

## **ON THE MARXIST PROGRAM**

- 1) Dialectics of Revolution: Program and Party**
  - (a) The Marxist Method and Program**
  - (b) Vanguard Party and Democratic Centralism**
  - (c) Petty bourgeois ‘Trotskyism’**
- 2) Theory/Strategy of Permanent Revolution**
  - (a) Marx on Permanent Revolution**
  - (b) The Paris Commune tests permanent revolution**
  - (c) Engels and Lenin**
- 3) Epoch of imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism**
  - (a) Permanent Revolution in the Age of Imperialism**
  - (b) Imperialism Today**
  - (c) The Rise of China and Russia as new imperialist powers**
- 4) The Bolshevik Revolution and First Four Congresses of the International**
  - (a) The Bolshevik Revolution**
  - (b) The First Four Congresses: 1919-1922**
  - (c) The programmatic gains of the First Four Congresses**
- 5) Stalinism and the Left Opposition**
  - (a) The counter-revolution in the revolution**
  - (b) The Left Opposition for permanent revolution**
  - (c) From the 3rd to the 4th International**
- 6) The 1938 Transitional Program**
  - (a) Transitional Method**
  - (b) Trotsky’s Leadership**
  - (c) A Transitional Program for Today**
- 7) The Degeneration of the Fourth International**
  - (a) The Crisis of Leadership in the FI**
  - (b) “Reconstructing” the FI**
  - (c) Rebuilding a new international on the 1938 Program**
- 8) Restoration of capitalism**
  - (a) Unconditional Defence of the Soviet Union**
  - (b) Political Revolution Betrayed**
  - (c) Cuba, Vietnam, DPRK**
- 9) Terminal Crisis**
  - (a) Marx, Lenin and Trotsky on crisis**
  - (b) Debates on ‘Economic Crisis’**
  - (c) Marx on Ecological Crisis**

## ON THE MARXIST PROGRAM

### 1) Dialectics of Revolution: Program and Party

**Objective laws of motion of capitalism necessitate the democratic centralist proletarian vanguard party as the 'subjective' agent of revolutionary change.**

#### (a) The Marxist Method and Program

Our program is based on Marx's *scientific* critique of capitalism and his program for socialist revolution. First, we state what we understand by Marxism as *method, theory and program*. A very useful introduction to Marx's *method* is that of David Yaffe's article [“Crisis, Capital and the State”](#).

Marx broke with Hegel's idealism and developed an historical materialist critique of capitalism. Capitalism is an historically specific mode of production in which the contradiction between the social relations and forces of production, expressed by class struggle, drives it to develop the forces of production until it reaches the point where it must destroy the forces of production, in depressions and wars that necessitates its overthrow by the proletariat. This made a scientific break from bourgeois ideology that justified capitalism as natural and just, the evolutionary peak of civilisation in which the three main 'revenue' classes shared the distribution of income as wages, rent and profits. **While political economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo recognised that labour produces value, they attributed to landlords and capitalists a share of value as rent and profits as reward for their role in the process of production.**

Against Smith and Ricardo, Marx proved that the share of profits and rents were expropriated from labour only because landlords and capitalists had dispossessed workers of the means of production. This forced the proletariat to sell its labour power as a commodity and to produce more value than the value of their labour power which was expropriated as surplus value, the basis of profits and rents. The ideological appearance of profits, rents and wages as the rewards of the 'factors of production' (capital, land, labour) misrepresented the exploitative relations of production as equal exchange relations. In his analysis of 'commodity fetishism' **Marx shows** [\[Capital 1, Chapter 1 - section 4\]](#) **how the inversion of social relations as exchange relations was the material base of bourgeois ideology.**

The exploitative social relation between labour and capital defined capitalism as an historic mode of production driven by the contradiction between labour and capital. It set the objective conditions of class struggle between workers struggling to increase the value of the wage, and capitalists who wanted to increase their surplus-value, that is, the rate of exploitation,  $S/V$ . **Class struggle over the rate of exploitation was the motor of capitalist development, which was expressed by what Marx called the capitalist “laws of motion”.**

Specifically, labour resistance to increasing absolute exploitation forced capitalists to embark on increasing the relative exploitation of labour. That is, to invest more capital in the means of production 'C', (constant capital) in order to increase labour productivity. This exacerbated the contradiction between labour and capital, periodically driving it to the surface as the resistance of labour to further increases of  $S/V$  caused the [rate of profit to fall](#). For capital each crisis has to be resolved by destroying enough C and V to restore the rate of profit  $S/C+V$ . For labour, crises can only be resolved by the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat acting as a subjective force sufficient to overthrow the objective social relations of capitalism.

Marx's critique of capitalism as a historically limited mode of production made it clear that the task of the proletariat was to overthrow the bourgeois state and replace capitalism with a communist society. This program was first drafted as the [Communist Manifesto](#) of 1848 when Marx defines the Communist Party as an integral part of the working class representing its “international and historic” interests in the “development of the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie”.

*“The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole”.* Read ‘For Marx the Program Comes First’ in [Rebooting Lenin](#).

### **(b) Vanguard Party and Democratic Centralism**

Unlike other forms of socialism, the party does not bring the program ‘from outside’ the class! It is the vanguard of and for the class, i.e., “inside” the class, carrying the method of scientific socialism to the wider working class so it can act subjectively as the revolutionary class. Lenin argues in [What is to Be Done](#) that ‘scientific socialism’ is the work of the ‘intelligentsia’ that breaks from bourgeois ideology to arrive at a communist consciousness. Yet under capitalism neither workers nor bourgeois intellectuals *spontaneously* arrive at scientific socialism. For workers the fetishisation of social relations as exchange relations reproduces economism, or ‘trade union’ consciousness. For intellectuals, fetishism reproduces petty bourgeois socialism such as Fabianism or Menshevism. But once ‘[scientific socialism](#)’ was ‘worked out’ by Marx and Engels its discoveries became the common property of the proletariat and the foundation for the program of the revolutionary vanguard party.

The Communist Party Marx describes then becomes the ‘collective scientist’ applying the scientific method, not by aping bourgeois ‘science’, but of dialectical materialism. The party applies ‘Marxism’ by the method of testing theory in practice, drawing from Marx’s laws of motion conclusions that guide the proletariat in its concrete class struggle. As for Marx, for Lenin the “truth is concrete”. The program (and so the underlying theory) can only be tested in practice by the class struggle, drawing on the experience of the vanguard united in action, a process which Lenin later referred to as “[democratic centralism](#)”. [Trotsky](#) shared Lenin’s view of “democratic centralism”.

False socialist leaderships of the many petty bourgeois sects Marx identified failed to embrace the Marxist method of dialectics and substituted a bourgeois version of socialism. We can trace this phenomenon back to Marx’s critiques of Adam Smith and Ricardo. Marx refuted Ricardo who argued exploitation was based on unequal exchange; he did battle with Proudhon who wanted to abolish money; he did so in his critique of the petty bourgeois currents in the Paris Commune in [Critique of the Gotha Program](#). The essential criticism of Marx was that all of these currents were caught up in bourgeois ideology, and hostile to the dialectic method, suppressing the contradiction between labour and capital that drives the expropriation of surplus-value in production. By separating the objective and subjective aspects of class struggle, they ‘objectify’ the role of the proletariat, and deny it any subjective historic role in the revolutionary transformation of capitalism into socialism. **They produce one-sided distortions of Marxism that are either *objectivist* or *subjectivist* negating the dialectical *subjective* intervention of the democratic centralist vanguard party in transforming the *objective* reality.**

Of course, the concept of democratic centralism has undergone many distortions in the history of socialism. One is the anarchist doctrine that democracy is incompatible with centralism. This is a petty bourgeois theory that democracy means individual freedom from party discipline or state authority. The material base of the petty bourgeois is freedom from wage labour, to escape the working class into the capitalist class. Anarchists are predisposed to hate the working class as the freed slave hates the slave. Because their class is historically rootless (for example, having its roots torn up by capitalist agriculture or being transplanted into the capitalist state bureaucracy) their fate lies with the victory of one or other of the two contradictory social classes - proletariat or capitalist.

The **central premise of anarchism** is that the proletariat does not objectively need a state since all states serve a ruling class. This is the petty bourgeois ideological belief that a subjectively ‘spontaneous’ workers revolution can defeat the bourgeois dictatorship and prevent the emergence of a workers’ dictatorship (workers’ state). Yet history has shown that when anarchists claimed to play a key role in social revolutions, in Russia in 1917 and Spain in 1936-37, their leaders betrayed the workers and working peasants by forming counter-revolutionary alliances with bourgeois parties against the formation of a workers’ state. [Trotsky on Spain]

A second distortion of democratic centralism is that of Mensheviks and Stalinists (including Maoists) who turn the party into a **bureaucratic centralist organisation** where workers’ democracy is subverted by a bureaucratic caste based on the petty bourgeoisie. In this respect they are no different from social democracy. The Mensheviks and Stalinists (as relapsed Mensheviks) suffer from the ‘objectivist’ disease. For them the transition to ‘socialism’ is ‘objective’ - that is, historically inevitable, and therefore does not require a subjectively class-conscious revolutionary party to lead it. Rather the petty bourgeois bureaucracy will inform the workers in triplicate when they can celebrate their victory. Such treachery is the necessary expression of their class role in sucking up to capitalism by acting as bourgeois agents in politics and the unions. The consequence is to disrupt and disorganise the potential for a class-conscious workers movement led by a Marxist democratic-centralist party to overthrow capitalism and open the road to workers’ governments capable of stopping capitalism’s destruction of humanity and nature. But worse than anarchists, Mensheviks and Stalinists are the traitors to Trotskyism who profess to follow Lenin and Trotsky but who actually sell out to the bourgeoisie.

### **(c) Petty bourgeois ‘Trotskyism’**

The success of the democratic centralist party in Russia in 1917, and the aborted revolution in Germany in 1919, saw the bourgeoisie panic and immediately declare the ‘Leninist’ Party the evil enemy of humanity and the heavens. Trotsky’s [\*The Lessons of October\*](#) written after the death of Lenin in 1924 was his open attack on the rise of Stalin and his neo-Menshevik bureaucratic regime. The bourgeois attack on the Leninist Party as a ‘dictatorship’ against the ‘democracy’ of the Provisional Government, was disproved by the facts. First, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionary peasant party walked out of the soviets and gave the Bolsheviks a ‘bourgeois democratic’ majority rather than suffer inevitable defeat. Second, workers, soldiers and peasants formed a clear majority in support of the insurrection. Third, the imperialist countries invaded soviet Russia to smash a socialist revolution in the name of ‘democracy’ and against the majority will of workers in their own countries. It is clear that thereafter we can talk only of workers’ dictatorship and workers’ democracy!

The result of the isolation and military invasion of soviet Russia was the rise of the state bureaucracy substituting for workers’ democracy in the soviets. Trotsky and the Left Opposition resisted this

degeneration of proletarian democratic centralism into petty bourgeois bureaucratic centralism. Trotsky led the fight against Stalin until his death by a Stalinist wielded icepick. Unfortunately, long before his death some within the [‘Trotskyist’ movement](#) had begun to attack dialectics and the democratic centralist party.

Since Trotsky’s death we have been subjected to ‘improvers’ who reject the method of Trotsky’s [Transitional Program](#). Some, like the ‘new left’, consciously reject the method of the Communist Manifesto and the first four Congresses of the Communist International. Others (LIT, U Sec., CWI, LO, ICL, IBT), who claim to adhere to the method, *never* apply or teach it. This abandonment of the Marxist method reproduces the political confusion sown in the working class by the labour lieutenants of Capital and their exclusive preoccupation with exchange relations, signifying their complete surrender to the wage system.

The petty bourgeois politicians, the anarchists, Stalinists, pseudo-Trotskyists and labour bureaucrats all serve Capital and understand the threat of the Leninist party as the vehicle for the delivery of the Marxist program, and that it is a living thing *only* when it is taken up by the masses as their own. Their chosen role is to suppress the program to serve the class enemy. They do this with such theatrics admonishing militant workers that, “*while we on the dais and in the organizing meetings are all in favour of the most radical of the program’s demands, you workers are not ready for them, and cannot understand them at your current level of development*”. This is their alibi for organising workers around the broadest abstractions and timid demands.

The program cannot live unless it advances the *subjective will* of the vanguard in the class struggle in the form of the democratic centralist party. This cannot happen unless there is freedom of criticism to challenge the program, combined with disciplined action to implement and test the program in practice. For Marx the party embodies the program and acts as the ‘vanguard’ to advance the class struggle towards class consciousness. The [‘permanent revolution’](#) is the theory/program based on the transitional method. The revolution is permanent because it begins with immediate and democratic demands on the bourgeoisie to meet the needs of workers, who struggle to win these demands proves that they cannot be realised by capitalism, thereby raising the class consciousness of workers necessary to build organs of workers power and to prepare for the seizure of power.

## 2) Theory/Program of Permanent Revolution

**The Permanent Revolution from 1850 onward embodies the historical and internationalist class interests of the proletariat and is not completed until the development of communist society.**

### (a) Marx on Permanent Revolution

Marx and Engel’s perspective in the [Communist Manifesto](#) was that the bourgeoisie would turn on the proletariat after making its own revolution against the aristocracy. However, the failure of the 1848 revolutions showed that the European bourgeoisies had exhausted their role in the development of capitalism and made an alliance with the feudal regimes against the proletariat. The bourgeoisie had ceased to be the revolutionary class. It was now the task of the proletariat to take over from the bourgeoisie the role of developing the forces of production by means of *permanent revolution*, finishing the bourgeois revolution –in particular the national revolution, land reform and universal suffrage –as

part of the socialist revolution. [Marx and Engels summed up](#) these results in March, 1850, with a transitional program for “permanent revolution”! Read ‘For Marx the Program came first’ in [Rebooting Lenin](#).

The [First International](#) (International Workingmen’s Association) was formed (1864-1874) to advance the transitional program for permanent revolution. Marx offered addresses on [Capital](#) and current political questions. The International broke with the petty bourgeois socialists (Proudhon, Lassalle etc.,) who compromised with the bourgeois state, and with the anarchists (Bakunin) who rejected the need for a revolutionary workers’ state. It supported the right of national self-determination in the case of [Poland](#), the [USA](#) (civil war), [Ireland](#) and the [Franco-Prussian war](#). Only the proletariat could realise the bourgeois program for political independence by means of a political alliance between the workers and peasants against the national bourgeoisie. The armed proletariat would create a workers’ republic and defend it with a popular militia. The Paris Commune proved that the bourgeois state would have to be smashed and replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat.

### **(b) The Paris Commune tests permanent revolution**

The first real test of the International came with the *Paris Commune of 1871* when the French bourgeoisie allied with the Prussian state to [suppress the French Republic](#). The defeat of the Commune did not invalidate the Marxist program. It proved that the program tested in practice could be strengthened by the lessons of the Commune. It proved that the bourgeois state could not be simply taken over and used as the basis of the proletarian dictatorship, rather it would have to be [smashed](#). It highlighted the need to build a stronger international capable of overcoming both the reactionary bourgeoisie, now embarking on imperialist expansion to colonise the world, and also of overcoming the liberal bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties who compromised with the reactionaries, preventing the proletarian vanguard from becoming a class-conscious force for revolution. The defeat of the Commune brought a huge international reaction down on the proletarian movement.

Despite the lessons of the Commune, the International succumbed to opportunism in the 1870s. Marx’s critique of the Commune in the [Civil War in France](#) was followed up by an internal struggle in the International over the lessons of the Commune. It was time for the Marxists to settle accounts with their great rivals Proudhon and Blanqui, [Bakunin](#) and Lassalle. Marx provides the ammunition. There was a showdown with the anarchists in the International Conference at Hague in 1872, when their 4-year long attempt to take over the International finally saw Bakunin expelled (24 for, 6 against and 7 abstaining). The anarchist maximum program for smashing all states to “equalise the classes” to found a new society on autonomous groups was revealed as utopian, precisely because the Commune compromised with Thiers and did not use its embryonic state power to destroy the counter-revolutionary army and defend Republican Paris from the Prussian army.

Marx blamed the ultra-left Blanquists who had been the majority in the Commune and also led the Revolutionary Guard but failed to go beyond armed barricades to launch a serious attack on the Thiers army. They walked out of the Hague Conference when it voted to shift the General Council from London to New York, away from the barricades! The Proudhonists too (as the majority of members of the International in the Commune) were shown to be petty bourgeois students in their opposition to working class organisations. As Marx pointed out the Commune was a political association and passed edicts to empower the unions and even build one big union! The Proudhonists were closer to the

anarchists than Marxists, being critical of the need for a democratic and centralised party which in their view would inevitably succumb to “authoritarianism”.

Against these ultra-lefts and reformists, Marx and Engels were convinced that with the leadership of the International, the Commune could have led to an armed insurrection had the Marxist program for ‘permanent revolution’ been taken up by all members of the International and spread across France, forcing a truce with Thiers for a Workers and Peasants Republic. For those who think this prospect utopian, they should read Engels [1891 postscript](#) to *The Civil war in France* on the ‘dystopia’ that followed the defeat of the Commune. Its defeat was a defeat for France, then subjugated to Bismarck for twenty years, creating the conditions for a new war, “...a race war which would subject the whole of Europe to devastation by 15 or 20 millions of armed men.” The French state backed by the Prussians may have defeated the insurrection, but it would have been fought on the terms of permanent revolution, proving in the class war that compromises with the republican bourgeoisie are not possible, and that the bourgeois revolution can only be completed by smashing the state and replacing it with a Workers’ State.

Held after the defeat of the Commune, the Hague Congress largely removed the ultraleft petty bourgeois factions from the International. However, the ‘Marxists’ left in the International did not all draw Marx’s conclusions that the working class had to defend the bourgeois program only by advancing the proletarian program. While Marx knew that the Commune would be defeated unless the proletariat took power, many ‘Marxists’, such as the followers of Lassalle, held the view that because the proletariat was not ready for revolution in 1871, compromise with the bourgeoisie was necessary to prepare the conditions for socialist revolution. So, while Marx had driven off the ultra-left petty bourgeois ‘subjectivists’ who fantasized workers could take power without organisation or a party, he had not defeated the petty bourgeois ‘objectivists’ who said the proletariat were not ready for revolution. As a consequence, in 1872 the General Council of the International was shifted from London to the New York to relieve Marx of an administrative overload. It soon went into abeyance.

Three years later in 1875 the Gotha Congress of United German Workers Party would spark an angry attack by Marx on the draft program. In his [Critique of the Gotha Program](#) he berated the German party for compromising with Lassalle’s petty bourgeois socialism. He launched a [bitter attack](#) on the German ‘unity’ party for ignoring the Marxist method and program. “*Vulgar socialism (and from it in turn a section of the democrats) has taken over from the bourgeois economists the consideration and treatment of distribution as independent of the mode of production and hence the presentation of socialism as turning principally on distribution. After the real relation has long been made clear, why retrogress again?*”

The defeat of the Commune was now expressed in a defeat for Marxism facing vulgar socialism, signifying the ascendancy of the counter-revolution over the permanent revolution. The program remained nationalist in the face of the rise of imperialism, and lacked an understanding of the historical dialectic of the transition from capitalism to communism. Marx’s *Critique* had no impact for 15 years, and it was not made public until Engels insisted in putting it on the agenda at the Erfurt Congress in 1891 when the faults of the Gotha program came up for debate. Read the ‘Gotha Program abandons Marxist program’ in [Rebooting Lenin](#).

### **(c) Engels and Lenin**

After the death of Marx in 1884, Engels continued to vigorously defend the Marxist program. First, it fell to Engels as Marx's lifelong collaborator to complete Marx's unpublished drafts of Vols. 3 and 4 of *Capital*. This was important in revealing Marx's scientific method, moving from the high level of abstraction of Volume 1 to the many concrete determinations resulting from competition in the marketplace in Volume 3. Here Marx's *law of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall* (TRPF) and its *counter-tendencies* provided the theoretical basis for understanding the expansion of capitalism beyond the nation state into the global market, a perspective later developed by Lenin and Trotsky. Read Rosdolsky's [Making of Marx's Capital](#) Chapters 1&2

Second, in the Second International founded in 1889, Engels stressed the necessity of including the seizure of power, a workers' republic and a united German federation. Yet he did not develop Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program* to deal specifically with the rise of German imperialism or the impact of colonial super-profits on the opportunist aspects of the Erfurt draft program. Advancing the internationalist aspect of the Marxist program had to wait on further developments that led to the First Inter-Imperialist world war and the historic betrayal of the Second International. Read 'Engels and Lenin critique the Centrist Erfurt Program of 1891' in [Rebooting Lenin](#).

It fell to Lenin to undertake the unfinished tasks that Marx had set himself in his planned final three volumes of *Capital*: on the *State, Foreign Trade, and World Market*, and to specify how the laws of motion of capital in Volume 3 *would manifest concretely* in the decline of competitive capitalism and the rise of imperialism. **The epoch of imperialism as state monopoly capitalism led to the destruction of the forces of production, the parasitism of finance capital and worsening crises, wars and revolutions that would hasten the completion of the permanent revolution with the end of the capitalist mode of production and the beginning of the transition to communism.**

### 3) Epoch of imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism

**The 'highest' stage of capitalism divides the world between oppressor and oppressed states and does not allow for *new* imperialist states to emerge with the exception of ex-workers' states which are able to resist re-colonisation.**

It was Lenin who built on Marx's *Capital* to develop the concept of imperialism as the epoch of capital's final stage of decline based on parasitic finance capital. The accumulation of capital would necessitate bigger crises as the concentration of finance capital in the 'great powers' led to intensifying competition to plunder the world market for sources of surplus value. This competition led to the First Imperialist War which Lenin foresaw would either end in a redivision of the world market by the victorious great powers and a defeat for the world's workers, or in the revolutionary overthrow of global capitalism and victory for socialist revolution.

Lenin's [theory of imperialism](#) was critical in developing the Marxist program in the new epoch of state monopoly capitalism. He incorporated the programmatic advances from 1848 onwards testing them under the conditions of the revolution against the Tsar. The vanguard party was committed to the task of permanent revolution – the proletarian party leading all the oppressed classes to overthrow the Tsar. Russia was imperialist because the Tsar was modernising, with the aid of French and British finance capital, as an oppressor state. The democratic revolution to overthrow the Tsar would rapidly morph

into a full-blown socialist revolution to overthrow the Russian bourgeoisie who was now acting in the direct interests of foreign imperialists.

### **(a) Permanent Revolution in the Age of Imperialism**

The Russian bourgeoisie, like the European bourgeoisies of 1848, was incapable of leading, let alone completing, the bourgeois revolution. A workers' revolution in Russia, 'the weakest link' in imperialism, would open the permanent revolution; but completing the transition to socialism would not be possible without an international revolution. The international proletariat would have to complete this task as part of the international permanent revolution. Lenin and Trotsky came to agreement on Permanent Revolution as the completion of the bourgeois revolution with the victory of the socialist revolution.

**In 1905 Lenin and Trotsky spoke of an 'epoch' of permanent revolution. The permanent revolution would extend for an indeterminate 'epoch' and would be completed only when the revolution in Russia unified its three aspects, finishing the bourgeois revolution as socialist revolution, incorporating that into the international socialist revolution, and making the transition from socialism to communism.**

Meanwhile, the Second International was in crisis having succumbed to imperialist economism in the imperialist heartlands. The rivalry of the imperialist powers to partition the globe was complete by 1914 and the struggle for supremacy now had to be conducted by inter-imperialist war over the re-partition colonies and semi-colonies to plunder raw materials and labour. Thirty years of gradual adaptation to imperialist super-profits resulted in the betrayal of the majority of the Second International on August 4, 1914. Instead of opposing war the majority social-patriotic leadership of the International lined up behind their imperialist ruling classes and went to war.

While soldiers and sailors mutinied towards the end of the war on both the Eastern and Western fronts and formed armed soviets, only in Russia did civil war lead to the conquest of a workers' state. In Europe, armed insurrection was isolated and destroyed by the betrayal of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International. *The critical factor was the absence of the Marxist vanguard party capable of leading the proletariat-for-itself to the armed insurrection to overthrow of the bourgeois state. The revolutionary continuity of the Marxist program was kept alive by the Bolshevik Party in Russia, incorporating the lessons of the permanent revolution since 1850, and representing the international and historic interests of the world proletariat. However, it could not advance the permanent revolution further as the failure to build vanguard parties in Europe let the revolutionary crisis pass with the defeat of the international revolution.* Read [Reply to the RCIT on Permanent Revolution](#)

### **(b) Imperialism Today**

While the Bolsheviks thought that the First World War showed capitalism was overripe for overthrow by the proletariat, this proved premature (see chapter 4 below). Workers and poor peasants were ready and willing, but after the defeat of the imperialists' counterrevolutionary intervention, the Stalinists and petty bourgeois democrats dominated the majority of the oppressed, becoming the most treacherous leadership of the permanent counter-revolution. The Stalinists' policy of building 'socialism in one country' (exported as 'national roads to socialism') rejected the Marxist permanent revolution and substituted the 'peoples' front' (popular front) - Stalin's 'bloc of four classes' (workers, peasants,

intellectuals and national bourgeoisie) in support of ‘progressive’ ‘democratic’ imperialist bourgeois governments, against fascist regimes. Trotsky, writing in 1923 in [The New Course](#), to defend himself from a Stalinist attack on himself as an “anti-Leninist”, saw this as an attack on the theory/program of permanent revolution which embodied the method of Marx and Lenin.

*The Stalinist bureaucracy was playing the same role in the working class as the union tops and social democrats in the imperialist countries.* It trapped workers in popular fronts to prevent their armed independent organisation in Bolshevik-type parties threatening imperialism and the whole bourgeois social order. In [China](#) 1924-27, [Germany](#) 1933, [Spain](#) 1936-37 and [Vietnam](#) 1939-46, this was to have tragic consequences as the Stalinist leadership of the Communist Parties trapped the anti-Stalinist masses in counter-revolutionary popular fronts and eliminated them by military and fascist reaction. After the betrayal of the “3rd Period” ultraleft policy which rejected working class unity against fascism, the Stalinists moved to the right to bloc with the ‘democratic’ bourgeoisie to isolate and smash the Bolshevik-Leninist, and Fourth Internationalist parties, and defeat the proletarian revolution.

**Did the defeat of the proletariat in the First and Second imperialist wars and the reactionary civil wars that followed invalidate the theory/program of permanent revolution against the bourgeois program of permanent counter-revolution?** We say no. On the contrary, that method/theory holds all the more clearly today. The epoch of imperialism is still with us. **Global capitalism has been plagued by parasitism, wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions as each crisis gets deeper and more catastrophic, necessitating a ruling class strategy of permanent counter-revolution of depression, repression and war to defeat the world’s workers.** Therefore, the theory/program for permanent revolution remains the key task for the worlds’ workers and poor farmers organisations. Only by uniting in anti-imperialist struggles to complete the bourgeois democratic tasks as part of the socialist revolution, will imperialism’s permanent counter-revolution be defeated.

Stalinists were not alone in joining the counter-revolution. Self-proclaimed Trotskyists did so also. In the anti-imperialist struggles after the Second War, the Pabloists objectified permanent revolution into evolutionary stages during which the Stalinists and progressive capitalists would accompany, acquiesce to, or go along with, the objective social laws of capitalism towards socialism without the need for a Bolshevik-Leninist party. The rival anti-Stalinist current in the International Committee formed popular fronts with anti-colonial ‘left nationalists’ like Paz Estenssoro, Nasser and Gaddafi. As a result, the anti-colonial struggles were not led by Bolshevik parties but by social imperialist Mensheviks who put their trust in the ‘socialist’ credentials of colonial dictators, today, for example, Bashar Assad. The common factor here is the abandonment of the materialist ‘subjectivity’ of the working and oppressed people led by a Bolshevik party, and the substitution of the petty bourgeois idealist ‘objective’ completion of the bourgeois revolution preparatory to socialism in the never-never land.

*Lenin’s theory of imperialism explains the rise and fall of imperialist powers over this epoch.* The results of redivision of the world market in the two Imperialist wars has led to some imperialist states rising and others falling. Yet since the First Imperialist War, *no oppressed capitalist states* have emerged as an imperialist oppressor state. Among the British settler colonies, only [Canada](#) had a sizable national capital sufficient to join the imperialist club before the war. We reject the view of some fake Marxists that there are [sub-imperialist states](#), for example India or Brazil, even China, that represent progressive, countervailing, multipolar forces limiting US global hegemony. This is an admission that the proletariat is not ready for revolution and must rely upon some ‘anti-imperialist’ bloc to resist US imperialism. Nor as the RCIT claims are the Republic of Korea or Israel imperialist. We argue following

Lenin that the litmus test for imperialism is the export of finance capital to super-exploit cheap labour and extract raw materials as super-profits to counter the tendency for the rate of profit to fall (TRPF) in the home countries. The conclusion is, that no colony or semi-colony can accumulate a sufficient share of the surplus-value as national capital when virtually all surplus is appropriated by one or other imperialist power. This has been borne out by events since 1918. The existing imperialist powers re-divided the world, and yet failed to destroy the Soviet Union that had ‘partitioned’ itself from imperialist world economy. After 1945, a new ‘redivision’ resulted, this time with the help of the Soviet Union, which took territory in Eastern Europe and provided some aid for a number of national liberation wars from China to Cuba which resulted in bureaucratically deformed-at-birth workers’ states. Read [Russia and China and the Unfinished Permanent Revolution](#).

### (c) The Rise of China and Russia as new imperialist powers

*The only exceptions to imperialist wars and redivisions that allowed new imperialist powers to emerge was the success of permanent revolution in breaking from the imperialist world economy.* Russia and China as *degenerate workers’ states* escaped the fate of capitalist semi-colonies. Yet, as Trotsky long argued, without a political revolution to defeat the bureaucratic castes in power, restoration would be inevitable as the bureaucracy would have to revert to capitalism to save its own skin. The social phenomenon described in [The Revolution Betrayed](#) and further in the *Transitional Program* of a parasitic bureaucratic caste constituting a continuous threat of capitalist restoration in the absence of global support for political revolution led to the complete triumph of Yeltsin in 1991. A petty bourgeois/bureaucratic caste of “capitalist roaders” within China’s Communist Party likewise defeated the Tien An Men uprising in 1989 and immediately moved to restore capitalism. As we have argued in our documents, the rise of Russia and China as ex-workers’ states that restored capitalism and became imperialist states can only be explained by developing Lenin’s theory of imperialism.

We develop Lenin’s theory of imperialism by going back to its essence: the export of finance capital as a counter tendency to the TRPF. The domination of imperialism and its oppression of colonies and semi-colonies is necessary to extract super-profits from its capital investment. This clearly explains why new imperialist powers cannot arise once the world economy is divided by existing imperialist powers. But it also explains how it is possible for former bureaucratic workers’ states to restore capitalism in such a way as they escape being subordinated as semi-colonies and therefore can emerge as new imperialist powers exporting finance capital and expropriating colonial super-profits.

In summary, former bureaucratic workers’ states resulted from national revolutions that overthrew their bourgeoisies and escaped the imperialist division of the world economy. And even under bureaucratic rule, state property allowed the rapid development of the forces of production well beyond that which would have been possible had the national bourgeoisie remained in power. Yet in the absence of workers’ democracy, bureaucratic planning is inefficient in matching production to social need and leads to economic stagnation. It becomes a barrier to further development which puts pressure on the bureaucracy to open up to the market and restore capitalism in the form of state capitalism. The bureaucratic caste becomes a new ‘red’ bourgeoisie that takes advantage of the centralised state apparatus to re-integrate into the global capitalist market without being subordinated to imperialist domination. This means that Russia and China would inevitably emerge as new imperialist powers. In 2014 we summed up the impact of the rise of Russia and China. Read [Why are Russia and China imperialist powers and not capitalist semi-colonies?](#)

#### **(4) The Bolshevik Revolution and First Four Congresses of the International**

**The most advanced point in the Permanent Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution, faced the most reactionary counter-revolutionary attacks, imperialist war, the popular front, fascism and bureaucratic degeneration.**

##### **(a) The Bolshevik Revolution**

The victory of the Bolshevik revolution was the most momentous event in the history of the modern world. It vindicated the *program of permanent revolution* from the time of Marx to the epoch of imperialism. *The slogans for Peace, Land and Bread, summed up the Transitional Program.* They were immediate demands, but could be won only by a socialist revolution. Peace was the demand that the workers in uniform refuse to fight, turn their guns on their officers and form rank and file soviets. It ended the war, stopped the counter-revolution of Kornilov and built the Red Army. Land was the democratic demand to win over the poor peasants by expropriating land and turning it over to the tillers. This caused a split in the peasantry along class lines and opened the way for a class alliance with the proletariat. Bread was the transitional demand to meet the basic needs of the workers and poor peasants that could be won only by workers' expropriation and control of industry. All led necessarily to the seizure of power and construction of a workers' state. Read [Review of China Mieville's October: The Story of the Russian Revolution.](#)

Marxism was vindicated in its fundamentals. First, *only the proletariat*, leading the poor peasantry and other oppressed people, could rescue humanity from capitalist decline and reverse the destruction of crises and wars by means of revolution. All class compromises in or outside parliament led to betrayal. Second, *only the vanguard party and program* could inject the vital revolutionary subjective factor into transforming the objective factor. All workers parties that attempted to appease the petty bourgeois or labour aristocracy had to be split and the working-class majority won to the vanguard party. Third, the *workers' state was a class state* of the armed independence of the workers based on soviets and militias and not mere bourgeois workers governments based on a majority of workers votes. This distinction is manifest in the slogan of 'The Dictatorship of the Proletariat'!

The victory of the Bolshevik revolution was met by a wave of enthusiasm from workers the world over, and became the stimulus for the formation of vanguard parties in many countries. This wave became the basis of the new 3<sup>rd</sup> International which was formed in February 1919. *Its program debated in the first Four Congresses to 1924 summed up the lessons of the permanent revolution in flesh and blood. The new international was devoted to building world revolution not merely as an extension of the Russian revolution but as the necessary condition for its survival.* Read Trotsky, [Lessons of October.](#)

##### **(b) The First Four Congresses: 1919-1922**

Trotsky's main writings during the period of the first four congresses are collected in the [First Five Years of the Communist International](#) published in 1924. In his Introduction he states that the First and Second Congresses of March 1919 and July 1920 were under the "aegis of imperialist war." But "war did not lead directly to the victory of the proletariat in Western Europe. It is all too obvious today just what was lacking for victory in 1919 and 1920: a revolutionary party was lacking".

Writing in April 1919, Trotsky compares the German revolution to the Russian Revolution. There are similarities, but the differences are key. Germany was an advanced imperialist country and both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie were mature and powerful classes. When the armed workers opened the German ‘February’ in November 1918, the bourgeoisie were forced to concede a ‘republic’ led by a Social Democratic government which suppressed the revolution in the “July Days” of February 1919, assassinating its main leaders Liebknecht and Luxemburg. The treacherous role of German Social Democracy proved in Trotsky’s words – *“to be the most counter-revolutionary factor in world history.”*

This caused Social Democracy to split, but in the absence of a revolutionary party the proletariat was without a *“revolutionary combat organisation...It was compelled to not only fight for power but to create its organization and train future leaders in the very course of this struggle.”* Clearly, unlike the Russian “July Days”, events were taking on their own momentum without the guidance of an established vanguard party to avoid a showdown before the conditions for revolution had been prepared. Nonetheless Trotsky regarded the *“political and cultural level of the German workers”* as capable of rising to the task of winning workers from the treacherous SPD and the Kautskyite USPD, and to build the Spartacist League into a Bolshevik-type party that could lead the revolution to victory.

Writing in May 1919 Trotsky in [\*Thoughts on the Progress of the Revolution\*](#) draws up a balance sheet of the progress of the revolution so far. He critiques the Mensheviks’ evolutionary view that the revolution would begin in the ‘West’ and move ‘East’.

But events clearly disproved the two-stage ‘mechanical Marxism’ by beginning in the East (Russia) and moving West. Russia led first with the proletarian revolution in 1917 being neither an ‘accident’ or ‘adventure’. The betrayal of the Constituent Assembly in Germany (the Menshevik icon of ‘democracy’) in early 1918 led to the formation of a Communist Party with the slogan “All power to the Soviets”. In Hungary and Bavaria, the workers had the impudence to emulate the Bolsheviks and form workers governments with a *“truly genuine democracy in the form of the rule of the victorious proletariat.”* *“Thus, the proletarian revolution after starting in the most backward countries of Europe, keeps mounting upwards, rung by rung, toward countries more highly developed economically”.*

Thus, imperialist war not only disrupts the illusions in peaceful, evolutionary capitalist development, it reveals the interconnectedness of all countries in the imperialist system. While bourgeois democracy resists revolution in the West, its absence facilitates revolution in the East. Underneath the forms of democracy are the relations of oppression between oppressor and oppressed states. The imperialist ruling classes can ‘buy’ the ‘class peace’ with bourgeois democracy and delay civil war in the most developed countries, but cannot delay it in the more backward, oppressed countries which the imperialist bourgeoisies plunder for super-profits.

### (c) The programmatic gains of the First Four Congresses

In his [\*Report on the Fourth Congress \(to the Communist Fraction of the 10<sup>th</sup> All-Union Congress of the Soviets.\)\*](#) Trotsky summarises the international situation of the world labour movement. The three prerequisites for socialist revolution are the level of productive technique, working class maturity and a class-conscious vanguard.

**First, capitalism is overdue for replacement by socialism.** *“...25 years ago and more, the replacement of the capitalist mode of production by socialist methods would have already represented objective gains, that is, mankind could have produced more under socialism than under capitalism.”*

**Second, the working class “must become sufficiently powerful in the economic sense in order to gain power and rebuild society”.** *“The working class in all countries plays a social and economic role sufficiently great to be able to find a road to the peasant masses, to the oppressed nationalities, and in this way assure itself of the majority. After the Russian revolution this is not a speculation, not a hypothesis, not a deduction, but an incontestable fact”.* (307).

**Third, the ‘subjective factor’.** *“[T]he working class must be conscious of its power and must be able to apply this power.” “During the post-war years, we have observed in the political life of Europe that the working class is ready for the overturn, ready in the sense of striving subjectively toward it, ready in terms of its will, moods, self-sacrifices, but still lacking the necessary organisational leadership”.*

**Trotsky presents this leadership as the role of the party.** *“In the most critical year for the bourgeoisie, the year 1919, the proletariat of Europe could have undoubtedly conquered state power with minimum sacrifices, had there been at its head a genuine revolutionary organization, setting forth clear aims and capably pursuing them, i.e., a strong Communist Party. But there was none. On the contrary, in seeking after the war to conquer new living conditions for itself and in assuming an offensive against bourgeois society, the working class had to drag on its back the parties and trade unions of the Second International, all of whose efforts, both conscious and instinctive, were essentially directed toward the preservation of capitalist society.”*

In his balance sheet of the Third Congress Trotsky calls the Congress the *“highest school of revolutionary strategy”* **because it seeks answers to the failure of revolution outside Russia.** *“Many of us imagined the task of overthrowing the bourgeoisie much simpler than it actually is, and as reality has now proved to us.”* While the bourgeoisie is now parasitic on the forces of production it is desperately fighting for survival, expending economic resources in propping up its state, the task of overthrowing the bourgeoisie is not a “metaphysical” or “mechanical one” but one which, *“...requires for its fulfilment: revolutionary energy, political sagacity, experience, broadness of vision, resoluteness, hot blood, but at the same time a sober head. It is a political, revolutionary, strategic task.”*

In Trotsky’s *Report on the Fourth Congress*, he states that the Congress faced two big “intimately interrelated tasks”, to defeat centrism (social democrats, Mensheviks, etc.) and to win the majority of the working class. First, the CI demanded a “complete break with the bourgeoisie” programmatically. Second, the CI argued that this could only happen by means of the tactic of the united front which can win workers from bourgeois parties and centrist parties linked to the bourgeois program of class collaboration. Trotsky addresses the centrists, *““You do not believe in our revolutionary methods and in the dictatorship. Very well. But we Communists propose to you and your organization that we fight side by side to gain those demands which you are advancing today.” This is an unassailable argument. It educates the masses about the Communists and shows them that the Communist organization is the best for partial struggles as well”.* ([Report, 323](#))

**Communists raise their full program in every united front. The tactic is subordinated to the strategy, not vice versa!** Trotsky says: *“From the united front flows the slogan of a workers’ government. The Fourth Congress submitted it to a thorough discussion and once again confirmed it as the central political slogan for the next period. What does the struggle for a workers’ government signify? We Communists of course know that a genuine workers’ government in Europe will be established after the proletariat overthrows the bourgeoisie together with its democratic machinery and installs the proletarian dictatorship under the leadership of the Communist Party.”*

Trotsky then concludes that the Fourth Congress recognised a majority workers’ government in a bourgeois state as a genuine transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat **only if it was carried into power by the majority of workers in a revolutionary situation capable of using it as a platform to**

**seize power.** In other words, a workers' government must be actively transitional to soviet power. *“That is to say, a moment may arrive when the Communists together with the left elements of the Social Democracy will set up a workers' government in a way similar to ours in Russia when we created a workers' and peasant' government together with the Left Social-Revolutionaries. Such a phase would constitute a transition to the proletarian dictatorship, the full and completed one.”* ([ibid 324](#))

**In summary, the first four Congresses mark the rapid development of a new Communist International learning from the experience of the war, revolution and counterrevolution in Europe between 1918 and 1922 to test its program and correct its errors. The result was the affirmation of the vital role of a democratic centralist vanguard party armed with the tasks and methods to break the masses from reformism and centrism by means of the tactic of the united front on all immediate and democratic demands, and at the same time raising the transitional program that posed the theory/program of permanent revolution. The demand which captured the essence of this program was the *Workers' Government*.**

## **(5) Stalinism and the Left Opposition**

### **(a) The counter-revolution in the revolution**

The tasks and methods formulated by the First Four Congresses were the basis for the organised *Left Opposition* in the Soviet Union between 1924 and 1929, and after the 1933 Stalinist betrayal of the German revolution (again!). The Bolshevik-Leninists (Trotsky's preferred name) pursued these same tasks and methods until the founding of the 4th International in 1938. As the Bolsheviks never stopped saying, the workers revolution in Russia had everything going for it, a weak bourgeoisie and a strong 'Communist' vanguard party. But without a revolution in Europe the Soviet Union would be isolated from the advanced forces of production necessary to overcome Russia's economic backwardness. This would leave the new workers' state reliant upon capitalist production methods in industry and private peasant production in agriculture.

Thus, the Soviet Union was caught in the contradiction between workers state property in industry and capitalist agriculture as the Trojan Horse of world capitalism. **Lenin recognised that this made the Soviet Union 'state capitalist' in the sense that the workers state oversaw an economy still dependent on capitalist agricultural production and the expansion of the market in the economy.** It was these conditions that encouraged the rise of the petty capitalist peasants (Kulaks) and capitalist traders (Nepmen) as an anti-working-class base for the bureaucratisation of the workers' state. Was this inevitable?

Lenin and Trotsky proposed a way out of this 'inevitability' of bureaucratisation and restoration; the *'party dictatorship'*. "Inevitability" means that the historic conditions of isolation and backwardness must overwhelm the soviet state and the leading role of the Communist Party proving that the Bolshevik revolution was 'premature'. But of course, the Mensheviks of the 2nd International and the Kauskyites of the 2½ International, also believed that the failed German Revolution of 1919 was premature, and betrayed it in the name of 'Marxism', isolating the Russian revolution. Since Lenin and Trotsky were *internationalists*, they knew it was necessary for the Party to keep the permanent revolution alive and guide the international revolution to victory. The key was to prevent the bureaucratisation of the Party and of the Comintern. But for this to happen democratic centralism had to be maintained so that the class interests of the proletariat and poor peasants could be advanced by the planned socialist economy until the world revolution caught up with the Soviet Union.

Lenin's last fight against bureaucratism in the Party proves that he was no authoritarian, nor was the dictatorship of the Party his personal dictatorship. The survival of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat was now the responsibility of the Dictatorship of the Party. In his few final years Lenin was committed to defending *democratic centralism* in the Party despite his declining health. He understood the crisis facing the young workers' state. In five years, it had survived the civil war but the immense damage done to an already isolated and backward state was almost fatal and required emergency surgery. The Party would have to step in to reform the state apparatuses to overcome the Tsarist survivals and the encroachment of a petty bourgeois bureaucracy drawing its support from the small peasant owners.

**Lenin's solution was typical of all his bold interventions - the Party had to be democratised in order to mobilise the resources for economic planning capable of developing state industry, overcoming the class contradiction and transforming petty capitalist peasant production into collective agriculture.**

His proposal was to reform the state *Commissary of 'Workers' and Peasants' Inspection* from a minor body without respect or authority into a central body with equal rights to the *Central Committee* of the Communist Party. It would recruit a fresh body of worker and peasant communists trained in planning and organisation to inspect and oversee not only all economic matters but to keep the bureaucratized central apparatus of the Party under check. [[Better Fewer but Better](#)]

Trotsky, like Lenin, saw the solution to the crisis in the economy as restoring inner-party democracy in order to overcome the bureaucratic barriers to efficient state planning and production. Without democratic centralism in the Party the bureaucracy would grasp at market-driven piecemeal policies that created anarchy and ultimately brought the restoration of capitalism. Lenin's final struggle and appeal to the 12th Congress had been doomed. Stalin maneuvered to put his own appointees into the Workers and Peasants' Inspection neutralising its impact proving that centralism without democracy becomes *bureaucratic centralism*. The bureaucracy under Stalin was using the crisis to strengthen its bureaucratic dictatorship.

Trotsky argued that the emergency measures taken to mobilise the people in the civil war, called 'war communism', could not be applied to overcome the worsening economic crisis, The 'scissors' crisis, the widening gap between the rising prices of manufactured commodities and falling prices of agricultural commodities, could not be solved "by attempts to command prices in the style of war communism." Given the failure of the German revolution in 1923 (in which Stalin played a nefarious role) in coming to the rescue of the Soviet Union, the Bolsheviks would have to manage the soviet state and plan the economy to resolve the contradiction between workers' state industry and capitalist agriculture as expressed in the New Economic Policy (NEP). Although already entrenched, the bureaucrats' victory was not yet assured.

Trotsky wrote a series of articles published in *Pravda* in December, reprinted as a pamphlet, *The New Course*, just days before the 13th Party Conference in January 1924. He proved that the failure to act on the Party and Plan questions had common roots in the rise of the bureaucracy as a result of the isolation of the revolution by the failure of the German Revolution, the consequences of the Civil War, and the collapse of the economy made worse by the NEP and the "scissors crisis". All these factors combined to strengthen the petty bourgeois peasantry - the Kulaks, and the NEPMEN, as well as capitalist industry, and in turn, the adaptation of the bureaucracy to these pro-capitalist forces. The reliance on capitalism would overwhelm the workers' state and restore capitalism unless corrected by workers' democracy and comprehensive economic planning.

### **(b) The Left Opposition for permanent revolution**

The 13th Congress was a defeat for Trotsky and the Left Opposition. Stalin could use his *faction* to ban the Opposition criticism of the bureaucracy as *factional* in a total break with Leninist norms. Trotsky had to change tack. He now took on the task of explaining the failure of the German Revolution and making the lessons of the October Revolution a guide to the international movement. He was educating the international vanguard on the question of the bureaucracy indirectly to avoid the charge of ‘factionalism’. His speeches on these subjects were testing the ground for his *Lessons of October* which appeared in July, 1924.

The main lesson Trotsky drew in *Lessons*, was that the success of October, 1917 in Russia was because there existed a Bolshevik Party, moreover led by Lenin. In Germany the failure of October, 1923, was because no battle-hardened Bolshevik party with a Lenin-type leadership existed. Stalin was only mentioned in passing, but his two Troika partners, Zinoviev and Kamenev, were identified as leading ‘conciliationists’ (those who conciliated with Menshevism). This particular ‘lesson’ was not lost on Stalin. Trotsky was claiming that the ‘conciliationists’ in the party, who opposed the insurrection and called for a ‘soviet government’ sharing power with ‘pre-parliament’, were essentially Mensheviks repudiating permanent revolution for the halfway house of the Constituent Assembly; i.e., the unfinished bourgeois revolution, now thwarted by bourgeois counter-revolution.

A new burst of bureaucratic repression of Trotsky followed, designed to discredit “Trotskyism” as anti-Leninism. Trotsky responded with “*Our Differences*” to repudiate the charges against him as a “Trotskyist”, but which remained unpublished because he was gagged. [note: the pressure on Trotsky forced him to lie low in the service of the bureaucracy to avoid an “open struggle” (‘The Challenge of the Left Opposition’. 23-25; 259-303 Pathfinder, not online).

Trotsky concluded that his bureaucratic critics were attempting to return to the politics of the Mensheviks. Their criticism of his ‘underestimation of the peasantry’ and his ‘fetish of permanent revolution’ reveals the class influence of the petty bourgeois peasantry to liquidate the dictatorship of the proletariat by means of a “Menshevisation of the Bolshevik Party.” Moreover, he had no “*theological* attitude toward the formula of permanent revolution.” Permanent revolution had become the flesh and blood of the revolution of the proletariat leading the peasantry.

The LO of 1925-27 was an unstable bloc of right, left and centrist forces. The centre was the faction led by Trotsky, faithful to Lenin’s dialectical method of restoring inner party democracy, grounded in the militant and class-conscious workers, to resolve the class contradiction expressing itself as the struggle for power in the Party. The right and left tendencies attempted to resolve this contradiction by bureaucratic planning on the one side, and by direct workers democracy on the other, leaving the battle for internal party democracy to the central Leninist/Trotskyist tendency. The right led by Zinoviev was essentially an internal split in the bureaucracy over Stalin’s leadership. Zinoviev was a bureaucrat, but broke with Stalin on his failure to overcome the ‘scissors’ crisis. The left was actually ‘ultra-left’ continuing the petty-bourgeois Communist Left idealist rejection of a workers’ state where workers democracy had been usurped by the bureaucracy. This set the scene for the Ultra-lefts failure to defend the gains of workers’ property, because of, rather than despite Stalinism, and a rightward trajectory into the ‘third camp’ position of the USSR as a restored capitalist state ruled by a ‘new class’.

To sum up, the struggle of the Left Opposition was the internal fight in the Party against Stalinism to resolve the contradiction between workers property and the restoration of capitalism at the hands the bureaucracy, by activating democratic centralism and elevating the role of the worker over the apparatchik; it was the struggle to keep the permanent revolution alive! Here again were the ‘two

tactics' of a revolutionary wing and a reformist wing of the RSDLP that Lenin wrote of in 1905, as the essence of Bolshevism and Menshevism. But now recast as the resistance of international Bolshevism to the counter-revolutionary Stalinist 'centrist' degeneration of the Comintern into a restored Menshevik International.

In response to the economic contradiction of the isolated Russian revolution, the Left Opposition's task was to resolve the scissors crisis without creating a dangerous kulak class; fight for restoration of party democracy; increase the weight of factory workers to offset the 'Lenin levy' of careerists and factionalists; and to do so by transforming GOSPLAN from a bureaucratic, top-down and inefficient leadership of the workers' economy into a truly democratically planned *socialist* production plan. Trotsky's task was to overcome the maneuvers and propaganda of the Stalin bloc so as to bring about further progress on the 12th Party Congress Resolution, which was Lenin's legacy!

### **(c) From the 3rd to the 4th International**

The Stalin factions' series of mid-late 1920's leadership combinations prolonged the NEP and then abruptly abandoned it wholesale in a caricature of Trotsky's earlier proposal for measured collectivisation and industrialization. Stalin turned the army loose on the farmers to force collectivization and eliminate the Kulaks (latterly enriched peasants) as a class. This was just one part of Stalinism's simultaneous assault on Marxism in party program and practice and state policy, both on the international and national fields. Stalin abandoned the Bolshevik policies of the first 4 Comintern Congresses in his "Draft Program of the Communist International." Stalin had just had to fight the Left Opposition over his China policy in 1925-27. To avoid repeating (avoid an international discussion and controversy) that disastrous experience, Stalin had Trotsky and Trotskyists expelled from the party and the International (1928) with Trotsky exiled (1929) and ultimately assassinated (1940).

The Stalin faction derived the "Socialism in one country" policy by reverting to the Menshevik policy of 'revolution by stages,' accommodating the reaction of the Kuomintang under cover of a return to the early Bolshevik slogan for the "Democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry." For Stalinism, defeat was proof of success. Following Chiang Kai Shek's massacre of the CCP leadership and cadres in Shanghai, the class-collaborationist China policy zagged into the ultra-left Canton uprising and the ultraleft 'third period' that led to the betrayal of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International and Hitler's consolidation of power in 1933-4, zigging back yet again to the peoples' front period of collaboration with democratic imperialism in defense of "socialism in one country". The Comintern became the public relations arm of the Stalin faction, where every struggle could be for sale to the bourgeoisie in pursuit of Peoples Fronts and then "collective security" Stalin's apologists say no other course was possible for an isolated, surrounded USSR. But where did this "necessity" come from? From the abandonment of the perspective of world socialist revolution for "socialism in one country"!

Thus when we look at the [British General strike](#) of 1926 we see a Stalinist-led Comintern influencing the Trades Union Congress to call off support to the strike after only 9 days, even though it was apparent that the position of the ruling class was weak and weakening and that New York capitalists were already beginning to gobble up the business and proceeds of their world empire. Trotsky told anyone who would listen. But Stalin's entire emphasis was already moored to the conception that internationally capitalism had stabilized, and hence it was time for purely legal and parliamentary tactics. The British miners would have to go it alone. Here we see one side, the reformist side, of Stalinism's centrism.

We saw the [ultraleft side](#) in China. After running behind the Wang Ching Wei left faction in the Kuomintang (KMT) in a misapplication of the Comintern's united front theory-- even to the point of anointing the KMT the official Comintern party for China-- for purely factional, anti-Trotskyist reasons Stalin had the Shanghai comrades launch an abortive uprising in April 1927, resulting in a repression with mass executions as Chiang Kai Shek effectively applied the coup de grace of the popular front policy of KMT-Comintern alliance. The lesson Stalinism took from this was that their stageist theory worked!

It was the German debacle that led Trotsky to conclude that the Third International was no longer a force for world revolution. The coming to power of Hitler and the Nazis witnessed the crushing of the powerful German workers movement. In their ultra-left 3rd Period, the German Communist Party (KPD) characterized the Social Democrats (SPD) as 'social-fascists', refusing to build anti-fascist united fronts, instead stupidly proclaiming that "after Hitler, us." Trotsky argued for a united front to unite the rank and file of the working class in action and to undermine and expose the SPD leadership in front of the mass of SPD workers. It was after this defeat that Trotsky started the building of a new revolutionary Fourth International.

The Opposition's defense of the workers' state required a political revolution. i.e., the overthrow of the bureaucracy and restore a healthy workers democracy. But after the German defeat in 1933, Trotsky concluded the Comintern could not be reformed. This meant new, authentic Bolshevik-Leninist parties had to be formed out of the previous External Factions of the CPs. This was done, by fighting the great class battles of the Minneapolis strikes, the Dewey Commission condemnation of the Moscow show trials of the old Bolsheviks, and the updating and elaboration of analyses and party program. Everywhere Stalinism subordinated the workers' struggle to the program of the bourgeoisie, saving capitalism from its crisis by allowing fascism to defeat the proletariat and restore the conditions for the return to capital accumulation.

For Stalinism, the conclusion drawn from the German debacle was the desirability of cross-class alliance, "united fronts" in the parlance of [Georgy Dimitrov](#). known as "Peoples" or "Popular Fronts" against fascism. From the popular front it was but a step to supporting Roosevelt, which they did until, and then again after, their pact with Ribbentrop and Hitler. Dimitrov's fake orthodoxy of 1934-5 was a cynical appeal to the Stalinist conception of the real Leninism as the pre-1917 "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry", where in reality the transitional program content of the workers' program dating to the Communist Manifesto 1850 edition was rejected along with the permanent revolution. Gone was class-political independence as a principle. Gone was the world revolution in all but convoluted explanations of fast-changing wobbles. Alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie, only lately (1917) the goal of Menshevism (and Stalin himself before The April Theses!), was the be-all in pursuit of the defense of the USSR (and everyone else) against fascism. However, before Trotsky could consolidate the movement for a Fourth International events overtook the Opposition cadres. First in France, and then in a major way in unmistakably revolutionary events in Spain.

## [6] The Transitional Program

We have laid out the relationship between the vanguard party and program in testing and advancing the program. The fundamental point here is that the Transitional Method is dialectics in action. Transitional demands to meet workers' needs are designed to raise revolutionary consciousness as each advance by the workers is met by a bourgeois reaction, forcing in turn a new advance by workers until the point of seizure of power is *not only necessary but possible*. The essence of dialectics then is the active, conscious leadership of the vanguard to lead the working class "over the bridge," as Trotsky called it, from united fronts for immediate and democratic demands until a class-conscious majority of workers calling for "all power to the soviets!" arises capable of fighting for and winning socialist demands.

### **(a) Trotsky's Transitional Method**

The Transitional Program was Trotsky's weapon to arm the proletariat at a time when once again the bourgeoisie was forced to go to war to resolve its worsening crises. Its method was to close the gap between the objective world situation, summarised as the coming showdown between the two main classes over the future of humanity, and the subjective backwardness of the consciousness of the masses. Either the war would bring a defeat of the revolution and a fall into barbarism, or the proletariat would rise to the situation and make a socialist revolution. But for that to happen the revolutionary party and program was needed to close the gap. It was a desperate last-minute attempt to create a new international party in time to smash the Stalinist, social democratic and centrist misleadership of the proletariat and release its potential as the only revolutionary class. For Trotsky this crisis was summed up as the 'crisis of Marxism' which in its heart was "the crisis of revolutionary leadership' that could be resolved only by a new, 4<sup>th</sup> International.

The TP was the summation of the development of the Marxist program from the Communist Manifesto through the first Four Congresses of the Third International. It built on the Left Opposition that took up the work of defending Bolshevik Leninism after the degeneration of the Third International and the rise of Stalin (from 1924). As we have seen after the final betrayal of the Third International in Germany in 1933, the Left Opposition became the International Communist League (ICL), the embryo of a new, Fourth International committed to the urgent task of founding a new international to carry forward the task of the socialist revolution. Between 1933 and 1938 Trotsky fought to bring together the various currents that had broken from the Stalinist Comintern, facing resistance from some who thought a new international premature. Those who opposed its foundation, like the Polish section, the Chinese Trotskyist Chen Tu-Hsiu and Isaac Deutscher, based their belief on the period of defeats suffered by the world proletariat that would render the new international impotent. [Trotsky's response](#) was that no matter how weak, a new international had to be founded urgently to raise the Marxist flag to rally the masses to revolution when the world faced war and counter-revolution and humanity was in mortal danger.

*"The new parties and the new International must be built upon a new foundation: that is the key with which to solve all other tasks. The tempo and the time of the new revolutionary construction and its consummation depend, obviously, upon the general course of the class struggle, the future victories and defeats of the proletariat. Marxists, however, are not fatalists. They do not unload upon the historical process those very tasks which the historical process has posed before them. The initiative of a conscious minority, a scientific program, bold and ceaseless agitation in the name of clearly formulated aims, merciless criticism of all ambiguity those are some of the most important factors for the victory of the proletariat. Without a fused and steeled revolutionary party, a socialist revolution is inconceivable. The conditions are difficult; the obstacles are great; the tasks are colossal; but there is*

*no reason whatever to become pessimistic or to lose courage. Despite all the defeats of the proletariat, the position of the class enemy remains a hopeless one. Capitalism is doomed. Only in the socialist revolution is there salvation for mankind.”*

The Transitional Program was drafted by Trotsky as the basis for the new international. It was presented as a draft and far from complete. It lacked important aspects of a complete program – a deeper theoretical introduction and a revolutionary conclusion.

*“A complete program would should have a theoretical expression of the modern capitalist society in its imperialist stage. The reasons of the crisis, the growth of unemployed, and so on, and in this draft this analysis is briefly summarized only in the first chapter because we have written about these things in articles, books, and so on...Also the end of the program is not complete because we don’t speak here about the social revolution, about the seizure of power by insurrection, the transformation of capitalist society into a dictatorship, the dictatorship of socialist society. This brings the reader only to the doorstep. It is a program for action from today until the beginning of the socialist revolution.”*

Trotsky expected that the program would be competed in discussion with comrades in every country so the general lines of the program would be balanced by particular local conditions. This was a clear reference to the need for the new international party to be born both democratic and centralist. Democratic discussion and critique would complete the program and agreement would be expressed in its adoption by the founding congress and acted upon as a disciplined international. In response to some criticisms from US comrades that “some parts of the program do not conform to the situation” he took it upon himself to ‘elaborate’ on what was missing from the theoretical section and its implications for the missing section on revolution. In discussions with leading US comrades, [he said:](#)

*“We have repeated many times that the scientific character of our activity consists in the fact that we adapt our program not to political conjunctures or the thought or mood of the masses as this mood is today, but we adapt our program to the objective situation as it is represented by the economic class structure of society. The mentality can be backward; then the political task of the party is to bring the mentality into harmony with the objective facts, to make the workers understand the objective task. But we cannot adapt the program to the backward mentality of the workers, the mentality, the mood is a secondary factor – the prime factor is the objective situation...Everywhere I ask what should we do? Make our program fit the objective situation or the mentality of the workers? And I believe that this question must be put before every comrade who says that this program is not fit for the American situation. This program is a scientific program. It is based on an objective analysis of the objective situation. It cannot be understood by the workers as a whole. It would be very good if the vanguard would understand it in the next period and that they would then turn and say to the workers, “You must save yourselves from fascism.”*

However, the criticisms of the incomplete program by US comrades demonstrated not its weakness so much as that of the critics. Trotsky was forced to defend the 4<sup>th</sup> International against the US petty bourgeois opposition which rejected dialectics for bourgeois empiricism, leading to a capitulation to national chauvinism within the imperialist countries, and a refusal to defend the Soviet Union ‘unconditionally’. The draft program was adopted and it remains for today’s revolutionaries to debate what changes were made in the time since 1938 are consistent with the theory and practice of Marxism as held by Trotsky. Despite its limitations, as pointed out by Trotsky, the Transitional Program became the revolutionary guide to the proletariat on how to advance its struggle across many

class fronts to resolve the crisis of Marxism, to defeat imperialist war and defend unconditionally the Soviet Union. For, while the workers have an instinct for dialectics as they become conscious of the struggle of labour against capital, this is not enough without an international party and program **capable of transcending the divide between the objective situation and the subjective consciousness and making the transition to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.**

### **(b) Trotsky's Leadership**

Yet it is obvious that the crisis of Marxism put a huge load on Trotsky's shoulders. Trotsky exiled in Mexico had to contend with the Stalinist trials, the assassination of leading comrades including his son Leon Sedov, the Dewey Commission, and those who opposed the founding of the new international. He also faced the bourgeois slander that the international was a sort of 'vanity project' for the sole surviving leader of the Bolshevik revolution. [Deutscher] [Trotsky refuted all this](#) in his explanation of the origins of the Transitional Program in common ideas, common understanding and common discipline, the result of common experience:

*"One can say that we didn't have a program until this day. Yet we acted. But this program was formulated under different articles, different motions, etc. In this sense the draft program doesn't presage a new invention, it is not the writing of one man. It is the summation of collective work up until today. But such a summation is absolutely necessary in order to give to the comrades an idea of the situation, a common understanding. Petty bourgeois anarchists and intellectuals are afraid to subscribe to giving a party, common ideas, a common attitude. In opposition they wish moral programs. But for us this program is the result of common experience. It is not imposed upon anybody for whoever joins the party does so voluntarily...The program for the class cannot fall from heaven. We can arrive only at an understanding of the necessity...The program is the articulation of the necessity, that we learned to understand, and since the necessity is the same for all members of the class, we can reach a common understanding of the tasks and the understanding of this necessity is the program. We can go further and say that the discipline of our party must be very severe because we are a revolutionary party against a tremendous bloc of enemies, conscious of their interests, and now we are attacked not only by the bourgeoisie but by the Stalinists, the most venomous of the bourgeois agents. Absolute discipline is necessary but it must come from common understanding. If it is imposed from without it is a yoke. If it comes from understanding it is an expression of personality, but otherwise it is a yoke. Then discipline is an expression of my free individuality. It is not opposition between personal will and the party because I entered of my free will. The program too is on this basis and this program can be upon a sure political and moral basis only if we understand it very well."*

The task is to take the program based on common experience, and common discipline as free activity of the voluntary members, to the masses.

*"The duty of the party is to seize every American worker and shake him ten times so he will understand what the situation is in the United States. This is not a conjunctural crisis but a social crisis. Our party can play a great role." [Question: Isn't the ideology of the workers a part of the objective factors?]*  
*"For us as a small minority this whole thing is objective including the mood of the workers. But we must analyze and classify those elements of the objective situation which can be changed by our paper and those which cannot be changed. That is why we say that the program is adapted to the fundamental stable elements of the objective situation and the task is to adapt the mentality of the masses to those*

*objective factors. To adapt the mentality is a pedagogical task. We must be patient, etc. The crisis of society is given as the base of our activity. The mentality is the political arena of our activity. We must change it. We must give a scientific explanation of society, and clearly explain it to the masses. That is the difference between Marxism and reformism.”*

This was no clearer concrete demonstration of this than the question of an independent Labor Party. In the discussions with the SWP leaders on the program Trotsky found that the SWP were divided over whether there was sufficient ‘sentiment’ to call for an Independent Labor Party. Cannon thought that there was strong sentiment in the CIO. Shachtman thought that sentiment was lacking and if the SWP had to call for their formation they would end up as “appendages” of Roosevelt. Trotsky responded by explaining that the objective of the formation of the CIO demanded an Independent Labor Party to take the struggle forward.

On the question that “there is no evidence to indicate any widespread sentiment for such a party” Trotsky answers:

*“We have no machine to take a referendum. We can measure the mood only by action if the slogan is put on the agenda. But what we can say is that the objective situation is absolutely decisive. The trade unions as trade unions can have only a defensive activity, losing members and becoming more and more weak as the crisis deepens, creating more and more unemployed...I say here what I said about the whole program of transitional demands. The problem is not the mood of the masses but the objective situation, and our job is to confront the backward material of the masses with the tasks which are determined by objective facts and not by psychology. The same is absolutely correct for this specific question on the labor party. If the class struggle is not to be crushed, replaced by demoralization, then the movement must find a new channel and this channel is political.*

*We claim to have Marxism or scientific socialism. What does “scientific socialism” signify in reality? It signifies that the party which represents this social science, departs, as every science, not from subjective wishes, tendencies, or moods but from objective facts, from the material situation of the different classes and their relationships. Only by this method can we establish demands adequate to the objective situation and only after this can we adapt these demands and slogans to the given mentality of the masses. But to begin with this mentality as the fundamental fact would signify not a scientific but a conjunctural, demagogic, or adventurist policy.”*

To those who fear becoming a reformist party, [Trotsky responds](#) that the SWP would raise its revolutionary program inside the Labor Party to get it adopted:

*“...a concrete program of action and demands in the sense that this transitional program issues from the conditions of capitalist society today, but immediately leads over the limits of capitalism. It is not the reformist minimum program which never included workers’ militia, workers control of production. These demands are transitory because they lead from the capitalist society to the proletarian revolution...we can’t stop only with the day-to-day demands of the proletariat. We must give to the most backward workers concrete slogan that corresponds to their needs and that leads dialectically to the conquest of power...We propagandize this program in the trade unions, propose it as the basic program for the labor party. For us it is a transitional program; but for them, it is the program. Now it’s a question of workers’ control of production, but you can realise this program only through a workers’ and farmers’ government. We must make this slogan popular.”*

Trotsky's assassination deprived the 4th International of his leadership and it succumbed to a failure of dialectics as he feared. The international was weakened by a leadership too influenced by the economism/opportunism of the petty bourgeois/labour aristocracy to operate as an effective international vanguard. It that did not grasp the essentials of dialectics, rather succumbing to national chauvinism in the interests of adapting to the mood of the 'backward' masses. Despite Trotsky's efforts to raise a program based on the objective situation to raise demands that would close the gap between objective reality and subjective consciousness, the TP became reduced to a new mini-max program. The leadership rejected dialectics as the contradictory unity of objective and subjective reality, and resorted to the impressionism of the petty bourgeois intelligentsia which substitutes itself for the agency of class-conscious workers.

### (c) A Transitional Program for Today

To conclude this discussion of the Transitional Program we need to work out how to make a Transitional Program for today **based on the method** of Trotsky's program of 1938 'The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International.' Trotsky referred to it as 'unfinished', and that should adopt it together with all other programmatic documents of the new International such as the [\*Manifesto of the Fourth International on Imperialist War\*](#). In this way we use the method to arrive at a program for today's conditions that takes the objective situation as it presents itself and raises the demands that are capable of developing workers' class consciousness for the tasks of socialist revolution.

First, what is the objective situation? Trotsky in talking about the TP explained the objective and subjective factors in history from 1848 up to 1940. We would sum up that history as 'permanent revolution' in the sense of Marx when he first used the term in 1850; the bourgeoisie was no longer the revolutionary class and had to be replaced by the **new revolutionary class**, the proletariat, to make the [permanent revolution](#).

*"The expression "permanent revolution" is an expression of Marx which he applied to the revolution of 1848. In Marxian, naturally not in revisionist but in revolutionary Marxian literature, this term has always had citizenship rights. Franz Mehring employed it for the revolution of 1905-1907. The permanent revolution, in an exact translation, is the continuous revolution, the uninterrupted revolution. What is the political idea embraced in this expression?"*

*It is, for us communists, that the revolution does not come to an end after this or that political conquest, after obtaining this or that social reform, but that it continues to develop further and its only boundary is the socialist society. Thus, once begun, the revolution (insofar as we participate in it and particularly when we lead it) is in no case interrupted by us at any formal stage whatever. On the contrary, we continually and constantly advance it in conformity, of course, with the situation, so long as the revolution has not exhausted all the possibilities and all the resources of the movement. This applies to the conquests of the revolution inside of a country as well as to its extension over the international arena."*

The objective situation is summarised as the balance of class forces between permanent revolution and permanent counter-revolution. It is not an abstraction, but the practical theory/program for the ongoing class struggle between the two antagonistic classes. We assess the objective situation today in relation to the imperialist epoch as one of capitalist decay and the destruction of the forces of

production. This poses the question of which class shall rule – the proletariat or the ruling class. Our program is therefore one that makes the demands necessary to mobilise workers to fight for their immediate needs all the way to the seizure of power and the subjective transformation of the existing objective situation into the new objective situation of world socialist revolution. Read [‘Workers unite! the historic task of workers is to overthrow rotten capitalism and fight for world socialism!’](#)

## 7) The Degeneration of the Fourth International

### a) The Crisis of Leadership in the Fourth International

From 1940 the International suffered major setbacks. The death of Trotsky was a decisive blow. War weakened an already fragile international and left it facing the major task of seizing power against massive hostile forces. We reject the argument that the Fourth was too weak at its foundation to qualify as a serious international, or that its leadership was incapable of applying Trotsky’s war program. Trotsky had spent the last 7 years of his life preparing for the Fourth International and arming it with a *Transitional Program* that put the defense of the USSR in the coming world war at the heart. He wrote many programmatic documents over this period arming the international for the coming imperialist war, including *War and the Fourth International* (1934); *A Manifesto Against Imperialist War* (1938); *A Fresh Lesson: On the Character of the Coming War* (1938); *Imperialist War and the Proletarian Revolution* (1940) and *Bonapartism, Fascism and War*, the last article he wrote that was interrupted by his assassination.

Despite the objective situation weighing heavily on the new International, following the example of the Bolsheviks in war and revolution, Leninist-Trotskyists had the duty to raise the banner of the Fourth in the war and fight for socialist revolution to defeat imperialism and to make the political revolution against Stalinism. Broue in “*How Trotsky and the Trotskyists confronted the Second World War*” concludes:

“But we may suppose, on the contrary [against being victims of the objective situation] that the Trotskyist organisations, their members and their leaders, were involved, and that they have at least some responsibility for their own setbacks. In that case, we may think, that if we start from the premises of Trotsky’s analysis of 1940, that the Second World War did see that development of a mass movement based upon a national and social resistance, which the Stalinists did their utmost to divert, and which in the case of Greece, they led to its destruction - a resistance which the Trotskyists could neither support nor utilise, because they did not know how to locate themselves in it, and even, perhaps, because they could not understand the concrete character of the moment in history in which they were living. We believe this question deserves to be asked.”

Yet Trotsky had already asked and answered this question, so who do we hold responsible? Trotsky spelled out the concrete tactics of defeatism in his *Proletarian Military Policy* (PMP). He warned constantly right up to his death of the danger of lapsing into social patriotism, notably in ‘*A Step Towards Patriotism*’. “*Should revolutionary defeatism be renounced in relation to non-fascist countries? Herein lies the crux of the question: upon this issue, revolutionary internationalism stands or falls.*” The Communist Tendency in the SWP (US) wrote a *1972-73 critique* of the degeneration of the FI after the death of Trotsky. It argued that the FI succumbed to national chauvinism during the

war and failed to correct that deviation from revolutionary Marxism after the war. It blamed the increasingly petty bourgeois leadership and not the hostile conditions of the time, and called for the founding of a new International based on the Program of the FI of 1938.

The case of Greece which Broue cites above proves that Trotsky's perspectives and program were correct. Not only with respect to the maturing conditions for civil war, but the internal debates within Greek Trotskyism over defeatism and defensism in which the majority upheld defeatism. Therefore we must make the leadership of the FI responsible for renouncing defeatism. As the Communist Tendency states, "The crisis of leadership became the crisis of the Fourth International". Why? The problems Trotsky spoke of before his death were not overcome. The Crisis of Marxism was the rejection of dialectics necessary to fight imperialist war and to defend the Soviet Union. The Second imperialist war was a continuation of the First War, as workers were expended as cannon fodder to settle a new pecking order of the great powers, in preparation for the class war against their mortal enemy, the Soviet Union. Therefore, the defeat of imperialist powers by their own working classes was the necessary condition for socialist revolution and the political revolution in the Soviet Union. The national chauvinist defense against imperialist occupation, fascist or 'democratic', sucked workers into the counter-revolutionary 'patriotic front' against the socialist revolution. Concretely, this meant that in every imperialist power, occupied or not, defeatism was the order of the day. Armed workers had to follow the famous call of Liebknecht and turn their guns on their own ruling classes. National liberation had to wait for the defeat of the ruling class at home and the victorious wars in defense of the new workers' states.

In Learn to Think, Trotsky states:

"To carry the class struggle to its highest form – civil war – this is the task of defeatism. But this task can be solved only through the revolutionary mobilization of the masses, that is, by widening, deepening, and sharpening those revolutionary methods which constitute the content of class struggle in "peace"-time. The proletarian party does not resort to artificial methods, such as burning warehouses, setting off bombs, wrecking trains, *etc.*, in order to bring about the defeat of its own government. Even if it were successful on this road, the military defeat would not at all lead to revolutionary success, a success which can be assured only by the independent movement of the proletariat. Revolutionary defeatism signifies only that in its class struggle the proletarian party does not stop at any "patriotic" considerations, since defeat of its own imperialist government, brought about, or hastened by the revolutionary movement of the masses is an incomparably *lesser evil* than victory gained at the price of national unity, that is, the political prostration of the proletariat. Therein lies the complete meaning of defeatism and this meaning is entirely sufficient."

The FI leadership capitulated to national chauvinism, Stalinism, and the patriotic front against fascism in the name of 'democracy' and the defense of the Soviet Union. Trotsky's insistence that only socialist revolution could win democracy and the political revolution in the SU was abandoned. In France the conference of the European Secretariat in 1944 belatedly recognised this as a 'deviation' of the leadership but claimed falsely it was corrected by the masses. The patriotic 'deviation' remained unacknowledged by the Second Congress of the FI in 1948. In the US the SWP, also capitulated to chauvinist pressure and turned the slogan 'turn imperialist war into civil war', into 'turn imperialist war into the war against fascism'. The SWP 1943 resolution failed to apply the PMP tactics to the front in Europe where civil wars were breaking out in Italy and Greece. The German section expressed the logic of the capitulation to national chauvinism with a theory that the Nazis had thrown Europe back 100 years so that the bourgeois democratic demands including national self-determination now replaced the transitional demand of civil war. Yet, in the weakest imperialist

powers (Greece, Italy) and in the colonies and semi-colonies, (Vietnam, India) where the conditions for civil war created spontaneous mutinies and rebellions, Trotskyists who were prepared to embark on civil war against their own ruling class for socialist revolution, were diverted into fatal national chauvinist blocs with the Stalinists by the leadership of the FI.

The failure of leadership of the FI in the war, was not inevitable. Its program was proven correct by the war. Opportunities for revolution presented themselves, most tragically in Greece. As the weakest imperialist link in Europe, Greece became the test of Trotsky's program on the imperialist war. It showed that national resistance was a trap leading to the mass slaughter of Trotskyists, while the majority of the FI section that took defeatism seriously was able to fight to turn imperialist war into civil war breaking workers from the Greek Communist Party (KKE). Broue comments:

“Trotsky's remarks in 1940 about the war became concrete. The Greek soldiers in the Middle East wanted to fight, arms in hand, against fascism. They therefore demanded officers whom they could trust, allied themselves with the labour movement, and formed their own soviet-style organisations. This was precisely along the lines which Trotsky had developed when he wrote that the defense of their ‘democracy’ could not be delivered over to the likes of Marshall Petain. The mass movement born out of the war expressed itself along these lines, and did so, as Trotsky had forecast, in the army, that central section of militarised society, no less important than in the factories.”

Such was the potential threat posed by the majority wing of Greek Trotskyism in giving direction to the mutinies and insurrections, despite the reactionary bloc between the national bourgeoisie, Stalinism and Anglo-American imperialism, that Churchill (the British butcher of the Middle East in both world wars) took it upon himself to personally oversee the suppression of the civil war to “save Greece from Communism”. But a more politically savvy Churchill claimed his intervention was to stop “triumphant Trotskyism”, with a “grin of complicity in the direction of Stalin”, and so set the course for the post-war imperialist alliance to end the Soviet Union. Churchill was correct, for while the FI leadership failed to notice the significance of the Greek civil war, it proved that Trotsky's war program survived his own death, international isolation and the petty bourgeois composition of the FI.

The Second Congress in 1948 was the opportunity to correct this degeneration, but dominated by the US and European sections and without genuine representation of the colonial and semi-colonial sections where the ranks had been betrayed to the Stalinists, no Trotskyist balance sheet was made. The majority in the Greek section (KDKE) that refused to defend bourgeois Greece and join the partisans, and which opposed the patriotic deviation of the international leadership, was not ‘represented’ by Michael Raptis on the European IS, after the war. Raptis, who led the minority in the KDKE that supported the resistance dominated by the Stalinists, nominated himself as a permanent delegate following his expulsion from Greece in agreement with the Security police. The result was an entrenched post-war bureaucratic imperio-centrist leadership that covered up the war-time capitulation, was dogmatic in its understanding of the program, and before long, liquidated the FI under the influence of Michel Pablo (Michael Raptis).

But now there was no Trotsky to defend dialectics against eclectics - the bourgeois method of empiricism/pragmatism that led to the one-sided Stalinophile (Pabloite/Marcyite) and Stalinophobe (Healyite/Wohlforthite) tendencies. The Stalinophiles came out of the war convinced that the Stalinists played a progressive role in defeating fascism and that the Trotskyist party should act as its cheerleader in the transition to socialism. The Stalinophobes reversed this position, making Stalinists “counter-revolutionary through and through” while at the same time acting as cheerleaders for the “progressive” national bourgeoisies. The SWP found their own socialist fatherland and ‘unconscious’

Trotskyist, becoming the cheerleaders for the Cuban ‘healthy workers state’ and its leader Fidel Castro. Meanwhile the Wohlforth/Healy camp saw Castro as just another bourgeois leader of national liberation struggles, with Cuba becoming a degenerated workers state by the bureaucratic assimilation of a bourgeois state into the Soviet Bloc.

Despite the struggles of many dedicated cadre, none of the various splits in the international resulted in a healthy continuity with the program of 1938. It was not until the end of the post-war boom and the onset of another structural crisis of capitalism in the 1960s that a re-examination of Marxism in general and Trotskyism in particular by a new generation of revolutionaries began to arrive at a scientific analysis of the collapse and betrayal of the Fourth during and after the war in preparation for rebuilding the Fourth as a healthy international.

The return to Marx was needed to account for the political and economic retreats from Marxism during the war and post-war period that, dispensing with Marx’s view that capitalism was inherently crisis prone and had to be overthrown, held that state intervention could prevent further crises. David Yaffe, among others argued that the depression and war, compounded by the betrayal of the Fourth International, enabled the accumulation crisis of the 1930s to be temporarily resolved by destroying value sufficient to restore the rate of profit. The result was the period of renewed capital accumulation during the post-war boom, rather than a period of slump. However, far from state intervention stabilising capital and preventing further crises, by the 1960s the Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall (TRPF) was again driving capitalism to a new crisis of falling profits. Such a defense of classic Marxism, and Trotskyism under Trotsky, was the starting point for building a new international on the basis of the 1938 program.

## **b) ‘Reconstructing’ the Fourth International**

Who was left to ‘refound’ or ‘reconstruct’ the Fourth International on the method and program of 1938? We acknowledge several important contributions on the causes of the degeneration of the Fourth and attempts to regenerate it on a healthy basis. Typically, these attempts arose from militants who broke with the SWP, or the Communist Party. In the US, Harry Turner joined the SWP after breaking with Stalinism after 1956 and subsequently split with the Robertsonites when both factions of the Left Tendency were expelled in 1966. He then broke with the Spartacists in 1969 and documented this history in [‘Trotskyism Today’](#) published in the *Vanguard Newsletter* in 1970/71.

Turner argued that both Robertson and Wohlforth factions that came out of the Left Tendency in the SWP failed to explain the historical roots of the majority view that Cuba was a healthy workers state. The SWP’s fusion with the United Secretariat in 1963 was a capitulation to the political backwardness of the US labor aristocracy and its national chauvinism. The Spartacists inherited this petty bourgeois U.S. chauvinism uncritically. Robertson wanted to continue the post-war SWP national Trotskyist ‘federalism’ while Healy and Wohlforth counterposed a spurious ‘organisational’ internationalism. None of these petty bourgeois currents oriented seriously to the working class, especially its black section. All became centrist barriers to the building of a revolutionary vanguard party. We applaud Turner’s fight to build an internationalist vanguard party based on democratic centralism to replace the social-imperialist pseudo-Trotskyist currents.

David Fender leader of the Communist Tendency (CT) in the SWP wrote its platform and was expelled in 1972. It's platform, "[\*Historical Roots of the Degeneration of the Fourth International, the centrism of the SWP, and for a Return to the Proletarian Road of Trotskyism\*](#)" deals with the degeneration of the FI between the death of Trotsky and 1953. This degeneration led to the abandonment of the Leninist position on imperialist war under pressure from national chauvinism in every country. In Europe, the Trotskyists argued that the war had destroyed democracy, so that the revolutionary task was to fight in a patriotic front for national liberation. This included the 'liberation' of occupied imperialist nations such as France and Italy! And in the U.S. where there was no threat of occupation, the SWP backed the war against fascism as the first step in the struggle for socialism. No attempt was made in the European Conference of 1944 and the Second Congress of the Fourth International in 1948 to correct these betrayals of the Transitional Program.

### **c) Rebuilding the International on the basis of the 1938 Program**

*The only explanation for this degeneration was the failure of the leadership of the Fourth to defend the Transitional Program. While the Fourth was weak, and under attack, losing many of its best cadres, in the places where it had more influence than the Stalinists, as in Vietnam, it subordinated itself to the Stalinists and the politics of the popular front with "democratic imperialism," only to be crushed by the Stalinists; or in Bolivia where the [POR led a miners revolution](#) in 1952 and then formed a "popular front" Government with the bourgeois general Paz Estenssoro who staged a counter-revolution! The "crisis of leadership was now the crisis of leadership of the Fourth International." By 1953 the Fourth had liquidated into the Stalinist or Menshevik program. Turner's article sums up. "... It is for this reason that we say a new Trotskyist International must be built basing itself on the founding documents of the Fourth International in 1938 and on an objective assessment of the historical period since..."*

We acknowledge Turner's commitment in trying to challenge US chauvinism in the labor aristocracy by recruiting blacks and Latinos and pushing for national rank and file caucuses with the perspective of a workers' Labor Party based on the *Transitional Program*. We see this as the essence of Trotsky's warnings to the SWP that unless the US labor movement fought for the inclusion of Blacks in the proletariat, then the US was ripe for race wars and fascism. The orientation to the rank and file and Labor Party based on the Transitional Program was something that the SWP and its splinters had totally failed to do. An orientation towards the Latin American semi-colonies and specially oppressed minorities such as Blacks was the only way to end the degeneration of US Trotskyism stuck in 'white' national chauvinism.

To summarise our position on the degeneration of the FI: The Fourth degenerated in the final analysis because of a failure of revolutionary leadership. This resulted from a collapse of the democratic centralism during the war and a lapse into social patriotism that could not be corrected unless the US and European leadership had recognised their betrayals and turned to the semi-colonial sections for leadership in the post-war congresses. The war and its aftermath proved to be the critical test, and the Fourth failed the test. The urgent task today, then, is to build a new international based on the founding documents of the Fourth International!

## **(8) Restoration of capitalism**

### a) **Unconditional Defence of the Soviet Union**

The unconditional defence of the Soviet Union, and by extension the other bureaucratic workers states, was the touchstone of Bolshevik Leninism and of Trotskyism. The defeat of the bureaucratic workers states with the restoration of capitalism was a world-historic defeat for the proletariat, but *not* for Stalinism and Menshevism. Stalinism (and its Maoist spinoff) found its parasitical existence under threat as the bureaucratically planned economies fell into long-term stagnation. **Without proletarian democracy to apply socialist planning, the bureaucracy could not overcome the failure to match production with social needs, and planning became even more inefficient than the law of value. Nor could it overcome workers resistance to the bureaucratic plan. The result was overproduction of inferior goods, and shortages in basic goods, resulting in the growth of a black market. The bureaucracy recognised its privileges would be lost unless it restored the LOV and converted itself into a new capitalist class.** As Trotsky predicted, unless proletarian political revolutions succeeded in these bureaucratic workers states, the bureaucracy would replace workers' property with capitalist property.

Trotsky's position therefore was unconditional defence of workers property, despite the existence of the counter-revolutionary bureaucratic caste. We refer here to the pages in the *Transitional Program* titled "The USSR and the Problems of the Transitional Epoch." This summarizes Trotsky's view and excludes all the possible outcomes it was possible to foresee at the time, exactly because it began its investigation from an examination of the class interests within the USSR and internationally. The ultimate fate of Stalinism in state power was predicted and described here. The entire dialectic was laid out. Defence of the world revolution depended upon the successful political revolution against the parasitic bureaucratic caste and a restoration of the political power of the soviets, freedom of all soviet parties, publishing of all secret diplomacy and the replacement of the socialism in one country program with a revolutionary foreign policy.

The greatest failure of the fragmented Fourth International was its inability to defend the workers' property against capitalist restoration, i.e., to lead successful political revolutions in Russia, China and other deformed workers states. Even when the International Committee, the International Secretariat and the Latin American Secretariat of Orthodox Trotskyism made their occasional recitations of the call for political revolution against Stalinism, this had the quality of holiday speechifying, as it had little connection to putting the *Transitional Program* into practice. They displayed no intention to raise its demands as a practical program for restoring or placing the workers into power in the deformed and degenerated workers states. Each acquiesced in the monopoly of state power by Stalinism in the present day, i.e., in their time, in the name of defense against imperialism. This failure amounted to a de facto rejection of dialectics equivalent to the literal rejection by the petty-bourgeois opposition of 1939-40 and later manifestations of this "3rd camp" sort. As Trotsky said. "A program is formulated not for the editorial board or for the leaders of discussion clubs, but for the revolutionary action of millions."

Unconditional defence of the Soviet Union was rejected by the petty bourgeois opposition who substituted empiricism for dialectics to arrive at the theory of state capitalism. In the post-war situation, the FI was disoriented by its bad method. It split between objectivists and subjectivists mentioned above, excluding the dialectics of the contradictory unity between objective and subjective reality. The Stalinists and Mensheviks invoke evolutionary determinism (the subject is abstracted as the Soviet state). The real subject, the democent party, is missing in action, as there is no contradiction for the party to act on and make a political revolution. One current led by Pablo became Stalinophiles

tailing the Stalinists in the DWSs. Stalinism was ‘progressive’ so long as it followed the evolutionary ‘national roads to socialism’.

The opposing 3<sup>rd</sup> camp became Stalinophobes and condemned Stalinism as worse than ‘democratic’ imperialism. They mucked up the analysis of the post-war situation by junking Trotsky’s writings on Ukraine, Poland and Finland. No one grasped the necessary methodological unity between the 1939/40 events and the post-war transformations. A serious but ultimately scientifically insufficient opposition was made by the Vern-Ryan tendency in the U.S. SWP. They mechanically posited the transition to a workers’ state to coincide with the monopoly of state power in the hands of the USSR army and applied this logic again to the monopoly of state power by the People’s Liberation Army in China.

They were correct in so far as they recognized the contradiction of the necessity for economic transformation with the Stalinist program of “Socialism in One Country”. But this was a mechanical extrapolation. The necessity was not explained. Neither the Stalinophile International Secretariat nor the Stalinophobic International Committee understood Cuba as a bureaucratized workers state. Thus, both currents substituted for the workers international either critical support for the Stalinist/Maoist bureaucratic caste or support for and hope of “Reiss factions” to emerge as a force for reform within the bureaucracy. The political revolution as part of the Permanent Revolution disappeared into the grand evolutionary schema of Menshevism.

### **b) Political Revolution Betrayed**

This diseased tree bore the rotten fruit of capitalist restoration. The Stalinist bureaucracy was granted a greater life expectancy than Trotsky had predicted with the defeat of Nazi Germany and the post-war social revolutions, but by the late 1980’s, the pressures of world capitalism on the Soviet workers state came to the fore. Brezhnev’s labor Liberman reforms of 1965 expressed the capitalist restorationist wing of the Stalinist bureaucracy and reaffirmed the existence of it. Gorbachev introduced Perestroika as a series of bureaucratic reforms (“market socialism”) that undermined central planning and increased the strength of pro-capitalist counter revolutionary forces both within and outside of the bureaucracy.

Perestroika was incapable of resolving the problems of the Soviet degenerated workers state and validated the Trotskyist program of workers political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy, restore workers democracy and reconstitute the Soviet workers state as an internationalist beacon for world socialist revolution and the only way forward for the working class. In 1991, the Yanayev coup, representing a wing of the Stalinist bureaucracy who wanted to slow down the drive toward capitalist restoration, was met by the Yeltsin wing of the bureaucracy opposing the coup which made its bid for accelerated capitalist restoration.

The Third Camp Stalinophobes such as the Cliffite International Socialists, in typical fashion, hailed Yeltsin under the guise of “democracy”, even going so far as to state that “Communism is dead! Now the fight for real socialism can begin” (quote). The centrists, such as Workers Power, capitulated to social imperialism. Workers Power supported the pro-capitalist drive of the Baltic states to break away from the Soviet Union, subordinating the class defense of the Soviet degenerated workers state to the bourgeois democratic right of self-determination. This method was carried forward into open support for Yeltsin. For Workers Power, and their later offshoot the RCIT/RKOB, the rise of Yeltsin to power would increase democratic openings for the workers movement, a false momentary dialectic

with a phony unity of opposites, something more usually put forward by Stalinists. Workers Power abandoned the Trotskyist program of workers political revolution and sided with the forces of capitalist counterrevolution. The RCIT came out of Workers Power and carries forward this fetishization of bourgeois democracy today.

In contrast, at least to first appearance, the Robertson-associated currents, defended workers property against capitalist restoration. But not really. In fact, some, like the International Bolshevik Tendency, supported the Yanayev coup, the ‘slow roaders’ who sought to preserve more of their bureaucratic privileges in the course of capitalist restoration. The ICL (Spartacists) withheld support for the Yanayev gang, but only on account of their being “incompetents”! The political content of competence was nowhere described and certainly not in terms of Trotsky’s call for Political Revolution, and the ICL did not acknowledge the restoration until more than a year after the Yeltsin coup, still holding out hope for a Reiss Faction equivalent to save the workers’ day.

The abandonment of political revolution in the bureaucratic workers states and the world historic defeat of the workers’ states was a crime for Trotskyists. Trotsky stated in his battle with the ‘petty bourgeois opposition’ that despite the Stalinist regime, the unconditional defence of the Soviet Union was, in the event of a new imperialist war ultimately targeting the workers state, the supreme test of revolutionary Marxism. Why? Because political revolution to remove the Stalinist bureaucracy and restore workers control of workers property would mark a major advance in the permanent revolution globally.

On the other hand, restoration and defeat of the workers state would be a major defeat for the permanent revolution. If revolutionaries couldn’t defend workers property as a major gain of the 1917 revolution, they could not defend anything. Worse, those Trotskyist currents that did pay lip service to political revolution with few exceptions capitulated to restoration without a fight (LRCI/LFI/RCIT) or still denied that restoration has taken place (ICL, IBT on China/Cuba) and that what exists is a hybrid form of ‘bureaucratic socialism’. Meanwhile other ostensible Trotskyists argue that restoration has created capitalist semi-colonies, regional powers (SF) or “transitional” states where Russian or Chinese imperialism is an impossibility (FLTI).

### **c) Cuba, Vietnam and DPRK**

The ILTT [then the LCC] in 2013 concluded that capitalist restoration was now the guiding operating principle of the Castroist Cuban Communist Party. We recognised that we were late in seeing the tell-tale signs of this development and said so, although our tendency was the first to face the truth! “...The 6th Cuban Communist Party Congress held in April, 2011 resolved to make major changes for the Cuban economy to overcome its stagnation. They represent a wholesale embrace of the capitalist market. No longer limited to the ‘external sector’ where foreign corporates have made joint ventures with state corporates for years, but for the whole economy. Cubans are now being encouraged to adopt market practices such as buying state property as private property and employing wage workers. Thus, the capitalist market will replace state allocation of resources as the main mechanism of the economy. Marxists analyse this as a shift from state planning to the law of value, and hence a shift from a Workers State, albeit deformed from its birth in 1959, to a Capitalist State.”

“...the parasite bureaucrats of the Cuban CP learned the lesson from its collapse that workers’ property could no longer allow it to extract its privileges from workers labor. But to avoid the fate of the USSR which opened itself up to capitalism by means of rapid ‘shock treatment’, Cuba looked towards China’s

gradual restoration of capitalism. It began to open a sector of the economy to foreign private investment and found that the new market relations with imperialism were much more lucrative for the bureaucracy than trying to defend the planned economy. So, it now seeks to complete the process and turn itself into a new bourgeois class. The 6th Cuban CP Congress in April marks a decisive break from the revolution and the sealing of the capitalist counter-revolution as a world historic defeat of the international working class.”

“Cuba’s ‘capitalist road’ converges with the much-vaunted Chavista ‘21st century socialism’. This is the key to the defeat of Latin American workers which is necessary to allow Cuba to complete its historic counter-revolution. Chavez’ Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela (and which leads the ALBA countries including Bolivia and Ecuador) has trapped Latin American workers behind a popular front with China. Chavez famously talks of walking hand in hand with China towards ‘21st century socialism’. It is the counter-revolutionary role of the Chavista popular front in Latin America that allows Cuba to complete a historic counter-revolution by the Chinese method of many defeats and repressions of workers over the decades and then to complete that historic defeat. It follows that if the Cuban counter-revolution is to be defeated before it is altogether victorious, it is necessary to smash the Bolivarian popular front. We cannot stress this enough. Chavez and Castro are part of an ‘anti-imperialist’ bloc with China and semi-colonial semi-fascists like Gaddafi and Assad to stop the new wave of workers’ uprisings against the global crisis--uprisings which can play the critical role of breaking up the popular fronts and the fake ‘market socialism’ that ultimately serves imperialism.” [Cuba Sold Out]

With the Vietnamese-Cambodian war of 1979, the Vietnamese economy became a subsidiary of the USSR. Politically, the Viet Nam Workers Party (VNWP) became even more vassalized to Moscow and subsumed in its policy of confrontation with China, whose project the Pol Pot regime was. Thus, once the Yeltsin coup succeeded, Viet Nam was subjected to great pressure to undo the revolutionary gains of 1975-79 and reinstitute the rule of the law of value, and this occurred despite the continued political monopoly of the VNWP.

The ILTT considers North Korea to still be a deformed workers state, despite capitalist restorationist forces, but that the CP leadership does not want to surrender to the US or China. Capitalist restoration would present a particular problem for the North Korean Stalinist bureaucracy as they would end up a semi-colony of either the US or China unless they had a German-style reunification under the bourgeois South Korean regime. So, the question of how the North Korean Stalinist bureaucracy can maintain its privileges is acute and we are watching this. There exist enterprise zones and joint enterprises that the North Korean Kim bureaucracy turns on or off based on their current diplomatic position (with the US in particular) and the level of military confrontation with the South. Hence the Trotskyist program of defense of the deformed workers state and workers political revolution still holds for North Korea. The ILTT stands against a capitalist re-unification and for a political revolution in the DPRK and socialist revolution in the ROK.

## **(9) Terminal Crisis**

Starting with Marx, crisis is a crisis of reproduction of the conditions of capitalist production. Capitalism can survive so long as it has not exhausted its capacity to impose and restore those conditions. It can do so unless the proletariat intervenes and takes power. Thus, the crucial factor in

resolving capitalist crises is which class has power. The current crisis marks terminal decline of capitalism, as the looming environmental catastrophe means capital can no longer reproduce its conditions for existence.

As we have seen capitalism for the whole imperialist epoch has been over-ripe for its replacement by socialism. Relative to socialism, capitalism destroys the forces of production in successive depressions and wars. But capitalism even in its death throes will not just fall over and die. It has to be overthrown and buried by its “gravediggers” the revolutionary proletariat. Lacking so far is the revolutionary party to subjectively lead the working class to make the revolution. Ultimately the critical factor for the ability of the proletariat to take power is the existence of an internationalist revolutionary party. Without that party, capitalist crises become more and more destructive of the conditions for capitalism’s reproduction, including the destruction of accumulated wealth (dead labor) and the labor power or living labour. The future of humanity therefore is a race between living labor (the proletariat) and dead labor (accumulated capital). Either capitalism dies or humanity dies.

### **(a) Marx, Lenin and Trotsky on Crises**

The experience of the economic crises of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries vindicate Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. Lenin developed Marx’s theory of the anarchic self-expansion of capital to explain the rise of imperialism and the inevitability of the First Inter-Imperialist War. That war failed to solve the problems of restoring profits as the Bolshevik Revolution opened a new period in which the world’s workers threatened to take power. Imperialism used social democracy and its state forces to suppress the revolution, ultimately resorting to fascist movements to suppress the still-powerful proletariat.

Trotsky as the main surviving Bolshevik leader saw the rise of fascism as the mortal enemy of the working class and its program of Permanent Revolution, and expected that if global revolution did not result from the 2<sup>nd</sup> inter-Imperialist War, then Marxism itself as a revolutionary theory/program would be found wanting. Had Trotsky survived the war he would have quickly drawn up a balance sheet. He would have recognised that the 4<sup>th</sup> International in the Second inter-Imperialist war betrayed the international working class by adapting to the Stalinist 3<sup>rd</sup> International with terrible consequences as in Vietnam. The Stalinists succeeded in destroying the best Trotskyist cadres during and after the war, sucking workers in the “democratic” imperialist countries into popular fronts with their own capitalist ruling classes against the fascist powers. This divided the international working class and led, as we have seen above, to the abandonment of the Bolsheviks’ program on imperialist war in the majority of the Fourth International (FI).

Trotsky would have concluded that while imperialism survived the war, this was only a temporary respite. The crisis of Marxism was not the same as its bankruptcy. The crisis of Marxism was now the crisis of revolutionary leadership of the Fourth International. The Post-war boom was the result of unprecedented destruction of the forces of production in the ‘30s and ‘40s. Yet it did not resolve capitalism’s tendency to crises. Despite Stalinism’s betrayals, workers’ property survived the war in Russia, and in the semi-colonies, imperialism was forced to go through a formal ‘de-colonisation’. In some countries this struggle for independence would lead to the formation of bureaucratic workers states. The FI, reneging on the most important part of the program on war, would have to be rebuilt to prepare for the inevitable onset of a new, bigger crisis. The 1946 and 1948 international meetings

would have drawn up honest balance sheets and repudiated the social imperialist deviation of the European and US sections. This correction did not take place.

The first major test of a rebuilt international would have been drawing these lessons to vindicate the Transitional Program for the post-war boom. Like the end of the First inter-imperialist war, workers, despite their historic defeat, were after the Second inter-Imperialist war, able to organise and demand some concessions in a period of new capital accumulation and prepare for the inevitable new, bigger crisis. The new crisis came in the '60s with the end of the 'post-war boom'. In the absence of Trotsky and a healthy International, the response to the crisis revealed the bankruptcy of theory and program of the official Fourth International. We can see this clearly in the debate between Ernest Mandel and David Yaffe over the onset of a new crisis of falling profits.

### **(b) Debates over the post-war 'structural' crisis from 1970s to today**

Mandel, the chief theoretician of the Pabloist USEC had an empiricist multi-cause theory of crisis, (contingency was all the rage) which when boiled down was left with underconsumption, i.e., a distributional theory of crisis not unlike [David Harvey's](#) theory today. Yaffe accused Mandel of capitulating to a state-centred Keynesian economics consistent with the FI's capitulation to Stalinism. In fact, the post-war boom had disoriented most Marxists, worsening the crisis of Marxism. The defence of 'democracy' against fascism and the defence of the Soviet Union got conflated into the defence of Stalinism as a petty bourgeois fraction of the working class embedded in the capitalist state alongside classical Social Democracy (as for example 'Eurocommunism'). The 'boom' was explained as the result of 'democratic' capitalism managed by Social Democracy, and its end resulted from, not from inflation as a symptom of the LTRPF, but the revival of neo-classical economics and neo-liberal regimes. Hence Marxism was increasingly diluted, the left moved right across the world tailing democratic imperialism. In the UK it tailed the retreat of the imperialist Labour Party from Harold Wilson to the Blairite "third way", and the US Democratic Party from the 'Great Society' to Bill Clinton. The Pabloists or all colors who followed Mandel called Yaffe and Co 'fundamentalists' when they claimed the 'neoliberal' upturns of the '80s and '90s were largely speculative. Neo-liberal 'reforms' destroyed constant and variable capital to raise the rate of profit but this was not sufficient to restore pre-crisis levels of profitability in production. Over-accumulated capital was diverted from production to speculating in existing values. Neither did capitalist restoration in Russia, China in the early 1990s help solve capitalism's crisis. Russia and China were not super-exploited neo-colonies of the US bloc but became new imperialist powers to rival the declining US. [Cuba](#) and Vietnam restored capitalism and became capitalist semi-colonies under the influence of the imperialist Russia/China bloc.

Debates among Marxists about the nature and causes of crisis, continue to reflect the need to attack Marxism to undermine its revolutionary theory and practice by refuting its 'laws of motion' – the laws that explain the drive for capital accumulation. We can see this in the positions taken on the Law of Value (LOV) and the Law of the Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall (LTRPF). Those who defend both laws (fundamentalists) see the current crisis as demanding a socialist revolution while those who reject both laws (empiricists) explain the current crisis as resulting from wrong policies that can be corrected with democratic socialist reforms. The debate between Michael Roberts and David Harvey is instructive. Roberts argues that Harvey rejects the LOV and therefore the LTRPF. Capitalist crises are therefore not necessary but contingent on powerful elites controlling the distribution of income. This is shared with the radical [neo-Ricardian school](#) that says that exploitation occurs at the level of

distribution. And therefore, we need a politics of re-distribution! Roberts explains that the capitalists' power is to make profits, but when the laws of motion necessarily destroy the conditions for this, they are powerless to stop their money losing value without a massive attack on workers to restore those conditions. *We argue that the structural crisis of the 1970's to today demonstrates that capitalism can no longer accumulate sufficient value as capital, so that the crisis is not contingent but necessary; and further, we would argue, terminal.*

The "Global Financial Crisis" of 2007/8 proves that the structural crisis that ended the post-war boom is worsening. Since the 1960s the capitalist world economy has failed to destroy sufficient surplus capital to restore the conditions for a new period of capitalist accumulation. Nor can Russia and China as new imperialist powers evade the decline of the capitalist world economy as they are necessarily subject to its laws of motion. This means that in the epoch of imperialism, spanning the period from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until today, capitalism has been in inexorable decline. Despite its attempts to restructure and re-divide the global economy and resolve depressions with world wars, each crisis gets deeper and longer. Each world war merely postpones the day of reckoning. The build-up of the explosive contradictions that are just beneath the surface of the neo-liberal veneer, will burst forth to bring its life to an end. The owners of the big chunks of capital are desperately trying to suppress those contradictions by state-backed financial speculation in existing values. *But this is now expressed as multi-trillions of 'fictitious' capitals resulting in impossibly high levels of debt that can never be exchanged for actual new value expropriated from labor power as profit.* We can see this explosion in the making as capitalism's ability to restore profits now drives it towards the final destruction of the forces of production and with it, nature.

### **(c) Marx on Ecological Crisis**

Once we factor in the many negative feedbacks driving global warming it is obvious that we face the prospect of human extinction. Once the ecosystem which capitalism takes for granted begins to collapse, capitalism itself will collapse. *Capitalism only exists as a mode of production by a constant process of exploiting nature to the point of destruction.* Marx recognised this early on. There was a limit to the ability of capital to replenish or restore nature when it could deplete and destroy nature for profit. Marx concept of metabolic rift is based on the best science of his day already revealing the depredations of capitalist agriculture. It is a model for understanding the ecological rift between capital and nature.

Contrary to popular wisdom, Marx was not a fan for environmental destruction. Rather he based his whole theory on the contradiction between nature and society, expressed as between use-value and exchange-value. Use-value being the natural process of producing for use (though this 'nature' is conditioned by the requirements of capital); exchange value as being the requirement that use-values were commodified as exchange value. Commodities would only be used if they were bought and sold on the market. This contradiction is the seed of capitalist development which accumulates riches at the top and accumulates impoverishment at the bottom. Inevitably capital would destroy nature and itself unless labour as part of nature fought back and restored a harmonious relation between nature and society. (Capital to Commune).

The only unanswered question is how soon this will happen and in what form. Global warming is already destroying the conditions for production as the 'external' costs of pollution, degradation, and exhaustion of raw materials impact back on declining profits. The costs of wars to control this

declining resource base on human life as part of nature is producing a rise in resistance to this inevitable social collapse. There is no prospect of the capitalist ruling class taking any responsibility for preventing this collapse. It is necessary for the proletariat to take the lead in this task.

Marxism holds that under capitalism the class relation between capital and labor generates the motive force for class struggle between the proletariat and capitalist class that, through workers strikes, occupations and insurrections, will end in socialist revolution. As capital exhausts its historic capacity to develop the forces of production, it inevitably destroys nature including the ecological conditions for human existence. The proletariat in fighting to overthrow capital, must take the lead in drawing all other oppressed people into the struggle for survival. These include all forms of labour, producing value or not, unemployed, undocumented, self-employed, skilled or unskilled, white or blue collar etc., plus all those who are outside the formal capital-labour relation but whose labour is appropriated by capital. Its Transitional Program must address itself to bringing all oppressed peoples, and groups behind the banner of socialist revolution, because without them there can be no revolution.

Women as the majority of workers, as members of an historic sex-class, still perform domestic labour for no payment as domestic slaves, and continue to face ongoing gender oppression. As domestic slaves, they do not directly create value but contribute their unpaid labour in reproducing the value of labour power. Contrary to Marx and Engels, who expected the inclusion of women as wage workers alongside men to make them more equal, they remain doubly exploited as domestic slaves and a floating section of the reserve army of wage labour, where their working conditions lag well behind those of men. Colonial and semi-colonial workers, (including self-employed, unemployed and migrant workers) peasants and poor farmers are the big majority of the world's workers and doubly oppressed as unpaid slaves and wage workers. They are the largest section of the global reserve army, super-exploited since their labour can earn no more than a poverty income. Indigenous peoples who remain colonized in some form, partially embedded in their pre-capitalist social relations, are oppressed by capital, and have their labour and land exploited by capital. There will be no socialist revolution that does not include the representatives of working women, semi-colonial and indigenous workers in the vanguard of the proletariat, and which does not make the liberation of all oppressed from the threat of extinction, and the realization of communism, its goal.

Since Marx, Marxists have maintained that capitalism is a living contradiction between labor and capital, which can be suppressed indefinitely unless transcended by socialist revolution. Today, however, we do not see any prospect of capitalism 'stabilising' as it did briefly after the First Imperialist and Second Imperialist wars. Today, the decomposition of capitalism is so advanced that we are justified in using the term "terminal" crisis to mean that capitalism cannot restore profitability because it is destroying its own conditions of existence. Whether this takes the form of fascist attacks on workers and oppressed to resolve the crisis of falling profits, failure of production as the ecosystem collapses, or expansion of many local and regional wars into a Third Imperialist World War, the outcome is the same. The proletariat and other oppressed people facing death and destruction have nothing to lose but their chains. Led by a revolutionary international communist party, they have everything to win; the survival of the human, and other threatened species, in a global socialist, and ultimately, communist world.