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## **The Struggle for Democracy in the Imperialist Countries**

**by Michael Pröbsting**

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*Front page: Afro-American activist Nekima Levy-Pounds at a march of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2015*

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# The Struggle for Democracy in the Imperialist Countries Today

## The Marxist Theory of Permanent Revolution and its Relevance for the Imperialist Metropolises

By Michael Pröbsting

### Introduction

**Note from the Editorial Board:** The following essay is a pre-publication of a chapter which was written for a forthcoming book by Michael Pröbsting on Imperialism and the Great Powers today. The RCIT plans to publish the book later this year.

\* \* \* \* \*

The theory of *permanent revolution* is a central component of the Marxist program in the epoch of imperialism and as such it is relevant for each country of the world. Trotsky made it very clear that without this theory revolutionaries are incapable of understanding the character of the class struggle dynamic and therefore will not succeed in deriving from it the required strategic tasks. In a letter to an opponent, in 1931 he wrote:

*“But this theory [of permanent revolution, Ed.] gives us a unique and correct starting point in the internal dynamic of each contemporary national revolution and in its uninterrupted connection with the international revolution. In this theory the Bolshevik-Leninists have a fighting formula imbued with the content of the gigantic events of the last thirty years. On the basis of this formula, the Opposition is combating and will combat the reformists, the centrists and the national communists in a decisive manner. One of the most precious advantages of this formula is that it slices like a razor through the ideological ties with all kinds of revisionism of the epigones.”*<sup>1</sup>

A crucial misunderstanding of most Marxists is that they consider the strategy of permanent revolution as only relevant for countries of the South. In this chapter we will show that this view is false. In fact the strategy of permanent revolution is the programmatic reverse side of the coin of the *Law of Uneven and Combined Development*. And since this law is relevant not only for the semi-colonial countries but also for the imperialist metropolises, as we have shown in a preceding chapter, permanent revolution constitutes a crucial strategy for the rich countries too.

While Trotsky wrote about the theory of permanent revolution mostly in the context of the revolutionary tasks in so-called “backward” countries – either backward imperialist countries like Russia before 1917 or colonial or semi-colonial countries – he was at the same time unambiguously clear that this theory also applies to advanced imperialist countries. In the early 1930s he pointed to the example of Germany in the times of the Weimar Republic – at that time one of the most advanced imperialist countries.

*“Now the problem of the permanent revolution unfolds before us on the arena of the Iberian peninsula. In Germany the theory of the permanent revolution, and that theory alone, stands counterposed to the theory of a “people’s revolution.” On all these questions the Left Opposition has expressed itself quite categorically.”*<sup>2</sup>

Equally, Trotsky saw the struggle against fascism in imperialist Italy as part of the program of permanent revolution: *“As to the problem of the anti-fascist revolution, the Italian question, more than any other, is intimately linked to the fundamental problems of world communism, that is, of the so-called theory of permanent revolution.”*<sup>3</sup>

Likewise he referred to the strategy of permanent revolution in relation to the liberation struggle of the Black minority in the United States: *“Weisbord is correct in a certain sense that the ‘self-determination’ of the Negroes belongs to the question of the permanent revolution in America.”*<sup>4</sup>

These few quotes already demonstrate that Trotsky considered the theory of permanent revolution as highly relevant for all countries in the world – including imperialist societies – even if he did not elaborate on this issue more in depth.

# 1. A Brief Recapitulation of the Three Aspects of Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution

Let us at the start briefly recapitulate the three central aspects of the theory of permanent revolution. The first aspect – and the issue around which the faction struggle between the Stalinist bureaucracy and Trotsky's Left Opposition started in 1923 – is the need for the internationalization of the revolution. The Stalinists claimed that socialism – i.e., a society where productive forces are so developed that classes and the state are withering away – can be built in a single nation state. Trotsky, referring to the traditional position of both Lenin as well as himself, stated that this is impossible. Both Lenin and Trotsky explained that since all national economies are inextricably linked with the world economy and since imperialist great powers can not tolerate a victorious revolution in a single country, the working class in power must see the international spread of the revolution as its most important strategic task.

*"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. From this follows on the one hand, imperialist wars, on the other, the utopia of a bourgeois United States of Europe. 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."*<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, Trotsky showed that the tasks in the proletarian liberation struggle – including the democratic tasks – cannot be implemented under any form of capitalist regime but only under the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is particularly relevant (but not exclusively!) for backward

countries where many democratic tasks – national independence, agrarian revolution, and democratic freedoms – remain unfulfilled. From this follows that the revolutionary class struggle must not strive for actualization in *separate stages of revolution* and must not be subordinated to any faction of the bourgeoisie, but rather must continue without interruption until the proletariat has conquered power and established its dictatorship.

*"No matter what the first episodic stages of the revolution may be in the individual countries, the realization of the revolutionary alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry is conceivable only under the political leadership of the proletariat vanguard, organized in the Communist Party. This in turn means that the victory of the democratic revolution is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat which bases itself upon the alliance with the peasantry and solves first of all the tasks of the democratic revolution. (...) The dictatorship of the proletariat which has risen to power as the leader of the democratic revolution is inevitably and, very quickly confronted with tasks, the fulfillment of which is bound up with deep inroads into the rights of bourgeois property. The democratic revolution grows over directly into the socialist revolution and thereby becomes a permanent revolution."*<sup>6</sup>

Finally, Trotsky stressed that the revolutionary struggle does not end with the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Quite the contrary, the working class must continuously drive the revolutionary process forward. It has to organize the class struggle – including the civil war and revolutionary wars – both internally against its domestic enemies as well as abroad against the imperialist powers.

*"The conquest of power by the proletariat does not complete the revolution, but only opens it. Socialist construction is conceivable only on the foundation of the class struggle, on a national and*

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international scale. This struggle, under the conditions of an overwhelming predominance of capitalist relationships on the world arena, must inevitably lead to explosions, that is, internally to civil wars and externally to revolutionary wars. Therein lies the permanent character of the socialist revolution as such, regardless of whether it is a backward country that is involved, which only yesterday accomplished its democratic revolution, or an old capitalist country which already has behind it a long epoch of democracy and parliamentarism.”<sup>7</sup>

So from this brief summary we already see that the theory of permanent revolution applies not only to backward countries but also to advanced capitalist societies. Trotsky stressed that irrespective of the differences in the tempo and the concrete tasks all countries – backward and advanced capitalist states – had to combine the immediate tasks with the goal of socialist revolution.

“Then wherein lies the distinction between the advanced and the backward countries? The distinction is great, but it still remains within the limits of the domination of capitalist relationships. The forms and methods of the rule of the bourgeoisie differ greatly in different countries. At one pole, the domination bears a stark and absolute character: The United States. At the other pole finance capital adapts itself to the outlived institutions of Asiatic mediaevalism by subjecting them to itself and imposing its own methods upon them: India. But the bourgeoisie rules in both places. From this it follows that the dictatorship of the proletariat also will have a highly varied character in terms of the social basis, the political forms, the immediate tasks and the tempo of work in the various capitalist countries. But to lead the masses of the people to victory over the bloc of the imperialists, the feudalists and the national bourgeoisie – this can be done

only under the revolutionary hegemony of the proletariat, which transforms itself after the seizure of power into the dictatorship of the proletariat.”<sup>8</sup>

Likewise Trotsky explained that the need to internationalize the revolution instead of mistakenly trying to build socialism in a single country is true for modern imperialist countries as much as it is for backward ones.

“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 ‘highly-developed productive forces which have grown beyond national boundaries resist this, just as do those forces which are insufficiently developed for nationalization. The dictatorship of the proletariat in Britain, for example, will encounter difficulties and contradictions, different in character, it is true, but perhaps not slighter than those that will confront the dictatorship of the proletariat in China. Surmounting these contradictions is possible in both cases only by way of the international revolution.”<sup>9</sup>

However, in this chapter we will not discuss these two aspects of permanent revolution in more detail. Rather we will focus below on the specifics of the democratic task as part of the program of permanent revolution in the imperialist countries. We take this approach first because we are convinced of the importance of these specifics for the revolutionary class struggle in the imperialist metropolises of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Secondly we believe that this is needed because apart from a few isolated remarks this aspect has not been elaborated by Trotsky.

## New Book!

### Michael Pröbsting: Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice

Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of Organized Struggle for Bolshevism

The RCIT is proud to announce the publication of a book called *BUILDING THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE*. The book’s subtitle is: *Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of organized Struggle for Bolshevism*. The book is in English-language. It contains four chapters on 148 pages and includes 42 pictures. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who serves as the International Secretary of the RCIT.

The following paragraphs are the back cover text of the book which give an overview of its content.

A few months ago, our movement commemorated its 25th anniversary. In the summer of 1989 our predecessor organization, the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) was founded as a democratic-centralist international tendency based on an elaborated program. The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) continues the revolutionary tradition of the LRCI. Below we give an overview of our history, an evaluation of its achievements as well as mistakes, and a summary of the lessons for the struggles ahead. This book summarizes our theoretical and practical experience of the past

25 years.

In Chapter I we outline a summary of the Bolshevik- Communists’ theoretical conception of the role of the revolutionary party and its relation to the working class. In Chapter II we elaborate on the essential characteristics of revolutionary party respective of the pre-party organization. In Chapter III we deal with the history of our movement – the RCIT and its predecessor organization. Finally, in Chapter IV we outline the main lessons of our 25 years of organized struggle for building a Bolshevik party and their meaning for our future work.

You can find the contents and download the book for free at <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/rcit-party-building/> ■

**Building the  
Revolutionary Party  
in Theory  
and Practice**

Looking Back and Ahead after  
25 Years of organized Struggle for Bolshevism



By Michael Pröbsting

Published by the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency

## 2. On Unevenness in the Imperialist Countries

Let us first recapitulate briefly what we have shown in preceding chapters about the relevance of the *Law of Uneven and Combined Development* for the imperialist countries. We have demonstrated that in the imperialist countries there is increasing unevenness on the economic, political, and social levels. In China as well as in Russia we are witnessing the coexistence of very rich, economically developed provinces and poor, backward regions. This reflects the simultaneous existence of different stages of capitalist development and different levels of labor productivity (e.g., modern factories – backward agricultural production). Likewise we see growing contradictions between a modern proletariat, an emerging middle class and an authoritarian Bonapartist state apparatus.

In the old imperialist countries of Northern America, Western Europe, and Japan we are similarly witness to uneven development in a variety of ways. Economically there is increasing inequality in real income and accumulated wealth between the broad mass of the working class and the lower strata of the middle layers on one hand and the bourgeoisie and the upper strata of the middle layers on the other hand. On the political level there is increased importance of democratic rights both in (bourgeois) public opinion as well as in popular consciousness in parallel with a huge, all pervasive build-up of imperialist surveillance and repression apparatuses. The accelerating capitalist crisis – both in the semi-colonial world and in the imperialist metropolises – spawns a huge increase of migration from the South to the North; this in turn exacerbates the unevenness between various forms of capitalist labor conditions as well as between the lower and upper layers of the proletariat. Likewise unevenness and political oppression of national minorities (Catalans, Basques, etc.) or racial minorities like the black and ethnic minorities in the US and Britain increases in the period of capitalist decay. Finally, we should add that the imperialist countries are increasingly dependent on the super-exploitation of the semi-colonial world, a dependence which in itself accelerates the capitalist process of unevenness.

Hence we can speak of a certain degree of “*semi-colonialization*” inside the imperialist countries. By this we group together the following phenomena: the substantial increase in the portion of the population which has origins in semi-colonial countries; the spread of super-exploitive labor conditions; and the simultaneous increased vulnerability of the imperialist countries to political, social, and economic developments in the semi-colonial world.

In addition it is important to be cognizant of the unevenness *within* the EU between the richest and most powerful imperialist states (Germany, France, Benelux, etc.) and the semi-colonial countries (Eastern Europe, Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Ireland, etc.)

Finally let us focus our attention on those uneven social relations which capitalism inherited from previous class

societies, like the oppression of women and youth. During the past decade or two of capitalist decay in the imperialist metropolises, this inequality has evolved in contradictory directions. On one hand more and more women have been employed, something which has enhanced their economic independence. However this positive development has hardly affected the inequality between male and female wages. At the same time, the increasing commodification of all aspects of social life also increases the social oppression of women. Similarly, we have witnessed the growth of the role of youth in social life – driven as it is by the capitalists’ desire to develop young people as consumers – while at the same time capitalist decay throws an increasing number of youth into chronic unemployment and impoverishment.

### 3. Lenin and Trotsky on the Permanent Revolution in the Imperialist Countries

Contrary to the view of many so-called Marxists, Lenin and Trotsky considered the democratic questions as highly relevant not only for the backward capitalist countries but also for the advanced countries.

First let us recall Lenin's general statement about the importance of the class struggle for democratic rights as part of the struggle for the socialist revolution. In a polemic against those whom he called "imperialist economists" – i.e., economists in the epoch of imperialism who ignore the importance of the political struggle, including the struggle for democracy – he stressed that the democratic questions are an inseparable part of the revolutionary class struggle.

*„This leaves only one single argument [for the 'imperialist economists', Ed.]: the socialist revolution will solve everything. Or, the argument sometimes advanced by people who share his views: self-determination is impossible under capitalism and superfluous under socialism. From the theoretical standpoint that view is nonsensical; from the practical political standpoint it is chauvinistic. It fails to appreciate the significance of democracy. For socialism is impossible without democracy because: (1) the proletariat cannot perform the socialist revolution unless it prepares for it by the struggle for democracy; (2) victorious socialism cannot consolidate its victory and bring humanity to the withering away of the state without implementing full democracy.“*<sup>10</sup>

In the same spirit Trotsky stated, in a polemic against the Bordegists – an ultra-left current based in Italy – who denied the importance of the struggle for democracy both in their motherland Italy as well as everywhere else:

*“These doctrinaires [the ultra-left Bordegists, Ed.] refuse to understand that we carry on half, three-quarters or, in certain periods, even 99 percent of the preparations of the [proletarian, Ed.] dictatorship on the basis of democracy, and in doing this we defend every inch of democratic positions under our feet”*<sup>11</sup>

From the beginning Lenin insisted that socialists have to fight against all violations of democratic rights – not only in colonial or backward countries but also in advanced capitalist societies of the time like Germany. In *What Is To Be Done?* Lenin wrote:

*“Why is there not a single political event in Germany that does not add to the authority and prestige of Social-Democracy? Because Social-Democracy [as the revolutionary Marxists were called at that time, Ed.] is always found to be in advance of all others in furnishing the most revolutionary appraisal of every given event and in championing every protest against tyranny. It does not lull itself with arguments that the economic struggle brings the workers to realise that they have no political rights and that the concrete conditions unavoidably impel the working-class movement on to the path of revolution. It intervenes in every sphere and in every question of social and political life; in the matter of Wilhelm's refusal to endorse a bourgeois progressist as city mayor (our Economists have not yet managed to educate the Germans to the understanding that such an act is, in fact, a compromise with liberalism!); in the matter of the*

*law against "obscene" publications and pictures; in the matter of governmental influence on the election of professors, etc., etc. Everywhere the Social-Democrats are found in the forefront, rousing political discontent among all classes, rousing the sluggards, stimulating the laggards, and providing a wealth of material for the development of the political consciousness and the political activity of the proletariat.”*<sup>12</sup>

This approach became particularly relevant in the epoch of imperialism. Lenin explained that by its nature monopoly capital strives towards the violation of democracy – both at home as well as abroad.

*„The political superstructure of this new economy, of monopoly capitalism (imperialism is monopoly capitalism), is the change from democracy to political reaction. Democracy corresponds to free competition. Political reaction corresponds to monopoly. "Finance capital strives for domination, not freedom," Rudolf Hilferding rightly remarks in his *Finance Capital*. It is fundamentally wrong, un-Marxist and unscientific, to single out "foreign policy" from policy in general, let alone counterpose foreign policy to home policy. Both in foreign and home policy imperialism strives towards violations of democracy, towards reaction. In this sense imperialism is indisputably the "negation" of democracy in general, of all democracy, and not just of one of its demands, national self-determination.“*<sup>13</sup>

Therefore Lenin considered it as particularly important that the working class in the imperialist countries learns to oppose the anti-democratic policy of "its" ruling class by consistently fighting for the rights of the oppressed – even if they are "only" small nations.

*“The important thing is not whether one-fiftieth or one-hundredth of the small nations are liberated before the socialist revolution, but the fact that in the epoch of imperialism, owing to objective causes, the proletariat has been split into two international camps, one of which has been corrupted by the crumbs that fall from the table of the dominant-nation bourgeoisie—obtained, among other things, from the double or triple exploitation of small nations—while the other cannot liberate itself without liberating the small nations, without educating the masses in an anti-chauvinist, i.e., anti-annexationist, i.e., "selfdeterminationist", spirit.”*<sup>14</sup>

Against the argument of the economists that the struggle for democratic rights could distract the workers from their "real" goals, Lenin counterposed that this violates completely the principles of Marxism.

*“The idea that the slogan of socialist revolution can be "overshadowed" by linking it up with a consistently revolutionary position on all questions, including the national question, is certainly profoundly anti-Marxist.”*<sup>15</sup>

This is particularly true since the struggle for socialist revolution is not a one-time event but a long process of which the struggle for democratic rights is an inseparable part.

*„The socialist revolution is not a single act, it is not one battle on one front, but a whole epoch of acute class conflicts, a long series of battles on all fronts, i.e., on all questions of economics*

and politics, battles that can only end in the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. It would be a radical mistake to think that the struggle for democracy was capable of diverting the proletariat from the socialist revolution or of hiding, overshadowing it, etc. On the contrary, in the same way as there can be no victorious socialism that does not practise full democracy, so the proletariat cannot prepare for its victory over the bourgeoisie without an all-round, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy."<sup>16</sup> The crucial point is not to put forth the democratic question in a reformist way, not as an isolated appeal to the ruling class, but in a revolutionary way, i.e., as a slogan to mobilize the working class and the popular masses and which Marxists link to the revolutionary program.

„The demand for the immediate liberation of the colonies that is put forward by all revolutionary Social-Democrats is also “impracticable” under capitalism without a series of revolutions. But from this it does not by any means follow that Social-Democracy should reject the immediate and most determined struggle for all these demands—such a rejection would only play into the hands of the bourgeoisie and reaction—but, on the contrary, it follows that these demands must be formulated and put through in a revolutionary and not a reformist manner, going beyond the bounds of bourgeois legality, breaking them down, going beyond speeches in parliament and verbal protests, and drawing the masses into decisive action, extending and intensifying the struggle for every fundamental democratic demand up to a direct proletarian onslaught on the bourgeoisie, i.e., up to the socialist revolution that expropriates the bourgeoisie. The socialist revolution may flare up not only through some big strike, street demonstration or hunger riot or a military insurrection or colonial revolt, but also as a result of a political crisis such as the Dreyfus case or the Zabern incident, or in connection with a referendum on the secession of an oppressed nation, etc.”<sup>17</sup>

Later the Stalinists, in their ultra-left centrist phase in the late 1920s and early 1930s, also tended to ignore the importance of the democratic questions. This was the case not only for semi-colonial countries like in China after the defeat of the 1925–27 revolution but also for imperialist countries like Germany, Spain, or Italy. Trotsky strongly polemicized against this revisionism. He stressed that revolutionaries have to gather up every, even minor, democratic demands of the popular masses. They should energetically support such struggles and explain to the masses that the final implementation of authentic democracy is only possible through a socialist revolution and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. „The Stalinists (and their miserable imitators, the Brandlerites), declared democratic slogans under prohibition for all the countries of the world: for India, which did not as yet accomplish its liberating national revolution; for Spain, where the proletarian vanguard must yet find the ways for transforming the creeping bourgeois revolution into a socialist one; for Germany, where the crushed and atomized proletariat is deprived of all that it achieved during the last century; for Belgium, the proletariat of which does not take its eyes off its Eastern borders and, suppressing a deep mistrust, supports the party of democratic “pacifism” (Vandervelde & Co.). The Stalinists deduce the bare renunciation of democratic slogans in a purely abstract way from the general characteristic of our epoch, as an epoch of imperialism and of socialist revolution.

Thus presented, the question contains not even a grain of dialectics! Democratic slogans and illusions cannot be abolished

by decree. It is necessary that the masses go through them and outlive them in the experience of battles. The task of the proletariat consists in coupling its locomotive to the train of the masses. It is necessary to find the dynamic elements in the present defensive position of the working class; we must make the masses draw conclusions from their own democratic logic, we must widen and deepen the channels of the struggle. And on this road, quantity passes over into quality.”<sup>18</sup>

Taking into account that the workers and popular masses still retain numerous illusions in bourgeois democracy and their political parties (like social democracy), Trotsky advocated combining the raising of democratic demands with the application of the tactics of the united front. This means that he urged revolutionaries to strive for joint actions with the reformist-minded workers and oppressed in order to jointly fight for such democratic demands. Such a policy has to include putting demands on the reformist leadership which the masses still trust.

“Let us recall once more that in 1917, when the Bolsheviks were immeasurably stronger than any one of the present sections of the Comintern, they continued to demand the earliest convocation of the Constituent Assembly, the lowering of the voting age, the right of suffrage for soldiers, the election of officers, etc., etc. The main slogan of the Bolsheviks, “All Power to the Soviets,” meant from the beginning of April up to September, 1917, all power to the Social-Democracy (Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionists). When the reformists entered into a governmental coalition with the bourgeoisie, the Bolsheviks put forth the slogan, “Down with the Capitalist Ministers.” This signified again, Workers, force the Mensheviks and the Social-Revolutionists to take the whole power into their hands! The political experience of the only successful proletarian revolution is perverted and falsified by the Stalinists beyond recognition. Our task, here also, consists in reestablishing the facts and drawing from them the necessary conclusions for the present.

We, Bolsheviks, consider that the real salvation from fascism and war lies in the revolutionary conquest of power and the establishing of the proletarian dictatorship. You, socialist workers, do not agree to this road. You hope not only to save what has been gained, but also to move forward along the road of democracy. Good! As long as we have not convinced you and attracted you to our side, we are ready to follow this road with you to the end. But we demand that you carry on the struggle for democracy, not in words but in deeds. Everybody admits – each in his own way – that in the present conditions a “strong government” is necessary. Well, then, make your party open up a real struggle for a strong democratic government. For this is it necessary first of all to sweep away all the remnants of the feudal state. It is necessary to give the suffrage to all men and women who have reached their eighteenth birthday, also to the soldiers in the army. Full concentration of legislative and executive power in the hands of one chamber! Let your party open up a serious campaign under these slogans, let it arouse millions of workers, let it conquer power through the drive of the masses. This, at any rate, would be a serious attempt of struggle against fascism and war. We, Bolsheviks, would retain the right to explain to the workers the insufficiency of democratic slogans; we could not take upon ourselves the political responsibility for the social-democratic government; but we would honestly help you in the struggle for such a government; together with you we would repel all attacks of bourgeois reaction. More than that, we would bind ourselves before you not to undertake any revolutionary actions which go beyond the limits of democracy (real democracy)

so long as the majority of the workers has not consciously placed itself on the side of revolutionary dictatorship.”<sup>19</sup>

Another reason why Trotsky considered the program of permanent revolution as highly relevant for imperialist countries was the continuing existence of national and racial oppression in these societies. Discussing the oppression of the black minority in the US, Trotsky emphasized the need to orient the building of a revolutionary party towards these layers as a crucial task which he saw as an organizational consequence of the program of permanent revolution.

“We must say to the conscious elements of the Negroes that they are convoked by the historic development to become a vanguard of the working class. What serves as the brake on the higher strata? It is the privileges, the comforts that hinder them from becoming revolutionists. It does not exist for the Negroes. What can transform a certain stratum, make it more capable of courage and sacrifice? It is concentrated in the Negroes. If it happens that we in the SWP [Socialist Workers Party, the US section of the Fourth International, Ed.] are not able to find the road to this stratum, then we are not worthy at all. The permanent revolution and all the rest would be only a lie.”<sup>20</sup>

## NEW RCIT PUBLICATIONS ON RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM!

### Russia as a Great Imperialist Power

By Michael Pröbsting, March 2014



#### Introduction

#### I. What are the Criteria for an Imperialist State?

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The Great Imperialist Powers before 1914

Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks on Russia as an Imperialist Power

An Ultra-Left Version of Kautskyianism

Inverted Social-Imperialists

#### VI. Appendix: The Capitalist Restoration in Russia (2001)

## 4. General Considerations on the Question of Democracy in the Imperialist Countries

Let us now elaborate some general thoughts on the question of democracy in the imperialist countries. Our fundamental thesis is that in the period of capitalist decay the democratic issues obtain *increasing importance* for the class struggle not only in the semi-colonial countries but also in the imperialist metropolises in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In one of the quotes cited above, Lenin stated that “imperialism is indisputably the ‘negation’ of democracy in general”. The experience of the past 120 years has shown that while Lenin’s thesis is fundamentally correct for the whole epoch of imperialism, it is obviously not true *to the same degree in all different periods within this epoch*. The period after World War II was certainly one in which bourgeois democracy was established in most imperialist countries. This was the result of a combination of forces. At the end of the war and after the collapse of fascism the working class and the poor peasants rose up and fought for their rights. In a number of countries – Greece, France, and Italy – revolutionary situations emerged in the years 1944–47. Other countries experienced periods of sharp class struggles (e.g., Japan, Austria). However, these revolutionary possibilities were liquidated mainly because the Stalinists – who commanded the largest working class parties in most of these countries as well as in Eastern Europe – formed class-collaborationist popular front governments with openly bourgeois parties and subordinated the class struggle to the goals of the Moscow bureaucracy. The USSR’s interests were first to form a strategic alliance with Western imperialism which included leaving the capitalist profit system untouched in Western countries. After this turned out to be illusionary, because imperialism no longer needed the Stalinist collaborators following the end of the revolutionary situations in 1947/48, the Moscow bureaucracy strived for a peaceful coexistence with imperialism in the period of Cold War.

In addition, monopoly capital – as a result of the historic defeats of the working class and the undisputed absolute hegemony of US imperialism among the capitalist states – was able to restore the rate of profit and hence to open a new period of growth for world capitalism which lasted until the early 1970s. Strengthened by this economic boost, the ruling classes in the imperialist countries were able to make various social and democratic concessions to the working class (universal suffrage, the right to organize trade unions and to strike, higher wages, provision of health service, etc.) and in particular to the labor aristocracy.<sup>21</sup>

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To a certain degree a number of the concessions of this period – e.g., democratic rights like universal suffrage, the right to strike, etc. – are still in place in most Western imperialist countries. The main reason for this is contradictory: on the one hand until now the imperialist bourgeoisie could afford – despite the accelerating economic crisis of capitalism – to retain the formal framework of bourgeois democracy. They could do so because of the defeats of the working class – and the accompanying demoralization, defeat of strikes and drastically decreased trade union organization, “de-proletarianization” of workers’ parties, etc. – as a result of the austerity offensive introduced in the early 1980s and the collapse of the Stalinist workers’ states in 1989–91. On the other hand, at the same time we have witnessed an acceleration of a mass democratic consciousness of a mass democratic consciousness among the working class and the middle layers. This mass democratic consciousness – expressed in an ever-increasing popular hatred against the greedy corporations, super-rich, and war-mongering as well as corrupt politicians – has been reinforced since the early 2000s (e.g., the mass anti-war, anti-globalization and occupy movements).

However, with the beginning of the new historic period of capitalist crisis in 2008/09 a qualitative change has emerged. Naturally, this transformation did not occur suddenly but was a result of preceding developments. First the capitalist crisis has qualitatively deepened and, hence, the bourgeoisie’s scope for concessions has dramatically decreased. In fact, it rather forced the capitalists to qualitatively accelerate the attacks on the working class as is demonstrated in the rapid rise of unemployment and the new wave of mass impoverishment.<sup>22</sup>

To illustrate, first we refer to the tremendous increase of unemployment within the Euro-Zone to 11.5% by 2014 which caused the *Washington Post* to warn that “the euro zone is experiencing conditions that some economists say echo the Great Depression.”<sup>23</sup> In the United States, the Labor Force Participation Rate, i.e., the share of people who are employed, has dropped from 66% before the start of the recession in December 2007 to only 62.8% in May 2014 despite the so-called “recovery” of the past years.<sup>24</sup>

Related to this increased unemployment is the continually growing need of the bourgeoisie to force down the cost of labor. In all imperialist countries, this has led to the creation of a growing layer of working poor in addition to an increasing numbers of migrant workers. At the same time, as we have shown in previous publications, migrants with origins in the semi-colonial world – including second and third generation migrants – form a significant sector of the urban working class in the imperialist metropolises. The migrants’ growing social weight makes it impossible for the ruling class to simply treat them as slaves without any rights (as was formerly the case e.g., in Germany and Austria at the beginning in the 1960s when they were so-called “guest workers”). Nevertheless, the migrants face

massive racist oppression on an economic, social, and political level. On the other hand, the bourgeoisie whips up chauvinism in order to repress the migrants and to use them as scapegoats to divert the anger of the domestic working class. Migrants constitute – in their huge majority – an oppressed national minority of super-exploited workers who belong to the lower strata of the proletariat. They represent a bridgehead of the semi-colonial South in the imperialist societies and reflect the growing interrelationship between the two sectors of class struggle. We refer readers to our detailed elaborations on the role and importance of migration.<sup>25</sup> Here, we content ourselves with pointing out that in the US the share of migrants amongst the population grew from 5.2% (1960) to 12.3% (2000) to more than 14% (2010). In Western Europe the migrant share of the population grew from about 4.6% (1960) to nearly 10% (2010).<sup>26</sup> And these are official figures which ignore migrants of the second and third generation as well as illegal migrants.

To illustrate the role of migrants and ethnic minorities in imperialist metropolises we will give a few examples. As early as the first years of the new millennium half of all resident workers in New York were black, Hispanic, or belonged to some other national minority. In inner and outer London, respectively 29% and 22% of residents were from ethnic minorities in 2000. In our study on racism and migrants we have shown how in Vienna (the capital city of Austria) migrants represent 44% of the population. Two thirds of them come from the former Yugoslavia, Turkey, or the Eastern European states belonging to the EU.

To sum up, the growing social strength of the migrant sector of the proletariat, the accelerating polarization of capitalist society, the spread of chauvinism – all this makes the oppression of migrants *one of the key issues of the struggle for democracy in the imperialist societies*.

Closely related to this is the issue of refugees from the South who in growing numbers are trying to enter the imperialist states. This phenomenon illustrates, in the most brutal way, the utter misery of people living in the South – super-exploited by the imperialist monopolies which have ruined their livelihoods – who try to flee to the “pockets of affluence” of the North and who are treated there as aliens and thieves.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, we see that in the period of historic crisis “old” national (including racial) questions have also intensified. The mass protests against the systematic killing of black people by US police and the emergence of the *#Black Lives Matters* movement in 2013 as well as the involvement of many migrants and ethnic minorities in the militant August Uprising in Britain in 2011 demonstrate this clearly.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, Catalan nationalism has risen dramatically and today the clear majority of the Catalans want to separate from Spain and form their own state.

From this it follows that in building a revolutionary party in imperialist countries, it is crucial that from the beginning revolutionaries orient themselves towards winning over militants from among the migrants and national and ethnic minorities. Likewise, revolutionaries must fight for a strong internationalist outlook, in particular towards building close ties with the struggles of the workers and oppressed in the semi-colonial world.

\* \* \* \* \*

Another crucial area in which imperialism increasingly nullifies democracy is the massive expansion of the state apparatus – the “*New Leviathan*” as Nikolai Bukharin rightly called it.<sup>29</sup> Below we show some figures which reflect the massive growth of the imperialist state apparatus since the beginning of the epoch of monopoly capitalism 120 years ago. While the range of state spending was the equivalent of only 8–18% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1900, this figure grew to 40–57% by 2012. (See Table 1)

If we also take into account the rapid growth of public debt during recent decades, the increasing power and role of the imperialist state becomes even more pronounced. (See Table 2)

From these figures we see just how powerful the imperialist *New Leviathan* has become in the epoch of monopoly capitalism, making as valid as ever Lenin’s observation in *State and Revolution*:

„Imperialism—the era of bank capital, the era of gigantic capitalist monopolies, of the development of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism—has clearly shown an extraordinary strengthening of the “state machine” and an unprecedented growth in its bureaucratic and military

**Table 1 State Spending of Selected Imperialist Countries, 1880–2012 (Percentage of GDP)<sup>30</sup>**

	1880	1913	1950	1973	1992	2012
<b>France</b>	11.2	8.9	27.6	38.8	51.0	56.8
<b>Germany</b>	10.0	17.7	30.4	42.0	46.1	44.2
<b>Britain</b>	9.9	13.3	34.2	41.5	51.2	47.0
<b>Japan</b>	9.0	14.2	19.8	22.9	33.5	41.8
<b>USA</b>	-	8.0	21.4	31.1	38.5	40.1

*apparatus in connection with the intensification of repressive measures against the proletariat both in the monarchical and in the freest, republican countries.*"<sup>32</sup>

Today this "imperialist robber state" – to use another useful characterization of Bukharin<sup>33</sup> – becomes an increasingly aggressive tool of the ruling class both domestically as well as abroad. The never-ending increase of surveillance of the population by the imperialist state, the growing violation of democratic rights, the increasing numbers of imperialist wars (Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Syria, etc.) in the past one and a half decades underline this thesis.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hence, we see that in the present historical period which opened in 2008/09, Lenin's statement "imperialism is the negation of democracy" is of particular relevance. Monopoly capital in all imperialist states becomes increasingly anti-democratic in light of the advancing decay of capitalism. The acceleration of the capitalist crisis leads to an acceleration of anti-democratic reaction. To put it another way, the law of uneven and combined development in the period of capitalist decay provokes inevitable social regression and increasing anti-democratism.

Naturally, the struggle for a democratic program is posed in imperialist countries differently than it is in the semi-colonial world. At the time of Lenin and Trotsky, to a certain degree there still existed in imperialist societies semi-feudal modes of production and well as the remnants of the nobility which continued to exploit the oppressed classes in this arrangement (e.g. the Junkers in East Germany, the Tennō in Japan). Today, this is still the case in the semi-colonial world where a number of fundamental tasks of the democratic revolution remain unresolved, just a few important examples being: the semi-colonial world's dependence on and super-exploitation by the imperialist monopolies and states; the huge class of landless or nearly landless peasants in face of a small band of large land owners; and the dominant role of the military which often results in Bonapartist or semi-Bonapartist dictatorships.

Clearly, semi-feudal modes of production no longer exist in the today's imperialist societies. Nearly all features of the semi-feudal social formation have been eliminated, if we leave aside some social and political remnants like the monarchies in Western Europe (there are currently 12 monarchies in Western Europe, including the Vatican; 7 of them are members of the EU).

In this sense it would be wrong for Bolshevik-Communists

in the imperialist countries to speak about the need for a "democratic revolution" as we do regarding the semi-colonial world. Trotsky once characterized the difference between the democratic questions between the two sectors of the world quite well when he wrote:

*"While destroying democracy in the old mother countries of capital, imperialism at the same time hinders the rise of democracy in the backward countries."*<sup>34</sup>

Thus while during the 19<sup>th</sup> century democracy was still suppressed or threatened by the pre-capitalist nobility, the absolutist bureaucracy and the opportunist bourgeoisie, today it is threatened by imperialist monopoly capital and its lackeys in the semi-colonial countries. Yes, today there are no semi-feudal modes of production within the imperialist countries, but this does not at all imply that capitalism has become "pure." What we are facing instead is decaying, rotten imperialist capitalism. Such a system creates new contradictions and exacerbates long-existing ones. As the reactionary offensive of the imperialist bourgeoisie accelerates, it makes immediate and democratic demands an increasingly more important part of the program for permanent revolution within the imperialist countries.

\* \* \* \* \*

Another difference between the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and today is that, at the time of Lenin and Trotsky, there were bourgeois parties like the liberal party of the Russian bourgeoisie – the Kadets. However, despite their calls for freedom and legal rights, these bourgeois parties were afraid of waging any serious struggle for democratic rights against the Tsarist regime. The Marxists of then rightly denounced them not only as counter-revolutionary vis-à-vis the interests of the proletariat but also with regard to the consistent democratic interests of the popular masses (questions of national liberation, republicanism, etc.)

However, the liberals of today, like the *Green Party* or the so-called *Pirate Parties*, are much more cowardly and impotent that even the Kadets were a century ago! Today, the Green Party even openly joins imperialist governments which the Kadets did not dare to do so until the February Revolution of 1917. While at that time petty-bourgeois parties like the *Social-Revolutionary Party* had a mass following among the rural population and partial support among the urban proletarian masses, nothing like this can be said today about such caricatures of radical protest like the so-called *Pirate Parties*.

**Table 2 Public Debt of Selected Imperialist States, 1980 - 2014 (Percentage of GDP)<sup>31</sup>**

	1980	1990	2000	2014
France	21.0	35.4	58.7	95.0
Germany	30.3	41.3	59.0	74.7
Britain	51.4	31.4	39.1	89.4
Japan	52.5	69.4	143.8	247.0
USA	41.2	62.0	53.1	104.8

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To summarize, the struggle for democratic demands within the imperialist countries during the period of capitalist decay becomes increasingly relevant given the unrelenting attacks of the ruling class. However, this struggle can only be fought by the working class – in alliance with the proletariat and the huge popular masses of the South – and as such it must be integrated into a transitional program which directs the masses towards the socialist revolution.

Therefore, in the RCIT's program we have raised the following demands which we consider as crucial for the democratic program of permanent revolution in the imperialist countries:

*"\* Down with the monarchies and dictatorships! For the elimination of Bonapartist institutions such as a Military Council or National Security Council, a second parliamentary chambers, the presidency, etc.*

*\* In the struggle against dictatorships, and also against the corrupt "democracies" we advocate a radical purge of the state apparatus! For the complete screening of all state officials and their actions - especially police, army, intelligence, administration, legal, enterprise directors, etc. - under the control of councils!*

*\* Defence of the right to strike, freedom of speech and assembly, freedom of political and union organising, as well as the freedom to make use of all communication and information media!*

*\* Radical democratisation of the administration and jurisdiction: election and possibility to recall the entire administrative apparatus by the people! Trial by jury for all crimes and misdemeanours! Abolition of judicial office and replacement by jurisdiction by a jury under the advice of legally qualified experts!*

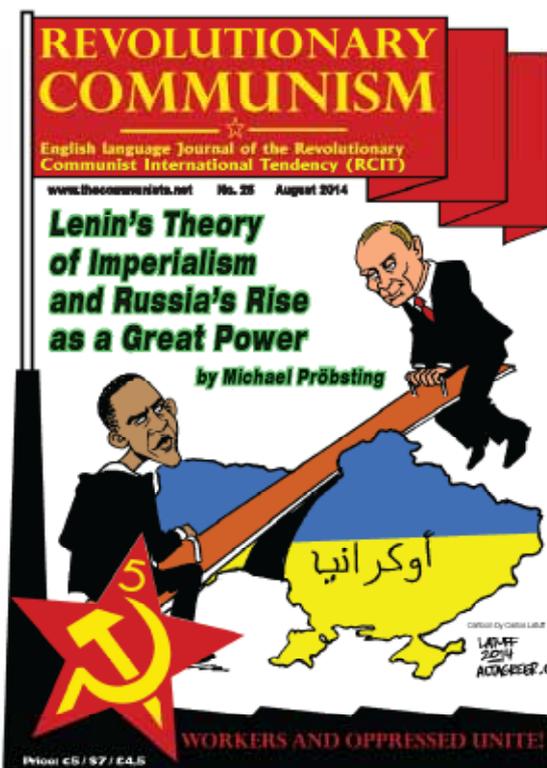
*\* For the extension of local self-government!*

*\* No to police and the surveillance state! Against expanding the powers of police and courts! For the replacement of the apparatus of repression by workers' and people's militia!"<sup>35</sup>*

## NEW RCIT PUBLICATIONS ON RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM!

### Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power

By Michael Pröbsting, August 2014



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## 5. On “Transitional Revolutionary-Democratic Demands” in the Present Period

Most adherents of Trotsky’s theory – particularly those from Europe and North America – assume that democratic demands are of no importance and distinguish between them and vital transitional demands. What is true is that democratic demands must – in order to play a revolutionary role – be integrated into a transitional program. In the founding document of the Fourth International in 1938 – the famous *Transitional Program* – Trotsky emphasized the interdependence between the different types of demands:

*“Democratic slogans, transitional demands and the problems of the socialist revolution are not divided into separate historical epochs in this struggle, but stem directly from one another.”*<sup>36</sup>

This means that Bolshevik-Communists have to integrate democratic demands into a program which starts from the present situation and elaborates a series of slogans (including immediate demands) which all lead to the core slogan of the transitional program: the conquest of state power by the working class and the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship. This is why the key slogans of the transitional program are calls for the formation of soviets, of workers and popular militias, of workers control in the enterprises, and the establishment of a workers’ government supported by the poor peasants and the urban poor.

*“This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today’s conditions and from today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.”*<sup>37</sup>

Trotsky insisted that democratic slogans must be revolutionary, mobilizing slogans, but not demands which become an obstacle for the advance of the working class. Hence, such democratic slogans must not be misused – as was done by the Stalinists – to subordinate the proletariat to a sector of the bourgeoisie. This means that democratic demands must not be issued as passive appeals to the state or be distinct from mobilizing and organizing demands designed to raise the self-organizing capabilities of the working class (action committees, soviets, militias etc.). On this Trotsky noted:

*“Of course, this does not mean that the Fourth International rejects democratic slogans as a means of mobilizing the masses against fascism. On the contrary, such slogans at certain moments can play a serious role. But the formulae of democracy (freedom of press, the right to unionize, etc.) mean for us only incidental or episodic slogans in the independent movement of the proletariat and not a democratic noose fastened to the neck of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie’s agents (Spain!). As soon as the movement assumes something of a mass character, the democratic slogans will be intertwined with the transitional ones.”*<sup>38</sup>

Let us deal with the question of whether democratic demands assume the character of transitional demands? While many so-called “Trotskyists” deny this, we say that under specific conditions this is certainly possible.

In its declaration of principles, Trotsky’s *International Left Opposition* – the predecessor organization of the Fourth International – in 1933 proclaimed as one of the conditions of membership:

*“Recognition of the necessity to mobilize the masses under transitional slogans corresponding to the concrete situation in each country, and particularly under democratic slogans insofar as it is a question of struggle against feudal relations, national oppression, or different varieties of openly imperialist dictatorship (fascism, Bonapartism, etc.)”*<sup>39</sup>

In other writings Trotsky spoke explicitly about “transitional revolutionary-democratic slogans”<sup>40</sup>. In the case of China, at that time he considered the slogan of a Constituent Assembly as such a crucial transitional demand:

*„The struggle against the military dictatorship must inevitably assume the form of transitional revolutionary-democratic demands, leading to the demand for a Chinese Constituent Assembly on the basis of universal direct, equal, and secret voting, for the solution of the most important problems facing the country: the introduction of the eight-hour day, the confiscation of the land, and the securing of national independence for China”*<sup>41</sup>

In another document dealing with the problems of fighting against fascism in imperialist Italy, Trotsky wrote in 1930:

*„In no way do we deny a transitional period with its transitional demands including democratic demands.”*<sup>42</sup>

Let us try to define more concretely which democratic slogans in the imperialist countries could assume the character of such transitional revolutionary-democratic demands. It goes without saying that this question can not be discussed in abstract. Certain demands can assume a transitional character in a given period but not in another. For example, the democratic demand of suffrage for migrant workers who are foreign citizens did not have a transitional character in the 1960s and 1970s in Europe when migrants were still a relative small minority. However, things are very different in Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar where migrants constitute between 69–86% of the whole population! Similarly, the demand for abolition of the monarchy and the expropriation of the nobility is much less explosive in Britain than it is in Saudi-Arabia.

Another example is the demand for full equality for sexual minorities (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender persons, etc.). Such a demand naturally deserves the fullest support of socialists, but it cannot be considered a transitional revolutionary-democratic demand.

In short, we think that the democratic slogans which should be considered as transitional revolutionary-democratic demands relate to core issues of the capitalist system in its present political, economic, and social configuration and have the potential to shake it. In other words, revolutionary-democratic demands which challenge the logic of imperialist capitalism can be considered as transitional. Or to put it in another way: such slogans which are capable of attracting the attention of the working

class to the issue of conquering state power and building a new, socialist society.

For example the demand for a universal suffrage for women was of crucial importance in the period before 1914. On the other hand, the demand for free abortion was and remains an important democratic demand but does not contain a transitional dynamic. However it is an entirely different matter with the demand for the socialization of housework which fundamentally challenges the chaining of women to unpaid domestic work and childcare. This is a demand which partly can only be realized in an advanced socialist society when classes and the structures of the traditional family will be withering away.

Similarly we consider the slogan for *open borders* for migrants and refugees in the present period as a *transitional revolutionary-democratic demand*. Given the enormous global weight of the proletariat in the semi-colonial world, the increasing super-exploitation of the South by the monopoly capitalists, the drive for more imperialist wars in the South, and the inability of the imperialist metropolises to accommodate the mass of those in the South who wish to migrate to the North – all these factors demonstrate the importance of the slogan for *open borders*. In addition, this slogan helps mobilize the workers and popular masses against imperialism by building links of international solidarity between the oppressed of the North and those of the South. Furthermore, this slogan challenges the social-imperialist bond which chains the backward sectors of the working class in the North to their capitalist masters.

For similar reasons we see the slogan for *full equality for migrants* (equal wages, abolition of a state language as such and equality for all languages of migrants, truly universal suffrage, etc.) in those imperialist countries with a significant sector of migrants as a *transitional revolutionary-democratic demand*. Let us recall that in a number of European and North American urban metropolises, migrants and racial minorities constitute between ¼ and ½ of the population. Again, this constitutes a central issue for a crucial migrant sector of the proletariat and it helps to break domestic workers away from identification with “their” imperialist nation state.

These slogans concerning migrants and refugees are also particularly relevant in the current historical phase because in the period of globalization the gulf between the base and the superstructure and between *world* economy and *national* state widens even more.

Other important democratic slogans which can be considered as *transitional revolutionary-democratic demands* are the slogans for local self-government and those which fundamentally challenge the capitalist state bureaucracy (i.e. popular election of those who serve as state functionaries, etc.). We note in passing that these slogans are hardly even mentioned by “Marxists” today. However, this should not be very surprising, as, for Stalinists and left social democrats, these slogans are clearly much too radical! How, they ask, can you possibly combine sitting (or aspiring to sit) in a government which presides over an imperialist state and at the same time call for universal eligibility in filling the role of all state functionaries?! From their perspective, centrists either don’t want to irritate these reformist bureaucrats or they consider these slogans as entirely “anarchistic.”

The slogans for local self-government and for the eligibility of state functionaries were initially raised by Marx and Engels in 1871 after the experience of the Paris Commune, and they became part of their program to smash the state as “*machine of class domination*.”<sup>43</sup> In 1891 Engels criticized the German social democrats for not including such slogans in their Erfurt Program and proposed that they include the following demands:

*“Complete self-government in the provinces, districts and communes through officials elected by universal suffrage. The abolition of all local and provincial authorities appointed by the state.”*<sup>44</sup>

Engels explained that the desire for local self-government is not in contradiction with the notion of a centralized state. Quite the contrary, he maintained, a centralized state creates the best conditions for authentic local self-government. In the same letter to his German comrades he wrote:

*“So, then, a unified republic—but not in the sense of the present French Republic, which is nothing but the Empire established in 1798 without the Emperor. From 1792 to 1798 each French department, each commune [Gemeinde], enjoyed complete self-government on the American model, and this is what we too must have. How self-government is to be organised and how we can manage, without a bureaucracy has been shown to us by America and the first French Republic, and is being shown even today by Australia, Canada and the other English colonies. And a provincial [regional] and communal self-government of this type is far freer than, for instance, Swiss federalism, under which, it is true, the canton is very independent in relation to the Bund [i.e., the federated state as a whole], but is also independent in relation to the district [Bezirk] and the commune. The cantonal governments appoint the district governors [Bezirksstatthalter] and prefects—which is unknown in English-speaking countries and which we want to abolish here as resolutely in the future as the Prussian Landräte and Regierungsräte” (commissioners, district police chiefs, governors, and in general all officials appointed from above).”*<sup>45</sup>

These by no means antiquated slogans for capitalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In his book *State and Revolution* published in 1917, Lenin insisted that such a program retains full validity in the epoch of imperialism. The slogan for local self-government is of crucial importance to fight against the “*imperialist robber state*.”

*“But Engels did not at all mean democratic centralism in the bureaucratic sense in which the term is used by bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologists, the anarchists among the latter. His idea of centralism did not in the least preclude such broad local self-government as would combine the voluntary defence of the unity of the state by the “communes” and districts, and the complete elimination of all bureaucratic practices and all “ordering” from above. (...) I have already had occasion to point out (...) how on this point (of course, not on this point alone by any means) our pseudo-socialist representatives of pseudo-revolutionary pseudo-democracy have made glaring departures from democracy. Naturally, people who have bound themselves by a “coalition” to the imperialist bourgeoisie have remained deaf to this criticism.”*<sup>46</sup>

And Lenin added self-critical: *“Insufficient attention has been and is being paid in our Party propaganda and agitation to this fact, as, indeed, to the whole question of the federal and the centralised republic and local self-government.”*<sup>47</sup>

Today, in a historic period like the present, characterized

as it is by the massive expansion of the imperialist state apparatus, such demands are even more topical and relevant than before for the revolutionary program in the imperialist countries.

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Reformists will object that our revolutionary-democratic slogans are “unrealistic.” Of course, they cannot be consistently implemented under the capitalist regime. This is – as Trotsky pointed out – true for all transitional demands: “It is easier to overthrow capitalism than to realize this demand under capitalism. Not one of our demands will be realized under capitalism. That is why we are calling them transitional demands.”<sup>48</sup>

But since we are realists and thus understand that sustainable reforms cannot be achieved under capitalism, we see it as the main task of the revolutionary vanguard to mobilize and organize the working class and the popular masses in the struggle for reforms in order to prepare them for the final assault on bourgeois power. This is, by the way, also the best guarantee – insofar as any guarantees are possible – to achieve concrete improvements in the living conditions of the masses.

Another objection, mostly made by sectarians, is that such democratic demands are so “vulgar” that even sectors of the bourgeoisie could support them, and consequently they call us “opportunists.” It is certainly true that both in past as well as in the present sectors of the capitalist class – sometimes even a majority – supports half-heartedly this or that democratic demand. To give an actual example: in a referendum held in Ireland on 22 May 2015, the majority of the ruling class, including all established parties, supported the legal possibility of same-sex marriages. Irrespective of this, revolutionaries too called for support for the legal possibility of same-sex marriages at the referendum.

The main difference between Bolshevik-Communists and truly opportunistic revisionists is certainly not the fact that they both raise democratic demands. Rather the difference is *how* they do so and the *limitations* which they set, or don't, for these demands. We can summarize our differences with the revisionists on this issue as follows:

i) Revisionists don't raise the democratic slogans consistently (e.g., they do not support anti-imperialist struggles, migrants' rights, etc.)

ii) Revisionists don't raise democratic slogans in a revolutionary but rather in a reformist manner. In other words, they put forward such slogans as an appeal to the bourgeois state and focus on the parliamentary struggle instead of on mobilizing the working class and popular masses. They also don't denounce the un-reformable anti-democratic nature of the imperialist state and they don't work towards fighting against democratic illusions in this state.

iii) Revisionists limit themselves to such democratic demands instead of combining them with the goal of a proletarian revolution. Thus they usually create around such demands a separate democratic stage, mechanistically separating it from the class struggle with the result being that the working class is politically subordinate to the bourgeoisie.

Lenin already pointed out the possibility that sectors of

the bourgeoisie may try to utilize this or that democratic demand for their own purposes. This however must not lead socialists to fight less energetically for such rights. Quite the contrary, it is instead necessary to strive towards leading mass mobilizations for such democratic demands, thereby freeing them from any subordination to the bourgeoisie.

„The fact that the struggle for national liberation against one imperialist power may, under certain conditions, be utilised by another “great” power for its own, equally imperialist, aims, is just as unlikely to make the Social-Democrats refuse to recognise the right of nations to self-determination as the numerous cases of bourgeois utilization of republican slogans for the purpose of political deception and financial plunder (as in the Romance countries, for example) are unlikely to make the Social-Democrats reject their republicanism.”<sup>49</sup>

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Finally, it is useful to remember that the democratic program is not limited only to demands concerning various legal rights and freedoms. Marxists have often considered economic minimum demands – higher wages, shortened working week, more labor rights, social security, etc. – as also being part of the democratic program. So, for example, when in *Permanent Revolution* Trotsky discussed the program for the Chinese Revolution 1925–27: “Without the democratic programme – constituent assembly, eight-hour day, confiscation of the land, national independence of China, right of self-determination for the peoples living within it – without this democratic programme, the Communist Party of China is bound hand and foot and is compelled to surrender the field passively to the Chinese Social-Democrats who may, with the aid of Stalin, Radek and company, assume the place of the Communist Party.”<sup>50</sup>

The demand for an eight-hour day was an important democratic demand at that time as a slogan to unite the working class. Economic minimum demands retain their validity particularly in the present historical period characterized as it is by the increasing dichotomization of imperialist society. On one hand there is increased consumption (financed by private debt) and rising living standards of small sectors of the middle class and the labor aristocracy. At the same time we see increasing unemployment and impoverishment of the lower strata – i.e. the broad masses – of the working class. Under such conditions the struggle against lay-offs, for higher wages, higher unemployment benefits, etc. are of inordinate importance. However, Bolshevik-Communists must combine such slogans in their propaganda with transitional demands like worker control of enterprises, a sliding scale of wages, and the creation of public works programs financed by taxing the rich.

## 6. The Slogan Calling for a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly

Let us now discuss one of the most important of the democratic slogans – the slogan calling for a *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly*. Historically this slogan has played a prominent role in Marxist agitation and propaganda. In its program the RCIT has defined its approach to this slogan as follows:

*“Where there are basic issues of political sovereignty on the agenda and there is still no awareness among the masses about the superiority of proletarian council democracy, in certain phases the slogan of a revolutionary Constituent Assembly can be important. Bolsheviks-Communists advocate that the delegates should be controllable and open to recall by its people. Thus such a Constituent Assembly cannot easily become an instrument of the ruling class, they should not be called by a bourgeois government, but by a revolutionary government of workers and peasants’ councils.”*<sup>51</sup>

In what follows we will discuss this issue more concretely and review its applicability to imperialist countries. First, what is a Constituent Assembly? Basically it is a body which is elected for the sole purpose of elaborating and deciding on the constitution of a state. It is therefore a place where the representatives of the antagonistic classes can present their different programs on how the society should be run. Marxists don't have the illusion that socialism can be peacefully introduced via such an assembly since this is a question of power which ultimately will be decided by means of an armed confrontation between the ruling and oppressed classes. However, the Bolshevik-Communists advocate utilizing such an assembly to propagate the full program for a revolutionary transformation of the society and in this way expose the treacherous reformist and openly bourgeoisie leaders.

Historical experience has demonstrated that democratic (including economic) slogans in general and the slogan for a Constituent Assembly in particular can be posed in a revolutionary as well as in a reformist way. As we have noted above, reformists raise democratic demands as an appeal to the bourgeois state and focus on the parliamentary road instead of mobilizing the working class and popular masses. The demand for a Constituent Assembly is usually posed by the reformists and centrists as a proposal to the ruling class to convoke such an assembly. However under such circumstances a Constituent Assembly can only be an instrument of the ruling class since it will be controlled by them.

In contrast to reformists and centrists, the Bolshevik-Communists call not for a conciliatory Constituent Assembly which can only serve to pacify the masses but rather for a *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly*. This means a Constituent Assembly which is convened by the fighting masses organized in councils of action and armed militias. In other words, such an assembly will be the result of a revolutionary upsurge in which the working class and the oppressed take power or at least have initiated a period of dual power.

In an article written in the midst of the 1905 Revolution in Russia Lenin explained:

*„The slogan of a popular Constituent Assembly, taken by itself, separately, is at the present time a slogan of the monarchist bourgeoisie, a slogan calling for a deal between the bourgeoisie and the tsarist government. Only the overthrow of the tsarist government and its replacement by a provisional revolutionary government, whose duty it will be to convene the popular Constituent Assembly, can be the slogan of the revolutionary struggle. Let the proletariat of Russia have no illusions on this score; in the din of the general excitation it is being deceived by the use of its own slogans. If we fail to match the armed force of the government with the force of an armed people, if the tsarist government is not utterly defeated and replaced by a provisional revolutionary government, every representative assembly, whatever title—“popular”, “constituent”, etc.—may be conferred upon it, will in fact be an assembly of representatives of the big bourgeoisie convened for the purpose of bargaining with the tsar for a division of power.”*<sup>52</sup>

Likewise, Trotsky emphasized this principle after the experience of the Chinese Revolution of 1925–27 and the disaster of Stalinist policy:

*„The slogan of the Constituent Assembly becomes an empty abstraction, often simple charlatanry, if one does not add who will convoke it and with what program. Chiang Kai-shek can raise the slogan of a Constituent Assembly against us even tomorrow, just as he has now raised his “workers’ and peasants’ program” against us. We want a Constituent Assembly convoked not by Chiang Kai-shek but by the executive committee of the workers’ and peasants’ soviets. That is the only serious and sure road.”*<sup>53</sup>

The deputies of a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly should be elected on the basis of local popular assemblies; they should be perpetually recallable by their constituents, and they should receive the salary of a skilled worker.

Needless to say socialists must decide by a concrete analysis if they should advocate the boycott of any such Constituent Assembly convened in a reactionary way or rather should take part in it in order to better utilize it to unmask it as a charade. The decisive point will be the state of the working class struggle and the class' consciousness in the specific prevailing situation. If the working class and the popular masses still have illusions in such a reformist Constituent Assembly, socialists should not boycott it but rather stand for elections to the assembly with a revolutionary program.

Should socialists call for a Constituent Assembly if the masses have already formed soviets? This depends on the circumstances. They should do so *as long as the masses have illusions in bourgeoisie democracy and don't see proletarian democracy* – i.e., the dictatorship of the proletariat based on soviets and militias – *as a higher form of democracy*. As we know from historical experience this can involve a fairly lengthy period of time. Even during revolutionary periods like in that of Spain in 1931–39, Portugal in 1974/75, Iran in 1979, Argentina in 2001/02, etc., the masses can retain

illusions in bourgeois democracy for a long time if there is no strong revolutionary party on the scene and in situations in which they have not had the opportunity to gain experience and get rid of their (petty-)bourgeois leaderships.

Note that the formation of soviets is not in itself an indication that the masses have lost illusions in bourgeois democracy. Soviets – as mass democratic organs of struggle – usually emerge as instruments to organize the struggle. Initially the workers and oppressed usually have not reached the stage where they view soviets as organs of power. This perspective goes hand in hand with the fact that it is usually (petty-)bourgeois forces, and not revolutionary-proletarian forces, which constitute the leadership of the masses in such soviets.

In other words, for the RCIT the slogan of a Constituent Assembly is one which should mobilize the masses – still harboring illusions in bourgeois democracy – to fight for the highest possible form of democracy in the framework of bourgeois democracy. In this way, calling for the convening of a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly can serve as a democratic instrument against the ruling class and help the working class and the oppressed gain experience both organizing their own power as well as countering the treacherous policies of their class enemies. Therefore the denunciation by ultra-left phrasemongers of the call for a Constituent Assembly, asserting as they do that such a slogan holds the masses back from fighting for socialist revolution and a workers' government, is utter nonsense. This would only be so if socialists raised such a slogan in a situation where the working class and the oppressed have *already understood* the superiority of soviet democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat. As long as this is not the case, the struggle for democratic demands plays an extremely useful role in revolutionary agitation and propaganda. Lenin summarized the experience of the Bolsheviks as follows:

*„We took part in the elections to the Constituent Assembly, the Russian bourgeois parliament in September-November 1917. Were our tactics correct or not? If not, then this should be clearly stated and proved, for it is necessary in evolving the correct tactics for international communism. If they were correct, then certain conclusions must be drawn. Of course, there can be no question of placing conditions in Russia on a par with conditions in Western Europe. But as regards the particular question of the meaning of the concept that “parliamentarianism has become politically obsolete”, due account should be taken of our experience, for unless concrete experience is taken into account such concepts very easily turn into empty phrases. In September-November 1917, did we, the Russian Bolsheviks, not have more right than any Western Communists to consider that parliamentarianism was politically obsolete in Russia? Of course we did, for the point is not whether bourgeois parliaments have existed for a long time or a short time, but how far the masses of the working people are prepared (ideologically, politically and practically) to accept the Soviet system and to dissolve the bourgeois-democratic parliament (or allow it to be dissolved). It is an absolutely incontestable and fully established historical fact that, in September-November 1917, the urban working-class and the soldiers and peasants of Russia were, because of a number of special conditions, exceptionally well prepared to accept the Soviet system and to disband the most democratic of bourgeois parliaments. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks did not*

*boycott the Constituent Assembly, but took part in the elections both before and after the proletariat conquered political power. That these elections yielded exceedingly valuable (and to the proletariat, highly useful) political results has, I make bold to hope, been proved by me in the above-mentioned article, which analyses in detail the returns of the elections to the Constituent Assembly in Russia. The conclusion which follows from this is absolutely incontrovertible: it has been proved that, far from causing harm to the revolutionary proletariat, participation in a bourgeois-democratic parliament, even a few weeks before the victory of a Soviet republic and even after such a victory, actually helps that proletariat to prove to the backward masses why such parliaments deserve to be done away with.“<sup>54</sup>*

The contention that the slogan calling for a Constituent Assembly is only relevant for semi-colonial countries is a widespread misunderstanding on the part of many Marxists. Given the fact that the ruling classes in semi-colonial countries are less wealthy than their more mature class brothers and sisters in the imperialist metropolises, it is certainly true that the political system in these former countries are much less stable than those in the North. As a result, systematic violation of democratic rights and the existence of various forms of Bonapartist regimes or the occurrence of coup d'états are by necessity much more common in semi-colonial countries than in imperialist states. For this reason, the issues of democracy and political sovereignty – and hence the slogan calling for a Constituent Assembly – have been posed much more frequently in the South than in the North.

However, as we note above when quoting from the RCIT's program, we nonetheless consider it as a potentially relevant slogan in situations where there are *“basic issues of political sovereignty on the agenda and there is still no awareness among the masses about the superiority of proletarian council democracy.”* Potentially such conditions can as they have in the past, do in the present, and will in the future also exist in individual imperialist countries.

Leaving aside the fact that Russia itself was an imperialist state before 1917, Trotsky would later also apply the slogan calling for a Constituent Assembly to other imperialist countries like Italy and Spain. As he wrote in the context of the Spanish Revolution in 1931:

*„But even while boycotting Berenguer's Cortes, the advanced workers would have to set up against it the slogan of revolutionary constituent Cortes. We must relentlessly disclose the charlatan character of the slogan of the constituent Cortes in the mouth of the “Left”, bourgeoisie, which in reality, wants a conciliationist Cortes by the grace of the king and Berenguer, for a dicker with the old ruling and privileged cliques. A genuine constituent assembly can be convoked only by a revolutionary government, as a result of a victorious insurrection of the workers, soldiers and peasants. We can and must oppose the revolutionary Cortes to the conciliationist Cortes; but to our mind, it would be incorrect at the given stage to reject the slogan of the revolutionary Cortes. To oppose the course directed towards the dictatorship of the proletariat to the problems and slogans of revolutionary democracy (republic, agrarian overturn, the separation of church and state, the confiscation of church properties, national self-determination, revolutionary constituent assembly), would be the most sorry and lifeless doctrinarism. Before the masses can seize power, they must unite around the leading proletarian party. The struggle for democratic representation, as well as for participation in the Cortes, at one or another stage of the*

*revolution, may do an irreparable service towards the solution of this problem.*"<sup>55</sup>

Similarly, Trotsky considered applicable the slogan calling for a Constituent Assembly in Italy during the years of Mussolini's fascist regime:

*"And I do not even exclude the possibility of the Constituent Assembly which in certain circumstances, could be imposed by the course of events or, more precisely, by the process of the revolutionary awakening of the oppressed masses. To be sure, on the broad historical scale that is from the perspective of a whole number of years the fate of Italy is undoubtedly reduced to the following alternative: Fascism or Communism. But to claim that this alternative has already penetrated the consciousness of the oppressed classes of the nation is to engage in wishful thinking and to consider as solved the colossal task that still fully confronts the weak Communist Party. If the revolutionary crisis were to break out, for example, in the course of the next months (under the influence of the economic crisis on the one hand, and under the revolutionary influence coming from Spain, on the other), the masses of toilers, workers as well as peasants, would certainly follow up their economic demands with democratic slogans (such as freedom of assembly, of press, of trade union organisation, democratic representation in parliament and in the municipalities). Does this mean that the Communist Party should reject these demands? On the contrary. It will have to invest them with the most audacious and resolute character possible. For the proletarian dictatorship cannot be imposed upon the popular masses. It can be realised only by carrying on a battle - a battle in full - for all the transitional demands, requirements, and needs of the masses, and at the head of the masses.*

*It should be recalled here that Bolshevism by no means came to power under the abstract slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat. We fought for the Constituent Assembly much more boldly than all the other parties. We said to the peasants: "You demand equal distribution of the land? Our agrarian programme goes much further. But no one except us will assist you in achieving equal use of the land. For this you must support the workers". In regard to the war we said to the popular masses: "Our communist task is to war against all oppressors. But you are not ready to go so far. You are striving to escape from the imperialist war. No one but the Bolsheviks will help you achieve this"."*<sup>56</sup>

Is the slogan calling for a Constituent Assembly applicable today *only* for semi-colonial countries? We don't think so. Has the working class in the imperialist countries already overcome its illusions in bourgeois democracy? Only a political lunatic would claim so.

Is the slogan calling for a Constituent Assembly applicable today *only* for countries ruled by a dictatorship or fascism? We don't think so. Even in countries with bourgeois democracy, democratic issues can still certainly be – as they have been many times in the past – extremely relevant for the working class in the North. As the increasing attacks on democratic rights in the present period demonstrate, this is definitely the case today. Let us recall that the Bolsheviks continued to raise the slogan for a Constituent Assembly even after February 1917 when Russia had become the most democratic bourgeois democracy the world had ever seen and they even organized the convening of such an assembly after the successful seizure of power. In a similar way Trotsky raised radical demands to democratize the bourgeois parliament in France in 1934 (see below), i.e.

in a country which had a long tradition of bourgeois democracy.

In countries like China and Russia where bourgeois democracy does not exist at all or does so only to a limited degree, the slogan for a *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly* is today absolutely relevant. In the old imperialist countries too this slogan could also become relevant in particular situations. No, there is absolutely no reason from a Marxist point to exclude, as a matter of principle, the slogan calling for a *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly* from the democratic program for permanent revolution in the imperialist countries.

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Furthermore it is important to recognize that even after having integrated the slogan calling for a Constituent Assembly into the democratic program, this does not necessarily mean that this slogan always stands at the center of the party's agitation. This can only be decided by a concrete analysis of a given political situation. In countries characterized by Bonapartist or dictatorial regimes or in which political instability and dependency of foreign powers pose by its very nature the issue of the political constitution, it is clear that the slogan for a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly has a permanent relevance. In countries with more stable, bourgeois democratic conditions, this slogan can gain agitational significance only in situations of acute political crisis, when the masses still retain illusions in bourgeois democracy.

Similarly, to decide on the tactical applicability of such a slogan it is crucial to determine what the focal points of the class struggle are and how far class consciousness of the proletariat has advanced. For example in Spain, after the monarchy was overthrown in January 1930, Trotsky emphasized the importance of the slogan for a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly. In this period, the political life was focused on the question of the political constitution of the country. By 1936 this had changed insofar as the working class had moved massively to the left and put all its hopes on the Popular Front government. In such a situation, the Constituent Assembly slogan would have rather deflected from the crucial issue of the break-up of the popular front, and the establishment of Soviets and a workers and peasant government. France experienced a similar development between 1934 and 1936/37.

\* \* \* \* \*

Finally, we want to discuss an interesting application by Trotsky of the revolutionary-democratic program to a bourgeois-democratic imperialist country. In 1934 Trotsky collaborated closely with his French comrades on the elaboration of an *Action Program for France* which was subsequently published in June 1934. At that time France was an imperialist state with a parliamentary system. The crisis of the political system discredited by scandals around corrupt politicians in addition to the deep social and economic crisis, and the increasing political polarization of the country (fascist provocation on 6 February 1934, anti-fascist general strike of the working class on 12 February, etc.) – all this opened a pre-revolutionary situation.<sup>57</sup>

In such a situation, Trotsky elaborated a Transitional Program applied to France's national conditions. One of the chapters of this program (titled "For a Single Assembly") is dedicated to the issue of the bourgeois parliamentary system. While Trotsky does not raise the demand for a Constituent Assembly, he does raise the demand for a more democratic bourgeois parliament. Starting from the premises that the majority of the working class still retains illusions in bourgeois democracy and that the issue of political sovereignty was a crucial question in this period, Trotsky called revolutionaries to offer these workers a united front in the defense of bourgeois democracy against any reactionary attacks. At the same time, he proposed to these workers to fight for democratic reforms of the parliamentary system.<sup>58</sup>

*"Meanwhile, as long as the majority of the working class continues on the basis of bourgeois democracy, we are ready to defend it with all our forces against violent attacks from the Bonapartist and fascist bourgeoisie.*

*However, we demand from our class brothers who adhere to 'democratic' socialism that they be faithful to their ideas, that they draw inspiration from the ideas and methods not of the Third Republic but of the Convention of 1793.*

*Down with the Senate, which is elected by limited suffrage and which renders the power of universal suffrage a mere illusion!*

*Down with the presidency of the republic, which serves as a hidden point of concentration for the forces of militarism and reaction!*

*A single assembly must combine the legislative and executive powers. Members would be elected for two years, by universal suffrage at eighteen years of age, with no discrimination of sex or nationality. Deputies would be elected on the basis of local assemblies, constantly revocable by their constituents, and would receive the salary of a skilled worker." (Emphasis in the Original)*

Trotsky combined this with an application of the united front tactic vis-à-vis the social democratic party SFIO in order to win them over to authentic Marxism. This included the defence of a social democratic government against any attack by the bourgeoisie.

*"If, during the course of the implacable struggle against the enemy, the party of "democratic" socialism (SFIO), from which we are separated by irreconcilable differences in doctrine and method, were to gain the confidence of the majority, we are and always will be ready to defend an SFIO government against the bourgeoisie. We want to attain our objective not by armed conflicts between the various groups of toilers but by real workers' democracy, by propaganda and loyal criticism, by the voluntary regrouping of the great majority of the proletariat under the flag of true communism."*

At the same time, Trotsky made clear that even such a "democratized" parliament could not alter the rule of the capitalist class. However, a more democratic capitalist system would help the working class to gain experience with the rottenness of capitalist democracy and also provide conditions to advance its combative and organizational capacities. Trotsky wrote:

*"Workers adhering to democratic socialism must further understand that it is not enough to defend democracy; democracy must be regained. The moving of the political center of gravity from parliament towards the cabinet, from the cabinet towards the oligarchy of finance capital, generals, police, is an accomplished fact. Neither the present parliament nor the new*

*elections can change this. We can defend the sorry remains of democracy, and especially we can enlarge the democratic arena for the activity of the masses only by annihilating the armed fascist forces that, on February 6, 1934, started moving the axis of the state and are still doing so."*<sup>59</sup>

This example shows that Bolsheviks do not disregard the struggle for democratic rights in the imperialist countries but that they are rather the most consistent, most dedicated fighters for democratic rights. It is not coincidental that the Bolsheviks often called themselves "consistent democrats".

Trotsky elaboration on the democratization of parliamentarism in an imperialist country is an instructive example of how to apply the democratic program of permanent revolution. Again, it would be completely wrong to imagine that such demands would distract the consciousness of the working class from their socialist goals. As long as the workers do not already possess a socialist consciousness and still retain illusions in bourgeois democracy, revolutionary-democratic demands – combined with slogans for the creation of soviet-like organizations and propaganda for a workers government – can only advance their class consciousness. At the same time Bolshevik-Communists must educate the vanguard about the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Hence we think that the democratic program of the permanent revolution in the imperialist countries must also integrate demands which aim towards the democratization of the existing bourgeois-democratic institution. Among these are the abolition of all Bonapartist elements (like abolition of the presidency, of the secret service, etc.), the eligibility of all to fill positions of state functionaries, shortening of parliamentary terms, etc. We do not raise such demands because we believe that bourgeois democracy can gradually be transformed into socialism. Rather we do so because we consider this as a necessary tactic to destroy illusions about bourgeois democracy among the working class and because we support each step which improves the conditions for the working class to organize and fight.

## 7. The Democratic Program for Permanent Revolution in the Imperialist Countries

Let us now more concretely discuss the most important democratic demands as part of the program for permanent revolution in the imperialist countries. It is self-evident that a number of democratic demands are valid for all imperialist countries whether advanced or backward; in fact, they are valid for all countries throughout the world. Among these for example are demands for local self-government and against state bureaucracy (eligibility of state functionaries, etc.). The same is true for equal rights for women and youth as well as minimum economic demands. Below – as we have outlined them in the RCIT program – we will discuss which demands of the democratic program are particularly relevant for the imperialist countries.<sup>60</sup>

We re-emphasize that the democratic program, as a whole and in its essential parts, cannot be realized under capitalism but only after a socialist revolution when the working class has established its dictatorship. Likewise we reiterate that the struggle for democratic demands must be led by the working class in order to win. Socialists must fight inside mass movement which are led by bourgeois or petty-bourgeois forces and strive for the working class to become independent of the latter. In this context it is crucial to advocate the formation of fighting organs of the masses – councils of action, self-defense units, soviets, etc. – in order to prepare the independence of the working class. Furthermore, socialists have to combine the struggle for immediate and democratic demands with systematic propaganda for key transitional slogans like the expropriation of the large enterprises under workers' control, the arming of the workers as well as the creation of a workers' government.

Finally, a successful implementation of these steps as well as of the entire democratic program of permanent revolution presupposes the formation of a revolutionary workers' party which can gain the leadership of the working class in such struggles. Such a party must be characterized by strict proletarian internationalism so that it understands that solidarity with the working class and the oppressed in the South, in words and deeds, is a primary duty of workers in the imperialist metropolises. In order that such internationalism does not remain platonic lip service, such a party has to be part of the new (fifth) Workers' International based on a revolutionary program.

### The Democratic Program in the "Backward" Emerging Imperialist Powers: China and Russia

As we have elaborated in our theoretical literature, the RCIT considers China and Russia as "backward" emerging imperialist powers. This means that these countries have a lower level of labor productivity on the average and have only become imperialist powers – in contrast to Northern America, Western Europe, and Japan – relatively recently. In general, this backwardness means that the ruling class

has fewer material resources to bribe a sizeable middle class and labor aristocracy. As a result, the regimes of these countries are founded on less stable social conditions and hence are forced to rule with fewer or no formal democratic mechanisms and with more openly bonapartist and dictatorial means.

This is particularly the case in China where the Stalinist-capitalist ruling class managed a seamless transformation from a degenerated workers' state to a capitalist one and thereby succeeded in retaining the entire state apparatus. China therefore remains a bourgeois dictatorship with no freedom of the press, no right of assembly, and no right to form other parties, trade unions, or to organize strikes, etc. Therefore the revolution in China will probably start as a democratic uprising of the popular masses against the tyranny and corruption of the state apparatus. Socialists have to fully support the desire of the working class and the poor for democratic rights. They should raise demands for free assembly, free elections, a free press, the right to strike, the right to form independent trade unions as well as new parties, for the right of self-determination of oppressed nationalities, etc. Likewise, socialists should demand the release of all political prisoners, including incarcerated persons who were involved in protest activities.

A particularly important democratic issue is the right of people to move around freely within the country. As we have shown in our study on China, currently the so-called *hukou*-system does not allow people to move from one province to another without permission of the authorities. As a result there hundreds of millions of people – characteristically called "migrants" – who have moved from the rural regions to the cities in order to find work, but who are living in their new place of residence illegally, and they therefore have no legal access to housing, employment, education, medical services, or social security. Thus, a particularly important slogan for socialists is the abolition of the *hukou*-system, the right to move around freely inside the country and equal access for all to social and health services.

Faced with increasing inequality, low wages, and the worsening condition of social and health services, socialists must support the economic demands of the working class and poor: No to lay-offs; for higher wages; for adequate social and health insurance; shortening of the work week; for better housing etc. These demands should be combined with that calling for the nationalization all large enterprises under workers' control as well as for the implementation of an extensive public works program financed by massively taxing the rich.

Another important issue is the struggle against oppression of women. In addition to the more general valid demands of the program for women's liberation (equal wages, against domestic violence, socialization of housework, etc.), socialists must fight against the reactionary one-

child per family policy which places sanctions on families which have more than a single child. In addition to the blatantly undemocratic aspect of this policy, one of its terrible consequences is incidents of infanticide of girl babies. As a result of this scourge, the sex ratio of live births has skewed dramatically:

*"In China the imbalance between the sexes was 108 boys to 100 girls for the generation born in the late 1980s; for the generation of the early 2000s, it was 124 to 100. In some Chinese provinces the ratio is an unprecedented 130 to 100"* <sup>61</sup>

Equally, socialists support the struggle of the oppressed nations in China for national self-determination including the right to form their own nation state. The most prominent oppressed nations are the people of Tibet as well as the Muslim people in East Turkmenistan (called Xinjiang by the Han-Chinese).

A key issue related to permanent revolution in China is the need to smash the tremendously overblown repressive state apparatus with the Stalinist-capitalist ruling party at its top. This apparatus is the main tool of the regime in suppressing the increasing number of strikes and mass protests. Hence, the struggle for the abolition of the various militias, secret services, etc., as well as for the formation of self-defense units for protesting workers and peasants – which later could be transformed into workers' and popular militias – will be an important part of the democratic program for a Chinese revolution.

Given the crucial importance of democracy for a working class which has been faced with a dictatorship for many decades, socialists in China should raise the slogan of a *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly*. Its deputies should be elected as members of local assemblies, they should be recallable at any time by their constituents, and they should receive a payment for their role the salary of a skilled worker. In such an assembly revolutionary deputies will raise a program for socialist transformation. Socialists in China should also oppose the monstrous chauvinism propagated by the ruling class. They should raise the Leninist slogan of *"The main enemy is at home!"* and oppose the defense of the imperialist fatherland in any conflict. They should also oppose China's increasing militarism and the Beijing regime's claims to the whole of the South Chinese Sea (opposed by all neighboring Asian countries) as well as its claims against South Korea and Japan in the East China Sea. It goes without saying that socialists in the US and Japan must equally oppose the militarism of "their" own imperialist ruling class. <sup>62</sup>

In contrast to China, Russia does not have an all out dictatorship but rather a Bonapartist regime with elements of bourgeois democracy. This situation is the result of the different road to capitalist restoration which Russia took, combined with the rupture of the regime and the failure of the dictatorial option for capitalist restoration in August 1991 when the Yanayev coup was defeated.

Consequently, Russia's working class possesses a limited number of democratic rights like that of assembly, the right to strike, to form trade unions, parties, etc. However, these rights are often violated by the repressive state apparatus. The best known examples for this have been the arrest of critical musicians (e.g., Pussy Riots), the murder of dozens if not hundreds of critical journalists (the most prominent having been Anna Politkovskaya), as well as of the assassination of opposition politicians (like

Boris Nemtsov).

Basically, the struggle for the full implementation of democratic rights that we enumerated in the case of China – unrestricted right of assembly, the right to form parties and trade unions, freedom of the press, etc. – remain in full force for Russia too.

Here we shall add only a few specifics of the democratic program for permanent revolution in Russia.

In contrast to China, Russia is home to a significant number of migrants from abroad – at least 1/10 of the workers, not taking into account illegal migrants – who are nationally oppressed and super-exploited. Thus, the Bolshevik-Communist program on migration applies fully to Russia: full legal rights for all migrants, equal rights to use their native language, equal wages, etc. Likewise, the struggle against the threat of fascism is an urgent priority. In addition, more than 19% of the total population of Russia belongs to national and ethnic minorities who are systematically discriminated against. Most prominent are the Chechen people who have struggled for independence for a long period of time and against whom the Russian state has waged two wars of occupation in the past two decades. In these two barbaric wars – the first in 1994-96 and the second since the end of 1999 – the Russian army and the secret service FSB have massacred about 150,000 Chechens (in a country with a Chechen population of only 1,2 million!).

Again, as it is always the duty of socialists to take the side of oppressed nations, the RCIT and its predecessor organization have consistently called for the victory of the Chechen resistance and the end of the Russian occupation. We equally support the right of national self-determination for all other national minorities in Russia. <sup>63</sup>

In addition socialists should oppose Russia's militarism, its intervention in the Ukraine, and its attempts to build its empire via the so-called *Eurasian Union*. Again, socialists in the Western countries have to equally oppose "their" own imperialist ruling classes.

As part of its ruling ideology, the Putin regime cultivates homophobia. As an historical curiosity we note that Putin's campaign against homosexuals has impelled the Western imperialist states, in which open oppression of homosexuals existed until recently, to now become "pioneers" in the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people! In contrast to this essentially bourgeois position, socialists call for full equality for all sexual minorities.

As mentioned above, Russia is characterized by a dominant Bonapartist presidential regime whose undisputed leader since 1999 has been Vladimir Putin. While Bolshevik-Communists fight for a workers' government and a socialist revolution, they support all steps which make the existing system more democratic. Therefore socialists should advocate the abolition of the presidential system and the shortening of the period of parliamentary terms to two years. Deputies should be elected as members of local assemblies, be recallable at any time by their constituents, and receive as pay for their role the salary of a skilled worker.

Furthermore, socialists in Russia should integrate – as in China – the slogan for a *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly* into their programmatic arsenal.

### The Democratic Program in the Old, Decaying Imperialist Powers: Northern America, EU and Japan

The situation is different in the old, decaying imperialist powers in Northern America, the EU, and Japan. The higher labor productivity and accumulated wealth in these countries gives their ruling classes sufficient economic strength. This, in addition to the ability of the working class to fight for its rights, forces (or enables) the monopoly capitalists to allow a considerable degree of bourgeois democracy in these countries.

In all three of these regions, the ruling classes have managed to considerably extend the repressive state apparatus in the name of "War against Terror." It is now common knowledge that the imperialist states and in particular their secret services have tremendously expanded the police, security agencies, etc. as well as their overall powers in the course of this campaign. These states now restrict the liberty of their citizens (and more so their non-citizen residents) and spy everywhere including against each other. This increased surveillance has become an important element of public awareness and has resulted in popular mistrust of the ruling class. Consequently, opposition to this surveillance and other police state measures has already become an important element of the consciousness of politically advanced sectors of the working class.

Therefore the struggle against the expansion of the powers of police and courts, and for the abolition of the secret services and other "anti-terrorist" institutions like the *Department of Homeland Security* in the US, etc. has become extremely important. Other recent examples for this are e.g. the arrests of critiques of the racist journal *Charlie Hebdo* in France or the ban of pro-Palestinian public rallies during the Gaza war in the summer of 2014. Socialists must also defend the right of migrants to actively participate in political life. Down with increased censorship and the repression of free speech!

Another example for the increasingly authoritarian rule of the bourgeoisie is the recently introduced *Citizens Security Law*, also known as the Gag Law, in Spain. This law includes fines of up to €600,000 for demonstrations not previously notified to the authorities, or anyone reporting on them, re-tweeting or posting a "like" on Facebook. Anyone videotaping the police during demonstrations faces a fine of up to €30,000.

The systematic killing of Afro-Americans demonstrates the racist, murderous character of the police in the US. Thus, the workers and black movement should demand the disarmament of the police. Likewise socialists should oppose the presence of armed police at demonstrations and strikes. Naturally, socialists would be naïve to expect the bourgeois state implement such measures. It is therefore crucial to build self-defense units to protect the working class at demonstrations, in the neighborhoods, and against the states' ubiquitous surveillance.

Equally, the workers' movement should fight all laws which limit the right of workers to strike and to organize in trade unions. (e.g., the anti-union laws instituted in Britain and various attempts to limit the right to strike in the public sector in various countries.)

As we have pointed out above, migrants form a crucial sector of the lower strata of the working class in Northern

America, Western Europe, Australia and Israel. Socialists must mobilize the workers' movement to fight for full equality for migrants (equal wages, abolition of the state language with equality for all languages of migrants, universal suffrage, etc.). This includes in particular full equality for Muslim migrants who face the full force of racist Islamophobia and whose religious rights are regularly violated (e.g., prohibition of Muslim women to wear a hijab). Socialists demand equal rights for Muslim migrants!

Similarly, socialists must raise the slogan of *Open Borders* for migrants and refugees. They should also call the workers' movement to organize support for refugees and to assist those who are living in their countries without any legal status.

Likewise socialists should support the right of oppressed and discriminated national minorities for self-determination. For example they should support the desire of the Catalan and the Basque people to secede from the Spanish state and combine this with the perspective for an independent workers' republic. Socialists should also call for the expulsion of the British occupation forces from Northern Ireland and for the unification of Ireland as a *32-county socialist republic*. Socialists should also defend the national rights of minorities like the *Zainichi Koreans* in Japan.

A crucial aspect of the revolutionary-democratic struggle in the US as well as Canada and Australia is the demand for full equality for Afro-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Indigenous Natives, and other national and racial minorities. Such a program includes granting of equality for the use of native languages for non-English speaking minorities, equal wages and equal share in public jobs, local self-government for districts with a high proportion of nationally and racially oppressed minorities, etc.

In the context of the "War against Terror" referred to above, the ruling classes in the imperialist states are waging a war against the working class and the oppressed both domestically as well as abroad. It is the utmost duty of all socialists to defend victims of imperialist terrorism – Muslim migrants and progressive activists at home, and all oppressed people in the South. Faced with the imperialist aggression in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Mali, etc. as well as Israel's continuous aggression against the Palestinian people, socialists have to continue calling for the defeat of the imperialist aggressors and for the military victory of the oppressed people in these countries.

Socialists have to take a revolutionary defeatist position against NATO's imperialist interference in the Ukraine and its aggression against Russia. No less, they should fight against Japan's aggressive stand against China in the East Chinese Sea.

Socialists in the Western imperialist countries also have to fight against the increasing super-exploitation of the semi-colonial world. Therefore, they should oppose "their" imperialists' desire to force countries of the South to accept the so-called "free-trade-agreements" which are so disadvantageous to the semi-colonial countries.

The European Union is confronted with increasing inner tensions and conflicts. These are based on the EU's specific political configuration as an imperialist proto-state Empire dominated by a few great powers (in particular Germany and France). At the same time there are a number of

smaller countries (in Eastern Europe together with Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Ireland, etc.) which together constitute 24% of the EU's total population and which continually oppressed and super-exploited by foreign monopoly capitalists.

Socialists call for the revolutionary destruction of the imperialist European Union and fight for the perspective of *United Socialist States of Europe*. We stand for a joint internationalist struggle of the European working class – inside and outside the EU – against the bosses' attacks and imperialist aggression. Bolshevik-Communists living in imperialist EU countries should take a defeatist position in referenda about membership in the EU, since we give no preference either to the imperialist EU or to the individual imperialist nation states. Hence, when such referenda are held, the RCIT declares "*Neither the imperialist EU nor imperialist Britain/France/Germany, etc.!*" This defeatist attitude is also valid in cases of conflict between the EU and smaller imperialist states like Belgium, Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, etc. <sup>64</sup> At the same time, Bolshevik-Communists advocate the exit of semi-colonial countries from membership in the EU because this Empire intensifies the political and economic subordination of these countries. <sup>65</sup> Faced with the endless debates about the political physiognomy and the constitution of the European Union, socialists advocate the election of a Constituent Assembly.

Israel is a special case since it is an imperialist state characterized by its history as a colonial settler state since having come into existence by mostly expelling and continually oppressing the indigenous Arab population. In each and every confrontation between the Apartheid State of Israel and the Palestinian people and/or Arab states, socialists stand for the unconditional support for the Arab people and for the defeat of Israel. Socialists in Israel therefore fight against the continued existence of Israel as a Jewish state, for the right of all Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and property, and for their compensation in full by the Zionists. Our perspective is a single democratic, multi-national Palestinian workers and fallahin republic from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. In parallel, socialists must strive to break sectors of the Jewish working class away from Zionism and to win them over for international solidarity with the oppressed. <sup>66</sup>

As "consistent democrats," revolutionaries should fight for the abolition of reactionary remnants of the feudal epoch like those existing in the monarchies in Japan and Western Europe. For the expropriation of all aristocrats without compensation and the abolition of all monarchies! Equally socialists fight for the abolition of Bonapartist institutions such as a presidency with extraordinary powers (like in France and the US), various powerful military councils or national security councils, etc.

Against the tendency of the ruling class to increasingly diminish bourgeois democracy – by extending terms of office for parliamentary legislators as well as for presidencies – socialists advocate the reduction of these terms. Socialists also raise revolutionary-democratic demands like the election of deputies on the basis of local assemblies, the ability of their constituencies to recall them at any time, and their receipt of a salary only on the level of a skilled worker.

In periods of political crisis when central issues of the country's political system are the focus of the class struggle, Bolshevik-Communists must raise the slogan of the *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly*.

The struggle against increasing unemployment and impoverishment of growing sectors of the working class as well as the capitalists' attacks on wages and social- and health-security for nearly all workers and the lower middle class is a key task for socialists. Therefore, must fight for higher wages, for adequate social and health insurance, for shortening of the working week, and against lay-offs, etc. Here too, socialists should combine these demands with the slogan of nationalization of the large enterprises under workers' control as well as the institution of a public works program financed by massive taxation of the rich.

## 8. The Slogan of the Constituent Assembly: Bolshevism versus Revisionism

The Bolshevik application of the strategy of permanent revolution in general and of its democratic program in particular has been repeatedly attacked and distorted by revisionists. A particular point of confusion is the slogan of the Constituent Assembly. Below we will deal with a number of criticisms and distortions of the Bolshevik application of this slogan.

### Ultra-Left Rejection: The Sectarian Tradition of the Spartacists

The most consistent rejection of the Constituent Assembly slogan – if we leave aside the Bordegist tradition – has been advocated by the so-called Spartacists. This is an ultra-left, sectarian and passive propagandist middle-class outfit whose biggest group is based in the United States and which – based on a total misunderstanding – see themselves as “Trotskyists.” The main group of the Spartacist tradition is the so-called *International Communist League* (ICL). In late 2012 the ICL published an essay in which it revised its old position and formulated a new one which entirely rejects the slogan calling for a Constituent Assembly in all circumstances.<sup>67</sup>

The ICL justify their ultra-left rejection of the Constituent Assembly slogan with a combination of silly criticism and historic falsification. For example, they erroneously claim that Lenin dropped this slogan after the 1917 revolution. “In re-examining the historical record, it became clear that every authoritative Communist document that touched on the question in the first several years after 1917 flatly rejected the idea that a constituent, or national, assembly could be in the proletariat’s interest.”

They continue by claiming:

“In May 1920, Lenin wrote ‘Left-Wing’ Communism—An Infantile Disorder’ for distribution to delegates at the CI’s Second Congress. His aim was to combat ultraleft tendencies among the young and inexperienced Communist parties. Urging them to assimilate the lessons of Bolshevik history, Lenin explained that participation in bourgeois elections and use of the parliamentary rostrum to rally the workers could be valuable Communist tactics. He noted that “the Bolsheviks did not boycott the Constituent Assembly, but took part in the elections both before and after the proletariat conquered political power.” But nowhere in this manual of Communist tactics—or anywhere else at the Second Congress, including in its “Theses on the Communist Parties and Parliamentarism”—was there any attempt to revive the slogan for a constituent assembly, which had been central to “old Bolshevik” agitation for 15 years.” (Emphasis in the Original)

As a matter of fact, Lenin explicitly defended the Bolsheviks’ application of the Constituent Assembly slogan. In the very same book on ‘Left-Wing’ Communism Lenin restated the correctness of the Bolshevik tactic to advocate the Constituent Assembly slogan.

“We did not proclaim a boycott of the bourgeois parliament,

the Constituent Assembly, but said—and following the April (1917) Conference of our Party began to state officially in the name of the Party—that a bourgeois republic with a Constituent Assembly would be better than a bourgeois republic without a Constituent Assembly, but that a “workers’ and peasants’” republic, a Soviet republic, would be better than any bourgeois-democratic, parliamentary republic. Without such thorough, circumspect and long preparations, we could not have achieved victory in October 1917, or have consolidated that victory.”<sup>68</sup>

Not only did Lenin continue to defend the Bolsheviks’ not boycotting the Constituent Assembly but even convened it after the successful seizure of power in October 1917! Lenin – like Trotsky, as we showed above – was convinced that this tactic was useful for the working class’ and the peasants’ overcoming any illusions they may still have in bourgeois parliamentarism and allowing them to understand the superiority of soviet democracy. Let us reproduce his lengthy quote from his book:

„We took part in the elections to the Constituent Assembly, the Russian bourgeois parliament in September-November 1917. Were our tactics correct or not? If not, then this should be clearly stated and proved, for it is necessary in evolving the correct tactics for international communism. If they were correct, then certain conclusions must be drawn. Of course, there can be no question of placing conditions in Russia on a par with conditions in Western Europe. But as regards the particular question of the meaning of the concept that “parliamentarism has become politically obsolete”, due account should be taken of our experience, for unless concrete experience is taken into account such concepts very easily turn into empty phrases. In September-November 1917, did we, the Russian Bolsheviks, not have more right than any Western Communists to consider that parliamentarism was politically obsolete in Russia? Of course we did, for the point is not whether bourgeois parliaments have existed for a long time or a short time, but how far the masses of the working people are prepared (ideologically, politically and practically) to accept the Soviet system and to dissolve the bourgeois-democratic parliament (or allow it to be dissolved). It is an absolutely incontestable and fully established historical fact that, in September-November 1917, the urban working-class and the soldiers and peasants of Russia were, because of a number of special conditions, exceptionally well prepared to accept the Soviet system and to disband the most democratic of bourgeois parliaments. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks did not boycott the Constituent Assembly, but took part in the elections both before and after the proletariat conquered political power. That these elections yielded exceedingly valuable (and to the proletariat, highly useful) political results has, I make bold to hope, been proved by me in the above-mentioned article, which analyses in detail the returns of the elections to the Constituent Assembly in Russia. The conclusion which follows from this is absolutely incontrovertible: it has been proved that, far from causing harm to the revolutionary proletariat, participation in a bourgeois-democratic parliament, even a few weeks before the victory of a Soviet republic and even after such a victory,

actually helps that proletariat to prove to the backward masses why such parliaments deserve to be done away with.”<sup>69</sup>

Likewise, the ICL claims that Trotsky was confused about the Constituent Assembly slogan and advocated it incorrectly. However, the ICL finds consolation in Trotsky’s ostensibly having confined his confusion mostly to the late 1920s and early 1930s. Thus they write:

*“Trotsky’s revival of the constituent assembly slogan came a decade later, following the defeat of the Second Chinese Revolution of 1925-27. Indeed, the vast majority of his arguments in favor of the demand were made in articles and letters written between late 1928 and early 1932, many of which are compiled in the collection ‘Leon Trotsky on China’”*

In fact Trotsky remained convinced of the legitimacy of the Constituent Assembly slogan until 1940, i.e. the end of his life. In his most important document – the *Transitional Program* which served as the foundation program of the Fourth International in 1938 – he repeated:

*“It is impossible merely to reject the democratic program; it is imperative that in the struggle the masses outgrow it. The slogan for a National (or Constituent) Assembly preserves its full force for such countries as China or India. This slogan must be indissolubly tied up with the problem of national liberation and agrarian reform. As a primary step, the workers must be armed with this democratic program. Only they will be able to summon and unite the farmers. On the basis of the revolutionary democratic program, it is necessary to oppose the workers to the “national” bourgeoisie. Then, at a certain stage in the mobilization of the masses under the slogans of revolutionary democracy, soviets can and should arise. Their historical role in each given period, particularly their relation to the National Assembly, will be determined by the political level of the proletariat, the bond between them and the peasantry, and the character of the proletarian party policies. Sooner or later, the soviets should overthrow bourgeois democracy. Only they are capable of bringing the democratic revolution to a conclusion and likewise opening an era of socialist revolution.”*<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, the ICL incorrectly claims: *“Particularly in light of the experiences in Russia and Germany, the Communist movement under Lenin and Trotsky recognized that, at least in the imperialist countries, the slogan could only be used to anti-revolutionary ends in the epoch of capitalist decline.”*

Contrary to the fancy of these charlatans – and as we have shown above – Trotsky also advocated the Constituent Assembly slogan for imperialist countries like Italy and Spain. In the *Transitional Program* he even discussed the possibility of the application of the Constituent Assembly slogan in Germany. He believed that the fascist regime factory committees would collapse before trade unions and soviets, before a new Constituent Assembly.

*“Of course, this does not mean that the Fourth International rejects democratic slogans as a means of mobilizing the masses against fascism. On the contrary, such slogans at certain moments can play a serious role. But the formulae of democracy (freedom of press, the right to unionize, etc.) mean for us only incidental or episodic slogans in the independent movement of the proletariat and not a democratic noose fastened to the neck of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie’s agents (Spain!). As soon as the movement assumes something of a mass character, the democratic slogans will be intertwined with the transitional ones; factory committees, it may be supposed, will appear before the old routinists rush from their chancelleries to organize trade unions; soviets will cover Germany before a new Constituent*

*Assembly will gather in Weimar. The same applies to Italy and the rest of the totalitarian and semi-totalitarian countries.”*<sup>71</sup>

While this prognosis has not been vindicated, it underlines once more that Trotsky considered the democratic program (including the Constituent Assembly slogan) as a legitimate part of the revolutionary program in the imperialist countries. However, he insisted that such slogans – democratic slogans, the Constituent Assembly, formation of trade unions, etc. – must not become strategic goals, an obstacle to advance the rank and file organization of the working class and its strategic orientation to the creation of mass organs of struggle and the seizure of power.

Faced with the uncomfortable fact that Trotsky also raised the Constituent Assembly slogan in Spain in 1930/31, the ICL tries to console itself by remarking: *“But he raised the call for a constituent assembly, or constituent Cortes, only in a handful of letters and articles in January-February 1931.”*

Again, the truth is otherwise. Trotsky raised the slogan, among others, in the most important public programmatic document he wrote during the entire Spanish Revolution in 1930/31 – his only pamphlet at that time which was called *“The Revolution in Spain”!*

While the ICL claims throughout its article that Trotsky’s *“arguments for the constituent assembly were confusing and contradictory”*, it is rather the ICL which is confused. It writes: *“The idea [of Trotsky, Ed.] that the proletariat in power ‘will have to convoke a national assembly’ to consolidate support among the peasants is also foreign to the conclusions drawn by Lenin and the early CI.”* In fact, far from being “foreign,” this was the praxis of the Bolsheviks after the seizure of power in October 1917 and was always defended by Lenin and Trotsky as we have shown above.

The ICL claims *“the constituent assembly is not a democratic demand but a call for a new capitalist government.”* This is simply wrong. Yes, the reformist and petty-bourgeois forces raised this slogan as synonym for a bourgeois government. But revolutionaries did not and do not raise it in this sense. Rather, they call for a Constituent Assembly whose exclusive purpose is to meet and formulate a constitution. Revolutionaries use such an assembly in order to unmask the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces and to propel forward the revolutionary road to socialism. Furthermore Bolshevik-Communists call for a Constituent Assembly which is convened and controlled by popular mass assemblies. Such a program can either stop the bourgeoisie from utilizing such a Constituent Assembly as a hotbed for counter-revolution or – in the event that the bourgeoisie succeeds in this – prepare the way for dissolving such a reactionary assembly.

The crucial point, foreign to the mindset of the ultra-leftists, is that as long as the workers and peasants still harbor illusions in bourgeois democracy, revolutionaries must advocate slogans which can help them overcome such illusions. In this way the slogan calling for a *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly* can be one of a set of slogans preparing the popular masses for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

An offshoot of the Spartacist tradition – the *International Bolshevik Tendency* (IBT) – does not go as far as the ICL, denouncing the Constituent Assembly slogan in all circumstances. However, they do raise another typical sectarian argument:

*"In our view the call for a constituent assembly is inapplicable in Spain today [2011, Ed.], because the population has experienced bourgeois democracy for a generation. (...) Raising the call for a constituent assembly in a country where bourgeois democracy had existed for almost two decades [they spoke about Argentina in this context, Ed.] could only confuse matters."*<sup>72</sup>

So it is, according to the IBT, not the popular masses who should decide whether they still have illusions in bourgeois democracy but ... the small sectarian groups who know better. This is the same sectarian nonsense as that of centrists who claim that, since a reformist party has already been in power, the workers can no longer have any illusions about this party and thus it is not necessary for revolutionaries to deploy united front tactic vis-à-vis such a party. Unfortunately for such sectarians, the mountain usually refuses to come to the prophet and it is rather the prophet who has to go to the mountain!

The IBT simply has no idea (or does not want to have an idea) of Lenin's important doctrine, that *"the point is not whether bourgeois parliaments have existed for a long time or a short time, but how far the masses of the working people are prepared (ideologically, politically and practically) to accept the Soviet system and to dissolve the bourgeois-democratic parliament."*<sup>73</sup>

The masses will demonstrate through their deeds – their demands, their hopes, their actions, their participation (or lack of it) in parliamentary elections, their support for reformist parties – how many illusions they still retain in bourgeois democracy or in some reformist party. Revolutionaries will have to listen and patiently explain. They will raise demands and tactics which will address the current consciousness of the flesh and blood working class and not some fancy picture of an unreal working class existing only in the confused mind of sectarians!

### **The Criticism of Imperialist Economism: Alan Woods and the Right-Centrist IMT**

Another criticism of the slogan of the Revolutionary Constituent Assembly has been raised by Alan Woods, the central leader and theoretician of the right-centrist *International Marxist Tendency* (IMT). In contrast to the Spartacist tradition which is nothing but sterile sectarianism, the IMT is characterized by an unabashed opportunism towards the labor bureaucracy and popular front parties. Throughout their decades-long existence they have acted as "left wing" inside social-democratic and Stalinist parties and have at times even openly participated for many years in bourgeois, popular-frontist parties (i.e. parties which consist of capitalists, petit bourgeois as well as workers like the Pakistani PPP or the South African ANC). In open conflict with the doctrine of Lenin and Trotsky, the IMT advocates the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism, even by parliamentary means. Thus, Woods wrote in one of the key texts of his organization:

*"A peaceful transformation of society would be entirely possible if the trade union and reformist leaders were prepared to use the colossal power in their hands to change society. If the workers leaders did not do this, then there could be rivers of blood, and this would entirely be the responsibility of the reformist leaders. (...) it would be entirely possible to carry through the socialist transformation peacefully, and even through parliament,*

*provided the trade unions and Labour Party were led by Marxists."*<sup>74</sup>

In short, Woods' group advocates "Marxism" in reformist clothing. As so often happens, such right centrism is often mixed with economism, i.e., the refusal to raise a complete political program for permanent revolution which includes revolutionary-democratic demands.

Hence on many occasions the IMT has criticised Trotskyist organization in the semi-colonial world for raising revolutionary-democratic slogans like the Revolutionary Constituent Assembly. In a lengthy polemic, Alan Woods attacks the Argentinean *Partido Obrero* (PO) for having raised this slogan during the revolutionary crisis of 2001/02.<sup>75</sup>

While Woods does not outrightly reject the Constituent Assembly slogan, he erroneously draws the limits of its legitimate application, writing:

*"Under what circumstances should one advance such slogans? There are two possibilities: 1) in a semi-feudal or semi-colonial country and 2) in a country where a parliament, elections and other democratic rights did not exist. But none of these conditions apply to Argentina. It is certainly not a backward, semi-feudal country. And, as it has been independent for almost two hundred years, and is the second biggest economy in South America, it hardly falls into the category of a semi-colonial nation (the fact that the oligarchy have reduced the former tenth industrial nation on earth to a situation of ruin and penury, so that many of the privatised industries have fallen into foreign hands, is a separate matter)." (Emphasis in the Original)*

This is wrong for two reasons. First it is certainly true that democratic slogans usually contain more urgency under conditions of a dictatorship. However, as we have shown above, the increasing anti-democratism of the ruling class, the unresolved fundamental problems of the capitalist society in the semi-colonial countries, the backwardness in the political consciousness of the popular masses – all these mean that illusions in bourgeois democracy remain an important factor in many countries. Marxists who wish away such factors are doomed to isolate themselves from the revolutionary-democratic struggles of the masses.

It is characteristically patronizing for an ignorant centrist theoretician from an old imperialist country with centuries of bourgeois parliamentarism to claim that the Argentinean people shouldn't have illusions in bourgeois democracy since they have "already" experienced a much for two decades. Thus Woods writes: *"For the last two decades, Argentina has had a bourgeois democratic regime, which does not differ in any essentials from the bourgeois democratic regimes in Europe or the USA. (...) But all that it proves is that Argentina is a perfectly normal bourgeois democracy. Neither more nor less." (Emphasis in the Original)*

It is no accident that such imperialist-economist nonsense is repeated not only by opportunists but also by sectarians in order to justify their refusal to support revolutionary-democratic struggles in semi-colonial countries. Thus the *Internationalist Group* (IG) led by Jan Norden – another offshoot of the Spartacist tradition – claims that the Latin American countries have already completed the democratic revolution.

*"Hence the slogan is not appropriate in an imperialist country, or where those tasks have already gone beyond the bourgeois-democratic level. In Mexico or Bolivia or Ecuador today, no democratic demand can break the stranglehold of imperialism*

*or of capitalist agribusiness – this can only be accomplished by workers revolution.”*<sup>76</sup>

Again, these centrists ignore the doctrine of the Bolsheviks – as elaborated by Lenin in his “Left-Wing Communism” (see the quote above)<sup>77</sup> – that the issue is not if or how long bourgeois democracy has already existed but the extent to which the popular masses still retain illusions in this system.

Woods and Nordens assertion is of course completely ridiculous! Countries like Argentina (and many other Latin American countries) have in the past century experienced many decades of dictatorships, semi-dictatorships, successful or attempted coup d'états, etc. There is no Argentinean who has not either personally lived through a dictatorship or whose parents have not. It is true that in the past two decades there have been more bourgeois-democratic conditions in Latin America than which has been usual during the past two centuries. But this does not and cannot negate the historical experience of entire nations. This is even truer now that the threat of coup d'état looms once again in a number of Latin American countries. Maybe Mr. Woods has “forgotten” the failed coup d'état in Venezuela in 2002, in Paraguay in 2008, in Honduras in 2009, the attempted coup in Ecuador in 2010 and the recent crises in Brazil and Ecuador?! All this clearly demonstrates how different Latin America is from Western Europe and that it is most definitely not “a perfectly normal bourgeois democracy”!

Similarly foolish, if not more so, is the claim that Argentina is not a semi-colonial country. True, this claim is not new but has been raised both by opportunists and sectarians based in the imperialist metropolises. Again, it is no accident that sectarians like Norden's IG repeat the same nonsense:

*“In economically backward capitalist, semi-feudal or colonial countries, such an assembly could be the vehicle for mass struggles for agrarian revolution, national independence and basic democratic rights. But both before and after December 2001, Argentina was an independent, fully capitalist country which doesn't even have a real peasantry but rather agricultural workers. To pretend that there is a “democratic revolution” to be accomplished in Argentina is to capitulate to and adopt the democratic illusions of the masses, not to lead them to socialist revolution.”*

The IMT and its predecessor organization (the CWI from which Woods and Grant split in 1992) have always denied the semi-colonial status of Argentina – as well as of many other countries of the South. They do so in order to justify their refusal to defend such countries in conflicts – including wars – against imperialist powers. Thus, for example, the CWI – whose centre is located in Britain (as is the case with the IMT) – refused to support Argentina against the aggression of British imperialism in the Malvinas War of 1982. Even more chauvinistically astounding was its call for a Labour Government (at that time Britain was ruled by the Tories under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher) to continue the war against Argentina! *“A Labour government could not just abandon the Falklanders and let Galtieri get on with it. But it would continue the war on socialist lines.”*<sup>78</sup>

In our book *The Great Robbery of the South* we have dealt extensively with Argentina's supposed “fully independent capitalist statutes.” There we have demonstrated with facts

and statistics that Argentina was and remains a dependent semi-colonial country which has been super-exploited by imperialist monopoly capital for more than a century.<sup>79</sup> The economic collapse in 2001/02, the huge indebtedness of Argentina and the arrogant bullying of the country by imperialist hedge funds in recent years are just a few examples of this. The denial of the semi-colonial status of countries of the South exploited by imperialism is nothing but an ideological cover for “left-wing” social-imperialists who objectively (against their muddled intentions) serve the interests of the monopolies and great powers.

The IMT also raises another, methodological argument against raising the Constituent Assembly slogan in countries like Argentina. They write:

*“The article in Prensa Obrera is quite specific on this. It says that the constituent assembly will be “convened by the mobilised people”. But here we immediately enter into a contradiction. If the Argentine working class is strong enough to impose its will on the ruling class, and strong enough to convene a constituent assembly, then it is also strong enough to take power. The way in which the working class takes power is through its own organisations of struggle - the Popular Assemblies (soviets). That idea was correctly expressed by the article when it says: “Let us multiply the Popular Assemblies to the point where they become a power of the exploited people.” But why then introduce the question of the constituent assembly?”* (Emphasis in the original)<sup>80</sup>

Alan Woods could have posed the same question to the Bolsheviks who first took power in October 1917 and then convened a Constituent Assembly (and later dissolved it). The point is – and this seems to be a miracle to Woods – that the masses can (and did) retain bourgeois democratic illusions even after they founded soviets and even after these soviets might have taken power. This was exactly what happened in Russia and it would be nonsense to preclude the repetition of such a development in the future.

Woods also justifies his criticism of the Constituent Assembly slogan by pointing out that it has been utilized a number of times by the bourgeoisie.

*“Let us remind ourselves that the Argentine constitution has been changed many times - from 1853 to 1857 it was changed four times. One more change would make little difference to the bourgeoisie”*

Norden too repeats this argument: *“We also noted that while Bolivia was the continental champion in the number of coups d'état, it also led in the number of constituent assemblies or congresses (at least 19 by our count)”*

Now, it is certainly true that the bourgeoisie has repeatedly utilized constituent assemblies to retain their power. But the opportunist and sectarian imperialist economists draw the wrong conclusions from this. Instead revolutionaries conclude:

i) The Constituent Assembly will unavoidably become a tool of reaction if it is convened and controlled by the ruling class. This is why revolutionaries do not call upon capitalists to convene a Constituent Assembly but rather the worker and peasant soviets participating in a revolutionary government.

ii) Secondly, the fact that Constituent Assemblies have been convened numerous times by the Latin American bourgeoisie is a proof that the issue of a constitution has always been a central issue on this continent. (How many

times have Western European bourgeoisies convened a Constituent Assembly in the past century?) This is concrete proof that the continent has not experienced “perfectly normal bourgeois democracy” and that revolutionaries must therefore not allow factions of the ruling class to monopolize the Constituent Assembly slogan. The Bolshevik-Communists have to raise the slogan for a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly themselves whenever and wherever it is appropriate and they have to raise this demand in a revolutionary and not an opportunistic way.

### **The Opportunist Application: The Right-Centrist Tradition of Nahuel Moreno (LIT-CI, UIT-CI)**

While until now we have examined the fallacious arguments of the sectarian and economist opponents of the Constituent Assembly slogan, now we’ll deal with the reverse side of the same coin: the *opportunistic application* of this demand. To do this we will focus on the program of the most important Trotskyist current in Latin America – the organizations in the tradition of the late Nahuel Moreno which today are first and foremost the *International Workers League – Fourth International* (the Spanish abbreviation: LIT-CI) and *International Workers Unity – Fourth International* (UIT-CI).

While many militants of Moreno’s organizations have played a heroic role in the underground struggle against Latin American dictatorships (including the *Brigade Simon Bolivar* in Nicaragua 1979), Moreno’s programmatic tradition has always been characterized by extraordinary opportunism vis-à-vis all kinds of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces. Moreno was quite right when he called his tradition “*Barbaric Trotskyism*.”<sup>81</sup> During its history, Moreno’s current has posed as “left Peronists” and “pro-Castroites”; has whitewashed the military dictatorship of General Videla in Argentina which massacred more than 30,000 people in the mid-1970s, calling it “*the most democratic military government in Latin America*”; has created the illusion of “*absolute democracy of the Armed Forces*”; has called for the unification of imperialist West Germany and the Stalinist workers’ state in East Germany which could only mean the capitalist restoration in the latter; etc. He revised the program of permanent revolution and replaced it with a Menshevik stagist conception which focuses on the “*February Revolution*” (i.e., a democratic revolution) and only later on an “*October Revolution*” (i.e., a socialist revolution). This is evident from various statements made by Moreno:

*“It seems that the fact of capitalist counterrevolution has restated the need that we have to have a democratic revolution. And ignoring that what arises in the developed countries where there are a counterrevolutionary regimes is also a democratic revolution, it’s maximalism; it’s as serious as ignoring the bourgeois-democratic revolution in backward countries. This is very important. I don’t know whether it’s correct or not. If correct, we need to change the entire formulation of the Theses of permanent revolution. It seems to me that it’s correct and that Trotsky was aiming there. If correct, it changes our entire strategy in regard to the opportunist parties, and in good measure in regard to the bourgeois parties that oppose the counterrevolutionary regime. As a step towards the socialist revolution, we’re in favour of the arrival of a bourgeois regime*

*completely different [from the counterrevolutionary regime]. Just as we were in favour of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, and we said it was different from the other, [the socialist revolution], that had to be done, the Tsar had to be overthrown, which was a specific bourgeois democratic task, we need to discuss whether there is now a specific bourgeois democratic task, which is to overthrow the counterrevolutionary regime so it can come, at least a bourgeois regime.”*<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore Moreno grotesquely claimed that the socialist revolution could be led without the working class as its leadership and without a revolutionary party. He simply confused a Stalinist-led social transformation with a working class-led socialist revolution.<sup>83</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of Morenoism we refer readers to our respective documents.<sup>84</sup>

At this point we will focus only on the Morenoite application of the Constituent Assembly slogan. Basically Moreno saw the implementation of the slogan, which the sectarians utterly condemn, in an inherently opportunist fashion, transforming it from a revolutionary-democratic demand designed to expose deceit of the bourgeoisie into a Menshevik caricature. He repeatedly created the illusion that a Constituent Assembly could elect a workers’ government in order to build a socialist society. In 1972, his party called for the emergence of a “socialist” government via the parliamentary road through the “*Constituent Assembly [which would] appoint a workers’ and people’s popular government which would expel the [foreign] bases and construct a socialist Argentina*”.<sup>85</sup>

The same logic was applied by Moreno a decade later in Brazil: “*In the constituent assembly we will struggle for the workers to secure the vote for a constitution that will organize the country in a new way, under socialist planning. Or we will struggle for it to vote in a workers’ government and a socialist constitution that will create the basis for the construction of a socialist Brazil.*”<sup>86</sup>

The Argentinean PTS comrades correctly accused the Morenoite tradition as advocating “*the Constituent Assembly as a privileged way to socialism in Argentina*”.<sup>87</sup> In 1980, Moreno attributed so much importance to the Constituent Assembly slogan that he proposed raising it in all countries throughout the world: “*Hence the enormous importance the slogan of Constitutional Assembly or something like that, has acquired in all countries of the world.*”<sup>88</sup>

The tradition of the late Pierre Lambert – a central figure of French Trotskyite centrism – is at least as bad as Morenoism in the application of the Constituent Assembly slogan. Lambertism raised the slogan of a Constituent Assembly as a strategic demand in France and many other countries. They have never posed it as a revolutionary-democratic demand but rather as an electoralist appeal to the ruling class. Together with another strategic slogan of Lambertism – the call for a coalition government of the reformist social democratic and Stalinist parties dubbed “workers government” – these demands served in fact as a replacement for the perspective of building working class soviets and an authentic workers government based on such councils.<sup>89</sup>

In fact, Morenoism and Lambertism are not Trotskyism but simply parliamentary cretinism! As we have outlined above, Bolshevik-Communists have to be the most consistent fighters for a *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly*. But we do so in order to attack the illusions of the masses

in bourgeois democracy and to help them to overcome them. We will apply such democratic tactics – as Lenin demanded – as long as the popular masses retain illusions in bourgeois democracy and until „*the masses of the working people are prepared (ideologically, politically and practically) to accept the Soviet system and to dissolve the bourgeois-democratic parliament.*“

At the same time revolutionaries will utilize such a Constituent Assembly as a public forum in which they can unmask the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces and at the same time outline a socialist program. However, Bolshevik-Communists must not reinforce the popular illusion in bourgeois democracy which envisions a Constituent Assembly creating a workers' government and facilitating the transition towards socialism. Such a workers' and peasant government can never emerge as a result of a Constituent Assembly but can only do so on the basis of soviets and armed popular militias. The transformation towards socialism will develop along the road of armed insurrection and civil war in which the working class is led by a revolutionary party. In sum, these differences draw the line between the Morenoite and Lambertist right-wing centrism and authentic Trotskyism. To conclude this chapter, we emphasize one crucial conclusion: All these examples of revisionism – not to speak about the reformist appendixes of the imperialist bourgeoisie – show once more how crucial it is to found new revolutionary parties and a new revolutionary Workers' International. The former must break with all the old apparatus of the labor bureaucracy. In fact, the growing gap between the old, traditional labor movement and the lower strata of the working class masses makes such an orientation of revolutionizing the existing trade unions while in parallel re-building the workers' movement from below –including building action committees in workplaces and neighborhoods, founding new workers' parties, etc. – as crucial tasks for all revolutionaries in the coming period.

## Endnotes

- 1 Leon Trotsky: Another Letter to Albert Treint (1931), Trotsky Writings 1930-31, Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p. 319
- 2 Leon Trotsky: A Letter to Albert Treint (1931), Trotsky Writings 1930-31, Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p. 314
- 3 Leon Trotsky: Problems of the Italian Revolution (1930); in Trotsky Writings 1930, p.223
- 4 Leon Trotsky: The Negro Question in America (1933); in: Leon Trotsky: On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination, Merit Publishers, New York 1967, p. 25.
- 5 Leon Trotsky: The Permanent Revolution (1929), Pathfinder Press, New York 1969, p. 297
- 6 Leon Trotsky: The Permanent Revolution (1929), p. 277
- 7 Leon Trotsky: The Permanent Revolution (1929), p. 297
- 8 Leon Trotsky: The Permanent Revolution (1929), p. 253
- 9 Leon Trotsky: The Permanent Revolution (1929), p. 255
- 10 V. I. Lenin: A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism (1916), in: LCW 23, p. 74
- 11 Leon Trotsky: Critical Remarks about Promoteo's Resolution on Democratic Demands (1931), in: Trotsky Writings 1930-31, Pathfinder 1973, p. 135
- 12 V. I. Lenin: What Is To Be Done? (1902); in: LCW 5, p. 439
- 13 V.I. Lenin: A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist

- Economism (1916); in: LCW 23, p. 43 (Emphasis in the Original)
- 14 V. I. Lenin: The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up (1916) ; in: CW Vol. 22, p. 343
- 15 V. I. Lenin: The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up (1916) ; in: CW Vol. 22, p. 344 (Emphasis in the Original)
- 16 V.I. Lenin: The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (1916); in: LCW 22, p. 144
- 17 V.I. Lenin: The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (1916); in: LCW 22, p. 145
- 18 Leon Trotsky: Our Present Tasks (1933), Trotsky Writings 1933-34, pp. 137-138
- 19 Leon Trotsky: Our Present Tasks (1933), Trotsky Writings 1933-34, pp. 138-139
- 20 Leon Trotsky: Second Discussion on the Negro Question. A Negro Organization (1939); in: Leon Trotsky: On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination, Merit Publishers, New York 1967, p. 62
- 21 See on this e.g. Keith Hassel: Revolutionary Theory and Imperialism, in: Permanent Revolution (Journal of Workers Power Britain), No. 8 (1989)
- 22 See on this RCIT: Perspectives for the Class Struggle in Light of the Deepening Crisis in the Imperialist World Economy and Politics, January 2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-january-2015/>; RCIT: The World Situation and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Communists, March 2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-march-2013/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South, RCIT, Vienna 2013, see in particular chapter 3 and 5, <http://www.great-robbery-of-the-south.net/great-robbery-of-south-online/download-chapters-1/chapter3/> and <http://www.great-robbery-of-the-south.net/great-robbery-of-south-online/download-chapters-1/chapter5/>; Michael Pröbsting: World economy – heading to a new upswing? (2009), in: Fifth International Vol.3, No. 3, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-economy-crisis-2009/>
- 23 Lori Montgomery and Griff Witte: Japan recession, Europe stagnation cast pall over global economic outlook, Washington Post, Nov. 18 2014
- 24 James Sherk: Not Looking for Work: Why Labor Force Participation Has Fallen During the Recovery, The Heritage Foundation, Backgrounder No. 2722, September 4, 2014, p. 4
- 25 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South, see in particular pp. 112-117 and pp. 179-188; Michael Pröbsting: Marxism, Migration und revolutionäre Integration (2010); in: Der Weg des Revolutionären Kommunismus, Nr. 7, pp. 38-41, <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/werk-7>. We have published a summary of this study in English-language: Michael Pröbsting: Marxism, Migration and revolutionary Integration, in: Revolutionary Communism, No. 1 (English-language Journal of the RCIT), <http://www.thecommunists.net/oppressed/revolutionary-integration/>
- 26 See Rainer Münz/Heinz Fassmann: Migrants in Europe and their Economic Position: Evidence from the European Labour Force Survey and from Other Sources (2004), pp. 5-6 and Carlos Vargas-Silva: Global International Migrant Stock: The UK in International Comparison (2011), [www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk), p. 5
- 27 The character of the oppression and discrimination of migrants have been presented well on an artistic field in the film *District 9*.
- 28 See on this e.g. Adam Beltz and Nina Gunić: US: Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin – For a Revolutionary Black Liberation Movement! 13.12.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/north-america/ferguson/>
- Nina Gunić and Michael Pröbsting: These are not “riots” – this is an uprising of the poor in the cities of Britain! The strategic task: From the uprising to the revolution!, 10.8.2011, <http://www.rkob.net/new-english-language-site-1/uprising-of-the-poor-in-britain/>; Michael Pröbsting: The August uprising of the poor and nationally and racially oppressed in Britain: What would a revolutionary organisation have done?, 18.8.2011, <http://www.rkob.net/new-english-language-site-1/august-uprising-what-should-have-been-done/>; Bericht der RKOB-Delegation über ihren Aufenthalt in London 2011, <http://www.rkob.net/international/berichte-uprising-in-gb/>; Michael Pröbsting: Five days that shook Britain but didn't wake up the left. The bankruptcy of the left during the August uprising of the oppressed in Britain: Its features, its roots and the way forward; in: RCIT: Revolutionary

Communism No. 1, (September 2011), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/britain-left-and-the-uprising/>

29 Nikolai Bukharin: *Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State* (1915); in: Nikolai Bukharin: *Selected Writings on the State and the Transition to Socialism* (Edited and Translated by Richard B. Day), M. E. Sharpe, Armonk 1982, pp. 6-37, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1915/state.htm>

30 The figures (except for the year 2012) are taken from: Robert Pollin: *Globalization, Inequality and Financial Instability: Confronting the Marx, Keynes and Polanyi Problems in Advanced Capitalist Economies* (2000); Political Economy Research Institute Working Papers No. 8, p. 30. The figures for 2012 are taken from: European Commission: *Statistical Annex of European Economy*, Spring 2015, Table "General government Total expenditure (% of GDP at market prices)", pp. 158-159

31 European Commission: *Statistical Annex of European Economy*, Spring 2015, Table "General government consolidated gross debt", pp. 164-165

32 V. I. Lenin: *State and Revolution. The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution* (1917); in: LCW 25, p. 415

33 Nikolai Bukharin and Evgenji Preobraschensky: *A. B. C. of Communism, Vol. I, The Marxian Educational Society, Detroit 1921*, p. 124

34 Leon Trotsky: *Marxism In Our Time* (1939), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1939/04/marxism.htm>

35 RCIT: *The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto* (2012), p. 46, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/revolutionary-struggle-for-democracy/>

36 Leon Trotsky: *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International. The Transitional Program* (1938); in: *Documents of the Fourth International*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p. 205

37 Leon Trotsky: *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*, p. 183. Elsewhere in the same document, Trotsky wrote: "Insofar as the old, partial, 'minimal' demands of the masses clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of decadent capitalism — and this occurs at each step—the Fourth International advances a system of transitional demands, the essence of which is contained in the fact that ever more openly and decisively they will be directed against the very bases of the bourgeois regime. The old 'minimal program' is superseded by the transitional program, the task of which lies in systematic mobilization of the masses for the proletarian revolution." (p. 184, Emphasis in the Original)

38 Leon Trotsky: *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*, p. 209

39 Leon Trotsky: *The International Left Opposition, Its Tasks and Methods*, in: *Documents of the Fourth International*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p. 24 (Emphasis in the Original)

40 Leon Trotsky: *The Political Situation in China and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Leninist Opposition* (1929); Trotsky: *Writings 1929*, p. 149

41 Leon Trotsky: *The Political Situation in China and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Leninist Opposition* (1929); Trotsky: *Writings 1929*, p. 149 (Emphasis in the Original). In the Transitional Program Trotsky spoke also about transitional demands for the petty-bourgeoisie: "The sections of the Fourth International should work out with all possible concreteness a program of transitional demands concerning the peasants (farmers) and urban petty bourgeoisie, in conformity with the conditions of each country. The advanced workers should learn to give clear and concrete answers to the questions put by their future allies." (Leon Trotsky: *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*, p. 194)

42 Leon Trotsky: *Problems of the Italian Revolution* (1930); in: *Trotsky Writings 1930*, p. 224

43 Karl Marx: *The Civil War in France. Address of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association* (1871); in: MECW Vol. 22, p. 329

44 Friedrich Engels: *A Critique of the Draft Social Democratic Programme of 1891*, in: MECW Vo. 27, p. 229

45 Friedrich Engels: *A Critique of the Draft Social Democratic Programme of 1891*, in: MECW Vo. 27, p. 228

46 V. I. Lenin: *State and Revolution. The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution* (1917); in:

LCW 25, pp. 452-453

47 V. I. Lenin: *State and Revolution. The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution* (1917); in: LCW 25, p. 454

48 Leon Trotsky: *The Transitional Programme for Socialist Revolution*, Pathfinder, Pathfinder Press, New York 1983, p. 159

49 V. I. Lenin: *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (1916); in: LCW 22, p. 148

50 Leon Trotsky: *The Permanent Revolution* (1929), Pathfinder Press, New York 1969, p. 273 (Our emphasis). Likewise was the demand for an eight-hour day one of the (three) key demands of the Bolsheviks' democratic program: "The whole work of the Bolsheviks between the two revolutions went under the slogans of 1. A democratic republic; 2. the land to the peasants (democratic-agrarian reform); 3. eight-hour day (demand for workers democracy). The Bordigists will certainly explain that all this was a compete error, that it belongs to the dark period in which the truth about the proletarian dictatorship had not yet been discovered." (Leon Trotsky: *Critical Remarks about Promoteo's Resolution on Democratic Demands* (1931), in: *Trotsky Writings 1930-31*, Pathfinder 1973, p. 136)

51 RCIT: *The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto* (2012), p. 46, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/revolutionary-struggle-for-democracy/>

52 V. I. Lenin: *The Democratic Tasks of the Revolutionary Proletariat* (1905); in: LCW Vol. 8, p. 517

53 Leon Trotsky: *The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin*, in: *Leon Trotsky: Problems of the Chinese Revolution*, Pioneer Publisher, New York 1932, p. 32

54 V.I. Lenin: 'Left-Wing' Communism— An Infantile Disorder, in: LCW Vol. 31, pp. 59-60. Similarly, Trotsky wrote: „Proclaiming the slogan of the democratic dictatorship the Sixth Congress at the same time condemned democratic slogans as impermissible (constituent assembly, universal suffrage, freedom of speech and of the press, etc.) and thereby completely disarmed the Chinese Communist Party in the face of the dictatorship of the military oligarchy. For a long number of years, the Russian Bolsheviks had mobilized the workers and peasants around democratic slogans. Democratic slogans played a big role in 1917. Only after the Soviet power had actually come into existence and clashed politically with the Constituent Assembly, irreconcilably and in full view of the entire people, did our party liquidate the institutions and slogans of formal democracy, that is, bourgeois democracy, in favour of real soviet democracy, that is, proletarian democracy." (Leon Trotsky: *The Permanent Revolution* (1929), Pathfinder Press, New York 1969, p. 140)

55 Leon Trotsky: *The Revolution in Spain* (1931); in: *Leon Trotsky: The Spanish revolution* (1931-39), Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p. 79 (Emphasis in the Original)

56 Leon Trotsky: *Problems of the Italian Revolution* (1930); in: *Trotsky Writings 1930*, pp. 224-225

57 See e.g. Leon Trotsky: *On France*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1979; Roger Magraw: *France*, in: Stephen Salter and John Stevenson (Editor): *The Working Class and Politics in Europe and America 1929-1945*, Longman House, New York 1990, pp. 62-98; Michael Seidman: *Workers Resistance to Work in Paris and Barcelona during the Popular Fronts*; Irwin M. Wall: *The French Popular Front: A Reconsideration*, both in: Wolfgang Maderthaler, Helmut Gruber (Editor): *Chance und Illusion. Labor in Retreat*, Europa Verlag, Wien 1988, pp. 305-342; Jaques Danos, Marcel Gibelin: *Die Volksfront in Frankreich. Generalstreik und Linksregierung im Juni 1936*, Junius Verlag, Hamburg 1982.

58 Leon Trotsky: *A Program of Action for France* (1934); in: *Trotsky Writings 1934-35*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1974, pp. 31-32 (our emphasis).

59 Ibid

60 See RCIT: *The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto* (2012), Chapter V, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/the-program-of-the-revolution/>

61 The Economist: *Gendercide. The war on baby girls*, 4.3.2010, <http://www.economist.com/node/15606229>

62 See on this Michael Pröbsting: *No to chauvinist war-mongering by Japanese and Chinese imperialism! Chinese and Japanese workers: Your main enemy is at home! Stop the conflict on the Senkaku/Diaoyu-islands in the East China Sea!* 23.9.2012, in: *Revolutionary Communism No. 6*, <http://www.thecommunists.net/>

[worldwide/asia/no-war-between-china-and-japan/](#)

63 See on this e.g; Michael Pröbsting: Russia as a Great Imperialist Power. The formation of Russian Monopoly Capital and its Empire – A Reply to our Critics, 18 March 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 21, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-russia/>

LRCI-FT: Russian Troops Out! Self-determination for Chechnya! 30.06.1996, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/freedom-for-chechnya/>

64 See on this RCIT: Boycott Cameron's Trap: Neither Brussels, nor Downing Street! For Abstention in Britain's EU-Referendum! For international Unity and Struggle of the Workers and Oppressed! Fight against both British as well as European Imperialism! Forward to the United Socialist States of Europe, 2 August 2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/eu-referendum-in-uk/>; Michael Pröbsting: The British Left and the EU-Referendum: The Many Faces of pro-UK or pro-EU Social-Imperialism. An analysis of the left's failure to fight for an independent, internationalist and socialist stance both against British as well as European imperialism, August 2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/british-left-and-eu-referendum/>

65 See on this e.g. RKOB: The European Union and the issue of the accession of semi-colonial countries, 14.10.2012, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 6, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/eu-and-semi-colonies/>

66 For an overview of the Trotskyist strategy for Israel / Occupied Palestine we refer readers to the RCIT's section program: Summary of the Program of the Internationalist Socialist League, February 2014, <http://www.the-is-league.com/our-platform/>; Yossi Schwartz: Israel's War of 1948 and the Degeneration of the Fourth International, in: *Revolutionary Communism*, Special Issue on Palestine, No. 10, June 2013, [www.thecommunists.net/theory/israel-s-war-of-1948-1](http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/israel-s-war-of-1948-1)

Yossi Schwartz: Israel's Six-Day War of 1967. On the Character of the War, the Marxist Analysis and the Position of the Israeli Left, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 12, July/August 2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/israel-s-war-of-1967/>

Michael Pröbsting: On some Questions of the Zionist Oppression and the Permanent Revolution in Palestine, in: *Revolutionary Communism*, Special Issue on Palestine, No. 10, June 2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/permanent-revolution-in-palestine>

67 ICL: Marxism and Bourgeois Parliamentarism. Why We Reject the "Constituent Assembly" Demand; in: *Spartacist English* edition No. 63, Winter 2012-2013. All following quotes from the ICL in this sub-chapter are taken from this article.

68 V.I. Lenin: 'Left-Wing' Communism— An Infantile Disorder, in: *LCW* Vol. 31, p. 31

69 V.I. Lenin: 'Left-Wing' Communism— An Infantile Disorder, in: *LCW* Vol. 31, pp. 59-60

70 Leon Trotsky: The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International. The Transitional Program (1938); in: *Documents of the Fourth International*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, pp. 205-206

71 Leon Trotsky: The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International, p. 209

72 IBT: On the Revolutionary Constituent Assembly, 11 August 2011, in: 1917 Nr. 34 (2012)

73 V.I. Lenin: 'Left-Wing' Communism— An Infantile Disorder, in: *LCW* Vol. 31, p. 59

74 Alan Woods: Marxism and the State, December 2008, <http://www.marxist.com/marxism-and-the-state-part-one.htm> (Emphasis in the Original)

75 Alan Woods: On the constituent assembly slogan: Is it applicable to Argentina? IMT, 9 February 2002, [http://www.marxist.com/Latinam/arg\\_const\\_assly.html](http://www.marxist.com/Latinam/arg_const_assly.html). All following quotes from the Alan Woods in this sub-chapter are taken from this article. Another issue is the question if Argentinean Trotskyists like the PO were right in raising the slogan of the *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly* as the central political slogan. But this is a question of the concrete application of such a slogan while in this chapter we focus on considerations in principle.

76 IG: Fight for Power to Workers and Peasants Councils! Trotskyism vs. "Constituent Assembly" Mania, October 2007, in: The

Internationalist No. 27 (May-June 2008). All following quotes from the IG in this sub-chapter are taken from this article. See also in the same article: "But to raise the call for a constituent assembly in Ecuador or Mexico today, where the formal structures of bourgeois democracy, however stunted, exist and semi-feudal latifundia have long-since been replaced by capitalist agriculture, would be to call to "refund" the country on a bourgeois basis when what is called for is socialist revolution."

77 V.I. Lenin: 'Left-Wing' Communism— An Infantile Disorder, in: *LCW* Vol. 31, p. 59

78 Lynn Walsh: Falklands war: what lessons for the labour movement? in: *Militant International Review*, Nr. 22, June 1982 (reprinted in: *Socialism Today*, Nr. 108, April 2007, <http://www.socialismtoday.org/108/falklands.html>)

79 Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South, see in particular chapter 9, <http://www.great-robbery-of-the-south.net/great-robbery-of-south-online/download-chapters-1/chapter9/>

80 The same argument has been repeated by another IMT leader, Fred Weston. He asks rhetorically: "We could however pose the question once more: if the masses are so strong as to be able to form a "provisional government" that can remove the present bourgeois parliament, why do they need to limit their scope to that of electing another bourgeois parliament?" (A precious lesson from Trotsky on the Constituent Assembly and other matters, May 2004, <http://www.marxist.com/trotsky-constituent-assembly090604.htm>)

81 "Now, I think we've made a lot more mistakes than Trotsky and the Bolsheviks. When I say that ours has been a barbarian Trotskyism is because I really think it, I'm not doing demagoguery." (Conversations with Nahuel Moreno, 1986, Ediciones El Socialista, in English: 2012, p. 65)

82 Nahuel Moreno: Party Cadres' School: Argentina 1984; in English: Ediciones El Socialista, Buenos Aires, 2015, pp. 47-48. See also e.g. Nahuel Moreno: *Revolutions of the XX Century*, Buenos Aires, 1986, Ediciones El Socialista, Buenos Aires, 2014

83 "We believe that in the last 40 years there have been different phenomena to those that Trotsky witnessed, and they force us to start developing between us all— or some of you will in a few years— a new formulation, a new way of writing the theory of permanent revolution, taking into account all these problems. We have to state that it isn't mandatory for the working class and for revolutionary Marxist party with mass influence to lead the process of democratic revolution to socialist revolution. It's not required to be so. On the contrary: there have been, and it isn't ruled out there will be, democratic revolutions that in the economic field become socialist. This is to say, revolutions expropriating the bourgeoisie without having as essential axis the working class— or having it as important participant— and not having revolutionary Marxist and revolutionary workers' parties at their head, but petty-bourgeois parties." (Nahuel Moreno: Party Cadres' School: Argentina 1984; in English: Ediciones El Socialista, Buenos Aires, 2015, p. 15)

84 See LRCI: Barbaric Trotskyism: a History of Morenoism (Part 1); in *Trotskyist International* No.1 (1988), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/morenoism-part-1/> and *Barbaric Trotskyism: a History of Morenoism* (Part 2); in *Trotskyist International* No.9 (1992), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/morenoism-part-2/>. We refer readers also to another thoughtful criticism of the Moreno tradition which has been elaborated by the Argentinean-based PTS/FT. See: Manolo Romano: Polemic with the LIT and the Theoretical Legacy of Nahuel Moreno, PTS; in: *Estrategia Internacional* N°3 (December 1993 / January 1994), [http://www.ft.org.ar/estrategia/ei3polemica\\_con\\_lit\\_english.html](http://www.ft.org.ar/estrategia/ei3polemica_con_lit_english.html)

85 "The Basis for Unification of the PSA/PRT", in: *Intercontinental Press* 13, November 1972; quoted in: LRCI: *Barbaric Trotskyism: a History of Morenoism* (Part 1)

86 *Convergencia Socialista*, No. 5, November 1978, p. 4; quoted in: LRCI: *Barbaric Trotskyism: a History of Morenoism* (Part 1)

87 Manolo Romano: Polemic with the LIT and the Theoretical Legacy of Nahuel Moreno

88 Nahuel Moreno: *The Transitional Program Today* (1980); in English: Ediciones El Socialista, Buenos Aires, 2014, p. 72

89 On this, see for example our predecessor organization's book: *Workers Power (Britain): The Death Agony of the Fourth International*, 1983, chapter 3 and 4 as well as Denis Foliás: *Die Revolution in Permanenz. Theorie der proletarischen Weltrevolution von 1848 bis heute*, intarlit, Dortmund 1981

# Books from the RCIT

## Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South

**Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism**

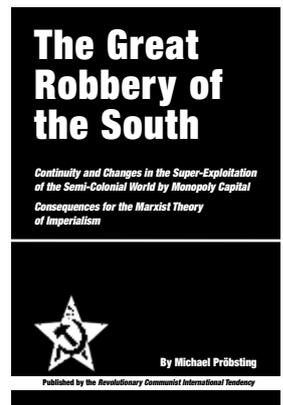
The RCIT is proud to announce the publication of a book called *THE GREAT ROBBERY OF THE SOUTH*. The book's subtitle is: *Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital*. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism. The book is in English-language. It has 15 chapters, 448 pages and includes 139 Tables and Figures. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who is the International Secretary of the RCIT.

In *The Great Robbery of the South* Michael Pröbsting analyses the super-exploitation and oppression of the semi-colonial world (often referred to as the "Third World") by the imperialist powers and monopolies. He shows that the relationship between the small minority of rich capitalist countries and the huge majority of mankind living in the semi-colonial world forms one of the most important elements of the imperialist world system we are living in. The Great Robbery of the South shows that the past decades have been a complete confirmation of the validity of Lenin's theory of imperialism and its programmatic conclusions. *The Great Robbery of the South* demonstrates the important changes in the relationship between the imperialist and the semi-colonial countries. Using comprehensive material (including 139 Tables and Figures), Michael Pröbsting elaborates that never before has

such a big share of the world capitalist value been produced in the South. Never before have the imperialist monopolies been so dependent on the super-exploitation of the semi-colonial world. Never before has migrant labor from the semi-colonial world played such a significant role for the capitalist value production in the imperialist countries. Never before has the huge majority of the world working class lived in the South – outside of the old imperialist metropolises.

In *The Great Robbery of the South* Michael Pröbsting argues that a correct understanding of the nature of imperialism as well as of the program of permanent revolution which includes the tactics of consistent anti-imperialism is essential for anyone who wants to change the world and bring about a socialist future.

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## Michael Pröbsting: Cuba's Revolution Sold Out?

**The Road from Revolution to the Restoration of Capitalism**

The RCIT is proud to announce the publication of a book called *Cuba's Revolution Sold Out?*. The book's subtitle is: *The Road from Revolution to the Restoration of Capitalism*. The book is in English-language. It has 5 chapters plus an appendix, 108 pages and includes 19 Tables and Figures. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who is the International Secretary of the RCIT.

In *Cuba's Revolution Sold Out?* Michael Pröbsting analyses the character of the Cuban Revolution 1959-61, its bureaucratic degeneration, and the recent march of the Castro leadership towards capitalism.

The author demonstrates how the Cuban Revolution, despite the initial modest intentions of its leaders, was spurred forward to more radical policies by grass roots struggles of Cuban workers and peasants. In fact, the very abolishment of capitalism by the Cuban regime was no part of the original game plan of either Castro's Movimiento 26 de Julio or of the official Cuban communist party (PSP), but rather was a product of precisely such pressures from below.

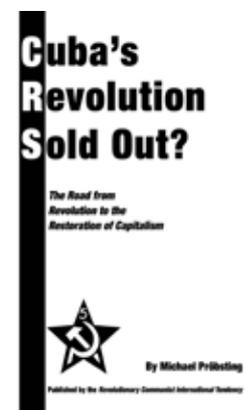
*Cuba's Revolution Sold Out?* describes in detail how a number of relatively recent political, economic, and social measures were

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In conclusion, the book proposes a socialist program for political and social revolution in Cuba to halt the advance of capitalism and to eradicate the country's bureaucratic dictatorship.

Price: 8 Euro / 12 US-Dollars / 7 British Pound (plus delivery charges) ■



The Author: Michael Pröbsting is a revolutionary activist since 34 years. He is the author of many articles and pamphlets in German and English language. He published books or contributed to books on Rosa Luxemburg (1999), on the World Economy (2008), on Migration (2010) and the Arab Revolution (2011). In addition to *The Great Robbery of the South* and *Cuba's Revolution Sold Out?* he also published in 2014 the book *Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice. Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of Organized Struggle for Bolshevism*. He is the International Secretary of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency.

# What the RCIT Stands for

The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) is a revolutionary combat organisation fighting for the liberation of the working class and all oppressed. It has national sections in a number of countries. The working class is composed of all those (and their families) who are forced to sell their labor power as wage earners to the capitalists. The RCIT stands on the theory and practice of the revolutionary workers' movement associated with the names of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky.

Capitalism endangers our lives and the future of humanity. Unemployment, war, environmental disasters, hunger, and exploitation are all part of everyday life under capitalism as are the imperialistic oppression of nations, the national oppression of migrants, and the oppression of women, young people, and homosexuals. Therefore, we want to eliminate capitalism.

The liberation of the working class and all oppressed is possible only in a classless society without exploitation and oppression. Such a society can only be established internationally.

Therefore, the RCIT is fighting for a socialist revolution at home and around the world.

This revolution must be carried out and led by the working class, for only this class has the collective power to bring down the ruling class and build a socialist society.

The revolution cannot proceed peacefully because a ruling class never has nor ever will voluntarily surrender its power. By necessity, therefore, the road to liberation includes armed rebellion and civil war against the capitalists.

The RCIT is fighting for the establishment of workers' and peasants' republics, where the oppressed organize themselves in councils democratically elected in rank-and-file meetings in factories, neighbourhoods, and schools. These councils, in turn, elect and control the government and all other state authorities, and always retain the right to recall them.

Authentic socialism and communism have nothing to do with the so-called "socialism" that ruled in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and which continues to do so in China and Cuba, for example. In these countries, the proletariat was and is dominated and oppressed by a privileged party bureaucracy.

Under capitalism, the RCIT supports all efforts to improve the living conditions of the workers and oppressed, while simultaneously striving to overthrow this system based on economic exploitation of the masses.

Towards these ends, we work from within the trade unions where we advocate class struggle, socialism, and workers' democracy. But trade unions and social democracy are controlled by a bureaucracy perniciously connected with the state and capital via status, high-paying jobs, and other privileges. Thus, the trade union bureaucracy is far from the interests and living conditions of

its members, based as it is on the top, privileged layers of the working class – a labor aristocracy which has no real interest in replacing capitalism. Therefore, the true struggle for the liberation of the working class, the toppling of capitalism and the establishment of socialism, must be based on the broad mass of the proletariat rather than their "representative" from the upper trade union strata.

We also fight for the expropriation of the big land owners as well as for the nationalisation of the land and its distribution to the poor and landless peasants. Towards this goal we struggle for the independent organisation of the rural workers.

We support national liberation movements against oppression. We also support the anti-imperialist struggles of oppressed peoples against the great powers. Within these movements we advocate a revolutionary leadership as an alternative to nationalist or reformist forces.

While the RCIT strives for unity of action with other organizations, we are acutely aware that the policies of social democrats and pseudo-revolutionary groups are dangerous, and ultimately represent an obstacle to the emancipation of the working class, peasants, and the otherwise oppressed.

In wars between imperialist states we take a revolutionary defeatist position: we do not support either side, but rather advocate the transformation of the war into a civil war against the ruling class in each of the warring states. In wars between imperialist powers (or their stooges) and a semi-colonial countries we stand for the defeat of the former and the victory of the oppressed countries.

As communists, we maintain that the struggle against national oppression and all types of social oppression (women, youth, sexual minorities etc.) *must* be led by the working class, because only the latter is capable of fomenting a revolutionary change in society. Therefore, we consistently support working class-based revolutionary movements of the socially oppressed, while opposing the leadership of petty-bourgeois forces (feminism, nationalism, Islamism, etc.), who ultimately dance to the tune of the capitalists, and strive to replace them with revolutionary communist leadership.

Only with a revolutionary party fighting as its leadership can the working class be victorious in its struggle for liberation. The establishment of such a party and the execution of a successful revolution, as it was demonstrated by the Bolsheviks in Russia under Lenin and Trotsky remain the models for revolutionary parties and revolutions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

For new, revolutionary workers' parties in all countries!  
For a 5<sup>th</sup> Workers International to be founded on a revolutionary program! Join the RCIT!

*No future without socialism!*

*No socialism without revolution!*

*No revolution without a revolutionary party!*



