

Chapter 11: The Theory of Permanent Revolution and its Program for the Working Class Struggle

The theory of Permanent Revolution was developed by Trotsky out of the experience of the Russian Revolutions in 1905 and 1917, the revolutionary events in the 1920s and the Chinese Revolution 1925-27. It helped overcoming weaknesses in Lenin's pre-1917 strategy of the *"revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry"* which shared many aspects of Trotsky's concept but was algebraic and inadequate in various aspects.⁶³⁹

Trotsky's concept of Permanent Revolution is based on the dialectical concept that the revolution can not be divided schematically into stages which are separated from each other. This does not mean that there are not different stages in the development of the revolution. This is of course the case. But in all stages of the revolution it is one and the same class which must lead the struggle in order

⁶³⁹ Trotsky explained in his book „Permanent Revolution“, written in 1929, the historic weaknesses of Lenin's concept: *"In 1905, it was a question with Lenin of a strategical hypothesis still to be verified by the actual course of the class struggle. The formula of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry bore in large measure an intentionally algebraic character. Lenin did not solve in advance the question of what the political relationships would be between the two participants in the assumed democratic dictatorship, that is, the proletariat and the peasantry. He did not exclude the possibility that the peasantry would be represented in the revolution by an independent party – a party independent in a double sense, not only with regard to the bourgeoisie but also with regard to the proletariat, and at the same time capable of realising the democratic revolution in alliance with the party of the proletariat in struggle against the liberal bourgeoisie. Lenin even allowed the possibility – as we shall soon see – that the revolutionary peasants' party might constitute the majority in the government of the democratic dictatorship."*

Trotsky also concluded in the summary of the same book: *"Assessed historically, the old slogan of Bolshevism – 'the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' – expressed precisely the above-characterized relationship of the proletariat, the peasantry and the liberal bourgeoisie. This has been confirmed by the experience of October. But Lenin's old formula did not settle in advance the problem of what the reciprocal relations would be between the proletariat and the peasantry within the revolutionary bloc. In other words, the formula deliberately retained a certain algebraic quality, which had to make way for more precise arithmetical quantities in the process of historical experience. However, the latter showed, and under circumstances that exclude any kind of misinterpretation, that no matter how great the revolutionary role of the peasantry may be, it nevertheless cannot be an independent role and even less a leading one. The peasant follows either the worker or the bourgeois. This means that the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' is only conceivable as a dictatorship of the proletariat that leads the peasant masses behind it."* (Leo Trotzki: Die permanente Revolution, in: Leo Trotzki: Ergebnisse und Perspektiven. Die permanente Revolution; Frankfurt a. M., 1971, p. 23 respectively p. 159; in English: Leon Trotsky: The Permanent Revolution)

We have discussed Trotsky's concept of uneven and combined development as well as of the Permanent Revolution and the Stalinist/Maoist counter-arguments in our German-language book on the Arab Revolution. See Michael Pröbsting: Die halbe Revolution. Lehren und Perspektiven des arabischen Aufstandes, pp. 19-25 and pp. 47-55. (The Half Revolution. Lessons and perspectives of the Arab Uprising, in: Der Weg des Revolutionären Kommunismus, Theoretisches Journal der Revolutionär-Kommunistischen Organisation zur Befreiung, RKOB), Nr. 8 (2011), <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/werk-8>

to win the democratic as well as economic goals of the revolution: the working class. Naturally the working class must seek allies amongst the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie. But it is the proletariat and only the proletariat which can lead the struggle to victory. The reason for this is that the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie – regardless of their numerical size – are not classes that can act independently and therefore they can not play a leading role. They must rather subordinate themselves sooner or later under one of the two main classes of capitalist society - the proletariat or the bourgeoisie.

From this follows that in all stages of the revolution the strategic goal is to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and not the power for any other class. While temporary blocs with sectors of the bourgeoisie can not be excluded, it would be criminal for the working class to subordinate its goals and interests in order not to wreck a potential alliance with such bourgeois forces. It would be even more criminal to support the taking of power by bourgeois forces. Every sector of the semi-colonial bourgeoisie will look for a compromise with imperialism and betray the working class and the popular masses.

The theory of permanent revolution assumes that if the revolution is not continued up to the socialist seizure of power, it will inevitably end with the victory of the ruling class and a counter-revolution. Similarly, the theory of Permanent Revolution considers that the revolution can not last victoriously in a single country (as Stalin claimed), but must be spread internationally. The modern economy especially in the age of global capitalism makes all countries dependent on the international exchange of goods, technology and knowledge. Moreover, sooner or later the imperialist powers would not tolerate a victorious revolution in a single country. Marxists therefore support the strategy of permanent revolution not because it is more radical or “exciting”, but because it represents the only realistic way to overcome the capitalist system and establish a truly socialist society.

Trotsky summarized the concept of the permanent revolution in the following way:

“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.”*⁶⁴⁰

The Program of Permanent Revolution in the semi-colonial countries contains numerous social, democratic and anti-imperialist demands and combine them with the question of power. In the following we present the most important demands for the revolutionary struggle in the semi-colonial world as we summarize them in the RCIT Program.

Free the oppressed peoples from the clutches of the banks and corporations!

* No further interest and debt repayment! Immediate and complete cancellation of all private and government debt!

* Cancel the debt of all semi-colonial countries of Latin America, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe! Instead, the imperialist states must compensate the semi-colonial world for the plundering of their natural and human resources!

* Smash the IMF, World Bank and the WTO!

* No to protectionism in the imperialist countries against the commodities of poorer countries! Abolition of the NAFTA and the EU's common agricultural policy and similar protectionist weapons of imperialism! On the other hand, however, we defend the right of 'third world' countries to protect their markets from cheap imports from the imperialist countries.

* Nationalisation of the imperialist banks and corporations under workers' control!

* For an international emergency plan to rescue the starving and to fight against the consequences of climate change – funded from the profits of the banks and corporations in rich countries!

* For a plan to pay the semi-colonial countries repatriation for the century-long plundering by the imperialist powers! It must be financed by expropriating the wealth of the super-rich.

Against wage cuts, job insecurity and unemployment!

* No to any pay cut! For massive wage increases and a minimum wage, the amounts of which should be set by independent workers' committees!

* Fight insecure employment! Conversion of unprotected, informal and temporary contracts into permanent contracts, with alignment of the employment protection provisions and wages. The adherence of these should be regulated by collective tariff agreements and controlled by trade unions and workforce representatives!

* Fight all layoffs and plant closures! Expropriation without compensation of all enterprises that don't pay wages completely, that threaten with layoffs, that don't pay their taxes in full or threaten with closure or relocation of the site! In such cases: the entrepreneurs must be made to pay out of their private property!

⁶⁴⁰ Leo Trotzki: Die permanente Revolution, in: Leo Trotzki: Ergebnisse und Perspektiven. Die permanente Revolution; Frankfurt a. M., 1971, p. 136; in English: Leon Trotsky: The Permanent Revolution

Continuation of these companies as public companies under the management of the employees!

* Cut the working hours now! We support any reduction in working hours. The aim must be the division of labour on all hands. This means that everyone should have a job and work less hours at unchanged wages!

Fight inflation! For the adjustment of wages to inflation!

For price control committees!

* Fight inflation! For automatic adjustment of wages and all social benefits and pensions to match price increases!

* For the control of prices through price monitoring committees, elected by the workers, housewives and -men as well as consumers! The basis should be a cost of living index, which is determined by representatives of the working class, the peasants and small traders.

* Nationalisation of assets in commodity trading at the stock markets and the abolition of the stock market!

An end to the “business secret”! For workers’ control!

For a public employment programme!

* Open the books – bookkeeping, bank accounts, tax returns, etc.! Inspection by accountants who enjoy the trust of the workers!

* For workers inquiry committees for comprehensive detection of corruption between companies and between companies and government agencies!

* For the control and the veto right of the workers against all decisions of the management! Against any participation of workers representatives in management positions!

* For a public employment programme to improve infrastructure (energy supply, public transport, education and child care, etc.), to take action against climate change, etc. This programme must not be subject to state control of bureaucrats, but must be planned and controlled by the workers and oppressed people. It is to be paid out of profits and the assets of the super-rich.

No division – Joint fight, regardless of nation, and location!

* Instead of divisions – joint struggle of workers in different locations in multinational corporations! For joint, transnational collective bargaining of trade unions within a multinational corporation! Equal pay for equal work in multinational corporations – raising the salary to the top level! Joint workers organisations in multinational companies! For joint workers’ control over the corporation!

* No to outsourcing and relocation without the consent of the workers! Instead of the conflict between wage labourers of different nationalities about the same job: Equal pay and division of labour on our hands! Full alignment of the collective agreements and employment rights for employees of subcontractors

to the level of the general contractor!

* Joint struggle of the unions across the nation-state boundaries for an increase in working and living conditions!

No more tax breaks for the rich! Expropriate the super rich!

* Abolition of all indirect taxes such as VAT!

* Massive reduction in taxes on wages! Drastic increase in taxes on profits and speculation! Elimination of tax loopholes for businesses! Immediate recovery of outstanding tax debts of the companies!

* For the confiscation of property of the powerful and influential families and their utilisation in the context of a national economic plan! For the expropriation of the super rich!

* Nationalisation of banks, large corporations and in wholesale trade and transport, social, health, education and communication areas, without compensation under workers' control!

* Stop the tax evasion of capitalists by moving their wealth to other countries! Complete expropriation of all companies associated with fake companies! Abolish all opportunities for multinational corporations, to move their profits and losses within the business group across countries for the purpose of tax benefits!

* Confiscation of capital in the so-called tax havens! Use it to combat environmental degradation, hunger and poverty in the semi-colonial countries!

Revolutionary Struggle for Democracy

* For a revolutionary Constituent Assembly! Such a Constituent Assembly should not be called by a bourgeois government, but by a revolutionary government of workers and peasants' councils.

* 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 the police and surveillance state! Against expanding the powers of police and courts! For the replacement of the apparatus of repression by workers' and people's militia!

Support the national liberation struggles of oppressed peoples!

* Equal rights and equal pay! Full citizenship rights for all persons belonging to national minorities!

* For a public employment and education programme under the control of representatives of national minorities and the workers movement - paid for by the capitalists profits!

* For the abolition of the official state languages! Equal treatment and equal supply of languages of national minorities in the schools, courts, public administration and in the media!

* For extensive regional autonomy and self-government of regions with specific national composition! Defining the borders of self-governing territories by the local population themselves!

* No to the nationalism of the (petty-)bourgeois forces in the oppressed nations! Against the policy of isolation of communities from each other and for the closest possible union of workers of different nationalities!

* For the right to self-determination of oppressed peoples including the right to form their own state, if they wish so! Wherever oppressed people have already clearly stated their desire for a separate state, we support this and combine this with the slogan for a workers 'and peasants' republic. This applies for example for a socialist Tamil Eelam, a united Ireland, a united Kashmir, an independent Kurdistan, Chechnya, Tibet, etc.

* Unconditional support for the liberation struggle – including in its armed form!

Fight against the super-exploitation and national oppression of migrants!

* Full citizenship rights and abolition of all special laws for all migrants – regardless of nationality, race, religion or nationality! Equal pay for equal work!

* For the right to stay and immediate legalisation of all illegal migrants and asylum seekers! Right of asylum for those fleeing war, oppression and poverty in their countries! Open borders for all!

* Fight the incitement against Muslims. For the right to free exercise of religion – including the right to build mosques and the right of Muslim women to wear a veil (scarf, burqua etc.) wherever they want! Similarly, we say: No one must be forced against her or his will to follow religious guidelines (such as the wearing of a headscarf)! The same applies e.g. for the wearing of the Dastar of the Sikhs.

* For the abolition of the official state languages! Equal treatment and equal supply of languages of migrants in the schools, courts, public administration

and in the media! Free and voluntary offer for all to learn the languages of other national groups in the country!

* Local self-government of areas with a high proportion of migrants! Special consideration to the wishes of migrants in defining the borders of self-governing regions! Financial support by the state!

* For a revolutionary movement of the migrants as part of the 5th Workers International! For the right of caucus for migrants in the unions and the organizations of the workers' movement!

Save our planet from the capitalist climate catastrophe!

* Nationalisation under workers' control of all energy companies and all companies that are responsible for basic supplies such as water, agriculture and airlines, ship and rail facilities!

* For an emergency plan to convert the energy and transport system and for a global phasing out of fossil fuels and nuclear energy production connected to a public employment programme! For the massive exploration and use of alternative forms of energy such as wind, tidal and solar power! For a global reforestation program of the woods! Radical expansion of public transport to push back individual car traffic!

* Prohibition of genetic manipulation and hazardous chemicals in agriculture! Abolition of the hybrid culture system!

* Force the imperialist corporations and states, to pay compensation to the semi-colonial countries for the environmental destruction caused by them! No emissions trade and "ecological points" system!

* Abolition of commercial secrecy in clean technology and energy sectors! Bring together the knowledge for the creation of effective alternatives!

Jobs and housing for the poor in urban slums!

* For a public employment programme under the control of representatives of slum dwellers and the workers' movement - paid for by the capitalists profits! For a large-scale state investment programme for the development of housing, energy, sanitation and waste management, hospitals and schools, roads and public transport!

* For the formation of local committees of action and self-defence units of the slum dwellers!

The land to the peasants! Organise the agricultural workers!

* Immediate ban on the purchase of land by multinational corporations and hedge funds! Immediate confiscation of all non-agricultural used land owned by large landowners! Abolition of all patents of capitalist monopolies in agriculture!

* For the expropriation of the big landlords, the church and the multinationals! For the nationalisation of the land under the control of workers and poor

peasants! The land to those who cultivate it! The local democratic actions council representatives of the poor and landless peasants have to decide the question of the allocation and use of the land! Promotion of voluntary agricultural cooperatives and the formation of larger state production units!

* Debt cancellation and abolition of rent for the peasants! Nationalisation of the banks! Interest-free loans for small peasants!

* For a radical change of direction in the agricultural economy. Away from the monoculture! For sustainable cultivation methods in agriculture! As much international transport of agricultural product as necessary to supply the world's population as necessary and as much supplies of agricultural goods on the spot as possible!

Joint struggle for women's liberation!

* An end to all forms of legal discrimination against women - whether in the workplace, in access to education or at the polls!

* Equal pay for equal work!

* Massive support for the conversion of part-time to full-time employment for women!

* For the massive construction of free, well-equipped 24-hour child-care facilities! For a wide range supply of affordable and high-quality public restaurants and laundry facilities! Our goal is the socialisation of housework!

* For a public employment programme to create the conditions for the socialisation of housework and simultaneously eliminate unemployment among women!

* Free access to free contraception and abortion on demand regardless of age and no matter in what month of pregnancy the woman is!

* Fight against violence against women! For the expansion of public women's safe houses, controlled by women's organisations! For the formation of self-defence units by the workers' and women's movement against sexist violence!

* Down with all laws and public campaigns on religious dress codes! For the right to wear religious clothing, independently whether it is a form of Muslim veiling, the Dastar of the Sikhs etc. is! But also against any compulsion to wear these garments!

* For the building of a revolutionary women's movement! For the right to caucus for women in the mass organisations of workers and oppressed!

Combat the sexual oppression of church and state!

* An end to the paternalism by the state and religious institutions: everyone should be able to realise his or her sexuality without coercion and regulations, as long as this takes place with the mutual consent of the partners.

* For wide-ranging possibilities to obtain high-quality and free contraceptives in pharmacies, at jobs and training sites!

* Complete equality for lesbian, gay and transgender people in the marriage law, right to have children, the public showing of their affection, etc.!

* No criminalisation of the sexuality of young people by statutory age restrictions! However, we are in favour of strict laws against rape and domestic violence, to protect children from abuse. Domestic violence perpetrators should be held accountable by neighbourhood and school committees.

An end to the oppression of young people!

* Equal pay for equal work! Prohibition of child labour! Full-fledged training programmes with full wage and guaranteed employment for young people instead of low-cost training programs!

* For the full right to vote, at least from 16 years on!

* For the development of a wide variety of youth centres, paid by the state and under self-management of the young people!

* For the building of a revolutionary youth movement! For the right to caucus for young people in the mass organisations of workers and oppressed!

Down with militarism and imperialist war!

* No money, no man and no woman for the bourgeois army! Democratic rights for the soldiers, for the building of soldiers' committees and the election of officers!

* For the military training under control of the workers' movement! For a workers' and people militia instead of the bourgeois army!

* Withdrawal from and dissolution of all imperialist military alliances (e.g. NATO, Partnership for Peace)! Disbandment of all U.S. and other imperialist military bases around the world!

* No to all imperialist wars and occupations (Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya, Chad, etc.)! For the defeat of the imperialists - for the victory of the resistance! Hands off Iran, Cuba, Venezuela and North Korea!

The arming of the working class and the oppressed! For a workers' government, based on the poor peasants and the urban poor!

* Nationalisation of banks and fusion into a single central bank, nationalisation of large companies, large wholesale trade and transport, social, health, education and communication sector without compensation and under workers' control! Introduction of a foreign trade monopoly!

* Expropriation of the capitalist class and especially the banks, corporations and speculators!

* For a workers' government, based on the poor peasants and the urban poor, on the basis of councils in the enterprises and neighbourhoods as well as armed militias; Their representatives are under the direct election and can be recalled by the workers and they receive not more than an average skilled workers salary!

Forward to the Fifth Workers International, the world party of socialist revolution!