

The Slogan of the Constituent Assembly in the Great Arab Revolution

Defending the Marxist approach against ultra-left and opportunist criticism

By Michael Pröbsting, International Secretary of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 23 April 2019, www.thecommunists.net

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The popular uprisings in Algeria and Sudan in the last few months have triggered the beginning of the second wave of the Arab Revolution. ¹ These epochal events push, once again, a number of crucial questions of revolutionary strategy and tactic into the foreground.

The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) has supported the Great Arab Revolution from the very first hour in 2011. Our comrades – both in the Middle East as well as globally – have participated in numerous related activities in the past eight years. ² We have advocated to the vanguard of militant workers and youth a consistent Marxist program of struggle as documented in a series of pamphlets, statements and articles. ³

Likewise we have repeatedly argued against the defeatist doomsayers who confused the *setbacks* with a *final defeat* of the Arab Revolution and who used this gross misjudgment as an excuse for denouncing the ongoing liberation struggles of the popular masses as “reactionary”. Well, the profound ruptures in Algeria and Sudan, the ongoing civil wars of the popular masses against dictatorship and foreign invasion in Syria, Libya and Yemen, the steadfast liberation struggle of the Palestinian people against the Zionist enemy, the increasing number of mass struggles in Iran, Iraq, and Jordan, etc. – all of these events have demolished the reactionary myth of the “done” and “degenerated” Arab Revolution and exposed it as the wishful thinking of demoralized fellow-travelers, Eurocentric skeptics, and Stalinist slanderers.

However, it would go far beyond the scope of the present essay to give a comprehensive balance sheet of eight years of Arab Revolution. ⁴ At this point we choose instead to focus on one particular question

¹ On the RCIT's assessment of the Algerian and Sudanese Revolutions see: Algeria and Sudan: Two Important Victories and a Warning. No trust in the army command and the old elite! Continue the Revolution! 11 April 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/first-victories-in-algeria-and-sudan/>; Algeria: Bouteflika Retreats! Now Let Us Defeat His System! Organize Committees of Action! For a General Strike and Popular Insurrection to bring down the regime! For a Workers and Poor Peasants Government! 12 March 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/algeria-bouteflika-retreats-now-let-us-defeat-his-system/>; Algeria: Victory to the Popular Insurgency against Bouteflika and his System! 9 March 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/algeria-victory-to-the-popular-insurgency-against-bouteflika-and-his-system/>; Sudan: Bring Down the Regime of Omar al-Bashir! 28 December 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/sudan-bring-down-the-regime-of-omar-al-bashir/>; Report (with Photos and Videos): Sudan: Rally in Solidarity with the Popular Uprising, 6 April 2019, Austrian Section of the RCIT, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/sudan-rally-against-the-dictatorship/>; Report (with Photos and Videos): Sudan: Rally in Solidarity with the Popular Uprising against the dictatorship of Omar al-Bashir, 13 January 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/sudan-rally-in-solidarity-with-popular-uprising/>

² Some of these activities can be viewed on the RCIT's website in this column: <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/>

³ See on this the numerous documents collected at the following sub-page on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/>

⁴ The RCIT has repeatedly assessed the state of the Arab Revolution; see e.g. Michael Pröbsting: World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings (Chapter V), February 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/chapter-v/>; Michael Pröbsting: Is the Syrian Revolution at its End? Is Third Camp Abstentionism Justified? An essay on the organs of popular power in the liberated area of Syria, on the character of the different sectors of the Syrian rebels, and on the failure of those leftists who deserted the Syrian Revolution, 5 April 2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/syrian-revolution-not-dead/>; RCIT: Revolution and Counterrevolution in the Arab World: An Acid Test for Revolutionaries, 31 May 2015, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/theses-arab-revolution/>. There are also several thoughtful outlooks from a non-Marxist point of view; see e.g. David Hearst: The second Arab Spring? Egypt is the litmus test for revolution in the Middle East, 16 April 2019 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/second-arab-spring-egypt-litmus-test>; There Is No End in Sight for Turmoil in the Middle East, Interview with University Professor Gilbert Achcar, by Dina Yazdani, April 18, 2019

that has proven to be important in the recent revolutionary upheavals in Algeria and Sudan – as it has repeatedly in the revolutionary events of the preceding eight years. We are talking about the democratic question, in general, and the slogan of the *Constituent Assembly*, in particular.

In the following essay we will outline the Marxist approach to this question. We will demonstrate why the issue of the Constituent Assembly is highly relevant in the present conjuncture and how the RCIT tackles this slogan drawing on the theoretical legacy of Lenin and Trotsky. Based on this we will delineate our approach from what we consider thorough revisionist deviations – either ultra-left sectarian or opportunistic.

I. Algeria and Sudan: The Central Issue of the Constitution

The events in Algeria and Sudan in the past few months have demonstrated beyond doubt that the issues of the political order and the constitution are playing a crucial role in the revolutionary process. The conflictual process of transition before and after Bouteflika's resignation is a clear example for this. The dictator facilitated his 20-year rule by amending the constitution in 2008 to scrap presidential term limits. When the popular insurgency swelled, despite efforts of the regime to pacify the masses through pseudo-concessions, the army command of General Ahmed Gaid Salah decided to abandon the tyrant. Again, this was done by utilizing Article 102 of the country's constitution which regulates the process of removing an ailing head of state. This constitutional measure ensured that Bouteflika officially notified the president of the Constitutional Council, Tayeb Belai, of his "*decision to end his presidential mandate*". In accordance with the constitution, upper house speaker Abdelkader Bensalah, a close ally of Bouteflika and key figure of his regime, became interim president charged with organizing a "transparent" presidential election within 90 days.

The new de-facto leader of Algeria, General Ahmed Gaid Salah, vowed, according to a defense ministry statement, that the military would ensure that the transition followed the "*rules of transparency and integrity, and the laws of the republic*". He simultaneously inveighed against "*slogans aimed at leading the country to a constitutional void and destroying state institutions*".⁵

However, the Algerian people have learned from the experience of the Great Arab Revolution and are continuing their protests in order to get rid of the whole system (one of the most popular slogans is "*Système degage!*"). In this context, people are referring also to Article 7 of the Constitution; it stipulates that "*the people is the source of power*".

In short, we see an important process of political radicalization evolving in Algeria where the popular masses are determined not only to get rid of the long-time tyrant, Bouteflika, but the whole political caste that has ruled their country for decades. At the same time, the workers and poor have not created their own organ of struggle – committees of action in workplaces and neighborhoods – which could become future organs of power. During the revolutionary process in Russia in 1917 such organs

https://www.fairobserver.com/region/middle_east_north_africa/interview-professor-gilbert-achcar-middle-east-politics-security-hope-16512/

⁵ Algeria announces presidential elections in July as anti-regime protests continue, 10 April, 2019, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2019/4/10/algeria-sets-new-election-date-as-anti-regime-protests-continue>

were called "Soviets". In Germany they were called "Räte". Furthermore, the masses continue to retain a desire for "true democracy" which they currently identify as some form of bourgeois democracy.

Similar developments have taken place in Sudan. Initially the popular insurgency was triggered by the tripling of the price of bread and other instances of unbearably high inflation. However, the protests were also provoked by regime plans to amend the constitution, so that Omar al-Bashir – who took power nearly 30 years ago – could remain in office beyond a term slated to end in 2020.

Unsurprisingly, the bourgeois democratic forces at the top of the mass movement, which called for the resignation of Bashir and his clique ("*Tasgut bas*"), also focused on issues of the constitution. The *Sudanese Professional Association*, bourgeois opposition parties like the *National Umma Party*, as well as the Stalinist *Sudanese Communist Party* issued on 1st January a document called "*Declaration of Freedom and Change*".⁶ This document stated their plan to work towards the end of Bashir's presidency and the "*formation of a National Transitional Government. This transitional government will be formed of qualified people based on merits of competency and good reputation, representing various Sudanese groups and receiving the consensus of the majority. Their role is to govern for a term of four years, until a sound democratic structure is established, and elections held.*" This "transitional government" should, among other objectives, "*convene a Comprehensive Constitutional Conference*".

It is hardly necessary to point out how undemocratic such a plan is which calls for a "transitional government" taking power for four years without any elections or control. Likewise, it is not surprising that the *Sudanese Communist Party* supports such a pseudo-democratic charade. Mohamed Mokhtar al-Khatib, the general secretary of the Communist Party, said at a news conference on 14 February: "*We have decided on the programme that would take place after the regime falls and (will) hold a constitutional dialogue conference at the end of the transitional period to decide how Sudan will be ruled.*"⁷

In recent days, the army command disposed of Bashir in order to save the system. The newly formed transitional military council announced a state of emergency, a nationwide ceasefire, and the suspension of the constitution.

In short, all these developments demonstrate the central place that the issue of the constitution has played in the revolutionary process in Sudan.

Such developments in Algeria and Sudan are by no means unprecedented. They have been observed during nearly all sharp turns of the revolutionary events in the Arab world in the past eight years. To name just a few examples we refer to Tunisia where a bourgeois-controlled Constituent Assembly was

⁶ Declaration of Freedom and Change, Khartoum, January 1st 2019, <https://www.sudaneseprofessionals.org/en/declaration-of-freedom-and-change/>

⁷ Sudan's Bashir declares year-long state of emergency, dismisses government, 22 February 2019 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sudans-bashir-declares-year-long-state-emergency-dismisses-government>; see also Signatories for change in Sudan hold first meeting, February 14 2019, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/signatories-for-change-in-sudan-hold-historic-meeting>; Sudanese opposition groups issue declaration for regime change, January 1, 2019, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article66861>; Sudan opposition groups issue first joint call for Bashir to resign, 14 February 2019 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sudan-opposition-groups-issue-first-joint-call-bashir-resign>; Sam Wainwright: Can the Sudanese people bring down the dictator? January 7, 2019, Issue 1206, <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/can-sudanese-people-bring-down-dictator>

elected after the overthrow of the Ben Ali dictatorship in January 2011. ⁸ This Assembly elaborated and adopted a new constitution in January 2014.

A similar process took place in Egypt. After the successful popular uprising resulting in the downfall of the Mubarak dictatorship in January 2011, a Constituent Assembly was elected in March 2012 that elaborated a new constitution. This was approved in a popular referendum in December of the same year and signed by the newly-elected bourgeois Islamist President Mohamed Morsi. Half a year later the Egyptian army overthrew Morsi, suspended the constitution, and created a bloody dictatorship. In 2014 the regime of General Sisi imposed a new constitution. A few days ago, Egypt's "parliament" approved some constitutional amendments that would allow General Sisi to stay in power until 2030. ⁹

To give another example we refer to the constitutional changes and the referendum in 2017 in Turkey that resulted in the creation of a presidential system with strong Bonapartist powers for Erdoğan. ¹⁰

Finally, in order to demonstrate that the issue of the constitution is not limited to the revolutionary convulsions that have wracked the Middle East since 2011, we refer to the example of Thailand. Here too, General Prayut Chan-o-cha suspended the constitution when he carried out a military coup in May 2014 against the government of Prime Minister Yingluck. After imposing an interim constitution in the same year he organized a "popular referendum" in 2017 approving a new constitution. ¹¹

These examples demonstrate beyond doubt the importance of the issue of a constitution in political life – particularly in periods of revolution and counter-revolution. Only the willfully blind – or politically blinded – could fail to see the importance of the democratic question in general and the

⁸ See the following statements of the RCIT on Tunisia: RCIT: Tunisia: Solidarity with the Mass Protests! 10.01.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/solidarity-with-the-mass-protests-in-tunisia/>; RCIT: Tunisia: Solidarity with the Workers' and Youth Uprising! 23.01.2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/tunisia-uprising/>.

⁹ The RCIT has published a number of pamphlets, statements and articles in the weeks after the military coup in July 2013. See e.g. RCIT: Egypt: Down with the Military Coup d'État! Prepare Mass Resistance! 8.7.2013, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-down-with-military-coup-d-etat/; RCIT: Egypt: International Solidarity against the Army Crackdown!, 14.8.2013, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-international-solidarity/; Michael Pröbsting: The Coup d'État in Egypt and the Bankruptcy of the Left's "Army Socialism". A Balance Sheet of the coup and another Reply to our Critics (LCC, WIVP, SF/LCFI), 8.8.2013, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-and-left-army-socialism/; Yossi Schwartz: Egypt: Mobilize Resistance against the reactionary military regime!, 27.7.2013, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-no-to-military-regime/; Michael Pröbsting: The Military's Coup d'État in Egypt: Assessment and Tactics, 17.7.2013, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-meaning-of-coup-d-etat/; Yossi Schwartz: Egypt: The U.S. Support for the Military Coup and the Left's ignorance. Notes on the role of US imperialism in the military's coup d'état and the failure of the Egypt left, 11.7.2013, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-us-support-for-military-coup/.

¹⁰ See e.g. the RCIT's Action Program for Turkey: TEK YOL DEVRİM!, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/program-turkey/>

¹¹ On the RCIT's assessment of the military coup in Thailand see: RCIT: Thailand: Smash the Developing Military Coup! 21.5.2014, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/thailand-coup/>; Michael Pröbsting: Thailand: How Should Socialists Fight Against the Military Coup? 27.5.2014, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/thailand-coup-critique/>; Michael Pröbsting: Thailand: Shall Socialists Defend the Government Against the Military Coup? Reply to a Neo-Bordigist Polemic of the "Liaison Committee of Communists", 24.5.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/thailand-coup-reply/>; Joseph Adams: Thailand Four Years after the Coup. General Strike to bring down the Prayut Cha-O-Cha Dictatorship! For A Revolutionary Workers and Poor Peasant Government! 9 July 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/thailand-4-years-after-the-coup/>

issue of the constitution in particular. The central question is how (and how not) revolutionaries should tackle this matter.

II. The Marxist Tactic on the Revolutionary Constituent Assembly

The RCIT starts from the recognition that questions of democracy remain a central component of the class struggle all over the world. The Arab Revolutions against dictatorships and for freedom, the struggles in Latin America against institutional coups (e.g. Brazil 2016-19, Honduras 2009, etc.), the military coup in Thailand in 2014, the struggle against the authoritarian ZANU-PF regime in Zimbabwe, the struggles against national oppression (e.g. Palestine, Uyghurs in China, Kashmir), the struggle against Islamophobia and for full rights for refugees and migrants in Europe and North America, for the right of abortion in Ireland and Argentina, ... these are just a few examples that demonstrate the crucial importance of democratic questions in the current period. This is hardly surprising given the fact that the current historic period is characterized by capitalist decay and an accelerating rivalry between the imperialist Great Powers of the U.S, China, Russia, the EU, and Japan.

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Lenin's famous statement remains completely valid: *"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,"* ¹³

It would go beyond the scope of this essay to deal at this place with the democratic questions in detail. For those interested we refer readers to a substantial pamphlet that we have published on this issue. ¹⁴ At this point we will focus on 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. Bolshevik-Communists advocate that the delegates should be controllable and open to recall by its people. Thus such a Constituent Assembly cannot easily become an

¹² See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry. The Factors behind the Accelerating Rivalry between the U.S., China, Russia, EU and Japan. A Critique of the Left's Analysis and an Outline of the Marxist Perspective, RCIT Books, January 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/anti-imperialism-in-the-age-of-great-power-rivalry/>; RCIT: World Perspectives 2019: Heading Towards a Volcanic Political Eruption. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries, 2 March 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2019/>; RCIT: World Perspectives 2016: Advancing Counterrevolution and Acceleration of Class Contradictions Mark the Opening of a New Political Phase, Chapter II, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2016/part2/>; 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, Vienna 2013, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>

¹³ V.I. Lenin: A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism (1916); in: LCW 23, p. 43

¹⁴ Michael Pröbsting: The Struggle for Democracy in the Imperialist Countries Today. The Marxist Theory of Permanent Revolution and its Relevance for the Imperialist Metropolises, August 2015, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 39, p. 12, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/democracy-vs-imperialism/>

*instrument of the ruling class, they should not be called by a bourgeois government, but by a revolutionary government of workers and peasants' councils."*¹⁵

What is a Constituent Assembly? Basically it is a body that 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 competing programs of how society should be run. Marxists don't have the illusion that socialism can be peacefully introduced via such an assembly. In contrast to the centrist confusionists like Peter Taaffe's CWI or Alan Woods' IMT, we are fully aware of the fact that the transformation of capitalism into socialism is not possible via a peaceful road – neither by a Constituent Assembly, a parliament, nor any other institution.¹⁶ This is a question of power which ultimately will be decided by means of an armed confrontation between the ruling and oppressed classes.

However, revolutionaries advocate utilizing a Constituent Assembly to propagate the full program for a revolutionary transformation of society and in this way expose the treacherous reformist and openly bourgeois leaders. Calling for a Constituent Assembly takes into account that the popular masses still retain illusions concerning the realization of their legitimate aspirations within the terrain of bourgeois democracy. A Constituent Assembly is the most radical democratic form within bourgeois democracy as it involves the popular classes in a debate over the political and economic structure of society. To ensure such participation 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.

Historical experience has demonstrated that democratic slogans in general and the slogan for a Constituent Assembly in particular can be posed in either a revolutionary way or a reformist way. 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 RCIT calls not for a conciliatory Constituent Assembly that can only end up pacifying the masses but rather for a *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly*. This means a Constituent Assembly that is convened and controlled 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 have at least initiated a period of dual power.

Of course, integrating the slogan calling for a Constituent Assembly into the democratic program 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

¹⁵ RCIT: The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto (2012), p. 46, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/revolutionary-struggle-for-democracy/>

¹⁶ See on this e.g. 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: Revolutionary Communism No. 1 (2011), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/britain-left-and-the-uprising/>

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.

III. The Tradition of Lenin and Trotsky

Such an approach draws on the method as it was elaborated by Lenin's Bolsheviks as well as the Fourth International of Trotsky. Lenin always emphasized that the important role of the democratic question in the revolutionary program. He explained that 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 practice full democracy, so the proletariat cannot prepare for its victory over the bourgeoisie without an all-round, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy.“*¹⁷

The Bolsheviks and later the Fourth International, always considered the slogan of a Constituent Assembly as a key tactic in the democratic program. The program of the Russian Marxists, adopted at the Second Congress in 1903 and upheld until the revolution fourteen years later, concluded with: *“The RSDLP, for its part, is firmly convinced that the complete, consistent and lasting realisation of these political and social changes can only be achieved through the overthrow of the autocracy and the convocation of a constituent assembly, freely elected by the entire nation.“*¹⁸

Even after taking power in October 1917 the Bolsheviks organized the election of a Constituent Assembly in order to help the popular masses overcome their illusions in the petty-bourgeois and reformist parties (after this task was accomplished, the Soviet Government unceremoniously dissolved the Constituent Assembly in January 1918 without facing serious resistance from the demoralized enemies).

Lenin, in his famous book *“‘Left-Wing’ Communism – An Infantile Disorder”* strongly defended the tactics of the Bolsheviks. Countering the arguments of various ultra-lefts who opposed raising democratic demands and participating in parliamentary elections, he explained:

“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. (...) 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

¹⁷ V.I. Lenin: *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (1916); in: LCW 22, p. 144

¹⁸ Programme of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, adopted at the Second Congress of the Party in 1903, in: Robert H. McNeal (Ed.): *Resolutions and decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Vol. I (1898-1917)*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1974, p. 45

*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.”*¹⁹

Lenin also emphasized that as long as the masses were not prepared to actively support a Soviet system based on workers and poor peasants councils and militias, as long it is necessary for revolutionaries to fight for democratic demands including the slogan of a Constituent Assembly:

*“Despite views that are today often to be met with in Europe and America, the Bolsheviks began their victorious struggle against the parliamentary and (in fact) bourgeois republic and against the Mensheviks in a very cautious manner, and the preparations they made for it were by no means simple. At the beginning of the period mentioned, we did not call for the overthrow of the government but explained that it was impossible to overthrow it without first changing the composition and the temper of the Soviets. 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.”*²⁰

Later such an approach was defended and developed by Leon Trotsky, Lenin’s closest collaborator from the time of the October Revolution until his death in January 1924. Trotsky, too, emphasized that democratic demands remain a crucial part of the revolutionary program as long as the masses retain democratic illusions.

*“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.”*²¹

¹⁹ V.I. Lenin: ‘Left-Wing’ Communism— An Infantile Disorder, in: LCW Vol. 31, pp. 59-60

²⁰ V.I. Lenin: ‘Left-Wing’ Communism— An Infantile Disorder, in: LCW Vol. 31, p. 31

²¹ Leon Trotsky: Our Present Tasks (1933), Trotsky Writings 1933-34, pp. 137-138

Consequently, the slogan of a Constituent Assembly would play a key role in the programs the Trotskyist movement raised in a number of countries in the 1920s and 1930s (e.g. in China, in Spain, in India, in Indochina). Trotsky remained convinced of the legitimacy of the Constituent Assembly slogan until 1940, i.e. the end of his life. In his most important programmatic document – the *Transitional Program* (which served as the foundation program of the Fourth International in 1938) – he concluded:

“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.” ²²

And at its emergency conference after the outbreak of the Second World War, in May 1940, - the last conference before Trotsky's death – the Fourth International emphasized again that the democratic demands and the tactic of Constituent Assembly, in particular, plays an important role in the revolutionary struggle.

“Democratic and transitional slogans retain their full validity, however, especially in the relatively more advanced subject countries like China and India. The slogan of a National or Constituent Assembly remains the most powerful lever for marshaling the masses in struggle. But into this slogan the revolutionary party of the workers must pour the full content of the agrarian revolution and the fight for national liberation. Otherwise it becomes an easy means of deception in the hands of the national bourgeoisie, as it did in China with Comintern help in 1927 and again at the present time. The democratic struggle must not be left in the hands of the national bourgeoisie but must, under conditions of a rising mass movement, find expression in the creation of workers', peasants', and soldiers' councils on a local, provincial, and national scale, as organs of mass struggle and sooner or later as organs of workers' power. Such a power, counterposed to that of the national bourgeoisie, will alone be capable of carrying the democratic revolution through to the end, liberating the peasants on the land, and the land itself from the grip of both native and foreign exploiters.” ²³

In summary, we think these brief excerpts demonstrate beyond doubt that Lenin and Trotsky considered the slogan of a Constituent Assembly as a crucial component of the revolutionary program.

²² 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

²³ *The Colonial World And The Second Imperialist War*, Resolution adopted the Emergency Conference of the Fourth International, 1940, in: *Documents of the Fourth International*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, pp. 396-397

IV. Ultra-Leftist Rejection of the Constituent Assembly Slogan

Let us now deal with the arguments raised by several ultra-left and opportunist opponents. The *Liaison Committee of Communists* – a federation of sectarian grouplet in the U.S., New Zealand and Zimbabwe – has used the event of the Algerian Revolution to renew its criticism of the RCIT. This group has repeatedly attacked the RCIT for defending bourgeois democracy against reactionary coup d'états such as Egypt in 2013 or Thailand in 2014. ²⁴ We note, in passing, that this “ultrrrra-revolutionary” group also distinguished itself not long ago by adapting to Trump’s “America First” chauvinism by opposing the traditional communist call for “open borders” and, instead, advocated “workers” immigration control in the U.S. and New Zealand! ²⁵

“Calls for any compromise with the national bourgeoisie or imperialism, such as a Constituent Assembly (CA), fall well short of victory and must lead to defeat. The RCIT makes the mistake of calling for a workers’ and poor peasants’ government based on workers’ and poor peasants’ councils to ‘convene’ a “revolutionary constituent assembly”. This is putting the revolution into reverse. Workers and Peasants councils are the political base for armed workers power in government. A CA is a bourgeois parliament. In other words, a popular front. Such a CA would become the focus for counter-revolutionary attempts to destroy a new Workers and Poor Peasants Government. Attaching the word “revolutionary” does not change the class composition of the popular front.” ²⁶

Here we have, once more, an example of fake-radicalism that hides its ignorance of Marxist teachings behind radical phrase-mongering. The ultra-lefts characterize the slogan of a Constituent Assembly as a “*compromise with the national bourgeoisie or imperialism*” and a “*popular front*”. So, we ask, how on earth could have Lenin and Trotsky advocated the tactic of a Constituent Assembly throughout their entire political life? How could the Fourth International support this tactic in its founding program? Might the Bordegists have been right in calling Lenin and Trotsky “opportunist”? According to the sectarian geniuses of the LCC, generations of Marxists have been unaware that the Bolsheviks and the Fourth International sought compromises with imperialism and championed the popular front! ²⁷

To a certain degree it is true that we suggest a “*compromise*”. But it is a compromise not with the bourgeoisie or imperialism but with the current underdeveloped political consciousness of the popular masses. Only an obstinate proponent of ostrichism denies the reality that the political consciousness of the workers and popular masses is dominated by various shades of petty-bourgeois

²⁴ See on this, e.g., RCIT: It is Time to Break with a Wrong Method! Open Letter from the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT) to the Members of the Liaison Committee of Communists, July 2015, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/open-letter-to-lcc/>. In this document readers find references to various documents on the relevant issues.

²⁵ See on this Michael Pröbsting: Patriotic "Anti-Capitalism" for Fools. Yet Again on the CWG/LCC's Support for "Workers" Immigration Control and Protectionism in the US, 30.5.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/cwg-lcc-us-protectionism/>. In this article readers find references to more articles from the RCIT as well as of our opponents on the issue of migration and “open borders”.

²⁶ CWG(NZ): Algeria and the Arab Revolution, March 2019, <http://redrave.blogspot.com/2019/03/algeria-and-arab-revolution.html>

²⁷ As we have pointed out in the pamphlet mentioned above (“*The Struggle for Democracy in the Imperialist Countries Today*”), the LCC is not the only group rejecting the slogan of a Constituent Assembly. The whole sectarian school of the so-called “Spartacists” in the tradition of the recently passed away James Robertson with their various splitters is also largely opposed to this tactic. Coming from an economist and opportunist approach, Alan Wood’s IMT has also attacked this slogan (for a more detailed discussion of their arguments see chapter 8 of this pamphlet).

democratism. There is not the slightest indication that the masses oppose a bourgeois democratic system with parliamentary institutions and, instead, would directly embrace a soviet system.

As soon as one takes this reality into account, the tactic of Constituent Assembly is not a compromise with the bourgeoisie or imperialism but rather a tactic relating to engaging, confronting, and overcoming the limitations of prevailing mass consciousness. This might not be relevant for the sectarians who prefer armchair fantasizing about the Fata Morgana of the masses longing for the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is, however, absolutely relevant to Marxists intervening in the revolutionary transformation of those masses!

The slogan of a Constituent Assembly is one that can play an important role in mobilizing the masses – still harboring illusions in bourgeois democracy – to fight for the highest possible form of democracy within the framework of bourgeois democracy. Calling for the convening of a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly can serve as a democratic measure against the ruling elites. In the context of proper timing it can allow the working class and oppressed to gain experience in organizing their own power while simultaneously opposing the treacherous policies of class enemies.

The comrades are anxious to point out a contradiction in our logic. They accuse us of “...*putting the revolution into reverse. Workers and Peasants councils are the political base for armed workers power in government. A CA is a bourgeois parliament.*”. This is a contradiction, however, only for the sectarian mechanist who lacks any dialectical understanding of real life.

Workers and peasants councils emerge as organs of struggle. They don't emerge because the masses subjectively decide that they want to get rid of capitalism and have chosen socialism. Marxists work towards a development where such popular councils and militias confront a bourgeois government, try to overthrow it, and take power into their own hands. However, this does not mean that the masses would have already transcended their bourgeois democratic prejudices. Have the LCC comrades forgotten the important experience of the Russian Revolution where the Bolsheviks held elections for a Constituent Assembly even *after* taking power?

The sectarians claim that a Constituent Assembly could be used by the bourgeoisie for their own reactionary agenda. This is undoubtedly true. But for any thinking person this is not a legitimate argument. Nearly every democratic demand, even wage increases, *can* be exploited and utilized by the ruling class for their own purposes. Let us list some examples: wage increases can be utilized by the capitalists to pacify the working class and persuade it into accepting concessions such as “flexible” working hours; the broadening of the right to vote (women's suffrage or the lowering of the voting age to 16 years – the latter has taken place in several EU countries in the past years) with the deliberate intent of blunting the class struggle; the use of agrarian reform in poor countries to bolster a layer of wealthy middle peasants; formal sovereignty for a colony with its actual transformation into a semi-colonial country dependent on imperialism. The tactic is called *bait and switch*.

One can easily find dozens of instances for each of these above-mentioned bourgeois political gambits. But should these lead revolutionaries to refrain from fighting for higher wages, for broadening of the right to vote, for an agrarian reform, or for national self-determination? Only the most sectarian die-hard could arrive at such a conclusion!

No, the relevant point is *how* to fight for such democratic goals, i.e. to fight for these not in a passive and bureaucratic way which would make it easy for the capitalists and the reformist traitors to

liquidate the revolutionary potential of such issues. Instead, Marxists must create a revolutionary path in fighting for such democratic goals so that it enables the working class and oppressed to organize themselves, to strengthen their combative abilities, and to develop an increasingly political class consciousness.

It is the same with the slogan of the Constituent Assembly. The slogan in itself is not a miracle that can solve the problems of the class struggle. It can serve to advance the class struggle but it can do so only if this tactic is applied in a revolutionary manner. In other words, there is no guarantee that the struggle for a Constituent Assembly will result in a victory for the working class. It is, however, guaranteed that if one rejects the fight for democratic demands like the Constituent Assembly, the liberation struggle will be doomed.

Marxists must develop tactics that *acknowledge* the *current* political consciousness of the popular masses. We cannot impose an imagined socialist consciousness that we, in fact, must be the active agents in developing. The purpose of revolutionary democratic tactics is rooted in engaging current consciousness, helping the masses realize its limitations, and achieving socialist class consciousness as an outcome. That's a transformative process. We are midwives, not passive witnesses or commentators.

In this context it is crucial to understand the dynamic in Algeria and Sudan and, in general, the entire Arab Revolution. The explosive, revolutionary potential of these struggles does not lie in the fact that the masses enter their battles with a pre-existing desire for a socialist rupture with the capitalist political and economic order. Such an advanced political mass consciousness does not exist in the Arab world (nor anywhere else, currently). No, the revolutionary potential exists, rather, in the irresolvable contradiction between the desire of the masses for bread and democratic rights and the impossibility of decaying capitalism to satisfy these basic needs.

Formulated on a more theoretical level, it confirms the fundamental assumption of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. Simply stated the goals of the democratic revolution (freedom, agrarian reform, national independence, etc.) cannot be fulfilled as long as the bourgeoisie remains in power. The realization of the democratic revolution requires that the working class, in alliance with the poor peasantry, takes power, expropriates the bourgeoisie and, thereby, opens the road towards the socialist transformation of society.

"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." ²⁸

Without understanding the revolutionary potential of the democratic question and its relationship to the strategy of permanent revolution, one is incapable of finding a correct political orientation in the

²⁸ Leon Trotsky: *The Permanent Revolution* (1929), Pathfinder Press, New York 1969, p. 277

current events in the Arab world (or anywhere else). Ignoring the challenges of prevailing mass consciousness, with all of its initial petty-bourgeois democratic limitations, leads directly to the cul-de-sac of sectarian isolation. Revolutionaries must champion the democratic question and not leave it to the petty-bourgeois leaders and bourgeois traitors! This was the approach of the Bolsheviks and Leon Trotsky... and this is our approach too!

Unfortunately, the sectarians stand aloof from direct experience in the mass struggles and retain little interest in the teachings of the Marxist classics. The consequences demonstrate how important it is for revolutionaries – even if their numbers are small – to seriously study the scientific program of Marxism and combine that with consistent mass work. Failing that, one ends up with bloodless treatises discussed in isolated circles!

V. Mandelite “Fourth International”: An Opportunist Caricature of the Constituent Assembly Slogan

Looking at the Mandelite “Fourth International”, we see the opposite error. This is one of several international entities claiming to be the “Fourth International”. Actually it is the largest one, although, it hardly functions as an international organization at all. It is rather a pluralistic federation of national organizations lacking democratic centralism. Decisions of the international leadership are not binding on anyone. Historically, it comes from the centrist, post-war tradition of Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel. However, today the Mandelite “Fourth International” has moved so far away from Trotskyism that their national organizations have dropped any pretence of building revolutionary parties. Affiliates seek out opportunities to liquidate themselves into reformist or populist formations (“broad parties”). It is no exaggeration to state that the majority of the members of this international do not even regard themselves “Trotskyists”.²⁹

However, there also exists a left opposition inside the Mandelite “Fourth International”. It has the support of sections – or parts of sections (some are already expelled) – in the U.S., France, Spain, Greece and Canada, as well as, individual supporters in other countries. This current calls, inconsistently, for a more orthodox Trotskyism. This tendency is small. At the last world congress of the Mandelite “Fourth International” in spring 2018 it received the support of only 5% of the delegates. Unfortunately, these comrades failed to break with the arch-opportunist Mandelite “Fourth International”, despite the fact that they have been working inside this body for many years and have no prospect of overcoming their status as the small left-fig-leaf of a very right-wing, centrist formation.

The approach of the Mandelite “Fourth International” towards the current events in Algeria and Sudan underlines once more their extraordinary opportunism. In the statements of its international

²⁹ For a full analysis of degeneration of the Fourth International and its fragments (including the current of Pablo and Mandel), see our book *Workers Power (Britain) and Irish Workers Group: The Death Agony of the Fourth International*, London 1983, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/death-agonies-of-the-fourth-international-1983/>; see also Michael Pröbsting: *Healy’s Pupils Fail to Break with their Master. The revolutionary tradition of the Fourth International and the centrist tradition of its Epigones Gerry Healy and the “International Committee” – A Reply from the RCIT to “Socialist Fight”, October 2013*, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 16, November 2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/healy-and-fourth-international/>

leadership as well as of its Algerian section, the Mandelistas raise the slogan of the Constituent Assembly not as a *tactic* but rather as an *alternative slogan for power*.

“Hence the responsibility of socialist activists to join forces on the basis of a programme of demands with a perspective of class independence that will accompany the mobilization and organization of the working class, youth and women for a sovereign constituent assembly that will ensure a radical democratic regime and an independent economy to meet the basic needs of the population, based on collective ownership and grassroots control. (...) The Fourth International expresses its full solidarity with the struggles of the Algerian people to bring down a regime, of dictatorship, corruption and dependence, and supports its right to popular sovereignty through a sovereign Constituent Assembly.”

The same statement ends with the final slogans: *“Down with the dictatorship of corruption and archaic dependence, for a sovereign Constituent Assembly!”*³⁰

A similar opportunist spirit characterizes the statement of the “Socialist Workers Party” (PST), the Algerian section of the Mandelites:

*“For the PST, the uprising of the popular masses against the regime that began on 22 February 2019 challenges the entire system, its institutions and its constitution. No superficial tinkering, no transitional subterfuge, no providential man can replace the will of the people, the source of all democratic legitimacy. For the PST, only the election of a sovereign constituent assembly, representative of the democratic and social aspirations of workers, youth, women and all oppressed people in our country, can constitute a real democratic solution to the current crisis. For the PST, the time has come for the Algerian popular masses to self-organize in factories, universities and high schools, neighbourhoods and villages, for women and the unemployed, etc., on the one hand, and, on the other, the priority is winning back our democratic freedoms, in particular the freedoms of expression, organization, demonstration, trade union freedoms and the right to strike.”*³¹

The Mandelite statement on Sudan is no better. It limits itself to give a rosy picture of the bourgeois-Stalinist opposition – which calls for a “transitional government” which takes power for four years without any elections or control, as we showed above.

*“The organisation of the uprising was first and foremost driven by the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA), composed of networks of doctors, teachers and other civil servants and professionals. They kept the principles and memory of class struggle trade unionism alive while the unions were put under the total control of the regime, and progressive militancy severely repressed over long decades (We should remember that the Sudanese Communist Party was one of the most massive in the Arab world). They have been able to combine this memory and give a prominent place to youth but also to women, which allows a strong inventiveness and the necessary size and strength in the current situation. Under this impetus, the revolution adopted a plural political and organizational leadership called Forces of Freedom and Change, with a founding document of the same name that lays the foundations for a democratic break with the regime and its policies.”*³²

³⁰ Solidarity with the Algerian people in their struggle for popular sovereignty! Renaissance of the Algerian revolution!, Statement of Fourth International Bureau, 28 March 2019, <http://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article6004>

³¹ PST (Algeria): For a sovereign constituent assembly, the struggle continues! Algiers, 3 April 2019, <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article6015>

³² Solidarity with the Sudanese revolution! Adopted unanimously by the International Committee of the Fourth International, 5 March 2019, <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article5981>

Concerning the perspective of struggle, the Mandeliste statement on Sudan does not even raise the slogan of a Constituent Assembly but limits itself to some empty well-wishing to the insurrectionary people!

“The Fourth International expresses its full solidarity with this powerful uprising of the Sudanese people, and calls for an end to repression and the release of detainees. We wish them every success in their goal of overthrowing an autocratic regime that has been responsible for the suffering of the Sudanese people for too long. We hope that this dynamic will contribute to the momentum of popular struggles.”

These quotes demonstrate quite clearly how little the Mandelites have in common with Trotskyism. None of their statements on the revolutionary events in Algeria and Sudan raises, or even touches, the issue of the working class, in alliance with the poor peasantry, *taking power!* Not even in disguised form is there a single word about a workers and peasant government! In short, these are not statements outlining in any way a socialist perspective but only the short cut to a radical democratic dead end.³³

As we have demonstrated above, Marxists raise the slogan of a Constituent Assembly in situations like those that exist today in Algeria and Sudan. But they don't raise it as an *alternative* to the perspective of workers and peasant government. They don't encourage illusions that such an Assembly should take the power and lead the country to freedom and equality! This is the petty-bourgeois, reformist distortion of the Constituent Assembly tactic.

True, Marxist delegates in such an assembly would use it as a platform to advocate the revolutionary road to socialism. But they would not create the illusion that such a Constituent Assembly itself could accomplish this! No, this can be only done by a workers and poor peasant government based on popular councils and militias. Hiding this essential truth, pretending that the same goals could be implemented by such a Constituent Assembly is the worst form of vulgar opportunism! It reflects, once more, the Mandelites' adaption to various petty-bourgeois democratic forces.

Such an adaption is clearly reflected in multiple formulations. Take the statement of the Mandeliste's international leadership on Algeria. It does not call for a workers and peasant government but rather

³³ The Mandelites are not the only centrist force that demonstrates their opportunism in face of the second wave of the Arab Revolution. To give another example from the centrist Cabinet of Curiosities we refer to the “League for the Fifth International” – the organization from which the founding cadres of the RCIT were expelled in 2011. This organization adapts to the bourgeois-Stalinist opposition in Sudan to such a degree that it takes up and raises its slogan for a bourgeois civilian government! (*“For a democratic all-civilian provisional government, not under the tutelage of the generals!”*; L5I: Revolution in Sudan, 11/04/2019 <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/revolution-sudan>) After its “critical” preference for imperialist free trade agreements instead of imperialist protectionism, after its support for Britain to stay in the EU, and after its illusionary program for the socialist reform of the EU, this is just another example of opportunist adaption to petty-bourgeois liberalism by this ex-Trotskyist organization. (For a critique see e.g. Michael Pröbsting: The Reformist Pipe Dream of a “Socialist” European Union. Is A Socialist Transformation of the Imperialist EU Possible? A Marxist Analysis on the L5I's Latest Opportunistic Adaptation to Labour Reformism, 01.10.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/is-a-socialist-transformation-of-the-imperialist-eu-possible/>; Marxism, the European Union and Brexit. The L5I and the European Union: A Right Turn away from Marxism. The recent change in the L5I's position towards the support for EU membership represents a shift away from its own tradition, of the Marxist method, and of the facts; August 2016, in: Revolutionary Communist No. 55, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/eu-and-brexite/>; Does the EU Represent “Bourgeois Democratic Progress”? Once again, on the EU and the Tactics of the Working Class, 16.09.2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/eu-brexite-article/>.)

for a “*radical democratic regime*.” This is the classic formula of a petty-bourgeois nationalist, democratic government but not of a workers and peasant government aiming towards a rupture with capitalism.

Likewise, it is characteristic that the same statement calls for “*an independent economy*” instead of an economy where the bourgeois elite is expropriated and which strives towards socialism. Again, a crucial concession to petty-bourgeois nationalism!

It is also characteristic that Mandeliste statements call for the convocation of a “*sovereign Constituent Assembly*” but don’t say a word *how* such an assembly could come into existence (nor how it should not come into existence). It is a well-known fact that the bourgeoisie has repeatedly convoked Constituent Assemblies but kept them under their control and manipulated them for their own ends. It is exactly this fact that the sectarians use in order to justify their contempt for this tactic. True, the sectarians “forget” that this is relevant for all democratic demands, i.e. that they can be utilized by the ruling class to pacify revolutionary struggles. Should revolutionaries correspondingly abandon the entire democratic program? That would be foolish. No, revolutionaries must help the working class to see through its limitations and utilize all those democratic rights to advance itself in struggle against the bourgeoisie.

But the opportunist Mandelites make the exact opposite mistake: They pose the slogan of a *Constituent Assembly* not as a revolutionary tactic of the mass struggle but rather as a reformist demand to the ruling class. They don’t include a single word about workers and peasant councils and militias that would convoke, control and defend such a Constituent Assembly. Under such conditions a Constituent Assembly will inevitably be controlled by the bourgeoisie and, hence, betray the masses.

This is why the RCIT calls for a *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly*, i.e. one which is convened and controlled 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 have taken power or initiated a period of dual power.

This has also always been the understanding of Lenin and Trotsky as we demonstrated in our pamphlet mentioned above. In an article written in the midst of the 1905 Russian Revolution 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.”*³⁴

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

³⁴ V. I. Lenin: *The Democratic Tasks of the Revolutionary Proletariat* (1905); in: LCW Vol. 8, p. 517

*“The slogan of the Constituent Assembly becomes an empty abstraction, often simple charlatantry, 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.”*³⁵

It is in the same spirit of Lenin and Trotsky with which the RCIT raises the slogan of a *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly*, i.e. neither isolated nor as an appeal to the ruling class but as a fighting perspective in the context of a program of struggle for working class power.

Finally, we want to state our astonishment that this arch-opportunist statement on Algeria has been republished *without any critical comment* (!) by *Socialist Action* (USA) which is a leading organization of the mentioned above “Left Opposition” within the Mandeliste “Fourth International”.³⁶

We fear this reflects a thoroughly inconsistent approach of *Socialist Action* (USA) and the whole “Left Opposition” in their relationship with their right-wing centrist international. On one hand, they express themselves in devastating terms about the Mandeliste “Fourth International”. According to *Socialist Action* (US), the Mandeliste “Fourth International” is facing a “long-term and ongoing political and organizational degeneration of this formerly revolutionary world party”. Such degeneration causes the SA(US) to aim “at re-orienting the FI to its historic rejection of coalition capitalist (“popular front”) politics and imperialist wars, unconditional support to the right of oppressed nations and peoples to self-determination, and the construction of disciplined revolutionary parties on the Leninist model aimed at the construction of a world socialist order. Today, most of these founding programmatic principles have been abandoned. FI sections largely shun the construction of Leninist parties in favor of participation in “more influential” reformist “broad parties” with an electoralist orientation.”³⁷

But what *conclusions* do *Socialist Action* (USA) and the whole “Left Opposition” draw from this devastating assessment of the Mandeliste “Fourth International”? None! Despite years and years of right-wing opportunist drift, despite years and years of fruitless lamentation as an impotent left opposition within this opportunist current, *Socialist Action* (USA) and the “Left Opposition” don’t demonstrate any serious desire to *break* with this centrist, pro-popular frontist swamp. As a consequence, they remain a left-wing figleaf to an arch-opportunist current.

No, comrades of *Socialist Action* (USA) and the “Left Opposition”: it is high time to draw conclusions from you criticism and to break with the Mandeliste “Fourth International”! Stop acting as constant noodges. Go forward as an independent organization on the basis of a revolutionary Marxist program and democratic centralist principles!

³⁵ 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

³⁶ <https://socialistaction.org/2019/03/28/solidarity-with-the-algerian-people-in-their-struggle-for-popular-sovereignty/>

³⁷ (12) *Socialist Action National Convention registers gains*, The Editors, January 16, 2019, <https://socialistaction.org/2019/01/16/socialist-action-national-convention-registers-gains/>

VI. Conclusions

Let us conclude: authentic Marxists have to be the most consistent fighters for a *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly*. They must do so not because such an assembly in itself is the solution to the political and social problems but rather in order to help the masses overcome their illusions in bourgeois democracy. 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, authentic Marxists must not reinforce already existing popular illusions in bourgeois democracy. They must not envision 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 authentic Trotskyism and its sectarian and opportunist distortions.

All these examples of revisionism show once more how crucial it is for authentic revolutionaries around the world to unite on the basis of a clear program. In order to combat the reformist traitors and centrist confusionists, it is urgent to advance the construction of a Revolutionary World Party!

Those comrades who agree with such a perspective must draw the obvious conclusions and break with the opportunist ballast. Those who have already broken must unite internationally with other revolutionaries to avoid the trap of national isolation. Those who are willing to unite internationally should move from words to deeds. This is the way forward that the RCIT proposes! Join us. There is no time to lose!