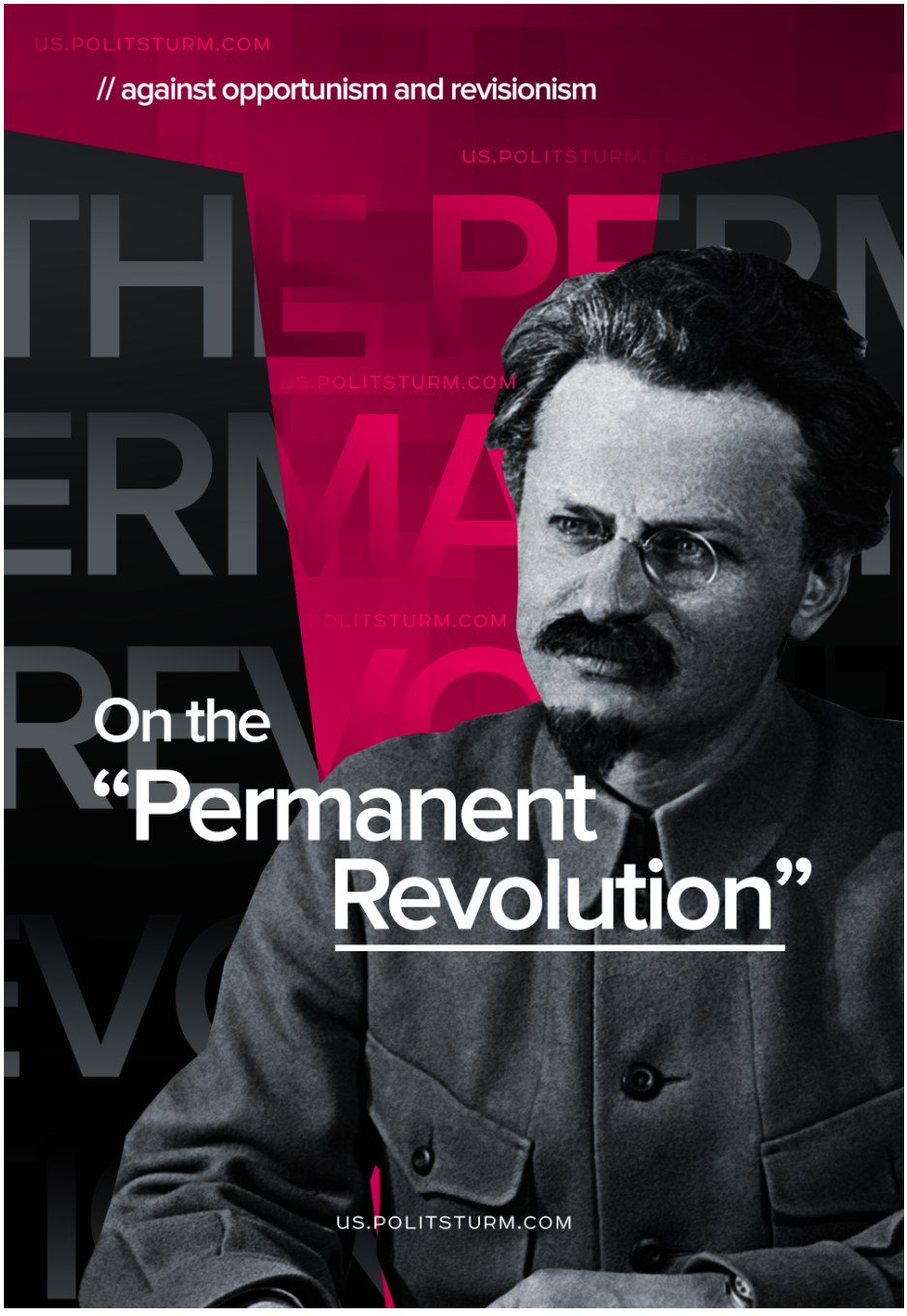
On the "Permanent Revolution"



Original article

2021-04-03

46 min read

One of the keystones of Trotskyism is the theory of “permanent revolution”. However, few people have any idea what this is. A purely superficial, philistine conception of this idea prevails, which mostly boils down to detached arguments about the “world revolution”, that “Stalin could not stand the permanent revolution”, because he was “a Bonapartist, a Thermidorian, and a restorer of capitalism under a socialist wrapper”.

This commonplace notion is extremely convenient for Trotskyists and all kinds of “semi-trotskyists”, since it allows them, on the one hand, to obscure the meaning of their own ideas, which are “revolutionary” by default, and, on the other hand, to cast the opponents of the idea of “permanent revolution” in a negative light as opponents of the idea of revolution in general.

In this article we break down this convenient façade and briefly explain what permanent revolution in Trotsky’s view is and to what fatal consequences for the revolutionary movement this postulate leads.

“The Permanent Revolution”

The roots of Trotsky’s ideas go back to the eve of the first Russian revolution of 1905. At that time, there was a great deal of confusion within the young Russian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party as to which path this revolution should take and which classes should lead it.

The Mensheviks and their associates pointed to the bourgeois-democratic character of the coming revolution, simultaneously pointing to the weakness of the proletariat, which would not be able to play a leading role and would therefore have to hand over primacy to the bourgeoisie, only helping it on its way to realize its bourgeois-democratic tasks.

The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, while agreeing that the revolution was bourgeois-democratic, nevertheless insisted on the need to fight for the leading role of the working class.

Why? Because the revolution of 1905 took place at a time when the proletariat had already come onto the historical scene, when in conditions of semi-feudal backwardness, the struggle between the working class and the bourgeoisie was already boiling in Russia. That’s why the latter, although interested in eliminating pre-capitalist remnants, was by no means eager to fully implement the democratic tasks, thus strengthening its new opponent.

According to Lenin, only the working class, having established a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship in alliance with broad strata of the peasantry – with the working class leading it – is capable not merely of bringing the bourgeois-democratic revolution to an end, but of creating the conditions for the outgrowth of the democratic revolution into a socialist revolution. This is, in short, the Leninist, Bolshevik principle of outgrowth, consistent with Marx and Engels’ views on the continuity of the revolutionary process.

Trotsky, with his traditionally centrist “middle” position, tried to “reconcile” Bolshevik and Menshevik analysis in the concept developed jointly with Alexander

Parvus. Its main features are set out in the works “1905”, “Our Differences”, “Results and Prospects”, issued by Trotsky on the wave of events that swept Russia.

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For the sake of time and energy, we won’t examine each of these “epochal” pamphlets in detail, especially since Lenin briefly touched on Trotsky’s conclusions and explained the essence of the theory of “permanent revolution” in his article “On the Two Lines of the Revolution” in a clear and concise manner:

> *Fromthe 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. The peasantry, he asserts, are divided into strata, have become differentiated; their potential revolutionary role has dwindled more and more; in Russia a “national” revolution is impossible; “we are living in the era of imperialism,” says Trotsky, and “imperialism does not contrapose the bourgeois nation to the old regime, but the proletariat to the bourgeois nation.”*

What does it mean?

Trotsky and Parvus, while agreeing on the necessity of carrying out bourgeois-democratic transformations within the framework of the coming revolution, refused to see in the bourgeoisie the class that was capable of carrying out these transformations. However, this was not because, as Lenin claimed, the bourgeoisie was not interested in carrying out these tasks in an intensified struggle with the proletariat. But simply because, in their opinion, the bourgeoisie was too weak.

> *“…it would be very good if we have the leading Jacobin party with the prospect of the dictatorship in the future and with the obligation to carry out the dirty work of the revolution in the present and we would save purely political leadership over the proletariat. But we do not, and the dirty work should be done in any way and we need to take it by ourselves because we are honest revolutionaries so it means to monopolize it. The implementation of this dirty revolutionary work, the uprising organization becomes our main political duty.”Leon Trotsky, Political letter II, 1905*The “Jacobin party” in this case refers to the bourgeois-revolutionary party*

Thus, if there were not, according to Trotsky, some peculiar conditions in Russia, he (logically) should have joined the Mensheviks with their hopes of revolutionizing the bourgeoisie. But, as it happens, the proletariat is forced (precisely forced) to assume the role of leader of the revolution, seizing political power, and, by implementing a democratic program, initiating a direct transition to a socialist revolution.

Parvus proceeded from this very premise when he proposed the slogan “Without a Tsar, but a workers’ government,” which became a kind of symbol of the theory of “permanent revolution”, a kind of quintessential Trotskyist revolutionary scheme.

At first glance, the slogan does not seem very clear to the modern reader, moreover, it says nothing at all. Nevertheless, in the context of the theory of “permanent revolution”, this slogan is the cornerstone, reflecting the main course for the establishment of an unrestricted dictatorship of the workers already at the democratic stage.

It is this dictatorship (“workers’ government”) that, according to Trotsky, is the key to the further development of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution: the “workers’ government” first implements the democratic program and then proceeds to implement the program of socialist reorganization. It is simple and straightforward.

So what's the problem here? – you may ask. The problem is not only that Trotsky mixes the bourgeois-democratic and socialist stages of the revolution, turning the principle of outgrowth into a mechanical scheme of changing a "workers' government" program-minimum into a program-maximum.

The problem is not only that Trotsky actually calls for the establishment of a socialist dictatorship ("workers' government") within the framework of a bourgeois-democratic coup, thereby jumping over the stages of the revolution. The problem is also that Trotsky, as part of his scheme, denies the principle of a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants. Why? Because Trotsky denies the revolutionary nature of the peasantry.

For Trotsky, the peasantry is a shapeless, useless mass, a set of zeros, capable only of being a tool either in the hands of the bourgeoisie or in the hands of the proletariat:

> *"But is it not possible that the peasantry may push the proletariat aside and take its place? This is impossible. All historical experience protests against this assumption. Historical experience shows that the peasantry are absolutely incapable of taking up an independent political role."Trotsky, "Results and Prospects", 1906.*

The unconditional and unrestricted subordination of this mass to the proletariat – this is Trotsky's interpretation of the idea of proletarian hegemony. For the peasant mass is mainly a reactionary, anti-revolutionary force and there can be no alliance with it, no joint democratic dictatorship at any stage of the development of the revolution. To say otherwise – as Lenin did – means to weaken the revolutionary energy of the proletariat, to force the proletariat to abandon its revolutionary aims, to "self-limit" it on the road to the conquest of socialism:

> *"The objection might be raised that I am imagininga situation in which the dictatorship of the workers is unlimited, whereas in fact what we are talking about is the dictatorship of a coalition between the proletariat and the peasantry. Very well, let us take this objection into account. We have just seen how the proletariat, despite the best intentions of its theoreticians, must in practice ignore the logical boundary line which should confine it to a democratic dictatorship. Lenin now proposes that the proletariat's political self-limitation should be supplemented with an objective anti-socialist "safeguard" in the form of the muzhik as collaborator or co-dictator. If this means that the peasant party, which shares power with the social-democrats, will not allow the unemployed and the strikers to be maintained at state cost and will oppose the state's opening of factories and plants closed down by the capitalists, then it also means that on the first day of the coalition, that is, long before the fulfillment of its tasks, the proletariat will enter into conflict with the revolutionary government. This conflict can end either in the repression of the workers by the peasant party, or in the removal of that party from power. Neither solution has much to do with a "democratic" dictatorship by a coalition.The snag is that the Bolsheviks visualize the class struggle of the proletariat only until the moment of the revolution's triumph, after which they see it as temporarily dissolved in the "democratic" coalition, reappearing in its pure form – this time as a direct struggle for socialism – only after the definitive establishment of a republican system. Whereas the Mensheviks, proceeding from the abstract notion that "our revolution is a bourgeois revolution," arrive at the idea that the proletariat must adapt all its tactics to the behavior of the liberal bourgeoisie in order to ensure the transfer of state power to that bourgeoisie, the Bolsheviks proceed from an equally abstract notion – "democratic dictatorship, not socialist dictatorship" – and arrive at the idea of a proletariat in possession of state power imposing a bourgeois-democratic limitation upon itself. It is true that the difference between them in this matter is very considerable: while the anti-revolutionary aspects of Menshevism have already become fully apparent, those of Bolshevism are likely to become a serious threat only in the event of victory. Of course the fact that both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks*

> *invariably talk about the “independent” policy of the proletariat (the former in relation to the liberal bourgeoisie, the latter to the peasantry) in no way alters the fact that both, at different stages of the development of events, become scared of the consequences of the class struggle and hope to limit it by their metaphysical constructs.”Trotsky, «Our Differences», 1905.*

Thus, the only thing this peasant herd can do right is to submit wholeheartedly to the proletariat, which by its heroic actions will lead it somewhere:

> *“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. But while every bourgeois party commanding the votes of the peasantry hastens to use its power in order to swindle and deceive the peasants and then, if the worst comes to the worst, gives place to another capitalist party, the proletariat, relying on the peasantry, will bring all forces into play in order to raise the cultural level of the countryside and develop the political consciousness of the peasantry.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.”Trotsky “Results and Prospects”*

Trotsky’s attitude toward the peasantry is very close to that of another prominent social democrat, Ferdinand Lassalle, who viewed the proletariat as the only revolutionary force in society. In Lassalle’s view, all non-proletarian classes and strata are still the same shapeless counter-revolutionary mass, in relation to which the working class has no obligation.

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We do not think that “Lev Davydovich” went far from the same views. The thesis about the potential reactionary nature of the peasantry is exactly the foundation on which Trotsky built the idea of the impossibility of building socialism in a single country. Thus, in his translation of Kautsky’s “Driving forces and prospects of the Russian revolution”, Trotsky warns:

> *“Of course, the proletariat in power will do everything in its power not to cause a premature conflict with the peasantry; but since the possession of power will not only not change its class nature, but, on the contrary, will make it manifest even more decisively; since it cannot fail to support the agricultural workers in their struggle for human life,-the conflict of the proletariat and the ‘strong’ peasantry is, in the end, inevitable. But this will be the beginning of the end. How will the conflict end? Certainly not by the fact that the representatives of the proletariat will move from the ministerial benches to those of the opposition. The situation will be much more serious. The conflict would end in a civil war and the defeat of the proletariat. There is no other “way out” within the framework of the national revolution from the political domination of the proletariat under our social conditions. This is why the proletariat, in the first period of its domination, will face, as a matter of its life and death, a colossal task: to break the national framework of the Russian revolution, to set in motion all the resources of provisional power in order to make the national coup an episode of the European revolution. This is the path that follows from the whole revolutionary situation.” (in Russian: https://iskra-research.org/Trotsky/Permanent/chapter23.shtml)*

The same conclusion is drawn by Lev Davidovich in the preface to his “1905”:

> *“This rather high-flown expression defines the thought that the Russian revolution, although directly concerned with bourgeois aims, could not stop short at those aims;*

the revolution could not solve its immediate, bourgeois tasks except by putting the proletariat into power. And the proletariat, once having power in its hands, would not be able to remain confined within the bourgeois framework of the revolution. On the contrary, precisely in order to guarantee its victory, the proletarian vanguard in the very earliest stages of its rule would have to make extremely deep inroads not only into feudal but also into bourgeois property relations. While doing so it would enter into hostile conflict, not only with all those bourgeois groups which had supported it during the first stages of its revolutionary struggle, but also with the broad masses of the peasantry, with whose collaboration it – the proletariat – had come into power.The contradictions between a workers' government and an overwhelming majority of peasants in a backward country could be resolved only on an international scale, in the arena of a world proletarian revolution. Having, by virtue of historical necessity, burst the narrow bourgeois-democratic confines of the Russian revolution, the victorious proletariat would be compelled also to burst its national and state confines, that is to say, it would have to strive consciously for the Russian revolution to become the prologue to a world revolution."

Accordingly, with such an unreliable partner in the rear as the peasantry, the proletariat is unable to exercise its domination in agrarian Russia for long without the support of the working class that came to power in the developed capitalist countries:

"But how far can the socialist policy of the working class be applied in the economic conditions of Russia? We can say one thing with certainty – that it will come up against political obstacles much sooner than it will stumble over the technical backwardness of the country. Without the direct State support of the European proletariat the working class of Russia cannot remain in power and convert its temporary domination into a lasting socialistic dictatorship. Of this there cannot for one moment be any doubt. But on the other hand there cannot be any doubt that a socialist revolution in the West will enable us directly to convert the temporary domination of the working class into a socialist dictatorship."Trotsky, Results and Prospects 1906.

What are the prospects? Not the brightest.

«Without waiting for the others, we begin and we continue the struggle on our own national soil in complete certainty that our initiative will provide the impulse for the struggle in other countries; and if this were not so, then it would be hopeless to think – as is borne out both by historical experience and theoretical considerations – that revolutionary Russia, for example, would be able to maintain herself in the face of conservative Europe, or that Socialist Germany could remain isolated in a capitalist world.»Trotsky, The Programme of Peace.

It is worth emphasizing here that, contrary to the glorious tradition of staggering from side to side, Trotsky remained faithful to this idea even after October. His disbelief in the strength of the Russian proletariat is evident in the afterword to his article "The Programme of Peace", written in 1922:

«The assertion, repeated several times in the Programme of Peace", to the effect that the proletarian revolution cannot victoriously consummated within a national framework may perhaps seem to some readers to have been refuted by the five years experience of our Soviet Republic. But such a conclusion would be unfounded».(...)Trade negotiations with bourgeois states, concessions, the Geneva Conference and so on are far too graphic evidence of the impossibility of isolated socialist construction within a national-state framework. So long as the bourgeoisie remains in power in other European states we are compelled, in the struggle against economic isolation, to seek agreements with the capitalist world.(...)At the same time it can be stated with certainty that these agreements, in the best case, will help us heal this or that economic wound, make this or that step forward, but the genuine rise of socialist economy in Russia will become possible only after the victory of the

> *proletariat in the most important countries of Europe».*

Thus, we have discovered the source of the Trotskyist idea of the impossibility of building socialism in a single country. It is:

a) Confidence in the reactionary essence of the peasantry, which will inevitably come into conflict with the revolutionary proletariat – if, of course, it actually defends revolutionary goals;

b) Confidence in the inability of the proletariat to guide the working peasantry along the path of socialist construction.

Moreover, both of these statements are the basis of Trotsky's "permanent revolution" theory. That is, in fact, the essence of the Trotskyist theory.

The Bolshevik Theory of Outgrowth

Lenin's point of view at the case of the growth of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution is completely different.

Firstly, as we indicated above, the question of the hegemony of the proletariat in the bourgeois-democratic revolution was treated differently. While Trotsky recognizes the forced nature of proletarian leadership because the Russian bourgeoisie is weak and unable to cope with the realization of bourgeois-democratic tasks, Lenin's conception of proletarian hegemony proceeds from quite different assumptions.

The Russian bourgeoisie cannot lead a bourgeois revolution, not because it is weak, but because it has already become counter-revolutionary, it has already engaged in a class struggle with the proletariat, and is not interested in any democratic reforms.

This is why hopes that the bourgeoisie can bring the peasant revolution (bourgeois-democratic in nature) to an end are unfounded. The bourgeoisie is afraid of the forces that might be awakened by such a revolution and tries in every possible way to curb this danger by strengthening its own political hegemony (leadership role) in the masses of distressed peasants.

Therefore, the Bolshevik tactics were not aimed neither at ignoring the bourgeoisie (like the Trotskyists), nor at "pushing" it toward the revolution (like the Mensheviks), but at isolating the bourgeoisie from the revolutionary movement of the peasantry, since the bourgeois leadership is unequivocally on the path of conformity and maintaining the old order.

Secondly, unlike Trotsky, who viewed the peasantry as a shapeless petty-bourgeois mass serving only as a temporary support for the proletariat, Lenin saw in the peasantry the driving force behind the bourgeois-democratic revolution, an ally of the proletariat in the realization of this revolution, with tremendous energy.

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It is in alliance with this class that the proletariat gains power in order to establish a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship: an organ for purging the country of feudal-landlordism.

> *"Indeed, is it not clear that as far as the proletariat is concerned the struggle for the republic is inconceivable without an alliance with the petty-bourgeois masses? Is it not clear that without the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry there is not a shadow of hope for the success of this struggle? (...) If we, the revolutionary people, viz., the proletariat and the peasantry, want to "fight*

> *together" against the autocracy, we must fight against it together to the last, finish it off together, and stand together in repelling the inevitable attempts to restore it! (...)If the Russian autocracy, even at this stage, fails to find a way out by buying itself off with a meagre constitution, if it is not only shaken but actually overthrown, then, obviously, a tremendous exertion of revolutionary energy on the part of all progressive classes will be called for to defend this gain. This "defence", however, is nothing else than the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry! The more we gain now and the more vigorously we defend the gains, the less will the inevitable future reaction be able to reappropriate afterwards, the shorter will the intervals of reaction be, and the easier will the task be for the proletarian fighters who will come after us."Lenin, The Revolutionary-Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry.*

It should be noted that both the 1905 Revolution and the February Revolution of 1917 demonstrated examples of spontaneous forms of such revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants. In the first case, there were numerous joint actions of peasant and workers' organizations; in the second, the notorious Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies in which, during the spring of 1917 (when Lenin put forward the famous slogan "All Power to the Soviets"), where not just peasants and people from the peasant environment prevailed, but which politically held the Menshevik-SR line.

How is this revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants capable of developing into a socialist dictatorship? Lenin wasn't a simpleton, endowing the peasantry with qualities they did not possess. In speaking of the revolutionary nature of the peasantry, he did not forget the reactionary traits that stemmed from their place in social production as petty proprietors.

> *"It goes without saying that if the Social-Democrats were to forget, even for a moment the class distinctiveness of the proletariat vis-à-vis the petty bourgeoisie, if they were to form an ill-timed and unprofitable alliance with one or another untrustworthy petty-bourgeois party of the intelligentsia, if the Social-Democrats were to lose sight, even for a moment, of their own independent aims and the need (in all political situations and exigencies, in all political crises and upheavals) for attaching paramount importance to developing the class-consciousness of the proletariat and its in dependent political organisation, then participation in the provisional revolutionary government would be extremely dangerous. But under such circumstances, any political step, we repeat, would be equally dangerous."Lenin, The Revolutionary-Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry*

The revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants develops into a socialist dictatorship of the proletariat, not at the behest of the "workers' government", as Trotsky suggested, but through a new tactic – the tactic of separating the proletarian elements from the petty-bourgeois. That is, the separation from the peasantry as a class of the strata closest to the proletariat – the poorest peasantry above all – in alliance with which the proletariat transforms the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship into a socialist dictatorship, a dictatorship of the proletariat and the poorest peasantry.

Thus, Lenin's principle of outgrowth is related to the incorporation of the various strata of the peasantry into the proletariat during the implementation of the socialist revolution:

> *"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.”Lenin, The Proletarian Revolution And The Renegade Kautsky.*

This is how the process of development of the Russian Revolution proceeded: in February 1917 the bourgeois-democratic revolution, carried out by the proletariat in alliance with the peasantry and the non-proletarian urban strata, won. Then, – during the spring and summer, – the unresolved contradictions of the democratic phase gave rise to the widest peasant movement of squatting on the landed estates, to which the bourgeois government responded with equally broad repression.

Realizing that the bourgeois-democratic revolution could not be completed by “peaceful” methods, the peasantry in its entire mass began to support the Bolsheviks, who in parallel engaged in a decisive battle with the bourgeoisie. And in October 1917, the anti-feudal, bourgeois-democratic and socialist revolutions merge in a single process.

In the spring of 1918, stratification among the peasants began: the “committees of the poor” (“kombedy”), a new ally of the proletarian dictatorship in the countryside, were born. The activities of the kombeds to completely destroy the land property of the landlords encounter the resistance of the kulaks, who revolt against the Soviets. Accordingly, the proletariat finds strong support from the peasant poor and part of the middle classes in suppressing these kulak uprisings.

Another illustration of the Leninist tactics is the already mentioned Soviets. After February 1917, the Soviets of Workers’ and Peasants’ Deputies were politically entirely in the hands of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries and placed their unreserved trust in the bourgeois Provisional Government. The role of the Bolsheviks in these Soviets was negligible. However, as the revolutionary process deepened, radical elements gained more and more weight in the Soviets – in the cities these were the Bolsheviks, and in the countryside their temporary allies in the form of the Left Wing of the Social-Revolutionary Party. In September and October, the Soviets go left, which became an additional argument in the Bolsheviks’ decision to seize power.

Subsequently, the coalition of the Bolsheviks with the Left Socialist Revolutionaries collapsed in July 1918 for the same reason of splitting the village:

> *“The village was no longer united. The peasants, who had fought as one man against the landowners, now split into two camps-the camp of the more prosperous peasants and the camp of the poor peasants who, side by side with the workers, continued their steadfast advance towards socialism and changed from fighting the landowners to fighting capital, the power of money, and the use of the great land reform for the benefit of the kulaks. This struggle cut the property-owning and exploiting classes off from the revolution completely; it definitely put our revolution on the socialist road which the urban working class had tried so hard and vigorously to put it on in October, but along which it will not be able to direct the revolution successfully unless it finds firm, deliberate and solid support in the countryside.”Lenin, “Speech to the First All-Russia Congress of Land Departments, Poor Peasants’ Committees and Communes”.*

In this revolutionary struggle in the countryside, the Left Social-Revolutionaries, who expressed the interests of the middle section of the peasantry, sided with the kulak camp, completing the transformation of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution.

Peasant Soviets finally became the authority in the village, displacing the volost committees and zemstvos, which had been in the hands of the kulaks. In the village councils, the process of re-election of deputies began after October, accompanied by the expulsion of the kulak elements and the nomination of representatives of the rural poor, who were equal to the Bolshevik Party.

Accordingly, the dictatorship of the proletariat was finally established in Russia in the form of Soviet power in the city and in the countryside. Moreover, in the countryside, proletarian power, while supporting and organizing the peasant poor in the struggle against the kulaks, sought to draw the middle strata to the side of the poor as well in order to strengthen the alliance of the working class and the vast majority of the peasantry necessary for socialist construction.

Such, in general, are the dynamics of the outgrowth of the Russian bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution.

Leninist theory and practice have nothing to do with the Trotskyist theory of “permanent revolution”. This detail is especially important because even after Lenin’s death Trotsky, taking advantage of the political inexperience of the party masses (especially the youth) attracted by the revolution and socialist construction, developed a vigorous literary activity, trying to present himself as the ingenious inspirer of the October Revolution and a real prophet, whose findings in the field of revolutionary strategy were used by Lenin himself, who previously, as we recall, defended “the anti-revolutionary features of Bolshevism”, according to Trotsky.

Trotsky’s slander about “rearming Bolshevism”, about “debolshevisation”, about Lenin’s spontaneous transition to the Trotskyist idea of “permanent revolution”, gave rise to the so-called “literary discussion” in the fall of 1924.

In the framework of which Trotsky, who allowed blatant distortions of Party history for the sake of exalting his own person, was attacked not only by the “evil” Stalin (his works “Trotskyism or Leninism?” and “The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists” we strongly advise reading), but also Trotsky’s future allies in the “United Opposition”: Kamenev, Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek and others (in fact, it was they who officially initiated this campaign).

Nevertheless, the myth created by Trotsky and his closest associates proved to be quite tenacious and formed the basis of the ideology of the Trotskyists, who proudly called themselves “Bolshevik-Leninists,” emphasizing a certain continuity between Leninism and the eclectic ideas of Trotsky, actually a screaming fellow traveler of the revolution.

But, once again, there is no connection between the theory of “permanent revolution” and Lenin’s theory (and practice) of the outgrowth of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution.

Conclusion

“All right”, the reader may say, “but what does all this murky discussion from a century ago have to do with the present moment?”

The fact is that numerous distortions and deformations in both theory and practice have arisen and continue to arise from the theory of “permanent revolution”, effectively preventing the development of the revolutionary movement, weakening it, leading it nowhere with ultra-revolutionary shouts.

The Question of Allies

Trotsky, as we have understood, did not assign any independent role to the peasants. For him, the peasantry is a powerful but potentially counter-revolutionary mass, which the proletariat only temporarily uses to seize political power. Further, in the course of socialist construction, the proletariat inevitably comes into conflict

with the peasantry, for the petty-proprietorship character of the peasantry can in no way be used for the erection of a socialist economy.

From this disbelief in the peasantry and in the proletariat itself, unable to cope with the peasant element, organically follows the idea of the impossibility of building socialism in a single country like Russia.

Later on, Trotsky's supporter Preobrazhensky used these ideas, when in 1925 he put forward a battering program of "super-industrialization" ("initial socialist accumulation") based on the same postulates about the reactionary nature of the village. This program consisted in the banal robbery by the proletarian state of the village that had "become rich" during the years of the NEP, which the Trotskyites regarded as nothing more than an "inner colony" (in this very terminology!), a community of rural petty bourgeois who were historically condemned to death and with whom anything could be done for the good of the working class.

Trotsky himself proceeded from the same premise in the 1930s, predicting the imminent collapse of the Soviet collectivization campaign, which could not overcome the apparently eternal and endless petty proprietary instincts of the peasantry.

However, the question of the peasants is not so much a question of the peasants as it is a question of the proletariat's allies, a question of the strategy of the revolutionary struggle and the tactics of the working class in implementing this alliance.

Trotsky, as already pointed out, in his attitude to the non-proletarian classes and strata, stood on positions similar to those of Lassalle.

Ferdinand Lassalle, an old Hegelian, viewed the proletariat as the only revolutionary class in society, opposing the surrounding anti-revolutionary mass of all other social strata. Accordingly, there can be no alliances of principle with any representatives of this anti-revolutionary mass.

Trotsky was thinking in a similar metaphysical spirit, pointing to the need for the complete and unconditional submission of the peasantry to the proletariat, the sole leader and organizer of the revolution, which had already come to power within the framework of the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

In doing so, Trotsky distorts Lenin's doctrine of the hegemony of the proletariat in the popular revolution, which consists not in the schematic domination of the proletariat over the peasantry, but in gaining the leading role of the working class over other strata (petty-bourgeois, peasant strata) that also possess revolutionary power. It is in this rallying of the various strata around itself that the organizing role of the working class lies:

> *«From the proletarian point of view hegemony in a war goes to him who fights most energetically, who never misses a chance to strike a blow at the enemy, who always suits the action to the word, who is therefore the ideological leader of the democratic forces, who criticises half-way policies of every kind."Lenin, Working-Class and Bourgeois Democracy.«The hegemony of the working class is its (and its representatives') political influence on other elements of the population in the sense of purging their democratism (when there is democratism) from undemocratic impurities, in the sense of criticizing the limitations and myopia of all bourgeois democratism, in the sense of combating "cadetism" (if you call the ideological-disseminating content of liberal speeches and policies this), etc., etc..»Lenin, Our Abolitionists (Наши упразднители)*

Hence, the proletariat, as a social class interested in bringing the democratic revolution into a socialist revolution, does not subordinate the non-proletarian strata to itself, but rallies them around itself, clears these strata from reactionary tendencies, moving these strata further to the left at each new stage of development, rebuilding the non-proletarian strata from the reserve of the bourgeoisie into the reserves of the working class.

This is the theoretical scheme for the hegemony of the proletariat, the interaction of the working class with the non-proletarian strata on the road to the outgrowth of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution.

And this scheme of interaction between the proletariat and the non-proletarian strata in the realization of the democratic revolution, which then develops into a socialist revolution, we see in numerous historical examples.

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Beginning with the October Revolution, continuing with the post-war revolutions in Eastern Europe, and ending with the people's democratic revolutions in China, Cuba, Vietnam, Laos or Grenada in the second half of the twentieth century – everywhere we see the same picture of the struggle of a broad front of the popular masses led by the proletariat for the realization of a democratic revolution.

Everywhere we see the process of the subsequent outgrowth of the democratic revolution into a socialist revolution, accompanied by the political and economic isolation of the reactionary part of the non-proletarian strata, while simultaneously strengthening the revolutionary elements close to the proletariat, forming with it a strong revolutionary alliance.

The question of why in many of these countries the construction of socialism was not completed while the proletarian government remained in power is a separate question, linked in each particular case both directly with the problems of the political economy of socialism and with the subjective factor, i.e., the theoretical qualities of the proletarian parties that came to power.

However, the Leninist tactics of outgrowth, the Leninist principle of the proletariat's interaction with its non-proletarian allies in gaining power, the Leninist position on the hegemony of the proletariat in the democratic revolution, is itself a truth proven by historical experience.

In contrast, ignoring the petty bourgeoisie, ignoring the reserves of the revolutionary proletariat represented by the non-proletarian classes in the name of establishing a "socialist dictatorship of the proletariat" without taking into account the specific situation, the "proletarian ultra-revolutionaryism" of the Trotskyists everywhere and always led to the weakening of the revolutionary movement, to the repulsion, through revolutionary bluster, of its potential reserves, to defeat.

The Question of the Nature of the Revolution

Trotsky himself was repeatedly accused by Lenin of ignoring the bourgeois-democratic character of the Russian revolution. Why? Because Trotsky and Parvus – the authors of the theory of "permanent revolution" – already at the democratic stage raised the question of the transition of full political power to the "workers' government", i.e. to the government of the proletariat, to the proletarian dictatorship.

Thus, Trotsky and Parvus trivially jumped over the democratic stage, assuming that already at this stage the working class in such an undeveloped agrarian country as Russia was, had all the power to win state power and exercise their own unlimited

dictatorship. The naivety of this notion needs no comment.

Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, raised the question of the gradual conquest by the working class of the non-proletarian masses, the gradual deepening of the democratic revolution, the gradual “exhaustion” of the democratic stage after which the revolution moves to a new, socialist stage, outgrowing one into another.

In terms of power, as already indicated, this process is reflected in the transformation of the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants, meeting the requirements of the democratic stage, directly into the dictatorship of the proletariat, a form of power already of the socialist revolution.

Trotsky and his followers did not understand the algorithm of these tactics at all, denying the division of the revolutionary process into stages, neglecting questions about the proletariat’s allies, seeing in any political crisis the threshold of the socialist revolution and insisting on the proletariat’s sole, immediate gain of all political power.

As for the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship, Trotsky and the Trotskyites denied the very possibility of such a dictatorship of the transitional type, perceiving the social movement purely mechanically in the spirit of simple thinking that “there are only two classes, and whoever is not for one, is for the other”.

Everywhere, beginning with China and Spain, Trotsky and the Trotskyites have vigorously demanded the direct implementation of socialist transformations, the seizure of political power directly by Communists, the deepening directly of the “social revolution” (in the most radical interpretation of this concept), the direct establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, completely ignoring the specific stages of the revolutionary process, completely ignoring the ability of the proletariat itself to fulfill the revolutionary program exhibited.

Jumping over stages, Trotsky and the Trotskyites called for the establishment of Soviet power in China when the Kuomintang had not yet exhausted its revolutionary potential and the Communists were still extremely weak to confront the bourgeoisie.

A little later, when the Communists engaged in a direct armed clash with the finally slipping into the reactionary camp of the Kuomintang and began to establish Soviet power, Trotsky and the Trotskyists ironized the Chinese “adventurers” and put forward a completely irrelevant slogan of the Constituent Assembly as the Soviet Republic covered more and more areas of China, while continuing to cry about the Chinese revolution “strangled by Stalin”.

In Spain, the Trotskyists of the POUM behaved quite similarly: denying the necessity of defending the revolutionary bourgeois-democratic republic against the fascist onslaught, the Trotskyists, using the loudest revolutionary slogans about socialism, made every possible effort to break up a united anti-fascist front.

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Trying to destroy the Republican army, trying to undermine the tactical connection between the proletariat and the petty and middle bourgeoisie, trying finally to split the working class itself by accusing the Spanish Communist Party and the unions under its control of “reformism”, the Trotskyists logically reached a joint riot with the anarchists in the rear of Barcelona in May 1937.

By the way, the leadership of the anarchist National Confederation of Labor the next day recovered from its “revolutionary frenzy” by issuing a call to dismantle the barricades and return to normal life, for which a completely mad Trotsky, in another of his pamphlets (“Again on the causes of the defeat of the Spanish Revolution”) accused the CNT and the FAI of “serving the bourgeoisie” for refusing immediate

socialist reforms and merciless opposition to “Stalinist reactionaries” hiding behind abstract slogans about the struggle against fascism.

It goes without saying that the tactics of the united front of the workers and the people’s anti-fascist front, put forward in 1935 by the Comintern against the background of the rise of fascism, were similarly rejected by Trotsky and the Trotskyists as contrary to the principles of the “proletarian revolution”. With redoubled force, the Trotskyists cried out about the need to implement socialist revolutions, bypassing the stage of the struggle against fascism for democratic transformation, considering the struggle for democracy as a retreat from the “revolutionary line”.

What is most amusing is the fact that Trotsky himself had earlier insisted on continuing the tactic of a united front of the workers taken by the Comintern back in 1921, which in 1924 was revised toward so-called “unity from below” because of the reactionary nature of the social-democratic elite.

In opposition to this “unity from below”, Trotsky went so far as to call for a “tactical unity” of the Second and Third Internationals, which at that time was no more than a fantasy, given the fierce anti-communism of the Social Democrats. Moreover, in his criticism of the Comintern and the German Communist Party, Trotsky presented the case as if the Communist International was directly prohibiting any unity of anti-fascist action with the social-democratic workers at the behest of Stalin.

Such claims were far from reality: suffice it to say that after the Social-Democratic (!!!) government banned “Rot-Front” in 1929, its successor, “Kampfbund gegen den faschismus”, emerged in 1930 with the main goal of uniting communists and soc-dem workers in a concrete struggle against the “brown shirts”.

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In May 1932, the KgF transformed into the famous “Anti-Fascist Action” – a broad-based militant movement similarly designed to unite the efforts of communists, social democrats, and non-party workers to resist fascism. Trotsky never mentions the calls by the Communist Party to the SPD leadership for general strikes against the onset of fascism (in July 1932 and January 1933), which were rejected as “extremist” by the social-democratic leaders, either, trying to paint a picture of complete political blindness on the part of German communists and the international communist movement.

However, as soon as the world communist movement openly turned to the tactics of a popular anti-fascist front, Trotsky and the Trotskyites suddenly completely changed their views. By mixing together the Comintern’s tactical principles of a united front of the workers and an anti-fascist Popular Front with the involvement of sectors of the petty and middle bourgeoisie opposed to fascism, and by reticent to mention the insistence of the Comintern, even in a tactical alliance with the reformists and bourgeois forces, to maintain independence and strengthen the work of exposing these forces, distorting the meaning of the existence of the Popular Front itself (as a temporary coalition to oppose fascism) and the essence of a possible anti-fascist coalition government (which, as Dimitrov pointed out, is not capable of solving the problems of the workers without being a socialist dictatorship), the Trotskyists began to proclaim with redoubled force that “the Stalinist faction betrayed the ideas of revolutionary Marxism”, proclaim about “social patriotism” and “the subordination of the revolutionary movement to the bourgeoisie”.

History has put everything in its place. Experience has shown that the “ultra-revolutionary” cries of the advocates of an immediate proletarian revolution, denying the very possibility of a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship, which is transformed into a socialist dictatorship of the working class, ended in a complete

political fiasco.

In contrast, the Bolshevik tactics of dividing the revolutionary process into stages, each fulfilling its own tasks, with its own reserves and its own goals, has proven its consistency and effectiveness.

This proves not only the post-war success of the anti-fascist popular fronts in the countries of Eastern Europe (Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Albania, Poland, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Romania), where the Communist parties through the tactics of gradual isolation and political destruction of the class opponents of the fronts systematically moved toward the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat through the outgrowth of the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship.

This is proved by the experience of Asian countries (China, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia), where communist parties, again using the same tactical principles, won the leadership in the revolutionary process, but failed – due to the subjective factor (i.e. the qualities of party structures) and various objective circumstances to bring matters to the establishment of a socialist dictatorship.

This is proven by the experience of Cuba, where the national liberation revolution also turned into a socialist revolution through the stage of the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of a few classes.

Finally, we have before us the experience of Grenada, Nicaragua, Guinea-Bissau, Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, Afghanistan, where the democratic popular liberation revolutions were also led by communists, who rallied a broad alliance of various non-proletarian strata around themselves, but the process of transition to a socialist dictatorship – due to the underdevelopment of these countries, the pressure of imperialism and, again, the subjective factor – has encountered a number of problems, which have not been resolved in the best way, as a result of which even the tasks of the democratic stage have not been fully resolved.

Unprincipled

It has already been pointed out many times that Trotsky’s views on the role of the proletariat generally coincide with those of Ferdinand Lassalle, the “father of German Social Democracy”. As stated above, for Lassalle the proletariat was the only revolutionary class; it alone was the bearer of the pure idea of the state; an abstract state whose task is the education and development of mankind in the direction of freedom.

And in relation to the proletariat, absolutely all the other classes and strata of capitalist society appear as one reactionary formless mass, walking in the wake of the bourgeoisie. In “Critique of the Gotha Program”, Marx devoted a few lines to criticizing this opportunist position, pointing out that Lassalle puts forward such “ultra-proletarian” ideas “only in order to justify his alliance with his absolutist and feudal opponents against the bourgeoisie”.

In other words, since the petty bourgeoisie (including the working peasantry), along with the feudal lords and the bourgeoisie, are one solidly reactionary mass, why not form an alliance with the feudal lords against the bourgeoisie? Both the feudal lords and the peasantry are reactionary masses, so it makes no difference with whom the proletariat should make alliances.

Thus, Lassalle sought to replace the revolutionary tactics of the working class, built on a dialectical understanding of the historical movement, with a kind of Jesuit pragmatism. In fact, Trotsky adhered to such a pragmatic position, shifting his movement to the rails of absolute unprincipled. Unprincipled, sanctified by the

assertion that only Trotsky and he alone stands for the cause of the working class, and therefore, all means are good for asserting Trotsky's ideas (as well as for fighting his main opponent in the form of "Stalin's USSR").

Hence the completely idiotic, useless and essentially opportunistic tactic of "entrism", put forward by Trotsky in 1934, which consisted in infiltrating members of small and uninfluenced Trotskyist groups into mass political organizations (social-democratic and "Stalinist") in order to "take over" them from within.

Having nothing to do with the Marxist understanding of political struggle, this "game of spies" naturally failed.

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From this also comes political unprincipledness in the form of blocking with absolutely any forces in the struggle for implementing the goals of the Trotskyist doctrine, which is eclectic and contradictory in itself. This is the source of permanent and ceaseless splits within the Trotskyist camp.

With no coherent political line other than hatred for the USSR and "Stalinism", which is the root of all of creation's ills, and with no coherent revolutionary strategy or tactics (they are replaced by shrill slogans and schemes divorced from reality), the Trotskyists are organically incapable of building any viable organization.

This opportunistic indiscriminateness, like the classic Trotskyist unity between "left" and "right", combined with the defence of the principles of bourgeois pluralism (a special "inner-party democracy" with separate factions and platforms), creates fertile ground for the decay of the Trotskyist movement itself.

The series of relentless political and organizational failures that have accompanied Trotskyism since its formation has driven Trotskyism and Trotskyists further and further along the path of unprincipled and panicked search for at least some social support for their dismal movement.

On this road of "permanent dissolution", the Trotskyist movement activists, who have lost all reference points, rush to all lengths in the hope of introducing their shouting "leftist agenda" into literally any public action, regardless of its political orientation or ideological basis. Nowhere are they successful.

Thus, adventurism, pluralism in the worst sense, and naïve "ultra-revolutionary" fantasizing have long been characteristic features of Trotskyist and semi-Trotskyist groups. These traits are derived from the theory of "permanent revolution", which no one seems to know in detail.

Original article