

Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution

A Leninist Critique

Doug Lorimer

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I. Introduction

Leon Trotsky was one of the outstanding Marxist revolutionaries of the 20th century. A leading figure in the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party from the time of its second congress in 1903, after joining the Bolsheviks in July 1917, Trotsky rapidly became one of its central leaders. When the Bolsheviks won a majority in the Petrograd soviet (council) of workers' and soldiers' deputies, Trotsky was elected its president and in that capacity headed the organisation of the insurrection of November 7 (October 25 in the tsarist calendar). A member of the first Soviet government, he served as People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs until the signing of the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty between Soviet Russia and imperial Germany, and then as People's Commissar of War. In the latter capacity, he was responsible for the organisation of the Red Army in 1918 and was its supreme commander during the 1918-21 Russian civil war. A central leader of the Communist International during its first five years, from the mid-1920s he became the chief spokesperson of the Bolshevik-Leninist Opposition within the Soviet Communist Party, fighting against the antiproletarian line of the Stalin bureaucracy.

During the 1930s Trotsky made his most significant contributions to the theoretical arsenal of the Marxist movement. In 1932-33 he wrote a three-volume *History of the Russian Revolution*, providing an incomparable Marxist exposition of the events that led to the Bolshevik victory in 1917. During the same period, in his writings on Germany, he made the first systematic Marxist analysis of the nature of fascism and of the strategy and tactics needed by the working-class movement to combat and defeat this reactionary phenomenon. In his 1936 book *The Revolution Betrayed* he provided the first consistently Marxist explanation of the nature and causes of the regime established in the Soviet Union under Stalin.

From the time of his exile from the USSR by Stalin in 1929 until his death at the hands of a Stalinist agent in 1940, Trotsky dedicated himself to the forging of a new

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international organisation of Marxist cadres — the Fourth International — based upon the defence of the political heritage of Bolshevism and the programmatic acquisitions of the early years of the Communist International. He regarded this as his most important contribution to the revolutionary movement.

James P. Cannon, one of Trotsky's key collaborators in this project, pointed out in *The History of American Trotskyism* that: "Trotskyism is not a new movement, a new doctrine, but the restoration, the revival of genuine Marxism as it was expounded and practised in the Russian revolution and in the early days of the Communist International."¹ In one important doctrinal respect however the movement that Trotsky founded in the 1930s departed from this claim.

Explaining the factors that were responsible for the success of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, Lenin noted in 1919 that one of these was that "Russia's backwardness merged in a peculiar way the proletarian revolution against the bourgeoisie with the peasant revolution against the landowners". Elaborating on this point, Lenin added:

As long ago as 1856, Marx spoke, in reference to Prussia, of the possibility of a peculiar combination of proletarian revolution and peasant war. From the beginning of 1905 the Bolsheviks advocated the idea of a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.²

Despite the fact that the 1927 platform of the Bolshevik-Leninist Opposition in the CPSU had argued in favour of this idea, counterposing it to the Stalinists' neo-Menshevik formula of a "bloc of four classes" (i.e., a regime "uniting" representatives of the workers, peasants, petty-bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie), from its foundation the international Trotskyist movement officially rejected the Bolshevik formula in favour of a revived version of Trotsky's pre-1917 theory of "permanent revolution".

The Opposition platform had argued that:

The slogan of "soviets" proposed by Lenin for China as early as 1920 had every possible justification in the conditions existing in 1926-27. Soviets in China would have offered a form through which the forces of the peasantry could have been consolidated under the leadership of the proletariat. They would have been real institutions of the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry...

The doctrine of Lenin, that a bourgeois-democratic revolution can be carried through only by a union of the working class and the peasants (under the leadership of the former) against the bourgeoisie, is not only applicable to China, and to similar colonial and semicolonial countries, but in fact indicates the only road to victory in those countries...

It follows from this that a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat

and peasantry, taking the form of soviets in China, would have every chance, in the present age of imperialist wars and proletarian revolutions and given the existence of the USSR, of developing relatively rapidly into a socialist revolution...

In mockery of Lenin's teaching, Stalin asserted that the slogan of soviets in China would mean the demand for an immediate formation of the proletarian dictatorship. As a matter of fact Lenin, as long ago as in the revolution of 1905, advanced the slogan of soviets as organs of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasants.³

The first resolution adopted by the international Trotskyist movement, however, stated that one of the fundamental principles of the movement was "[r]ejection of the formula of the '*democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry*' as a separate regime distinguished from the *dictatorship of the proletariat*, which wins the support of the peasantry and the oppressed masses in general; rejection of the anti-Marxist theory of the peaceful 'growing over' of the democratic dictatorship into the socialist one".⁴

This position was enshrined in the basic programmatic statement adopted by the Fourth International at its founding congress in 1938. This document — the "Transitional Program" — declared that the Bolshevik formula of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" had been "buried by history" and that the Stalinists had "tried to revive" it. Moreover, it claimed that when they "had revived" this formula the Stalinists had given it "a completely 'democratic', i.e., bourgeois content, *counterposing* it to the dictatorship of the proletariat".⁵ Instead of the Bolshevik formula, the document declared that the "general trend of revolutionary developments in all backward countries can be determined by the formula of the *permanent revolution* in the sense definitively imparted to it by the three revolutions in Russia (1905, February 1917, October 1917)".⁶

This implied that Trotsky's pre-1917 theory of "permanent revolution" was superior to the Bolsheviks' policy as a guide to revolutionary action in industrially backward countries. This view was to become an officially endorsed article of faith among Trotskyists.

The Trotskyist movement has been the main vehicle through which the legacy of Bolshevism and the early years of the Communist International has been transmitted to many revolutionary-minded workers, students and intellectuals in large parts of the world, particularly the advanced capitalist countries, in the last decades of the 20th century. Any attempt to build an international movement that is really based, as Cannon put it more than fifty years ago, on a revival of "genuine Marxism as it was expounded and practised in the Russian revolution and in the early days of the Communist International", cannot avoid dealing with the misrepresentations of Bolshevik theory and policy made by Trotsky in the 1920s and '30s. This work is a contribution to that task.

I have limited the discussion of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution to those aspects of his theory which differ from the theory and policy of Leninism. The Stalinists claimed that the theory of permanent revolution was opposed to Leninism because Trotsky rejected the idea that a socialist society could be brought into being in one country, i.e., the USSR, without the victory of socialist revolutions in the industrially more developed countries. While rejection of the *Stalinist* theory of "socialism in one country" was a key part of Trotsky's theory, as he presented it from the late 1920s on, this aspect of Trotsky's theory fully accorded with the views of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Indeed, until late 1924 Stalin himself rejected the idea that socialism, i.e., a classless society of freely associated producers, could be achieved in one country alone. In the first edition of his pamphlet *Foundations of Leninism*, published in May 1924, Stalin wrote:

Can this task be fulfilled, can the final victory of socialism be attained in a single country without the joint efforts of the proletariat in several advanced countries? No, it cannot. In order to overthrow the bourgeoisie, the efforts of a single country are sufficient; this is proved by the history of our revolution. For the final victory of socialism, *for the organisation of socialist production, efforts of a single country, and particularly of such a peasant country as Russia, are inadequate; for that, the efforts of the proletariat of several advanced countries are required.*⁷

Here Stalin was only repeating Lenin's view of the matter. In 1922, for example, Lenin wrote:

But we have not finished building even the foundations of socialist economy and the hostile powers of moribund capitalism can still deprive us of that. We must clearly appreciate this and frankly admit it; for there is nothing more dangerous than illusions (and vertigo, particularly at high altitudes). And there is absolutely nothing terrible, nothing that should give legitimate grounds for the slightest despondency, in admitting this bitter truth; for we have always urged and reiterated the elementary truth of Marxism — that joint efforts of the workers of several advanced countries are needed for the victory of socialism.⁸

I have also not attempted to take up the innumerable distortions of Lenin's views on the question of the class dynamics of the Russian revolution made by later Trotskyists and by writers influenced by Trotskyism, preferring instead to concentrate on the original source of these distortions, i.e., Trotsky himself. ■

II. 1905 to 1917: Bolshevism & Trotskyism

The immediate task facing the working people of Russia was to carry through a bourgeois-democratic revolution — to bring down the tsarist autocracy, abolish semi-feudal landlordism, and secure political liberties. Both of the two main currents in the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party — the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks — were in agreement on this. However, they drew fundamentally opposing conclusions about what strategic line the Russian working class and its political vanguard should pursue to achieve this task.

1. Bolshevism versus Menshevism

The Mensheviks believed that the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia had to consolidate the political rule of the industrial capitalists. The Mensheviks therefore sought to forge a strategic alliance between the working class and the anti-tsarist, “enlightened liberal”, elements of the bourgeoisie. The aim of this alliance would be to replace the autocratic, semi-feudal tsarist regime with a capitalist-dominated democratic republic. In the Mensheviks’ view, a proletarian revolution would only become possible in Russia after many decades of capitalist development had transformed the country into a developed industrial society.

In opposition to this perspective, the Bolsheviks regarded the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia as fundamentally a *peasant* revolution against the survivals of feudalism. They therefore sought to forge a revolutionary alliance between the working class and the peasant masses. The Bolsheviks believed that the victory of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia could only be accomplished through the coming to power of a revolutionary government based on an alliance of the workers and peasants.

In a 1907 article, “The Attitude to the Bourgeois Parties”, Lenin summarised the differences between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks as follows:

The two trends in Russian Social Democracy on the question of an assessment of our

revolution and the tasks of the proletariat in it, had become perfectly clear at the very beginning of 1905, and in the spring of that year were given full, precise and formal expression, recognised by the organisations concerned, at the Bolshevik Third Congress of the R.S.D.L.P. in London and the Menshevik Conference held simultaneously in Geneva...In the view of the Bolsheviks the proletariat has had laid upon it the active task of pursuing the bourgeois-democratic revolution to its consummation and of being its leader. This is only possible if the proletariat is able to carry with it the masses of the democratic petty-bourgeoisie, especially the peasantry, in the struggle against the autocracy and the treacherous liberal bourgeoisie. The inevitability of bourgeois treachery was deduced by the Bolsheviks even then, before the open activities of the Constitutional-Democrats, the chief liberal party; the deduction was based on the class interests of the bourgeoisie and their fear of the proletarian movement.*

The footnote that Lenin appended to this paragraph stated: "The full victory of the revolution, said the Bolsheviks, is possible only as a revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry." Turning to the Mensheviks' position, Lenin wrote:

The Mensheviks were inclined to the view that the bourgeoisie are the motive force and that they determine the scope of the bourgeois revolution. The proletariat cannot lead the bourgeois revolution, but must fulfil only the role of the extreme opposition, and not strive to win power. The Mensheviks rejected in the most determined manner the idea of a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry...

The Bolsheviks asserted that the Mensheviks' views would actually lead to the slogans of the revolutionary proletariat degenerating to the slogans and tactics of the liberal-monarchist bourgeoisie. In 1905 the Mensheviks tried their hardest to prove that they alone defended the true proletarian policy and that the Bolsheviks were dissolving the working-class movement in bourgeois democracy. That the Mensheviks themselves had a most sincere desire for an independent proletarian policy can be seen from the following highly instructive tirade in one of the resolutions of that time, adopted at the Menshevik Conference in May 1905. "Social-Democracy," says the resolution, "will continue to oppose hypocritical friends of the people, oppose all those political parties that raise a liberal and democratic banner and refuse to give real support to the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat." Despite all these well-meant intentions, the incorrect tactical theories of the Mensheviks led, in actual fact, to their sacrificing proletarian independence for the liberalism of the monarchist bourgeoisie.¹

Looking back on these differences following the October 1917 Revolution, Lenin presented the same assessment of the basic strategic lines of divergence between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks in his November 1918 pamphlet *The Proletarian*

Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky. Since the tasks of the impending revolution were bourgeois-democratic, Lenin wrote, the Mensheviks argued that “the proletariat must not go beyond what is acceptable to the bourgeoisie and must pursue a policy of compromise with it”.

The Bolsheviks, Lenin pointed out, replied that “this was a bourgeois-liberal theory. The bourgeoisie were trying to bring about the reform of the [tsarist] state on bourgeois, *reformist*, not revolutionary lines, while preserving the monarchy, the landlord system, etc., as far as possible. The proletariat must carry through the bourgeois-democratic revolution to the end, not allowing itself to be ‘bound’ by the reformism of the bourgeoisie.”²

“The Bolsheviks”, Lenin wrote, “formulated the alignment of *class* forces in the bourgeois revolution as follows: the proletariat, winning over the peasants, will neutralise the liberal bourgeoisie and utterly destroy the monarchy, medievalism and the landlord system.” Lenin pointed out that it “is the alliance between the proletariat and the peasants *in general* that reveals the bourgeois character of the revolution, for the peasants in general are small producers who exist on the basis of commodity production”. He also explained that having carried through the bourgeois-democratic revolution to its conclusion in alliance with the peasantry as a whole, the Russian “proletariat will win over *the entire semi-proletariat* (all the working and exploited people), will neutralise the middle peasants and *overthrow* the bourgeoisie; this will be a socialist revolution, as distinct from a bourgeois-democratic revolution. (See my pamphlet *Two Tactics*, published in 1905 and reprinted in *Twelve Years*, St. Petersburg, 1907.)”³ This was a reference to his July 1905 pamphlet *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, in which Lenin had counterposed this strategic line to the views of Aleksandr Martynov, the Mensheviks’ chief spokesperson on the issue at the time.

The immediate aim of Bolshevik activity in Russia was to educate and organise the working class so that it could lead the peasant majority in the overthrow of the tsarist autocracy and the establishment of a provisional revolutionary government. In its class character and tasks, the Bolsheviks said, such a government would be a “revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry”. In *Two Tactics*, Lenin explained that this “slogan defines the classes upon which the new ‘builders’ of the new [political] superstructure can and must rely, the character of the new superstructure (a ‘democratic’ as distinct from a socialist dictatorship), and how it is to be built (dictatorship, i.e., the forcible suppression of resistance by force and the arming of the revolutionary classes of the people)”⁴

What would be the relationship between the proletariat and the peasantry in the

bourgeois-democratic revolution? “Our Party”, Lenin wrote in his 1909 article “The Aim of the Proletariat in Our Revolution”, “holds firmly to the view that the role of the proletariat is the *role of leader* in the bourgeois-democratic revolution; that *joint actions* of the proletariat and the peasantry are essential to carry it through to victory; that unless *political power is won* by the revolutionary classes, victory is impossible.”⁵

Through what forms of organisation would this revolutionary worker-peasant alliance be realised? In November 1905, a month after the workers formed the first soviet in Russia, Lenin pointed out in his first article on the soviets that “the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies should be regarded as the embryo of a *provisional revolutionary government*”.⁶ In his “Speech on the Attitude to the Bourgeois Parties” to the Fifth Congress of the RSDLP (1907), Lenin stated:

In all the embryonic organs of revolutionary power (the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies, the Soviets of Peasants’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, etc.) representatives of the proletariat were the main participants, followed by the most advanced of the insurgent peasantry.⁷

A revolutionary dictatorship — or state power — organised through the soviets, which united the representatives of the proletariat and the insurgent peasant masses — that, Lenin argued, would constitute a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.

Furthermore, Lenin argued that the completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution by an alliance of the workers and peasants, led by the Marxist party, would then enable the working class, in alliance with the poor, semi-proletarian majority of the peasantry, to pass uninterruptedly to the socialist revolution. He explained this point in his 1905 article, “Social Democracy’s Attitude Toward the Peasant Movement”:

...from the democratic revolution we shall at once, and precisely in accordance with the measure of our strength, the strength of the class conscious and organised proletariat, begin to pass to the socialist revolution. We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop half-way.

If we do not now and immediately promise all sorts of “socialisation”, that is because we know the actual conditions for that task to be accomplished, and we do not gloss over the new class struggle burgeoning within the peasantry, but reveal that struggle...

To try to calculate *now* what the combination of forces will be within the peasantry “on the day after” the revolution (the democratic revolution) is empty utopianism... we shall bend every effort to help the entire peasantry achieve the democratic revolution, *in order thereby to make it easier* for us, the party of the proletariat, to pass on as quickly as possible to the new and higher task — the socialist revolution.⁸

The Russian workers’ ability to fulfil this “new and higher task” would, in the Bolsheviks’

view, be made possible by the international impact of the victory of a bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia led by the revolutionary proletariat. The Bolsheviks believed that the victory of a worker-peasant democratic revolution in Russia would stimulate the proletarian-socialist revolution in the more industrially developed countries of Western Europe. The victory of proletarian-socialist revolutions in Western Europe, in turn, would open the way for the Russian proletariat to advance along the road of the socialist reorganisation of the Russian economy.

In his 1918 pamphlet Lenin pointed out that the Bolsheviks' policy had been verified by the course of developments in Russia in 1917-18:

Things have turned out just as we said they would. The course taken by the revolution has confirmed the correctness of our reasoning. *First*, with the "whole" of the peasants against the monarchy, against the landowners, against medievalism (and to that extent the revolution remains bourgeois, bourgeois-democratic). *Then*, with the poor peasants, with the semi-proletarians, with all the exploited, *against capitalism*, including the rural rich, the kulaks, the profiteers, and to that extent the revolution becomes a *socialist* one. To attempt to raise an artificial Chinese Wall between the first and second, to separate them *by anything else* than the degree of preparedness of the proletariat and the degree of its unity with the poor peasants, means to distort Marxism dreadfully, to vulgarise it, to substitute liberalism in its place...

The victorious Bolshevik revolution meant the end of vacillation, meant the complete destruction of the monarchy and of the landlord system (which had *not* been destroyed before the October Revolution). We carried the *bourgeois* revolution *to its conclusion*. The peasants supported us *as a whole*. Their antagonism to the socialist proletariat could not reveal itself all at once. The Soviets united the peasants *in general*. The class divisions among the peasants had not yet matured, had not yet come into the open.

That process took place in the summer and autumn of 1918...A wave of kulak revolts swept over Russia. The poor peasants learned, not from books or newspapers, *but from life itself*, that their interests were irreconcilably antagonistic to those of the kulaks, the rich, the rural bourgeoisie...

A year after the proletarian revolution in the capitals, and under its influence and with its assistance, the proletarian revolution began in the remote rural districts, and it has finally consolidated the power of the Soviets and Bolshevism, and has finally proved there is no force in the country that can withstand it.

Having completed the bourgeois-democratic revolution in alliance with the peasants as a whole, the Russian proletariat finally passed on to the socialist revolution when it succeeded in splitting the rural population, in winning over the rural proletarians and

semi-proletarians, and in uniting them against the kulaks and the bourgeoisie, including the peasant bourgeoisie.⁹

In the main report of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) which he presented to the party's eighth congress in March 1919, Lenin repeated this assessment of the development of the October Revolution:

In a country where the proletariat could only assume power with the aid of the peasantry, where the proletariat had to serve as the agent of a petty-bourgeois revolution, our revolution was largely a *bourgeois* revolution until the Poor Peasants' Committees were set up, i.e., until the summer and even the autumn of 1918...But from the moment the Poor Peasants' Committees began to be organised, our revolution became a *proletarian* revolution...only when the October Revolution began to spread to the rural districts and was consummated, in the summer of 1918, did we acquire a real proletarian base; only then did our revolution *become a proletarian revolution in fact*, and not merely in our proclamations, promises and declarations.¹⁰

In a report on "Work in the Countryside" which he presented on behalf of the RCP Central Committee to the same party congress, Lenin stated:

In October 1917 we seized power *together with the peasants as a whole*. This was a bourgeois revolution, in as much as the class struggle in the rural districts had not yet developed. As I have said, the real proletarian revolution in the rural districts began only in the summer of 1918. Had we not succeeded in stirring up this revolution our work would have been incomplete. The first stage was the seizure of power in the cities and the establishment of the Soviet form of government. The second stage was one which is fundamental for all socialists and without which socialists are not socialists, namely, to single out the proletarian and semi-proletarian elements in the rural districts and to ally them to the proletariat in order to wage the struggle against the bourgeoisie in the countryside. This stage is also in the main completed.¹¹

Thus, in the Bolsheviks' view, the October Revolution — as it had unfolded in the year after the insurrectionary seizure of political power in Petrograd on November 7, 1917 — had confirmed the correctness of their policy of carrying out the proletarian revolution in Russia through two stages. During the first stage, which lasted up to June-July 1918, the Russian working class transferred political power in the cities to the workers' soviets and other organs of proletarian state power. The urban proletariat was only able to do this because it forged a political alliance with the peasant masses, who, during this same period, transferred political power in the countryside and control of the semi-feudal estates to the peasant soviets.

During the second stage of the October Revolution, from July to November 1918, the urban workers used the state power they had seized and consolidated in the cities

during the first stage to forge an alliance with the semi-proletarian majority of the peasantry against the urban and rural bourgeoisie. Some 40,000 armed workers went into the countryside to help the poor peasants organise themselves independently of the rich-peasant dominated rural soviets, to confiscate the surplus grain, land, animals and tools of the rich peasants and to bring the rural soviets under the control of the poor peasants and agricultural workers.

Thus the October Revolution began as a worker-peasant democratic revolution and, then, eight months later, developed uninterruptedly into a proletarian-socialist revolution. It was the continuity of proletarian political leadership that gave the transition from the bourgeois revolution to the socialist revolution its uninterrupted character, i.e., made them two stages of a single, uninterrupted revolutionary process.

2. Trotsky's disagreements with the Bolsheviks

How then did Trotsky's pre-1917 views on this question differ from those of Lenin and the Bolsheviks?

Trotsky was in basic agreement with the Bolsheviks on the question of what approach the working class should take toward the liberal bourgeoisie. He agreed with them that the industrial capitalists and their political representatives (the liberals) would ally themselves more and more with the old order as the revolutionary struggle advanced, and that the working class should not look to the liberal bourgeoisie for leadership or regard it as a reliable or strategic ally in the struggle against the tsarist autocracy, as the Mensheviks urged. Trotsky agreed with the Bolsheviks that the working class, through its own party, had to play the role of political leader in the Russian revolution.

Trotsky had initially lined up with the Mensheviks following the split in the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party in 1903, but he broke with them over the above issue a year later in 1904. However, Trotsky's pre-1917 differences with the Bolsheviks were considerable.

While the Bolsheviks recognised that the working class needed to forge an alliance with the peasantry *as a whole* (including the peasant bourgeoisie, the rich peasants, or kulaks) in order to be able to come to power in Russia, Trotsky shared the Mensheviks' assessment of the peasantry, i.e., that it was too backward, dispersed and passive to play the role of a strategic ally (and be the major social force) in the bourgeois-democratic revolution. For example, in an article printed in September 1915 in *Nashe Slovo*, which he co-edited with the Menshevik internationalist Julius Martov, Trotsky wrote:

Today, based on the experience of the [1905] Russian revolution and of the reaction, we can expect the *peasantry* to play a less independent, not to mention decisive, role in the development of revolutionary events than it did in 1905. To the extent that the

peasantry has remained in the grip of “estate” and feudal slavery, it continues to suffer from economic and ideological disunity, political immaturity, cultural backwardness and helplessness. Despite its elemental opposition to the old regime, in every movement the peasantry’s social energy is always paralysed by these weaknesses. They force it to halt where really revolutionary action begins...

For the industrial proletariat, therefore, it is now — immeasurably more so than in 1905 — a question of attracting to its side the rural proletarian and semi-proletarian elements rather than the peasantry as “an estate.” In these circumstances, the revolutionary movement acquires an incomparably less “national,” and an incomparably more “class” character than it had in 1905...

Our social relations in this decade have developed toward a further reduction in the potential revolutionary role of the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry and a further growth in the numbers and productive importance of the industrial proletariat. If a “national” revolution could not be *completed* in 1905, then a second national revolution, that is, a revolution that unites “the nation” against the old regime, cannot even be *posed*.¹²

Thus while Trotsky rejected the Mensheviks’ petty-bourgeois reformist policy of a strategic alliance between the working class and the liberal bourgeoisie, he also rejected, as unrealisable, the Bolshevik policy of a transitional alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry as a whole. Instead, he believed that not only would the working class play the role of political vanguard in the anti-tsarist struggle, it would be the main social force in overthrowing and destroying the old order.

In the first major presentation of his theory of “permanent revolution”, contained in *Results and Prospects*, the concluding chapter in a volume of essays entitled *Our Revolution* (1906), Trotsky argued that “the nature of [the] socio-historical relations” in Russia “lays the whole burden of the bourgeois revolution on the shoulders of the proletariat”¹³

By dismissing the possibility and necessity of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry *as a whole*, Trotsky tended toward the view that the democratic revolution in Russia would be carried out by the proletariat alone, and that the “logic of its position” would compel the proletariat to implement socialist measures simultaneously with the tasks of the democratic revolution. This tended to give his perspectives an ultraleft character. For example, in *Results and Prospects* he argued that a revolutionary government should not allow the peasants to divide up the large estates of the landed nobility, but rather should immediately reorganise them into collective or state farms.

By contrast, the Bolsheviks argued that the proletariat should support the

confiscation of these estates by peasant committees, leaving open the question of what position it should take toward the problem of how these confiscated estates should be reorganised. This problem, in their view, could only be settled by assessing the relationship of class forces in the countryside and the level of consciousness of the poor peasants, once the estates had been taken into the hands of revolutionary peasant committees. If, in the course of the democratic revolution, the poor peasants had already differentiated themselves from the rich peasants and developed an understanding of the superiority of socialised production over petty-commodity production, and had thus begun to demand the conversion of the landlords' estates into co-operatives, then the Bolsheviks would help them realise this demand. If, on the other hand, the poor peasantry retained a petty-bourgeois outlook and wished to divide up the landed estates into small farms, the Bolsheviks would not oppose the demand for "equal land tenure", even though they did not advocate it. The key thing, in their view, was to maintain the alliance between workers and the great majority of the peasantry — its poor, semi-proletarian section.

As things turned out, following the November 7, 1917 insurrection the peasants did demand "equal land tenure", and the Bolshevik-led government acceded to their demand. Commenting upon this in his 1918 pamphlet *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, Lenin wrote:

...when enforcing the land socialisation law — the "spirit" of which is equal land tenure — the Bolsheviks most explicitly and definitely declared: this is not our idea, we do not agree with this slogan, but we think it our duty to enforce it because this is the demand of the overwhelming majority of the peasants. And the idea and demands of the majority of the working people are things that the working people must *discard of their own accord*: such demands cannot be either "abolished" or "skipped over." We Bolsheviks shall *help* the peasants to discard petty-bourgeois slogans, to *pass* from them as quickly and as easily as possible to socialist slogans.

Lenin emphasised that the poor peasants had to learn from their own experience that "equal land tenure" would not solve their problems:

Kautsky will never be able to refute the view that the idea of equal land tenure has a progressive and revolutionary value in the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Such a revolution cannot go beyond this. By reaching its limit, it *all the more clearly, rapidly* and *easily* reveals to the people the *inadequacy* of bourgeois-democratic solutions and the necessity of proceeding beyond their limits, of passing on to *socialism*.¹⁴

Trotsky's approach to the land question reflected his "repudiation" of the decisive role of the peasantry in the bourgeois revolution and of a revolutionary-democratic alliance between the working class and the *entire* peasantry as the necessary bridge to the anti-

capitalist alliance of the workers and poor peasants.

The Bolsheviks projected a line of march that was necessary for the working class to take and hold power in Russia. The Bolsheviks recognised that a socialist revolution could only be carried out in Russia if the majority of the population (the workers and poor peasants) supported it. But the majority of workers, and above all, the masses of poor peasants could only be won to support a socialist revolution through their own experiences in struggle. As long as the bourgeois-democratic revolution was not completed, the Bolsheviks argued, the poor peasants would remain united with the peasant bourgeoisie in the struggle against the landlords and would not see that their problems stemmed not only from the vestiges of feudalism in Russia (the autocracy and landlordism) but also from capitalism. As long as this remained the case, the revolutionary proletariat would be unable to rally the majority of the country's population, i.e., the semi-proletarian section of the peasantry, to the perspective of carrying out a socialist revolution. As Lenin explained in *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*:

...if the Bolshevik proletariat in the capitals and large industrial centres had not been able to rally the village poor around itself against the rich peasants, this would indeed have proved that Russia was "unripe" for socialist revolution. The peasants would then have remained an "integral whole", i.e., they would have remained under the economic, political, and moral leadership of the kulaks, the rich, the bourgeoisie, and the revolution would not have passed beyond the limits of a bourgeois-democratic revolution.¹⁵

Thus the line of march of the Russian workers to a socialist revolution had to pass through the necessary first stage of forging an alliance with the peasantry as a whole to *complete* the bourgeois-democratic revolution. By contrast, Trotsky argued in *Results and Prospects* that immediately upon coming to power, the "proletariat will find itself compelled to carry the class struggle into the villages and in this manner destroy that community of interest which is undoubtedly to be found among all peasants, although within comparatively narrow limits. From the very first moment after its taking power, the proletariat will have to find support in the antagonisms between the village poor and the village rich, between the agricultural proletariat and the agricultural bourgeoisie."

Trotsky, however, was pessimistic about the proletariat's ability to forge an alliance with the poor peasants against the rural bourgeoisie:

While the heterogeneity of the peasantry creates difficulties and narrows the basis for a proletarian policy, the insufficient degree of class differentiation will create obstacles to the introduction among the peasantry of developed class struggle, upon which the urban proletariat could rely. The primitiveness of the peasantry turns its hostile face

towards the proletariat...

Thus, the more definite and determined the policy of the proletariat in power becomes, the narrower and more shaky does the ground beneath it become.

Why did Trotsky believe a “proletarian policy” would produce hostility from the entire peasantry, including its semi-proletarian majority? “The very fact of the proletariat’s representatives entering the government, not as powerless hostages, but as the leading force”, Trotsky wrote, “*places collectivism on the order of the day.*”¹⁶ Lacking any conception of the possibility and necessity of measures transitional to the socialist revolution, Trotsky believed that the working class would immediately have to begin the socialist expropriation of bourgeois property in city and village. Lacking political support for this among the poor peasants, who would still be under the leadership of the peasant bourgeoisie, the Russian proletariat would very quickly find itself a besieged minority surrounded by a hostile peasant population. The bourgeoisie would be able to rally the Russian peasantry against the “workers’ government” and easily overthrow it, unless the Russian workers quickly gained material, presumably military, support from revolutionary workers’ regimes in Western Europe.

Trotsky was certainly correct in his view of what the consequences would be of a revolutionary government immediately putting “collectivism on the order of the day” in a country with a peasant majority. This prognosis was tragically confirmed by the 1919 Hungarian revolution.

The Hungarian Communists, led by Bela Kun, took power in March 1919, proclaimed a “Soviet republic”, and implemented policies basically similar to those Trotsky had presented in *Results and Prospects*, i.e., while decreeing the confiscation of the large semi-feudal landed estates they refused to allow the peasantry to divide them up. Instead, the Communist-led government in Budapest decreed that these estates should be converted into state farms. Lacking experienced farm managers of their own, the Hungarian Communists were forced to appoint the old landlords and their managers as the directors of the new “state farms”. The effect of this policy was to alienate the peasantry — some 60% of Hungary’s population — from the Communist government, since they had gained nothing from it. Furthermore, the Hungarian Communists also decreed the immediate nationalisation of industry and commerce, thus allowing no time for the workers to organise and prepare themselves to manage the newly statised enterprises. The result was a precipitous fall in industrial production and a sharp rise in unemployment. With the workers confused, divided and demoralised, and the peasantry having been given no reason to defend the Communist government from a landlord-capitalist counter-revolution, the Hungarian Soviet Republic was overthrown by Czech, Romanian and Serbian mercenaries 19 weeks

after it was proclaimed.

It was precisely to avoid such a situation that the Bolsheviks did not advocate putting “collectivism on the order of the day” in the first stage of the proletarian revolution in Russia. As Lenin explained in *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*:

...if the Bolshevik proletariat had tried at once, in October–November 1917, without waiting for the class differentiation in the rural districts, without being able to *prepare* it and bring it about, to “decree” a civil war or the “introduction of socialism” in the rural districts, had tried to do without a temporary bloc with the peasants in general, without making a number of concessions to the middle peasants, etc., that would have been a *Blanquist* distortion of Marxism, an attempt by the *minority* to impose its will upon the majority; it would have been a theoretical absurdity, revealing a failure to understand that a general peasant revolution is *still* a bourgeois revolution, and that *without a series of transitions, of transitional stages*, it cannot be transformed into a socialist revolution in a backward country.¹⁷

This was the same argument that Lenin had made in his 1905 writings on the relationship between the peasant-bourgeois revolution and the proletarian-socialist revolution. In *Two Tactics*, for example, he argued that the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry would be “unable (without a series of intermediary stages of revolutionary development) to affect the foundations of capitalism”. At best, “it may bring about a radical redistribution of landed property in favour of the peasantry, establish consistent and full democracy, including formation of a republic, eradicate all the oppressive features of Asiatic bondage, not only in rural but also in factory life, lay the foundation for a thorough improvement in the conditions of the workers and for a rise in their standard of living, and — last, but not least — carry the revolutionary conflagration into Europe”. Such a victory, Lenin stressed, “will not yet by any means transform our bourgeois revolution into a socialist revolution; the democratic revolution will not *immediately* overstep the bounds of bourgeois social and economic relationships” (emphasis added). But, Lenin went on to explain:

The complete victory of the present revolution will mark the end of the democratic revolution and the beginning of a determined struggle for a socialist revolution...The more complete the democratic revolution, the sooner, the more widespread, the cleaner, and the more determined will the development of this new struggle be.¹⁸

In his 1918 polemic against Kautsky, Lenin affirmed that this policy had been proven correct by the October Revolution: “It was the Bolsheviks”, Lenin wrote, “who strictly differentiated between the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the socialist revolution: by carrying the former through, they opened the door for the transition to the latter.

This was the only policy that was revolutionary and Marxist.”¹⁹

3. Methodological roots of Trotsky's position

In his pre-1917 opposition to the Bolshevik policy, Trotsky argued that the moment power was “transferred into the hands of a revolutionary government with a socialist majority, the division of our programme into maximum and minimum”, i.e., into socialist measures and bourgeois-democratic measures, “loses all significance both in principle and in *immediate practice*” (emphasis added)²⁰. This was because a “proletarian government” which sought to introduce measures such as the eight-hour working day (part of the RSDLP's minimum program), or to provide financial support for unemployed workers, would be confronted by a general lockout of workers from the factories by the capitalists. In *Results and Prospects* Trotsky wrote:

In undertaking the maintenance of the unemployed, the government thereby undertakes the maintenance of strikers. If it does not do *that*, it immediately and irrevocably undermines the basis of its own existence.

There is nothing left for the capitalists to do then but to resort to the lockout, that is, to close the factories. It is quite clear that the employers can stand the closing down of production much longer than the workers, and therefore there is only one reply that a workers' government can give to a general lockout: the expropriation of the factories and the introduction in at least the largest of them of State or communal production.

Similar problems arise in agriculture by the mere fact of the expropriation of the land. In no way must it be supposed that a proletarian government, on expropriating the privately-owned estates carrying on production on a large-scale, would break these up and sell them for exploitation to small producers. The only path open to it in this sphere is the organisation of co-operative production under communal control or organized directly by the State...

For this reason there can be no talk of any sort of *special* form of proletarian dictatorship in the bourgeois revolution, of *democratic* proletarian dictatorship (or dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry).²¹

Thus, according to Trotsky, a socialist-led revolutionary government in Russia would *immediately* be confronted with the need to *carry out the socialist revolution* (socialisation of ownership of all large-scale industry, wholesale and foreign trade, banking, etc.). There would therefore be no basis for a *transitional* revolutionary-democratic alliance of the workers and the peasantry as a whole aimed at completing the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

In an article published in 1909 — “Our Differences” — Trotsky made it clear that when he had written in 1906 of the socialist revolution being implemented “from the

very first moment” that the proletariat came to power, this was not a rhetorical phrase on his part. “I have demonstrated elsewhere”, Trotsky wrote, referring to his 1906 work *Results and Prospects*, “that *twenty-four hours* after the establishment of a ‘democratic dictatorship’ this idyll of quasi-Marxist asceticism is bound to collapse utterly”. In support of this argument, Trotsky added:

In one form or another (public works, etc.) the proletariat in power will immediately have to undertake the maintenance of the unemployed at the state’s expense. This in turn will immediately provoke a powerful intensification of the economic struggle and a whole series of strikes.

We saw all this on a small scale at the end of 1905. And the capitalists’ reply will be the same as their reply to the demand for the eight-hour day: the shutting down of factories and plants...What can the workers’ government do when faced with closed factories and plants? It must reopen them and resume production at the government’s expense. But is that not the way to socialism?²²

Thus Trotsky rejected the Bolshevik policy of seeking to bring into being a “special form of proletarian dictatorship in the bourgeois revolution” (the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants), because he believed that “within twenty-four hours” of the proletariat’s seizing state power in Russia’s major cities and instituting the eight-hour working day, the capitalists would launch a general lockout and this would force the revolutionary government to respond with the wholesale nationalisation of large-scale industry. This prediction, however, proved to be utterly wrong — as he himself acknowledged in 1928:

Beginning with April 1917, Lenin explained to his opponents, who accused him of having adopted the position of the “permanent revolution”, that the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry was realized *partially* in the epoch of dual power. He explained later that *this* dictatorship met with its further extension during the first period of soviet power from November 1917 until July 1918, when the *entire peasantry*, together with the workers, effected the agrarian revolution while the working class *did not as yet* proceed with the confiscation of the mills and factories, but experimented with workers’ control [emphasis added].²³

The ultraleft theory of permanent revolution that Trotsky counterposed to the Bolsheviks’ policy of a two-stage, uninterrupted revolution was based upon a *mechanical-fatalistic conception of the class struggle*. Trotsky first articulated this conception in relation to the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat. “Marxism”, he wrote in his 1904 polemic against Lenin, *Our Political Tasks*, “teaches that the interests of the proletariat are determined by its objective conditions of life. These interests are so powerful and so inescapable that they finally oblige the proletariat

to bring them into the realm of its consciousness, that is, to make the attainment of its *objective* interests its *subjective* concern.”²⁴

Commenting on this argument, the Belgian Trotskyist Ernest Mandel correctly observed in his 1970 article “The Leninist Theory of Organisation”:

Today it is easy to see what a naively fatalistic optimism was concealed in this inadequate analysis. Immediate interests are here put on the same level with historical interests, i.e., with the unravelling of the most complex questions of political tactics and strategy. The hope that the proletariat will “eventually” recognise its historical interests seems rather shallow when compared to the historical catastrophes that have arisen because, in the absence of an adequate revolutionary leadership, the proletariat was not even able to accomplish the revolutionary tasks of the here and now.

The same naive optimism is even more strikingly manifested in the following passage from the same polemic: “The revolutionary social democrat is convinced not only of the inevitable [!] growth of the political party of the proletariat, but also of the inevitable [!] victory of the ideas of *revolutionary* socialism within this party. The first proof lies in the fact that the development of bourgeois society spontaneously leads the proletariat to politically demarcate itself; the second in the fact that the objective tendencies and the tactical problems of this demarcation find their best, fullest and deepest expression in revolutionary socialism, i.e., Marxism.”

This quotation makes clear that what the young Trotsky was championing in his polemic against Lenin was the “old, tested tactic” and the naive “belief in the inevitability of progress” à la Bebel and Kautsky which prevailed in international Social Democracy from the time of Marx’s death until the First World War. Lenin’s concept of class consciousness was incomparably richer, more contradictory and more dialectical precisely because it was based on a keen grasp of the relevance of the revolution for the present (not “finally some day,” but in the coming years).²⁵

Trotsky’s mechanical-fatalistic conception of the development of the class struggle led him to draw erroneous conclusions from the experience of the 1905 revolution, that is, to mechanically project them onto the future course of the development of a new revolution in Russia. Thus, from the temporary convergence in the tactical views of the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks at the end of 1905, Trotsky mechanistically drew the general conclusion that a future revolutionary upsurge of the proletariat would drive both factions toward common positions. As he observed in his 1924 article “Our Differences”:

The deep differences that divided me from Bolshevism for a whole number of years, and in many cases placed me in sharp and hostile opposition to Bolshevism were expressed most graphically in relation to the Menshevik faction. I began with the radically wrong perspective that the course of the revolution and the pressure of the

proletarian masses would ultimately force both factions to follow the same road.²⁶ The same mechanical-fatalistic conception was evident in the predictions Trotsky made about the future role of the peasantry and the actions of the capitalists in a new revolution. Trotsky argued that the introduction by a revolutionary government of an eight-hour work day would *inevitably* lead the capitalists to resort to a “general lockout”. This was based on a mechanical projection of events in 1905 (“We saw all this on a small scale at the end of 1905”). The fact that in late 1905 the capitalists could still count on the support of the tsarist police and army, and that they would *not* enjoy such support under a revolutionary dictatorship of the workers and peasants, did not lead Trotsky to revise his assessment of what the capitalists might do after such a regime came into existence. To the contrary, he projected that what they had done on a small scale at the end of 1905 (when they still had a state power defending their interests), they would do on a larger scale when state power passed into the hands of the proletariat and peasantry.

In fact, contrary to Trotsky's prediction here, the Russian capitalists did not respond with a general lock-out to the demand of the workers for an eight-hour work day in 1917. The emergence of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies and the replacement of the tsarist police by armed worker detachments, created a highly favourable relationship of class forces in Petrograd for the workers' to pursue their economic demands. Recognising this, the capitalist factory-owners decided to concede to the workers' demand. On March 10, 1917 an agreement was signed between the Petrograd Soviet and the Petrograd Industrialists' Society on the institution of the eight-hour work day in all of the city's factories. It was instituted at most factories throughout Russia in March and April.

Similarly, Trotsky's 1906 assessment of the role of the peasantry in a future revolution was based upon a mechanical projection onto a future revolution of its role in the revolutionary upsurge of 1905-06. “Historical experience”, Trotsky wrote in *Results and Prospects*, “shows that the peasantry are absolutely incapable of taking up an *independent* political role.” He went on to pose the question: “Does the fact of the rise and development first of the peasant union and then of the Group of Toil (Trudoviki) in the Duma run counter to these and subsequent arguments?” His answer: “Not in the least.” Elaborating on this judgment, Trotsky wrote:

The radicalism and formlessness of the Group of Toil was the expression of the contradictoriness in the revolutionary aspirations of the peasantry. During the period of constitutional illusions it helplessly followed the “Cadets” (Constitutional Democrats). At the moment of the dissolution of the Duma it came naturally under the guidance of the Social-Democratic Group. The lack of independence on the part of the peasant

representatives will show itself with particular clearness at the moment when it becomes necessary to show firm initiative, that is, at the time when power has to pass into the hands of the revolutionaries.²⁷

For Trotsky, the “formlessness” and lack of “firm initiative” of the peasant organisations that arose in the revolutionary upsurge of 1905-06 were proof that the peasantry would not play any independent or decisive role in a victorious revolution. From this assessment Trotsky drew the conclusion that:

The Russian bourgeoisie will...have to surrender the revolutionary hegemony over the peasants. In such a situation, created by the transference of power to the proletariat, nothing remains for the peasantry to do but to rally to the regime of workers' democracy. It will not matter much even if the peasantry does this with a degree of consciousness not larger than that with which it usually rallies to the bourgeois regime.²⁸

Lenin strongly disagreed with Trotsky's approach to the peasantry. In a 1909 polemic with Menshevik leader Julius Martov, Lenin cited the above quoted lines as “the most fallacious of Trotsky's opinions that Comrade Martov quotes and considers ‘just’,” adding the following comment:

The proletariat cannot count on the ignorance and prejudices of the peasantry as the powers that be under a bourgeois regime count and depend on them, nor can it assume that in time of revolution the peasantry will remain in their usual state of political ignorance and passivity. The history of the Russian revolution shows that the very first wave of the upsurge at the end of 1905, at once stimulated the peasantry to form a political organisation (the All-Russian Peasant Union) which was undoubtedly the embryo of a distinct peasant party. Both in the First and Second Dumas — in spite of the fact that the counter-revolution had wiped out the first contingents of advanced peasants — the peasantry, now for the first time acting on a nation-wide scale in the Russian general elections, immediately laid the foundations of the Trudovik group, which was undoubtedly the embryo of a distinct peasant party. In these embryos and rudiments there was much that was unstable, vague and vacillating: that is beyond doubt. But if political groups like this could spring up at the beginning of the revolution, there cannot be the slightest doubt that a revolution carried to such a “conclusion”, or rather, to such a high stage of development as a revolutionary dictatorship, will produce a more definitely constituted and stronger revolutionary peasant party. To think otherwise would be like supposing that some vital organs of an adult can retain the size, shape and development of infancy.²⁹

Lenin's assessment was fully confirmed by the October Revolution: the victory of the revolutionary alliance of the workers and peasants was accompanied by the emergence of a powerful revolutionary peasant party — the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party.

Moreover, the Bolsheviks' success in forging an alliance with the Left SRs played a crucial role in the first stage of the revolution, when the peasantry remained united in carrying through the bourgeois agrarian revolution against the semi-feudal landlords.

4. The practical consequences of Trotsky's position

The practical political consequences of Trotsky's pre-1917 "permanent revolution" line were twofold:

1. He paid scant attention to the need for the revolutionary workers' movement to forge an alliance with peasant organisations. Such an alliance, of course, would only be possible if the revolutionary workers, organised in a Marxist party, could win the political leadership of the peasants away from their "natural leaders" — the liberal bourgeoisie. By insisting that the peasantry as a whole wouldn't play a decisive role as a revolutionary social force, Trotsky ended up giving aid to those in the workers' movement who sought to ensure that the peasants *didn't* play such a role. As Lenin observed in his 1915 article "On the Two Lines in the Revolution": "Trotsky is in fact helping the liberal-labour politicians in Russia, who by 'repudiation' of the role of the peasantry understand a *refusal* to raise up the peasants for the revolution!"³⁰

2. Flowing from this serious error, Trotsky failed to understand the significance of Lenin's struggle to forge a party of the working-class vanguard that excluded from its ranks the agents of the political influence of the liberal bourgeoisie within the labour movement, i.e., the Mensheviks.

If the working class was to provide political leadership to the peasant movement (the decisive social force in the bourgeois revolution) it could only do so by defeating liberal-reformist conceptions within its own organisations — in the first place, within its revolutionary party. In a 1908 article, "The Assessment of the Russian Revolution", Lenin wrote:

Only if it pursues an unquestionably independent policy as vanguard of the revolution will the proletariat be able to split the peasantry away from the liberals, rid it of their influence, rally the peasantry behind it in the struggle and thus bring about an "alliance" *de facto* — one that emerges and becomes effective, when and to the extent that the peasantry are conducting a revolutionary fight.³¹

That is, unless the Russian proletariat pursued an independent class policy in the struggle for democracy, refusing to tailor its struggle to the reformism of the liberal bourgeoisie, it would not be able to win the peasantry away from the influence of the liberals and forge a revolutionary-democratic alliance with it. "In a word", Lenin wrote in *Two Tactics*, "to avoid finding itself with its hands tied in the struggle against the inconsistent bourgeois democracy the proletariat must be class-conscious and strong

enough to rouse the peasantry to revolutionary consciousness, guide its assault, and thereby independently pursue the line of consistent proletarian democratism.”³² It couldn't do this if it was led by a party that united proletarian revolutionists and petty-bourgeois reformists. Lenin therefore sought to build a party consisting only of proletarian revolutionists, a party that could educate and organise the Russian workers to provide revolutionary leadership to the peasant masses in carrying through and completing the bourgeois-democratic revolution as the necessary bridge to the proletarian-socialist revolution.

Unlike Lenin, who recognised the petty-bourgeois reformist character of Menshevism, Trotsky believed the Menshevik leaders were sincere, if mistaken, revolutionary Marxists who should be included within the ranks of the workers' party. He regarded Lenin's struggle to build a party that excluded the Mensheviks from its ranks as an expression of “organisational sectarianism”, rather than as being based on a principled understanding of the fundamental interests and tasks of the Russian workers' movement.

The Bolsheviks' policy reflected the class interests of the Russian workers. In opposition to this, the Mensheviks' policy was an adaptation to the class interests of the bourgeoisie. By contrast, Trotsky's position did not reflect the interests of any of the fundamental classes in Russia. Rather, it was an eclectic *amalgamation* of the two principal class lines, which is also why it failed to win any substantial influence among the masses. As Lenin observed in his 1915 article, “On the Two Lines in the Revolution”: “From the Bolsheviks Trotsky's original theory has borrowed their call for a decisive proletarian revolutionary struggle and for the conquest of political power by the proletariat, while from the Mensheviks it has borrowed ‘repudiation’ of the peasantry's role.”³³ ■

III. 1917 to 1928: Debates within the CPSU

Under the impact of the Mensheviks' support for Russian imperialism's war effort and their support for the bourgeois-landlord Provisional Government that emerged out of the February 1917 revolution, Trotsky came to see the correctness of the Bolsheviks' struggle against Menshevism and expressed agreement with the political line the Bolsheviks had adopted prior to his return to Russia in May 1917. From July 1917, when he joined the Bolshevik Party, until 1919 Trotsky abandoned his pre-1917 permanent revolution formula and his criticisms of the Bolsheviks' two-stage, uninterrupted revolution policy.

1. Trotsky's 1919 evaluation of Bolshevik policy

In a March 1919 preface to the re-issuing of his 1906 work *Results and Prospects* Trotsky presented an interpretation of his past views that minimised the differences between his perspectives and those of the Bolsheviks.

From the very beginning of its existence as a distinct political current, Bolshevism, Trotsky wrote, "acknowledged the decisive importance of the working class for the coming Revolution, but as to the programme of the Revolution itself the Bolsheviks limited it at first to the interests of the many millions of peasants, without and against whom the Revolution could not have been carried through to the end by the proletariat. Hence their acknowledgement (for the time being) of the *bourgeois*-democratic character of the Revolution".¹ As to his own views before 1917, Trotsky wrote:

The standpoint [Trotsky] then supported can be outlined as follows: the Revolution, having begun as a bourgeois revolution as regards its first tasks, will soon call forth powerful class conflicts and will gain final victory only by transferring power to the only class capable of standing at the head of the oppressed masses, namely, to the proletariat. Once in power, the proletariat not only will not want, but will not be able to limit itself to a bourgeois democratic programme. It will be able to carry through the

revolution to the end only in the event of the Russian Revolution being converted into a Revolution of the European proletariat. The bourgeois-democratic programme of the Revolution will then be superseded, together with its national limitations, and the temporary political domination of the Russian working class will develop into a prolonged Socialist dictatorship. But should Europe remain inert the bourgeois counter-revolution will not tolerate the government of the toiling masses in Russia and will throw the country back — far back from a democratic workers' and peasants' republic. Therefore, once having won power, the proletariat cannot keep within the limits of bourgeois democracy. It must adopt the tactics of *permanent revolution*, i.e., must destroy the barriers between the minimum and maximum programme of Social Democracy, go over to more and more radical social reforms and seek direct and immediate support in revolution in Western Europe.²

He went on to affirm that this perspective had been confirmed by the course of the October Revolution:

Irrefutable proof of our having correctly applied Marxist theory is given by the fact that the events in which we are now participating, and even our methods of participation in them, were foreseen in their fundamental lines some 15 years ago.³

The only error in his past views that Trotsky acknowledged was that, because both the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks had “started out from the standpoint of *bourgeois* revolution”, he did “not fully appreciate the very important circumstance that in reality, along the line of the disagreement between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, there were being grouped inflexible revolutionaries on the one side and, on the other, elements which were becoming more and more opportunist and accommodating”.⁴

Summing up the subsequent evolution of the two factions, Trotsky implied that in 1917 the Bolsheviks had come over to the “tactics of permanent revolution”, as he now presented them:

When the Revolution of 1917 broke out, the Bolshevik Party constituted a strong centralized organisation uniting all the best elements of the advanced workers and revolutionary intellectuals, which — after some internal struggle — frankly adopted tactics directed towards the socialist dictatorship of the working class, in full harmony with the entire international situation and class relations in Russia.⁵

While the Bolsheviks did adopt *tactics* in 1917 that were “*directed towards* the socialist dictatorship of the working class”, the immediate aim of these tactics was to bring into being a “democratic workers' and peasants' republic”, i.e., precisely the “special form of proletarian dictatorship in the bourgeois revolution” that Trotsky, in 1906, had argued could not be realised.

Trotsky's 1919 summary of his pre-1917 permanent revolution line glossed over

the difference between that line and the Bolshevik policy of a two-stage, uninterrupted revolution. In fact, the formulations Trotsky used in his 1919 introduction to *Results and Prospects* implied that in 1906 he had advocated a “democratic workers’ and peasants’ republic” as a step toward the “socialist dictatorship of the working class”, while the Bolsheviks had limited their perspectives to an alliance between the proletariat and peasantry to carry through the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

While his 1919 preface acknowledged the correctness of the Bolshevik view that the Russian proletariat could not take power without the support of the peasantry, Trotsky did not acknowledge that the Bolsheviks had also been correct in recognising that the poor peasants could only be won to support a socialist revolution as a result of the class conflict that would emerge within the peasantry as a consequence of the *carrying through to completion* of the bourgeois-democratic programme of agrarian reform. Moreover, he failed to make any criticism of the mechanical-fatalist approach to the class struggle which had permeated his pre-1917 views, an approach that was evident in his recounting of those views:

Once in power, the proletariat ... *will not be able* to limit itself to a bourgeois democratic programme... It *must* adopt the tactics of *permanent revolution*, i.e., *must* destroy the barriers between the minimum and maximum programme of Social Democracy, go over to more and more radical social reforms and seek direct and immediate support in revolution in Western Europe. [emphasis added]⁶

2. ‘Lessons of October’

Trotsky returned to the issue of whose pre-1917 perspectives — his own or the Bolsheviks’ — had been proven right by the October Revolution in an article written in September 1924 entitled “Lessons of October”. In this article Trotsky presented the view that the change in *tactical* line adopted by the Bolsheviks in April 1917 was a break with their pre-1917 *strategic* policy of carrying through the proletarian revolution in Russia in two stages, the first stage being the completion of the tasks of the democratic revolution in alliance with the peasantry as a whole and the second being the socialist expropriation of capital in alliance with the semi-proletarian section of the peasantry.

In his 1924 article Trotsky claimed that upon his return to Russia in April 1917 Lenin “came out furiously against the old slogan of ‘the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry,’ which under the new circumstances meant the transformation of the Bolshevik Party into the left wing of the defensist bloc”, i.e., the left-wing of the pro-war bloc supporting the Provisional Government.

“Lenin”, Trotsky wrote, “occasionally remarked that the soviets of workers’, soldiers’ and peasants’ deputies in the first period of the February revolution did, *to a certain*

aegree, embody the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry... But they could take power not in the capacity of a democratic coalition of workers and peasants represented by different parties, but only as the dictatorship of the proletariat directed by a single party and drawing after it the peasant masses, beginning with their semiproletarian sections.”

“In other words”, Trotsky added, “a democratic workers’ and peasants’ coalition could only take shape as an immature form of power incapable of attaining real power... Any further movement toward the attainment of power inevitably had to explode the [bourgeois-]democratic shell, confront the majority of the peasantry with the necessity of following the workers, provide the proletariat with an opportunity to realise a class dictatorship, and thereby place on the agenda — along with a complete and ruthlessly radical democratisation of social relations — a purely socialist invasion of the workers’ state into the sphere of capitalist property rights.”⁷

Trotsky thus implied that in April 1917 Lenin had rejected his previous perspective of a transitional worker-peasant government to carry through the bourgeois-democratic revolution, and had come over to Trotsky’s perspective of a “workers’ government” that would carry out the tasks of the democratic and socialist revolutions *simultaneously*.

But this was not what Lenin had proposed in April 1917. In his April 1917 article “Letters on Tactics”, Lenin noted that:

The Bolshevik slogans and ideas *on the whole* have been confirmed by history; but *concretely* things have worked out *differently*; they are more original, more peculiar, more variegated than anyone could have expected...

“The revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” has *already* become a reality (In a certain form and to a certain extent) in the Russian revolution, for this “formula” envisages only a *relation of classes*, and not a *concrete political institution implementing* this relation, this co-operation. “The Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies” — there you have the “revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” already accomplished in reality.

“This formula is already antiquated”, Lenin added, because events had “moved it from the realm of formulas into the realm of reality, clothed it with flesh and bone, concretised it and *thereby* modified it. . .”

“The revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry has already been realised”, Lenin wrote, “but in a highly original manner, and with a number of extremely important modifications.”⁸

The peculiarity of the situation arising out of the February 1917 revolution was that the workers and the peasants (in the form of millions of conscripted peasant soldiers) had created a revolutionary workers’ and peasants’ government, the Petrograd soviet,

but this government was voluntarily ceding power to the rival Provisional Government created by the liberal bourgeoisie.

In his April 1917 pamphlet *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution: Draft Platform of the Proletarian Party*, Lenin explained that the dual power situation “expresses a *transitional* phase of the revolution’s development, when it has gone farther than the ordinary bourgeois-democratic revolution, *but has not yet reached* a ‘pure’ dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry”.

Why had the revolution not created a “pure” dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, but instead two, interlocking, dictatorships — one bourgeois, the other, worker-peasant? Lenin provided the following explanation:

The class significance (and the class explanation) of this transitional and unstable situation is this: like all revolutions, our revolution...immediately *drew* unprecedentedly vast numbers of ordinary citizens *into the movement*...

Millions and tens of millions of people, who had been politically dormant for ten years and politically crushed by the terrible oppression of tsarism and by inhuman toil for the landowners and capitalists, *have awakened and taken eagerly* to politics. And who are these millions and tens of millions? For the most part small proprietors, petty bourgeois, people standing midway between the capitalists and the wage-workers...

A gigantic petty-bourgeois wave has swept over everything and overwhelmed the class-conscious proletariat, not only by force of numbers but also ideologically; that is, it has infected and imbued very wide circles of workers with the petty-bourgeois political outlook...

An attitude of unreasoning trust in the capitalists...characterises the politics of the *popular masses* in Russia at the present moment; this is the fruit that has *grown* with revolutionary rapidity on the social and economic soil of the most petty-bourgeois of all European countries. This is the *class* basis for the ‘*agreement*’ between the Provisional Government and the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies.⁹

This was also the reason why the petty-bourgeois reformist parties — the Mensheviks and the peasant-based Socialist Revolutionaries — dominated the newly formed soviets, and the Bolsheviks initially found themselves a small, isolated minority.

It was also the reason a section of the Bolshevik leadership, headed by Stalin and Kamenev, initially adopted a conciliationist position toward the Provisional Government and the Mensheviks, even raising the possibility of reunifying the Bolshevik and Menshevik parties. As Lenin pointed out in the report on his “April Theses” to the April 17, 1917, meeting of Bolshevik delegates to the first All-Russia Conference of Soviets: “Even our Bolsheviks show some trust in the government. This can only be explained by the intoxication of the revolution.”¹⁰

In sharp opposition to such conciliationist positions, Lenin argued that the revolution could only move forward if the Bolsheviks could win a majority in the soviets. To do this they would have to overcome the masses' petty-bourgeois reformist illusions in the liberal bourgeoisie and its Menshevik and SR allies:

Our work must be one of criticism, of *explaining* the mistakes of the petty-bourgeois Socialist-Revolutionary and Social-Democratic parties, of preparing and welding the elements of a *consciously* proletarian, Communist Party, and of *curing* the proletariat of the "general" petty-bourgeois intoxication.

This *seems* to be "nothing more" than propaganda work, but in reality it is most *practical revolutionary* work; for there is no advancing a revolution that has come to a standstill, that has chocked itself with phrases, and that keeps "marking time", *not because* of external obstacles, *not because of the violence* of the bourgeoisie . . . but *because* of the unreasoning trust of the people.

Only by overcoming this unreasoning trust (and we can and should overcome it only ideologically, by comradely persuasion, by pointing to the *lessons of experience*) can we set ourselves free from the prevailing *orgy of revolutionary phrase-mongering* and really stimulate the consciousness of both the proletariat and of the mass in general, as well as their bold and determined initiative *in the localities* — the independent realisation, development and consolidation of liberties, democracy, and the principle of people's ownership of all the land.¹¹

Lenin explicitly rejected any idea that this tactical line involved abandoning the Bolsheviks' policy of forging a revolutionary worker-peasant alliance to complete the bourgeois-democratic revolution. In "Letters on Tactics" Lenin wrote:

But are we not in danger of falling into subjectivism, of wanting to arrive at the socialist revolution by "skipping" the bourgeois-democratic revolution — which is not yet completed and has not yet exhausted the peasant movement?

I might be incurring this danger if I said: "No Tsar, but a *workers'* government." But I did *not* say that, I said something else. I said there *can be no* government (barring a bourgeois government) in Russia *other than* that of the Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies... And in these Soviets, as it happens, it is the peasants, the soldiers, i.e., petty bourgeoisie, who preponderate...

In my theses, I absolutely ensured myself against skipping over the peasant movement, which has not outlived itself, or the petty-bourgeois movement in general, against any *playing* at "seizure of power" by a workers' government, against any kind of Blanquist adventurism...

In the theses, I very definitely reduced the question to one of *a struggle for influence within* the Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers', Peasants', and Soldiers'

Deputies.¹²

Nor did Lenin propose that upon taking all power into their hands, the soviets should immediately introduce socialist measures. In a "Resolution On the Current Situation", which was adopted by the seventh conference of the Bolshevik Party, held April 24-29 (May 7-12 in the Western calendar), Lenin argued:

Operating as it does in one of the most backward countries of Europe amidst a vast population of small peasants, the proletariat of Russia cannot aim at immediately putting into effect socialist changes.

But it would be a grave error, and in effect even a complete desertion to the bourgeoisie, to infer from this that the working class must support the bourgeoisie, or that it must keep its activities within limits acceptable to the petty bourgeoisie, or that the proletariat must renounce its leading role in the matter of explaining to the people the urgency of taking a number of practical steps towards socialism for which the time is now ripe.

These steps are: first, nationalisation of the land. This measure, which does not directly go beyond the framework of the bourgeois system, would, at the same time, be a heavy blow at private ownership of the means of production, and as such would strengthen the influence of the socialist proletariat over the semi-proletariat in the countryside.

The next steps are the establishment of state control over all banks, and their amalgamation into a single central bank; also control over the insurance agencies and big capitalist syndicates (for example, the Sugar Syndicate, the Coal Syndicate, the Metal Syndicate, etc.), and the gradual introduction of a more just progressive tax on incomes and properties. Economically, these measures are timely; technically, they can be carried out immediately; politically, they are *likely* to receive the support of the overwhelming majority of the peasants, who have everything to gain by these reforms...

Great care and discretion should be exercised in carrying out the above measures; a solid majority of the population must be won over and this majority must be clearly convinced of the country's practical preparedness for any particular measure. This is the direction in which the class-conscious vanguard of the workers must focus its attention and efforts, because it is the bounden duty of these workers to help the peasants find a way out of the present debacle.¹³

In his pamphlet *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution: Draft Platform for the Proletarian Party*, written in April 1917 but only published in September of that year, Lenin explained that the economic measures he advocated be immediately implemented by a Soviet government had been "frequently resorted to during the war by a number of bourgeois states" and were "absolutely indispensable in order to combat impending

total economic disorganisation and famine”.¹⁴ These measures, Lenin explained in a pamphlet published a month later (*The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It*), had been prepared by the war-time state organisation of the capitalist monopolies. Placing the existing state-capitalist monopolies under the control of a Soviet government, Lenin explained, would “*still not* be socialism, but it will *no longer* be capitalism”. It would be “a tremendous *step towards* socialism”.¹⁵

Lenin also proposed to the Bolshevik seventh conference that the clauses in the party’s program dealing with the state be revised.

The program that the Bolsheviks had formally adhered to had been the one they had adopted in common with the Mensheviks at the RSDLP’s second congress in 1903. On the question of the state, the 1903 program had set as the RSDLP’s ultimate aim a “proletarian social revolution” to “do away with the division of society into classes and thereby emancipate the whole of oppressed humanity”. It stated that a “necessary condition for this social revolution is the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e., the conquest by the proletariat of such political power as will enable it to suppress all resistance on the part of the exploiters”. But the program defined the party’s immediate political task as the “overthrow of the tsarist autocracy” and its replacement by “a democratic republic” that would ensure, among other things, the “concentration of the supreme state power in the hands of a legislative assembly, consisting entirely of representatives of the people” and the “replacement of the standing army by the universally armed people”.¹⁶ The Mensheviks had interpreted this as a demand for a bourgeois-democratic parliamentary republic.

If, as Trotsky claimed in his “Lessons of October”, Lenin had come to the conclusion in April 1917 that the Bolsheviks should immediately aim for the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship to effect a socialist revolution in Russia, then it is curious that in proposing to revise the party’s program Lenin did not simply call for an amendment to this effect. Instead, Lenin proposed that an amendment be drafted “to be in the nature of a demand for a democratic proletarian-peasant republic (i.e., a type of state functioning without police, without a standing army, and without a privileged bureaucracy), and not for a bourgeois parliamentary republic”.

In his report on the question of revising the party program, Lenin pointed out that other formulations of this point had been proposed in the drafting committee:

One of them mentioned the experience of the Paris Commune and the experience of the period between the seventies and the eighties, but such a formulation is unsatisfactory and too general; another spoke about a republic of Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’, and Peasants’ Deputies, but this formulation, too, was considered unsatisfactory by most of the comrades. A formulation, however, is needed; the point is not what an institution

is called, but what its political character and structure is. By saying “proletarian-peasant republic”, we indicate its social content and political character.¹⁷

In June 1917 Lenin published a pamphlet containing his draft amendments for revising the party's program. These stated in part:

The party of the proletariat cannot rest content with a bourgeois parliamentary democratic republic, which throughout the world preserves and strives to perpetuate the monarchist instruments for the oppression of the masses, namely, the police, the standing army, and the privileged bureaucracy.

Instead, Lenin's draft amendments set “the immediate duty” of the Bolshevik party to “fight for a political system which will best guarantee economic progress and the rights of the people in general, and make possible the least painful transition to socialism in particular”. This was to be achieved through “a more democratic workers' and peasants' republic, in which the police and the standing army will be abolished and replaced by the universally armed people, by a people's militia; all officials will be not only elective, but also subject to recall at any time upon the demand of a majority of the electors; all officials, without exception, will be paid at a rate not exceeding the average wage of a competent worker; parliamentary representative institutions will be gradually replaced by Soviets of people's representatives (from various classes and professions, or from various localities), functioning as both legislative and executive bodies”.¹⁸

In September 1917 the unelected Provisional Government proclaimed Russia a republic with Aleksandr Kerensky as its president. After this change, Bolshevik propaganda defined the party's immediate aim as the establishment of a “workers' and peasants' government” through the transfer of all state power to the workers', soldiers' and peasants' soviets. When, as a result of the insurrection of November 7, 1917, this transfer was effected in Petrograd, the second All-Russia Congress of Soviets officially defined the new Soviet government as a “workers' and peasants' government”.

All of these Bolshevik formulas — “democratic proletarian-peasant republic”, “democratic workers' and peasants' republic”, “workers' and peasants' government” — contained the same socio-political content, i.e., a revolutionary government based upon the seizure of state power by an alliance of the workers and peasants that would complete the bourgeois-democratic revolution (confiscation of the landed estates by the peasant soviets) and introduce measures transitional to the socialist reorganisation of Russia's economy (workers' control of production, nationalisation of the banks and Soviet state direction of the state-capitalist monopolies). The completion of the peasant-democratic revolution in the countryside and the breaking of the resistance of the capitalists to Soviet state control over industry would open the door to the next stage of the proletarian revolution in Russia — the socialist expropriation of bourgeois

property in city and village.

Lenin, and other Bolshevik leaders, in the period after the formation of the Soviet government in November 1917, often referred to the dictatorship of the proletariat having come into existence in Russia from the time of the formation of this government. Such references are often cited by Trotskyists to “prove” that Trotsky’s pre-1917 theory of permanent revolution was correct and that in 1917 Lenin had abandoned his previous views on the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry and come over to Trotsky’s pre-1917 position. Such an argument, however, reflects a failure to understand that for Lenin, the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry was not a form of state power *counterposed* to the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat, but a *step on the road* to it. As Lenin pointed out in *Two Tactics*:

Like everything else in the world, the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry has a past and a future. Its past is autocracy, serfdom, monarchy, and privilege. In the struggle against this past, in the struggle against counter-revolution, a “single will” of the proletariat and the peasantry is possible, for here there is unity of interests.

Its future is the struggle against private property, the struggle of the wage-worker against the employer, the struggle for socialism...

A Social-Democrat will never for a moment forget that the proletariat will inevitably have to wage a class struggle for socialism even against the most democratic and republican bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. This is beyond doubt. Hence, the absolute necessity of a separate, independent strictly class party of Social-Democracy. Hence, the temporary nature of our tactics of “striking a joint blow” with the [peasant] bourgeoisie and the duty of keeping a strict watch on “over our ally, as over an enemy”, etc. All this leaves no room for doubt. However, it would be ridiculous and reactionary to deduce from this that we must forget, ignore, or neglect tasks which, although transient and temporary, are vital at the present time. The struggle against the autocracy is a temporary and transient task for socialists, but to ignore or neglect this task in any way amounts to betrayal of socialism and service to reaction. The revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry is unquestionably only a transient, temporary socialist aim, but to ignore this aim in the period of a democratic revolution would be downright reactionary.¹⁹

A revolutionary worker-peasant dictatorship, or state power, could only come into being if the workers in the cities overthrew and replaced the state institutions of the tsarist landlord-capitalist state with their own organs of state power. The workers would use the state power they had conquered to rally the peasantry as a whole to consummate the bourgeois-democratic revolution and then, once the poor peasants

came into conflict with the peasant bourgeoisie, to rally the poor peasants in the struggle for the transition to socialism. The proletarian-peasant dictatorship would therefore be the first stage of the proletarian dictatorship in Russia, or, as Trotsky himself had described it in *Results and Prospects*, “a special form of proletarian dictatorship in the bourgeois revolution”.

Trotsky's ostensible purpose in writing “Lessons of October” was to examine the reasons for the failure of the Communist Party in Germany to lead the working class in a struggle for power during the revolutionary crisis that had emerged in that country in October 1923. He did this by examining the disputes that had erupted within the Bolshevik Party on the eve of the October 1917 insurrection.

Trotsky also sought to use his article to politically discredit Grigory Zinoviev, who at that time was president of the Communist International, and CPSU Politburo member Lev Kamenev, by recounting the errors they had made in 1917. This was because he mistakenly regarded Zinoviev and Kamenev, rather than Stalin, as the chief political representatives within the CPSU leadership of the conservative bureaucratic stratum that was consolidating its grip on the Soviet party. Kamenev had initially been the most vocal opponent of Lenin's reorientation of Bolshevik tactics in April 1917. In “Lessons of October”, Trotsky argued that Kamenev's and Zinoviev's vacillations on the eve of the October insurrection had been due to their failure to reject the “Old Bolshevik” policy of fighting for a proletarian-peasant democratic revolution in favour of Lenin's supposedly new policy of fighting for an immediate socialist revolution.

The effect of the article however was the opposite of what Trotsky intended. It provided the Stalin bureaucracy with a pretext to launch a campaign to publicly discredit Trotsky by claiming he was trying to replace Leninism with “Trotskyism”. Despite Trotsky's repeated denials that he was seeking to resurrect his pre-1917 permanent revolution formula in opposition to the Leninist policy, the Stalinists were able to utilise his September 1924 interpretation of Lenin's April Theses as a polemical stick to brand Trotsky — and Zinoviev and Kamenev, when they united with Trotsky in opposition to the Stalin bureaucracy in 1926-27 — as opponents of Leninism.

Furthermore, under the cover of the “Leninism or Trotskyism” campaign, Stalin began to smuggle in a neo-Menshevik line.

In a speech to the 14th Congress of the CPSU in December 1925 Stalin cited the following passage from Lenin's November 1918 polemic with Kautsky: “With the peasantry to the end of the bourgeois-democratic revolution; with the poor, the proletarian and the semi-proletarian section of the peasantry, forward to the socialist revolution!”. Lenin had pointed out that the Bolshevik proletariat had allied itself to the peasantry as a whole in the period from November 1917 until the middle of 1918

in order to complete the bourgeois-democratic revolution, and had then allied itself with the poor peasants against the peasant bourgeoisie after June-July 1918 to carry out the socialist revolution. Stalin now offered a radically different interpretation of the meaning of Lenin's words — an interpretation that, ironically, partially accorded with Trotsky's 1924 view of developments in 1917: "With the peasantry as a whole against the tsar and the landlords — that is the bourgeois revolution", Stalin declared. "With the poor peasants against the bourgeoisie — that is the October Revolution."²⁰

The political significance of this interpretation of the "Leninist policy" was spelt out by Stalin two years later during a speech he gave to the CPSU Central Committee on "The International Situation and the Defence of the USSR". Stalin declared that in his April Theses of 1917 "Lenin recognised two stages in our revolution: the first stage was the bourgeois-democratic revolution, with the agrarian movement as its main axis; the second stage was the October Revolution, with the seizure of power by the proletariat as its main axis".²¹

Stalin used this interpretation of Lenin's two-stage policy to justify the neo-Menshevik policy of a "bloc of four classes" that the Stalinised Comintern had imposed on the Chinese Communist Party in 1927. Stalin argued that a bourgeois revolution like the February 1917 revolution (i.e., the transfer of power to a bloc of the nationalist bourgeoisie, the urban petty-bourgeoisie, the peasantry and the proletariat) had to be carried out before there could be a proletarian revolution in China, i.e., before the workers and poor peasants could carry out their "October Revolution".

3. Trotsky on China: from Leninism to ultraleft fantasies

During 1927, in opposition to the Stalinist "bloc of four classes" line in China, Trotsky counterposed the Leninist policy of a revolutionary-democratic alliance of the workers and peasants under the leadership of the proletarian party.

Trotsky's arguments at the time were most clearly presented in a May 7, 1927 criticism of an article by Stalin, entitled "Questions of the Chinese Revolution", printed in *Pravda* on April 21, 1927. In his criticism, Trotsky denounced as "senseless" Stalin's accusation that the Opposition believed China stood on the "eve of a socialist dictatorship of the proletariat":

There is nothing original in this "criticism." On the eve of 1905 and later on, the Mensheviks frequently declared that Lenin's tactic would be correct if Russia were directly on the eve of the socialist revolution. Lenin, however, explained to them that his tactic was the only road to the radical victory of the democratic revolution which, under favorable conditions, would begin to grow over into a socialist revolution.

The question of the "noncapitalist" path of development of China was posed in a

conditioned form by Lenin, for whom, as for us, it was and is ABC wisdom that the Chinese revolution, left to its own forces, that is, *without the direct support of the victorious proletariat of the USSR and the working class of all advanced countries*, could end only with the conquest of the broadest possibilities for the capitalist development of the country, with more favorable conditions for the labor movement.²²

Turning to the policy imposed on the Chinese CP by the Comintern, Trotsky wrote:

The official leadership of the Chinese revolution has been oriented all this time on a “general national united front” or on the “bloc of four classes”...Matters had gone so far on this track that on the eve of Chiang Kai-shek's [April 1927 military] coup, *Pravda*, in order to expose the Opposition, proclaimed that revolutionary China was not being ruled by a bourgeois government but by a “government of the bloc of four classes”...

The theses of Comrade Stalin, to be sure, seeks to oppose to each other the two paths of development of the Chinese revolution: one under the leadership of the bourgeoisie, with its suppression of the proletariat and an inevitable alliance with foreign imperialism; the other under the leadership of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie.

But in order that this second perspective of the bourgeois-democratic revolution should not remain an empty phrase, it must be said openly and plainly that the whole leadership of the Chinese revolution up to now has been in irreconcilable contradiction to it. The Opposition has been and is subjected to a rabid criticism precisely because, from the very beginning, it brought to the fore the Leninist manner of putting the question, that is, the path of the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie for the leadership of the oppressed masses of city and country within the framework and on the foundation of the national democratic revolution...

In order to have the right to speak about the struggle for the Bolshevik path of the democratic revolution, one must possess the principal instrument of proletarian policy: *an independent proletarian party* which fights under its own banner and never permits its policy and organization to be dissolved in the policy and organization of other classes...The Chinese Communist Party, in this whole period, has not been *in alliance* with the revolutionary petty-bourgeois section of the Kuomintang, but *in subordination* to the whole Kuomintang, led in reality by the bourgeoisie, which had the army and the power in its hands...

To justify such a policy by the necessity for an alliance of the workers and peasants is to reduce this alliance itself to a phrase, to a screen for the commanding role of the bourgeoisie. The dependence of the Communist Party, an inevitable result of the “bloc of four classes,” was the main obstacle in the path of the workers' and peasants' movement,

and therefore also of the real alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry, without which the victory of the Chinese revolution cannot even be thought of.²³

In September 1927, however, Trotsky circulated to members of the CPSU Opposition an article in which he called for the abandonment of its call for the Comintern to apply the Leninist line of fighting for a democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants, organised through soviets, in opposition to the bourgeois-landlord Kuomintang government. Instead, he argued that the Opposition should call for a struggle for the “dictatorship of the proletariat” in China.

According to Trotsky’s new line of argument, if the Chinese CP had issued the “call for a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” in 1926, this call would “have played a tremendous role in the development of the Chinese revolution, would have completely assured a different course for it”. Issuing such a “call” at that time “would have isolated the bourgeoisie and thereby the conciliationists, and it would have led to the posing of the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat under conditions infinitely more favorable than in the past”. But now that the “big bourgeoisie and the middle and upper petty-bourgeoisie in the city and countryside” had turned against the aims of the national-democratic revolution, Trotsky argued, “the call for a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” in a new upsurge of the revolutionary movement would “prove to be vague and amorphous”.²⁴

Trotsky’s argument made little sense. The Bolsheviks’ propaganda in 1917 for a “democratic workers’ and peasants’ republic” based on the seizure of power by the workers’, soldiers’ and peasants’ soviets, had not proved to have been “vague and amorphous” to the Russian workers after the bourgeoisie and the upper petty-bourgeoisie betrayed the democratic revolution in Russia. Why then should propaganda by the Chinese Communists for a democratic worker-peasant dictatorship, based on soviets, prove “vague and amorphous” simply because the Kuomintang had betrayed the national-democratic revolution in China?

Seeking to clarify why he was advocating dumping the Leninist policy in China, Trotsky claimed that there “can be virtually no doubt that Stalin will come forward tomorrow under the banner of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry after giving it a conciliationist character”. If a new upsurge of the revolutionary movement in China were to occur “a section of the left conciliationists” from the Kuomintang would move “in the direction of a ‘bloc’ with the revolutionary forces in order to co-opt the movement and neutralize it. The conciliators will be able to move toward this goal under the very slogan of a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry so as to once again even more surely and at a higher level, subordinate the proletariat to themselves, narrow the scope of the movement, and prepare a new

disaster...”²⁵

Exactly how Stalin would give the idea of a revolutionary-democratic alliance of the Chinese workers and peasants a “conciliationist character” was not explained by Trotsky. Failing this, he obviously needed a stronger argument to convince the other members of the Bolshevik-Leninist Opposition that they should abandon the Leninist policy that the Opposition had defended against Stalin up to then. Trotsky did this by claiming that the tasks now facing the Chinese proletariat were analogous to those that confronted the Russian workers in the middle of 1918, i.e., *after* they had seized power in the major cities of Russia and carried through the democratic revolution in alliance with the peasantry as a whole. Trotsky wrote:

...for us it is no longer a question of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, but of the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the inexhaustible masses of the urban and rural poor...

The task of the Communist Party is first and foremost *the creation of a revolutionary army*. A Red Army of regulars must be constructed on the basis of the movement of the workers and peasants that is actually unfolding...

The task of feeding the armies and the cities poses *the problem of the food policy*. Resolving this problem under conditions of civil war and blockade is inconceivable without measures of iron discipline regarding food, without the seizure of the food supplies of the big landholders, kulaks, the speculators, and without rationing in one form or another...

Civil war at the present stage is inconceivable in China without *the dispossession of the kulaks*...

Problems of industry and transport will rise point blank before the revolutionary government...

It is patently obvious that under conditions of civil war, the bourgeoisie can be prevented from sabotaging the economy, above all industry and transport, not by admonishment, but by the measures of the dictatorship — through organized proletarian control of industry in those instances where it is feasible and through workers taking enterprises into their own hands in every case where it is otherwise impossible to secure a continuity of production. The same applies with respect to rail and water transportation. In short, the overall plan should be to transfer the most important enterprises, i.e., industries and transportation facilities ripest for it, into the hands of the soviet state.²⁶

There was one problem with this line of argument that Trotsky overlooked — there was no “soviet state” in China, and given the devastating defeat the Chinese workers had suffered at the hands of Chiang Kai-shek’s military dictatorship, nor was it remotely likely that one would soon come into being. As such, Trotsky’s call for the Opposition

to advocate that the Chinese CP begin implementing a regime of “War Communism” in China was simply absurd revolutionary phrasemongering.

While Trotsky was indulging in adventurist fantasies, Stalin was preparing a real adventure. In order to cover-up his own responsibility for the bloody defeat inflicted on the revolutionary worker-peasant movement in China at the hands of Chiang Kai-shek’s government and to neutralise the CPSU Opposition’s criticism of his neo-Menshevik “bloc of four classes” policy, Stalin desperately needed to prove that the 1925-27 Chinese revolution had not been defeated. Despite the fact that an estimated 230,000 workers and peasants, including more than half of the Chinese CP’s 60,000 members, had been killed by Chiang’s government, Stalin issued instructions via the Comintern’s agents in China for the Communist Party to organise a new “revolutionary upsurge”.

Under the direction of Heinz Neumann, Stalin’s new envoy in China, a meeting of what remained of the CP’s Central Committee on November 9-10, 1927, adopted a resolution declaring the existence of “an immediate revolutionary situation in the whole of China”. An elaborate instruction was drawn up directing the Guangdong provincial party committee to declare “a political general strike for the conquest of power”. Workers and peasants in Guangdong province were to be summoned to “rise in revolt and establish political power through a conference of Soviets of Workers’, Peasants’ and Soldiers’ and the Poor” even though no such bodies existed in the province.²⁷

The rump CPC Central Committee instruction was delivered to the Guangdong party committee in Canton by Neumann, who took personal charge of organising the Canton “insurrection”. A “Red Guard” of 2000 active Communist workers, armed with a motley assortment of weapons including crowbars, swords, and a small number of pistols, was formed. At 3 a.m. on December 11, 1927, this “Red Guard”, plus 200 government army troops and 1000 army cadets under the command of the Communist officer in charge of the Kuomintang army training school, occupied the centre of Canton, disarmed some regular troops in the barracks and set up a “Soviet of Workers’, Peasants’ and Soldiers’ Deputies” consisting of 16 members. This self-appointed “Soviet government” issued decrees declaring the nationalisation of large industrial and banking enterprises and the confiscation of land from landlords and rich peasants.

No general strike was called to coincide with this armed assault. Nevertheless, a telegram reporting the establishment of the Canton “Soviet” was immediately dispatched to Moscow, where the 15th Congress of the CPSU was in session.

The day before the Canton “insurrection”, Nikolai Bukharin, the president of the Comintern and Stalin’s chief ally in the CPSU leadership at the time, had told the

CPSU congress that there was “an extraordinarily tense situation throughout the province of Kwangtung [Guangdong], especially around Canton”, and that “in China very serious events are ripening”.²⁸

On December 15, 1927 the Comintern Executive Committee issued a statement announcing that in “Canton, city of glorious revolutionary combat, the workers and peasants have seized power, and the banner of the soviets, the red flag of revolution, has been raised over the capital of South China”.²⁹ However, by then the Canton “Soviet” had already been crushed by the Kuomintang army, which had entered the city on the afternoon of December 11. By 2 p.m. on December 13 — two days after the “insurrection” had begun — the last rebel stronghold, the Canton secret police headquarters, had fallen to Kuomintang troops. Communist cadres were hunted down and executed. According to official Kuomintang reports, 5700 Communist workers were killed.

Trotsky's first assessment of the Canton uprising, written in December 1927, characterised it as an example of “bureaucratic adventurism” undertaken by the Comintern “after the disastrous consequences of the Menshevik policy in China had made themselves fully apparent”. He declared that the “Canton episode” was “a worse and more pernicious repetition of the Estonian putsch of 1924”, when some 200 armed members of the Estonian Communist Party had attacked government buildings in Tallinn, and lacking any popular support, had been crushed within four hours.³⁰

However, in response to criticism of his new line from other Oppositionists, Trotsky began to reassess the Canton adventure. In March 1928 he claimed that it “would be erroneous to argue that the Canton uprising was an adventure by and large, and that the actual class relations were reflected in it in a distorted form”. While acknowledging that the “insurrection was obviously untimely”, he claimed that “class forces and the programs that inevitably [*sic*] flow from them were disclosed by the insurrection in all their lawfulness.”³¹

In his criticism of Bukharin's draft program of the Communist International, written in June 1928, Trotsky argued that the Canton insurrection “with all the adventurism of its leadership” had “raised the curtain of a new stage, or, more correctly, of the coming *third* Chinese revolution”. It had, of course, done no such thing — as Trotsky was to acknowledge within a few months. But in June 1928 Trotsky was swept away in an orgy of verbal radicalism.

In his June 1928 article, Trotsky wrote:

Seeking to insure themselves against their past sins, the [Comintern] leadership monstrosly forced the pace of events at the end of last year and brought about the Canton miscarriage. However, even a miscarriage can teach us a good deal concerning

the organism of the mother and the process of gestation. The tremendous and, from the standpoint of theory, truly decisive significance of the Canton events for the fundamental problems of the Chinese revolution is conditioned precisely upon the fact that we have here a phenomenon rare in history and politics, a virtual *laboratory experiment on a colossal scale*. We have paid for it dearly, but this obliges us all the more to assimilate its lessons.³²

If, as Trotsky here acknowledged, the Canton “Soviet” was an adventure, i.e., an action that had not flowed out of a revolutionary mass movement of the Chinese workers and peasants, but something artificially imposed by the Comintern Executive Committee (ECCI) in Moscow, then it was ridiculous to argue that it had revealed anything about a future revolutionary upsurge of the masses.

In “monstrously” forcing the course of events, the Comintern’s Canton adventure had attempted in a totally bureaucratic and declaratory manner to combine the tasks of the national-democratic revolution, of the democratic worker-peasant dictatorship, with those of the socialist revolution, of the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat. But it was precisely in this that Trotsky saw its virtues:

One of the fighting slogans of the Canton insurrection, according to the account in *Pravda* (no. 31), was the cry “Down with the Kuomintang!”. The Kuomintang banner and insignia were torn down and trampled underfoot... The workers of Canton outlawed the Kuomintang, *declaring all of its tendencies illegal*. This means that for the solution of the basic national tasks, not only the big bourgeoisie but also the petty bourgeoisie was incapable of producing a political force, a party, or a faction, in conjunction with which the party of the proletariat might be able to solve the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution.³³

This argument falsely implied that the Opposition’s Leninist policy, as set down in its 1927 platform, had advocated the carrying through of the national-democratic revolution in China by an alliance between the proletarian vanguard, organised in the Chinese CP, and some section of the Kuomintang. But this error in Trotsky’s argument was minor compared to the ultraleft blunders in theory that came next:

Pravda carried the following report about the policies of the short-lived Canton Soviet government:

“In the interests of the workers, the Canton Soviet issued decrees establishing...workers’ control of industry through the factory committees...the nationalization of big industry, transportation, and banks.”

Further on such measures are mentioned as: “The confiscation of all dwellings of the big bourgeoisie for the benefit of the toilers...”

Thus it was the Canton workers who were in power and, moreover, the government

was actually in the hands of the Communist Party. The program of the new state power consisted not only in the confiscation of whatever feudal estates there may be in Kwangtung in general; not only in the establishment of workers' control of production; but also in the nationalization of big industry, banks, and transportation, and even the confiscation of bourgeois dwellings and all bourgeois property for the benefit of the toilers...

Notwithstanding the fact that the directives of the ECCI had nothing to say on the subject of the proletarian dictatorship and socialist measures...the revolutionary overturn effected *against the Kuomintang* led automatically to the dictatorship of the proletariat which, at its very first steps, found itself compelled by the entire situation to resort to more radical measures than those with which the October revolution began.³⁴

It was certainly true that, on paper, i.e., in its written proclamations, the Canton "Soviet" had begun with "more radical measures" than the October Revolution. Seeking to avoid any examination at the 15th CPSU congress of the policies that had led to the *defeat* of the second Chinese Revolution, Stalin had ordered the creation of a revolutionary "Potemkin village" in Canton, which could be presented, even if only for a few days, as evidence that his policies were ushering in a new revolutionary upsurge in China. Trotsky temporarily fell for the illusion the Stalinists had created. In doing so, he forgot Lenin's warning in *"Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder* that taking your own desires for objective reality is "a most dangerous mistake for revolutionaries to make".³⁵

Trotsky claimed that the policies proclaimed by the Canton "Soviet" flowed "quite lawfully from the social relations of China as well as from the entire development of the revolution". In his June 1928 article, he wrote:

The most widespread, common, and hated exploiter in the village is the kulak-usurer, the agent of finance capital in the cities...In China, there will be practically no such stage as the first stage of our October revolution in which the kulak marched with the middle and poor peasant, frequently at their head, against the landlord. The agrarian revolution in China signifies from the outset, as it will signify subsequently, an uprising not only against the few genuine feudal [*sic*] landlords and the bureaucracy, but also against the kulaks and usurers. If in our country the poor peasant committees appeared on the scene only during the second stage of the October revolution, in the middle of 1918, in China, on the contrary, they will, in one form or another, appear on the scene as soon as the agrarian movement revives. The drive on the rich peasant will be the first and not the second stage of the Chinese October...

The direct expropriation first of the foreign capitalist and then of the Chinese capitalist enterprises will most likely be made imperative by the course of the struggle,

on the day after the victorious insurrection.

...the third Chinese revolution, despite the great backwardness of China, or more correctly, because of this great backwardness as compared with Russia, will not have a “democratic” period, not even such a six-month period as the October revolution had (November 1917 to July 1918); but it will be compelled from the very outset to effect the most decisive shake-up and abolition of bourgeois property in city and village.³⁶

If, as Trotsky asserted without a shred of proof, the “kulak-usurer” and not the bourgeois-landlord, was the “most widespread, common, and hated exploiter in the village” then China’s social relations would not have been more backward than pre-revolutionary Russia’s. The objective tasks of the Chinese revolution would not have revolved around a bourgeois-democratic agrarian revolution, carried through by a revolutionary-democratic alliance of the workers and the peasantry *as a whole*, as a necessary *transitional step* toward the proletarian-socialist revolution. Instead, the immediate objective tasks confronting the Chinese revolution would have been the “most decisive shake-up and abolition of bourgeois property in city and village”. But in the very same article in which he projected this latter scenario, Trotsky declared that “the social *content* of the bourgeois-democratic revolution will fill the initial period of the coming dictatorship of the Chinese proletariat and the poor peasants”!³⁷

If the initial period of the third Chinese revolution was going to be filled with the social content of the *bourgeois-democratic revolution*, then it was absurd to talk about the third Chinese revolution effecting, *from its very outset*, the socialist expropriation of bourgeois property “in city and village”. By failing to recognise that a general peasant revolution was still a bourgeois revolution and could not immediately be transformed into a socialist revolution, Trotsky replicated in relation to China the errors he had made in his pre-1917 views on the Russian revolution. ■

IV. 1928 to 1940: Trotsky's defence & 'generalisation' of the theory of permanent revolution

In the second half of 1928 Trotsky abandoned, without ever acknowledging it, the absurdly leftist line on China he had argued for since September 1927. At the same time he also wrote an extensive defence of his pre-1917 theory of permanent revolution in which he attempted to paint the theory in "Bolshevist" colours.

1. Trotsky's new line on China

In an article completed on October 4, 1928 — "The Chinese Question After the Sixth Congress" — Trotsky directed his fire against the adventurist line on China that had been approved by the Stalinised Comintern at its sixth congress, held in September 1928. He now rejected the idea that the Canton putsch was the signal for a new revolutionary upsurge in China:

The uprising had been commanded in advance, deliberately and with premeditation, based upon a false appreciation of the whole atmosphere. One of the detachments of the proletariat was drawn into a struggle that obviously held out no hope, and made easier for the enemy the annihilation of the vanguard of the working class...

Bolshevik policy is characterised not only by its revolutionary scope, but also by its political realism. These two aspects of Bolshevism are inseparable. The greatest task is to know how to recognize in time a revolutionary situation and to exploit it to the end. But it is no less important to understand when this situation is exhausted and is converted, from the political point of view, into its antithesis. Nothing is more fruitless and worthless than to show one's fist after the battle...

It must be distinctly understood that there is not, at the present time, a revolutionary

situation in China. It is rather a counterrevolutionary situation that has been substituted there, transforming itself into an interrevolutionary period of indefinite duration.¹

Flowing from the recognition of the new situation, Trotsky argued that this dictated that Chinese Communists must avoid adventurist tactics:

The Chinese proletariat, beginning with its vanguard, must assimilate the enormous experiences of the defeats and, by acting with new methods, recognize the new environment; it must redress its shattered ranks; it must renew its mass organizations; it must establish with greater clarity and distinctness than before what its attitude must be toward the problems that are arising before the country: national unity and liberation, revolutionary agrarian transformation.²

Trotsky argued that Chinese Communists needed to raise democratic demands in order to build mass opposition to the Kuomintang's military dictatorship:

The Communist Party can and should formulate the slogan of the constituent assembly with full powers, elected by universal, equal, direct, and secret suffrage. In the process of agitation for this slogan, it will obviously be necessary to explain to the masses that it is doubtful if such an assembly will be convened, and even if it were, it would be powerless so long as the material power remains in the hands of the Kuomintang generals. From this flows the possibility of broaching in a new manner the slogan of the arming of the workers and peasants...

The slogan of the national (or constituent assembly) is thus intimately linked up with those of the eight-hour day, the confiscation of the land, and the complete national independence of China. It is precisely in these slogans that the democratic stage of the development of the Chinese revolution will express itself.

...the slogan of soviets can and must be put forward from the first stages of the revolutionary progress of the masses. But it must be a real progress... But ... during the period of revolutionary ebb tide and of the development of centrifugal tendencies in the masses, the slogan of soviets will be doctrinaire, lifeless, or what is just as bad, it will be the slogan of adventurists. The Canton experience showed it better than anything else in a striking and tragic manner.³

Nevertheless, Trotsky still argued that the Canton experience had foreshadowed an element of the course that would be taken by the future Chinese revolution. "The Canton insurrection", he wrote, "showed that only the proletarian vanguard in China is capable of carrying out the uprising and of capturing power."⁴ In reality, the Canton uprising had demonstrated, if such a thing needed demonstrating to Marxists, that the "proletarian vanguard" could not, on its own, seize state power, and that any attempt to do so would be a suicidal adventure. The real task confronting the proletarian vanguard was to provide the necessary revolutionary political leadership to the worker-

peasant masses so that *they* could capture power. Trotsky's argument confused classes and parties.

This was a confusion that he had also made in his pre-1917 arguments against Lenin's idea of a worker-peasant democratic dictatorship. In his 1906 article *Results and Prospects*, Trotsky had argued that:

In the event of a decisive victory of the revolution [in Russia], power will pass into the hands of that class which plays a leading role in the struggle — in other words, into the hands of the proletariat. Let us say at once that this by no means precludes revolutionary representatives of non-proletarian social groups entering the government. They can and should be in the government: a sound policy will compel the proletariat to call to power the influential leaders of the urban petty-bourgeoisie, of the intellectuals and of the peasantry. The whole problem consists in this: *who will determine the content of the government's policy, who will form within it a solid majority?*

...participation of the proletariat in a government is ... permissible in principle, only as a *dominating and leading participation*. One may, of course, describe such a government as the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry ... but the question nevertheless remains: who is to wield the hegemony in the government itself, and through it the country?...

When we speak of a workers' government we have in view a government in which the working-class representatives dominate and lead...

And this means that the representative body of the nation, convened under the leadership of the proletariat, which has secured the support of the peasantry, will be nothing else than a democratic dress for the rule of the proletariat...

From what we have said above, it will be clear how we regard the idea of a "proletarian and peasant dictatorship". It is not really a matter of whether we regard it as admissible in principle, whether "we do or do not desire" such a form of political co-operation. We simply think that it is unrealisable — at least in a direct immediate sense.

Indeed, such a coalition presupposes either that one of the existing bourgeois parties commands influence over the peasantry or that the peasantry will have created a powerful independent party of its own, but we have attempted to show that neither the one nor the other is possible.⁵

In his 1909 article "The Aim of the Proletarian Struggle in Our Revolution", Lenin refuted these arguments of Trotsky's. Lenin pointed out that "if the question of the composition of this or that *government* is not substituted for the question of the dictatorship of *classes* — in short, if the question is examined *as a whole*, then nobody can prove by concrete examples taken from the experience of 1905 that a victorious revolution could be anything else than the dictatorship of the proletariat and the

peasantry... for such a dictatorship is 'joint action' by these classes, which have 'carried, or are carrying, the revolution to victory!'"⁶

Directly addressing Trotsky's argument that a worker-peasant dictatorship presupposed the existence of a "powerful independent party" of the peasantry, Lenin pointed out that:

This is obviously untrue both from the standpoint of general theory and from that of the experience of the Russian revolution. A "coalition" of classes *does not at all* presuppose *either* the existence of any particular powerful party, *or* parties in general. This is only confusing classes with parties. A "coalition" of the specified classes *does not in the least* imply *either* that one of the existing bourgeois parties will establish its sway over the peasantry *or* that the peasantry should form a powerful independent party! Theoretically this is clear because, first, the peasants do not lend themselves very well to party organisation; and because, secondly, the formation of peasant parties is an extremely difficult and lengthy process in a bourgeois revolution, so that a "powerful independent" party may emerge only towards the end of the revolution.⁷

As it turned out, such an independent peasant party did emerge during the course of 1917 and its left-wing majority entered into a governmental coalition with the Bolsheviks during the democratic stage of the proletarian revolution. As Trotsky himself pointed out in a report on the fourth congress of the Communist International to a meeting of the Communist fraction of the 10th Congress of Soviets in December 1922, "in Russia we created a workers' and peasants' government together with the Left Social-Revolutionaries" during "the transition to the proletarian dictatorship, the full and completed one".⁸

Continuing his refutation of Trotsky's 1906 argument, Lenin explained that: The experience of the [1905-07] Russian revolution shows that "coalitions" of the proletariat and the peasantry were formed *scores and hundreds of times*, in the most diverse forms, without any "independent powerful party" of the peasantry. Such a coalition was formed when there was "joint action", between, say, a Soviet of Workers' Deputies and a Soviet of Soldiers' Deputies, or a Railwaymen's Strike Committee, or Peasants' Deputies, etc. All these organisations were mainly *non-party*; nevertheless, every joint action between them undoubtedly represented a "coalition" of *classes*... To deny it means to engage in pettifoggery, or to transform the broad scientific concept of a "coalition of classes" into a narrow, juridical concept, almost that — I would say — of a notary.⁹

To Trotsky's argument that Marxists could participate in a revolutionary-democratic government only if they constituted "a solid majority" in it, and that therefore such a government would not be an instrument of a proletarian-peasant dictatorship, but a

“workers’ government”, Lenin responded:

Trotsky, himself, in the course of his argument, concedes that “representatives of the democratic population will take part” in the “workers’ government”, i.e., concedes that there will be a government consisting of representatives of the proletariat *and* the peasantry. On what terms the proletariat will take part in the government of the revolution is quite another question... The question of the dictatorship of the revolutionary classes, however, cannot be reduced to a question of the “majority” in any particular revolutionary government, or of the terms on which the participation of the Social-Democrats in such a government is admissible.¹⁰

In fact, in 1905 the Bolsheviks had noted that Marx had endorsed the participation of his co-thinkers as *a minority* alongside various representatives of petty-bourgeois democracy in the revolutionary-democratic government created by the uprising of the Parisian masses in March 1871, i.e., the “Paris Commune”.¹¹

The new line that Trotsky presented on China in October 1928, while emphasising the need to mobilise the masses under democratic slogans, did not involve a change in his *strategic perspectives* for the third Chinese revolution. While Trotsky no longer explicitly argued that from its very outset this revolution would have to attack bourgeois property in city and village, he continued to reject the use of the Leninist formula of a democratic worker-peasant dictatorship as a description of the class content of the initial stage of the revolution. In his October 4, 1928 article he wrote:

In Russia, the formula of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry was the algebraic expression, in other words, the most general, the most extensive expression of the collaboration of the proletariat and the lower strata of the peasantry in the democratic revolution. The logic of this formula was conditioned by the fact that its fundamental magnitude had not been verified in action. In particular, it was not possible to predict quite categorically if, in the conditions of the new epoch, the peasantry would be capable of becoming a more or less *independent* political power, to what extent it would be such, and what would be the reciprocal political relations of the allies in the dictatorship that would result from it.

The year 1905 did not bring the question to the point of a decisive verification. The year 1917 showed that when the peasantry bears on its back a party (the Social Revolutionaries) independent of the vanguard of the proletariat, this party proves to be in complete dependence upon the imperialist bourgeoisie. In the course of the period from 1905 to 1917, the growing imperialist transformation of the petty-bourgeois democracy as well as of the international Social Democracy, made gigantic progress. It is because of this that in 1917 the slogan of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry was actually realized in the dictatorship of the proletariat, drawing

with the peasant masses. By this very token, the “transformation by growth” of the revolution, passing from the democratic phase to the socialist stage, already took place under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In China, the slogan of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry might still have had a certain political logic, much more limited and episodic than in Russia, if it had been formulated at the right time in 1925-26, in order to test out the animating forces of the revolution, so as to be replaced, also at the right time, by the dictatorship of the proletariat drawing behind it the poor peasants...

The period of interrevolutionary stabilization corresponds to the development of the productive forces, to the growth of the national bourgeoisie, to the growth and the increase of the cohesion of the proletariat, to the accentuation of the differentiation in the villages and to the continuation of the capitalist degeneration of democracy à la Wang Ching-wei or any other petty-bourgeois democrat...

The social changes that the interrevolutionary regime will introduce in China depend especially upon the duration of this regime. But the general tendency of these modifications is henceforth indisputable: it is the sharpening of the class contradictions and the complete elimination of the petty-bourgeois democracy as an independent political power. But this signifies precisely that in the third Chinese revolution, a “democratic” coalition of the political parties would acquire a still more reactionary and more antiproletarian content than that of the Kuomintang in 1925-27. There is therefore nothing left to do but make a coalition of classes under the direct leadership of the proletarian vanguard.¹²

In the above quoted passages Trotsky resurrected the theoretical mistakes he had made prior to 1917 in regard to Russia and applied them anew to China. His argument against the use of the Leninist formula of a democratic worker-peasant dictatorship operated on two levels. On the political level, it repeated the argument that a revolutionary-democratic coalition between the workers and peasants was unrealisable because any petty-bourgeois revolutionary party, including one based on the peasantry, would inevitably be dependent upon the big bourgeoisie (the subsequent course of events in China — where the Stalinists transformed the Chinese CP into a petty-bourgeois revolutionary peasant party that was independent of the big bourgeoisie — was to refute this argument). Here Trotsky again confused the question of a coalition of *classes* with a coalition of *parties*. On the social level, he argued that there would be no objective basis for a revolutionary peasant “power” because the future development of Chinese capitalism would accentuate the class differentiations in the villages between the rich and poor peasants to the point where they would be unable to conduct a common struggle. Therefore, the victory of the third Chinese revolution would be

realised, not by a dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry *as a whole*, but by a dictatorship of the proletariat “drawing behind it the poor peasants”.

For orthodox Marxists, the term “dictatorship of the proletariat”, as Lenin explained in his 1917 work *The State and Revolution*, signifies a revolutionary state power that organises the working class to suppress the resistance of the bourgeoisie during the transition period between capitalism and the classless, socialist society of the future.

A state power that organises the working class, in alliance with the peasantry as a whole, to suppress the resistance of the big landowners and industrialists in order to carry to completion a democratic revolution would also be a form of proletarian dictatorship, of working-class state power. But it would not yet be a *socialist* dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e., a state power that organises the working class and the semi-proletarian elements to suppress the resistance of the capitalists to the “abolition of bourgeois property in city and village”. It would be a special form of proletarian state power in a bourgeois-democratic revolution, a *revolutionary-democratic* dictatorship of the proletariat *and the peasantry*.

If, as Trotsky argued in his October 1928 article on China, what was required for the victory of the third Chinese revolution was a dictatorship of the proletariat allied to the poor peasants *only*, then the strategic task facing the Chinese proletariat would not be that of rallying the peasantry *as a whole* for a *national-democratic revolution* against the big landowners and the foreign exploiters, as a *step toward* the socialist revolution. The strategic task facing the Chinese proletariat would be that of rallying the poor peasants for an *immediate* socialist revolution against the rich peasants and the urban bourgeoisie. There would therefore be *no* democratic stage in the third Chinese revolution.

In a 1984 article in the internal bulletin of the Fourth International, Ernest Mandel claimed that Trotsky's June 1928 predictions on the future course of a third Chinese revolution had been proven correct:

*Right from the beginning of 1950 — in other words in a shorter period than after October 1917 — exactly as Trotsky had predicted — something like 65% of all Chinese industrial capital and 80% of modern industrial capitalism were nationalized. These nationalizations preceded the land reform in the South of the country. So where is the “democratic phase”?*¹³

It is true that Mao's Central People's Government, as soon as it was formed, took over control of more than 2000 industrial enterprises accounting for 80% of China's fixed capital assets. However, these industrial enterprises had been state-owned *before* the coming to power of Mao Zedong's government. They had formerly been the property of Japanese investors, and were overwhelmingly concentrated in Manchuria, occupied

by the Japanese army from 1937 to 1945. At the end of World War II, Chiang Kai-shek's bourgeois-landlord government had nationalised them and run them as state-capitalist enterprises.

While these enterprises accounted for 80% of China's fixed capital assets, they only accounted for 34.7% of the value of China's industrial production. The great bulk of the value of the country's industrial output, produced by factories located in the coastal cities of central and south China, remained under private ownership until 1953. Between 1950 and 1953 the number of privately-owned industrial firms actually *increased* — from 23,000 to 150,000 and employed 2.2 million workers, compared with 800,000 workers employed in state-owned industrial enterprises.

It was only in 1953, i.e., after the bourgeois-democratic agrarian reform had been completed throughout mainland China, that the Mao regime mobilised the Chinese working class to crush the resistance of the Chinese bourgeoisie to the regime's program of wholesale expropriation of capitalist property.

2. Trotsky's defence of his pre-1917 permanent revolution theory

By October 1928 Trotsky had completed the writing of an extensive defence of his pre-1917 theory of permanent revolution. Published in November 1929 under the title *The Permanent Revolution*, the whole thrust of the book was an attempt by Trotsky to show that the disagreements that had existed between Lenin and himself prior to 1917 on the perspectives for the Russian revolution were simply differences of emphasis:

While Lenin, always proceeding from the leading role of the proletariat, emphasized and developed in every way the necessity of the revolutionary democratic collaboration of the workers and peasants — teaching this to all of us — I, invariably proceeding from this collaboration, emphasised in every way the necessity of proletarian leadership, not only in the bloc [i.e., the worker-peasant alliance -DL] but also in the government which would be called upon to head this bloc. No other differences can be read into the matter.¹⁴

This argument, however, was not very forthright. In the first place, prior to 1917 Trotsky did not “invariably” acknowledge the centrality of the “revolutionary democratic collaboration of the workers and peasants”. To the contrary, he had disputed the very possibility of such collaboration.

The second problem with Trotsky's 1928 explanation of his pre-1917 differences with Lenin's perspectives for the Russian revolution — i.e., that they only concerned matters of emphasis — was that in the book itself Trotsky argued that they concerned “the *political mechanics* of the collaboration of the proletariat and the peasantry in the

democratic revolution”.¹⁵

In the introduction to the first edition of the book, Trotsky explained this difference as follows:

Lenin attacked the agrarian problem, which affected the vital interests of the overwhelming majority of the population and at the same time constituted the basic problem of the capitalist market, with a truly revolutionary boldness. Since the liberal bourgeoisie, which confronts the worker as an enemy, is intimately bound by innumerable ties to large landed property, the genuine democratic liberation of the peasantry can be realised only by the revolutionary co-operation of the workers and peasants. According to Lenin, their joint uprising against the old society must, if victorious, lead to the establishment of the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry”...

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 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...

That the agrarian revolution, and consequently, the general democratic revolution also, could be realised only by the united forces of the workers and peasants in struggle against the liberal bourgeoisie, was for me, contrary to the senseless fairy tales of recent years, beyond any doubt. Yet I came out against the formula “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry”, because I saw its shortcomings in the fact that it left open the question of which class would wield the real dictatorship. I endeavoured to show in spite of its enormous social and revolutionary weight the peasantry was incapable of creating a really independent party and even less capable of concentrating the revolutionary power in the hands of such a party.¹⁶

It is true that the Leninist formula bore an intentionally “algebraic” character. This was not because Lenin was unsure what the political relationships would be between the proletariat and the peasantry in a victorious democratic revolution. As Trotsky himself acknowledged in his 1928 book, Lenin had always proceeded “from the leading role of the proletariat”. Rather, the formula had an “algebraic” character because, as Lenin explained in his April 1917 “Letters on Tactics”, it “envisages only a *relation of classes*, and not a *concrete political institution implementing* this relation, this co-operation”.¹⁷

Once again Trotsky had fallen into the theoretical error of confusing a coalition of classes with a coalition of parties. In fact, in his 1928 book Trotsky identified this as the central issue in his dispute with the Bolsheviks, claiming that the October Revolution had proved him right, and Lenin wrong:

Were the peasantry capable of creating their own independent party in the epoch of the democratic revolution, then the democratic dictatorship could be realized in its truest and most direct sense, and the question of the participation of the proletarian minority in the revolutionary government would have an important, it is true, but subordinate significance. The case is entirely otherwise if we proceed from the fact that the peasantry, because of its intermediate position and the heterogeneity of its social composition, can have neither an independent policy nor an independent party, but is compelled, in the revolutionary epoch, to choose between the policy of the bourgeoisie and the policy of the proletariat. Only this evaluation of the political nature of the peasantry opens up the prospect of the dictatorship of the proletariat growing directly out of the democratic revolution...

What were Lenin's views on the question of a peasant party? To reply to this question, a comprehensive review would be required of the evolution of Lenin's views on the Russian revolution in the period of 1905-17. I shall confine myself here to two quotations:

"It is possible ... that the objective difficulties of a political unification of the petty bourgeoisie will check the formation of such a party and leave the peasant democracy for a long time in the present state of a spongy, shapeless, pulpy, Trudovik-like mass."

In 1909, Lenin expressed himself on the same theme in a different way:

"There is not the slightest doubt that a revolution which reaches ... so high a degree of development as the revolutionary dictatorship will create a more firmly-formed and more powerful revolutionary peasant party. To judge the matter otherwise would mean to assume that in a grown-up man, the size, form, and degree of development of certain essential organs could remain in a childish state."

Was this assumption confirmed? No, it was not...

The gigantic role of the agrarian question and the peasant question in general, as the soil or the subsoil of all other problems, and the great number of the peasant intellectuals and those who sympathised with the peasants, with their Narodnik ideology, with their "anti-capitalist" traditions and their revolutionary tempering — all this in its entirety signified that *if an anti-bourgeois revolutionary peasant party was at all possible anywhere, then it was possible precisely and primarily in Russia...*

For half a century we had, as it were, a huge laboratory for the creation of an "anti-capitalist" peasant party with an independent position toward the proletarian party.

The largest scope was attained, as is well-known, by the experiment of the S.R. Party which, for a time in 1917, actually constituted the party of the overwhelming majority of the peasantry. But what happened? This party used its position only to betray the peasants completely to the liberal bourgeoisie. The S.R.s entered into a coalition with the imperialists of the Entente [the postwar Anglo-French imperialist alliance -DL] and together with them conducted an armed struggle against the Russian proletariat.¹⁸

Trotsky's description of the evolution of the Socialist Revolutionary peasant party here leaves out one, not insignificant, episode — the split in the SRs shortly before the October insurrection and the entry of their left-wing majority into a revolutionary alliance, including at the governmental level, with the Bolsheviks during the *democratic stage* of the October Revolution, i.e., during the period from November 1917 until the middle of 1918 when the proletariat was allied with the peasantry as a whole. This alliance came to an end when the Bolshevik proletariat supported the poor peasants against the rich peasants (kulaks) and the revolution entered its *socialist stage*. It was then that the petty-bourgeois democratic Left SRs joined forces with the Right SRs, right-wing Mensheviks, the Kadets, and the Entente imperialists to organise a bourgeois-landlord counterrevolutionary civil war against the Russian workers. Thus, while Lenin's formula of a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry — contrary to Trotsky's assertions — was not dependent upon the coming into being of an independent peasant party, Lenin's expectation that such a party *might* come into being and constitute a political ally of the proletarian vanguard when the revolution reached the point of a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship, was proven correct by the experience of the October Revolution.

Trotsky's claim that the peasantry could not put forward an independent policy was also proven incorrect. In 1917 representatives of the peasantry put forward a policy of "equal land tenure". In his 1918 polemic against Kautsky, Lenin pointed out that this was not a proletarian, but a petty-bourgeois, policy. While the Bolsheviks' did not agree with this policy, Lenin explained that they had nevertheless enforced it "because this is the demand of the overwhelming majority of the peasants".¹⁹

That the Bolshevik proletariat found it necessary to accede to the implementation of this petty-bourgeois policy was one expression of the fact that during the first, democratic, stage of the October Revolution the Soviet regime was not "a democratic dress for the rule of the proletariat" (as Trotsky imagined it would be in his 1906 work *Results and Prospects*).²⁰ The revolutionary dictatorship at that stage was not wielded by the proletariat alone, but by the proletariat *and* the peasantry, with the latter still united under the ideological hegemony and political leadership of the peasant bourgeoisie, the kulak-usurer class.

In his 1928 book Trotsky took issue with the argument raised by CPSU Oppositionist Karl Radek that the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry had been realised in 1917 in the form of the dual power between the bourgeois-landlord Provisional Government and the soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies. In doing so Radek had appealed to the September 1924 article "Lessons of October" in which Trotsky had made the same claim: "[A] democratic workers' and peasants' coalition could only take shape as an immature form of power incapable of attaining real power — it could take shape only as a tendency and not as a concrete fact."²¹

In endeavouring to show that his pre-1917 theory of permanent revolution only differed in "emphasis" from Lenin's pre-1917 strategic line, Trotsky was now forced to substantially modify this argument. Responding to Radek, Trotsky wrote:

If the democratic dictatorship had only been realized in our country in the form of Kerenskyism ... then we would have to say that history indulged in cruel mockery of the strategic slogan of Bolshevism. Fortunately, it is not so. The Bolshevik slogan was realized in fact — not as a morphological trait but as a very great historical reality. Only, it was realized *not before, but after October*... The collaboration of the two classes was realized through October on a gigantic scale. At that time every ignorant peasant grasped and felt, even without Lenin's commentaries, that the Bolshevik slogan had been given life. And Lenin himself estimated the October Revolution — its first stage — as the *true* realization of the democratic revolution, and by that also as the true, even if changed, embodiment of the strategic slogan of the Bolsheviks...

The question of the class character of the revolution and its "growing over" [into a socialist revolution -DL] was submitted by Lenin (after October) to an analysis in his book against Kautsky. Here is one of the passages over which Radek should reflect a bit.

"Yes, our revolution (the October Revolution - L.T.) is a bourgeois revolution *so long* as we march with the peasantry *as a whole*. This has been clear as clear can be to us; we have said it hundreds and thousands of times since 1905, and we have never attempted to skip this necessary stage of the historical process or abolish it by decrees."

And further on:

"Things have turned out just as we said they would. The course taken by the revolution has confirmed the correctness of our reasoning. *First*, with the "whole" of the peasantry against the monarchy, the landlords, the mediaeval regime (and to that extent, the revolution remains bourgeois, bourgeois-democratic). Then, with the poorest peasants, with the semi-proletarians, with all the exploited, *against capitalism*, including the rural rich, the kulaks, the profiteers, and to that extent the revolution becomes a *socialist* one."

That is how Lenin spoke — not "occasionally" but always, or, more accurately,

invariably — when he gave a finished and generalized and perfected evaluation of the revolution, including October. “Things have turned out just as we said they would.” The bourgeois-democratic revolution was realized as a coalition of the workers and peasants. During the Kerensky period? No, *during the first period after October*. Is that right? It is.

Of course, this argument, which accurately reflected Lenin's assessment of the October Revolution, spoke against Trotsky's pre-1917 theory of permanent revolution, not for it. Attempting to rescue his position from this conclusion Trotsky added to the end of the above quoted passage the comment: “But, as we now know, it [i.e., the bourgeois-democratic revolution — DL] was not realized in the form of a democratic dictatorship, but in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat.”²² By the latter formula Trotsky meant a state power led by the political vanguard of the proletariat. But Lenin had always conceived of the worker-peasant dictatorship being politically led by the proletariat, by its revolutionary party.

Lenin had rejected Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, not because he had disagreed with Trotsky's argument for the need for a revolutionary struggle for power by the proletariat or for proletarian political leadership in a revolutionary government. He had rejected Trotsky's theory because it failed to recognise that a general peasant revolution was still a bourgeois revolution and that as long as the peasantry remained united in their aim of carrying through the bourgeois agrarian revolution (confiscation of the semi-feudal estates), the bourgeois revolution could not be transformed into a socialist revolution. As a small minority within the Russian population, the urban proletariat could only carry through a socialist revolution in Russia if it could win support for this aim from the majority of peasants, from its semi-proletarian section. That would only become possible once the poor peasants came into conflict with the peasant bourgeoisie, with the kulak-usurer section of the peasantry, i.e., once the bourgeois agrarian revolution was consummated.

In an attempt to demonstrate that there was no contradiction between this perspective and his pre-1917 theory of permanent revolution, Trotsky offered the following argument:

Now contrast the quotation from Lenin's book, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, with the passage from my *Results and Prospects* where, in the chapter on “The Proletarian Regime”, the first stage of the dictatorship and the prospects of its further development are outlined:

“The abolition of feudalism will meet with support from the *entire* peasantry as the burden-bearing estate. A progressive income tax will also be supported by the great majority of the peasantry. But any legislation carried through for the purpose of protecting

the agricultural proletariat will not only not receive the active sympathy of the majority, but will even meet with the active opposition of a minority of the peasantry.

“The proletariat will find itself compelled to carry the class struggle into the villages and in this manner destroy the community of interest which is undoubtedly to be found among all peasants, although within comparatively narrow limits. From the very first moment after its taking power, the proletariat will have to find support in the antagonisms between the village poor and the village rich, between the agricultural proletariat and the agricultural bourgeoisie.” (*Our Revolution*, page 255, 1906)

How little all this resembles an “ignoring” of the peasantry on my part, and the complete “antagonism” between the two lines, Lenin’s, and mine!²³

Lenin, however, had never claimed that Trotsky’s pre-1917 theory of permanent revolution was in *complete* antagonism to the Bolsheviks’ policy. Rather, he had argued that it combined Bolshevism’s “call for a decisive proletarian revolutionary struggle and for the conquest of political power by the proletariat” with Menshevism’s “repudiation” of the active revolutionary role of the peasantry as a whole.²⁴

This criticism of Lenin’s was confirmed by the passage that Trotsky cited from *Results and Prospects*. In it, Trotsky affirmed that from “the very first moment after its taking power” the urban proletariat would “find itself compelled to carry the class struggle into the villages” and “destroy that community of interest which is undoubtedly to be found among all peasants”. From “the very first moment after its taking power” the urban proletariat would have to attempt to “find support in the antagonisms between the village poor and the village rich”. By contrast, Lenin pointed out that the proletariat had to “march with the peasantry *as a whole*” against the landlords. In his 1918 polemic against Kautsky, Lenin had explained that:

The victorious Bolshevik revolution ... carried the *bourgeois* revolution to its conclusion... The Soviets united the peasants *in general*. The class divisions among the peasants had not yet matured, had not yet come into the open.

That process took place in the summer and autumn of 1918... Having completed the bourgeois-democratic revolution in alliance with the peasants as a whole, the Russian proletariat finally passed on to the socialist revolution when it succeeded in splitting the rural population, in winning over the rural proletarians and semi-proletarians, and in uniting them against the kulaks and the bourgeoisie, including the peasant bourgeoisie.²⁵

A paragraph later, Lenin explained that “if the Bolshevik proletariat had tried at once, in October-November 1917 [i.e., “from the very first moment after taking power” — DL] without waiting for the class differentiation in the rural districts” to attempt “to ‘decree’ a civil war” in the rural districts (i.e., “to carry the class struggle into the villages”), this would have been an ultraleft distortion of Marxism, “an attempt by the

minority to impose its will upon the majority". It would, Lenin added, have been a "theoretical absurdity, revealing a failure to understand that a general peasant revolution is *still* a bourgeois revolution, and that *without a series of transitions, of transitional stages*, it cannot be transformed into a socialist revolution in a backward country".²⁶

It was Trotsky's failure to understand this that had led Lenin to point out in his 1909 article "The Aim of the Proletarian Struggle in Our Revolution" that: "Trotsky's major mistake is that he *ignores* the bourgeois character of the revolution and has *no clear conception* of the transition from this revolution to the socialist revolution" (emphasis added).²⁷

3. Trotsky's identification of Bolshevik policy with Menshevism

Just how muddled Trotsky thinking on this question had become by 1928 was illustrated by the fact that in his pamphlet *The Permanent Revolution*, written in October 1928, he noted that in November 1905 the Bolsheviks had declared their agreement with his first formulations of the idea of the *uninterrupted growing over* of the proletarian-peasant democratic revolution to a socialist revolution. But, then, in December 1928, Trotsky claimed that up to 1917 the Bolsheviks had believed that the proletarian-peasant democratic revolution would necessarily have to be followed by *decades* of capitalist industrial development before a proletarian-socialist revolution would be possible in Russia.

In *The Permanent Revolution*, Trotsky wrote:

What was the attitude of the then leading organ of the Bolshevik faction, *Novaya Zhizn*, published under the vigilant editorship of Lenin, when I [first] raised the question of permanent revolution in the press?... To an article of the "radical" bourgeois newspaper *Nasha Zhizn* (*Our Life*), which endeavoured to set up the "more rational" views of Lenin against the "permanent revolution" of Trotsky, the Bolshevik *Novaya Zhizn* replied (November 27, 1905) as follows:

"This gratuitous assumption is of course sheer nonsense. Comrade Trotsky said that the proletarian revolution can, without halting at the first stage, continue on its road, elbowing the exploiters aside; Lenin, on the other hand, pointed out that the political revolution is only the first step. The publicist of *Nasha Zhizn* would like to see a contradiction here... The whole misunderstanding comes, first, from the fear with which the name alone of the social revolution fills *Nasha Zhizn*; secondly, out of the desire of this paper to discover some sort of sharp and piquant difference of opinion among the Social Democrats; and thirdly, in the figure of speech used by Comrade Trotsky: 'at a single blow.' In No. 10 of *Nachalo*, Comrade Trotsky explains his idea

quite unambiguously:

“The complete victory of the revolution signifies the victory of the proletariat’, writes Comrade Trotsky. ‘But this victory in turn implies the uninterruptedness of the revolution in the future. The proletariat realizes in life the fundamental democratic tasks, and the very logic of its immediate struggle to consolidate its political rule poses before the proletariat, at a certain moment, purely socialist problems. Between the minimum and the maximum programme (of the Social Democrats) a revolutionary continuity is established. It is not a question of a single ‘blow’, or of a single day or month, but of a whole historical epoch. It would be absurd to try to fix its duration in advance.’”

This one reference in a way exhausts the subject of the present pamphlet... My article explained that the victorious proletariat, in the process of carrying out the democratic tasks, would by the logic of its position inevitably be confronted at a certain stage by purely socialist problems. This is just where the *continuity* lies between the minimum and the maximum programmes, which grows inevitably out of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is not a single blow, it is not a leap — I explained to my critics in the camp of the petty bourgeoisie of the time — it is a whole historical epoch. And Lenin’s *Novaya Zhizn* associated itself completely with this prospect.²⁸

It is certainly true that in late 1905 the Bolsheviks associated themselves with the idea that “the proletarian revolution can, without halting at the first stage” (i.e., the overthrow of the autocracy and the destruction of semi-feudal agrarian relations, in alliance with the peasantry as whole) “continue on its road, elbowing the [capitalist] exploiters aside”, in alliance with the poor peasants. That, after all, was the strategic line they had advocated since the middle of 1905. But, in defending Trotsky’s first formulations of his theory of permanent revolution in late 1905 from attacks by the bourgeois press, the Bolsheviks also indicated a possible difference that might exist between their conception of *uninterrupted* revolution and Trotsky’s permanent revolution theory, i.e., that the democratic and socialist stages of the proletarian revolution in Russia could not be effected “at a single blow”.

The difference between the Leninist conception of uninterrupted revolution and Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution was to become clearer in 1906. In late 1905 Trotsky had argued that “[b]etween the minimum and the maximum programme (of Social Democracy) a revolutionary *continuity* is established”. The Bolsheviks “completely associated” themselves with this idea. But in his 1906 pamphlet *Results and Prospects* Trotsky replaced this idea with the ultraleft view that “immediately ... power is transferred into the hands of a revolutionary government with a socialist majority, the division of our programme into maximum and minimum loses all significance, both in

principle and in immediate practice”, i.e., the democratic and socialist revolutions would be carried out simultaneously. This was an idea that Lenin and the Bolsheviks disagreed with, not only in 1905-06, but also in 1917-18. As Lenin pointed out in his 1918 polemic against Kautsky:

With all the peasants right through to the end of the bourgeois-democratic revolution; and with the poor, the proletarian and semi-proletarian section of the peasantry, forward to the socialist revolution! That has been the policy of the Bolsheviks, and it is the only Marxist policy.²⁹

Two months after he acknowledged in *The Permanent Revolution* that the Bolsheviks had, since 1905, held the view that the proletarian revolution in Russia would not halt at the “first stage” of completing the bourgeois-democratic tasks, but “continue on its road” to the socialist expropriation of the capitalist exploiters, Trotsky presented a very different view of the Bolsheviks’ position from 1905 to 1917.

In an article entitled “Marxism and the Relation Between the Proletarian and Peasant Revolutions”, Trotsky claimed that the Menshevik “idea, that first there must be a bourgeois-democratic revolution, then the productive forces must develop for a period of unspecified length on capitalist foundations, and only after that would come the age of socialist revolution in its own right — that idea was the prevailing one, as the proceedings of the Bolshevik Party conference of March 1917 show”. Trotsky went on to argue that because all of the participants in that conference “viewed things from the angle that the democratic revolution must be completed” they therefore were opposed to any perspective of a struggle for power by the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies. He wrote:

What was involved was not at all [the idea] that the revolution must first carry out the democratic tasks and only on that basis could it grow over into a socialist revolution. None of the participants in the March conference had the slightest inkling of such an idea before Lenin’s arrival... There were three stages: first the democratic revolution, carried through to the end; then a period of the development of capitalist productive forces; and finally the period of socialist revolution. The second stage was conceived as quite a prolonged one, measured ... in multiple decades... According to this stereotyped theory held by Stalin and prevailing (in the party) almost totally, the position of permanent revolution, which united the democratic and socialist revolutions within the framework of a single stage, was absolutely inadmissible, anti-Marxist, monstrous.³⁰

As we have seen, in *November 1918*, Lenin stated that the idea that the democratic and socialist revolutions could be carried out simultaneously (“united within the framework of a single stage”) was a “theoretical absurdity”. He explained that the Bolsheviks had *always* held to the view that the proletarian revolution in Russia had to first carry out

the democratic tasks and only on that basis could it grow over into a socialist revolution.

Trotsky's inability to clearly understand that a proletarian-socialist revolution could not be carried out in a peasant country except on the basis of the completion of the tasks of the peasant-democratic revolution, led him to identify the Bolshevik perspective with that of Menshevism. Because the formal starting point of both Menshevism and Bolshevism was the need to first complete the democratic tasks, Trotsky now claimed they both shared the view that the socialist revolution would only become possible after "multiple decades" of capitalist economic development.

By the early 1930s Trotsky's identification of the Bolsheviks' pre-1917 strategic perspectives with those of Menshevism reached new levels of grotesque absurdity. For example, in a May 1931 article on "The Spanish Revolution and the Dangers Threatening It" he claimed that the Bolsheviks' formula of a revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, by its very nature, amounted to the perspective of creating a form of *capitalist* state power:

In April 1917, Lenin repeated and repeated for the benefit of Stalin, Kamenev, and others who were clinging to the old Bolshevik formula of 1905: There is not and there cannot be a "democratic dictatorship" other than the dictatorship of Miliukov-Tseretelli-Chernov [i.e., of the liberal bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeois democrats - DL]. The *democratic dictatorship*, by its very nature, is a *dictatorship of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat*.³¹

Lenin, of course, had made no such argument in April 1917. Rather, he argued that the soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies were the partial realisation of the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants. The worker-peasant power was only partially realised, Lenin explained, because the illusions of the peasant soldiers in the radical-democratic phrasemongering of the liberal bourgeoisie (which had also infected wide layers of workers), had enabled the petty-bourgeois democratic parties (the SRs and the Mensheviks) to convince the workers and soldiers to accept the "sharing" of power with the capitalist Provisional Government.

Adapting to the petty-bourgeois democratic illusions of the soldiers and the majority of workers, a section of the Bolshevik leadership in March-April 1917 advocated a conciliationist line toward the Provisional Government, a line summed up by Stalin's proposal that "insofar as the Provisional Government fortifies the steps of the revolution, to that extent we must support it; but insofar as it is counter-revolutionary, support to the Provisional Government is not permissible". Rather than conducting systematic propaganda against the Provisional Government and for all power being transferred to a government based on the soviets, Stalin advocated that the Bolsheviks "bide our time until the Provisional Government exhausts itself, until the time when in

the process of fulfilling the revolutionary[-democratic] program it discredits itself". In the meantime, the Bolsheviks should collaborate with the Mensheviks and SRs to "strengthen" the soviets.³²

Kamenev held a different position from Stalin's. At the April 12 session of the meeting of Bolshevik delegates to the All-Russia Conference of Soviets, Kamenev stated that it was "impermissible" for the Bolsheviks to express any support for the Provisional Government or "even to hint at it". According to the minutes of the meeting, which Trotsky reprinted in Russian in 1931, Kamenev argued:

We cannot support the Government because it is an imperialist government... In view of the dual power, the will of the revolutionary people is embodied not in the Provisional Government but in the Soviets of Workers' Deputies; and also that the latter must be strengthened and that they must come to a clash with the Provisional Government.

Our task is to point out that the only organ worthy of our support is the Soviet of Workers' Deputies.³³

Kamenev's conciliationist line was expressed in his view that the Bolsheviks should call upon the SR and Menshevik leaders of the soviets to "exercise vigilant control over the activities of the Provisional Government in the center and in the provinces, urging it on toward a most energetic struggle for the complete liquidation of the [tsarist] regime".³⁴

When, a week later, after his arrival back in Petrograd, Lenin presented his "April Theses", Kamenev accused Lenin of calling for an immediate transition to the socialist revolution and thus of ignoring the fact that the democratic revolution, above all the peasant agrarian revolution, was still to be completed. Kamenev claimed that Lenin was ignoring the possibility that the peasantry would break with the liberal bourgeoisie and unite with the workers to create a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.

Lenin's response to Kamenev's argument was not at all as Trotsky portrayed it. Lenin did not argue that a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry was "by its very nature a *dictatorship of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat*", i.e., a capitalist state. Rather, Lenin argued that the dictatorship of the workers and peasants already existed in the form of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, but the workers and soldiers were voluntarily ceding their power to the capitalist Provisional Government.

In this context, Lenin wrote, those Bolsheviks like Kamenev who spoke "only" of a "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" in general terms, were "behind the times" and were consequently assisting the illusions being spread by the petty-bourgeois democrats.³⁵ The task was not to bring into being a dictatorship of the workers and peasants, since this dictatorship already existed. In

Petrograd, Lenin argued, “the power is in the hands of the workers and soldiers”, but they were voluntarily ceding it to the capitalist government.³⁶

A “new and different task now faces us”, Lenin wrote. This task was to work for the transfer of all power to the soviets through curing the workers and peasants of their petty-bourgeois democratic illusions by conducting systematic propaganda against the Provisional Government and the class-collaborationist policies of the SR and Menshevik leaders of the soviets.³⁷ Answering Kamenev and those Bolsheviks who shared his views, Lenin wrote:

A Marxist must not abandon the ground of careful analysis of class relations. The bourgeoisie is in power. But is not the mass of the peasants *also* a bourgeoisie, only of a different social stratum, of a different kind, of a different character? Whence does it follow that *this* stratum *cannot* come to power, thus “completing” the bourgeois-democratic revolution? Why should this be impossible?

This is how the old Bolsheviks often argue.

My reply is that it is quite possible. But, in assessing a given situation, a Marxist must proceed *not* from what is possible, but from what is real.

And the reality reveals the *fact* that freely elected soldiers’ and workers’ deputies are freely... *surrendering* power to the bourgeoisie...

In view of the present-day reality, it is simply ridiculous to turn one’s back on the fact and talk about “possibilities”...

Possibly the peasantry may seize the land and all the power...

But there is also another possibility; it is possible that the peasants will take the advice of the petty-bourgeois party of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, which has yielded to the influence of the bourgeoisie...

It is possible that the peasants will *maintain* and prolong their deal with the bourgeoisie, a deal which they have now concluded through the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies not only in form, but in fact.

Many things are possible. It would be a great mistake to forget the agrarian movement and the agrarian programme. But it would be no less a mistake to forget the *reality*, which reveals the *fact* that an *agreement*, or — to use a more exact, less legal, but more class-economic term — *class collaboration* exists between the bourgeoisie and the peasantry.

When this fact ceases to be a fact, when the peasantry separates from the bourgeoisie, seizes the land and power despite the bourgeoisie, that will be a new stage in the bourgeois-democratic revolution; and that matter will be dealt with separately

A Marxist who, in view of the possibility of such a future stage, were to forget his duties in *the present*, when the peasantry is *in agreement* with the bourgeoisie, would

turn petty-bourgeois. For he would in practice be preaching to the proletariat *confidence* in the petty bourgeoisie (“this petty bourgeoisie, this peasantry, must separate from the bourgeoisie while the bourgeois-democratic revolution is still on”). Because of the “possibility” of so pleasing and sweet a future, in which the peasantry would *not* be the tail of the bourgeoisie, in which the Socialist Revolutionaries... would *not* be an appendage of the bourgeois government — because of the “possibility” of so pleasing a future, he would be forgetting *the unpleasant present*, in which the peasantry still form the tail of the bourgeoisie, and in which the Socialist Revolutionaries... have not yet given up their role as an appendage of the bourgeois government...³⁸

The dispute between Lenin and Kamenev in April 1917, contrary to Trotsky's misrepresentation of it, had nothing to do with whether or not the Bolsheviks should still work for the carrying through to completion of a proletarian-peasant democratic revolution, as a step toward the socialist revolution. It had to do with what *tactics* the Bolsheviks should employ in order to advance along this strategic line of march.

4. Trotsky's 'generalised' theory of permanent revolution

At the end of the first (1929) edition of *The Permanent Revolution*, Trotsky added a summary of the “basic postulates” of his theory of permanent revolution as he now conceived it.³⁹ He stated that “with regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving *democracy and national emancipation* is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses.”

Reflecting the lessons he had learnt from the experience of the October Revolution, Trotsky now stressed the centrality of the worker-peasant alliance in carrying out the national-democratic revolution in industrially underdeveloped countries:

Not only the agrarian, but also the national question assigns to the peasantry — the overwhelming majority of the population in backward countries — an exceptional place in the democratic revolution. Without the alliance of the proletariat with the peasantry the tasks of the democratic revolution cannot be solved, nor even seriously posed. But the alliance of these two classes can be realized in no other way than through an irreconcilable struggle against the influence of the national-liberal bourgeoisie.

Again, reflecting the lessons of the October Revolution, Trotsky now drew out the importance of solving the democratic tasks:

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 proletarian vanguard... 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.

He next sought to clarify how his theory differed from the policy of Bolshevism: 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 the more precise arithmetic 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 by an independent role and even less a leading one. The peasant follows either the worker or the bourgeois. This means that the “dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” is only conceivable as a *dictatorship of the proletariat that leads the peasant masses behind it*.

Amplifying on this point, Trotsky wrote:

A democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, as a regime that is distinguished from the dictatorship of the proletariat by its class content, might be realized only in a case where an *independent* revolutionary peasant party could be constituted, expressing the interests of the peasants and in general of petty-bourgeois democracy — a party capable of conquering power with this or that degree of aid from the proletariat, and of determining its revolutionary programme.

Despite the fact that such a revolutionary peasant party — the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party — had appeared in Russia, Trotsky affirmed that:

As all modern history attests — especially the Russian experience of the last twenty-five years — an insurmountable obstacle on the road to the creation of a peasants' party is the petty-bourgeoisie's lack of economic and political independence and its deep internal differentiation. By reason of this the upper sections of the petty-bourgeoisie (of the peasantry) go along with the big bourgeoisie in all decisive cases, especially in war and in revolution; the lower sections go along with the proletariat; the intermediate section being thus compelled to choose between the two extreme poles. Between Kerenskyism and the Bolshevik power, between the Kuomintang and the dictatorship of the proletariat, there is not and cannot be any intermediate stage, that is, no democratic dictatorship

of the workers and peasants.

Trotsky thus repeated his past mistake of confusing the question of the coalition of classes needed to carry out the democratic revolution with the question of party-political composition of the revolutionary government. Even in terms of his own mistaken methodology, however, his argument did not hold true: between “Kerenskyism”, i.e., a landlord-capitalist government, and “the Bolshevik power”, i.e., a government exclusively consisting of communists, there had been the Bolshevik-Left SR coalition government. Within the framework of the mistaken methodology that Trotsky developed his line of argument, acknowledgment of the existence of this coalition government would have forced him to admit that a “democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants” had been constituted in Russia, during the first, democratic, stage of the October Revolution. By omitting the existence of this coalition government from the historical record, Trotsky “succeeded” in preserving the integrity of his theoretical dogma that there could not be a transitional stage of worker-peasant state power in a proletarian revolution in a predominantly peasant country.

Despite the fact that the Stalinised Comintern had *opposed* raising the Bolshevik “slogan” of a democratic worker-peasant dictatorship during the second Chinese revolution and had sabotaged the revolution by foisting upon the Chinese CP the *neo-Menshevik* policy of support for a governmental “bloc of four classes” in the form of the Kuomintang, Trotsky thundered away at the old Bolshevik formula:

The Comintern's endeavour to foist upon the Eastern countries the slogan of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, finally and long ago exhausted by history, can have only a reactionary effect. Insofar as this slogan is counterposed to the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat, it contributes politically to the dissolution of the proletariat in the petty-bourgeois masses and thus creates the most favorable conditions for the hegemony of the national bourgeoisie and consequently for the collapse of the democratic revolution. The introduction of this slogan into the programme of the Comintern is a direct betrayal of Marxism and of the October tradition of Bolshevism.

Rejection of the old Bolshevik formula was thus turned by Trotsky into a programmatic point of honour — a shibboleth by which those who defended “Marxism and the October tradition of Bolshevism” (i.e., Trotsky's interpretation of them) would distinguish themselves within the working-class movement.

As to the real issue which had distinguished Trotsky's pre-1917 theory of permanent revolution from Lenin's theory of uninterrupted revolution, i.e., the transformation of a general peasant revolution into a socialist revolution, in his 1929 summary of the “basic postulates” of the theory of permanent revolution, Trotsky presented an

ambiguous formulation:

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 fulfilment 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.

Did this mean that the democratic revolution would grow over *uninterruptedly* to the socialist revolution once the bourgeois-democratic tasks had been fulfilled (as Lenin had argued)? Or did it mean that the democratic revolution would grow over *immediately* into a socialist revolution, with the democratic and socialist tasks being implemented simultaneously (as Trotsky had tended to argue prior to 1917, and had definitely argued earlier in 1928 in relation to a third Chinese revolution)?

The analysis of the development of the October Revolution that Trotsky presented in the book also left the issue unclear. He referred to the democratic revolution being realised in the “first stage” of the October Revolution and argued that the democratic revolution “was accomplished ... in the form of the *dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasant war* — and then, a few months later, began growing into a socialist dictatorship”. But in the very next paragraph he claimed that “the class dynamics” of the revolution had “thoroughly ‘mixed up’, that is, *combined*” the bourgeois stage with the socialist.⁴⁰

Trotsky's writings after 1929 did little to clarify this crucial question. For example, in the *Transitional Program*, the programmatic resolution he drafted for the founding congress of the Fourth International in 1938, he gave the following outline of his view of the dynamics of the revolution in the “backward countries”:

The central task of the colonial and semicolonial countries is the *agrarian revolution*, i.e., liquidation of feudal heritages, and *national independence*, i.e., overthrow of the imperialist yoke. Both tasks are closely related to each other.

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 countries such 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 bodies. 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.⁴¹

From these passages, which largely restated the line contained in the resolutions of the second and fourth congresses of the Comintern, it could be concluded that Trotsky believed that a worker-peasant alliance, organised through soviets, should take power and consummate the democratic revolution, and that once the democratic revolution was brought to a conclusion, the soviets should begin the socialist revolution. However, they could also be interpreted to mean that as soon as the soviets had come to power (“overthrown bourgeois democracy”), this would be the conclusion of the democratic revolution and its transformation into a socialist revolution. That was certainly the thrust of Trotsky’s pre-1917 formula of permanent revolution, which he endorsed in the *Transitional Program*.

The brief comments that Trotsky made on the subject in his final writings were also ambiguous about the relationship between the democratic and socialist stages of the revolution in the “backward” countries. For example, in his 1939 article “Three Conceptions of the Russian Revolution”, Trotsky stated that the “perspective of the permanent revolution” meant that the “complete victory of the democratic revolution ... is inconceivable otherwise than in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat basing itself on the peasantry” and that “the dictatorship of the proletariat ... will inescapably place on the order of the day not only democratic but also socialist tasks”.⁴² And in the war Manifesto of the Fourth International that he drafted in May 1940 Trotsky declared that the Fourth International “does not draw watertight distinctions between ... the democratic and the socialist revolutions”, but “combines them”.⁴³

Lenin had pointed out in 1909 that Trotsky’s major mistake was that he had no clear conception of the process of transition from the proletarian-peasant democratic revolution to the socialist revolution. It was a theoretical mistake that Trotsky was never able to overcome and that made his theory of permanent revolution, even in the “Bolshevised” form he attempted to give it in *The Permanent Revolution* and in the *Transitional Program*, an inferior guide to revolutionary action compared to the Leninist theory and policy of a two-stage, uninterrupted revolution. ■

Notes

I. Introduction

1. Cannon, *The History of American Trotskyism* (New York, 1972), p. 1.
2. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Moscow, 1977), Vol. 29, p. 310.
3. Trotsky, *Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926-27)* (New York, 1980), p. 369, 372.
4. Trotsky, *Writings (1932-33)* (New York, 1972), p. 53.
5. Trotsky, *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution* (New York, 1973), p. 93.
6. *ibid.*, p. 98.
7. Quoted in Trotsky, *Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926-27)*, p. 157, emphasis added by Trotsky.
8. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 33, p. 206.

II. 1905 to 1917: Bolshevism & Trotskyism

1. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 12, pp. 490-91.
2. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 28, p. 295.
3. *ibid.*, p. 295.
4. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 9, p. 128.
5. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 15, p. 379.
6. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 10, p. 21.
7. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 12, p. 459.
8. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 9, p. 236-7.
9. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 28, p. 300-01, 302, 304-05.
10. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 29, p. 157.
11. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 29, p. 203.
12. Trotsky, "The Social Forces in the Russian Revolution", reprinted in *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International* (New York, 1984), pp. 387-88.
13. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects* (New York, 1970), p. 71.
14. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 28, p. 310.
15. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 28, p. 305.

16. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, p. 76-77, 80.
17. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 28, p. 305.
18. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 9, pp. 56-57, 130.
19. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 28, p. 312.
20. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, p. 78.
21. *ibid.*, p. 79-80.
22. Trotsky, *1905* (London, 1971 edn.), pp. 330-331.
23. Trotsky, *Leon Trotsky on China* (New York, 1976), p. 310.
24. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks (1904)* (New Park, London, undated, p. 74).
25. Mandel, "The Leninist Theory of Organisation", in R. Blackburn (ed.), *Revolution and Class Struggle* (London, 1977), p. 93-94.
26. Trotsky, *Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25)* (New York, 1975), p. 263.
27. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, p. 72.
28. *ibid.*, p. 73.
29. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 15, p. 374.
30. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 21, p. 420.
31. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 15, p. 58.
32. Lenin, *CW* Vol. 9, p. 60.
33. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 21, p. 419.

III. 1917 to 1928: Debates within the CPSU

1. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, pp. 30.
2. *ibid.*, p. 30-31.
3. *ibid.*, p. 32.
4. *ibid.*, p. 31-32.
5. *ibid.*, p. 32.
6. *ibid.*, p. 31.
7. Trotsky, *Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25)* (New York, 1980), p. 209, 210.
8. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, pp. 44-45.
9. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 24, pp. 61-62.
10. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 36, p. 434.
11. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 24, p. 63.
12. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 24, p. 48.
13. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 24, p. 311-12.
14. Lenin *CW*, Vol. 24, p. 74.
15. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 25, p. 362, 363.
16. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 24, p. 468, 471-73.

17. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 24, p. 278.
18. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 24., p. 471.
19. Lenin, *CW*, vol. 9, pp. 84-86.
20. Stalin, *On the Opposition* (Peking, 1974), pp. 250-51.
21. *ibid.*, p. 776.
22. Trotsky, *Leon Trotsky on China*, p. 162.
23. *ibid.*, pp. 165, 169-71.
24. *ibid.*, p. 265.
25. *ibid.*, pp. 265-66.
26. *ibid.*, pp. 266-67.
27. Quoted in E.H. Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia* (London, 1978), Vol. 14, p. 838.
28. *ibid.*, p. 847.
29. Degras (ed.), *The Communist International 1919-43* (London, 1960), Vol. 2, p. 415.
30. Trotsky, *Leon Trotsky on China*, p. 274.
31. *ibid.*, pp. 277-78.
32. *ibid.*, p. 302.
33. *ibid.*, p. 302.
34. *ibid.*, p. 303.
35. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 31, p. 58.
36. Trotsky, *Leon Trotsky on China*, pp. 303-05.
37. *ibid.*, p. 312.

IV. 1928 to 1940: Trotsky's defence & 'generalisation' of the theory of permanent revolution

1. Trotsky, *Leon Trotsky on China*, p. 355, 357.
2. *ibid.*, p. 359.
3. *ibid.*, p. 367-68, 379.
4. *ibid.*, p. 356.
5. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, pp.69-74.
6. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 15, pp. 366-67.
7. *ibid.*, p. 371.
8. Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International* (New York, 1972), Vol. 2, p. 324.
9. Lenin, *ibid.*, p. 371-72.
10. *ibid.*, pp. 373-74.
11. See the appended article "The Paris Commune and the Tasks of the Democratic Dictatorship" in Lenin, *On the Paris Commune* (Moscow, 1974).

12. Trotsky, *Leon Trotsky on China*, pp. 384-86.
13. Mandel, "On the Workers and Peasants Government", *International Internal Discussion Bulletin* (New York, 1984), Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 30.
14. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, p. 198.
15. *ibid.*, p. 189.
16. *ibid.*, p. 127-28.
17. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 24, p. 44.
18. Trotsky, *ibid.*, pp. 193-196.
19. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 28, p. 310.
20. Trotsky, *ibid.*, p. 72.
21. Trotsky, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25)*, p. 210.
22. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, pp. 228-29.
23. *ibid.*, p. 229-30.
24. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 21, p. 419.
25. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 28, p. 302-05.
26. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 28, p. 305.
27. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 15, p. 371.
28. Trotsky, *ibid.*, pp. 209-10.
29. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 28, p. 311.
30. Trotsky, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1928-29)* (New York, 1981), pp. 348-49.
31. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution (1931-39)* (New York, 1973), p. 122.
32. Minutes of the March 1917 Party Conference, appended to Trotsky, *The Stalin School of Falsification* (New York, 1971), p. 239.
33. *ibid.*, pp. 270-71.
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35. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 24, p. 45.
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37. *ibid.*, p. 45.
38. *ibid.*, pp. 46-48.
39. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, pp. 276-78.
40. *ibid.*, pp. 230-31.
41. Trotsky, *The Transitional Program of Socialist Revolution*, pp. 97-98.
42. Trotsky, *Writings (1939-40)* (New York, 1973), p. 72.
43. *ibid.*, p. 203.

After Lenin, the foremost leader of the Russian Revolution, Leon Trotsky was one of the outstanding figures in the revolutionary movement of the twentieth century. To many of his adherents, his most brilliant and distinctive contribution to Marxism was his theory of permanent revolution, which deals with the development of revolutions in Third World countries.

In this pioneering essay, Doug Lorimer takes issue with such assessments and subjects Trotsky's writings on permanent revolution to a sustained critique. He shows how Trotsky's theory is wrong on the fundamental questions and contrasts it to the ideas of Lenin, which have been powerfully confirmed by the Russian Revolution and all subsequent experience.

Resistance books