capitalist state and wield it for its own class interests is the dividing line between reformism and Marxism; this dividing line is even clearer today, when the bulk of the reformist left barely gives even lip service to the goal of socialism or communism and the pressure to conform to bourgeois-liberal ideology is pervasive and intense. Reaffirmation of the Marxist view of the state is central to maintaining our programmatic bearings in this period of post-Soviet reaction. Defending our program also means working out its extension to new situations and testing it in active polemical engagement and exemplary intervention. There can be no "finished program" for a living, fighting party. Our purpose in reconsidering our earlier attitude toward participating in elections for executive office, as in all internal party debate over programmatic positions, is to arm our party to intervene more effectively into class and other social struggles that arise.

Comrade J. Bride, one of two reporters on the main conference document, began his presentation by noting the importance of our discussion on communists running for executive office: "The fundamental point that's posed here is the line between reform and revolution, between the reformist strategy of taking hold of and administering the bourgeois state apparatus versus the revolutionary strategy, which means smashing the existing state organs and replacing them with organs of workers rule. Communists do not join, support or take responsibility for the administration of the bourgeois state. And when you run for, as well as hold, executive office, you are legitimizing exactly that—the executive authority."

The position that communists should under no circumstances run for executive offices of the bourgeois state is an extension of our long-standing criticism of the entry of the German Communist Party into the regional governments of

Saxony and Thuringia in October 1923. The KPD's support to these bourgeois governments run by "left" Social Democrats—first from outside the government and then from within—helped to derail a revolutionary situation (see "A Trotskyist Critique of Germany 1923 and the Comintern," page 30). Our new line clears up a confusion in the communist movement that has been present since the CI's Second Congress in 1920. As Bride's report noted: "We are trying to do what in the main the Third International did do, which is clean up the act of the Second International on the state; they just didn't finish the job. Because when they had that discussion at the Second Congress, they were doing battle with the Bordigists and ultralefts, who in principle didn't want to run for office. But no distinction there was made between running for parliament and running for executive office."

Our earlier line, affirmed at the ICL's Fourth Conference in 2003, was that Marxists could run for executive posts so long as we made clear in advance that we would not assume office if elected (see "Fourth ICL International Conference, Autumn 2003: The Fight for Revolutionary Continuity in the Post-Soviet World," *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 58, Spring 2004). Comrade Bride noted that a reconsideration of our line had first been raised internally in 1999, when the party was deeply disoriented, then was raised again after the 2003 conference, leading to the reopening of discussion. He commented, "I think our slowness to grapple with this has a lot to do with the state of the party and the prevailing conception, in fact, that the overriding problems were sectarianism and not Menshevism." The subsequent fights and discussions to reorient the ICL have greatly strengthened our ability to address such questions, drawing crucial lessons from the history of the workers movement to apply to our work.

The executive office question was a major subject of debate in the buildup to our Fifth Conference, with many contributions by comrades at pre-conference meetings and in internal bulletins. A number of research documents were produced, examining a variety of historical situations, among them the ministerialism (holding positions in bourgeois governments) of the Second International; the electoral work of the Bolshevik Party and its attitude toward bourgeois municipal administrations during the period of dual power in 1917; the work of the Bulgarian Narrow Socialists in the years before and after the Russian Revolution; and the work of early Communist parties in France, Mexico and elsewhere. Further historical research remains to be done, with an eye to publishing more extensive propaganda on this critical question in the future.

Our change of line remained controversial up to the eve of the conference. Some comrades initially argued for running for president in "exceptional" circumstances as a means of gaining a broader hearing for Marxist ideas. Another

continued on page 52