



REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNISM

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Revolutionary Tactics and the Constituent Assembly

PLUS: The Nature of South Korean Imperialism (Theses)

China passes the US on Global Business Ranking for first time

English-Language Theoretical Review of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), New Series No.30, January 2019

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Picture on the cover: The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly on 6 January 1918 (with Trotsky, Sverdlov & Zinoviev in the centre. (Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leon_Trotsky#/media/File:Protecci%C3%B3n_del_Palacio_Tauride_durante_el_Segundo_Congreso_Regional_de_los_Soviets.jpg)

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www.thecommunists.net - rcit@thecommunists.net
Tel/SMS/WhatsApp/Telegram: +43-650-4068314

The Nature of South Korean Imperialism and the Tactical Consequences for Revolutionaries (Theses)

By Michael Pröbsting, International Secretary of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 06.12.2019

1. South Korea has become an imperialist state in the course of the 2000s. The main characteristic of this development is the fact that South Korea has become a highly advanced capitalist economy dominated primarily by a domestic monopoly bourgeoisie (the *chaebols*). This Korean monopoly capital has also joined the top league of global capital where it competes with corporations from the U.S., China, Japan, Germany and others.

2. This development can be observed via a number of factors. South Korea has become the fourth-largest economy in Asia and the 11th largest in the world. Its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per head has reached the same level as Italy.

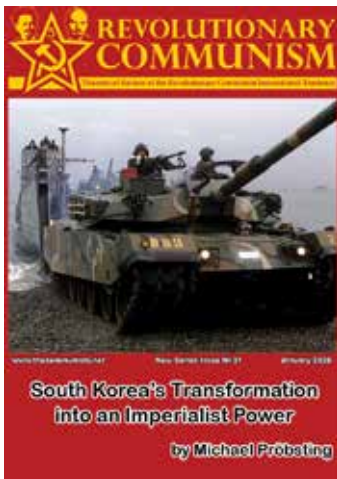
3. The domination of the domestic market by the Korean monopoly capitalists is reflected by the fact that the top 10 *chaebols* alone own more than 27% of all business assets in South Korea. The largest five of them – Samsung, LG, Hyundai, SK, and Lotte – represent approximately half of the South Korean stock market's value. Samsung Electronics, the largest Samsung affiliate, alone employs more than 300,000 people globally (more than Apple's 123,000 and Google's 88,000 combined). For the past decade it has accounted for more than 14% of South Korea's GDP.

4. The global role of the Korean *chaebols* and their

strong position in the world economy is confirmed by the fact that it highly ranks among the top global corporations. For example, South Korea is ranked as No. 5 among the *Forbes Global 2000* list respectively as No. 7 among the *Fortune Global 500* (with 16 corporations – only one less than Britain).

5. Another indication of the imperialist character of the Korean monopoly bourgeoisie is the enormous role of capital export. This means that South Korean capital plays a leading role in the world market and super-exploits the workers and oppressed in the semi-colonial countries. Between 2013 and 2018 the annual outflows of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) were always 2-3 as large as the inflows. The following figure reflects the transformation of South Korea into an imperialist state since the year 2000: While the FDI inward stock was more than double as large than the FDI outward stock in the year 2000 (\$43.7bn - \$21.5bn), this relationship has been turned upside down by 2018 (\$231.4bn - \$387.6bn).

6. However, South Korea is a new imperialist state with a specific history which gives its capitalist nature a specific, complicated character. In fact, this specific nature is an important, albeit not the only, reason why most South Korean socialists fail to recognize the transformation of their country into an imperialist nation.



Publications of the RCIT

South Korea's Transformation into an Imperialist Power

*On the nature of South Korean monopoly capital
and the ensuing programmatic tasks of the workers vanguard*

By Michael Pröbsting, December 2019

The Relevance of the Issue * Definition: What Constitutes a State as Imperialist? * Historical Background: Extraordinary Conditions Allow for Rapid Industrialization * South Korea as a Highly Industrialized, Modern Capitalist Country * South Korean Monopoly Capital: Domination of Domestic Market * South Korean Monopoly Capital: Global Players on the World Market * South Korean Monopoly Capital: The Role of Capital Export * On Some Political Issues Resulting from South Korea's Imperialist Transformation * The Emergence of a Labor Aristocracy and Inequality within the South Korean Working Class * The Political Role of South Korean Imperialism and its Limited Independence * The Stalinist Myth of South Korea Being Still a Neo-Colony of U.S. Imperialism * The Mistaken Conception of Sub-Imperialism * The Program of Revolutionary Defeatism * Anti-Imperialist Tasks in South Korea Today * Appendix: A Historic Analogy: Marxist Tactics in Germany in 1891 and 1914 * Capitalist Development in South Korea and Taiwan (1996)

A RCIT Pamphlet, 36 pages, A4 Format

7. In contrast to many other imperialist states, Korea does not have a historic past as a Great or colonial Power (like, for example, the European powers or Russia). Even China has a different history: while it faced increasing aggression and humiliation by the Great Powers from 1840 onwards until 1949, it was a Great Power before oppressing other people for many centuries (e.g. Muslim peoples, Tibet, Vietnam, Korea).

8. Korea has a different history: it never oppressed other people and for a long time its ruling class – led by the famous *Joseon dynasty* – isolated the country from the outside world (the “*Hermit Kingdom*”). From the 19th century onwards, Korea experienced increasing aggression by the Great Powers and in 1910 it became a colony of Japanese imperialism. This occupation lasted until 1945 and resulted in the most brutal oppression. Soon after the collapse of the Japanese Empire, Korea faced a barbaric war which resulted in the death of millions of people. Since then South Korea was occupied by U.S. imperialism and became a semi-colony.

9. South Korea became a front state in the Cold War against North Korea and its Chinese and Soviet allies. Washington and the South Korean bourgeoisie imposed several successive military dictatorships which ensured political loyalty to Western imperialism as well as the super-exploitation of the working class. However, being a “front state” in the Cold War, South Korea received a substantial amount of political support and financial and economic aid from the imperialist states (this resembles to a certain degree the Marshall Plan of the U.S. for Western Europe after 1948). The combination of massive super-exploitation of the South Korean working class, a series of military dictatorship until 1987, state-capitalist regulations and imperialist aid ensured exceptional circumstances which allowed for a rapid economic development of South Korean capitalism. In particular it helped to build a strong industry and the creation of monopoly corporations (the chaebols).

10. The fall of the military dictatorship in 1987 and the collapse of the Stalinist rule in the USSR and Eastern Europe in 1989-91 created new conditions for South Korean capitalism. The crucial period of 1987 and the years after saw a series of important class battles with many heroic strikes and occupations. However, in the end they failed to defeat the bourgeoisie. In fact, for the reasons outlined above, South Korean capital was strong enough to defeat the workers vanguard not by re-imposing a military dictatorship but via *democratic-counterrevolutionary means*. This means that they succeeded to defeat the workers movement without abolishing the limited bourgeois democracy which emerged after 1987. This was related to the fact that the Korean monopoly bourgeoisie was able to create and bribe a certain labor aristocracy.

11. This development was already an indication that the South Korean bourgeoisie was no longer a weak, semi-colonial capitalist class. The decisive test of South Korea’s transformation was the fact that it succeeded in overcoming the devastating consequences of the financial crisis in East Asia in 1997-98. The South Korean state – under pressure of the world market – restructured the chaebols and their relationship to the financial market. It also opened the domestic market for foreign capital and, at the same time, supported Korean monopoly capitalists to increase

their exports and investments in markets abroad. Likewise, most chaebols created alliances with foreign capitalists – a process which has been taken place in many other imperialist countries in the period of Globalization (e.g. Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi, Fiat-Chrysler, etc.). However, in most cases, the leading Korean families of the chaebols succeeded in retaining their dominant influence in their corporations.

12. Obviously, emerging South Korean imperialism is marked by the specific characteristics of its history. Hence, while it is in a strong economic position, its political role remains overshadowed by the dominant influence of U.S. imperialism since 1945. This is not an exceptional phenomenon for an imperialist state. A similar constellation exists in Japan since its defeat and occupation at the end of World War II. The presence of U.S. troops and bases in Okinawa and the enforced “pacifist” character of Japan’s constitution still reflect the limited political and military autonomy of Japanese imperialism. A similar situation existed in Western Germany until 1990.

13. However, the trade war between South Korea and Japan which started in 2019 reflect the decaying domination of U.S. imperialism as well as the increasing political independence both of South Korean and of Japanese imperialism.

14. Hardly any organization of the South Korean workers movement and left recognizes the transformation of South Korea into an imperialist state. Most consider the country as a neo-colony or semi-colony of US imperialism (the so-called “*National Liberation*” current which stand for a Stalinist and nationalist policy). Some characterize the state as “sub-imperialist” but not imperialist.

15. There are several important reasons for this failure. First, as mentioned above, South Korean monopoly capital has been able to create and bribe a labor aristocracy. This layer constitutes a crucial material basis for the trade union bureaucracy and the reformist parties. Reformism, as we see in many other imperialist countries, opportunistically adapts to its “own” bourgeoisie and preaches social-patriotic support for its “fatherland”. It is in the objective interest of the South Korean bourgeoisie to utilize nationalist sentiments and to direct popular hatred against its imperialist rivals (like Japan and the U.S.) by claiming that the country still suffers from the discrimination and pressure by other Great Powers.

16. Secondly, there is a strong historical-ideological reason. As mentioned above Korea has never been a Great Power but, quite the opposite, has been repeatedly humiliated and oppressed by foreign powers. Only in the past two decades has South Korean monopoly capital been able to overcome this situation. However, for this reason, there is a strong historic consciousness of the popular masses that Korea has always been oppressed and, hence, nationalism is a legitimate answer to this evil. Furthermore, it is difficult to recognize for many that Korean capital has now become an oppressor itself.

17. Finally, when it comes to the political left-wing organizations, one has to recognize the strong influence of Stalinism and its mechanistic ways of thinking. Stalinism – as all petty-bourgeois ideologies – is organically incapable of analyzing social developments in a dialectical-materialist way. However, without a Marxist scientific approach it is impossible to recognize that South Korea in 2020 is

qualitatively different from South Korea in 1980, i.e. that it is no longer a capitalist semi-colony but an imperialist state.

18. Such a failure is by far not unique. Many German Marxists could not believe that their country had become imperialist in the decade before 1914 given the, by and large, absence of colonialism in its history. In the 1920s and 1930s many Japanese socialists considered their country as "semi-feudal" and not as a capitalist power. The Stalinist "Japanese Communist Party" strongly denies since 1945 until today that Japan is an imperialist state and justifies their social-patriotic position by referring to Japan's subordinated position to U.S. imperialism in the political and military field. Likewise, most Russian Stalinists and leftists shamefully deny the imperialist character of their state. In short, social-patriotic denial of the imperialist character of their own country is not a unique feature of the Korean left but a general phenomenon of reformism and centrism. However, as history has demonstrated, such failure always results in social-chauvinist capitulation to its "own" imperialist bourgeoisie and the betrayal of the interests of the international working class.

19. Recognizing the imperialist character of South Korea has profound programmatic and tactical consequences for revolutionaries. It is completely impermissible for Marxists in South Korea to support the struggle for the country's "national liberation". In an imperialist country like South Korea, "national liberation" means nothing but social-patriotic support for the domestic imperialist monopoly bourgeoisie! Likewise, revolutionaries must not support the boycott campaign against Japan – an imperialist rival of South Korea – or any other form of chauvinism. Such reactionary campaigns only serve to subordinate the workers behind the ruling class. We call for international unity of the workers of South Korea, Japan and globally. We stand for the Leninist program of revolutionary defeatism which is based on the principle "The main enemy is at home!"

20. Naturally, this does not mean that revolutionaries should ignore the legitimate concerns of Korean citizens (and their families) who survived the Japan's barbaric regime of forced labor and sex slavery imposed during World War II. Contrary, they must support their demands for compensation by Japanese corporations resp. the Japanese state. However, it is crucial that revolutionaries ex-

plain in a popular and agitational way that the struggle for the legitimate demands of the Korean victims of Japan's war crimes must result in *compensation for these families* but *not in more profit for the chaebols*. They must explain that the boycott campaigns do not serve the interests of the Korean citizens but only the interests of Samsung, LG and Lotte which can gain a larger market share at the cost of their Japanese rivals via such campaigns!

21. Revolutionaries should emphasize that these legitimate claims of the Korean victims are only a pretext for the escalation of rivalry between the two countries. If the South Korean state would have been seriously interested in getting compensation for its citizens why is it acting only now – nearly 75 years after these tragic events took place? The reason is obvious: in the decades after World War II, South Korea and Japan were closely bound together as politically subordinated allies of U.S. imperialism in the Cold War. In the past as well as today, the legitimate interests of the Korean citizens have been subordinated to the political goals of the ruling class!

22. Likewise, the demands for the withdrawal of all U.S. troops, the dissolution of the U.S. military bases and the removal of the THAAD missile defense system retain their importance. Such campaigns should be combined with the call for the *defense of North Korea* against any imperialist aggression by the U.S., Japan, South Korea or by any other Great Power. Hence, revolutionaries *oppose the sanctions* against North Korea and call for the *military defeat of its enemies* in case of a war. Naturally, such defense must go hand in hand with resolute opposition against the bureaucratic, state-capitalist dictatorship in Pyongyang.

23. Such tactics are part of our strategy for the *revolutionary unification of Korea* and the struggle for the overthrow of the South Korean bourgeoisie as well as of the North Korea Stalinist-capitalist ruling class.

24. In conclusion, it is impossible to fight for a program of socialist revolution in Korea without recognizing the imperialist character of the South Korean state and without applying the Marxist principles of revolutionary defeatism. The struggle for such principles are a precondition for the healthy construction of a revolutionary workers party in South Korea and internationally. The RCIT and its comrades in South Korea are fully committed to this goal!

REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNISM - The RCIT's Theoretical Review

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China passes the US on Global Business Ranking for first time

New data on global corporations reflects China's rise as an imperialist Great Power

By Michael Pröbsting, International Secretary of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 23.07.2019

The U.S. business magazine *Fortune* is an influential organ of the top tier of the capitalist class. It is famous for its lists of global rankings of companies by revenue. These have been published annually since 1955. This ranking, known as the *Fortune Global 500*, is a useful indicator of the relation of forces between the largest capitalist corporations in the world (another well-known list is the *Forbes 2000*).

We have pointed out in past statements that the most significant recent trend in these lists has been the decline of the U.S. and the converse growth of China. We have consequently noted that this increasing share of Chinese corporations among the global elite reflects China's rise as an imperialist Great Power.

The *Fortune Global 500* of this year has historic significance insofar as it shows that China has now reached parity with the long-time hegemon – the U.S. *Fortune* magazine is fully aware of the implications and titled its article – “It's China's World”.

“As the Chinese Century nears its third decade, *Fortune's Global 500* shows how profoundly the world's balance of power is shifting. American companies account for 121 of the world's largest corporations by revenue. Chinese companies account for 129 (including 10 Taiwanese companies). For the first time since the debut of the *Global 500* in 1990, and arguably for the first time since World War II, a nation other than the U.S. is at the top of the ranks of global big business.”¹

The report continues: “It's true that Chinese companies' revenues account for only 25.6% of the *Global 500* total, well behind America's 28.8%. But that's to be expected. China is the rising power, economically smaller but growing much faster.”

The report also reveals that both the Chinese and US companies on the list are mainly concentrated in five industries – energy and mining, commercial trade, banking, insurance, and aerospace/defense.

This report is another powerful confirmation of the RCIT's analysis that China had become a capitalist state by the early 1990s and, more recently, entered the ranks of imperialist Great Powers.² According to this report, China's share among the most powerful 500 corporations has risen to 23.8% (25.8% if we include Taiwan) while the share of the U.S. has declined to 24.2%.

We have shown that behind the curtain of “socialist” rhetoric in official Chinese media lies the reality of capitalist exploitation and capitalist property relations. China's banks and industry – both private and state-owned – operate according to the capitalist law of value and play an increasing role in the super-exploitation of the countries of the South (e.g. China's *Belt and Road Initiative* project).³

The current relation of forces between the imperialist powers

The *Fortune Global 500* list also reflects the current relation of forces between the monopolies and the imperialist powers behind them. (See the Table in the Appendix.) As we noted, China and the U.S. are the undisputed leaders

with, respectively, 129 versus 121 corporations. The next nation is Japan with 52 corporations (which represents a global share of 10.4%), followed by France (6.2%), Germany (5.8%) and the UK (3.4%). This clearly expresses the decline of European imperialism as the combined number of French, German and British corporations is still far behind the number of each of the two leaders.⁴

Another highly interesting result of this compilation is the fact that South Korea continues a sustained trend of placing among the Top 10. Again, it is ranked as No. 7 with only one corporation less than Britain (3.2%). This buttresses the thesis of the RCIT and our South Korean comrades that South Korea is not longer a semi-colonial country but has transitioned into an imperialist state.⁵

The China question

Such coverage about China's burgeoning capitalist corporations constitute a rude slap in the face for the numerous Stalinist and Castro-Chavista fans of China who have praised the *Middle Kingdom* for many years as a “socialist” and “anti-imperialist” power.⁶ In fact, as the RCIT has explained numerous times, China is an imperialist Great Power with a strong monopoly capitalist class that is now challenging the long-time U.S. hegemon. The ruling party is “communist” in name but capitalist and imperialist in practice. Unsurprisingly, the “communist” state media of China has cheered with enthusiasm over the news that their capitalist corporations are overtaking their American rivals.⁷

The latest *Fortune Global 500* report also demonstrates how mistaken those socialists are who recognize the capitalist character of China but claim that is not an imperialist power but something qualitative weaker (e.g. semi-colonial or sub-imperialist) than the U.S., Western European and Japanese Great Powers. We have previously demonstrated that such a view strongly contradicts reality.⁸ The publication of the latest *Fortune Global 500* list is an important confirmation of the RCIT's analysis.

We close this article by repeating that Marxists cannot understand the dynamics of the current world situation without recognizing the rise of China as an imperialist power, and with that, the related acceleration of Great Power rivalry. Our principled conclusion? We consistently oppose *all* Great Powers – the U.S., China, Russia, Japan and the EU on the basis of a socialist program for the liberation of the international working class.⁹

Footnotes

1 Geoff Colvin: It's China's World. China has now reached parity with the U.S. on the 2019 *Fortune Global 500*—a signifier of the profound rivalries reshaping business today, July 22, 2019 <https://fortune.com/longform/fortune-global-500-china-companies>

2 Our documents which analyse China's capitalism and its rise to a new imperialist Great Power in detail are collected in a special section on our website: <https://www.thecomunists.net/theory/china-russia-as-imperialist-powers/>. All publications can be

read online or downloaded for free at these links. For our analysis of capitalist restoration in China we refer readers in particular to a major study by Michael Pröbsting: China's transformation into an imperialist power. A study of the economic, political and military aspects of China as a Great Power, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 4 (2012), <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/revcom-number-4>

3 See on this e.g. our recently published book by Michael Pröbsting: *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry. The Factors behind the Accelerating Rivalry between the U.S., China, Russia, EU and Japan. A Critique of the Left's Analysis and an Outline of the Marxist Perspective*, RCIT Books, January 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/anti-imperialism-in-the-age-of-great-power-rivalry/>.

4 2019 Fortune Global 500, <https://fortune.com/global500/2019/search/>

5 On our analysis of South Korea as an imperialist state see e.g. 홍수천: 한반도 전쟁 위기와 미·중 제국주의 패권 쟁투 (Hong Su-Cheon: War Crisis on the Korean Peninsula and the Rivalry between US and Chinese Imperialism, Article in Korean language, Spring 2019), <https://www.thecommunists.net/home/%ED%95%9C%EA%B5%AD%EC%96%B4/crisis-on-korean-peninsula-us-and-chinese-imperialism/>; 홍수천: 현 시기 격화하고 있는 제국주의 패권쟁투와 사회주의자의 임무 (Hong Su-Cheon: The Acceleration of the Great Power Rivalry in the Present Period and the Task of Socialists in Korea, Article in Korean language, March 2019), <https://www.thecommunists.net/home/%ED%95%9C%EA%B5%AD%EC%96%B4/struggle-for-imperialist-hegemony-socialism/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Korean Peninsula: Imperialist Aggression, Capitalist Restoration and Revolutionary Defensism (Chapter VI. in *World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings*), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/>; Michael Pröbsting: Capitalist Development in South Korea and Taiwan (1997), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/capitalism-in-south-korea-taiwan/>; Down with the Imperialist Trade War between Japan and South Korea! Down with all chauvinist boycott campaigns! Class War instead of Trade War! Joint Statement of the Revolutionary Communists of South Korea and the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 19 July 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/trade-war-between-japan-and-south-korea/>; Korea:

There Is No Peace Without Overthrowing Imperialism and the Rule of Capital! Peace through the Proletarian Socialist Revolution! Joint Statement of the Revolutionary Communists of South Korea and the RCIT, 8 March 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/joint-statement-on-south-korean-imperialism/> [The Korean-language version of the statement can be read here: <https://www.thecommunists.net/home/%ED%95%9C%EA%B5%AD%EC%96%B4/joint-statement-on-south-korean-imperialism/>; See also <http://go.jinbo.net/commune/view.php?board=cool&id=51945&page=1>]

6 See on this in particular chapter VIII. "*Revisionist Whitewashing: Stalinist and Bolivarian Admirers of Beijing's "Socialism"*" as well as chapter IX. "*Revisionist Whitewashing: Russia and China are neither Capitalist nor Great Powers (PO/CRFI)*", both in Michael Pröbsting: *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry*.

7 See e.g. Chi Jingyi and Huang Ge: China overtakes US on global business ranking, *Global Times* 2019/7/22 <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1158785.shtml>; Zhuang Qiange: 129 Chinese firms on Fortune Global 500, *chinadaily.com.cn*, 2019-07-22 <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201907/22/WS5d357fb1a310d830564005b9.html>; Yang Yang: China passes US on Fortune Global 500 for first time, *chinadaily.com.cn*, 2019-07-22 <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201907/22/WS5d3566f4a310d8305640055c.html>

8 See on this in particular chapter X. "*Revisionist Whitewashing: China and Russia are Semi-Colonies rather than Great Powers (LIT / UIT / FT)*" and chapter XI. "*Revisionist Whitewashing: When the Category "Imperialism" has no Meaning (CWI / IMT / IST)*", both in Michael Pröbsting: *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry*.

9 See on this, in addition to the above mentioned new book on Great Power rivalry: RCIT: *Theses on Revolutionary Defeatism in Imperialist States. Resolution of the International Executive Committee of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT)*, 8 September 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/theses-on-revolutionary-defeatism-in-imperialist-states/>; RCIT: *Global Trade War: No to Great Power Jingoism in West and East! Neither Imperialist Globalization nor Imperialist Protectionism! For International Solidarity and Joint Struggle of the Working Class and Oppressed People!* 4 July 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/joint-statement-on-the-looming-global-trade-war/>

Table: List of Top 10 Countries with most Global 500 Companies, 2019 ⁴⁰

Rank	Country	Companies	Share (in %)
1	United States	121	24.2%
2	China	119	23.8%
3	Japan	52	10.4%
4	France	31	6.2%
5	Germany	29	5.8%
6	United Kingdom	17	3.4%
7	South Korea	16	3.2%
8	Switzerland	14	2.8%
9	Canada	13	2.6%
10	Netherlands	12	2.4%

The New Global Wave of Class Struggles and the Slogan of the Constituent Assembly

How to apply a crucial revolutionary democratic tactic (and how not) – a critique of the opportunist deviations of the Argentine-based PTS/FT and PO/CRFI

by Michael Pröbsting, International Secretary of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 26.11.2019

Introduction

A wave of class struggles is spreading throughout the globe. In Iraq¹, Iran², Lebanon³, Egypt⁴, Algeria⁵, Chile⁶, Bolivia⁷, Ecuador⁸, Haiti, Honduras⁹, Hong Kong¹⁰, and Catalunya¹¹ – popular uprisings in the past few months have resulted in many cases in the opening of pre-revolutionary or even revolutionary situations. Add to this the ongoing heroic liberation wars of the Syrian people against the Assad dictatorship (since March 2011)¹² and of the Yemeni people against the Saudi-led invasion (since March 2015).¹³ In Kashmir, a de facto general strike against the evocation of autonomy rights by the right-wing Hindu chauvinist government of Narendra Modi could provoke another great intifada at any time.¹⁴ Furthermore, the ongoing Israeli aggression against Gaza could easily result in another war.¹⁵ In addition, there is an ongoing global mass movement led by youth against climate change.¹⁶ In short, the world situation is extraordinary volatile – more than it has ever been before in the past decades!

The RCIT has characterized this phase as a “pre-68” period in which the possibility of the emergence of a *pre-revolutionary world situation* exists.¹⁷ This is particularly the case since this massive upswing of the class struggle goes hand in hand with the opening of another Great Recession in the capitalist world economy as well as a massive domestic political crisis of key leaders of the counter-revolutionary offensive like U.S. President Donald Trump or Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.¹⁸

I. The central role of democracy and constitution in the current mass protests

As we did already observe in our essay on the current wave of uprisings, a “common characteristic is that these mass revolts have an elementary character. They usually focus on economic attacks (austerity packages, price rises, higher taxes, etc.) and/or democratic demands (corruption, authoritarian laws, dictatorships, etc.).”

In a number of these uprisings, it is not only democratic demands in general but, in particular, the issue of the constitution which plays a central role. This goes often hand in hand with calls for the overthrow of the whole government. Let us give a few examples.

In Iraq and Lebanon, demonstrators are demanding radical changes in the constitution and the abolishment of the religious sectarian system.¹⁹ In Algeria and Sudan, the issue of the constitution has also played a central role as we discussed already in another essay published some months ago.²⁰

The importance of the constitution has also become visible in Egypt after General Sisi came to power in a bloody military coup in July 2013. Within a few months, he overthrew

the constitution and imposed another one which serves his military dictatorship.²¹ In Syria, the ongoing popular insurrection against the tyrannical regime of Assad raises by its very nature the issue of the constitution – to which the counter-revolutionary alliance of Putin, Rouhani and Erdoğan (plus the leaderships of some treacherous FSA factions) react with imposing a so-called “*Syrian Constitutional Committee*”.

We see the same picture in Latin America. From early on, demonstrators in Chile drew their fire on the reactionary constitution which stems from the days of the notorious Pinochet dictatorship which ruled the country in 1973-1990. More than 80 percent of Chileans are in favour of a new constitution, according to recent polls.²²

Hong Kong’s mini-constitution, called *Basic Law*, has also been a central issue in the mass protests which shake the region since nearly half a year. This became even more the case when Hong Kong’s High Court ruled the government’s mask ban against protesters as unconstitutional in mid-November. In response, the Stalinist-capitalist dictatorship in Beijing suggested that the High Court had no remit on determining whether a law was in accordance with the Basic Law and threatened to overrule the decision.²³

Likewise, the issue of constitution plays a crucial role in Catalunya as the ruling class in Madrid denies the Catalan people their elementary right of national self-determination by referring to the constitution of the Spanish State. Furthermore, the draconic prison sentences for leading representatives of the pro-independence movement – which triggered the most recent uprising – had a legal basis in Spain’s bourgeois constitution (which was the result of the counter-revolutionary deal of the reformist leaders with the monarchist institutions of the Franco dictatorship).²⁴

Another example is Kashmir where the latest escalation has been provoked by the Modi government’s decision to revoke Article 370 of India’s constitution on 5 August. We could continue with providing many more examples but we think this brief global overview is sufficient to demonstrate the crucial place which the issue of constitution plays in the current wave of popular uprisings.

In cases where the government feels strong enough, it attempts to violently suppress the mass protests. In other cases, the ruling class has been pushed on the defensive. In such situations, the regime tries to pacify the mass protests by hijacking the demand for radical constitutional reform. The government formally agrees to such demands and starts a process of constitutional amendments under the control of their state institutions. In Iraq, for example, the parliament decided to form a temporary committee to propose amendments to the constitution.²⁵

In Chile, the right-wing government of the billionaire Sebastian Pinera initially proposed to open a process of amendments of the constitution which should have been

elaborated by a commission created by the government itself. After massive protests, the government brokered a deal with all parliamentary opposition parties (except the Communist Party PCCh) which includes a long-term process of a referendum in April 2020, election of a new convention in October to elaborate a new constitution within one year, and after this another referendum on such a draft constitution.²⁶ In other words, the ruling class tries to win up to two years time in order to delay and to institutionalize the process of a new constitution. It obviously hopes that it can pacify and liquidate the popular uprisings with such methods.

II. Reasons for the central role of democratic demands

It is not surprising that democratic demands and the issue of constitution play such an important role in the current global wave of class struggles. This is related to several fundamental characteristics of the current historic period – a period of capitalist decay resulting in the acceleration of the contradictions between the classes as well as the states. It is a highly explosive period pregnant with wars, revolutions and counterrevolutions. It would go beyond the scope of this essay to comprehensively deal with the character of the current period. We refer readers interested in this issue to other works which we have published in the last decade.²⁷

At this point we want to limit ourselves to emphasis only the following features which are relevant to the subject of this essay. The crisis-ridden character of the capitalist world economy and the onset of another Great Recession push the bourgeoisie all over the world to accelerate their

austerity attacks against the workers and popular masses. These austerity programs inevitable go hand in hand with systematic attacks on democratic rights and the expansion of authoritarian and dictatorial features of the bourgeois state. Lenin's famous statement remains completely valid: *"Both in foreign and home policy imperialism strives towards violations of democracy, towards reaction. In this sense imperialism is indisputably the "negation" of democracy in general, of all democracy,"*²⁸

Hence, the RCIT has repeatedly pointed to the significant relevance of the democratic question in the present historic period.²⁹ We therefore noted in our programmatic Manifesto: *"The struggle for democratic rights has become one of the most important issues in this age of capitalism in decay. In this context, the ruling classes inevitably violate and trample on democratic rights and strive to replace even limited bourgeois democracy by capitalist Bonapartism and dictatorship."*³⁰

In addition, Marxists have to recognize that while the popular masses heroically rise up against the ruling class, they lack political experience as well as an advanced consciousness on the political alternative to the rotten capitalist system. Years and decades of misleadership – by Stalinist and social democratic forces, Bolivarian and left-populists, petty-bourgeois nationalists and Islamists – have resulted in a situation where the masses have an underdeveloped political consciousness.

We can observe these developments in various countries. In Iraq and Lebanon, the people demand the ouster of the whole political elite and radical changes in the constitution. However, when it comes to the issue of a political alternative, we see widespread illusions in a "non-political, technocratic government". In Chile and Hong Kong, we see the combination of heroic struggles against the repres-

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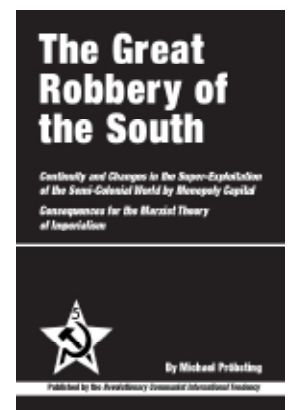
Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism

The RCIT is proud to announce the publication of a book called *THE GREAT ROBBERY OF THE SOUTH*. The book's subtitle is: *Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism*. The book is in English-language. It has 15 chapters, 448 pages and includes 139 Tables and Figures. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who is the International Secretary of the RCIT.

In *The Great Robbery of the South* Michael Pröbsting analyses the super-exploitation and oppression of the semi-colonial world (often referred to as the "Third World") by the imperialist powers and monopolies. He shows that the relationship between the small minority of rich capitalist countries and the huge majority of mankind living in the semi-colonial world forms one of the most important elements of the imperialist world system we are living in. The Great Robbery of the South shows that the past decades have been a complete confirmation of the validity of Lenin's theory of imperialism and its programmatic conclusions. *The Great Robbery of the South* demonstrates the important changes in the relationship between the imperialist and the semi-colonial countries. Using comprehensive material (including 139 Tables and Figures), Michael Pröbsting elaborates that never before

has such a big share of the world capitalist value been produced in the South. Never before have the imperialist monopolies been so dependent on the super-exploitation of the semi-colonial world. Never before has migrant labor from the semi-colonial world played such a significant role for the capitalist value production in the imperialist countries. Never before has the huge majority of the world working class lived in the South – outside of the old imperialist metropolises.

In *The Great Robbery of the South* Michael Pröbsting argues that a correct understanding of the nature of imperialism as well as of the program of permanent revolution which includes the tactics of consistent anti-imperialism is essential for anyone who wants to change the world and bring about a socialist future. Order your copy NOW! \$20 / £13 / €15 plus p+p (21\$ for US and international, £9 for UK, €10 for Europe)



sion apparatus and, at the same time, strong petty-bourgeois libertarian tendencies resulting in the opposition against any centralized political struggle and leadership. The same development can be observed in the global climate change movement.

All these developments result in a situation where the issues of democracy and constitution play a massive role in the consciousness of the workers and oppressed. Marxists must not take a sectarian approach but rather take the actual conditions of the struggle and the mass consciousness into account when they elaborate their slogans and tactics. As we stated somewhere else: *"Without understanding the revolutionary potential of the democratic question and its relationship to the strategy of permanent revolution, one is incapable of finding a correct political orientation in the current events in the Arab world (or anywhere else). Ignoring the challenges of prevailing mass consciousness, with all of its initial petty-bourgeois democratic limitations, leads directly to the cul-de-sac of sectarian isolation. Revolutionaries must champion the democratic question and not leave it to the petty-bourgeois leaders and bourgeois traitors! This was the approach of the Bolsheviks and Leon Trotsky... and this is our approach too!"*³¹

The task of Marxists is not to ignore the democratic demands but rather to pick them up and to give them a revolutionary dynamic. We certainly don't view the democratic question as less important as the masses do. We only emphasize that the methods of struggle for such demands should be that of revolutionary class struggle. It is not sufficient to demonstrate every day and to occupy some bridges and public places. It is necessary to bring the economy to a halt via an indefinite general strike. The occupation of the Tahrir Square is excellent. But this should be combined with the occupation of factories and governmental buildings in order to pose the question of power.

The masses are right to have no confidence in the established political parties. But this should not result in the lack of structures, organization and leadership. Quite the opposite, it is necessary to counterpose the organizations of the working class and oppressed to the organizations of the ruling class. Against their government and institutions, we need to organize in committees of action in workplaces, neighbourhoods and universities. Such committees should elect delegates so that there can be a national coordination of the struggle. When we are strong enough, such committees can become the basis for the overthrow of the regime and for the building of an alternative power. Against their police and army, we need to organize workers and popular self-defence committees.

Furthermore, Marxists need to explain that the question of democracy cannot be separated from the question of power. Those who own the economy and who command the gun – they have the power. As long as they continue to have the power, it is not possible to safeguard any substantial social or democratic achievements. Only if the workers and popular masses expropriate those who control the economy – the big capitalists – and dispose those who control the state apparatus – the ruling elite and the generals – only then will it be possible to achieve a lasting victory.

In other words, as Trotsky emphasized repeatedly, it is necessary to combine the struggle for minimal demands – like the defense of social gains or democratic rights – with a transitional program directed at the conquest of power.

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Such a victory can only be achieved via a successful socialist revolution. But this will not happen spontaneously but requires an organized and experienced leadership. Such a leadership is called a revolutionary party, i.e. an organization of the vanguard militants on the basis of a common program and perspectives. It is evident that such a party can only be constructed via the conscious and systematic efforts of a dedicated group of militants who spread the programmatic lessons and organize supporters on a democratic and centralist basis. It cannot be built outside of the struggles of the masses but only within that. The RCIT calls all revolutionaries who share such an approach to unite so that we can build together such a revolutionary party nationally and internationally!

III. Marxism and the slogan of the Revolutionary Constituent Assembly

As we have demonstrated above, the issue of the constitution plays a central role in the current class struggle. We have said that it is only possible to fight for a socialist perspective by taking a revolutionary stance on the democratic question, i.e. by consistently defending all democratic demands and by fighting for their most radical implementation. This must necessarily also include the issue of the constitution.

We do not intend to elaborate at this place in detail the approach of Marxists to the issue of the constitution. For this we refer readers to other writings of the RCIT where we elaborate on this issue in more detail.³³ In this chapter, we will only summarize our most important conclusions.

The slogan of the *Constituent Assembly* has played a central role in revolutionary democratic struggles already in the epoch of bourgeois revolutions. As the great historians of the French Revolution in 1789-94 demonstrated, the Constituent Assembly was already a focus of the liberation struggle at that time.³⁴ This was also the case in the revolutionary upheavals in Europe in 1848 as well as in the Russian Revolution in 1905 and 1917. The writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin at that time are ample testimony to this fact. And it has continued to play an important in numerous revolutions since then.

In itself, the Constituent Assembly is basically a body that is elected for the sole purpose of elaborating and deciding on the constitution of a state. It is therefore a place where the representatives of the antagonistic classes can present their competing programs of how society should be run. Hence, a Constituent Assembly is the most radical democratic form within bourgeois democracy as it involves the popular classes in a debate over the political and economic structure of society.

As Marxists we don't entertain any illusions that socialism can be peacefully introduced via such an assembly. The overthrow and expropriation of the capitalist class is a question of power which ultimately will be decided by means of an armed confrontation between the ruling and oppressed classes.

However, this does not mean that Marxists should ignore such bodies. We are in favor of utilizing all possible institutions in order to advocate the full program for a revolutionary transformation of society. Such work can also help to demonstrate to the popular masses who entertain

illusions in such bodies that these institutions cannot solve the fundamental problems of the society.

In order to make such Constituent Assembly as democratic and radical as possible, Marxists propose that deputies should be elected on the basis of local popular assemblies; they should be perpetually recallable by their constituents, and they should receive the salary of a skilled worker.

The recent events in Chile as well as numerous other examples before have demonstrated that democratic slogans in general and the slogan for a Constituent Assembly in particular can be posed in either a revolutionary way or a reformist way. Reformists raise democratic demands as an appeal to the bourgeois state and focus on the parliamentary road instead of mobilizing the working class and popular masses. The demand for a Constituent Assembly is usually posed by the reformists and centrists as a proposal to the ruling class to convoke such an assembly. However under such circumstances a Constituent Assembly can only be an instrument of the ruling class since it will be controlled by them.

In contrast to reformists and centrists, revolutionaries call not for a conciliatory Constituent Assembly that can only end up pacifying the masses but rather for a *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly*. This means a Constituent Assembly that is convened and controlled by the fighting masses organized in councils of action and armed militias. In other words, such an assembly will be the result of a revolutionary upsurge in which the working class and the oppressed take power or have at least initiated a period of dual power.

Under which conditions should Marxists raise the slogan of a *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly*? We don't think that this is a universal slogan which can or should be applied in all countries or under each and every condition.

In our founding program – *"The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto"* – we defined our approach to this slogan as follows:

*"Where there are basic issues of political sovereignty on the agenda and there is still no awareness among the masses about the superiority of proletarian council democracy, in certain phases the slogan of a revolutionary Constituent Assembly can be important. Bolshevik-Communists advocate that the delegates should be controllable and open to recall by its people. Thus such a Constituent Assembly cannot easily become an instrument of the ruling class, they should not be called by a bourgeois government, but by a revolutionary government of workers and peasants' councils."*³⁵

Hence, we propose to raise this slogan in situations where the struggle or the objective conditions of the capitalist political type of rule pose fundamental questions of democracy. This can be the case in countries where military dictatorship or less authoritarian forms of bourgeois rule exist (e.g. various forms of Bonapartism or semi-Bonapartism) or where the class struggle puts fundamental questions of the country's political constitution on the agenda (e.g. the excessive powers of bourgeois state apparatus in Chile, the sectarian constitutions in Lebanon and Iraq or the long-lasting conflict on Brexit in Britain). As long as the workers and popular masses still entertain illusions in bourgeois democracy, Marxists should advocate in such situation the slogan of the *Revolutionary Constituent Assembly*.

IV. Is the Constituent Assembly a road to socialism?

Before we begin with elaborating our critique of several Argentine-based organizations which stand in the tradition of Trotskyism, we want to make a brief remark on

Books of the RCIT

Yossi Schwartz: Palestine and Zionism

The History of Oppression of the Palestinian People. A Critical Account of the Myths of Zionism

In *Palestine and Zionism* Yossi Schwartz provides a critical analysis of numerous Zionist myths about the Jews as well as about the Palestinians. He demonstrates that the Zionist claim that Palestine is the historic homeland of the Jews lacks any serious basis.

Palestine and Zionism shows that the history of Zionism in the 20th century is a history of colonialism in the service of the Great Powers and directed against the native population – the Arabs.

In *Palestine and Zionism* Yossi Schwartz deals with key events – the "Nakba" in 1948, the wars in 1956, 1967 and 1973, more recent events like the Lebanon War, etc. – which were decisive for the expulsion of most Palestinians from their homeland.

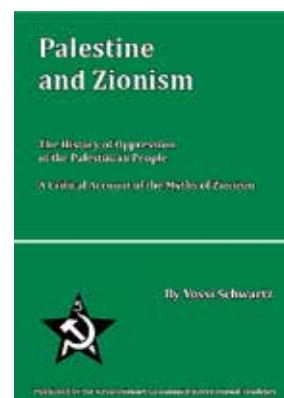
Yossi Schwartz also shows that the Palestinian people have heroically resisted against the occupation resulting in two Intifadas as well as the successful defense of Gaza against the Israeli aggression in three wars (2008/09, 2012, 2014). The author also analysis the shameful betrayal by the PLO leadership by signing the Oslo Agreement in 1993.

In *Palestine and Zionism* Yossi Schwartz defends the right of national self-determination for the Palestinian people and

outlines a socialist perspective. He emphasizes that the only solution is the right of millions of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland and to replace the Zionist entity with one democratic state from the river to the sea – a *Free Red Palestine* with equal civil rights to the Arabs and the Israeli Jews.

The book contains an introduction and 7 chapters (112 pages) and includes 7 Tables and 3 Maps. The author of the book is Yossi Schwartz, a leading member of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency and its section in Israel / Occupied Palestine..

You can find the contents and download the book for free at <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/palestine-and-zionism/>



some other groups which denounce the application of the slogan of the Constituent Assembly in Latin American countries in a sectarian way. There are various organizations, usually based in Western imperialist countries, which have stated that the slogan of the Constituent Assembly must not be applied in Latin America. Among them are the IMT led by Alan Woods, Jan Norden's Internationalist Group, the Spartacists of the late Jim Robertson or the US/New Zealand-based CWG. We refer readers for a comprehensive criticism of the wrong positions of these organizations to other works which the RCIT has published in the past.³⁶ At this point we limit ourselves to draw attention to the obvious fact that the issue of constitution plays a prominent role in the current global wave of class struggles. This demonstrates very powerfully how important it is for revolutionaries not to ignore this issue but to relate to these democratic struggles by raising the slogan of the Constituent Assembly in a revolutionary way (instead of renouncing it altogether)!

However, in this essay we rather want to deal with the approach of some sizeable Argentine-based Trotskyist organizations and how they are applying the slogan of the Constituent Assembly in the current conjuncture. In particular, we want to deal with two essential questions:

- 1) What is the role of the Constituent Assembly in the strategy of socialist revolution?
- 2) Under which conditions can the Constituent Assembly play a progressive role in the class struggle and under which conditions is this not possible?

Let us begin with the question of the role of the Constituent Assembly in the strategy of socialist revolution. There exists a long tradition among several Trotskyist tendencies based in Latin America to view the slogan of the Constituent Assembly as one of fundamental and strategic importance for the road to socialism. The late Nahuel Moreno, one of the historic figures of post-war Latin American Trotskyism, arrived at the conclusion that revolutionaries should fight for a Constituent Assembly not only in Latin American countries but in all countries around the globe. In his famous *Theses on Trotsky's Transitional Program*, Moreno stated in 1980: "*Hence the enormous importance the slogan of Constitutional Assembly or something like that, has acquired in all countries of the world.*"³⁷

Hence, organizations in the tradition of Moreno have always attributed a strategic and universal significance to the slogan of the Constitutional Assembly.³⁸ Here is not the place to deal in more detail with the strength and weaknesses of the tradition of Morenoism and we refer readers interested in this subject to other works.³⁹

Today, most significant organizations of Latin America-based Trotskyism have adopted Moreno's methodological approach to the question of the Constitutional Assembly. One can see this very clearly in Argentina which is the country where most of these currents have their strong base. The platform of the "*Frente de Izquierda y de Trabajadores - Unida*" (FIT-U) for the national elections held in late October 2019 demonstrates this very clearly. FIT-U is an alliance which unites most self-proclaimed Trotskyist organizations and which is dominated by the two largest forces in that country – the *Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas* (PTS) and the *Partido Obrero* (PO). The PTS is the dominating section of the international organization called *Fracción Trotskista - Cuarta Internacional* (FT-CI)⁴⁰ and the

PO runs the (effectively defunct) "*Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International*" (CRFI).⁴¹

The electoral platform of these organizations raises, after listing a number of democratic and economic demands, the following slogan: "*For a Free and Sovereign Constituent Assembly that discusses and decides emergency measures necessary to satisfy the most urgent needs of the working-class population and push for a transformation of the whole country on a new social basis.*"⁴²

This slogan reflects the fact that both PTS/FT as well as PO/CRFI broadly agree on the same approach. This becomes evident from the way how these two organizations raise the slogan of the Constitutional Assembly in Argentina as well as other countries. Matias Maiello, an academic at the University of Buenos Aires and also a leader of the PTS, wrote in an article debating with the PO the approach of this slogan for Argentina: "*When we say that a free and sovereign Constituent Assembly has "power," what we mean is that there is no institution of the bourgeois regime that can limit it, review it or veto its decisions, that it has full freedom to address all the nation's problems, to address popular demands and to adopt emergency measures that make the capitalists pay for the crisis and solve these problems in a sovereign fashion. With all this we can only agree. In this sense, the free and sovereign Constituent Assembly that is proposed does not only replace the government but all institutions of the regime.*"⁴³

The same methodological approach is put forward by the PTS/FT in Chile today. In a central article by its section in Chile, the comrades raise a kind of transitional program – including the expropriation of core sectors of the bourgeoisie – for adoption by a "*Truly Democratic, Free and Sovereign Constituent Assembly*".⁴⁴

"*Only via the methods of class struggle, a political general strike (...) can Piñera be removed and a solution in the interests of the workers be imposed. As Juan Valenzuela (a leader of the FT in Chile, Ed.) stated, we revolutionary socialists propose in this spirit a truly free and sovereign Constituent Assembly on the ruins of the inherited regime to solve all fundamental measures while, at the same time, we fight for a government of the working people to finally overthrow the capitalists.*"⁴⁵

While they differ with the PTS/FT on some secondary issues, the PO – or more precisely both wings of PO since they experienced a devastating split recently⁴⁶ – essentially share the same approach. It raises the slogan of a "*sovereign Constituent Assembly*" as the central tactic for Argentina as well as for Chile: "*This puts a sovereign Constituent Assembly at the order of the day, aimed at removing and putting an end to the inheritance left by the Chilean dictator and taking all the steps towards an integral transformation of the country upon new social bases. This undertaking can only be the work of the workers and must be enforced by striking and popular demonstrations.*"⁴⁷

We remark, as an aside, that the PO/CRFI and its historic leader Jorge Altamira view the slogan of a "*free and sovereign Constituent Assembly*" as a universal slogan which should be raised not only in Latin America but even in countries like North and South Korea.⁴⁸

The essential problem is, as we can see, that both PTS/FT as well as PO/CRFI agree on a fundamental issue: that they designate such a "*truly democratic, free and sovereign Constituent Assembly*" with the task to "*transform the country upon a new social bases*" respectively to "*solve all fundamental measures*".

V. A kind of “constitutional cretinism”

We consider such a method as a fundamental reformist deviation from the Marxist approach to the slogan of a Constituent Assembly. It is certainly true that revolutionaries have to raise a socialist program when agitating as deputies within a Constituent Assembly. This is effectively true for all institutions in which Marxist work. For example, a revolutionary deputy in a bourgeois parliament would also be obliged to raise such demands. However, the purpose of raising such demands – from the right of abortion to the expropriation of the big bourgeoisie – in such institutions is to demonstrate what the Marxists stand for and, in contrast, what the reformists and populists stand for since the later usually would not be ready to support such measures. However, it is a kind of *parliamentary cretinism* – or, more precisely, it is a kind of *constitutional cretinism* – to spread the illusion among the working class and the popular masses that such a Constituent Assembly could solve all the fundamental problems!

In fact, what we see here is a kind of Latin American version of a similar opportunist method for which the Britain-based tradition of Ted Grant, Peter Taaffe and Alan Woods has become infamous (today this tradition is represented by the two wings both claiming to represent the authentic “Committee for a Workers’ International”, by the “International Marxist Tendency” and by other smaller groupings). As we have discussed somewhere else, the CWI/IMT tradition has over decades defended the reformist idea that a transformation towards socialism can be accomplished via parliament.⁴⁹

Unfortunately, PTS/FT and PO/CRFI apply the same reformist method to the Constituent Assembly. In one case it is the parliament, in the other the Constituent Assembly – but essentially they are both applying the same methodological opportunist deviation from authentic Marxism!

In contrast, revolutionaries view a Constituent Assembly not as an instrument to accomplish the socialist transformation but as *the freest possible arena for the open struggle between the representatives of the bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between the reformists and the Marxists*. In an essay on this issue, we wrote:

“What is a Constituent Assembly? Basically it is a body that is elected for the sole purpose of elaborating and deciding on the constitution of a state. It is therefore a place where the representatives of the antagonistic classes can present their competing programs of how society should be run. Marxists don’t have the illusion that socialism can be peacefully introduced via such an assembly. In contrast to the centrist confusionists like Peter Taaffe’s CWI or Alan Woods’ IMT, we are fully aware of the fact that the transformation of capitalism into socialism is not possible via a peaceful road – neither by a Constituent Assembly, a parliament, nor any other institution. This is a question of power which ultimately will be decided by means of an armed confrontation between the ruling and oppressed classes.

However, revolutionaries advocate utilizing a Constituent Assembly to propagate the full program for a revolutionary transformation of society and in this way expose the treacherous reformist and openly bourgeoisie leaders. Calling for a Constituent Assembly takes into account that the popular masses still retain illusions concerning the realization of their legitimate aspirations within the terrain of bourgeois democracy. A Constituent Assembly is the most radical democratic form within bourgeois

democracy as it involves the popular classes in a debate over the political and economic structure of society. To ensure such participation the deputies of a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly should be elected on the basis of local popular assemblies; they should be perpetually recallable by their constituents, and they should receive the salary of a skilled worker.”⁵⁰

In short, the Constituent Assembly can be a useful instrument in order to unmask the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois traitors and thereby help to win the majority of the working class for the task of the socialist revolution. However, such a socialist revolution will have to be carried out by workers and popular councils and militias and via the road of armed insurrection and civil war.

This is also how the Marxist classics approached this issue. Lenin opened his famous document on the Constituent Assembly at the end of 1917 with the following theses:

„1. The demand for the convocation of a Constituent Assembly was a perfectly legitimate part of the programme of revolutionary Social-Democracy, because in a bourgeois republic the Constituent Assembly represents the highest form of democracy and because, in setting up a pre-parliament, the imperialist republic headed by Kerensky was preparing to rig the elections and violate democracy in a number of ways.

2. While demanding the convocation of a Constituent Assembly, revolutionary Social-Democracy has ever since the beginning of the Revolution of 1917 repeatedly emphasised that a republic of Soviets is a higher form of democracy than the usual bourgeois republic with a Constituent Assembly.

3. For the transition from the bourgeois to the socialist system, for the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Republic of Soviets (of Workers’, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies) is not only a higher type of democratic institution (as compared with the usual bourgeois republic crowned by a Constituent Assembly), but is the only form capable of securing the most painless transition to socialism.”⁵¹

Similarly, Trotsky explained in a letter to Chinese revolutionaries that the experience of the Russian Revolution in 1917 demonstrated the following:

“Even if the Soviets were a fact – which is not the case in China at present – this in itself would not be cause enough for the abandonment of the slogan of the National Assembly. The majority in the Soviets may be (and at the beginning will certainly be) in the hands of conciliatory and centrist parties and organizations. We will be interested to have these parties exposed in the open forum of the National Assembly. By this method the majority of the Soviets will be won over to our side sooner, and much more certainly. When our conquest of the majority will become a reality, we will counter-pose the program of the Soviets against the program of the National Assembly, we will gather the majority of the country around the banner of the Soviets, which will give us the possibility, in deed and not on paper, to replace the National Assembly, this parliamentary-democratic institution, by Soviets, as the organ of the revolutionary class dictatorship.

In Russia, the Constituent Assembly existed only for one day. Why? Because it made its appearance too late, when the Soviet power was already in existence, and came into conflict with it. In this conflict, the Constituent Assembly represented the yesterday of the Revolution. But let us suppose that the bourgeois provisional government had been sufficiently decisive to convene the Constituent Assembly in March or April (1917). Was it possible? Naturally it was. (...) Would we Bolsheviks have participated in the elections and in the Assembly itself? Undoubtedly, for it was we who demanded all the time the speediest convening

of the Constituent Assembly. Would the course of the revolution have changed to the disadvantage of the proletariat by an early convening of the Assembly? Not at all. Perhaps you remember that the representatives of the Russian possessing classes and following them also the conciliators were postponing all the important questions of the revolution "until the Constituent Assembly", at the same time also dragging out the convening of it. This gave the landowners and capitalists a possibility to mask to a certain extent their property interests in the agrarian question, industrial, etc. If the Constituent Assembly would have convened let us say in April 1917 then all the social questions would have been raised before them. The possessing classes would have been compelled to show their cards, the treacherous role of the conciliators would have been apparent, the Bolshevik faction of the Constituent Assembly would have acquired the greatest popularity and have assisted the Soviets to elect a Bolshevik majority. Under these circumstances the Constituent Assembly would have existed not one day but possibly several months but that would have enriched the political experiences of the laboring masses and not only would not have retarded the proletarian revolution but would rather have accelerated it." ⁵²

To avoid any misunderstanding: Marxists are definitely not indifferent to the specific bourgeois political superstructure formation under which the working class can organize and fight. Even the smallest democratic achievement should not be dismissed by Marxists as it improves the conditions for the working class and oppressed to organize and to fight. We prefer bourgeois democracy to fascism, we prefer more bourgeois democracy compared to less bourgeois democracy. Hence, as the RCIT has explained many times, the working class has to defend without hesitation bourgeois democracy against any form of reactionary military coup. ⁵³ But this does not mean that Marxists have the right to spread petty-bourgeois illusions about advancing towards socialism via a Constituent Assembly!

This has also been the approach of Trotsky, In an essay written in 1937 on the Spanish Revolution he stated: "Before 1934 we explained to the Stalinists tirelessly that even in the imperialist epoch democracy continued to be preferable to fascism; that is, in all cases where hostile clashes take place between them, the revolutionary proletariat is obliged to support democracy against fascism. However, we always added: We can and must defend bourgeois democracy not by bourgeois democratic means but by the methods of class struggle, which in turn pave the way for the replacement of bourgeois democracy by the dictatorship of the proletariat. This means in particular that in the process of defending bourgeois democracy, even with arms in hand, the party of the proletariat takes no responsibility for bourgeois democracy, does not enter its government, but maintains full freedom of criticism and of action in relation to all parties of the Popular Front, thus preparing the overthrow of bourgeois democracy at the next stage." ⁵⁴

We conclude this chapter by drawing attention to an ironic incident. More than 25 years ago, the comrades of the Argentinean PTS wrote in a polemic against LIT that the Morenoite tradition is advocating "the Constituent Assembly as a privileged way to socialism in Argentina". ⁵⁵ This was and remains obviously true. However, today the PTS comrades have forgotten this criticism and have adopted the same approach!

VI. A socialist transformation without armed struggle?

Furthermore, while we think it is correct to apply the Constituent Assembly as a crucial slogan for countries like Chile today (for reasons outlined above), we consider it as utterly wrong to do the same in Argentina today. In Chile, we have a constitution inherited from the era of the military dictatorship of Pinochet, a revolutionary situation with militant mass mobilizations to which the state apparatus responded with killing dozens of people as well as the widespread popular demand for changes in the constitution. In such a situation, it is absolutely necessary to raise the slogan for a Constituent Assembly. However, in Argentina, there exists a completely different situation. Neither is there a (pre-)revolutionary situation, not even any significant mass mobilizations, nor is there a widespread popular demand for changes in the constitution. Even if one would say that it is legitimate to raise this slogan in Argentina today, it is definitely wrong to put it forward as the central, crowning slogan – in combination with an opportunist version of the workers government slogan – of an electoral program!

The comrades of the PTS/FT might point out that they also warn in their articles that the bourgeoisie will rally their forces against such a transitional program adopted by a Constituent Assembly. Such they wrote in one of the articles mentioned above: "If an emergency program like the one we are proposing is implemented, it will likely come up against the violent opposition of the big capitalists, who will defend all their privileges tooth and nail alongside their repressive state. That is why it is more urgent than ever to form assemblies and coordinating committees at workplaces, schools and universities, and in neighborhoods. These must be bodies of genuinely democratic self-organization, such as the Emergency and Protection Committee of Antofagasta, bodies of the rank-and-file who are opposed by the union and social bureaucracies of the Social Unity Roundtable, led by the PC and the FA. These bodies are the only ones that can impose a solution that is favorable for working people and allow these emergency measures to be carried out. The struggle to defeat the resistance of big business leaders will form the basis for the struggle for a workers' government that confiscates the wealth of the capitalists; a workers' and people's government that, based on the masses' organizations of self-determination, can fully and effectively realize our social and democratic aspirations, and refound the country on new social bases." ⁵⁶

However, this does not solve the problem but rather opens an additional opportunist trap. First, if the bourgeoisie would not accept any radical transformation originating from the Constituent Assembly (as the PTS/FT says), why do they claim in their propaganda that such a Constituent Assembly indeed could embody the fundament for starting such a transformation to socialism?! This is, to put it diplomatically, a non-dialectical contradiction in itself.

Secondly, the last long quote which refers to the workers government reflects another opportunist deviation of the PTS/FT (as well as the PO/CRFI). If the ruling class will mobilize its forces against any radical transformation (which is obviously a correct assumption), how does the PTS/FT plan to counter this threat? In this article – as well as in the other documents cited above – they talk about workers government as well as workers and popular councils. This

is all fine and well, but none of this will stop a military coup or any other forceful attempt of the ruling class to defend their power!

A Marxist organization has to explain that a socialist transformation cannot take place in a peaceful way. In order to defeat the bourgeois counterrevolution it is necessary to organize workers and popular militias so that the reactionary forces can be defeated in the inevitable civil war. The RCIT has stated in its *Manifesto*: “*Contrary to the illusions of the left social democrats, Stalinist and various centrists (e.g., CWI, IMT), the socialist transformation cannot take place via parliamentary elections or in a gradual, peaceful way. All historic experience – both of successful socialist revolutions like Russia’s in 1917-21, bureaucratic social revolutions (e.g., Cuba in 1959-61, China in 1945-49), unfinished democratic revolutions (e.g., Nicaragua or Iran in 1979), or even stranded revolutions like the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, Chile of 1973, the Arab Revolutions since 2011, etc. – demonstrates that the ruling class will never give up its power peacefully. The working class and the oppressed can only take power and overthrow capitalism if they organize themselves – under the leadership of a revolutionary party – in popular militias and prepares for armed insurrection, civil war and the dictatorship of the proletariat as the only means by which the struggle for liberation can be advanced.*”⁵⁷

Unfortunately, the need for workers and popular militias and the warning of the inevitable armed confrontation with the ruling class is nowhere mentioned in all these documents of PTS/FT and PO/CRFI! They simply suggest that a transitional program and the socialist transformation would be possible to achieve without arming of the working class and without a violent struggle! Again, we see that Ted Grant, Peter Taaffe and Alan Woods have found new opportunist pupils in Latin America!

We agreed above with the PTS criticism – stated more than 25 years ago – about the mistaken approach to the Constituent Assembly as a privileged road to socialism. However, we need to go a step further. The tactic of the Constituent Assembly is no road to socialism at all! It is an important tactic of revolutionary democracy which, under specific circumstances, can help to prepare the road of struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie. In other words, it is a side track which leads to the road to socialism – no more, no less.

VII. A “de-revolutionization” or “social democratization” of Marxism

What is the basis of such opportunist deviations? The reason is not very difficult to identify. The major Trotskyist organizations in Argentina experienced some electoral successes since 2011. They managed to win several deputies in national as well as regional parliaments. This has undoubtedly increased the illusion among their leaders that they can achieve a significant breakthrough via electoral work. As they are lacking a clear programmatic and theoretical Marxist fundament, they hope to become a respected force – respected by the bourgeois media, the academic world and left-wing sectors among the trade union bureaucracy – by moderating their program and making it more “acceptable” for a “broader audience”. Such pressure on left-wing parties who experience some success in parliamentary elections is a phenomenon which one could observe many times in the history of the revolutionary workers movement. As said above, Marxists have a category for this – *parliamentary cretinism*.

However, the hopes of the FIT leaders to achieve an elec-

Books of the RCIT

Michael Pröbsting: Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice

Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of Organized Struggle for Bolshevism

The RCIT is proud to announce the publication of a book called *BUILDING THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE*. The book’s subtitle is: *Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of organized Struggle for Bolshevism*. The book is in English-language. It contains four chapters on 148 pages and includes 42 pictures. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who serves as the International Secretary of the RCIT.

The following paragraphs are the back cover text of the book which give an overview of its content.

A few months ago, our movement commemorated its 25th anniversary. In the summer of 1989 our predecessor organization, the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) was founded as a democratic-centralist international tendency based on an elaborated program. The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) continues the revolutionary tradition of the LRCI. Below we give an overview of our history, an evaluation of its achievements as well as mistakes, and a summary of the lessons for the struggles ahead. This book summarizes our theoretical and practical experience of the past

25 years.

In Chapter I we outline a summary of the Bolshevik-Communists’ theoretical conception of the role of the revolutionary party and its relation to the working class. In Chapter II we elaborate on the essential characteristics of revolutionary party respective of the pre-party organization. In Chapter III we deal with the history of our movement – the RCIT and its predecessor organization. Finally, in Chapter IV we outline the main lessons of our 25 years of organized struggle for building a Bolshevik party and their meaning for our future work.

You can find the contents and download the book for free at <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/rcit-party-building/> ■

Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice

Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of organized Struggle for Bolshevism



By Michael Pröbsting

Published by the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency

toral breakthrough suffered a serious setback at the last elections in October 2019. Not only did it lose a quarter of the votes which it received at the PASO elections two months earlier. It also experiences a long-term decline in electoral terms as an Argentine group reports:

*"In the presidential elections, the FIT-U, made up of four groups that declare allegiance to Trotskyism (PO, PTS, IS and MST), have gone from 3.23 percent (812,000 votes) in 2015, to 2.16 percent (580,000 votes) at present. In the elections for national deputies they have fallen from 4.90 percent (1,156,000 votes) in 2017 (5.4 percent and 1,250,000 votes if we include the MST, which stood separately that year) to three percent (760,000 votes) at present. Almost half a million votes have been lost. In 2013 (their historical election campaign, with a lot of media visibility, in which they won 5.25 percent and 1,224,000 votes, without counting the MST) they won three deputies. In 2015 they reached four, in 2017 they were reduced to three and now they only have one deputy."*⁵⁸

True, FIT still has a sizeable electoral support. However, it is a sheer illusion to imagine that a revolutionary party could be built primarily via such electoral work. Participation in parliamentary elections can be absolutely useful and justified. It can help to raise the prestige and spread the ideas of revolutionary Marxism. However, all this can only help to prepare for the real class battles – the (pre-) revolutionary events as we see them currently in various countries around the world. These are the struggle – and not the electoral work – which can enable a revolutionary organization to achieve breakthroughs!

We conclude this essay by drawing attention to the following situation. We don't think that the *constitutional cretinism* of PTS/FT and PO/CRFI is an exceptional phenomenon. It is rather part of a general crisis of leadership. Numerous organizations claiming adherence to Trotskyism have undergone a process of political degeneration. In our founding *Manifesto* we noted: *"In this deep crisis of leadership - combined with the possibilities of the imperialist bourgeoisie for the systematic bribery of the labour bureaucracy and aristocracy - the ultimate cause can be found in the extraordinary bourgeoisification of the labour movement and the De-revolutionisation of Marxism, as is has been distorted by left reformism, centrism and the left-wing academics in recent decades."*⁵⁹

The following characterization put forward by the Argentinean *"La Marx"* group – a split from the PTS – is also an appropriate formulation: they talk about a *"process of social democratization"* of these Trotskyist organizations.⁶⁰

Whatever categories one uses, the essential issue is the deep crisis of leadership of the working class. Trotsky has always emphasized the significance of this question. It is a tragedy of history that today many self-proclaimed Trotskyist organizations have themselves become part of this problem!

This is even more tragic given the fact that the class struggle is experiencing extraordinary leaps forward. If we don't advance in overcoming the crisis of leadership, our class will inevitably suffer serious defeats and setbacks!

Hence, it is of utmost importance that revolutionary militants in PTS/FT, PO/CRFI as well as other self-proclaimed Trotskyist organizations break with all forms of opportunist deviation and return to the path of revolutionary Marxism! The RCIT is ready to discuss these issues and to listen to the experiences, insights, and arguments of these

comrades. We are committed to working hand-in-hand with you in the construction of a healthy, revolutionary international based on authentic Marxist principles!

Footnotes

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Books of the RCIT

Michael Pröbsting: Marxism and the United Front Tactic Today

The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony in the Liberation Movement and the United Front Tactic Today.

The RCIT is proud to announce the publication of a new English-language book – MARXISM AND THE UNITED FRONT TACTIC TODAY. The book's subtitle is: The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony in the Liberation Movement and the United Front Tactic Today. On the Application of the Marxist United Front Tactic in Semi-Colonial and Imperialist Countries in the Present Period. It contains eight chapters plus an appendix (172 pages) and includes 9 tables and 5 figures. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who serves as the International Secretary of the RCIT.

The following paragraphs are the back cover text of the book which give an overview of its content.

The united front tactic is a crucial instrument for revolutionaries under today's circumstances in which the mass organizations of the working class and the oppressed are dominated by social democratic, Stalinist and petty-bourgeois-populist forces.

The purpose of this document is both to summarize the main ideas of the Marxist united front tactic while at the same time explaining its development and modification which have become necessary due to political changes which have transpired in the

working class liberation movement since the tactic's original formulation.

In this book we initially summarize the main characteristics of the united front tactic and elaborate the approach of the Marxist classics to this issue. We then outline important social developments in the working class and the popular masses as well as in their political formations in recent decades. From there we will discuss how the united front tactic should be applied in light of a number of new developments (the rise of petty-bourgeois populist parties, the decline of the classic reformist parties, the role of national minorities and migrants in imperialist countries, etc.). The eight chapters of the book are accompanied by nine tables and five figures.

