

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

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This book is dedicated to all those who devote their lives to the working class' liberation struggle and to the building of the revolutionary world party without which this liberation struggle can not win.

Published by the

Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT)

Web: www.thecommunists.net

Email: rcit@thecommunists.net

Phone: +43 (0)650 406 83 14

Address: Fuchselhofgasse 6, 1120 Vienna, Austria

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First Edition 2014

Impressum: Revolutionär-Kommunistische Organisation zur Befreiung (RKOB), Fuchselhofgasse 6, 1120 Vienna. Print: Riegelnik, Vienna

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Introduction

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. ¹

* * * * *

In Chapter I we will 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 will elaborate on the essential characteristics of revolutionary party respective of the pre-party organization. In Chapter III we will deal with the history of our movement – the RCIT and its predecessor organization. Finally, in Chapter IV we will outline the main lessons of our 25 years of organized struggle for building a Bolshevik party and their meaning for our future work. ²

* * * * *

We wish to express our special thanks to comrade Gerard Stephens who performed the English-language editing for this book.

1 Michael Pröbsting, the author of this book, became a political activist at the age of 14. Two years later, in 1984, he became a member of Ernest Mandel's *Fourth International (United Secretariat)*. After a faction struggle against the centrist policy of its leadership, he left them in February 1989 and joined the LRCI (renamed to *League for the Fifth International* in 2003). He served on the leadership bodies of the Austrian section from 1989 and of the LRCI/LFI from 1994 until he and his comrades-in-arms were expelled by the majority of this organization in April 2011. He worked as a fulltime party worker for the LFI since 1991. After their expulsion, the comrades founded the *Revolutionary Communist Organization LIBERATION* in Austria and the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* which today has sections in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Israel/Occupied Palestine, Brazil, USA and Austria as well as comrades-in-arms in Yemen and Sweden. He serves as the International Secretary of the RCIT.

2 We also refer readers to two documents on party building which our movement has previously published and which give a useful overview of our viewpoint: LFI: *The Method and Principles of Communist Organization* (2007), in: *Documents of the League for the Fifth International*, Vol. 1, 2009; LRCI: *Theses on the Early Stages of Party Building*, in: *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 2 (1992). However, the latter text contains some erroneous formulations concerning the role of intellectuals in a communist pre-party organization which we correct in the present publication.

I. The Revolutionary Party and Its Role in the Class Struggle

One of the most fundamental distinctions between authentic Marxism and its various caricatures propagated by petty-bourgeois intellectuals is whether it is primarily a *Weltanschauung*, or world view, which serves the proletariat as a “*guideline to action*” or if it is merely a sociological theory which is confined to analyze developments in the class society. As is well-known, Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky were ardent supporters of the viewpoint that Marxism is a method – the materialistic dialectic – a scientific instrument for understanding all phenomena in society as well as nature and for serving humanity by allowing it to intervene and model the world in its own interests.

Marx and Engels expressed this viewpoint in numerous writings. Probably the most famous formulation is the Marx’s 11th thesis on Feuerbach:

*“Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.”*³

Engels expressed this fundamental thought in the following way:

*„And Communism now no longer meant the concoction, by means of the imagination, of an ideal society as perfect as possible, but insight into the nature, the conditions and the consequent general aims of the struggle waged by the proletariat.”*⁴

From this follows that Marxism can never be a “neutral” theory standing above the classes and their parties but can only be a theory which explains the reality from a partisan point of view, i.e., from the standpoint of proletarian interests, or in a more general sense, of historical and social progress. Hence *partisanship* (“*partiinnost*” in the Bolshevik terminology) is a fundamental requirement for Marxists, as Lenin pointed out already in his early writings:

*„On the other hand, materialism includes partisanship, so to speak, and enjoins the direct and open adoption of the standpoint of a definite social group in any assessment of events.”*⁵

3 Karl Marx: Theses on Feuerbach (1845), in: MECW Vol. 5, p. 5 (Emphasis in the original). Many of the works of the Marxist classics as well as of the Communist International quoted in this document are available at the Marxist Internet Archive www.marxists.org

4 Friedrich Engels: On The History of the Communist League, in: MECW Vol. 26, p. 318

5 V. I. Lenin: The Economic Content of Narodism and the Criticism of it in Mr. Struve’s Book. (The Reflection of Marxism in Bourgeois Literature.) (1894); in: LCW Vol. 1, p. 401.

In a later article Lenin expressed this understanding trenchantly: *“Throughout the civilised world the teachings of Marx evoke the utmost hostility and hatred of all bourgeois science (both official and liberal), which regards Marxism as a kind of “pernicious sect”. And no other attitude is to be expected, for there can be no “impartial” social science in a society based on class struggle. In one way or another, all official and liberal science defends wage-slavery, whereas Marxism has declared relentless war on that slavery. To expect science to be impartial in a wage-slave society is as foolishly naïve as to expect impartiality from manufacturers on the*

This is why Marxism – invariably – is a guide to action as Engels, and later, Lenin and Trotsky stressed repeatedly. Lenin, taking up Engels statement, explained: „*Our doctrine – said Engels, referring to himself and his famous friend – is not a dogma, but a guide to action. This classical statement stresses with remarkable force and expressiveness that aspect of Marxism which is very often lost sight of. And by losing sight of it, we turn Marxism into something one-sided, distorted and lifeless; we deprive it of its life blood; we undermine its basic theoretical foundations – dialectics, the doctrine of historical development, all-embracing and full of contradictions; we undermine its connection with the definite practical tasks of the epoch, which may change with every new turn of history.*“⁶

Class Independence through Class War

The prerequisite for a correct political orientation of the proletarian liberation struggle is the most fundamental principle of the Bolshevik program which is – if one has to condense it as concisely as possible – *class independence*. Class independence of the proletariat means that it frees itself from the political, organizational and ideological fetters which chain it to the ruling class.

These comprehensive chains include the ideological manipulation by the capitalist media, schools, religious institutions, the control of the workers' movement (trade unions, reformist parties, etc.) by the labor bureaucracy, etc. Add to this what Marx called *commodity fetishism*, i.e., capitalism's inherent tendency to hide the inner mechanism of the capitalist value creation and exploitation process and to create a false, confused consciousness in the society (including the working class). Marx and Engels already observed in the *Communist Manifesto* that „*the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its*

question of whether workers' wages ought not to be increased by decreasing the profits of capital.“ (V.I.Lenin: The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism (1913), in: LCW Vol. 19, p. 23, emphasis in the original)

Ivan K. Luppol, one of the leading Marxist philosophers in the USSR in the 1920s, affiliated with the Deborin school which was crushed by Stalin in 1930/31, formulated this thought well: „*Partisanship, taking side is necessary and unavoidable in philosophy.*“ and „*Partisanship in science obligates also to partisanship in practical activities. Theoretical partisanship provides the rationale for practical activities.*“ (Iwan K. Luppol: Die materialistische Dialektik und die Arbeiterbewegung (1928); in: Unter dem Banner des Marxismus, II. Jahrgang (1928), p. 229 respectively 231; our translation)

6 V.I.Lenin: Certain Features of the Historical Development of Marxism (1910), in: LCW Vol. 17, p. 39.

Engels original statement is from a letter he wrote in 1886, when he criticized dogmatic socialists: „*To them it is a credo, not a guide to action.*“ (Friedrich Engels: Letter to Friedrich Adolph Sorge, 29 November 1886, in: MECW Vol. 47, p. 532)

Trotsky expressed his agreement with this thinking in numerous statements such as the following: „*The revolutionary worker must, before all else, understand that Marxism, the only scientific theory of the proletarian revolution, has nothing in common with the fatalistic hope for the “final” crisis. Marxism is, in its very essence, a set of directives for revolutionary action. Marxism does not overlook will and courage, but rather aids them to find the right road.*“ (Leon Trotsky: Once Again, Whither France? Part I (1935), in: Leon Trotsky: On France, Monad Press, New Your 1979, pp. 70-71)

ruling class."⁷

From this follows that class independence can only be achieved via the relentless class struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie and their lackeys in all spheres. This means that the proletariat has to wage its struggle in the economic sphere (for higher wages, against unemployment, against price rises, etc.), the political sphere (for democratic rights, against national oppression, etc.) as well as the theoretical-ideological sphere (against the ideas of the reformists, centrists, nationalists, Islamists, etc.). In other words, Marxism can only exist as a current if it transforms the existing objective antagonism between the classes in all spheres of social life into a subjective antagonism where the leadership of the proletariat wages war against all its enemies in all spheres. That's why Trotsky emphasized the militant character of Bolshevism in his book *The New Course* and other writings: „*Leninism is warlike from head to foot*“⁸ Similarly, Gregory Zinoviev, another Bolshevik leader who collaborated closely with Lenin during WWI, wrote in 1916: „*Socialism is not pacifism. Socialism is militant Marxism.*“⁹ In other words, a Marxism which is not militant and militaristic against the proletariats' enemies can hardly be called Marxism.¹⁰

Related to this, Marxists have to wage a constant, educational battle against the false consciousness created by commodity fetishism. This requires collective scientific work – since insight into the inner mechanism of capitalism and the conditions for its overthrow do not appear spontaneously – and systematic propaganda of the party in the ranks of the working class.¹¹

Class War as the Organized Struggle Led by the Revolutionary Party

From all this follows that, in the political sphere, Marxism can only become an animated *Weltanschauung* if it is adhered to by a collective of people who utilize it for the revolutionary liberation struggle of the working class and all oppressed. In other words, Marxism is the world view of a class and exists only as the ideology of a collective of this class. This is why the Marxist *Weltanschauung* necessitates the formation of a revolutionary party (or its pre-party organization) – not as a luxury but as a *conditio sine qua non*. As Lenin once remarked: „*For*

7 Karl Marx: Manifesto of the Communist Party (1848), in: MECW Vol. 6, p. 503

8 Leon Trotsky: *The New Course* (1923), in: *The Challenge of the Left Opposition* (1923-25), p. 99

9 Grigori Sinowjew: *Der Krieg und die Krise des Sozialismus* (1916/1924), p. 585 (Our translation. Emphasis in the original)

10 On this, see also some informative articles from bourgeois academics like: Jacob W. Kipp: Lenin and Clausewitz: The Militarization of Marxism, 1914-1921, in: *Military Affairs* Vol. 49, 1985, pp. 184-191; James Ryan: 'Revolution is War': The Development of the Thought of V. I. Lenin on Violence, 1899-1907, in: *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 89, No. 2 (April 2011), pp. 248-273

11 Marx once remarked rightly that „*all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided.*“ (Karl Marx: *Capital*, Vol. III, MECW Vol. 37, p. 804)

*“revolutionary Marxism” outside the Social-Democratic Party is simply a parlour phrase of the legalminded windbag”*¹²

A revolutionary party is indispensable under all circumstance. Only such a party can lead the workers both in periods of retreat as well as progress. Only such a party can draw the lessons and generalize them to programmatic conclusions in periods of ups and downs of the class struggle. Only such a party can educate militants in the revolutionary programmatic and organizational methods and hence prepare the proletariat for the future struggles. At the beginning of building the Russian Marxist party, Lenin rightly stated:

*„It is ridiculous to plead different circumstances and a change of periods: the building of a fighting organisation and the conduct of political agitation are essential under any “drab, peaceful” circumstances, in any period, no matter how marked by a “declining revolutionary spirit”; moreover, it is precisely in such periods and under such circumstances that work of this kind is particularly necessary, since it is too late to form the organisation in times of explosion and outbursts; the party must be in a state of readiness to launch activity at a moment’s notice.”*¹³

The revolutionary party represents the highest form of class consciousness and organization of the proletariat as Lenin emphasized.¹⁴ The Bolsheviks – as the revolutionary Marxists in Russia were called – were the first to understand the type of party necessary for the victory of the proletarian revolution and developed such a *“party of the new type”* from 1903 onwards.¹⁵ Later – after the victory of the October Revolution – many revolutionaries in other countries followed the Russian example and founded Communist Parties. When they joined forces and founded the Communist International in March 1919, they generalized the Bolsheviks’ experience and assimilated its lessons. Lenin himself pointed out that Bolshevism had become an internationally applicable program: *„Bolshevism has become the worldwide theory and tactics of the international proletariat!”*¹⁶

The most fundamental of these lessons was that a revolutionary party is the

12 V.I. Lenin: Notes of a Publicist (1910), in: LCW Vol. 16, p. 237

13 V. I. Lenin: Where To Begin (1901), in: LCW Vol. 5, p. 18

14 *„The revolutionary party of the proletariat, the highest form of proletarian class organisation”* (V.I. Lenin: ‘Left-Wing’ Communism— An Infantile Disorder, in: LCW Vol. 31, p. 50)

15 Contrary to the currently fashionable myth spread by Lars Lih and other left-wing academics, Lenin and the Bolsheviks effectively saw themselves and operated as an independent revolutionary from 1903 onwards: *“As a current of political thought and as a political party, Bolshevism has existed since 1903.”* (V.I. Lenin: ‘Left-Wing’ Communism— An Infantile Disorder, in: LCW Vol. 31, p. 24). Trotsky too stressed this point too at the end of his life: *„The Bolshevik faction led an independent existence. (...) In essence, the question so far as Lenin was concerned was whether it was possible to remain with Bogdanov in one and the same organization which although called a “faction” bore all the traits of a party. (...) The Bolshevik faction-party carried out a struggle against Menshevism which at that time had already revealed itself completely as a petty-bourgeois agency of the liberal bourgeoisie.”* (Leon Trotsky: From a Scratch – To the Danger of Gangrene (1940); in: Leon Trotsky: In Defense of Marxism, New York 1990, p. 138)

16 V.I.Lenin: Report at a joint Session of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee, the Moscow Soviet, Factory Committees and Trade Unions, October 22, 1918, in: LCW 28, p. 116

most important precondition for a successful liberation struggle of the working class:

*“The Communist Party is the principal and fundamental weapon for the emancipation of the working class. From now on, every country must have not just groups or currents, but a Communist Party.”*¹⁷

*“The Communist International decisively rejects the view that the proletariat can accomplish its revolution without having an independent political party of its own. Every class struggle is a political struggle. The goal of this struggle, which is inevitably transformed into civil war, is the conquest of political power. Political power cannot be seized, organized, and operated except through a political party. (...) The same class struggle likewise demands the centralization and unified direction of the most varied forms of the proletarian movement (trade unions, co-operatives, factory councils, educational work, elections, etc.). Only a political party can be such a co-ordinating and guiding centre. The refusal to create and to strengthen such a party and to subordinate oneself to it implies the rejection of unity in the direction of the different fighting forces of the proletariat acting on the various fields of battle. The class struggle of the proletariat needs concentrated agitation which illuminates the various stages of the struggle from a single standpoint and directs the attention of the proletariat whenever the occasion demands to definite tasks common to the whole class. That cannot be done without centralized political machinery, i.e. without a political party.”*¹⁸

Leon Trotsky summarized this conclusion in 1924 in one of his fundamental documents, *The Lessons of October*, with the following trenchant words: *„Without a party, apart from a party, over the head of a party, or with a substitute for a party, the proletarian revolution cannot conquer. That is the principal lesson of the past decade.”*¹⁹

The need to build a revolutionary party always exists—irrespective of the concrete conditions in the class struggle or the actual strength of the revolutionaries. Trotsky once wrote that even if there are only three revolutionaries throughout the entire world, they have to organize and fight for the formation of a Bolshevik party:

*„Let there remain in exile not three hundred and fifty who are true to our banner, but thirty-five or even three; the banner will remain, the strategic line will remain, and the future will remain.”*²⁰

The party is the leader and strategist of the class war waged against the exploitive capitalist system. Hence, the whole work of the party or the pre-

17 Communist International: Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution, approved by the Second Comintern Congress (1920); in: John Riddell (Ed.): *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite!* (Volume 1), Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress of the Communist International, 1920, p. 200

18 Communist International: Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution, pp. 129-130

19 Leon Trotsky: *The Lessons of October* (1924); in: Leon Trotsky: *The Challenge of the Left Opposition* (1923-25), Pathfinder Press, New York 1975, p. 252

20 Leon Trotsky: *How to help the Centrists?* (1929); in: *Writings 1929*, p. 398

party organization is orientated towards preparing for and organizing the class struggle. The Communist International stressed this point:

*“Our entire party work consists of practical or theoretical struggle or preparation for struggle.”*²¹

Therefore, the revolutionary organization is – as Lenin stressed in *What Is To Be Done?* and many other works – a *“combat organization”*, i.e., an organization whose members are all militants waging permanent war against the capitalist system and its lackeys at the top of the workers’ movement. In a short article in 1922, Nikolai Bukharin, one of the key Bolshevik leaders, gave an excellent description of the thoroughly fighting character of the party and the total dedication of its members. He rightly called the party *“the iron cohort of the proletarian revolution.”*²²

In his *Notebooks 1933-35*, Leon Trotsky once equated the Bolshevik party to the personified formula *„Lenin + Kamo.“*²³ Kamo was the famous Armenian leader of a Bolshevik fighting squad who organized a number of armed raids to raise funds for the party and to attack the enemy forces.²⁴ In combining Lenin and Kamo, Trotsky expressed the Bolshevik unity of theory and practice – the theoretical and propagandist fighter as well as the military fighter.

Hence, if we speak about *“militants”* and *“fighters”* we don’t use these words in a necessarily military sense. Bolsheviks are fighters against the bourgeois order and they fight against it by all means necessary and politically appropriate. While under some circumstances this will also include military means, it will first and foremost involve practical, organizational, propagandistic, and other means to win the hearts and minds of the working class.

To summarize, building the revolutionary party respectively the pre-party organization is always and under all conditions the most important task – in favorable as well as unfavorable circumstances and with numerically weak or strong forces. Such a party must be built as a *combat organization* or it is no revolutionary force.

21 Communist International: Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work; Adopted at the 24th Session of the Third Congress of the Communist International, 12 July 1921, in: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents Selected and Edited by Jane Degras, Vol. I 1919-1922, p. 260

22 See Nikolai Bucharin: Die eiserne Kohorte der Revolution (1922), reprinted in Karl-Heinz Neumann (Hrsg.), Marxismus Archiv, Bd.I, Marxismus und Politik, Frankfurt/M. 1971, pp. 319-323

23 Leon Trotsky: Notebooks 1933-35. Writings on Lenin, Dialectics and Evolutionism, New York 1986, p. 85

24 For a biographical overview of Kamo – whose real name was Ter-Petrosya – see: David Shub: Kamo – the Legendary Old Bolshevik of the Caucasus, in: Russian Review, Vol. 19, No. 3 (1960), pp. 227-247. See also: Boris Souvarine: Stalin - Anmerkungen zur Geschichte des Bolschewismus,- München Bernard & Graefe 1980, pp. 108-115.

The Proletariat as a Homogenous but Multi-Layered Class

Marxism insists that the proletariat is the class in bourgeois society which is more homogenous than other classes – the bourgeoisie or the petty-bourgeoisie, for example. The modus operandi of the latter classes is characterized by constant rivalry against their competitors. The working class, on the other hand, is united by its working and living conditions as a class which owns no means of production and is exploited by the capitalists. This forms the objective precondition for a united struggle against the exploitive capitalist class.

However, Marxism starts by recognizing that the working class is not a fully homogenous class. It is divided both socially as well as politically. Socially it is divided not only between blue-collar and white-collar workers, workers of big and small enterprises, more and less qualified workers, etc., but also – and more importantly – along specific lines of special oppression: workers in imperialist countries and workers in semi-colonial countries, female workers, nationally oppressed and migrant workers, proletarian youth, etc. Furthermore, the bourgeoisie in the imperialist countries is capable, through its exploitation of the (semi-)colonial world, to expropriate huge surplus profits with which it is able to bribe the upper strata of the proletariat – the labor aristocracy. Through such bribery, monopoly capital can integrate these most privileged sectors of the working class and transform them into supporters of bourgeois rule. While this aristocratic layer is rather small in numbers – compared with the entire proletariat – it plays a dominant role in the trade unions and reformist parties. Hence, the revolutionary party – in contrast to the reformists and most centrists – must be oriented not towards the labor aristocracy but rather towards the middle and lower strata of the proletariat. This was also the understanding of the Communist International in the times of Lenin and Trotsky:

„One of the chief causes hampering the revolutionary working-class movement in the developed capitalist countries is the fact that because of their colonial possessions and the super-profits gained by finance capital, etc., the capitalists of these countries have been able to create a relatively larger and more stable labour aristocracy, a section which comprises a small minority of the working class. This minority enjoys better terms of employment and is most-imbued with a narrow-minded craft spirit and with petty-bourgeois and imperialist prejudices. It forms the real social pillar of the Second International, of the reformists and the centrists. At present it might even be called the social mainstay of the bourgeoisie. No preparation of the proletariat for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie is possible, even in the preliminary sense, unless an immediate, systematic, extensive and open struggle is waged against this stratum, which, as experience has already fully shown, will no doubt provide the bourgeois White guards with many a recruit after the victory of the proletariat. All parties affiliated to the Third International must at all costs give effect to the slogans: “Deeper into the heart of the masses”, “Closer links with the masses” — meaning by the masses all those who toil and are exploited by capital, particularly those who are least organized and educated, who

are most oppressed and least amenable to organisation."²⁵

As we have shown in *The Great Robbery of the South* and other documents, the diversification of the world proletariat has increased tremendously since the time of Lenin and Trotsky.²⁶ Since then the working class has grown enormously in the semi-colonial countries so that today about ¾ of the international working class are living in the South. Therefore we state that the focus of the world proletariat has shifted to the workers in the semi-colonial world, China, and Russia, who are often super-exploited. In addition, important developments have taken place in the imperialist countries: the share of the wage-dependent middle class has grown substantially (while the old urban petty-bourgeoisie and the peasantry have declined substantially). Furthermore, the diversification inside the working class has increased tremendously: precarious and migrant layers of the proletariat have become important sectors while the labor aristocracy has increased its privileges. Thus, the role of the revolutionary party – nationally and internationally – to unite an increasingly diversified world proletariat and to rally, in particular, the lower and middle strata of the working class has become more important than ever.

These challenges for the revolutionary party in the old imperialist countries has become even greater since the proletariat there – particularly the native, non-migrant sectors – are strongly bound to the culture and traditions of their ruling classes. Lenin and Trotsky repeatedly pointed out these challenges:

„The proletariat is a powerful social unity which, in periods of hard revolutionary fighting for aims which are those of the whole class, comes completely into line. But in this unity we can see an extreme diversity and even a good few incompatibilities – from the illiterate shepherd to the highly skilled mechanic. Without this diversity the Communist task of unification and education would be the simplest thing in the world. One might say that the greater the history of a country, the greater is that of its working class, the richer it is in memories, traditions, habits, old groupings of forces – and the more difficult it is to form from it a revolutionary unity. Our Russian proletariat has little history or tradition behind it and this certainly facilitated its preparation for revolution in the Red October. But the same fact has since hindered its work of economic construction. Most of our workers lack the simplest habits and abilities of culture (the power to read, to write, to keep healthy, to be punctual). The European worker has had a long time in which to acquire these habits in bourgeois society; that is why the higher grades of European Labour hold so tightly to the bourgeois order, to democracy, to the capitalist free Press, and other benefits of this sort. Our backward Russian bourgeoisie has scarcely given anything of this sort to the workers; that is why

²⁵ Communist International: Theses on the Basic Tasks of the Communist International (1920). Resolution of the Second Congress of the Communist International; in: John Riddell (Ed.): *Workers of the World and Oppressed People, Unite! Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920*, New York 1991, p. 755

²⁶ See Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism*, Vienna 2013, pp. 69-80 and 228-240

the Russian proletariat has more easily broken with the bourgeoisie and overthrown it. But for the same reason it is forced for the most part to win and accumulate only now (i.e., on the basis of the workers' Socialist State) the simplest habits of culture."²⁷

Furthermore, these challenges are increased by the thoroughly degenerate and bourgeois character of the old reformist leaderships of the workers movements'. The revolutionary party in the South faces different but also important challenges. Here, the proletariat often has a new, raw character since many workers have recent origins in the peasantry and are thus affected with rural, patriarchal cultures.

The task of the revolutionary party is to fight against all forms of oppression and to unite the proletariat on the basis of the joint struggle for the liberation of the proletariat and all oppressed. This is only possible if the Bolshevik-Communists understand that the historical interests of the working class are not limited to the economic sphere (wages, jobs, etc.) but also include the political (democratic rights, foreign oppression, etc.) as well as ideological-cultural sphere (religion, bourgeois media, tradition, etc.). Hence, Lenin explained that the revolutionary party must act as a "tribune of the people":

„It cannot be too strongly maintained that this is still not Social-Democracy, that the Social-Democrat's ideal should not be the trade-union secretary, but the tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to generalise all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth before all his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for all and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat."²⁸

Naturally, the revolutionary working class movement will be not dominated by its upper, aristocratic sectors – as is the case with the reformist workers' movement – but rather by the most conscious and active sectors from the lower and middle proletarian strata.

In addition to these social divisions, the proletariat is also politically divided as well between workers who are revolutionaries, reformists, religious, conservatives, right-wing chauvinists, and a-political in their outlook.

From this follows that the revolutionary party can only lead the working class when it first wins over and organizes the most advanced and militant minority – the proletarian vanguard. Hence, the revolutionary party is not a mass party but a vanguard party.²⁹ The revolutionary party can only become a mass party

²⁷ Leo Trotzki: *Fragen des Alltagslebens* (1923), Berlin 1973, pp. 23-24; in English: Leon Trotsky: *Man Does Not Live by Politics Alone* (1923)

²⁸ V. I. Lenin: *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, p. 423 (Emphasis in the original)

²⁹ The Comintern summarized the role of the vanguard party in this way: "The Communist Party should be the vanguard, the front-line troops of the proletariat, leading in all phases of its revolutionary class struggle and the subsequent transitional period toward the realization of socialism, the first stage of communist society." (Communist International: *Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of*

in a revolutionary situation when the working class becomes overwhelmingly radicalized.

The task of the communist pre-party organization is to build such a party of the vanguard. Its main orientation, therefore, is the vanguard sectors of the working class and the oppressed – i.e., the most conscious and militant elements.

Marxism, Fatalistic Objectivism, and Voluntary Subjectivism

Another foundation of the Marxist understanding of the vanguard party is its conception of the role of the subjective factor in history. The whole school of revisionism is based on a kind of *fatalistic objectivism*, which portrays progress in history as an irreversible process. Depending on the current mood among the petty-bourgeoisie and the labor bureaucracy, the revisionists declare “optimistically” that the working class will irreversibly march towards victory. By this they justify their refusal to energetically intervene in the class struggle and transform it to a higher level through systematic agitation for more militant forms of the struggle and organization as well as against the foot-dragging bureaucrats. The refusal of reformists to agitate for more militant forms of strikes; their opposition to the formation of mass action committees during struggles; their hysterical warnings not to take up armed struggle against fascists or the police in periods of heightened confrontation (e.g., social democratic and Stalinist parties); the centrists’ assertion that the huge social weight of the proletariat will allow it to march peacefully towards socialism and, therefore, it doesn’t need a workers’ militia and an armed insurrection to take power (as, for example, the CWI and IMT maintain); their refusal to warn the workers of the betrayal of the labor bureaucracy because “*the workers wouldn’t understand*” (as, for example, the IST, CWI, and IMT claim) – all these are variations of such revisionist fatalistic objectivism.

An “ultra-left” variation of such fatalistic objectivism is the permanent reference to the “*final crisis*” of capitalism and, as a consequence, the refusal to elaborate and implement a series of tactics to intervene in the ongoing class struggle. These revisionists are all incapable of understanding “*the importance of class-conscious revolutionary activity in history,*” which can only be organized by a revolutionary party.³⁰

Voluntary subjectivism, i.e., the pursuing of radical tactics without taking into account the concrete objective relation of forces between the classes, is the other side of the same coin. Such a policy is usually propounded by ultra-leftists (including anarchists) and can find expression in the boycotting of elections (in periods of low class struggle), refusal to work inside reformist trade unions, etc.³¹ They fail to understand Marxism as the correctly weighted combination

Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work (1921)

30 Leon Trotsky: Centrist Alchemy or Marxism? (1935); in: Writings 1934/35, pp. 262-263

31 An excellent study on Lenin and the Bolsheviks’ approach to work in bourgeois parliaments has

of science and revolutionary will.

*„The revolutionary worker must, before all else, understand that Marxism, the only scientific theory of the proletarian revolution, has nothing in common with the fatalistic hope for the “final” crisis. Marxism is, in its very essence, a set of directives for revolutionary action. Marxism does not overlook will and courage, but rather aids them to find the right road.“*³²

Related to this is Lenin’s mastering of the dialectic and its application to politics in form of a highly flexible conception of revolutionary maneuvers including abrupt turns. This *Gibkost* – as Lenin called it – is an essential characteristic for revolutionary policy because it enables the party to react quickly to important changes in the relationship of forces between the classes or in the consciousness of the working class. Trotsky pointed this out as a central strength of Bolshevism: *„Leninism is the application of this method in the conditions of an exceptional historical epoch. It is precisely this union of the peculiarities of the epoch and the method that determines that courageous, self-assured policy of brusque turns of which Lenin gave us the finest models, and which he illuminated theoretically and generalized on more than one occasion.“*³³

The Party as Vanguard

From the beginning, the conception of the vanguard party was one of the cornerstones of Bolshevism – Lenin most famously developed it in his book *What Is To Be Done?* – and was later generalized by the Communist International as an alternative to the reformist, ideologically loose “mass party” type of the Second International. These lessons were summarized at the Second Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) in 1920 in its *Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution*.

“The communist party is a part of the working class, the most advanced, most class-conscious, and hence most revolutionary part. By a process of natural selection the communist party is formed of the best, most class-conscious, most devoted and far-sighted workers. The communist party has no interests other than the interests of the working class as a whole. The communist party is differentiated from the working class as a whole by the fact that it has a clear view of the entire historical path of the

recently been published by August H. Nimtz in two volumes: *Lenin’s Electoral Strategy from Marx and Engels through the Revolution of 1905. The Ballot, the Streets—or Both* and *Lenin’s Electoral Strategy from 1907 to the October Revolution of 1917. The Ballot, the Streets—or Both*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2014.

32 Leon Trotsky: *Once Again, Whither France?* Part I (1935), in: Leon Trotsky: *On France*, Monad Press, New York 1979, pp. 70-71

33 Leon Trotsky: *The New Course* (1923), in: *The Challenge of the Left Opposition* (1923-25), p. 96. In his *Philosophical Notebooks* Lenin emphasized this side of Hegel’s dialectic: *„All-sided, universal flexibility of concepts, a flexibility reaching to the identity of opposites,— that is the essence of the matter. (...) Flexibility, applied objectively, i.e., reflecting the all-sidedness of the material process and its unity, is dialectics, is the correct reflection of the eternal development of the world.“* (V.I.Lenin: *Conspectus of Hegel’s Science of Logic* (1914); in: *LCW Vol. 38*, p. 110)

*working class in its totality and is concerned, at every bend in this road, to defend the interests not of separate groups or occupations, but of the working class in its totality. The communist party is the organizational and political lever which the most advanced section of the working class uses to direct the entire mass of the proletariat and the semi-proletariat along the right road.”*³⁴

The Comintern warned against blurring the conception of the party and class, and emphasized the need to constitute the vanguard as a separate party which fights against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois influences inside the working class and which does not adapt to consciousness of backward workers.

*„A sharp distinction must be made between the concepts of party and class. The members of the ‘Christian’ and liberal trade unions of Germany, England, and other countries are undoubtedly parts of the working class. The more or less numerous groups of workers who still follow Scheidemann, Gompers, and their like, are undoubtedly part of the working class. In certain historical circumstances it is even quite possible for the working class to include very numerous reactionary elements. It is the task of communism not to adapt itself to these backward sections of the working class but to raise the entire working class to the level of the communist vanguard. Confusion of these two concepts — party and class — can lead to the greatest mistakes and bewilderment. It is for example clear that in spite of the sentiments and prejudices of a certain section of the working class during the imperialist war, the workers’ party had at all costs to combat those sentiments and prejudices by standing for the historical interests of the proletariat which required the proletarian party to declare war on the war. Thus, on the outbreak of the imperialist war in 1914 the parties of the social-traitors in all countries, when they supported the bourgeoisie of their ‘own’ countries, always and consistently explained that they were acting in accordance with the will of the working class. But they forgot that, even if that were true, it must be the task of the proletarian party in such a state of affairs to come out against the sentiments of the majority of the workers and, in defiance of them, to represent the historical interests of the proletariat. In the same way, at the beginning of this century, the Russian Mensheviks of that time (the so-called Economists) rejected open political struggle against Tsarism on the ground that the working class as a whole had not yet reached an understanding of the political struggle. In the same way the right wing of the German Independents always insist, when acting irresolutely and inadequately, on ‘the will of the masses’, without understanding that the party is there to lead the masses and show them the way.”*³⁵

It is equally important to recognize that the vanguard, and hence the vanguard party, can only act as a vanguard if it is rooted in the masses. Without an understanding of the actual, often confused consciousness of the masses, without building strong bridgeheads among the workers and oppressed, without gaining their trust, the vanguard party cannot possibly lead the masses.

34 Communist International: Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution, approved by the Second Comintern Congress (1920); in: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents. Selected and edited by Jane Degras, Volume I 1919-1922, p. 128

35 Communist International: Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution (1920), p. 129

In a note, Lenin once summarized the character of the vanguard party such:

„Party = Vanguard

(1) revolutionary part

(2) connected with the masses“³⁶

The Bolshevik conception of the party is not a purely organizational question as many post-modernist critics of Leninism claim. In fact, it is a cornerstone of the Marxist theory in the field of politics as Trotsky pointed out:

*“Whereas the theoretical structure of the political economy of Marxism rests entirely upon the conception of value as materialized labor, the revolutionary policy of Marxism rests upon the conception of the party as the vanguard of the proletariat. Whatever may be the social sources and political causes of opportunistic mistakes and deviations, they are always reduced ideologically to an erroneous understanding of the revolutionary party, of its relation to other proletarian organizations and to the class as a whole.”*³⁷

Leadership, Party, and Class

The workers’ vanguard provides leadership to the working class, just as the party provides leadership to the workers’ vanguard and the party’s leading core provides leadership to its membership.³⁸ This leading role is based on the revolutionary program, the organized roots of the party in the class, and the iron discipline and complete devotion of the party’s members to the cause.

Lenin summarized the experience of the Bolsheviks in his book ‘Left-Wing’ Communism on the role of the leadership:

„The first questions to arise are: how is the discipline of the proletariat’s revolutionary party maintained? How is it tested? How is it reinforced? First, by the class-consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its tenacity, self-sacrifice and heroism. Second, by its ability to link up, maintain the closest contact, and — if you wish — merge, in certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people — primarily with the proletariat, but also with the non-proletarian masses of working people. Third, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard, by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided the broad masses have seen, from their own experience, that they are correct. Without these conditions, discipline in a revolutionary party really capable of being the party of the advanced class, whose mission it is to overthrow the bourgeoisie and transform the

36 W. I. Lenin: Materialien zum II. Kongreß der Kommunistischen International (1920); in: LW EB 1917-23, p. 193 (our translation)

37 Leon Trotsky: The Mistakes of Rightist Elements of the Communist League on the Trade Union Question. Some Preliminary Remarks (1931), (Emphasis in the original), in: Leon Trotsky: Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay, Pathfinder, New York 1990, pp. 130-131

38 Trotsky drew attention to this relationship in one his last articles before he was killed by a Stalinist agent in August 1940: *“The vital mainspring in this [revolutionary, Ed.] process is the party, just as the vital mainspring in the mechanism of the party is its leadership. The role and the responsibility of the leadership in a revolutionary epoch is colossal.”* (Leon Trotsky: The Class, the Party and the Leadership. Why Was the Spanish Proletariat Defeated? (Questions of Marxist Theory), in: Fourth International, Vol.1, No.7 (1940), p.193)

*whole of society, cannot be achieved. Without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end up in phrase-mongering and clowning. On the other hand, these conditions cannot emerge at once. They are created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience. Their creation is facilitated by a correct revolutionary theory, which, in its turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement.”*³⁹

The relationship between the working class, the party and its leadership can be characterized as one of *concentric circles*. The working class rallies around the party's organization, while these organizations are led by the party's cadres and, finally, the party's central core leads the party as a whole. Nikolai Bukharin, one of the leading Bolsheviki, very well elaborated the party's understanding of this relationship in an article in 1922 in which he characterized the Bolshevik party as an *“iron cohort”* – a phrase which according to Victor Serge became popular among the Bolshevik cadre.

„For five years the Russian proletariat has maintained its power. (...) Undoubtedly the first factor which is to “blame” is the historical circumstances under which the toil-stained battalions of labour have advanced with mighty strides. (...) But there was yet another cause. The existence of an iron cohort absolutely devoted to the revolution; the existence of a party, unexampled in the whole history of great class struggles. This party had passed through the hard school of illegal action, its class will had been developed in the stress of conflict, it had won and trained its comrades in suffering and deprivation. The very hardness of the school evolved admirable workers, whose task it is to transform and conquer the world. In order to gain a clear idea of how this party has been formed, let us cast a glance at the main features of its development.

First a few words regarding the general staff. Our opponents do not deny of we have excellent leaders. (...) What is the truth in this respect? The main point is the careful choice of leaders, a choice ensuring a combination of competence, cohesion and absolute unity of will, With this watchword the leadership of the party was formed. It, this respect the party owes much to Lenin. That which narrow-minded opportunists call anti-democracy, mania for conspiracy, or personal dictatorship, in reality one of the most important principles of the organisation. The selection of a group of persons possessing absolute unity of thought, and filled with the same revolutionary flame, this was the first pre-requisite for successful action. And this pre-requisite was fulfilled by merciless combat against any deviation from orthodox Bolshevism. This utter rejection of compromise, this constant self-purging, welded the leading group so firmly together that no power on earth could divide it.

The most important elements of the party grouped themselves around these leaders. The strict discipline of Bolshevism, its iron cohesion, its uncompromising spirit, even during the period of joint work with the Mensheviks, its absolute unity of viewpoint, and its perfect centralisation—these have invariably been the characteristic features of our party. The comrades were blindly devoted to the party. “Party patriotism,” the passionate enthusiasm of struggle against all other groups, whether in workshop, public

39 V.I. Lenin: 'Left-Wing' Communism— An Infantile Disorder, in: LCW Vol. 31, pp. 24-25

meeting, or prison, converted our party into a sort of revolutionary religious order. For this reason Bolshevism aroused the abhorrence of all liberals, of all reformists, of all tolerant, vacillating, and weak-minded elements.

The party demanded real work among the masses from all its members, whatever the conditions and difficulties. It was precisely in this regard that our first differences with the Mensheviks arose. In order to carry out our purpose we formed fighting units. These were not composed of fine speakers, sympathising intellectuals, or migratory creatures here to-day and there to-morrow, but of men ready to give their all for the revolution, for the fight, and for the party; ready to face imprisonment and to fight at the barricades, to bear every deprivation and suffer constant persecution. Thus the second concentric circle was formed around our party, its fundamental proletarian working staff. But our party has never been narrowed or limited within any sectarian confines. It must be energetically emphasised that the party has never considered itself to be an aim in itself; it has invariably regarded itself as an instrument for the formation of the mind of the masses, for gathering together and leading the masses. (...)

In this way the third and the fourth ring are formed which already reach beyond the party: a ring of workers organizations which are under the influence of the party and a ring of the whole class and the masses who are led by the vanguard of the party thorough its organizations.”⁴⁰

It is indispensable that the revolutionary party or the pre-party organization observes this conception of concentric circles during its process of party building. A car can only work if the motor, the wheels, and the pedals are in the right place and correctly connected with each other. Otherwise we have only a useless wreck. Similarly, the party must carefully select its leadership; it must seriously build its party-affiliated organizations; etc. Otherwise it will become useless for the class struggle.

Naturally, such a conception is valid not only for the revolutionary party but also for the pre-party organization, albeit with certain modifications. The pre-party organization does not already lead and organize the vanguard and, hence, it cannot lead the working class. It can only provide a lead in exceptional cases and areas where it has some successes in building roots among the proletariat and the oppressed. However, the role of the leadership is no less important in the pre-party organization and similarly the role of the cadres is no less important in building party-affiliated organizations around the pre-party organization in order to organize workers and the oppressed for the revolutionary cause. Without such a leadership and party cadres, the pre-party organization will never find the correct road to become a party of the vanguard, but will rather be overpowered and disorientated by the huge obstacles along this road.

40 Nikolai Bukharin: A Great Marxian Party (1923), in: The Communist Review, May 1923, Vol. 4, No. 1. The article is an incomplete translation of Bukharin's article "The Iron Cohort" which was published in 1922. We have translated the last paragraph ourselves. (Source: Nikolai Bukharin: Die eiserne Kohorte der Revolution (1922), reprinted in Karl-Heinz Neumann (Hrsg.), Marxismus Archiv, Bd.I, Marxismus und Politik, Frankfurt/M. 1971, pp. 319-323)

The Revolutionary Party Brings Class Political Consciousness to the Proletariat

One of the most important – and disputed as well as misunderstood – elements of Lenin’s theory of the party is its role in bringing political class consciousness to the working class. In *What Is To Be Done?* Lenin explained that socialist consciousness – defined as a rounded understanding of capitalism’s mechanism of exploitation and oppression, the role of the classes and their political representatives, and the corresponding tasks of the program of proletarian revolution – cannot arise spontaneously from the struggle. Rather, it has to be discussed and developed in a scientific way by the party of revolutionary men and women and transmitted to the working class.

This idea was expressed by Lenin and his supporters in various writings:

„Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships of all classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of the interrelations between all classes. For that reason, the reply to the question as to what must be done to bring political knowledge to the workers cannot be merely the answer with which, in the majority of cases, the practical workers, especially those inclined towards Economism, mostly content themselves, namely: “To go among the workers.” To bring political knowledge to the workers the Social Democrats must go among all classes of the population; they must dispatch units of their army in all directions.”⁴¹

“Social-Democracy is not confined to simple service to the working-class movement: it represents “the combination of socialism and the working-class movement” (to use Karl Kautsky’s definition which repeats the basic ideas of the Communist Manifesto); the task of Social-Democracy is to bring definite socialist ideals to the spontaneous working-class movement, to connect this movement with socialist convictions that should attain the level of contemporary science, to connect it with the regular political struggle for democracy as a means of achieving socialism—in a word, to fuse this spontaneous movement into one indestructible whole with the activity of the revolutionary party.”⁴²

„We are the party of a class, and therefore almost the entire class (and in times of war, in a period of civil war, the entire class) should act under the leadership of our Party, should adhere to our Party as closely as possible. But it would be Manilovism and “tail-ism” to think that the entire class, or almost the entire class, can ever rise, under capitalism, to the level of consciousness and activity of its vanguard, of its Social-Democratic Party. No sensible Social-Democrat has ever doubted that under capitalism even the trade union organisations (which are more primitive and more comprehensible

41 V. I. Lenin: *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, p. 422

42 V. I. Lenin: *Our Immediate Task* (1899), in: LCW Vol. 4, p. 217

*to the undeveloped sections) are incapable of embracing the entire, or almost the entire, working class. To forget the distinction between the vanguard and the whole of the masses gravitating towards it, to forget the vanguard's constant duty of raising ever wider sections to its own advanced level, means simply to deceive oneself, to shut one's eyes to the immensity of our tasks, and to narrow down these tasks."*⁴³

Contrary to the claims of various traditions like Tony Cliff's IST or the Grant/Taaffe/Woods CWI/IMT tradition, Lenin never renounced this basic insights developed in *What Is To Be Done?* Quite the contrary, he later repeated the idea that the majority of the working class cannot achieve a socialist consciousness as long as they are dominated and oppressed by the bourgeoisie.

*„On the other hand, the idea, common among the old parties and the old leaders of the Second International, that the majority of the exploited toilers can achieve complete clarity of socialist consciousness and firm socialist convictions and character under capitalist slavery, under the yoke of the bourgeoisie (which assumes an indefinite variety of forms that become more subtle and at the same time more brutal and ruthless the higher the cultural level in a given capitalist country) is also idealisation of capitalism and of bourgeois democracy, as well as deception of the workers. In fact, it is only after the vanguard of the proletariat, supported by the whole or the majority of this, the only revolutionary class, overthrows the exploiters, suppresses them, emancipates the exploited from their state of slavery and-immediately improves their conditions of life at the expense of the expropriated capitalists—it is only after this, and only in the actual process of an acute class struggle, that the masses of the toilers and exploited can be educated, trained and organised around the proletariat under whose influence and guidance, they can get rid of the selfishness, disunity, vices and weaknesses engendered by private property; only then will they be converted into a free union of free workers.“*⁴⁴

Lenin's thesis of bringing class political consciousness to the proletariat from outside has been repeatedly discredited and distorted as meaning that Lenin would attribute to the intelligentsia the role of leading the working class. This claim is justified by a quote from Lenin, as well one from Karl Kautsky, in the same book in which they pointed out that the socialist theory was developed by intellectuals coming from a bourgeois class background.⁴⁵

43 V. I. Lenin: *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* (1904); in: LCW Vol. 7, pp. 258-259

44 V. I. Lenin: *Theses on Fundamental Tasks of The Second Congress Of The Communist International* (1920)

45 *"We have said that there could not have been Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc.* The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working-class movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia. In the period under*

However, Lenin wrote in the very same book and on the same page – commenting on Kautsky – that workers also take part in elaborating the socialist theory:

*“This does not mean, of course, that the workers have no part in creating such an ideology. They take part, however, not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians, as Proudhons and Weitlings; in other words, they take part only when they are able, and to the extent that they are able, more or less, to acquire the knowledge of their age and develop that knowledge. But in order that working men may succeed in this more often, every effort must be made to raise the level of the consciousness of the workers in general;”*⁴⁶

We shall add that this is even truer today when – compared with Lenin’s and Kautsky’s time a century ago – the level of education of the working class has risen tremendously and hence workers are much better situated to play a central role in writing articles and developing theoretical positions. In addition, it should also be noted that, at the same time, sectors of the intelligentsia have become proletarianized.

In addition to this, Lenin and the Bolsheviks fought strongly against the view that intellectuals should play a dominant role in the revolutionary party. Quite the contrary, they stressed again and again that intellectuals *must not dominate*

discussion, the middle nineties, this doctrine not only represented the completely formulated programme of the Emancipation of Labour group, but had already won over to its side the majority of the revolutionary youth in Russia.” (V. I. Lenin: What Is To Be Done? (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, pp. 375-376)

“Many of our revisionist critics believe that Marx asserted that economic development and the class struggle create, not only the conditions for socialist production, but also, and directly, the consciousness of its necessity. And these critics assert that England, the country most highly developed capitalistically, is more remote than any other from this consciousness. Judging by the draft, one might assume that this allegedly orthodox- Marxist view, which is thus refuted, was shared by the committee that drafted the Austrian programme. In the draft programme it is stated: ‘The more capitalist development increases the numbers of the proletariat, the more the proletariat is compelled and becomes fit to fight against capitalism. The proletariat becomes conscious’ of the possibility and of the necessity for socialism.’ In this connection socialist consciousness appears to be a necessary and direct result of the proletarian class struggle. But this is absolutely untrue. Of course, socialism, as a doctrine, has its roots in modern economic relationships just as the class struggle of the proletariat has, and, like the latter, emerges from the struggle against the capitalist-created poverty and misery of the masses. But socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions. Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition for socialist production as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one nor the other, no matter how much it may desire to do so; both arise out of the modern social process. The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia: it was in the minds of individual members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduce it into the proletarian class struggle where conditions allow that to be done. Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without [von Aussen Hineingetragenes] and not something that arose within it spontaneously [urwüchsig]. Accordingly, the old Hainfeld programme quite rightly stated that the task of Social-Democracy is to imbue the proletariat [literally: saturate the proletariat] with the consciousness of its position and the consciousness of its task. There would be no need for this if consciousness arose of itself from the class struggle. The new draft copied this proposition from the old programme, and attached it to the proposition mentioned above. But this completely broke the line of thought....” (Karl Kautsky, quoted in V. I. Lenin: What Is To Be Done? (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, pp. 383-384)

46 V. I. Lenin: What Is To Be Done? (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, p. 384

a Marxist organization and only those should be admitted to membership who break with the (petty-)bourgeois class and habits and subordinate themselves to the proletarian cause. This was already one of the main differences between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks at the time of the split in 1903/04.

„Under the name of the Party “minority” there have united a variety of elements who are linked by a conscious or unconscious desire to preserve circle relationships, pre-party forms of organisation. (...) Lastly, the opposition cadres have in general been drawn chiefly from those elements in our Party which consist primarily of intellectuals. The intelligentsia is always more individualistic than the proletariat, owing to its very conditions of life and work, which do not directly involve a large-scale combination of efforts, do not directly educate it through organised collective labour. The intellectual elements therefore find it harder to adapt themselves to the discipline of Party life, and those of them who are not equal to it naturally raise the standard of revolt against the necessary organisational limitations, and elevate their instinctive anarchism to a principle of struggle, misnaming it a desire for “autonomy”, a demand for “tolerance”, etc. The section of the Party abroad, where the circles are comparatively long-lived, where theoreticians of various shades are gathered, and where the intelligentsia decidedly predominates, was bound to be most inclined to the views of the “minority”, which there as a result soon proved to be the actual majority. Russia, on the other hand, where the voice of the organised proletarians is louder, where the Party intelligentsia too, being in closer and more direct contact with them, is trained in a more proletarian spirit, and where the exigencies of the immediate struggle make the need for organised unity more strongly felt, came out in vigorous opposition to the circle spirit and the disruptive anarchistic tendencies. It gave quite clear expression to this attitude in numerous statements by committees and other Party organisations.“⁴⁷

47 V. I. Lenin: To The Party 1904); in: LCW Vol. 7, pp. 453-454. Lenin also repeated this idea many times in this book which gave a balance sheet of the reason for the split between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.

„In a word, Comrade Martov’s formula will either remain a dead letter, an empty phrase, or it will be of benefit mainly and almost exclusively to “intellectuals who are thoroughly imbued with bourgeois individualism” and do not wish to join an organisation. In words, Martov’s formulation defends the interests of the broad strata of the proletariat, but in fact it serves the interests of the bourgeois intellectuals, who fight shy of proletarian discipline and organisation. No one will venture to deny that the intelligentsia, as a special stratum of modern capitalist society, is characterised, by and large, precisely by individualism and incapacity for discipline and organisation (cf., for example, Kautsky’s well-known articles on the intelligentsia). This, incidentally is a feature which unfavourably distinguishes this social stratum from the proletariat; it is one of the reasons for the flabbiness and instability of the intellectual, which the proletariat so often feels; and this trait of the intelligentsia is intimately bound up with its customary mode of life, its mode of earning a livelihood, which in a great many respects approximates to the petty-bourgeois mode of existence (working in isolation or in very small groups, etc.). Nor is it fortuitous, lastly, that the defenders of Comrade Martov’s formulation were the ones who had to cite the example of professors and high-school students! It was not champions of a broad proletarian struggle who, in the controversy over Paragraph 1, took the field against champions of a radically conspiratorial organisation, as Comrades Martynov and Axelrod thought, but the supporters of bourgeois-intellectual individualism who clashed with the supporters of proletarian organisation and discipline.“

(V. I. Lenin: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (1904); in: LCW Vol. 7, p. 267)

„For the factory, which seems only a bogey to some, represents that highest form of capitalist co-operation which has united and disciplined the proletariat, taught it to organise, and placed it at the head of all the

Thus while a revolutionary party of a Bolshevik pre-party organization welcomes wholeheartedly all sincere intellectuals who break with their non-proletarian class background and willingly serve the cause of the working class' liberation struggle, it should not become dominated by petty-bourgeois intellectuals.

On the Bolsheviks, Their Membership, and Their Leadership

The Bolsheviks did not only proclaim such a conception of the revolutionary party but also undertook strong and successful efforts to implement it. Out of a population of 126 million (1897) only about 10 million were industrial workers and another 20 million were poor peasants who were forced to look for an additional (often proletarian) job.⁴⁸ If one takes into account the tremendous repression of the Tsarist regime, the terrible working and living conditions which hardly left time for political activity, and the widespread backward popular consciousness at the beginning of the 20th century, it is easy to imagine the huge challenges which Marxists faced in building a revolutionary workers' party.

Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks were clearly more successful than the centrist Mensheviks in recruiting workers to their organization. In a sociological study about Russian Marxism between 1898 and 1907, the historian David Lane documented that the Bolsheviks were already an organization dominated by the working class in 1905. Out of 8,400 members 61.9% were workers (peasants:

other sections of the toiling and exploited population. And Marxism, the ideology of the proletariat trained by capitalism, has been and is teaching unstable intellectuals to distinguish between the factory as a means of exploitation (discipline based on fear of starvation) and the factory as a means of organisation (discipline based on collective work united by the conditions of a technically highly developed form of production). The discipline and organisation which come so hard to the bourgeois intellectual are very easily acquired by the proletariat just because of this factory "schooling". Mortal fear of this school and utter failure to understand its importance as an organising factor are characteristic of the ways of thinking which reflect the petty-bourgeois mode of life and which give rise to the species of anarchism that the German Social-Democrats call Edelanarchismus, that is, the anarchism of the "noble" gentleman, or aristocratic anarchism, as I would call it." (V. I. Lenin: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (1904); in: LCW Vol. 7, p. 389)

„This is, where the proletariat who has been through the school of the "factory" can and should teach a lesson to anarchistic individualism. The class-conscious worker has long since emerged from the state of infancy when he used to fight shy of the intellectual as such. The class-conscious worker appreciates the richer store of knowledge and the wider political outlook which he finds among Social-Democratic intellectuals. But as we proceed with the building of a real party, the class-conscious worker must learn to distinguish the mentality of the soldier of the proletariat army from the mentality of the bourgeois intellectual who parades anarchistic phrases; he must learn to insist that the duties of a Party member be fulfilled not only by the rank and file, but by the "people at the top" as well; he must learn to treat tail-ism in matters of organisation with the same contempt as he used, in days gone by, to treat tail-ism in matters of tactics! " (V. I. Lenin: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (1904); in: LCW Vol. 7, pp. 392-393)

⁴⁸ These are the figures given by the outstanding Russian Marxist historian of the 1920s M.N. Pokrovsky and which have been broadly confirmed by other historic-economic studies on Tsarist Russia. (See M. Pokrovski: Russische Geschichte, Berlin 1930, p. 244)

4.8%, white collar: 27.4%, others: 5.9%).⁴⁹

He also shows that the Bolsheviks had substantially more workers in their ranks than their social democratic competitors. Thus, for example the Bolsheviks had among their rank and file members more than five times as many activists with primary education as the Mensheviks.⁵⁰ Lane concludes from this: *"It seems probable that the Mensheviks had comparatively more 'petty-bourgeois' members, and fewer working-class supporters at the lower levels. (...) If judged by the bottom levels of the party and particularly by its popular support, it may be said that the Bolsheviks were a 'workers' party'. Middle strata or the 'petty-bourgeoisie' were important as supporters of the Mensheviks."*⁵¹

*"Bolshevism at the grass roots was supported mainly by the urban proletariat, including those uprooted and new to the town. The Mensheviks had supporters across the class lines. On the whole, the Mensheviks recruited more from among the better-paid and more skilled workers and less from among the poorer peasant urban newcomers."*⁵²

While the proportion of workers among the leadership was less than among the general members, the Bolsheviks' leadership in 1917-23 had 43% workers, 19% full-time professional revolutionaries, and another 38% from the middle class.⁵³ Another study puts the workers' share at 60%.⁵⁴ In addition, the Bolshevik cadres coming from the middle class were all battle-hardened militants with years of underground work, prison, and exile behind them. In short, the Bolshevik party was the party of the militant workers and those intellectuals who proved capable of breaking with their class background and serve the proletarian liberation struggle.

We shall add to this that the Bolsheviks also succeeded in translating their consistent struggle for the liberation of the oppressed nations into a thoroughly multi-national composition of its membership and leadership. As a side-note, we remark that this was quite an achievement since the proletariat was largely concentrated in the Russian-speaking areas of the empire (except areas like Poland which however had its own Marxist party). The leadership of the Bolshevik party had a share of between 30- 42% Russians (which constituted 44% in the Tsarist Empire), i.e., they had in their leadership between 56-70% non-Russians.⁵⁵ This is another proof that the Bolshevik were a tribune of the oppressed people.

49 David Lane: *The Roots of Russian Communism*, Martin Robertson 1969, p. 26. Another study, analyzing the Party's 24,000 members in 1917, gave similar figures: 60.2% of the members were of working-class origin, 7.5% peasant, and 32.2% white collar or "other". (See T.H. Rigby: *Communist Party Membership in the USSR, 1917-1967*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1968, pp. 85-87)

50 David Lane: *The Roots of Russian Communism*, p. 47

51 David Lane: *The Roots of Russian Communism*, p. 50

52 David Lane: *The Roots of Russian Communism*, p. 213

53 Liliana Riga: *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire*, University of Edinburgh, Cambridge 2012, p 279

54 Evan Mawdsley: *Makers of the Soviet Union Revisited: The Bolshevik Central Committee Elite in the Revolutionary Period*, in: *Revolutionary Russia* Vol. 8 (1995), No. 2, pp. 195 – 211

55 Liliana Riga: *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire*, p 16

The Bolsheviks achieved all this despite the fact that the working class constituted only a small sector of the total population and were living under working and educational conditions which made regular participation in revolutionary activities extremely difficult and dangerous.

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Founder of the Communist Movement:
Karl Marx (left) and Friedrich Engels (right)



Workers during the Uprising of the Paris Commune 1871



Leaders of the October Revolution 1917 and Marxist Theoreticians:
V.I. Lenin (left) and Leon Trotsky (right)



Armoured Train "Trotsky" during the Russian Civil War



Revolutionary Women of the First Hour: Jenny Marx (von Westphalen, top left) and Eleanor Marx (top right), Jenny Marx (below left) and Laura Marx (below right). Jenny von Westphalen was Marx's wife and the other three women were their daughters. They were all active socialists and played a key role in spreading communist ideas in the workers movement in Britain and France.



Bolshevik Women who played a key role in leading the Revolutionary Party and the Russian Revolution: Nadeshda Krupskaja (top left), Inessa Armand (top right), Alexandra Kollontai (below left) and Larissa Reissner (below right).

II. The Revolutionary Party and its Characteristics

The communist conception of the vanguard party is modeled on the experience of the Bolsheviks and its generalization by the Comintern and Trotsky's Fourth International. The Comintern stressed that revolutionaries always have to take the concrete circumstances into account.

*„The organization of the party must be adapted to the conditions and the purpose of its activity. (...) There can be no one absolutely correct and unalterable form of organization for the communist parties. The conditions of the proletarian class struggle are subject to change in an unceasing process of transformation and the organization of the proletarian vanguard must always seek the appropriate forms which correspond to these changes. Similarly, the parties in the different countries must be adapted to the historically determined peculiarities of the country concerned.“*⁵⁶

Obviously it makes a big difference if a revolutionary party has to work underground under illegal conditions or if it faces the conditions of a relatively stable bourgeois democracy; if it operates under a revolutionary, non-revolutionary or counter-revolutionary situation; if it has representatives in the trade union leadership or in parliament; if it is undertaking entry work inside a reformist party; if it is small or large; etc.

However, the need to take concrete circumstances into account does not alter the fact that communists must build the party or the pre-party organization on the basis of a number of principles. *“But this differentiation has definite limits. Despite all peculiarities there is a similarity in the conditions of the proletarian class struggle in the different countries and in the various phases of the proletarian revolution which is of fundamental importance for the international communist movement. It creates a common basis for the organization of communist parties in all countries.“*⁵⁷

Below we will summarize the most important principles of the Bolshevik-Communists' conception of the vanguard party. These principles apply to the revolutionary party as well as the Bolshevik pre-party organization, albeit with some modifications as we will outline below. Hence, when we speak below about the principles of the party, if not stated otherwise, our intention always applies to the pre-party organization as well.

⁵⁶ Communist International: Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work, p. 257

⁵⁷ Communist International: Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work, p. 258

Unity of Theory and Practice

The underlying method of the party's work is the Marxist principle of the *unity of theory and practice*. The one cannot exist without the other. Theory points to practice – otherwise it is only a lifeless dogma. And practice points to theory – otherwise it is blind activism without strategic direction.

In fact, theory would not exist without (past) practice. In other words, theory is generalized past practice, as Trotsky once pointed out:

*„To be guided by theory is to be guided by generalizations based on all the preceding practical experience of humanity in order to cope as successfully as possible with one or another practical problem of the present day. Thus, through theory we discover precisely the primacy of practice as a whole over particular aspects of practice.“*⁵⁸

From this it follows that the character of the Marxist theory must be structured and conceptualized according to the needs of practice and, at the same time, practice must be directed by theory. Such a dialectic-materialist way of understanding the relationship between theory and practice is the only way to achieve a correct insight into the party's tasks.

Abram Deborin, the leading Marxist philosopher in the USSR in the 1920s before the Stalinist clampdown, formulated the relationship between theory and practice very well.

*„In order to reshape reality it is necessary that theory becomes reality, that it becomes a fertile force, in one word that theory becomes practice. Marxism is such a theory, distinct from all others, a philosophical Weltanschauung, which demands the conversion of theory into practice as well as of practice into theory. Marxism does not know a separation between theory and practice. The dialectical unity between theory and practice demands, that the theory is practical and the practice is explained by theory and becomes itself theory.“*⁵⁹

Similarly did Ivan K. Luppol, another influential Soviet philosopher of the Deborin School, express the dialectic-materialist method in his book on Lenin's philosophy as *“the methodology of knowledge on the basis of action and the methodology of action on the basis of knowledge”*.⁶⁰

Finally, the unity of theory and practice is essential for the whole modus operandi of the revolutionary party or pre-party organization in order to form a collective of working class militants who despise passive propagandism and who, at the same time, are ideologically hardened to find the correct orientation under the conditions of difficult struggles and numerous pressures of class enemies outside and inside the workers' movement. Leon Trotsky formulated this basic truth in a letter to the Spanish youth in 1932:

58 Leon Trotsky: *Philosophical Tendencies of Bureaucratism* (1928); in: Leon Trotsky: *The Challenge of the Left Opposition* (1928-29), p. 396

59 Abram Deborin: *Lenin – der kämpfende Materialist*, 1924, S. 11

60 Iwan K. Luppol: *Lenin und die Philosophie. Zur Frage des Verhältnisses der Philosophie zur Revolution* (1928), S. 115

*„The strength of Marxism is in the unity of scientific theory with revolutionary struggle. On these two rails, the education of the communist youth should progress. The study of Marxism outside the revolutionary struggle can create bookworms but not revolutionaries. Participation in the revolutionary struggle without the study of Marxism is unavoidably full of danger, uncertainty, half-blindness. To study Marxism as a Marxist is possible only by participating in the life and struggle of the class; revolutionary theory is verified by practice, and practice is clarified by theory. Only the truths of Marxism that are conquered in struggle enter the mind and the blood.“*⁶¹

The old companion of Marx and Engels, Wilhelm Liebknecht, summarized the task of the revolutionary party very well in the formula: *„Study, Propagate, Organize“*.

Devotion of the Party's Militants

Uniting theory and practice means first that the militants must not only *agree* with the goals of their party but also *fight* for them by all means the organization considers necessary. This means that it requires total dedication of its members:

*„The revolution demands complete devotion from a man.“*⁶²

An organization, which lacks this fundamental requirement of complete dedication of its members to the revolutionary work, is lost for the cause of the proletarian liberation struggle. With such an organization, any agreement about a program or a theoretical analysis will be meaningless because it would constitute only an abstract sharing of views without any consequences for the practice. The party's members must be able to withstand all forms of pressure from political enemies and "socialist" rivals. It was no accident that the Bolsheviks were often called by others and called themselves *“hard as rock.”*⁶³ Hence a decisive criterion which differentiates a revolutionary-proletarian from a petty-bourgeois party is the attitude of its members towards the political and practical demands of the liberation struggle. Trotsky expressed this strongly in a speech on the foundation of the Fourth International:

„Our party demands each of us, totally and completely. Let the philistines hunt their own individuality in empty space. For a revolutionary to give himself entirely to the party signifies finding himself. Yes, our party takes each one of us wholly. But in return it gives to every one of us the highest happiness: the consciousness that one participates in the building of a better future, that one carries on his shoulders a particle of the fate of mankind, and that one's life will not have been lived in vain. The fidelity to the cause of the toilers requires from us the highest devotion to our international party. The party,

61 Leo Trotzki: An die spanische Jugend (1932), in: Revolution und Bürgerkrieg in Spanien, Band 1, pp. 164-165; in English language: Leon Trotsky: To the Spanish Youth

62 Leon Trotsky: Letter to a Friend in France (1939), in: Leon Trotsky: On France, Monad Press, New York 1979, S. 210

63 Lenin himself pointed this out: *„It will be a stubborn war. We knew how to work during the long years preceding the revolution. Not for nothing do they say we are as hard as rock.“* (V. I. Lenin: Political Notes (1908), in: LCW Vol. 13, p. 446)

of course, can also be mistaken. By common effort we will correct its mistakes. In its ranks can penetrate unworthy elements. By common effort we will eliminate them. New thousands who will enter its ranks tomorrow will probably be deprived of necessary education. By common effort we will elevate their revolutionary level. But we will never forget that our party is now the greatest lever of history. Separated from this lever, everyone of us is nothing. With this lever in hand, we are all.”⁶⁴

On a different occasion he explained to a sympathizing lawyer who could not bring himself to commit completely to the revolution:

“I said to myself, after having observed them closely, that comrades who are capable of such initiative and such personal sacrifice are revolutionaries, or can become such, because it is in this way, Comrade Paz, that revolutionaries are formed. You can have revolutionaries both wise and ignorant, intelligent or mediocre. But you can't have revolutionaries who lack the willingness to smash obstacles, who lack devotion and the spirit of sacrifice. (...) I will not dwell upon the record of the Russian party in times of illegal work. The person who belonged to the movement belonged not only with his material means, but with his body and soul. He identified openly with the cause he served, and it was by such a process of education that we were able to create the fighters who became the many “axes” of the proletarian revolution.”⁶⁵

Gerard Rosenthal, one of Trotsky's French collaborators, reported in his memoirs that Trotsky was irritated by the Western socialist's lack of revolutionary dedication:

„Trotsky's chief interest were the human qualities of a revolutionary. ‘We can lead and win the revolution only with people who dedicate themselves completely to the struggle. The Russian revolutionaries subordinated their private life consistently to the needs of the political struggle,’ Contacts with Western comrades disappointed him. ‘You cannot think about a revolution with people who put their jobs first, than their family and after all this the revolution.’”⁶⁶

James P. Cannon, the historic leader of American Communism and later Trotskyism, summarized the Marxist approach well in a pamphlet which was published as a summary of the faction struggle against the petty-bourgeois inner-party opposition around Max Shachtman:

„Our conception of the party is radically different. For us the party must be a combat organisation which leads a determined struggle for power. The Bolshevik party which leads the struggle for power needs not only internal democracy. It also requires an imperious centralism and an iron discipline in action. It requires a proletarian composition conforming to its proletarian program. The Bolshevik party cannot be led by dilettantes whose real interests and real lives are in another and alien world. It requires an active professional leadership, composed of individuals democratically selected and democratically controlled, who devote their entire lives to the party, and who find in the

64 Leon Trotsky: On the Founding of the Fourth International (1938), in: Fourth International, Vol. 1, No. 5 (1940), pp. 141-142

65 Leon Trotsky: How Revolutionaries are formed (1929), in: Trotsky Writings, Bd. 1929, pp. 192-193

66 Quoted in Leo Trotzki 1879-1940. In den Augen von Zeitzeugen, p. 120 (Our translation)

*party and in its multiform activities in a proletarian environment, complete personal satisfaction. For the proletarian revolutionist the party is the concentrated expression of his life purpose, and he is bound to it for life and death. He preaches and practices party patriotism, because he knows that his socialist ideal cannot be realised without the party. In his eyes the crime of crimes is disloyalty or irresponsibility toward the party. The proletarian revolutionist is proud of his party. He defends it before the world on all occasions. The proletarian revolutionist is a disciplined man, since the party cannot exist as a combat organisation without discipline. When he finds himself in the minority, he loyally submits to the decision of the party and carries out its decisions, while he awaits new events to verify the disputes or new opportunities to discuss them again.”*⁶⁷

This issue is of particular importance in the imperialist world, given the lack of revolutionary situations and traditions. Trotsky, who had the opportunity to compare the revolutionary workers' movement in Russia with their counterpart in the West, saw the lack of such revolutionary dedication as a central weakness of the Western socialist forces. On the occasion of the death of the old Bolshevik fighter Kote Tsintsadze Trotsky pointed this problem out:

*„The Communist parties in the West have not yet brought up fighters of Tsintsadze's type. This is their besetting weakness, determined by historical reasons but nonetheless a weakness. The Left Opposition in the Western countries is not an exception in this respect and it must well take note of it.”*⁶⁸

If Trotsky was worried by the lack of revolutionary fighters in Western Europe in the 1920s, what would he say today when there are far fewer revolutionary situations than at Trotsky's time and hence far fewer opportunities to develop a generation of dedicated communist militants? In fact, the whole so-called left is full of activists who rarely forget to think about personal achievements and career. It is one of the most urgent tasks to create a new generation of communist fighters who are completely dedicated to revolutionary work.

This development has been strengthened by the substantial growth of the urban middle class in the imperialist countries and the orientation of most centrist organizations to those and related layers or those hoping to join them (university students, intellectuals, highly educated sectors of the working class, etc.). As a result, most centrist and reformist organizations in Europe and the USA – and in particular their leaderships – have an inferior class composition, i.e., they are dominated by people with a background in the progressive white and

67 James P. Cannon: *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* (1940), Pathfinder Press, New York 1972, pp. 14-15

68 Leon Trotsky: *On the fresh grave of Kote Tsintsadze* (1930); in: *Writings 1930-31*, p. 123. See also Leon Trotsky: *What to Expect from the Sixth Congress* (1928), in: *Leon Trotsky: The Challenge of the Left Opposition* (1928-29), p. 155. Tsintsadze was an Old Bolshevik of Georgian origin, who participated – like Kamo – in numerous armed raids at the behest of the party. During the civil war he became the head of the Cheka in the Caucasus and supported Trotsky's Left Opposition from the beginning in 1923. He died in 1930 under the harsh conditions of exile to which the Stalin regime sentenced him. (See: Boris Souvarine: *Stalin - Anmerkungen zur Geschichte des Bolschewismus*, Verlag Bernard & Graefe, München 1980, pp. 111-114, 449 and 524.

middle class milieu. Such an orientation usually starts early, during the years of university study, when people who refuse to orient towards a professional carrier are considered as outcasts.

This “European type of revolutionary” has developed during the past decades among various university student movements which have constituted the main breeding ground for recruitment of centrist and reformist forces. Their class composition was not corrected by orienting their recruitment towards the lower strata of the working class and oppressed.

The result of this orientation is personified in such left-wing intellectuals as Tariq Ali, Henri Weber, André Gorz, and Robin Blackburn who for some time all combined a professional carrier and “Marxist” politics before entirely dropping out of activism. A revolutionary movement cannot be based on such rotten elements. It is one of the most urgent tasks to create a new generation of communist fighters who are completely dedicated to revolutionary work and who are repelled by those who claim to be “fighting the system from within” by ascending the carrier ladder.

Program First

First and foremost, the party needs a firm understanding of its theoretical foundation and, based on this, a revolutionary program. Without a program it has no political compass, no political orientation. Lenin famously stated in 1902: *„Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.“*⁶⁹

A program contains an analysis of the capitalist society in a given political epoch, a statement about the general socialist goals, an outline of the strategy for the proletariat to take power as well as of the most important tactics and demands. Hence a program must be what the Comintern and the Fourth International called a “*Transitional Program*”, i.e., a program which shows the road from the present situation to the seizure of power. In discussions with comrades-in-arms, Trotsky explained the importance of such a program:

*„Now, what is the party? In what does the cohesion consist? This cohesion is a common understanding of the events, of the tasks, and this common understanding - that is the program of the party. Just as modern workers more than the barbarian cannot work without tools so in the party the program is the instrument. Without the program every worker must improvise his tool, find improvised tools, and one contradicts another. Only when we have the vanguard organized upon the basis of common conceptions then we can act.“*⁷⁰

Marx and Engels wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, the first scientific socialist

69 V. I. Lenin: What Is To Be Done? (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, p. 369. Lenin later repeated this principle again and again: *„Without a programme a party cannot be an integral political organism capable of pursuing its line whatever turn events may take.“* (V. I. Lenin: The Election Campaign and the Election Platform (1911); in: CW Vol. 17, p. 280)

70 Leon Trotsky: Discussions with Trotsky on the Transitional Program (1938), in: Fourth International, Vol. 7 No. 2 (1946), p.53

program, soon after they joined the *Communist League* in 1847. The Second International had important national programs like the Germans' "Erfurter Program" or the French program which was written by Marx. Similarly, the Russian Marxists adopted an elaborate program in 1903 and, when the circumstances changed in 1917, Lenin first wrote the so-called "*April Theses*" as a kind of alternative program for the revolutionary period before October 1917. In March 1919, the party officially changed its program and adapted it to the new circumstances. This program was also a guiding line for the Comintern and its programmatic resolutions from 1919 to 1922. However, soon after the Fourth World Congress in 1922 had decided to elaborate a program, the Comintern degenerated under the weight of the Stalinist bureaucracy and this project was first delayed and finally terminated and replaced by a centrist Stalinist program in 1928. It was up to Trotsky's Fourth International, to adopt in 1938 – after a series of resolutions and programmatic documents had been elaborated in the preceding years – a communist program based on the transitional method.

Only if communists base themselves on such a revolutionary theory and program, they will be able to develop concrete and flexible tactics.

*„Marxism is a method of historical analysis, of political orientation, and not a mass of decisions prepared in advance. Leninism is the application of this method in the conditions of an exceptional historical epoch. It is precisely this union of the peculiarities of the epoch and the method that determines that courageous, self-assured policy of brusque turns of which Lenin gave us the finest models, and which he illuminated theoretically and generalized on more than one occasion.“*⁷¹

It is a hallmark of centrism that it refuses to elaborate a program which summarizes its principles as well as their application in a given political conjuncture. As a result, all the major centrist tendencies (Morenoites, CWI, IMT, IST, etc.) exist for decades without a program. The late Tony Cliff, one of the heroes of Anglo-Saxon pragmatism under the disguise of "Trotskyism," liked to exculpate his tendency's hostility to elaborating a program by stating that "*it is better to have a gun instead of the blueprint of a gun.*" As a result, the SWP/IST never had either a gun or a blueprint of one. When they faced volatile situations of class struggle they repeatedly failed to take a principled revolutionary position, but rather capitulated to alien class forces (e.g., failing to defend semi-colonial countries like Argentina 1982, Iraq 1991 and 2003 or Afghanistan in 2001 against imperialist attacks; failing to agitate for a general strike during the crucial British miners' strike in 1984/85; failing to defend degenerated workers state against imperialism like Korea in 1950-53, etc.)

Sometimes centrists justify their refusal to elaborate a program for the present period by referring to Trotsky's program of 1938 as a sufficient basis. These "Marxists" don't understand that a program is the application of the doctrine of class struggle to a concrete political conjuncture resulting in a set of strategies and tactics to give the workers' vanguard a clear orientation. Hence, when the

71 Leon Trotsky: *The New Course* (1923), in: *The Challenge of the Left Opposition* (1923-25), S. 96

relation of forces changes between the classes and a new political conjuncture opens – which usually is caused by decisive events in national or international politics – Marxists must adapt the program to the new conditions. Otherwise the program cannot function as a guide for action but is rather a lifeless, sectarian declaration of timeless dogmas.

As Trotsky warned – drawing the lessons of the failed German Revolution of 1923 – a party which does not keep in step with the developments of class struggle will lose its programmatic clarity and hence become, involuntarily, an instrument of non-proletarian class forces.

*„A revolutionary party is subjected to the pressure of other political forces. At every given stage of its development the party elaborates its own methods of counteracting and resisting this pressure. During a tactical turn and the resulting internal regroupments and frictions, the party’s power of resistance becomes weakened. From this the possibility always arises that the internal groupings in the party, which originate from the necessity of a turn in tactics, may develop far beyond the original controversial points of departure and serve as a support for various class tendencies. To put the case more plainly: the party that does not keep step with the historical tasks of its own class becomes, or runs the risk of becoming, the indirect tool of other classes.“*⁷²

A pre-condition for the political health of a party is to fight against tendencies inside the organization which reflect non-proletarian class forces and which attack the party’s program and method. Naturally, in any healthy organization which does not insulate itself from the living class struggle there will be differences. Such differences can in one way or another express opportunist or sectarian tendencies which reflect the pressure of alien classes.⁷³ However the party and its leadership must not remain passive and indifferent to such developments. It must react pro-actively and try to convince those members who promote such deviations and at least make sure that they do not achieve a dominating influence inside the party. This is particularly important in the early phases of party building, where programmatic clarity represents one of the key weapons to win militants of the workers vanguard. Trotsky remarked on this:

*„The philistines will sneer over the fact that we, a tiny minority, are constantly occupied with internal demarcations. But that will not disturb us. Precisely because we are a tiny minority whose entire strength lies in ideological clarity, we must be especially implacable towards dubious friends on the right and on the left.“*⁷⁴

Hence, Marxists reject the currently fashionable model of a “pluralist left party”

72 Leon Trotsky: The Lessons of October (1924); in: Leon Trotsky: The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25), p. 204

73 As a side-note we remark that, even those passive sects who try to insulate themselves from the pressures of class struggle by abstaining from it, even those sects pay a high political prize for their isolation from the masses and sooner or later will nevertheless fall victim to alien class pressures since human beings don’t and can’t exist in isolation.

74 Leon Trotsky: The Defense of the Soviet Union and the Opposition (1929); in: Writings 1929, p. 298

which rejects such programmatic clarity in order “to become bigger.” Such a rotten method was characteristic for the social democratic Second International and led to the dominating influence of the reformist wing and the party’s capitulation to the pressures of imperialism. Lenin and the Bolsheviks considered this one of the key lessons of their struggle and the Second International’s failure at the beginning of WWI in 1914.

*„Typical of the socialist parties of the epoch of the Second International was one that tolerated in its midst an opportunism built up in decades of the “peaceful” period, an opportunism that kept itself secret, adapting itself to the revolutionary workers, borrowing their Marxist terminology, and evading any clear cleavage of principles. This type has outlived itself.”*⁷⁵

In another article Lenin stated: *„There is nothing more puerile, contemptible and harmful, than the idea current among revolutionary philistines, namely, that differences should be “forgotten” “in view” of the immediate common aim in the approaching revolution. People whom the experience of the 1905-14 decade has not taught the folly of this idea are hopeless from the revolutionary standpoint.”*⁷⁶

Hence, the task of Marxists is not to unite as many workers as possible irrespective of their political views but to unite as many workers as possible around a revolutionary program.

*„In the school of Lenin we all learned that Bolsheviks must direct their efforts toward unity on the basis of a revolutionary and proletarian political line.”*⁷⁷

Propaganda and Agitation

In itself, elaborating a program alone is not a goal. It is rather insufficient if it not transmitted to the working class and its vanguard in order to educate and organize them in the ranks of the party. Hence one of the key activities of the revolutionary party is the systematic spreading of its goals and methods of struggle as they are outlined in Marxist theory and in its program. This is usually done by the means of propaganda and agitation in the organization’s paper, leaflets, public speeches, etc. Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, defined propaganda as “many ideas for a few” and agitation as “few ideas for many”. In other words, propaganda explains in detail the various aspects of the Marxist analysis, tactics, and necessary actions concerning a given issue. Agitation, on the other hand, focuses on one or a few important aspects of a given issue and outlines the conclusions of Marxists about them.

However, the underlying principle for the Marxists’ program as well as propaganda and agitation is “*Speak out what is!*” This means that Marxists must

75 V. I. Lenin: What Next? On the Tasks Confronting the Workers’ Parties with Regard to Opportunism and Social-Chauvinism (1915), in: LCW Vol. 21, p. 110

76 V. I. Lenin: The Defeat of Russia and the Revolutionary Crisis (1915), in: LCW Vol. 21, p. 379

77 United Opposition: Declaration of the Eighty Four; in: Leon Trotsky: The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926-27), p. 235

not hide the truth so as not to offend reformists or challenge the backward consciousness of the masses. Trotsky summarized this approach well when he wrote *"I believe that the Marxist, the revolutionary, policy in general is a very simple policy: 'Speak out what is! Don't lie! Tell the truth!' It is a very simple policy."*⁷⁸ Similarly Rosa Luxemburg stated in a speech at the Socialist Internationals' Copenhagen congress in 1904: *"Nothing is more revolutionary than recognizing and stating what is."*⁷⁹

Naturally, tactical flexibility and pedagogic adaption are also very important in the revolutionaries' daily work. But this must not lead to softening, hiding, or even contradicting Marxist principles.

*„The misfortune lies precisely in the fact that the epigones of Bolshevik strategy extol maneuvers and flexibility to the young communist parties as the quintessence of this strategy, thereby tearing them away from their historical axis and principled foundation and turning them to unprincipled combinations which, only too often, resemble a squirrel whirling in its cage. It was not flexibility that served (nor should it serve today) as the basic trait of Bolshevism but rather granite hardness. It was precisely of this quality, for which its enemies and opponents reproached it, that Bolshevism was always justly proud. Not blissful "optimism" but intransigence, vigilance, revolutionary distrust, and the struggle for every hand's breadth of independence -- these are the essential traits of Bolshevism."*⁸⁰

Hence, Marxist refuse the opportunistic maneuvers of various centrists who claim – in order to appease the labor bureaucrats – that the liberation struggle can win by non-violent means or who suggest that the reformist leaders could be convinced via pressure from below to take the road of consistent class struggle (e.g., CWI, IMT, IST, Morenoites).

It is the program and the attitude of socialists to it as a whole, as well as its central position, which determines the program's character. Denying, hiding, or distorting the programmatic conclusions disqualifies a socialist as a Marxist; failing to take a correct position on the important developments in world politics and class struggle equally disqualifies a socialist as a Marxist. Trotsky was absolutely unambiguous on this issue:

*„But thereby you admit that Brandler-Thalheimer are not revolutionists, because revolutionists are determined and recognizable by their attitude toward the basic issues of the world revolution."*⁸¹

The program is the basis of the party. But the character of the program must be

78 The Case of Leon Trotsky. Report of Hearings on the Charges Made Against Him in the Moscow Trials by the Preliminary Commission of Inquiry into the Charges Made Against Trotsky in the Moscow Trials (1937), New York 1968, p. 384

79 Rosa Luxemburg: Rede über die sozialistische Taktik (beim Internationalen Sozialistenkongress vom 14. bis 20. August 1904 in Amsterdam); in: Gesammelte Werke Band 1.2, p. 446 (translation from German language by us)

80 Leon Trotsky: The Third International After Lenin. The Draft Program of the Communist International: A Criticism of Fundamentals (1928), Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, pp. 140-141

81 Leon Trotsky: Once Again on Brandler-Thalheimer (1929); in: Trotsky Writings 1929, p. 155

such that it already contains the most important tactical conclusions. A party must always be in a position to explain to the workers on which side of the barricades they should stand in a given struggle and by which means they shall attempt to win.

A favorite argument of reformist and centrist bureaucrats against the Marxists is that it is “*untimely*” to propagate revolutionary tactics and that this would be “*too much ahead*” of the masses. This is a standard argument of those who Lenin characterized as “*Chvostists*” (“*Tailists*”) in the Russian social democratic movement. If socialists only repeat to the masses those insights and conclusions which they already know, why do the masses need them? Obviously, the masses were capable of achieving the necessary insights on their own. In that case, it would be better if these “*socialist*” organizations dissolve themselves. However the truth is that the vanguard and the masses always look for analysis and perspectives which, as they believe, correspond with their experience. If Marxists are not capable of helping the workers deepen their understanding, they will look for other political forces to offer them political explanations and alternatives. Only fools believe that the masses reject views and positions which are advanced relative to their current consciousness. In fact, this “*argument*” of the reformists and centrists is only a pretext for their opportunist adaption to the liberal bourgeoisie and labor bureaucracy.

Lenin – whose party demonstrated to the world that propagating revolutionary tactics will enable the party to win over first the vanguard and then the masses and lead them to victory – sharply rejected such opportunist positions:

*“For the present it is our task to jointly propagandise the correct tactics and leave it to events to indicate the tempo of the movement, and the modifications in the mainstream (according to nation, locality and trade). (...) As for declaring propaganda of revolution “inopportune”, this objection rests on a confusion of concepts usual among socialists in the Romance countries: they confuse the beginning of a revolution with open and direct propaganda for revolution. In Russia, nobody places the beginning of the 1905 Revolution before January 9, 1905, whereas revolutionary propaganda, in the very narrow sense of the word, the propaganda and the preparation of mass action, demonstrations, strikes, barricades, had been conducted for years prior to that. The old Iskra, for instance, began to propagandise the matter at the end of 1900, as Marx did in 1847, when nobody thought as yet of the beginning of a revolution in Europe.”*⁸²

Systematically combining the program with tactics, propagating these tactics, and implementing them where possible constitute the only way the revolutionary party can influence and finally win over the vanguard and the masses. This is the only possible way to unite theory and practice.

⁸² V. I. Lenin: Revolutionary Marxists at the International Socialist Conference, September 5- 8, 1915 (1915), in: LCW Vol. 21, pp. 391-392

Communist Work among the Masses

Since the task of the revolutionary party is to lead the working class to socialist revolution, its work must aim to first win over the vanguard and then the proletarian masses. The Comintern stressed the importance of work among the mass:

*"Successful leadership presupposes moreover the closest contact with the proletarian masses. Without such contact the leaders will not lead the masses but, at best, only follow them. These organic contacts are to be sought in the communist party organization through democratic centralism."*⁸³

This can only be achieved if revolutionaries combine their propaganda and agitation with practical work among the masses. Such work can be manifold: organizing a strike, leading a demonstration, organizing practical support for unemployed or poor, working within trade unions and other popular mass organizations, giving practical support in daily matters to colleagues in places of work, schools or villages, running as candidates in parliamentary elections, entering a reformist mass party as a faction, etc. All these forms of mass work should be combined with a patient explanation of the party's communist goals.

Party militants must desire to be the best leaders, organizers, and activists in mass-based activities. Only in this way can they win the trust of the masses. They will often be obliged to apply the united front tactic, i.e., advancing the unity of the proletariat in the struggle for their rights by calling upon the official leaders of the workers movement and other popular organizations to mobilize their forces for a given struggle. The central aim is to fight shoulder to shoulder with the workers who, for now, still follow the non-revolutionary leaderships. At the same time, revolutionaries have to warn the masses of their likely betrayal by the official leadership in the course of the struggle and denounce them for their reformist policy.

Obviously the extent to which a Bolshevik organization can undertake work among the masses depends both on the current situation of the class struggle as well as on subjective forces. The smaller the organization, the more it has to select the areas and frequency of its work among the masses. Hence, to do exemplary mass work, pre-party communist organizations are forced to limit such activities. They must selectively focus their energy on this or that area and try to intervene only there.

However, as soon as the organization has clarified its fundamental programmatic goals – i.e., as soon as it has left the very initial stage of an *ideological current* – it should be on the lookout for possibilities of mass work.

Such selective mass work is indispensable for the pre-party organization for a number of reasons. First, its members, as well as the organization as a collective,

⁸³ Communist International: Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work, p. 258

can only gain experience in the class struggle if they participate via such work. Second, the chief goal of the pre-party organization is to recruit members from among militant workers and the oppressed. This will be only possible if the pre-party organization fights alongside these vanguard militants instead of purely lecturing them from the outside.

Third, the Bolshevik-Communists can only demonstrate to the workers' vanguard the meaning of their program in practice if they intervene as activists in mass struggles.

Naturally, such exemplary mass work has to be performed – taking into account necessary modifications for security reasons given possible state repression – openly as communists. Otherwise there exists the danger that revolutionaries will split their work in propaganda (which has a communist character) and mass work (which has an economist character).

Class Composition and Orientation to the Non-Aristocratic Layers of the Working Class

As already elaborated in Chapter I, the revolutionary party or a pre-party organization has to have a predominantly proletarian composition. Otherwise it cannot bring the class political consciousness to the working class, cannot act a strategist, organizer, and leader of the class struggle, and cannot lead it the victorious socialist revolution.

We also stated above that the proletariat is a homogenous but multi-layered class. We showed that, on the one hand, the imperialist bourgeoisie has succeeded in bribing a small but influential upper stratum – the labor aristocracy. On the other hand, the mass of the proletariat belongs to the lower strata which face additional forms of oppression (gender, age, national, religious, etc.). To this one has to add that the huge majority of the world proletariat in the 21st century – about ¾ - lives in the South, i.e., outside the old imperialist metropolises.

This means that the revolutionary Workers' International must primarily orient itself to the lower strata of the working class in the old imperialist countries and the proletariat of the countries in the South. These lower sectors, who we can call the "*mass-type*" of the working class in contrast with the aristocratic layer at the top, constitute the huge majority of the world proletariat.

In its resolution on the role of the Communist Party, the Comintern stated: "*The most important task of a genuine communist party is to keep always in closest touch with the broadest masses of the proletariat.*"⁸⁴

In the same spirit did Trotsky explain the strategic orientation of Bolshevism: „*The strength and meaning of Bolshevism consists in the fact that it appeals to oppressed and exploited masses and not to the upper strata of the working class.*“⁸⁵

84 Communist International: Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution (1920), p. 131

85 Leon Trotsky: Perspectives and Tasks in the East. Speech on the third anniversary of the

The Bolshevik-Communists adamantly reject the approach, so typical of reformists and centrists, of orienting not to the lower, mass-type majority of the working class but rather to the privileged upper layers. The petty-bourgeois left justifies this by referring to the upper layers' higher level of education and "culture." They completely forget, or pretend not to know, that this so called higher level of (bourgeois) education goes hand in hand with arrogant prejudices against the "backward" mass of the workers and peasants and privileges, which bind this layer to the bourgeois order.

Trotsky drew attention to this tendency of the reformists and centrists in the *Transitional Program*:

*„Opportunist organizations by their very nature concentrate their chief attention on the top layers of the working class and therefore ignore both the youth and the women workers. The decay of capitalism, however, deals its heaviest blows to the woman as a wage earner and as a housewife. The sections of the Fourth International should seek bases of support among the most exploited layers of the working class; consequently, among the women workers. Here they will find inexhaustible stores of devotion, selflessness and readiness to sacrifice.“*⁸⁶

Naturally, the revolutionary party will willingly accept workers coming from the labor aristocracy – similar to intellectuals with bourgeois or petty-bourgeois background – as long as they have broken with the typical weaknesses of this layer.

However, the revolutionary party or the pre-party organization must always take care not to become dominated by petty-bourgeois intellectuals and labor aristocrats. If such a development takes place, the organization must find ways to counteract this and take steps towards improving its class composition. Otherwise, as Trotsky explained, the organization runs into danger of coming under too much influence from the political mood and prejudices of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals and the labor aristocracy:

*„But it must now be underlined that the more the party is petty-bourgeois in its composition, the more it is dependent upon the changes in the official public opinion. It is a supplementary argument for the necessity for a courageous and active re orientation toward the masses.“*⁸⁷

This is the only possible application of the communists' method under the conditions of today's decaying capitalism.

In contrast to various centrists, the Bolshevik-Communists stress that the communist approach to party building as outlined above is not only valid for developed revolutionary parties but also for smaller pre-party organizations. This was the theory and practice of Trotsky and his comrades-in-arms when

Communist University for the Toilers of the East (21. April 1924); in: Leon Trotsky Speaks, Pathfinder 1972, p. 205

⁸⁶ Leon Trotsky: The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International. The Transitional Program (1938); in: Documents of the Fourth International, New York 1973, p. 218

⁸⁷ Leon Trotsky: From a Scratch – To the Danger of Gangrene (1940); in: Leon Trotsky: In Defense of Marxism, New York 1990, p. 113

they were faced with building pre-party organizations in the late 1920s and 1930s. On numerous occasions, Trotsky insisted that the small groups of the Left Opposition must focus their orientation and recruitment on the workers and, in particular, on the lower strata. As he wrote in 1932:

“When ten intellectuals, whether in Paris, Berlin, or New York, who have already been members of various organizations, address themselves to us with a request to be taken into our midst, I would offer the following advice: Put them through a series of tests on all the programmatic questions; wet them in the rain, dry them in the sun, and then after a new and careful examination accept maybe one or two.

The case is radically altered when ten workers connected with the masses turn to us. The difference in our attitude to a petty-bourgeois group and to the proletarian group does not require any explanation. But if a proletarian group functions in an area where there are workers of different races, and in spite of this remains composed solely of workers of a privileged nationality, then I am inclined to view them with suspicion. Are we not dealing perhaps with the labor aristocracy? Isn't the group infected with slave-holding prejudices, active or passive?

It is an entirely different matter when we are approached by a group of Negro workers. Here I am prepared to take it for granted in advance that we shall achieve agreement with them, even if such an agreement is not actual as yet. Because the Negro workers, by virtue of their whole position, do not and cannot strive to degrade anybody, oppress anybody, or deprive anybody of his rights. They do not seek privileges and cannot rise to the top except on the road of the international revolution.

We can and we must find a way to the consciousness of the Negro workers, the Chinese workers, the Indian workers, and all the oppressed in the human ocean of the colored races to whom belongs the decisive word in the development of mankind.”⁸⁸

88 Leon Trotsky: Closer to the Proletarians of the Colored Races (1932), in: Trotsky Writings, Bd. 1932, p. 112. See also the following excerpt from a Letter to the US-American Left Opposition written in 1929:

“As far as I can judge, your official Communist Party inherited no few characteristics from the old socialist party. That became clear to me at the time when Pepper succeeded in dragging the American Communist Party into the scandalous adventure with the Party of LaFollette. This low-grade policy of parliamentary opportunism was disguised with “revolutionary” chatter to the effect that the social revolution will be achieved in the United States not by the proletariat but by the ruined farmers. When Pepper expounded this theory to me upon his return from the United States I thought that I had to do with a curious case of individual aberration. Only with some effort I realized that this is a whole system, and that the American Communist Party had been dragged into this system. Then it became clear to me that this small Party cannot develop without deep inner crises, which will guarantee it against Pepperism and other evil diseases. I cannot call them infantile diseases. On the contrary, these are senile diseases, diseases of bureaucratic sterility and revolutionary impotence.

That is why I suspect that the Communist Party has taken over many of the qualities of the socialist party, which in spite of its youth struck me with features of decrepitude. For the majority of those socialists – I have in view the governing strata – their socialism is a side-issue, a second-class occupation accommodated to their leisure hours. These gentlemen consecrate six days of the week to their liberal or commercial professions, rounding out their properties not without success, and on the seventh day they consent to occupy themselves with the saving of their souls. In a book of my memoirs (My Life, Ed.) I have tried to outline this type of socialistic Babbit. Evidently not a few of these gentlemen have succeeded in disguising themselves as Communists. These are not intellectual opponents, but class enemies. The Opposition must steer its course not on the petty-

In a discussion Trotsky had during his visit in Copenhagen 1932, he advised comrades about their attitude towards a student or an academic, that „*the workers movement for its part must regard him with the greatest scepticism. (...) When he has worked with the workers movement this way (for three, four or five years), then the fact that he was an academician is forgotten, the social difference disappear.*“⁸⁹

It is also important for the revolutionary party or the pre-party organization to orient itself towards the proletarian youth and young workers. The youth is usually less shaped with conservative prejudices and bourgeois ideologies and is more open to radically challenging the bourgeois order.

When we speak about the youth we mean, most primarily, proletarian youth as opposed to other popular strata, and not petty-bourgeois or bourgeois youth. This is important to emphasize given the fact that, when reformists and centrists today speak about the youth, they usually mean university students many of

bourgeois Babbits, but on the proletarian Jimmie Higginses, for whom the idea of Communism, when they are once imbued with it, becomes the content of their whole life and activity. There is nothing more disgusting and dangerous in revolutionary activity than petty-bourgeois diletantism, conservative, egotistical, self-loving and incapable of sacrifice in the name of a great idea. The advanced workers must firmly adopt one simple but invariable rule: Those leaders or candidates for leadership who are, in peaceful, everyday times, incapable of sacrificing their time, their strength, their means, to the cause of Communism, will ofteneast of all in a revolutionary period become direct traitors, or turn up in the camp of those who wait to see on which side the victory lies. It elements of this kind stand at the head of the Party, they will indubitably ruin it when the great test comes. And no better, are those brainless bureaucrats who simply hire out to the Comintern as they would to a notary, and obediently adapt themselves to each new boss.

Of course, the Opposition – that is the Bolshevik-Leninist – may have their traveling companions, who, without giving themselves wholly to the revolution, offer this or that service to the cause of Communism. It would of course be wrong not to make use of them. They can make a significant contribution to the work. But traveling companions, even the most honest and serious, ought to make no pretence to leadership. The leaders must be bound in all their daily work with those they lead. Their work must proceed before the eyes of the mass, no matter how small that mass may be at the given moment. I wouldn't give a cent for a leadership which can be summoned by cable from Moscow, or anywhere else, without the masses ever noticing it. Such leadership means bankruptcy guaranteed in advance. We must steer our course on the young proletarian who desires to know and to struggle, and is capable of enthusiasm and self-sacrifice. From such people we must attract and educate the genuine cadres of the Party and the proletariat.

Every member of the Opposition organization should be obliged to have under his guidance several young workers, boys from 14 to 15 up, to remain in continual contact with them, help them in their self-education, train them in the questions of scientific socialism, and systematically introduce them to the revolutionary politics of the proletarian vanguard. The Oppositionist who is himself inadequately prepared for such work should hand over the young proletarians recruited by him to more developed and experienced comrades. Those who are afraid of rough work we don't want. The calling of a revolutionary Bolshevik imposes obligations. The first of these obligations is to struggle for the proletarian youth, to clear a road to its most oppressed and neglected strata. They stand first under our banner.

The trade union bureaucrats, like the bureaucrats of false Communism, live in the atmosphere of aristocratic prejudices of the upper strata of the workers. It will be tragedy if the Oppositionists are infected even in the slightest degree with these qualities. We must not only reject and condemn these prejudices; we must burn them out of our consciousness to the last trace; we must find the road to the most deprived, to the darkest strata of the proletariat, beginning with the Negro, whom capitalist society has converted into Pariah and who must learn to see in us his revolutionary brothers. And this depends wholly upon our energy and devotion to the work.” (Leon Trotsky: A Letter to the American Trotskyists (1929), in: Trotsky Writings 1929, pp. 133-134)

89 Leon Trotsky: On Students and Intellectuals (1932), in: Trotsky Writings, Bd. 1932, S. 333

whom come from petty-bourgeois or bourgeois background or at least aim to reach these strata. Trotsky made it absolutely clear that revolutionaries – even if they are still in the stage of a small pre-party organization – should orient in their youth work to proletarian youth and not students from better-off families. In criticizing a document about youth work, he wrote in 1934:

*“As the social basis for the organization the ‘working, unemployed, and student youth’ are cited. Again purely descriptive, not social. For us it is a question of the proletarian youth and those elements among the students that lean towards the proletariat. Working, unemployed, and student youth are for a Marxist in no way equal links in the social chain.”*⁹⁰

The Bolsheviks were always aware of the importance of winning working class youth and young workers. Lenin attacked the Mensheviks in 1906 when they criticized the Bolsheviks for the young average age of their militants:

*„On the other hand, the composition of the politically guiding vanguard of every class, the proletariat included, also depends both on the position of this class and on the principal form of its struggle. Lenin complains, for example, that young workers predominate in our Party, that we have few married workers, and that they leave the Party. This complaint of a Russian opportunist reminds me of a passage in one of Engels’s works (I think it is in *The Housing Question, Zur Wohnungsfrage*). Retorting to some fatuous bourgeois professor, a German Cadet, Engels wrote: is it not natural that youth should predominate in our Party, the revolutionary party? We are the party of the future, and the future belongs to the youth. We are a party of innovators, and it is always the youth that most eagerly follows the innovators. We are a party that is waging a self-sacrificing struggle against the old rottenness, and youth is always the first to undertake a self-sacrificing struggle. No, let us leave it to the Cadets to collect the “tired” old men of thirty, revolutionaries who have “grown wise”, and renegades from Social-Democracy. We shall always be a party of the youth of the advanced class!”*⁹¹

Similarly Trotsky pointed out that the Bolsheviks, in contrast to the Mensheviks, always succeeded in attracting the proletarian youth and young workers.

*“Bolshevism when underground was always a party of young workers. The Mensheviks relied upon the more respectable skilled upper stratum of the working class, always prided themselves on it, and looked down upon the Bolsheviks. Subsequent events harshly showed them their mistake. At the decisive moment the youth carried with them the more mature stratum and even the old folks.”*⁹²

When we look to the average age of the party militants, the difference between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks becomes obvious. In the previously mentioned study by David Lane about the Russian Bolsheviks and Mensheviks before 1907, from which we quoted above in Chapter I, the author gives a number of impressive figures. He shows that if one compares the middle cadre of both

90 Leon Trotsky: *Against Centrism at the Youth Conference* (1934), in: *Trotsky Writings, Supplements 1934-40*, p. 452

91 V. I. Lenin: *The Crisis of Menshevism* (1906), in: *LCW Vol. 11*, pp. 354-355

92 Leon Trotsky: *The Revolution Betrayed*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1972, p. 159

factions, 17% of the Bolsheviks were below the age of 19 (Mensheviks: 0%), 42% were between 20-24 years old (Mensheviks: 26%), 24% were between 25-29 years old (Mensheviks: 46%) and 17% were over 30 years old (Mensheviks: 29%).

If we look to the rank and file members of both factions, we get a similar clear difference: 22% of the Bolsheviks were below the age of 19 (Mensheviks: 5%), 37% were between 20-24 years old (Mensheviks: 30%), 16% were between 25-29 years old (Mensheviks: 30%) and 26% were over 30 years old (Mensheviks: 35%).

The author concludes: *"These two tables show that the Bolsheviks were younger than the Mensheviks at the lowest level of the party organization and more so among the 'activists' than among the ordinary members. This suggests that the Bolshevik organizational structures allowed the young to advance to positions of responsibility more easily than did the Mensheviks."*⁹³

These are important lessons for revolutionaries today. All stages of building a revolutionary party today are impossible without a strong orientation towards working class youth.

If the orientation towards young workers and youth was correct in Lenin's time, it is ten times as correct today. As early as the 1930s, Trotsky explained that *"the old generation (of revolutionaries, Ed.) is completely consumed, used up."*⁹⁴

This is much truer today! The past decades of reformist and centrist dominance in the workers' movement have demoralized whole layers of elder workers and socialist activists. The future revolutionary party and International can only be borne on the shoulders of fresh militant young workers and youth.

Naturally in building the pre-party organization, when its forces are small and its foundation weak, the composition of its membership will be more dependent on conjunctural situations, personal factors, coincidences, etc. Similarly, in cases where the reformists and centrists have a strong hold over entire vanguard sectors of the working class and the oppressed, it may be difficult in the beginning for the pre-party organization to recruit among these sectors. However, even if a pre-party organization faces such challenges it must elaborate a plan on how it can overcome this unfavourable situation and consistently follow up with the implementation of this plan.

From the revolutionary movement's very beginnings, i.e., even within the pre-party organization, there should only be place for those intellectuals who are completely dedicated to the cause, who consistently fight against every form of careerism, who interact with proletarian activists without any aristocratic prejudices or airs, and who support the development of the latter as communist leaders.

93 David Lane: The Roots of Russian Communism, pp. 36-37

94 Leon Trotsky: Fusion with the Lovestonites? (1938), in: Writings Supplements 1934-40, S. 777

Tactics in Building the Revolutionary Party

Naturally there are numerous approaches and tactics in building the revolutionary party nationally and internationally. Nevertheless, the experience of the revolutionary workers' movement has shown that there are a number of tactics which often play a key role in our work. Naturally, which tactics can be applied by revolutionaries depends very much on the current stage of organization building – its size and roots in the working class.

Individual recruitment will always play an important role in party-building, in particular in the early stages of party-building. The Bolshevik organization clarifies with a militant his or her agreement with its programmatic foundations as well with the practical tasks to be done. During the first period the new member will be a candidate, i.e., the only difference with full members being that he or she has only a symbolic vote. If the organization is convinced about the seriousness and dedication of the new comrade, he or she will become a full member.

Formation of party-affiliated organizations: In its desire to advance its work in specific areas, the party will usually create party-affiliated organizations (e.g., youth organizations, women's organizations, migrant organizations, trade union fractions, cultural organizations, etc.). Naturally the pre-party organization has to be more selective in choosing when and which party-affiliated organization it can build. However, even in these early stages, such organizations can be very useful tools in advancing this work. In contrast to the cadre party, these organizations have a rather loose character, the requirements for joining – both in terms of programmatic agreement as well as in practical dedication – are lower and the disciplinary requirements for members are less strict. The goal of these organizations is to enable the party or pre-party organization to draw closer militant layers of workers and youth and to allow such aspiring militants to gain experience in revolutionary work. The party will ask the best of these comrades to become members of the cadre organization. The affiliation of these organizations to the party must not lead to a mechanical relationship of subordination. Quite the contrary, all members of the party-affiliated organizations should be encouraged to put forward their ideas and contribute to the work. The Bolsheviks acquired very valuable experience with affiliated organizations grouped around the party.

Recruitment via intervention in mass movements: If communists are faced with a progressive mass movement it is incumbent that they intervene in an exemplary fashion and combine their practical intervention with systematic communist propaganda and agitation. Such intervention – even if it carried out by a small communist pre-party organization – can result in leaps in party building if the Bolshevik-Communists succeed in winning over entire layers of militants in the struggle. This was the experience of the US Trotskyists in the 1934 Minneapolis strikes, as well as of various radical left-wing groups in 1968. Similarly, the

party can make a huge step forward if it wins the majority in a trade union or another mass organization.

Splits and Fusions: When left-reformists or centrists are seriously questioning their old program and strategy, Bolshevik-Communists should be prepared to confer with them in order to win them over to the revolutionary program and methods. When there is agreement about the national and international programmatic and practical tasks of the present period, revolutionaries should work towards fusion with such forces. Obviously they must make sure that such a fusion is based on a solid political foundation, because otherwise the fusion will very quickly result in a damaging split. There are also situations where methodological differences inside the party or pre-party organization become irresolvable and damaging for advancing the party's goals. In such a situation a split is the lesser evil compared with the danger of long-term paralysis. As it is well-known, Lenin never hesitated to split with opponents if they became an obstacle for building the revolutionary party. Similarly, the Trotskyists had such experiences in the 1930s when they split with various sectarian and opportunists (e.g., the Greek Archeo-Marxists, the Nin group in Spain, Sneevliets party in the Netherlands, the Molinier group in France, etc.)

Entryism: In certain periods – in particular in times of significant turmoil – reformist and centrist organizations can undergo an internal crisis where they experience lively debates and members question the traditional program and strategy. In such periods it can be a useful tactic for revolutionaries to join such a party and work inside as a revolutionary faction. In such cases it is indispensable to argue openly for the revolutionary program and a radical new strategy. Such entry tactics can involve sections of the Bolshevik organization or even the entire organization. In the long run, because coexistence between revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries is impossible within the same party, such entry tactics are usually short-term projects. The French as well as the US American Trotskyists carried out successful and principled entryism projects in the 1930s.

The Communists' Obligation to Work and Democratic Centralism

The unity of theory and practice in terms of activity of party members means that all members actively participate in the breadth of the organization's numerous tasks. The vanguard party rejects a division between active and passive members. The party has huge responsibilities and tasks and hence needs the participation of every member. As the female Bolshevik Elena Stasova liked to say, every task, even if it seems to be small, is important and strengthens the party work.⁹⁵ A member who is no longer in a position to fulfill his or her obligations as a party cadre (leaving aside cases of illness, personal difficulties, or other issues of a temporary nature) should become a sympathizer.

In order to achieve the best possible output of the members work, the party needs an effective division of labor. To achieve this, work must not be done spontaneously or according to individual wishes but must be organized according to collective needs and individual skills. For this, again, the party needs a plan which coordinates the numerous tasks and an organizing center which oversees the implementation of such plans. In other words, a party cannot work without firm discipline and supervision.

The Comintern summarized the Bolsheviks experience at their third congress in 1921 in an excellent document called *Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work*. The document stated:

"Because the first condition for seriously carrying out this program is the integration of all members into ongoing daily work. The art of communist organization consists in making use of everything and everyone in the proletarian class struggle, distributing party work suitably among all party members and using the membership to continually draw ever wider masses of the proletariat into the revolutionary movement, while at the same time keeping the leadership of the entire movement firmly in hand, not by virtue of power but by virtue of authority, i.e., by virtue of energy, greater experience, greater versatility, greater ability.

Thus, in its effort to have only really active members, a communist party must demand of every member in its ranks that he devote his time and energy, insofar as they are at his own disposal under the given conditions, to his party and that he always give his best in its service.

Obviously, besides the requisite commitment to communism, membership in the Communist Party involves as a rule: formal admission, possibly first as a candidate, then as a member; regular payment of established dues; subscription to the party press, etc. Most important, however, is the participation of every member in daily party work.

In order to carry out daily party work, every party member should as a rule always be part of a smaller working group-a group, a committee, a commission, a board or a

⁹⁵ See Alexandra Kollontai: Ich habe viele Leben gelebt... Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen. Dietz, Berlin 1987, p. 107

*collegium, a fraction or cell. Only in this way can party work be properly allocated, directed and carried out.”*⁹⁶

On the basis of such a general obligation by all party members to work and the widespread division of labor, the party functions according to the principles of *Democratic Centralism*. This means, in summary, that where legal conditions allow inner-party democracy, the membership decides at conferences about the most important issues and elects on this basis a central leadership. The leading bodies have the task of organizing and advancing the party's work. The decisions of the leading bodies are binding for all members and must be implemented.

*“The communist party must be built on the basis of democratic centralism. The basic principles of democratic centralism are that the higher party bodies shall be elected by the lower, that all instructions of the higher bodies are categorically and necessarily binding on the lower; and that there shall be a strong party centre whose authority is universally and unquestioningly recognized for all leading party comrades in the period between congresses.”*⁹⁷

Members have the right to voice criticism of the party's decisions internally. However, in order to implement the decisions most effectively, the party acts as a united body and discusses possible differences inside the organization and not publicly (except where the party decides to open such an internal debate to the public).

*“In their public appearances party members are obliged to act always as disciplined members of a militant organization. Should differences of opinion arise as to the correct method of action, these should as far as possible be settled beforehand within the party organization and then action must be consistent with this decision. In order that every party decision shall be carried out by all party organizations and members with the maximum energy, the widest circle of the party membership must whenever possible be drawn into the examination and decision of every question. Party organizations and committees also have the duty of deciding whether and to what extent and in what form questions shall be discussed by individual comrades in public (the press, lectures, pamphlets). But, even if the decisions of the organization or of the party leadership are in the opinion of other members mistaken, these comrades must in their public appearances never forget that the worst offence in regard to discipline and the worst mistake in regard to the struggle is to disturb or break the unity of the common front. It is the supreme duty of every party member to defend the communist party and above all the Communist International against all the enemies of communism. Whoever forgets this and publicly attacks the party or the International is to be treated as an enemy of the party.”*⁹⁸

96 Communist International: Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work, p. 259 (Emphasis in the original)

97 Communist International: Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution (1920), p. 134

98 Communist International: Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work, p. 269 (Emphasis in the original)

The central task of the leadership is to direct the organization according to the decisions of the highest party organ, i.e., the conference of its membership. For this it must constitute a strong, united and authoritative center. However, where important differences exist inside the party, this should be also reflected in the composition of the broader leadership body. At the same time the smaller, executive body of the leadership should be as homogenous as possible in order to enable the most effective implementation of the decisions of the higher organs.

*“For the same reasons differences of opinion on tactical questions which are of a serious character should not be suppressed in the election of the central committee. On the contrary, their representation on the central committee by their best advocates should be facilitated. The smaller committee, however, should, whenever this is feasible, be like-minded in their views and they must be able, if they are to provide strong and confident leadership, to rely not only on their authority but also on a clear and numerically strong majority in the leadership as a whole.”*⁹⁹

The Struggle against Bourgeois and Petty-Bourgeois Influences in the Working Class

One of the chief tasks of the party or pre-party organization is the struggle against those forces which mislead the working class and its vanguard – the labor bureaucracy, reformists, centrists, official leadership of the oppressed, etc. The victory of the proletariat in its struggle for liberation against the capitalist exploiter class will be impossible to achieve if the revolutionary party does not first defeat the influence of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces inside the working class and among the oppressed.

Marxists have repeatedly emphasized that the ruling class has not successfully sustained its dominance because of its inner strength, but because of the support it receives from the labor bureaucracy. James P. Cannon once stated:

*“The strength of capitalism is not in itself and its own institutions; it survives only because it has bases of support in the organizations of the workers. As we see it now, in the light of what we have learned from the Russian Revolution and its aftermath, nine-tenths of the struggle for socialism is the struggle against bourgeois influence in the workers’ organizations, including the party.”*¹⁰⁰

In contrast to those numerous post-modernist leftists who claim that Marxism is a broad, pluralist current which includes all who claim adherence to Marx’ teachings, the Bolshevik-Communists sharply differentiate between those who authentically work on the basis of the method elaborated by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky and those who systematically violate this method while

⁹⁹ Communist International: Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work, p. 268

¹⁰⁰ James P. Cannon: E.V. Debs (1956); in: James P. Cannon: The First Ten Years of American Communism, Pathfinder Press, New York 1962, p. 270

claiming to be “Marxists.” Only the first can be considered as Marxist, while the latter are either reformists of the social democratic or Stalinist version or centrists, i.e., those who cover their adaption to the reformist labor bureaucracy with “radical” phrases and occasional zigzags.

*„The mark of centrism is opportunism. Under the influence of external circumstances (tradition, mass pressure, political competition), centrism is at certain times compelled to make a parade of radicalism. For this purpose it must overcome itself, violate its political nature. By spurring itself on with all its strength, it not infrequently lands at the extreme limit of formal radicalism. But hardly does the hour of serious danger strike than the true nature of centrism breaks out to the surface.“*¹⁰¹

Marxists, therefore, always sharply differentiate between the proletarian, Marxist line and the petty-bourgeois, reformist or centrist line. Trotsky made this clear when he explained the vast chasm which exists between the forces of the Fourth International and their centrist rivals like the Spanish POUM or the German SAP:

*„But it is clear in any case that the leadership of your party has absolutely not understood the fatal mistakes of the POUM, which flow from its centrist, non-revolutionary, non-Marxian character.“*¹⁰²

*“We are separated not by nuances of tactic but by fundamental questions. It would be absurd and unworthy to shut one’s eyes to this after the experiences we have passed through. The differences between us and the SAP fall entirely into the framework of the contradictions between Marxism and centrism.“*¹⁰³

In fact, reformism and centrism represent a bourgeois influence in the ranks of the workers’ movement. By formulating the worker’s mind, they (in many cases involuntarily) help the ruling class to continue its domination over the working class. As the Bolsheviks wrote in their program in 1919:

„These conditions cannot be achieved unless a determined rupture is made on matters of principle, and a ruthless struggle is waged against the bourgeois distortion of socialism which has gained the upper hand among the leadership of the official Social-Democratic and Socialist Parties.

Such a distortion is, on the one hand, the opportunist and social-chauvinist trend which professes to be socialist in words, yet is chauvinist in practice, and covers up the defence of the rapacious interests of the fatherland, both in general and especially during the imperialist war of 1914-1918. This trend was created by the fact that in the progressive capitalist countries the bourgeoisie by robbing the colonial and weak nations were able, out of the surplus profits obtained by this robbery to place the upper strata of the proletariat in their countries in a privileged position, to bribe them, to secure for them

101 Leo Trotzki: Der einzige Weg (1932), in: Leo Trotzki: Schriften über Deutschland, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, Frankfurt am Main 1971, p. 378; in English language: Leon Trotsky: Germany: The Only Road

102 Leon Trotsky: Centrism and the 4th International (1939); in: Leon Trotsky: On France, New York 1979, p. 214 (Emphasis in the original)

103 Leon Trotsky: Centrist Alchemy or Marxism? (1935); in: Writings 1934-35, p. 258 (Emphasis in the original)

in peace time tolerable, petty-bourgeois conditions of life, and to take into its service the leaders of that stratum. Opportunists and social-chauvinists, being the servants of the bourgeoisie, are actually the direct class enemies of the proletariat, specially now, when, in alliance with the capitalists, they are suppressing by force of arms the revolutionary movement of the proletariat both in their own countries and in foreign countries.

*On the other hand, the "centrist" movement is also a bourgeois distortion of socialism. That movement is also found in all capitalist countries. It vacillates between the social-chauvinists and the Communists, advocates union with the former, and strives to revive the bankrupt Second International. The only leader in the proletarian struggle for emancipation is the new, Third, Communist International, of which the Communist Party of the Soviet Union is a detachment."*¹⁰⁴

Numerous reformists and centrists condemn the Bolshevik-Communists' approach of openly attacking erroneous programs and deceptive leaderships as "sectarian." In contrast to them, we draw the lesson from the Bolsheviks' successful building of a party which could lead the working class to victory that such a clear demarcation of what is right and what is wrong is the imperative precondition for organizing the workers' vanguard on a solid communist program. Hence, the task of the revolutionary party is to fight politically against the reformist and centrist forces in order to push back and finally liquidate their influence.

Naturally, the struggle against the reformists and centrists does not preclude the application of the united front tactic. In fact, the united front tactic is important not only because it enables the broadest possible unity of workers in the class struggle but also because it helps the revolutionary party to break away workers influenced by reformists and centrists from these respective misleaderships by demonstrating the superiority of the communist program in practice.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks repeatedly explained that the revolutionary party can never defeat the bourgeoisie if it does not simultaneously fight against the reformist and centrist lackey inside the workers movement:

*„The ideological struggle waged by revolutionary Marxism against revisionism at the end of the nineteenth century is but the prelude to the great revolutionary battles of the proletariat, which is marching forward to the complete victory of its cause despite all the waverings and weaknesses of the petty bourgeoisie."*¹⁰⁵

In his famous book on 'Left-Wing' Communism in which Lenin summarized the Bolsheviks' experience, he explained the importance of the ideological struggles against petty-bourgeois and bourgeois currents in order to prepare for the class battles.

„The years of preparation for revolution (1903-05). The approach of a great storm was sensed everywhere. All classes were in a state of ferment and preparation. Abroad,

104 Programm der Kommunistischen Partei Rußlands (Bolschewiki) (1919); in: Boris Meissner: Das Parteiprogramm der KPdSU 1906-1961, Köln 1962, S. 124; in English language: Program of the CPSU (Bolsheviks), adopted March 22, 1919 at the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party

105 V. I. Lenin: Marxism and Revisionism (1908), in: LCW Vol. 15, p. 39

*the press of the political exiles discussed the theoretical aspects of all the fundamental problems of the revolution. Representatives of the three main classes, of the three principal political trends—the liberal-bourgeois, the petty-bourgeois-democratic (concealed behind “social-democratic” and “social-revolutionary” labels), and the proletarian-revolutionary—anticipated and prepared the impending open class struggle by waging a most bitter struggle on issues of programme and tactics. All the issues on which the masses waged an armed struggle in 1905-07 and 1917-20 can (and should) be studied, in their embryonic form, in the press of the period. Among these three main trends there were, of course, a host of intermediate, transitional or half-hearted forms. It would be more correct to say that those political and ideological trends which were genuinely of a class nature crystallised in the struggle of press organs, parties, factions and groups; the classes were forging the requisite political and ideological weapons for the impending battles.”*¹⁰⁶

Later, the Communist International generalized from this experience in a document adopted at the second congress:

*“For two decades in Russia, and for some years in Germany, the communist party has been fighting not only the bourgeoisie, but also those ‘socialists’ who transmit bourgeois influences to the proletariat; it took into its ranks the staunchest, most farsighted, and most advanced fighters of the working class. Only if there is such a disciplined organization of the working class elite is it possible to surmount all the difficulties confronting the workers’ dictatorship on the morrow of victory.”*¹⁰⁷

*„In the columns of the press, at popular meetings, in the trade unions and cooperatives, wherever the adherents of the Communist International have an entry, it is necessary to denounce, systematically and unrelentingly, not only the bourgeoisie, but also their assistants, the reformists of all shades.”*¹⁰⁸

Trotsky fully shared the lessons of the Bolsheviks and the Communist International as he documented in the founding program of the Fourth International:

*“The Fourth International declares uncompromising war on the bureaucracies of the Second, Third, Amsterdam and Anarcho-syndicalist Internationals, as on their centrist satellites; on reformism without reforms; democracy in alliance with the GPU; pacifism without peace; anarchism in the service of the bourgeoisie; on “revolutionists” who live in deathly fear of revolution. All of these organizations are not pledges for the future, but decayed survivals of the past. The epoch of wars and revolutions will raze them to the ground.”*¹⁰⁹

106 V.I. Lenin: ‘Left-Wing’ Communism— An Infantile Disorder, in: LCW Vol. 31, pp. 26-27

107 Communist International: Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution, p. 133

108 Communist International: Conditions of Admission to the Communist International, in: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents Selected and Edited by Jane Degras, Vol. I 1919-1922, pp. 168-169

109 Leon Trotsky: The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International. The Transitional Program (1938); in: Documents of the Fourth International, New York 1973, pp. 147-

Building the Party in the National and International Realms Must be a Simultaneous Process

From its beginning, a truly revolutionary party or pre-party organization must be an *international formation*. This principle is rooted in the nature of capitalism and of the working class which are both international in nature. Only as an international organisation we can develop a truly internationalist outlook, internalise international experience and work as internationalist revolutionaries. If a group exists for too long as a national organisation, it runs into the serious danger of developing a nation-centered experience and perspective.

Furthermore, the international character of the party corresponds to the nature of the revolutionary program and activity. Just as the revolutionary program can only live, breathe, and develop in an organization of revolutionary militants, so can the international program as well as proletarian internationalism and solidarity only exist in an international organization. Without it, national centeredness and finally nationalist deviations are unavoidable.

Trotsky once rightly remarked: "*Marxist policies 'in one country' are as impossible as the construction of a socialist society 'in one country'.*"¹¹⁰

Such a conception is true for both a party and a pre-party organization, as Trotsky explained in numerous articles and letters:

*„From its very first steps the Opposition must therefore act as an international faction – as did the Communists in the days of the publication of the **Communist Manifesto**, or in the Zimmerwald Left at the beginning of the war. In all these cases the groups were for the most part small numerically or it was a matter of isolated individuals; but they nevertheless acted as an international organization. In the epoch of imperialism such a position is a hundred times more imperative than in the days of Marx.*

Those who believe that the International Left will someday take shape as a simple sum of national groups, and that therefore the international unification can be postponed indefinitely until the national groups "grow strong," attribute only a secondary importance to the international factor and by this very reason take the path of national opportunism.

It is undeniable that each country has greatest peculiarities of its own; but in our epoch these peculiarities can be assayed and exploited in a revolutionary way only from an internationalist point of view. On the other hand, only an international organization can be the bearer of an international ideology.

Can anyone seriously believe that isolated Oppositional national groups, divided among themselves and left to their own resources, are capable of finding the correct road by themselves? No, this is a certain path to national degeneration, sectarianism, and ruin. The tasks facing the International Opposition are enormously difficult. Only by being indissolubly tied together, only by working out answers jointly to all current problems, only by creating their international platform, only by mutually verifying each one of

their steps, that is, only by uniting in a single international body, will the national groups of the Opposition be able to carry out their historic task.”¹¹¹

Like many centrists today, various groups in the 1930s found “reasons” to declare the foundation of an international organization “premature.” In replying to such criticism by the Italian-centred Bordigists, Trotsky wrote in 1930:

“Your conception of internationalism appears to me erroneous. In the final analysis, you take the International as a sum of national sections or as a product of the mutual influence of national sections. This is, at least, a one-sided, undialectical and, therefore, wrong conception of the International. If the Communist Left throughout the world consisted of only five individuals, they would have nonetheless been obliged to build an international organization simultaneously with the building of one or more national organizations.

It is wrong to view a national organization as the foundation and the international as a roof. The interrelation here is of an entirely different type. Marx and Engels started the communist movement in 1847 with an international document and with the creation of an international organization. The same thing was repeated in the creation of the First International. The very same path was followed by the Zimmerwald Left in preparation for the Third International. Today this road is dictated far more imperiously than in the days of Marx. It is, of course, possible in the epoch of imperialism for a revolutionary proletarian tendency to arise in one or another country, but it cannot thrive and develop in one isolated country; on the very next day after its formation it must seek for or create international ties, an international platform, an international organization. Because a guarantee of the correctness of the national policy can be found only along this road. A tendency which remains shut-in nationally over a stretch of years, condemns itself irrevocably to degeneration.

You refuse to answer the question as to the character of your differences with the International Opposition on the grounds that an international principled document is lacking. I consider such an approach to the question as purely formal, lifeless, not political and not revolutionary. A platform or program is something that comes as a result of extensive experiences from joint activities on the basis of a certain number of common ideas and methods. Your 1925 platform did not come into being on the very first day of your existence as a faction. The Russian Opposition created a platform in the fifth year of its struggle; and although this platform appeared two and a half years after yours did, it has also become outdated in many respects.”¹¹²

In another document, in which Trotsky attacked the Germany-centred Socialist Workers Party (SAP) in 1935, he wrote:

„However, wherein does the “profound problem” involved in this question lie? Observe, objectively the new International is necessary, but subjectively it is impossible. In simpler terms, without the new International the proletariat will be crushed, but the masses do not understand this as yet. And what else is the task of the Marxists if not

111 Leon Trotsky: An Open Letter to All Members of the Leninbund (1930); in: Writings 1930, pp. 91-92

112 Leon Trotsky: To the Editorial Board of Prometeo (1930); in: Writings 1930, pp. 285-286

to raise the subjective factor to the level of the objective and to bring the consciousness of the masses closer to the understanding of the historical necessity – in simpler terms, to explain to the masses their own interests, which they do not yet understand? The “profound problem” of the centrists is profound cowardice in the face of a great and undeferrable task. The leaders of the SAP do not understand the importance of class-conscious revolutionary activity in history.”¹¹³

In the same spirit, Trotsky wrote to the French Piverists in 1939:

„Without as yet having doctrine, revolutionary tradition, clear program, masses, you did not fear to proclaim a new party. By what right? Obviously you believe that your ideas give you the right to win the masses, isn't that so? Why then do you refuse to apply the same criterion to the International? Solely because you do not know how to raise yourself up to the international point of view. A national party (even if it is in the form of an initiating organization) is a vital necessity for you, but an international party looks like a luxury, and that can wait. That's bad, Guérin, very bad!”¹¹⁴

In applying the principles of the party, authentic Marxists refuse to make a qualitative difference between national and international party-building. Hence, an international party or pre-party organization must be built on the basis of *international democratic centralism*, i.e., with an international homogenous programmatic line, discipline, and leadership. Against the centrist distortions, there must be no concessions to backward national-centeredness – neither in program nor in party-building.

Building an international organization is always a central task – for the pre-party organization no less than for the party. A smaller pre-party organization is no less influenced by its material conditions than a party. National centeredness is disastrous for revolutionaries irrespective of their numbers. The laws of materialism – “*being determines consciousness*” – holds true in all circumstances! Hence, a small national organization which refuses to simultaneously expand internationally will eventually be corroded by national centeredness and loses its revolutionary character if it does not energetically correct its orientation and turn towards internationalism in practical, organizational terms.

113 Leon Trotsky: *Centrist Alchemy Or Marxism?* (1935); in: *Writings 1934/35*, pp. 262-263

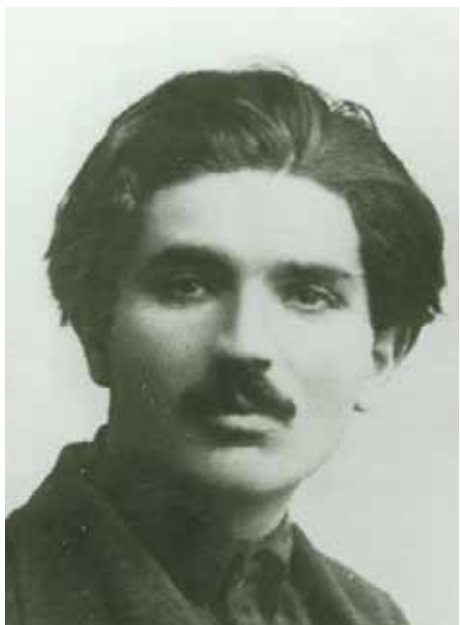
114 Leon Trotsky: *Centrism and the Fourth International* (1939); in: *Leon Trotsky: On France*, New York 1979, p. 223



Bolshevik Women who played a key role in leading the Revolutionary Party and the Russian Revolution: Evgenia Bosh (top left), Ludmila Stal (top right), Konkordiia Samoilova (below left) and Elena Stasova (talking with Lenin, below right).



Leaders of the Bolshevik Party at the time of Lenin: Gregory Zinoviev (top left) and Nikolai Bukharin (top right), Founder of Marxism in Russia: Grigoriy Pechanov (below left); Leading Marxist Philosopher in the USSR in the 1920s: Abram Deborin (below right).



Leader of the Trotskyist Movement: Christian Rakovsky (talking with Trotsky, top left), Karl Radek (top right), Ter-Vaganian (below left) and Leon Sedov (below right).

III. 25 Years of Building of Our International Tendency

After outlining the Bolshevick-Communists conception of the revolutionary party we shall now present an overview of the history of our movement and its practical efforts to build such an organization. Let us start by summarizing the challenges which our movement faced at the beginning.

We started with the recognition that Marxism was thrown into a deep crisis when the Fourth International degenerated in the late 1940s and early 1950s. We recognized that all fragments of the Fourth International had in one way or another succumbed to the anti-working class pressures of Stalinism, social democracy, and/or petty-bourgeois nationalism. All the fragments of the Fourth International betrayed the method of the Transitional Program of Leon Trotsky by their capitulation to anti-proletarian class forces. Concretely, the leadership of the Fourth International and all its leaders of the future splits – Pablo, Mandel, Cannon, Lambert, Healy, Moreno, etc. – capitulated either to Stalinism (in particular Titoism and Maoism), Social Democracy (e.g., the Labour Party in Britain), or bourgeois nationalism (e.g., MNR in Bolivia 1952, Peron in Argentina, or the SLFP in Sri Lanka).

As we have analyzed in other documents, the leadership of the Fourth International was, by then, disoriented by new and unexpected political developments – in particular the counter-revolutionary defeats which ended the revolutionary phase of 1943-47, the strengthening and expansion of Stalinism, the consolidation of capitalism, and the failure of the Fourth International to overcome its isolation from the masses (with a few exceptions like in Bolivia, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam). They were faced with a new situation and failed to apply the method of Trotsky's Transitional Program to the new phenomena and to adapt their perspectives to the changed circumstances. As a result, they distorted the revolutionary program in order to adapt to non-revolutionary forces – Stalinism, social democracy, and petty-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalism – which were stronger than the Fourth International.¹¹⁵

As we wrote in an essay: *"We are fully aware that the possibilities for revolutionary work were very difficult for the Trotskyists under such circumstances. But their centrist failure was not that they remained numerically weak. Neither was their centrist failure*

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

*that they made mistakes. Only those who don't do anything make no mistakes. Their centrist failure was that they became uncritical or even hailed Stalinist, left social democratic, and petty-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalist forces. Their centrist failure was that they spread illusions among vanguard workers (and their own members) in the revolutionary potential of Tito, Mao-Tsetung, Aneurin Bevan, Messali Hadj, General Peron, etc., instead of warning of their inevitable betrayal of the workers. Their centrist failure was that they failed to understand and to teach the workers' vanguard that only a revolutionary party fighting under the Trotskyist banner can lead the proletariat to victory. Their centrist failure was that, instead, they mis-educated the workers vanguard that an objective revolutionary process would push the Titos, the Maos, the Bevans, and the Perons to provide the workers and oppressed authentic leadership towards the revolutionary toppling of the capitalist system. No Stalinist agent forced them into these centrist failures! These failures were their own volition and responsibility! And it is these failures which marked the centrist degeneration of the Fourth International and all of its leaders in the years 1948-52."*¹¹⁶

As a result, the revolutionary continuity which started with Marx and Engels struggle for communism since the 1840s and embraced the four revolutionary Internationals until the early 1950s had unraveled. Hence, Marxism – or let us more accurately call it the official mis-interpretation of Marxism – became dominated by Stalinism, social-democratism, or Trotskyite centrism. This went hand in hand with the increasing corruption of the workers' movement by the labor bureaucracy and aristocracy. For this reasons the RCIT concluded in its program:

*"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."*¹¹⁷

Hence, it is an indispensable and urgent task of the Bolshevik-Communists to reconstitute Marxism as an orthodox, undistorted, militant, and revolutionary tradition, mode of thought, and fighting force.

116 Michael Pröbsting: Healy's Pupils Fail to Break with their Master, p. 36

117 RCIT: The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto, 2012, p. 24, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/>

i) Workers Power (Britain) and the MRCI in 1976–1989: The Beginning of the Reconstruction of Revolutionary Marxism

When *Workers Power* (Britain) and the *Irish Workers' Group* came into existence in 1975 after their split with the *Cliffite Socialist Workers Party* (SWP), they understood that the Fourth International had both programmatically as well as organizationally collapsed and, hence, the revolutionary heritage was broken. The chief task was to re-elaborate orthodox Marxism, to apply and extend it, given the new developments of capitalism and class struggle in the past decades and to build a cadre organization on the basis of such a program.

Later these two groups would join forces with *Gruppe Arbeitermacht* (Germany) and *Pouvoir Ouvrier* (France) and, in April 1984, they would found an international tendency – the *Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International* (MRCI).

These groups agreed on the need to re-elaborate a new program based on the transitional method of Trotsky's program of 1938. They also shared the view that they must build an international tendency based on the principles of democratic centralism. Such, the MRCI's *Declaration of Fraternal Relations* stated:

*"The building of a revolutionary international cannot be put off until national parties have been built. The international must be built by revolutionaries simultaneously with the building of national parties. It must be founded on the basis of an international programme guiding and informing the work of the national sections. On this basis it can and must be organised as a democratic centralist international."*¹¹⁸

Workers Power and the MRCI energetically set about to meet these tasks. They studied the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the development of Stalinism and corrected their analysis. Coming from the IS/SWP tradition, they initially held to Cliff's view that the USSR, China, and the other Stalinist states were state-capitalist societies. However, eventually the comrades reached the conclusion that these countries were degenerated workers states in which Stalinist bureaucracies oppressed the working class, and the strategic task was to organize a political revolution. The results of this work were published in the book *The Degenerated Revolution*.¹¹⁹ However, as we shall show below, this book contained a theoretical error on the issue of smashing the Stalinist state apparatus which we later corrected.

Another important theoretical achievement – as summarized above – was a Marxist assessment of the history and degeneration of the Fourth International

118 MRCI: *Declaration of Fraternal Relations*, in: *Permanent Revolution* No 2 (1984), p. 45

119 This analysis had been documented in *Workers Power: The Degenerated Revolution. The Origin and Nature of the Stalinist States* (1982). The most central comrades in elaborating WP's and the MRCI's programmatic foundations were Dave Hughes and Dave Stockton, both founding members of *Workers Power* and its forerunner in early 1970s. While Hughes unfortunately died in 1991, comrade Stockton has remained the most influential thinker of the LRCI/LFI. As a leader of creative intelligence, historical knowledge and extraordinary sensitivity he was central in developing our positions and in educating a number of cadres. His failure to withstand the centrist degeneration of the LFI in 2010/11 does not remove his revolutionary legacy.

and those who split with it, which was documented in the book *The Death Agony of the Fourth International*.

Another important contribution was Workers Power's restatement of the Leninist understanding of reformism – social democracy and Stalinism – as *bourgeois workers parties*. By this we understand that these parties are dominated by a bureaucratic caste with the labor aristocracy as its core constituent layer. This bureaucracy is integrated into the capitalist system and cannot be reformed or made into a tool of the working class struggle. At the same time, we recognized that these parties were still based – in terms of membership and electoral support – on the working class and that it was important for revolutionaries to apply the united front tactic.¹²⁰

Another key theoretical advance of the MRCI was the discussion and adoption of its *Thesis on the Anti-Imperialist United Front*. In this document the comrades went back to the original anti-imperialist position of the Communist International at the time of Lenin and Trotsky, which was later upheld by the Fourth International. Such an understanding included the consistent support for the military struggle of nations oppressed and attacked by imperialism. At the same time, communists must not give any political support to petty-bourgeois or bourgeois leaderships of these anti-imperialist struggles.¹²¹

Another important theoretical advance was the elaboration of the *Thesis on Women's Oppression*. In this document we elaborated a materialist analysis of the historic roots of women's oppression as well as an assessment of the heritage of the proletarian women's movement in the times of Clara Zetkin, Alexandra Kollontai, and Inessa Armand. The thesis also elaborated a Marxist critique of the feminist movement which it considered as petty-bourgeois. Finally, it outlined a communist program and strategy for a women liberation struggle.¹²²

While re-elaborating the fundamentals of the Marxist theory was certainly the most important achievements of Workers Power and the MRCI during this period, they did not limit their activities to the field of theory. For example, Workers Power was the only left-wing organization which took an anti-imperialist position during the Malvinas war in 1982 and stood for the defense of Argentina and the defeat of British imperialism. Similarly, the comrades supported the Irish national liberation struggle against the British occupation without giving political support to Sinn Fein's petty-bourgeois nationalism.

During the historic British miner's strike in 1984/85, the comrades intervened and applied revolutionary tactics in one of the most important strikes in Western Europe since 1968. They called for a general strike and warned against the reformist strategy of the Scargill leadership in NUM and the betrayal of

120 See on this Workers Power: Thesis on Reformism – the Bourgeois Workers' Party (1983), in: Permanent Revolution No. 1 (1983)

121 MRCI: Theses: The Anti-Imperialist United Front, in: Permanent Revolution No. 5 (1987)

122 MRCI: Thesis on Women's Oppression, in: Trotskyist International No. 3 (1989)

the TUC bureaucracy. They participated in efforts to build a rank and file movement of the miners. However, they did not succeed in recruiting miners for the organization.¹²³

Finally the MRCI succeeded in recruiting a Trotskyist group in Austria. It also won José Villa, a student cadre from the Bolivian POR led by Guillermo Lora, and small group of comrades around him in Bolivia and Peru.

Readers will find a more extensive coverage of the MRCI's history in a longer article by Richard Brenner which we published in 1999.¹²⁴

123 To be precise, WP won three miners but lost them after a short time.

124 Richard Brenner: An ongoing history: the LRCI ten years on, 30.6.1999, in: Trotskyist International, No. 26 (1999), pp. 18-29

ii) The LRCI in the Period 1989-2001: The Collapse of Stalinism and National Liberation Struggles

The year 1989 was important both for our movement as well as for world politics. As mentioned above, the MRCI had set itself the task of re-elaborating a new program based on the transitional method as well as the foundation of an international tendency based on the principles of democratic centralism. In the summer of 1989, delegates from groups in Britain, Ireland, Austria, France, Germany, and Peru discussed and adopted the new program called *The Trotskyist Manifesto*. They also agreed to transform the MRCI into an international tendency based on democratic centralism and elected an international leadership. The new organization was called *League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI)*.¹²⁵

Despite its small size, the founding of this new organization marked an important step forward. Bolshevik-Communists had re-elaborated a program more than six decades after Trotsky wrote the *Transitional Program*. They also had finally succeeded in overcoming national limitations and founded a militant Marxist international tendency.

1989-1991: Political Revolution and Social Counterrevolution in the Stalinist States

Our international tendency immediately faced an acid test. In the years 1989-91 the Stalinist regimes in the USSR and Eastern Europe went through their terminal crisis. In addition, the Chinese regime was confronted with an uprising of students and workers, which it managed to crush on 4 June 1989. These years constituted a world revolutionary phase.

The LRCI followed these historic events closely in words and deeds. We elaborated a program for the political revolution in these states. We understood that the working class and the popular masses were rebelling against the bureaucratic caste, primarily due to democratic issues (the right of national self-determination, democratic rights like the right to assemble or to strike, etc.) This was hardly surprising given that the workers had been suppressed by Stalinist dictatorships for many decades. This was the beginning of a political revolution. The LRCI supported these struggles for democratic rights and argued for a revolutionary program. We argued that the masses have to prepare for a possible Stalinist backlash (as in fact happened in China) and that they should advance the struggle towards a political revolution to overthrow the bureaucracy. We warned against any illusions either in the soft-Stalinist Gorbachev-wing or in the restorationist wing around Yeltsin, or respectively

125 LRCI: *The Trotskyist Manifesto*, London 1989, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/trotskyist-manifesto/>

in their Eastern European counterparts. We called for the formation of strike committees and action councils of the working class and workers' militias in order to advance the insurrection for a political revolution. Most importantly, we stressed the need to build revolutionary workers' parties instead of leaving the lead either to reform-Stalinist or bourgeois-democratic forces.

The culmination of this process was the failed Yanayev coup in August 1991. Between the 19th and 21st of August, the so-called Emergency Committee around Yanayev launched an attempted coup. Their plan was to impose a Stalinist-restorationist dictatorship like their Chinese caste-brothers and sisters did in 1989-92. They would have immediately crushed the gains which the workers and oppressed in the USSR had achieved in the years before. These gains included some minimal democratic rights like the right to demonstrate, to go on strike, etc. While sectarians sneer at such very simple gains, we – and all those who have experience of living under a dictatorship – consider them as important gains. While they are, of course, not sufficient, they are rather beneficial when organizing the class struggle.

Hence, during the three days from the 19th to 21st of August, we called for the defense of these gains against the threat of a Stalinist-restorationist dictatorship along the lines of that in China. We gave critical support to those forces who mobilized resistance against the coup – like the pro-Yeltsin forces who organized demonstrations, miners' strikes, and military resistance. At the same time we warned against any support for capitalist restoration. From the moment the coup was defeated and Yeltsin tried to utilize the new situation for advancing the capitalist counter-revolution, we warned that this was the new main enemy.

In the statement we issued on the day after the coup was defeated, 22 August 1991, we wrote:

“Our task is to get the working class to defend their post-capitalist property relations in the context of defending their democratic gains. The destruction of the democratic gains [by Pugo/Yanaev, Ed.] would have made it impossible to raise the consciousness of the masses to a level adequate to this task” (...) *“The greatest danger to the working class now that the coup has collapsed is Yeltsin (...) Yeltsin is no friend of the working class. He represents all the elements in the former bureaucratic caste who have abandoned the prospect of bureaucratic parasitism on proletarian property relations in favour of becoming the new ruling class of a restored capitalist Russia. (...) His pro-capitalist policies spell mass unemployment and the destruction of social welfare for millions of workers; he wants to open up the 120 million Soviet workers to unbridled imperialist exploitation the events of the past week, whilst they have blocked the road to a Stalinist bureaucratic counterrevolution, have acted as a catalyst to speed up the social counterrevolution; the cause of the democratic restorationists has been immeasurably advanced. The tempo of the demise of the nomenklatura has likewise been accelerated.”*

We went on to call for *“workers' councils elected in every workplace and region of the USSR”* and *“proletarian political revolution to smash the dictatorship of the Stalinists*

and prevent the restoration of Stalinism.”¹²⁶

In the end, the process which started as a political revolution of the working class ended in a social counter-revolution. This constituted a historic defeat because it meant the destruction of the degenerated workers states’ and their social gains through capitalist restoration. The reason for this is that decades of Stalinist dictatorship had destroyed any independent working class organizations and politically atomized the proletariat. As a result, there was no revolutionary party and it was not possible to build one during the few years of the political-revolutionary crisis in 1989-91. Only the existence of such a party could have secured a victorious outcome of the political revolution.

All this demonstrates, once again, the counter-revolutionary nature of Stalinism whose rule had devastating effects on working class consciousness and organizations. This was already emphasized by Trotsky in a study he wrote in 1939 after the start of WWII:

*„The primary political criterion for us is not the transformation of property relations in this or another area, however important these may be in themselves, but rather the change in the consciousness and organization of the world proletariat, the raising of their capacity for defending former conquests and accomplishing new ones. From this one, and the only decisive standpoint, the politics of Moscow, taken as a whole, wholly retain their reactionary character and remain the chief obstacle on the road to the world revolution.“*¹²⁷

In contrast to various centrists like the Mandeliste Fourth International, the LRCI did not support either the Gorbachev- or Yeltsin-wing. While Mandel excluded the possibility of a capitalist restoration, we warned against this danger. In contrast to the Morenoites, we did not believe in a long “*epoch of February*” where a seemingly automatic process would lead towards a political revolution. And in contrast to the Cliffites – who believed that the Stalinist countries had always been capitalist anyway – we understood that the destruction of the planned post-capitalist property relations represented a historic defeat.

Neither did we share the idiocies of various sectarians who saw the politicization and mobilization of millions of workers against the Stalinist bureaucracy as a “*counter-revolution*.” When they speak about the “*defense of the degenerated workers state*,” they mean in fact the bureaucratic regimes which they wanted to save with the help of Stalinist tanks. These sectarians avoided asking themselves why nowhere did the workers pour into the streets to defend the Stalinists?! Why did these regimes collapse without any support from sectors of the working class?! In contrast to them, Marxists orientate themselves towards the working class and its struggles for their rights, and try to help them overcome their illusions from *within* their mass movement instead of supporting the totalitarian state

126 LRCI: The Failed Coup in the USSR (22 August 1991), in: Trotskyist International No. 7 (Sept. 1991 – Jan 1992), pp. 5-6

127 Leon Trotsky: The USSR in War (1939), in: Leon Trotsky: In Defense of Marxism, New York 1942; reprinted by Pathfinder New York 1973, p. 19

apparatus which suppressed these workers for decades.

Not only did we argue for such a program of political revolution in 1989-91, we also sent several comrades – including the author of this booklet – to Eastern Germany, the USSR, Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary, and Romania. We gained important experience in these mass movements and made a number of contacts with progressive activists.

Our most important and sustained intervention was in Eastern Germany which already began in November 1989 when we had to cross the Stalinist checkpoint with our propaganda hidden. Here we succeeded in recruiting a number of young Eastern German workers which constituted a new section of the LRCI and ultimately fused with the Western German section.

Finally, our experience in the political revolutionary crisis as well as the capitalist counter-revolution in the USSR and Eastern Europe helped us to correct an earlier theoretical mistake. As mentioned above, our book *The Degenerated Revolution* published in 1982 contained an error as it claimed that the task of the proletarian revolution – smashing the state apparatus – had already been accomplished by the Stalinist takeovers of 1948-50. Consequently, we erroneously thought, this was no longer a strategic task of the political revolution. This incorrect position was already rejected by a minority in Workers Power in the 1980s and, after the experience of 1989-91, gained more supporters. We correctly argued that the “bourgeois-bureaucratic” state machine (i.e., police, standing army, bureaucracy) in the Stalinist countries is *not* a proletarian instrument, but one of the petty-bourgeois bureaucracy which is much closer to the bourgeoisie than the working class. Therefore, the political revolution required not the reform of but rather the smashing of the Stalinist-Bonapartist state apparatus. This position finally got a majority at our fourth congress in 1997.¹²⁸

Another theoretical mistake we made in the early 1990s was our concept of the “*moribund workers’ states*.” While we immediately recognized the reactionary nature of the events when openly bourgeois-restorationist forces came to power in the USSR and Eastern Europe, we thought that since the capitalist property relations had (and could) not have been immediately implemented, it would be inaccurate to already speak about capitalist states. Instead we characterized these countries as “*moribund worker’s states*.” In fact, we had misunderstood Trotsky who explained that the class character of a state is determined by the class forces which control the state. After an internal debate we corrected this error at our fifth congress in 2000.¹²⁹

128 See the resolution on this issue in the second edition of our book *The Degenerated Revolution*. The main protagonist of this position was Keith Harvey, a talented and intelligent comrade who played an important role in developing our program during the events of 1989-91. Unfortunately, he became more and more affected by the conservative and demoralized prejudices of the progressive middle class and labor aristocracy. He split from us in 2006 together with a passive-propagandist minority in Britain and eventually dropped out of organized political activity.

129 See: Richard Brenner: The Error of the ‘Moribund Workers State’ – a Correction, in: Workers Power, No. 248 (November 2000), pp. 12-13. The main protagonist of this correction was Richard

Another longer-term achievement of our closer analysis of the collapse of Stalinism was our study of the Marxist discussion about the relationship between the plan and market during the dictatorship of the proletariat. This led to our seriously elaborating how a workers' state will plan its economy and resulted in a number of longer articles as well as a pamphlet called *Plan versus Market*.¹³⁰

1991: The Imperialist Attack against Iraq

Another key event in the early 1990s was the imperialist attack on Iraq in January 1991. The bourgeois dictatorship of Saddam Hussein had conquered Kuwait in August 1990 and the Western imperialist powers – with the support of the Soviet regime of Gorbachev as well as the Syrian Assad regime – used this as a pretext for a massive military buildup in the Middle East.

The imperialists attacked and smashed the Iraqi army in a few weeks time. This provoked a popular uprising of the Shiite and Kurdish workers and peasants in early March. The imperialists preferred a weak dictatorship under Saddam over a victorious uprising and, therefore, halted their troops while the Baathist army crushed the insurrection.

Our organization took a clear anti-imperialist position in this war. We called for the defeat of the imperialist onslaught and for the military victory of the Iraqi forces. At the same time we refused to give any political support to the Baathist regime. We supported the Shiite and Kurdish uprising and called for a workers' and peasant government.

Our clear anti-imperialist stand brought us in sharp conflict with the reformists and centrists. Following the leadership of the Stalinist states, most "Communist" Parties supported the UN embargo against Iraq imposed in the autumn of 1990 in preparation for the imperialist onslaught. The CWI – as well as many other centrists – refused to defend Iraq and took a neutral position. Some sectarians confused the necessary defense of Iraq with political support for the Baathists and even supported the latter's maneuvers to retain or extend their power (like the invasion of Kuwait or the brutal repression of the popular uprising in March).

Brenner. Brenner was a comrade with both the ability of creative thinking as well as being the best public speaker and writer of WP. These strengths brought him a lot of hostility from the centrist left in Britain. Unfortunately, he is equally extraordinary in any lack of self-discipline and the ability to work collectively. His failure to break with the middle class and to dedicate his life to revolutionary work hastened his political failure in 2010/11 when he became a supporter of the LFI's course of centrist degeneration. Since then he has by and large retreated as a public figure of WP and the LFI. Our discussion was also positively influenced by a thoughtful pamphlet called "*The Marxist Theory of the State and the Collapse of Stalinism*". It was published in 1995 by the Workers International League, a British group which had already dissolved long ago.

130 See LRCI: *Plan versus Market: Economics and Politics in the Transition from Capitalism to Communism*, in: *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 9 London 1996. The main contributors to this work were Keith Harvey and Fritz Haller, a former comrade from the Austrian section.

1992-1995: Balkan Wars

In Yugoslavia – a multi-national country – the collapse of Stalinism also led to an implosion of the federal state. The national sections of the bureaucratic caste split and decided to restore capitalist property relations. In such a dramatic transformation, they could only hope to keep power if they stirred up nationalist hatred in order to rally their people behind them.

The Serbian bureaucracy under Milosevic started this process in 1987 by escalating the oppression of the Kosova people and by systematically subordinating other provinces (Montenegro, Kosova and Vojvodina). As a result, Belgrade was able to control half of the eight votes in the federal leadership and thus threatened to oppress the other republics. The Slovenian as well as the Croatian bureaucracy under Tudjman headed for separate states. The latter combined this with chauvinist oppression of the Serbian minorities in Eastern Croatia as well as in the Knin region. Naturally the Western imperialist powers tried to intervene, but initially there were different strategies how this could be best done: from early on German and Austrian imperialism supported separatism in contrast to the UK and US.

The LRCI defended the national right of self-determination and hence defended Slovenia against the Yugoslavian army's attack in June 1991. We took a defeatist position in the war between Serbia and Croatia since both sides waged war in order to oppress each other. At the same we defended the right of self-determination for national minorities (like the Serbs in Croatia). We warned that the nationalism instigated by the ruling regimes served as a distraction from the capitalist restoration. We called for the overthrow of the restorationist regimes and the creation of workers' republics and a socialist Balkan federation.

In the early 1990s, the author of these lines traveled repeatedly on behalf of the LRCI to Serbia and built links with progressive anti-war activists. We translated a number of documents into Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian language and distributed them in the Balkans as well as among migrants in Austria. In addition, in 1992 we co-organized a demonstration of 1,500 mostly Serbian migrant workers against the chauvinist anti-Serbian wave which so strongly dominated imperialist and petty-bourgeois "public opinion." There were two speakers at this demonstration – Pröbsting and a Serbian migrant comrade – and we called for opposition to both the imperialist campaign and Serbian nationalism.¹³¹

In April 1992 the chauvinist forces – in particular those around the Serbian nationalist Karadžić – provoked the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This brought unspeakable suffering to the Bosnian Muslims and those Serbs and Croats who resisted the nationalist partition of Bosnia by the Serbian and

131 We have published a detailed report on this: Michael Gatter: Yugoslavia: bringing the War to Austria, 29.9.1992, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/yugoslavia-bringing-war-austria>

Croatian chauvinists. According to a report about the 1992-95 war written by the head of the Bosnian Delegation to the United Nations in 2008, 200,000 people were killed, 12,000 of them children, up to 50,000 women were raped, and 2.2 million were forced to flee their homes (in a country of about 4 million people).

We denounced the reactionary Bosnian government of Alija Izetbegović which – like the bureaucracies of the other republics – was striving to restore capitalism and which failed to defend the Bosnian people against the chauvinist aggressors. We called for international support for the liberation war of the Bosnian people and combined this with the perspective of a multi-national workers' republic in Bosnia as part of a socialist Balkan federation. We denounced the US and EU imperialists who strangled the Bosnian resistance with an arms embargo and whose UN troops collaborated with the Serbian chauvinists when the butcher General Mladić organized the mass murder of 8,000 Muslim men in Srebrenica in July 1995.

The LRCI was part of the *“International Workers' Aid”* campaign delivering medicine, clothes, etc. for the workers in Tuzla and other places and the author of these lines acted as the Austrian coordinator of this campaign. We called for arms and international volunteer brigades for the Bosnian resistance and denounced the NATO bombing campaign in the summer of 1995 which stopped the Bosnian liberation forces just when they were starting to advance and take back the areas they had lost in the first years of the war.

While many centrists either took a neutral position in this war and some even supported Serbian chauvinism, the RCIT stood for the victory of the Bosnian people and the defeat of reactionary Serbian chauvinists and combined this with the perspective of a socialist Balkan federation.

In this context, we should also note that, at the time, we initially made an error. Only belatedly, after some months, did we recognize that the Bosnian war was a genocidal war from the start. We had held a defeatist position in the first few months after April 1992, and only defended the Bosnian side from the autumn of 1992 onwards. Again, this was an error and we should have had defended the Bosnian side against the Serbian (and Croatian) chauvinists from the very beginning. Within the LRCI's international leadership, the author of these lines argued, together with other comrades, for a correction of the LRCI's line. At an international leadership meeting in July 1995, Pröbsting proposed the following statement:

“The main weakness of our position during that period was that the terrible genocide was not initiated after the autumn, but most major conquests of Muslim territory by the Bosnian Serbs happened during this period. Therefore, we only started to defend the Muslims when they had already suffered their most serious defeats. When we changed our tactics in November 1992, we mentioned two decisive facts: i) the breakup of the Muslim-Croat alliance and ii) the decision of imperialism not to make a full-scale military intervention. Both reasons were not sufficient to create a qualitatively new

situation. The breakup of the alliance with the Croats, important as it was, should not have been decisive for our defensist position because this alliance in itself did not (in this first period) and does not (since its renewal in March 1994) change the situation of the genocide committed against the Muslims. Despite the existence of this alliance, the Muslims (and also the Croats) were wiped out of many parts of the country between April and November 1992. This alliance was not strong enough to counter the offensive by the Karadziz-chauvinists. The abandoning of a full-scale imperialist military intervention should also not have been decisive for our tactics. We know that the main reasons for the war were in the internal Yugoslavian and Bosnian relation of forces. While we should have changed our tactics immediately in the case of an imperialist intervention, it was not correct to argue that the possibility of such an intervention was sufficient enough not to defend the Muslims and the multi-ethnic Bosnians.”

However, this position only received the support of a significant minority and was thus defeated.

More importantly, in 1995 the LRCI faced a split by a small opposition among our ranks which supported pro-Stalinist and pro-Serbian chauvinist positions. This split included the small Bolivian and Peruvian groups led by José Villa, as well as part of the New Zealand section. Leaving aside the fact that Villa, coming from a wealthy background, had for years proved himself to be a mini-*caudillio* and unprincipled intriguer incapable of collective discipline, these comrades proved unable to understand the importance of the democratic question, particularly in periods of sharp class antagonism and the lack of a socialist leadership.¹³²

132 The Bolivian and Peruvian groups soon dissolved and José Villa, completely demoralized, became a pro-Zionist journalist. In contrast to these two South American groups, the New Zealand group around Dave Brown remained politically active. In 2009/10 they developed – simultaneously but independent of us – a correct and insightful analysis of emerging Chinese imperialism. They also called – even earlier than we did officially – for the Fifth International. They also managed to take a much better position on the Arab Revolution and the democratic issues it involved than they did in the early 1990s. Unfortunately, they have still not completely freed themselves from their sectarian and economist tradition and are obsessively attached to a nation-centered method of party-building. For a fuller critical assessment by the RCIT, see: Michael Pröbsting: The Military’s Coup d’État in Egypt: Assessment and Tactics. A reply to the criticism of the WIVP and the LCC on the meaning of the Military’s Coup d’État and the slogan of the Revolutionary Constituent Assembly, 17.7.2013, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 12, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-meaning-of-coup-d-etat/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Coup d’État in Egypt and the Bankruptcy of the Left’s “Army Socialism”. A Balance Sheet of the coup and another Reply to our Critics (LCC, WIVP, SF/LCFI), 8.8.2013, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 13, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-and-left-army-socialism/>; Michael Pröbsting: Thailand: Shall Socialists Defend the Government Against the Military Coup? Reply to a Neo-Bordigist Polemic of the “Liaison Committee of Communists”, 24.5.2014, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 23, June 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/thailand-coup-reply/>

1997-1999: The National Liberation Struggle in Kosova and NATO's War against Serbia

The Milosevic regime tried to make up for its losses by intensifying the oppression of the Kosova people. In the 1990s, it crushed the heroic miners' strike in 1989 and tried to smash the boycott campaign against public institutions.¹³³ Finally, an armed uprising started in 1997 led by the petty-bourgeois-nationalist UÇK which originated from the Hoxahist LPK. It resulted in a civil war. The imperialists tried to contain the uprising by the so-called Rambouillet Agreement. However the uprising continued. Meanwhile NATO used the civil war as a pretext to build up its military presence in the Balkans and started an aerial war against Serbia. This ended with the cessation of the Serbian occupation but at the same time Kosova became a territory occupied by NATO and EU. This was helped by the betrayal of the UÇK leadership which served as an instrument in post-war Kosova.

The LRCI supported the national liberation struggle of the Kosova-Albanians from the beginning. The Kosova-Albanians had been nationally oppressed by Serbia since 1913 and had always desired independence from Belgrade. We stood for the victory of the uprising and called for a Kosova workers republic. We gave no political support to the petty-bourgeois UÇK leadership and defended Serbia against the NATO bombardment.

We also started to collaborate with Kosova-Albanian migrants in Austria and organized solidarity work. When the armed uprising spread after the massacre of Dreniza on 6 March 1998, the community organized a mass rally of 3,000 Albanian migrant workers and youth in Vienna. The Austrian section was invited to speak from the platform. I spoke as our representative and expressed our solidarity with the national liberation struggle for an independent Kosova of workers and peasants and warned against any interference from NATO imperialism.

Again – in contrast to centrists who failed to support the Kosova-Albanians – we can proudly record that we took a principled position both in propaganda as well as practice by supporting the Kosovar uprising, combining it with a socialist perspective while calling for the defeat of NATO's war against Serbia.

¹³³ The author of these lines visited Kosova in 1994 and gained first-hand experience with Serbian state repression when he was kidnapped for a short time by the secret service UDBA.

1994 until Today: The Uprising of the Chechen People against the Russian Occupation

Russia's two wars of occupation against the Chechen people – the first in the years 1994-96 and the second since late 1999 – were of equal importance during this decade. Against the desire of the Chechen people for independence, Moscow waged an incredibly brutal war. During the first war it massacred about 100,000 Chechens and during the second again up to 50,000 (in a country with a population of only one million!). The victory of the Chechen guerilla war in 1996 was an impressive event – compare the small Chechen people with Russia's 143 millions! – demonstrating once again how much a liberation war supported by the whole population can achieve against a demoralized great power. While the Putin regime has succeeded in occupying the country until now, the resistance continues at a low level. This resistance has become dominated mostly by petty-bourgeois Islamist forces.

We supported the Chechen liberation struggle from the beginning and called for the defeat of the Russian occupation forces. We gave no political support to the petty-bourgeois and Islamist leaderships and called for an independent workers' and peasant republic of Chechnya.

The Chechen war also provided the backdrop for a deeper analysis of Russian capitalism. In March 2001 Pröbsting drafted a document in which he analyzed the development of capitalist restoration in Russia in the 1990s and explained how the country has been transformed into an imperialist power. He put forward a resolution to that effect to a LRCI leadership meeting. However his resolution was defeated as the majority erroneously believed that Russia had become a semi-colonial country.

This reflected that, as early as the 1990s, when the LRCI was still a revolutionary tendency, the majority of its members faced enormous difficulties in applying Lenin's theory of imperialism when faced with new developments. A longer, internal, and controversy-laden process of discussions was necessary to correct this incorrect assessment of Russian imperialism.

At the next congress of the LRCI in April 2003, he again put forward a resolution on Russian imperialism, and this time our position received a narrow majority of the delegates' votes.

The Difficulties in Party Building in the 1990s and the Struggle against Passive Propagandism

The 1990s were a difficult period for party building. Paraphrasing James P. Cannon's formulation, we could speak about our "*Dog Days*." After the destruction of the degenerated workers states and the victory of imperialism in Eastern Europe as well as in the Gulf war, a democratic-reactionary phase had commenced. It led to the crisis and demoralization of huge sectors of the workers' movements. The Stalinist world-movement collapsed, the social democratic left became even less left, and many centrists despaired. They talked about the "*midnight of the century*" and "*the end of the epoch of October*."

We didn't despair because we were aware that the removal of Stalinism would have positive consequences in the long run and that the defeats in Eastern Europe couldn't remove the structural contradictions of world capitalism and, hence, would sooner or later lead to new periods of capitalist crisis and class struggle.

First and foremost, these historic upheavals demanded that revolutionaries elaborate a correct theoretical understanding and programmatic orientation. Our organization passed this test very well. We proved ourselves capable of applying a program of political revolution against the Stalinist regimes under concrete conditions and succeeded in developing it further. The few theoretical mistakes we made were later corrected. So the main task in this period was defending the revolutionary program in order to consolidate and educate the cadre for the future struggles; we stood the test.

However the defeats of the 1990s and our focus on programmatic and theoretical debates had also important negative consequences for our development. It helped to develop or strengthen a conservative, inward looking mentality among substantial sectors of our members who had an appetite for internal discussions and maybe selling the paper at a demonstration (and in some cases even doing some routine trade union work). But many members were inexperienced in or even hostile to activism and openly communist participation in mass movements and struggles, in agitation directed to people without Marxist education, and in recruiting new activists from outside the milieu of the old left. This was a crucial issue, since we understood that we had to turn to the youth who were much less affected by the demoralizing ramifications of Stalinism and its collapse than older workers.

In the end, this was not so surprising. Revolutionaries are, like all human beings, influenced by the times they are living in and by the dominating "*Zeitgeist*". Changes of the world situation or of the class struggle may often lead to the loss of many comrade-in-arms who are overwhelmed by the new historical necessities demanded by the changed conditions of class struggle. This might shock the one or other communist at the very beginning but it should never become an obstacle in taking the necessary steps. As Lenin said:

*„Communists who have no illusions, who do not give way to despondency, and who preserve their strength and flexibility “to begin from the beginning” over and over again in approaching an extremely difficult task, are not doomed (and in all probability will not perish).“*¹³⁴

Together with other leading cadres, Pröbsting pushed for a re-orientation of the LRCI towards the resurging class struggle in the second half of the 1990s. We were aware that, if we do not reach out to new layers of activists, our membership will decline and become increasingly conservative in its outlook. However our efforts were met with open hostility from some and passive resistance from many more comrades. As a result we lost a number of them during the 1990s. The British section had less than half as many members as in 1990. In the year 2000, the Austrian section also lost more than half of its comrades who were not prepared to re-orient themselves in words and deeds, something which involved taking up exemplary mass work and carrying out recruitment from new layers. Our experience taught us that while it may be possible to pass resolutions about adopting an activist, outward orientation, it can be very difficult to make these comrades change their attitude so that they are capable of implementing such a re-orientation.

This was one of numerous experiences we needed to get on with our progress. Those of us who learned the lessons were not surprised or despondent during subsequent internal fights but, quite the contrary, bore down to face every fight that was necessary to keep the Marxist ranks free from any revisionist deviations.

We also made numerical gains by winning a group in Sweden and later in the Czech Republic. We also built a small group in Australia by transferring cadres from New Zealand. We also supported the German section by transferring several cadres and winning over an ex-Lambertist group of trade unionists. However, three important weaknesses remained: The remaining majority has not learned the lessons of the past internal struggles in their entirety. We also remained a largely European tendency with hardly any members in the semi-colonial world. In addition, our tendency was largely composed of intellectuals, students, and labor aristocrats. As we will see, these weaknesses would weigh heavily on the LRCI, and constituted a negative heritage.

134 V.I.Lenin: Notes Of A Publicist (1922); in: LCW, Vol. 33, p. 207

Discussing the Character of the Period

An important debate in the LRCI in the 1990s was the discussion on the character of the period. The majority view – adopted at the second congress in 1992 – was that the events in 1989-91 had opened a “*democratic-reactionary phase*” which however was only the first phase of a “*world-historic revolutionary period.*” While we agreed with the assessment that the defeats of 1991 had opened a short-term “*democratic-reactionary phase,*” from the beginning the author of these lines and other comrades opposed the view that we had entered a “*revolutionary period.*” We argued that the capitalist crisis had not yet been exacerbated to the degree that would result in massive destabilization of world politics and the global economy. We argued that such developments inevitably lay ahead, but that this would only happen at a later period. The character of the period in 1990s, we explained, had rather a “*transitional character.*”

Accordingly, Pröbsting put forward corresponding resolutions to the next LRCI congresses in 1994 and 1997 but lost. Finally he succeeded in gaining a majority at the congress in 2000. Year after year in which no revolutionary events of world-wide significance took place, contrary to their expectations, certainly helped the comrades to come over to our analysis. The following is the key section of the adopted resolution drafted by the author of these lines:

*“While the LRCI stood the test of the new period in the 1990s in a programmatic sense, it misunderstood the character of the period we are in. We characterised the period overoptimistically as a revolutionary one. We expected the deepening of the contradictions of capitalism, the rivalry between the great powers and as a consequence a massive upswing of class struggles and the emergence of revolutionary situations sooner than has happened. In reality, this process, as outlined above, was slower and more contradictory than we expected. In reality, the elements cited above prevented the period from having a revolutionary character. This does not mean that the LRCI was fundamentally wrong in its assessment of the dynamic of the world wide class equilibrium. We were wrong in assessing the tempo, not the fundamental direction, of the dynamic of the capitalist contradictions. Indeed, the elements of stability of the imperialist world system are decreasing and the elements of instability are increasing, as was apparent by the end of the democratic counter-revolutionary phase in 1997/98. But the period from the beginning of the last decade until now did not have a revolutionary character, marked by sharp contradictions. In the context of “global capitalism,” and continuing US-hegemony, imperialism was able to achieve a relative, temporary stabilisation, which reminds us – to draw a historic analogy – of 1896-1913 rather than 1914-1948. This period bears a character of one preparing for future world-wide political explosions. One can characterise it as a transitional period or one of Interregnum.”*¹³⁵

True, the majority of comrades did not arrive at tactical mistakes from their incorrect position on the character of the world period. But their mistake gave

¹³⁵ Resolution on the World Situation and its historic Place in the Imperialist Epoch; in: LRCI IIB 129 (23 August 2000) Congress Documents of the V. LRCI Congress.

unnecessary ammunition to those pessimistic comrades inside and opponents outside of the LRCI who polemicized against us. And, even more importantly, it reflected a theoretical confusion of this majority of comrades and helped create confusion among future members, which would seriously disorientate them when a global revolutionary period eventually opened in 2008/09.

In the final analysis, one has to say that, unfortunately, the majority of the leading comrades failed to understand the method behind the Marxist characterization of historical periods. Every change of the world situation demonstrated how they would stumble around with eyes closed, unable to correctly analyze the nature of the period and to understand its consequences. This inability, together with their unwillingness to at least accept our correct analyses was, in the long run, a crucial factor which ultimately led to the degeneration of the entire organization. We will elaborate on this below.

In these discussions on the character of the period, the author of these lines also provided an outlook of future developments in world politics for which revolutionaries should prepare. Written in the spring of 2000, we think this outlook made a prognosis which was broadly confirmed by the events of the following decade. Here is a key excerpt of a draft document written by Pröbsting:

“Towards a new, revolutionary crisis period

In all probability, the imperialist system will experience a sharp crisis and the opening of a new revolutionary period – probably in this decade. The reasons for this are: i) the accumulation of explosive contradictions in the imperialist world economy, ii) continued development of block formations and inner-imperialist rivalry, iii) the lack of important pre-conditions for a new boom period (like e.g., massive destruction of capital, a clear imperialist Hegemon, historic defeat of the working class in the imperialist centers), iv) in many countries the working class is still not decisively beaten and even sees an upswing of class struggles.

This new period will be characterised by a more intense rivalry between the great imperialist powers. Until now these contradiction have been suppressed by the heavy weight of the USA, but they are nevertheless present and express themselves (building of a separate EU army, steps towards the re-armament of Japan, repeated trade conflicts). US imperialism also lacks the resources to integrate Russia and China into a kind of world political alliance. Instead the contradiction between Moscow, Peking and Washington will increase, but Russia and China can challenge the USA not on a global but only regional level (e.g. Caucasus, Central Asia, Taiwan, South Chinese Sea)

This new period will be marked by a tendency of advancing block formation, particularly around USA (NAFTA, Latin America), EU (Eastern Europe, Northern Africa), and Japan (parts of Asia). This also implies increasing attacks against the oppressed people in the semi-colonies and an attempt to subordinate them further under the imperialist command (e.g., “Dollarization,” stationing of imperialist troops up to the formation of protectorates à la Balkans, etc).

The period ahead of us will witness an increase of world political instability. This

implies more civil wars and wars between states in the future, first in the weakest chain of the imperialist world system – the semi-colonial states (look to Africa, the Balkans, the Caucasus, etc.)

Against the backdrop of a crisis-ridden capitalist development, capital will be forced to increasingly attack the working class world-wide. In countries where the bourgeoisie has not succeeded until now in turning around the relation of forces qualitatively at the shop floor level – particularly in continental Europe and Japan – we will see more intense attacks. Given the upswing of the class struggle and the revival of the trade unions which suffered heavy defeats in the past (AFL-CIO in the USA) we can expect sharp clashes between the classes. (...)

Against this backdrop of increasing economic and world political contradictions, there will be an increased importance of national and democratic struggles. Precisely because the great imperialist powers are pushing for penetration and subjugation of the semi-colonies (and ex-Stalinist states) but at the same time are not capable of delivering economic and political stabilisation for these regions, there will be an increase of national rebellions against the great powers or their henchmen. For the same reason the bourgeois classes will increasingly be forced to hold onto their power by authoritarian means. Clashes with the working class (and the petty bourgeoisie) will be the result. These struggles can and will, in one form or another, be combined with social protests and insurrections.

These are the elements which will put international conflicts including wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions into the center of world politics. These are the elements which characterise a revolutionary period. These are the elements which make the building of a new revolutionary mass international more important and more realistic than ever. In the fire of many class battles, in defeats and victories revolutions, a new layer of the proletariat and the youth will be politically educated. Against this backdrop the ideas of revolutionary communism will fall on fertile ground. The new revolutionary international will be able to rally the proletarian vanguard.”¹³⁶

136 ASt resolution for the V. LRCI Congress: Thesis on the world situation and its historic place in the imperialist epoch

iii) The LRCI/LFI in the Period from 2001 to 2008: Pre-Revolutionary Period of Imperialist Wars and Resistance

The year 2001 saw the beginning of a new period in world politics with the 9/11 attacks and the imperialist war against Afghanistan as well as the rising anti-globalization protests. These events reflected that the imperialist world order had become less stable, imperialist wars in the South would become a regular feature, mass resistance in the semi-colonial world was increasing, and mass movements against the effects of global capitalism were also increasing even in the imperialist countries. They opened up a new political period which was no longer dominated by the collapse of Stalinism but by the offensive of monopolies and great imperialist powers and the mass resistance against them. Thus Pröbsting concluded in autumn 2001 that this new period had a pre-revolutionary character, i.e., a period of increasing contradictions of world capitalism and sharper class struggles which would at some point be transformed into a revolutionary period.

This characterization was supported by the healthier elements inside the leadership, but also met with strong resistance from others. The latter were rather inclined towards a conservative, passive-propagandist outlook which already forewarned of their later degeneration. But gradually we succeeded in overcoming this resistance, at least on the surface, and at the sixth congress in April 2003 our characterization was adopted. However, the sources of disagreement remained subliminally, waiting to manifest themselves much more severely at a later time.

2001: The Imperialist War of Aggression against Afghanistan

Immediately after the 9/11 events the LRCI warned that the US imperialism and its allies would use this as a pretext to *“prepare a sustained war on the peoples of the Third World, especially on those peoples who fight back.”* We called for the defeat of the imperialist war drive and concluded our statement: *“Defend any state or people targeted for revenge attacks by the USA and NATO”* ¹³⁷

When the war against Afghanistan was approaching, we issued statements and leaflets with the heading *“Defend Afghanistan! Defeat Imperialism!”* At the same time we condemned the Taliban as a reactionary force. We supported their military resistance but could not give them any political support. When the imperialists succeeded in occupying the country and a guerilla war for national liberation began, we continued to uphold our anti-imperialist stand.

This put us in sharp opposition to most centrists who refused to call for the

¹³⁷ LRCI: Fight imperialist hypocrisy! Reject individual terrorism! Stop US military retaliation! Statement on 9/11 Attacks by the International Secretariat of the LRCI, 13.9.2001, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/north-america/resolution-on-9-11/>

defense of Afghanistan claiming that one could not support a country led by radical Islamists like the Taliban. The centrist's pacifism reflected their adaption to the liberal intelligentsia and the labor bureaucracy which again was under the impact of the huge imperialist public relations campaign regarding the need "to fight against terrorism" which "threatens us all."¹³⁸ In short, the Afghanistan war and the following occupation drew a sharp class line between consistent Marxists who take an unambiguous anti-imperialist stand and the centrists who cover their adaption to imperialism by social-pacifist phrases.

In the weeks before the beginning of the Afghanistan War there was a certain vacillation among some comrades of the Workers Power leadership who did not take a clear anti-imperialist position, i.e., defend the Taliban against the great imperialist powers. However the LRCI leadership intervened and we corrected this mistake.

Our sections participated in the anti-war mobilizations and in Austria we were able to make first contacts with Muslim migrants communities. These contacts and our experience in collaboration with these brothers and sisters would prove to be invaluable for our future work among the masses.

In this context we shall also point to the Palestine solidarity work which the LRCI started with the beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000. Several comrades went to Palestine as part of the *International Solidarity Movement*. We combined this practical work with propaganda for our long-standing position of support for the Palestinian liberation struggle with the strategic goal of smashing the Zionist state and replacing it with a multi-national Palestinian workers and fellahin republic from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. We also participated in the solidarity demonstrations with the Lebanese resistance against the Israeli attack in the summer of 2006.

2003-2011: The War in Iraq and the Struggle against Imperialism

As we had predicted, the war against Afghanistan was just the beginning of the imperialist offensive to subjugate the Middle East. From the autumn of 2002, the US and Britain were preparing for another war against Iraq. This provoked a mass anti-war movement around the world, including inside the imperialist metropolises. At its high point – the international day of action on 15 February 2003 – between 15-20 million persons demonstrated around the world against the war-mongers Bush and Blair. This movement – definitely the most impressive mass movement in the imperialist countries since 1968 – received additional impetus with the beginning of the US/UK attack on 20 March. While the imperialists succeeded in conquering the country, they were soon faced with an armed mass insurrection. Their occupation became so costly and unpopular even among their own population that finally the US and British governments had to withdraw their forces in 2011.

¹³⁸ See Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South*, pp. 336-370

Based on our anti-imperialist program, the LRCI called for the defense of Iraq and the defeat of the imperialist aggressors. At the same time we rejected any political support for the Baathist or Islamist forces. Inside the anti-war movements we fought against the reformist and pacifist forces who appealed to the UN “*to find a solution*” and against those who equally condemned both sides, the US/UK and Iraq.

The sections of the LRCI took an active part in the mass demonstrations against the war. The Austrian section was able to develop exemplary mass work the furthest and would play a leading and initiating role in anti-war protests. At the school students’ strike on 20 March 2003, we had a substantial contingent of students. After this we were a central part of an anti-war collation which initiated a number of protest actions. The high point was on 21 June 2006 when US president Bush visited Vienna (Austria’s capital city). On that day alone we initiated a school student strike in the morning in which 5,000 school students participated. At the same time our coalition – together with a reformist-dominated coalition – called for a mass demonstration in the evening in which 25,000 people participated. Just before this, the author of these lines was sentenced by a court for leading a protest action of several dozen activists against a pro-war meeting organized by Zionists.

This exemplary anti-imperialist mass work – together with our campaigns and school strikes against cuts in education – constituted the most important area which allowed the Austrian section to recruit new layers of militants and to build a sizeable youth organization. We combined sharp criticism of the politics of various reformists and centrists with a flexible application of the united front tactic. After the requisite sharp internal debates on issues of strategic re-orientation and methods of party building – and the resulting loss of a number of conservative members – we had prepared and built an organization which was willing and able to implement this line. The result was a rapid growth of both the Austrian section as well as the youth organization. Those members who proved to be unwilling to carry on as dedicated revolutionaries had left our organization and soon gave up organized political activity altogether.

Revolutionary Developments in Latin America: Argentina, Venezuela, Bolivia, and the Bolivarian Movement

The new period found also expression in the upswing of class struggles in Latin America. In Argentina, the capitalist crisis and the continuous neoliberal attacks finally provoked a spontaneous mass uprising in December 2001 – the so-called *Argentinazo* – which caused several presidents to resign in a period of a few weeks. During this uprising the *piqueteros* (unemployed activists) – about a third of the working class had been made unemployed at that time – and the proletarian youth played a major role. A number of enterprises faced with bankruptcy – the most prominent of them were Zanon and Brukman – were

taken over by their workers and production was continued under workers' self-management. At the same time, the majority of trade unions remained under the control of the Peronist and the CTA bureaucracies and did everything to derail this revolutionary situation.

In 2002, the author of these lines was sent twice as the LRCI representative to Argentina and spent nearly half a year there. During that time we collaborated with the PTS, a sizeable Trotskyist organization. Unfortunately, the discussions were concluded without any concrete results because we could not overcome our political differences (e.g., the application of the united front tactic towards reformists and trade unions including the workers' party tactic).¹³⁹ More importantly, however, was the PTS's rejection in principle of taking steps towards joint international work. Furthermore, the situation was assisted by a conservative tendency among the majority of the LRCI leadership who also opposed our efforts to advance our discussions with the PTS.

In retrospect, this conservatism has to be severely condemned. It expressed the unwillingness to approach activists from semi-colonial countries at times in which it would have resulted in a tremendous improvement of the class composition of the LRCI (i.e., overcoming the limitations inherent to an organization based only in imperialist Europe). Progress in our discussion with the PTS could have led to a fusion which may have eventually been followed by a split. However, at the time, it would have made a vast improvement in the organization's composition and in the collective experiences of its members, as well as a substantially increasing its size. The author of these lines has to self-critically admit that, at the time, he did not sufficiently fight against the conservatism on this issue among the majority of the LRCI leadership, with the consequences which this would lead to.

In Venezuela, Hugo Chavez came to power in 1998, being carried along by the huge wave of desire of the popular masses to overcome their social misery. He soon faced strong hostility both of the majority of the domestic bourgeoisie as well as US imperialism which resulted in an attempted coup d'état in April 2002. During the 2000s the Chavez government took several state-capitalist measures (like the nationalization of the oil corporation PDVSA) and created social welfare programs for the poor (the so-called *misiones*). He combined this with strong anti-imperialist and socialist propaganda – including a call for a new Fifth International – and created a continent-wide movement which was often called the *Bolivarian* movement.

A similar movement coalesced in Bolivia where Evo Morales was elected as president in 2005. He also had the support of most trade unions, peasant

¹³⁹ In addition, one has to say that the PTS leadership had a too conservative attitude towards the *piquetero* movement which constituted the leading force during the revolutionary crisis. The PTS's correct insistence on the importance of the *industrial* proletariat made them overlook that revolutionaries should orient towards the entire proletariat and recognize the importance of its lower strata. As a result, the PTS was not able to grow during the revolutionary period in the year 2002, contrary to other "Trotskyist" parties like the PO.

federations, and other mass organizations. Like in Venezuela, his program of social reforms and limited state intervention in the economy provoked the resistance of the right wing parties and the Western imperialists. Later on, similar governments came to power in Ecuador and in Peru. They increasingly collaborated with the emerging imperialist powers China and Russia.

Many reformists as well as centrists like the IMT of Alan Woods hailed the Bolivarian regimes as “socialist.” They took Chavez’s promise to “*construct 21st century Bolivarian socialism*” at face value and supported the Bolivarian movement. In fact the Bolivarian regimes were not “socialist” but rather bourgeois, left-populist regimes. They represent popular front governments which are close allies of Chinese and Russian imperialism.

This, however, must not lead revolutionaries to ignore the fact that the Bolivarian movement has a lot of support among anti-imperialist and socialist-minded workers and peasants. Simply denouncing Bolivarian popular-frontism is not sufficient. This is why our movement – while sharply criticizing the Bolivarian policy – argued for applying the united front tactic. We defend the Bolivarian regimes against the coup plotters as well as imperialist pressure. We call for joint activities with these forces and – would Chavez have founded a “Fifth International” in 2009/10 – we would have attempted to fight as a revolutionary faction inside such an International against the Bolivarian misleaderships. The goal has to be to break up the popular front and constitute the working class as an independent force.

The Anti-Globalization Movement

The accelerating contradictions of capitalist globalization and the imperialist war offensives provoked a growing mass protest movement. This anti-globalization movement took to the streets for the first time at the WTO negotiations in Seattle (USA) in 1999, but became a mass movement in 2001. The biggest mobilizations took place against the meetings of the great imperialist powers – the G-7 summits. There were also important gatherings of the *World Social Forum* (WSF) respectively the *European Social Forum* (ESF).

Of particular relevance were the mobilizations against the G-7 summits in Genoa (Italy) in the summer of 2001 as well as in Heiligendamm (Germany) in 2007. Both saw international mass mobilizations and massive clashes with the repression apparatus. The LRCI mobilized sizeable international contingents to these events. Particularly memorable were the days of street fighting in Genoa when the young militant Carlo Giuliani was murdered by the Carabinieri. The day after the murder, 400,000 people participated in a mass protest. In these mobilizations and battles we proved that we had become an organization not only capable of producing good propaganda but also of undertaking necessary actions. Two of our comrades were arrested in this event – among them the author of these lines.

There were also various ESF conferences which we attended with sizeable delegations. At these conferences we argued for a strategy oriented to the working class and militant mobilizations. We confronted the reformist and petty-bourgeois leaderships which opposed any kind of democratic structures in order to build an organized and democratically controlled movement. In fact, the reformist forces – mainly a coalition of the ex-Stalinist *European Left Party* with various trade union bureaucrats and petty-bourgeois “civil-society” leaders with the support of centrists like the Cliffite IST – wanted to have their hands free for backstage maneuverings. One of the reformists’ tools was the so-called “*consensus principle*” which meant that decisions could be made only if everyone in the room agreed to them. This allowed the bureaucrats to prevent any unpleasant decisions.

Inside the LRCI leadership we had a controversial discussion about the character of the anti-globalization movement. Pröbsting argued for support and participation in this movement as a revolutionary opposition while at the same time pointing out the movement’s cross-class character given the strong presence of petty-bourgeois “civil society” forces. Hence, he called it the “*anti-globalization movement*.” However, the leadership majority downplayed this contradictory class character and called the movement an “*anti-capitalist movement*.” This incorrectly suggested that this movement was at least subjectively directed against capitalism as such. However, this was most definitely not true because Social Forum declarations and indeed the consciousness of many activists were primarily opposed to neo-liberalism and wars, but not to capitalism per se. These differences led to occasional conflicts inside the LRCI leadership about tactics to be used against the Social Forum leadership. For example, not all of the LRCI leaders were happy when we – and a number of anti-war activists – staged a protest at the ESF conference in London in 2004, as the organizers had invited a leader of the Iraqi Communist Party to speak from the platform. We opposed his presence, since his party was, from the beginning, part of the US occupation administration in Iraq. To the indignation of the SWP leaders, who defended his presence, we thwarted the Iraqi CP’s leader speech.

The Crisis of Reformism and the New Workers’ Party Tactic

The exacerbation of the class contradictions and the neo-liberal policies of the social democratic parties in Europe created a crisis and the decline of reformism. This led to the formation of new reformist or centrist parties to the left of social democracy. Most notable among these were the *Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste* (NPA) in France, the *RESPECT* party led by George Galloway in Britain and the *Linkspartei* in Germany. Later, the ex-Stalinist *European Left Party* (ELP) also saw an upswing in some countries (SYRIZA in Greece, *Izquierda Unida*, in Spain) while it had discredited itself in Italy where *Rifondazione Comunista* had supported the neoliberal popular front government of Romano Prodi.

The LRCI responded to the crisis of social democracy by advocating the new workers' party tactic, i.e., calling unions and progressive activists to break with social democracy and to unite in building new workers' party. We argued that such a party should have a revolutionary program of action. However, we also made clear that we did not consider the adoption of such a program as a precondition for our participating in its formation. We criticized the reformist or centrist leaderships of the new left of social democracy parties referred to above, which usually had a strategic orientation towards elections rather than building a mass party through participation and mobilizations for mass struggles.

While our British comrades did not participate in the RESPECT party of George Galloway, our German comrades participated for some time in the WASG (which later would fuse with the ex-Stalinist PDS to form the Linkspartei) while comrades in France entered the NPA.

In the summer of 2008, the Austria section co-initiated a left-wing electoral list with several centrist and left-reformist groups (e.g., the CWI, Stalinists, Turkish migrant groups, former social democrats) when the Austrian social democracy was hit by an important internal crisis. While the electoral alliance was a failure, it enabled us to recruit a number of youth and workers and helped to educate our membership and periphery through the political debates which we held inside the electoral alliance. It also helped us to gain some public prominence when our leading candidate, Nina Gunić, called at a press conference for the "*expropriation of the super-rich.*" This anti-capitalist statement did not only provoke outrage among bourgeois commentators but also among the reformist and centrist forces inside the electoral alliance.¹⁴⁰

140 Here is an incomplete selection of some articles from the bourgeois media decrying Nina Gunić statement:

Die Presse: Linkspjekt will die "oberen Zehntausend" enteignen, 22.07.2008, http://diepresse.com/home/politik/neuwahlen/400293/index.do?_vl_backlink=/home/index.do

DER STANDARD: Linkspjekt will „die oberen 10.000“ enteignen, 22.07.2008, <http://derstandard.at/?url=/?id=1216325364129>

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Internal Debates and the Split in 2006

At the sixth congress in 2003, the LRCI debated the slogan calling for the founding of the Fifth International. We argued that the “Trotskyist” milieu had proven once more that it is completely incapable of meeting the challenges of the class struggle by providing revolutionary answers. We explained that it is necessary to orient to new layers of workers and youth most of whom have no “Trotskyist” education. We understood the slogan of the Fifth International also as the application of the New Workers’ Party tactic on an international scale, i.e., approaching radical, left-moving sectors of the working class and oppressed who are looking to build a political alternative.

However, a significant minority of our tendency opposed this slogan. They did so because they effectively rejected our orientation to the new and radicalized layers of workers and youth and preferred an orientation to the traditional left and old trade unionists. In the end we adopted the slogan of the Fifth International and renamed our organization “*League for the Fifth International*” (LFI).

In addition, also recognizing the fact that a new period had started, we discussed and adopted a new program.¹⁴¹

The acceleration of the class contradictions and struggles opened the opportunity to orient to mass movements and to recruit new layers of young militants. The LRCI did this successfully in some countries (Austria, Germany, and Britain) while in some others the comrades proved incapable of building the group and had stagnated over years (Sweden, Czech Republic, and France).

All in all, this was obviously a positive development. However, given the tensions looming inside our organization between the conservative minority which favored a passive-propagandist orientation, and those who supported orienting ourselves to actual struggles and recruiting new layers of activists, this development rather exacerbated the tensions. Most of the opponents of the Fifth International slogan in the British section would soon start a faction struggle which would dominate the inner-party discussions in 2004-06.

The minority, which would later constitute itself as a tendency and then as a faction, attacked the *New Workers’ Party tactic*, soon started to challenge our whole assessment of the period. They disputed our characterization of the period as “*pre-revolutionary*.” Instead, they claimed that in the 1990s capitalism had entered a “*long wave of upswing*” during which its productive forces would grow. They claimed that this upswing would last until about 2015. They accused us of “*catastrophism*” because we stated that globalization had accelerated – not alleviated – the contradictions of the capitalist world economy. For us, China’s rise would not propel the world economy to a new upswing but rather escalate the rivalry between the great powers. Pröbsting wrote several longer documents

141 LFI: From Protest to Power – Manifesto for World Revolution, London 2003. The program was drafted by Richard Brenner and Dave Stockton.

in which he explained that the world view of this minority completely contradicted both empirical facts as well as Lenin's theory of imperialism. As he wrote, they were "*De-Leninizing*" Leninism. Their whole outlook was optimistic for capitalism and pessimistic for the class struggle and party building. Finally, the faction which constituted half of the British section's membership but had only little support in rest of the LFI, would split in the summer of 2006. Similarly, a handful of members from the Austrian section also created a faction in May 2006 with a similar passive-propagandist outlook. They would already split again within a few weeks. The future of these factions was rather comical. Their world view about the "*long upswing until 2015*" came to a sorry end two years after the split with the opening of a new period of capitalist decay. They founded a group called "*Permanent Revolution*", which remained nationally-centered, issued a few issues of a journal, and finally dissolved in 2013. Their Austrian counterparts had already dissolved and disappeared from organized political life less than a year after the split. However, the right wing of the LFI and major elements of the British section would later regret the struggle against these rotten elements.

Astonishingly our British comrades, while correctly criticizing the faction's rejection of the New Workers' Party tactic and their passive-propagandist outlook, found it difficult to answer the faction's absurd claims about the period and the world economy. Until shortly before the split in the summer of 2006, all documents on this issue were written by Pröbsting. The method of the conservative minority, but also the paralysis of the majority of comrades, demonstrated how deeply widespread Anglo-Saxon empiricism and eclecticism were in the British section. The chickens came home to roost in that, during the entire history of the LRCI, there were hardly any articles or debates, let alone a common understanding of Marxist philosophy. It turned out that most leading comrades were completely unaware of the philosophical debates in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, before the Stalinist clamp-down, and in particular of the leading philosophical school of the materialist dialecticians around Abram Deborin, Ivan K. Luppol, and N. A. Karev.¹⁴² The Austrian section published some articles on Marxist philosophy in its theoretical journal, but this was obviously not enough.

Another lesson of this debate was the strong eclecticism among the British comrades concerning Marxist political economy. This was already demonstrated in the early 1990s during seminars on political economy when several leading British comrades would sympathize with Ben Fine and his rejection of the

142 However, perhaps in their defense, one has to admit that most of this debate has never been translated to English. On the other hand, there *are* a number of English-language academic books on this subject which are available to anyone interested in Marxist philosophy. Consequently, British Marxists are usually influenced either by Althusser's structuralism (see e.g., Alex Callinicos from the SWP) or George Lukács (e.g., John Rees) or, worse, by charlatans like Žižek. However, there are also some who "manage" throughout their entire personal history of political activism without even pretending to be interested in Marxist philosophy (e.g., the SPEW/CWI).

Marxian law of the *Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall*. Others like Dave Brown and German and Austrian comrades correctly defended the orthodox Marxist viewpoint including the theory of breakdown (which was also defended by Leon Trotsky and well elaborated by Henryk Grossmann). Later in the 2000s, reformist economists like David Harvey would become popular among our British comrades. The negation of the importance of Marxist philosophy led to severe weaknesses in implementing the Marxist method in the sphere of economy (and not only there!).

These problems were also demonstrated by the long and somewhat sharp internal debates we had around the production of the book which was published in 2008 under the name *The Credit Crunch*. There was a year-long controversy about Pröbsting's essay "*Imperialism, Globalization and the Decline of Capitalism*" – which is part of this book – which was caused by the objection of several leading comrades against his "bold" statement that capitalism is in decline and that the productive forces are stagnating.¹⁴³ While the British comrades finally moved forward and came closer to our understanding, it should not be forgotten that this involved long and controversial discussions.¹⁴⁴

It is both ironic and humorous that Pröbsting's "bold" statement was soon to be vindicated by the start of capitalism's historic crisis in 2008, yet this did not provoke our opponents to any kind of self-criticism.

Another expression of this weakness was the LRCI/LFI's failure – despite corresponding plans since the early 1980s – to further develop Lenin's theory of imperialism and to apply it to the modern conditions. In hindsight, given their difficulties in understanding the essence of Lenin's theory of imperialism, it is not surprising that the comrades didn't see themselves in a position to fulfill these plans.

All these difficulties demonstrated how important it is for a Bolshevik organization to have a sound theoretical Marxist basis in Marxist philosophy and political economy.

143 See Michael Pröbsting: *Imperialism, Globalization and the Decline of Capitalism* (2008), in: Richard Brenner, Michael Pröbsting, Keith Spencer: *The Credit Crunch – A Marxist Analysis* (2008), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-and-globalization/>

144 To his credit, Richard Brenner made great efforts to deepen his knowledge of Marxist political economy and succeeding in developing a solid and profound understanding. Based on this, he wrote a number of insightful articles which were published together in the book *Credit Crunch*.

Growth ... and Harbingers of Problems in the Future: Class Composition, Orientation, and Our Struggle against Aristocratism

The split in 2006 resulted in a numerical setback regarding the organizations membership. However, it left the organization more united, with a clear political as well as organizational perspective of its future building. This laid the basis for the subsequent growth of the Austrian, British, and German sections. Not only did this strengthen us numerically, but also brought fresh and dynamic forces – including several talented young cadres – into our ranks. However, this success proved to be mixed, as a large number of these new recruits were university students or youth who were orientated towards the academic world. This also brought petty-bourgeois ideological influences and mindsets, fashionable in the progressive academic world – skepticism, post-modernism, and eclecticism – into the organization and thus exacerbated already existing problems.

We soon recognized the potential problems and the need to counteract them in order to bring the organization closer to the ordinary working class and the oppressed. Given the increasing number of migrants among the European working class and the prominent role of Muslim migrants in the anti-war movement, we recognized the importance of this question. Almedina “Nina” Gunić, a Bosnian migrant comrade and leader of the Austrian section, played an important role in stimulating a discussion on this issue. With her advice and experience, the author of these lines wrote in late 2005 a first draft of *Theses on Migration and the Strategy of Revolutionary Integration*.¹⁴⁵ A conference of the Austrian section in January 2006 agreed with the fundamental line of the theses and adopted several slogans. The theses included the application of the old Bolshevik slogan of “*the right to one’s native language*” which meant the abolition of an official state language and the right of national minorities to use their native language in public administration as well as in schools and universities. These positions naturally clashed with the deeply-seated social-chauvinism of the official workers’ movement. Most centrists considered it the best option to urge migrants to learn German so that they can better assimilate. This was, by the way, one of the major conflicts we had with the CWI and Stalinists in our electoral alliance in Austria in the summer of 2008.

Another conclusion we drew from these discussions was the need for the LRCI sections and its youth organizations in Europe to deliberately try to win migrants, specifically migrant youth. We argued that the sections, as well as their leaderships, should reflect the composition of the multi-national working class. While the Austrian section succeeded in this – its membership and leadership

145 Unfortunately, at that time the theses could not be finished for publication and we only printed articles on this subject. When we eventually completed an extended version of the theses in the autumn of 2010 and published them as a booklet, they would provoke an intense conflict within the LFI leadership, as we shall see below.

always had a migrant share of 20%-40% – the other European sections hardly won over any migrants or migrant youth. For example, throughout its entire history from the 1970s on, the British section hardly ever recruited comrades of black or Asian backgrounds.¹⁴⁶

Similarly, we criticized the fact that the LFI had far too few female members and hardly any women leaders. By 2010, only 18% of the LFI members in Europe were women and the only women on the IEC was our comrade Nina Gunić.¹⁴⁷ We explained that the LFI must make it a priority to win more women – particularly from the working class – and to develop women as leaders. Naturally, everyone agreed with this on every occasion the issue came up ... but nothing changed.

As a result of our serious intentions of recruiting young women, we first initiated a “*Revolutionary Women’s Collective*” which would later become a “*Revolutionary Women Organization*.” At the highpoint of our work, our women’s organization was part of a broad united front in a demonstration for equal rights in March 2011. More than 10,000 women and men participated in this demonstration and comrade Nina Gunić was among those who addressed it. However our women’s organization was met with fierce resistance from our opponents inside the LFI, and shortly after they had expelled us in April 2011 they dissolved this organization.

Our sense of urgency to make conscious efforts to win over migrants and migrant youth was part of a general strategic outlook about which we tried to convince the comrades in the LFI. We explained that the more class contradictions and struggles accelerate, the more vital it will become that the LFI succeeds in changing its composition and becoming more proletarian. We explained that in order to progress in building a revolutionary workers’ party, we have to become an organization with at least a high proportion of revolutionary workers and oppressed. We emphasized that we should orient to win workers and working class youth not from the labor aristocracy but from the lower and middle layers. The problem in the LFI was not only that they couldn’t win migrants and migrant youth but that they hardly won workers (except some from the more privileged and educated strata) or proletarian youth. The comrades had, but couldn’t admit, a class problem.

We raised criticism that the LFI in its present composition – predominately intellectuals, university students and labor aristocrats – would not be able to meet the challenges of the class struggle. In addition, we stressed that we

146 As we outlined in our theses on migration, by migrants we are referring primarily to migrants (or their children) who came from semi-colonial countries. A German student or manager who migrates to Austria or Britain, for example, to study or work cannot really be considered a migrant.

147 While the sections in Pakistan and Sri Lanka had a lower share of female members, one has to bear in mind the objective difficulties in these countries dominated by patriarchic traditions. During a visit to Sri Lanka in the spring of 2010, comrade Gunić, the women’s secretary of the LFI, played a crucial role in supporting the comrades in their founding of a women organization.

needed to make conscious efforts to bring more workers, migrants, and women into the leadership.

While several comrades in the international leadership occasionally agreed with our proposals, many protested and sometimes – like at the IEC in March 2008 – this provoked sharp clashes. Similarly, our proposal at the LFI congress in 2010 to consciously develop workers, migrants, and women cadres and positively discriminate in their favor vis. petty-bourgeois intellectuals provoked sharp polemics, not to say outcries. Our proposal was finally defeated at the congress by 36% to 64% of the votes.

Related to this we argued – beginning in 1995 in the Austrian section and more systematically for the entire LRCI from the early 2000s onwards – that the sections must desire not only to grow but also to establish deeper roots among the working class and the oppressed. For this they had to overcome their role as purely propaganda groups and become more militant communist organizations which undertake – in addition to propaganda – agitation and exemplary mass work.

While occasionally we received platonic support for our orientation, more often we heard that such a transformation of the LFI sections was not possible. However, over a number of years the Austrian section proved that it *is* possible. Looking back to the period since 2003, the Austrian section was – despite unfavorable class struggle circumstances – the most successful of the European LFI sections in undertaking exemplary mass work and recruiting out of these struggles. Of course, this was not at the expense of our propaganda tasks: we had a monthly paper, a theoretical journal, and had published a number of pamphlets.

In addition to the anti-war work already mentioned above, the section and its youth organization undertook work at schools focused on campaigns against cuts in education. Our youth work reached a new high point in April 2009, when we initiated a series of school strikes against cuts in education. The first and second strikes were each joined by about 1,500 Viennese school students. After these successes, nearly all youth organizations jumped aboard the wagon (even the conservative one) and ultimately 60,000 school students went out on the streets in Austria – the biggest school student strike in the country's history.

Furthermore, we intensified our work with migrant communities. We were active part of the campaign in solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle and collaborated with Muslim migrant communities both during the Gaza War 2008/09 as well as at the protests against the Zionist murder of Turkish solidarity activists in June 2010. We gained a lot of respect for this and – despite unavoidable clashes with conservative community leaders – repeatedly had the chance to address crowds of thousands of migrants at these demonstrations where we received enthusiastic responses.¹⁴⁸

148 For examples, see the videos of speeches from Nina Gunić and Michael Pröbsting at the

There was an occasion in which the British section and its youth organization were also in a position to play a certain role in the class struggle. This happened during the university student movement in 2010. But, unfortunately, they were not capable of playing an independent and communist role and didn't succeed in recruiting any new members. In the end, their leading involvement in the university student movement only accelerated their opportunist adaption towards the petty-bourgeois milieu.

We explained that we had to build organizations which – to a certain degree and in exemplary areas – could play a certain role in the class struggle. The comrades did not understand that the weaknesses of our class composition – too few workers and proletarian youth, migrants, and women - were related to a conception of the organization as one focused on intellectual, propagandist tasks. The LFI had an internal culture in which a comrade who had knowledge of Marxist theory, or who could write well-formulated articles, was highly valued (“*a promising cadre*”), while a comrade from a working class background who could attract workers and oppressed, who could help with practical work, or who could organize was never seen as similarly valuable. In addition to this, they don't even attempt supporting the development of working class comrades into *working-class intellectuals*. More likely, their orientation was to recruit many intellectuals from the middle class who are willing to lead the propaganda and theoretical work.

We would later call this problem “*aristocratism*,” i.e., a political and practical orientation, including in party-building, towards the intellectuals, university students, and labor aristocrats.

However, the leadership explicitly rejected the idea that a bad class composition is a problem for the LFI. They claimed that, in small organisations, such class compositions are necessary and unavoidable. In a letter, the leadership of the German section argued that the social composition of the fighting propaganda group like the LFI sections “*will have a disproportional high share of university students or better educated, political interested workers (skilled workers)*.”¹⁴⁹ This was the case, they claimed, “*because of the dominant role of propaganda*.” The Austrian supporters of the LFI majority argued in a similar vein in a statement they issued: “*It is perfectly natural that fighting propaganda groups tend, because of its very high requirements for a membership, not to be dominated by the lowest layers*.”

¹⁵⁰ After the split, they would emphasise even more the pre-dominate role of intellectuals in communist pre-party organizations:

Gaza solidarity demonstration. Nina Gunić on 16.1.2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stSfp9ZGPxE&list=PL1471A456DE52F1D5>; Michael Pröbsting on 9.1.2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azVN2x37g30&list=PL1471A456DE52F1D5&index=1> and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6Lh4_t9OVQ&index=2&list=PL1471A456DE52F1D5

149 Letter of German leadership to the Austrian sections' conference, 3.2.2011, in: Internes Bulletin der Liga der Sozialistischen Revolution Nr. 383, 4.2.2011 (our translation)

150 Reply to the “*Bolshevik Opposition*” by the Austrian supporters of the LFI majority, February 2011, in: Internes Bulletin der Liga der Sozialistischen Revolution Nr. 385, 23.2.2011 (our translation)

*“The core of the Marxist strategy for the achievement of socialism has always been recognition of the need to fuse the theoretical conquests of the socialist movement, which historically were developed by intellectuals, with the leading elements of the working class’ own organisations and movements. Distinct stages or phases can be seen historically in the development of this fusion; from very small numbers of revolutionary intellectuals committed to the working class cause who form an ideological current and first begin the task of promoting the revolutionary programme within the working class, through propaganda groups able to take the first steps in developing working class cadres and then cadre parties, predominantly composed of working class activists and constituting a recognised political current within the working class.”*¹⁵¹

In other words fighting for the working class interests with a communist programme requires ... “education”, i.e., bourgeois education. Therefore, according to the LFI leadership, for the mass of the global working class – particularly in the semi-colonial world – which possesses relatively less education, it is rather difficult to meet the requirements of the type of communist organisation like the LFI wants to build. On the other hand, according to the LFI leaders, the well-educated intellectuals and labor aristocrats (a disproportionately large proportion of whom live in the imperialist countries) are fitter to build communist pre-party organizations. Such arrogant nonsense has nothing to do with Marxism! Is it really “perfectly natural” to build an organisation for founding the future revolutionary party, that has the goal to free the working class and all oppressed, that such an organisation is not lead, not even dominated in its composition by workers, women, migrants, oppressed nations although they are the absolute majority in the world? Such an aristocratic standpoint might be “perfectly natural” among the progressive petty-bourgeois left milieu in the imperialist countries, but in the rest of the world it is just “perfectly absurd.”

In summary, we have to say that our efforts to re-orient the LFI’s work more towards winning activists from the lower and middle strata of the working class failed. While comrades agreed with such an orientation, it proved very difficult – and in the end impossible – for them to change the modus operandi and political culture of the organization to allow the recruitment and consolidation of new proletarian members. Looking back, we overestimated the possibility of convincing the comrades to practically re-orient of the League towards the working class and the oppressed (not only in words but also in deeds). Or to put it the other way around: we underestimated how much is determined by the comrades consciousness, how much their inappropriate class composition made it impossible for them to intensify our efforts to proletarianize the League via conscious efforts in our mass work.

The working and living conditions of workers and the oppressed were too distant from these comrades’ own daily lives and were therefore often pictured

151 LFI: Trotskyism in the Twenty-First Century, 14.2.2014, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/trotskyism-twenty-first-century>

in an absurd and illusionary way. For example, one of the former leaders of the British section, Luke Cooper, a white middle class intellectual par excellence who teaches at the Richmond University in London, vehemently denied that a huge section of migrants in his country define themselves as migrants and not primarily as British nationals. His argument was that each migrant defines himself by some specific, individual, and unique definition that has nothing in common with the understanding of other individual migrants. Unsurprisingly, Cooper was not in any kind of regular contact with migrants (at least not from the working class). It was indeed humorous how self-confidently most leaders of the LFI would argue about how to recruit and develop workers, women, migrants and other oppressed into cadres with hardly any success in doing so – not for years, but for decades.

It was an important lesson for us and helped us to more clearly set our priorities in party building and select our new members accordingly when building the RCIT. As a result, today our organization is led mainly by workers from the lower and middle strata of the working class and by workers from semi-colonial countries.

Growth in South Asia

An equally important success in the years 2007/08 was that we came into contact with Trotskyists in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. A group called *Socialist Party of Sri Lanka* (SPSL) which had previously split from the CWI contacted us and after discussions and visits they joined the LFI. They had a proletarian composition and undertook trade union work among important sectors like health workers and the Tamil plantation workers. While they did not have many Tamil members, under very difficult conditions, they – in contrast to the CWI – defended the Tamils right of national self-determination.

We were also in contact with a small group of socialists from a former student cadre of the IMT group in Pakistan. It was confronted with pre-revolutionary developments in 2007/08 when a mass movement of lawyers and students protested against army chief Pervez Musharraf's actions after he unconstitutionally suspended Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry as the chief justice of Pakistan's Supreme Court. This protest movement would initiate a political crisis which ultimately brought down the dictatorship of Musharraf. Our comrades intervened in the movement and combined support for the democratic demands with a socialist perspective. As a result, the group grew dramatically, called itself *Revolutionary Socialist Movement* (RSM) and became a section of the LFI.

The RSM had also a branch in Kashmir – but only in the northern part of this region since the southern part is occupied and oppressed by India. After discussions, the author of these lines drafted a resolution arguing for a united, independent and socialist Kashmir which was agreed to and adopted by the

section.

However, the section's success in recruiting a whole layer of university students who soon would dominate the group also caused the problem that it developed an unhealthy class composition. This opened it to petty-bourgeois ideological influences as we would soon see.

iv) 2008 – 2011: The LFI's Failure to Meet the Challenges of the Revolutionary Period of Historic Crisis of Capitalism

The Great Recession in 2008/09 and its consequences had vast implications both for the world economy as well as for world politics. It opened a new world historic period of a revolutionary character: the productive forces are in decline, the main contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and the oppressed, between the imperialist monopolies and states and the semi-colonial people and between the imperialist robbers themselves – all these contradictions are intensifying to such a degree that they repeatedly throw the equilibrium out of balance. The inner contradictions of capitalism are posed in such a sharp way that they unavoidably provoke pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations, as well as counter-revolutionary developments. In other words, the aggravation of the class contradictions poses the question of power – which class rules in the society – more often than in the past periods.¹⁵² The present period is therefore one in which the destruction of capitalism and the historical leap forward towards socialism is on the agenda or – to use Georg Lukács' words – which is characterized by the "Actuality of the Revolution".¹⁵³

Failure to Understand the Nature of the Period

It was clear to us from the beginning that this new revolutionary period would put all revolutionaries to a decisive test. We understood that it was urgent first to understand the character of the new period and secondly to draw the right conclusions for party-building. Pröbsting formulated this position for the first time in a short resolution which was tabled at an international leadership meeting in early January 2009.

„The new period is characterized by a historical crisis of capitalism. It is a period not of years but has a more long-term character. It is a period where the "curve of capitalist development" (Trotsky) is pointing downwards and where the productive forces and the social development are retreating rather than advancing. It is a period where short-term booms are not excluded but where the crisis-ridden, depressive character of the world economy is the dominant feature. World politics will be characterized by increasing instability and rivalry because the imperialist hegemon – the United States of America – is no longer capable of dominating the world. Faced with this crisis, the imperialist bourgeoisie will launch huge attacks on the working class and the oppressed people and as a result we will see a sharp increase of class struggle. This is why this period will be marked by a series of wars, pre-revolutionary, revolutionary, and counter-revolutionary situations. This is why the new period is a revolutionary period.

¹⁵² For a closer analysis of the historic period which opened in 2008/09 and its contradictory developments, we refer readers to our book *The Great Robbery*, pp. 372-382.

¹⁵³ Georg Lukács: Lenin: A Study on the Unity of his Thought (1924), <http://marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/1924/lenin/index.htm>

The working class enters this new period with a profound crisis of leadership. The official leaderships are very closely integrated into the bourgeois state apparatus and management. The revolutionary forces on the other hand are extremely weak. But at the same time the working class and the oppressed will form new forces of struggle and new vanguards. Existing vanguard elements – under reformist leadership at the moment – will question their leaderships and come into conflict with them. Against this background the task of Marxist revolutionaries is to address these militant and vanguard elements by means of propaganda and agitation, by joining them in struggle and striving to give a lead, by putting demands on the existing leadership and applying the united front tactic. Our task is to win the best elements of the vanguard for Bolshevism and to recruit them. The strategic task in the new period is to build the revolutionary party on a national and international scale.”

This resolution – which also received the support of leading German comrades – was narrowly defeated and opened up an intense and controversial debate. The majority – who had their main basis in the British section – not only argued against the characterization of the period as “revolutionary” but also now began in principle to oppose the characterization of periods. Hence this group of comrades also now rejected our past approach of attempting to characterize periods as “revolutionary,” “pre-revolutionary,” “transitional,” or “counter-revolutionary”. The eclecticism which we observed already in the years before had now reached new and more dangerous proportions.

A number of documents were written in the next year and a half, both by us and our opponents, but finally this group of eclectics would gain a narrow majority at the LFI congress in the summer of 2010.

If we summarize the two decades of discussions about the nature of the period, we can state that, from the early 1990s onwards, we were able to understand the nature of the dynamics of each period – and hence the corresponding tasks – and by this to foresee the character of the next period. Thus we were prepared for the changes in the class struggle, were not caught by surprise, and did not get confused by abrupt turns. If one agrees with Trotsky’s statement that *„the strength of Marxism lies in its ability to foretell,”* one has to conclude that the majority of the LFI leaders were hardly blessed with this skill.¹⁵⁴

Our understanding of the revolutionary nature of the period did not remain confined to the fields of theory and analysis. We also applied it to the areas of tactics and party-building. We concluded that given the nature of the new period as being one of an historical crisis of capitalism, it was unavoidable that the ruling class had to launch general attacks against the working class (massive austerity packages, etc.). Hence we argued that the LFI, in those cases in which such general capitalist attacks took place, should agitate for a general strike and put this demand to the trade unions. This was rejected by the majority of the LFI leaders as “*ultra-left.*” The British section even went so far as to criticize the SWP

¹⁵⁴ Leon Trotsky: *The Third International After Lenin. The Draft Program of the Communist International: A Criticism of Fundamentals* (1928), Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, p. 198

when the latter called on the TUC in the autumn of 2010 to organize a general strike against the attacks of the government! They justified their opportunism by stating that communists should deploy tactics which “react” to the policy of the official leadership of the workers movement. In fact, this was a position reflecting their tailist adaption to the reformist and centrist milieu which in turn adapts to the labor bureaucracy. The real task of communists is to agitate for tactics which are objectively necessary for the working class in a given situation to organize the fight back against the capitalists’ offensive.

Failure to Understand the Oppression of Migrants and the Nature of the Labor Aristocracy

As mentioned above, in the summer of 2010 we developed an extensive thesis on the nature of migrant oppression in the imperialist countries and the revolutionary strategy of the liberation struggle. We argued that migrants in the imperialist countries are nationally oppressed minorities who are in their vast majority a super-exploited labor force. As a consequence, we defend their rights including their right to use their native language in schools and public administration. At the LFI congress in June 2010, we got a narrow majority (58% to 42%) for our program calling for the abolition of the state language and for the right to use one’s native language.

However despite this victory, the substance of the issue remained highly disputed. Leading LFI comrades strongly opposed our position. They argued that migrants in Europe are not national minorities and that assimilation of them into the ruling nation is progressive.¹⁵⁵

In fact, these comrades were breaking with our past programmatic method.¹⁵⁶ While the LFI had never elaborated a deeper theoretical and programmatic analysis of migration, we had at least stated in our founding program – the *Trotskyist Manifesto* – a broadly correct definition of the character of the oppression of migrants which laid the basis for our later analysis:

“We fight the “mini-apartheid” style restrictions on democratic rights that are placed on immigrant workers all over the world. These restrictions are a means of facilitating the super-exploitation of immigrant workers and dividing the working class of a particular country along racial or national lines.”

“In addition, the post-war boom sucked millions of workers from the semi colonies to the imperialist heartlands, from one semi-colony to another, and from less developed to

¹⁵⁵ As the German section’s leadership wrote in a letter in December 2010: *“However, as Marxists, we recognise that with the development of the world market, the capitalist mode of production also always has a tendency towards “assimilation” and “integration” of minorities. This tendency has a progressive character, as Lenin and other Marxists explained.”*

¹⁵⁶ This holds true for the entire LFI program: The author of these lines drafted the Manifesto which was adopted at the LFI congress in 2010. However, in their practical policy, the LFI moved more and more away from the revolutionary essence of the program.

more highly developed imperialist countries. These migrant and immigrant workers are also racially oppressed. (...) The racially oppressed suffer discrimination in education and all spheres of welfare provision. They are subject to super-exploitation at work."
157

As a result of their lack of understanding the oppression of migrants, the LFI majority could not develop a strategy of consistent struggle for their revolutionary liberation. They argued that we should actively fight only for the right of migrants to learn the language of the ruling nation, but not for their equal right to learn to speak in their mother language in schools. If they wanted to learn their mother language, this should be done in their spare time. Schools should offer this possibility only if it is an official demand of the migrant organisations.¹⁵⁸ Another comrade wrote that our demands for multi-language classes "*can only mean absolute chaos or a national split.*" This, of course, is the old social-chauvinist fear that if migrants are not educated in the national majority language this will result in "splits and chaos." In fact, today there are already various multi-language schools in Vienna – without any chaos!¹⁵⁹ All these arguments against our strategy of revolutionary integration reflected a fundamental separation of these comrades from the world of migrants and aristocratism in the ideological field – i.e. consciously or unconsciously defending the privileges of the dominant white nation.

In contrast, we said that assimilation of the migrants/national minorities into the ruling nation is not in itself progressive. Under conditions of oppression, Marxists should neither consider assimilation nor national separation as something progressive per se. Lenin always argued *not* for assimilation but for fusion on completely voluntary and equal basis. This of course is only possible under socialism. Today it is essential to fight for the unity of multinational working class on the basis of a common struggle. This again requires that we struggle

157 LRCI: The Trotskyist Manifesto, London 1989, p. 53 and p. 124

158 In the same letter, the German section's leadership wrote: "*We also support the right of migrants for school education in their native language. However, we do not share the LSR-position demanding the exercise of this right independent of the expressed (or not expressed) will of respective migrant communities. In our opinion, it is no accident that in Germany, at least, this demand is not raised by the vast majority of migrants, and that it is not raised by any progressive migrant organisation.*" As a matter of fact, we proved to the German comrades – who hardly have any migrants in their ranks – that there are already a number of migrant organisations that demand the right to be educated in their native language at schools and universities. But to maintain their line of argumentation, some leading comrades then objected that these migrant organisations are politically backward and, therefore, do not represent the vanguard of the migrant youth which is supposedly willing to learn the official state language and have no interest in studying their own native language tongue to be used in their education and their daily civil life. Again these comrades are obviously also unaware of the existence of a number of progressive organizations, like the German teachers' trade unions or left-wing migrant organisations, which also demand the right for students to use their native language in the education system.

159 See our resolution on schools: *Einheit durch Kampf für Gleichberechtigung! Resolution für das Recht auf Muttersprache für MigrantInnen an den Schulen*, in: *Revolutionärer Kommunismus*, No. 7, August 2011

consistently for the equal rights of all parts of the oppressed and exploited. The struggle for equal rights also includes the demand for abolishment of any preferential treatment of the dominating nationality. Therefore, we fought for the abolishment of the state language as the Bolsheviks did. In the end, our position was defeated by a 6-2 majority at the IEC in December 2010.

Another reflection of this aristocratism was the protest of the majority of the Sri Lanka section's leadership – with the support of the LFI leadership majority – against the slogan of a *“Socialist Tamil Eelam.”* In the second part of the LFI congress in Asia in January 2011, the author of these lines dared to say that if the majority of the Tamils in Sri Lanka supported an independent state, revolutionaries should raise the slogan of a *“Socialist Tamil Eelam.”* We were severely condemned for raising this subject, something which we should have been allowed – according to the majority of the Sri Lanka section's leadership and with the tacit support of the LFI leadership majority – only if they would have agreed in advance to discuss such an issue. The real reason for their indignation was that the only Tamil member on the SPSL leadership body, as well as other members supported this slogan in contrast to the majority.¹⁶⁰ In fact, an issue which is a basic Leninist position on the national question – to support the separation of an oppressed people if its majority desires this – became a scandal for the SPSL and LFI majority. This was another reflection of their aristocratic tendency.

This is related to an incomplete assimilation of the Leninist program for national liberation by the LFI majority. In this way they opposed our application of Lenin's positive program for oppressed nations (autonomy, self-government, right to use one's native language, etc.). They also attacked our insistence that Lenin's national program is addressed to oppressed nations, not oppressor nations.

The other side of the coin of the majority's aristocratism was their rejection of the Leninist position that the labor aristocracy is a small top layer in the working class which is politically backward and bribed by the bourgeoisie. They rather believe that the labor aristocracy is the best organised and most militant sector of the class who gets privileges because of its class struggle. The LFI majority vulgarized Lenin's theory by de facto liquidating its characteristic as a bribed, pro-imperialist strata and instead explained the aristocracy's privileges as a result of its class struggle combativeness: *“While the “labour aristocracy” shares with the middle strata many common appearances, with regard to forms of income privilege and even “life style”, the root of these privileges are not “tradition” and the benevolence of the bourgeoisie but the class struggle of the proletariat and the strength of working class organisations.”*¹⁶¹

160 According to the minutes of a meeting of the majorities of the SPSL and the LFI leaderships after the congress, the latter assured the Sri Lankans leaders: *“The IS members present assured the SPSL that they would work to prevent a repetition of any such occurrence.”*

161 LFI: Resolution on the Working Class,, 10.12.2009, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/>

Instead they reduced the concept of the labor aristocracy to the empirical observation that it is better paid: „*At the core of the concept of the 'labour aristocracy', as used by Lenin, then, is the simple idea that the working class is socially differentiated and stratified economically.*“¹⁶² From this some LFI leaders concluded that the labor aristocracy represents a huge, important sector of the working class in the imperialist countries – in discussions it was suggested about one third of the proletariat – and, hence, it is “*the core sector of the working class without whom the revolution cannot succeed.*”

In sum, while the LFI leadership opportunistically overstates the progressive character of the labor aristocracy, it underestimates the importance of the middle and lower strata of the working class and of the nationally oppressed layers.

These theoretical differences were not accidental. Rather, they reflected the longstanding – in fact, from the very beginning of their existence decades ago – isolation of the LFI majority in Europe from workers from the middle and lower strata of the working class, migrants, blacks, and other national/racial minorities. Surely, a number of comrades had the subjective will to overcome this isolation, but they lacked theoretical insight into the problem as well as the willingness to break with their orientation to the milieu of the petty-bourgeois left and intelligentsia. As a result, the majority adapted more and more to the reformist and centrist prejudices, distorted the Leninist conception, developed a practice isolated from the working class migrants, and finally took political and practical centrist positions.

The Practical Demonstration of the LFI's Centrism during the August Uprising 2011 in Britain

A practical demonstration of the LFI's transformation into a centrist organization was their cowardly and cynical attitude during the August Uprising in Britain in 2011. During this historic event, the lower strata of the working class and the nationally and racially oppressed rose up after the police shot Mark Duggan. According to *Scotland Yard* more than 30,000 working class youth, black and migrants on the streets fought against the police and expressed their anger between 6 and 10 August. It forced the Tory/Liberal-Democrat government to mobilize 16,000 police on the street to put down the uprising and even to consider the use of the army against its own population. Despite all its limitations and weaknesses, it was definitely one of the most important class struggles in Britain since the miners' strike of 1984/85. To make an actual comparison, it was a larger version of the recent protests and riots in Ferguson after the police murder of Mike Brown.

[content/resolution-working-class](#)

¹⁶² Luke Cooper: Theories of late capitalist development: Harvey and Callinicos on contemporary imperialism, in: Fifth International Volume 3 Issue 4, Autumn 2010, p. 21

Understanding the importance of this event, the RCIT immediately produced several documents outlining an assessment of this event and adopting a strategy on how the vanguard of the workers and oppressed should respond. In addition, the Austrian section sent a delegation of three comrades to London.¹⁶³

Naturally during this uprising the bourgeois state and media were full of rage and denunciations against the insurrectional youth. As expected, the petty-bourgeois left and intellectuals adapted to this pressure and either condemned the uprising or remained passive. Workers Power's and the LFI's opportunistic orientation to the progressive petty-bourgeois milieu meant that they adapted and capitulated to pressure of this milieu.

During the uprising, Workers Power, to its credit, refuted the reactionary condemnation of the uprising made by other centrists like the CWI, the Labour Left and the Stalinists. But they treated the riots as an understandable, even justified, but hopeless local uprising without prospects. Worse, they even made concessions to the petty-bourgeois public opinion in relativizing the motivation of the masses in this uprising. In their statement they wrote: "*Some are motivated by hatred of the police and rage at this society – others by the promise of raiding local shops for goods – some by both.*"¹⁶⁴ While this was somewhat corrected, in another statement published one and a half weeks after the end of the uprising, they took a completely passive approach towards the entire event.¹⁶⁵ They did not

163 For an extensive analysis of the August Uprising and eyewitness reports from RCIT comrades, we refer readers to the following documents: Nina Gunić and Michael Pröbsting: *The strategic task: From the uprising to the revolution! These are not "riots" – this is an uprising of the poor in the cities of Britain!*, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/britain-uprising-of-the-poor>; *The August Uprising in Britain - A Report of the RKOB delegation on its visit in London in August 2011*, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/britain-report-from-uprising>; Michael Pröbsting: *What would a revolutionary organisation have done? August uprising of the poor, the nationally and racially oppressed in Britain*, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/britain-august-uprising/>; Michael Pröbsting: *Five days that shook Britain but didn't wake up the left. The bankruptcy of the left during the August uprising of the oppressed in Britain: Its features, its roots and the way forward*, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/britain-left-and-the-uprising/>. All documents were published in the RCIT's journal Revolutionary Communism No. 1 (September 2011).

164 Workers Power: With the working class youth of London – against the police, Statement from 8 August, <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2011/08/with-the-working-class-youth-of-london-%E2%80%93-against-the-police/>

165 Following the uprising, and from a safe distance in time, the WPB was forced to accept our characterization of the uprising – they even adopted the very name we gave to the event "*August Uprising*". As they wrote: "*the August 2011 riots will be remembered as a working class youth uprising against repression, racism and the recession.*" ... "*In all cases, there were a mix of people, classes and motivations for those who came onto the streets. Like revolutions, so-called 'riots' bring people from all the lower classes onto the streets, but this does not mean it is impossible to discern the dominant groups and the main class interests driving the action. It was in the main an uprising of working class youth against police brutality, racism and harassment, and the underlying conditions facing the working class today*" (Workers Power: The political situation in Britain after the August uprising; Resolution on the political situation after the riots, 19.8.2011, <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2011/08/political-situation-after-the-august-uprising/>)

call for joining and supporting the uprising; they didn't produce any agitational material, and they refused to participate themselves (see more below). They didn't apply the united front tactic in calling for the organisations of the workers' movement to join, support, and spread the uprising. Neither did they raise a single proposal to the tens of thousands of youth on how to fight and to spread the struggle except one sentence: *"we support self-defence."*

While *after* the end of the uprising they correctly called on the workers' movement to defend the poor against the repression, *during* the uprising they failed to call on the very same workers' movement to *support and join it*.

The neglect by Workers Power/LFI of the lower strata and nationally oppressed layers of the working class in theory and practice found its full demonstration during the August Uprising. They deliberately decided not to have any organised intervention in the uprising despite the fact that it continued for several days and regardless of the most favorable conditions. Extremely favorable, in fact, because, first, the uprising took place in London, the city in which the entire LFI had its strongest local branch. And secondly because at exactly the same time, between August 5th and 7th, they were holding their international youth conference; while from August 8th to 12th they were convening their international REVO summer camp close to London. According to a public REVO report, this camp was attended by more than 80 people.¹⁶⁶ They easily could have sent a delegation of several dozen comrades to the uprising to intervene, to participate, to discuss with people and to learn together in a concrete struggle alongside proletarian youth. Indeed, several young comrades proposed that they join the protests, but the LFI leadership adamantly rejected any such proposal. After a vote was taken, comrades were forbidden from joining the uprising.

Instead of intervening in the class struggle the LFI and REVOLUTION enjoyed their summer camp close to London while, at the same time, tens of thousands of youth were fighting in the streets! In a public REVO statement entitled *"Summer, sun, socialism - that was our international summer camp this year,"* the comrades report about *"interesting workshops"* and the *"opportunity of sports and leisure facilities of the camping grounds."* *"Every day we watched the events of the 'riots' in London and discussed about it [sic] at the Camp plenary. So we adopted for example a resolution and an international united front call against police violence and about the conditions for the British youth. Since as a youth organization we also like to fete, we had in the evening parties at a big camp fire or in the community tent. On Thursday "Broken Dialect," an anti-capitalist hip-hop crew, was our guest and thereafter DJs made music for us. The camp offered a lot of room for members, supporters and contacts to hold political discussions, but also to build new friendships."*¹⁶⁷

166 REVO Germany: Sommer, Sonne Sozialismus – das war unser diesjähriges internationales Sommercamp, 29. August 2011, <http://www.onesolutionrevolution.de/?p=1645>

167 REVO Germany: Sommer, Sonne Sozialismus – das war unser diesjähriges internationales Sommercamp, 29. August 2011, <http://www.onesolutionrevolution.de/?p=1645> (our translation)

We condemned this pathetic attitude of the LFI at that time: *“This official REVO report makes clear what was the practical attitude of this organisation is to a mass uprising of the lower strata of the working class which was taking place before their very faces. Published two weeks after the uprising, it is nothing other than a verification and justification of the collapse of LFI/REVO’s basic revolutionary attitude. These sunshine socialists don’t feel ashamed in any way when they report about their interesting workshops and how they enjoyed their parties in the evening while at the same the police killed and crushed working class youth which was fighting back on the barricades. And they are bold enough to write “With the working class youth - against the police!” at the same time. What cynicism, what a petty-bourgeois collapse of any basic revolutionary backbone! (...)*

It is easy to support an uprising of the migrants in the French banlieues in the autumn of 2005 and to develop tactics for them while being far away from France. It is easy to write an action programme for the revolution in Tunisia, Egypt or Libya. But when an uprising of the lower strata of the proletariat happens in their own country, in their own cities (!), they are not capable of implementing, not even developing, the correct tactics or any sort of a revolutionary action programme for the fighters, and even refused to join them on the barricades. When the uprising of the masses at Tahrir square in Cairo was taking place, the LFI sent two comrades to Egypt to write eye-witness reports. When there was an uprising at home they did not even send comrades to the barricades to – at least – write eye-witness reports, not to mention the possibility of intervening. The absolute majority of the so-called Marxists in LFI/REVO preferred to have programmatic discussions (and fun) while an uprising happened on their very doorstep.

*What the WP/LFI/REVO leadership doesn’t understand is that Marxism cannot be learnt and internalised without participation in the class struggle. Of course, a small propaganda group cannot participate in each and every struggle. But we are not talking about a minor event. We are talking about one of the most important class struggles in Britain since 1984/85 in cities where, at the time, the WP/LFI/REVO had – because of the REVO camp taking place near London – altogether about 100 people available.”*¹⁶⁸

Trotsky once drew the following line between Bolshevism and centrism which today is very relevant for the characterization of the LFI: while the former supports the oppressed in their struggle, the centrists consider this as “adventurist” and prefer to limit themselves to defend the oppressed against bourgeois repression:

„Nevertheless, Ledebour’s position even on this question does not leave the precincts of centrism. Ledebour demands that a battle be waged against colonial oppression; he is ready to vote in parliament against colonial credits; he is ready to take upon himself a fearless defense of the victims of a crushed colonial insurrection. But Ledebour will not participate in preparing a colonial insurrection. Such work he considers putschism,

¹⁶⁸ Michael Pröbsting: Five days that shook Britain but didn’t wake up the left The bankruptcy of the left during the August uprising of the oppressed in Britain: Its features, its roots and the way forward, 1.9.2011, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/britain-left-and-the-uprising/>

*adventurism, Bolshevism. And therein is the whole gist of the matter. What characterizes Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude toward oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics. Bolshevism does not confine itself to recognizing their "right" to self-determination and to parliamentary protests against the trampling upon of this right. Bolshevism penetrates into the midst of the oppressed nations; it raises them up against their oppressors; it ties up their struggle with the struggle of the proletariat in capitalist countries; it instructs the oppressed Chinese, Hindus, or Arabs in the art of insurrection and it assumes full responsibility for this work in the face of civilized executioners. Here only does Bolshevism begin, that is, revolutionary Marxism in action. Everything that does not step over this boundary remains centrism."*¹⁶⁹

After the uprising, we concluded that Workers Power and the LFI had finally crossed the Rubicon. They had failed a major practical test of class struggle which took place – literally – on their front doorstep. It was an uprising of a key sector of the working class and the oppressed. They showed that our previous warnings and criticism about their aristocratic orientation away from these sectors of the working class were absolutely correct. After a process of degeneration, they finally had become a centrist organization.

Failure to Understand and to Fight against Centrism

Another fundamental issue in our inner-party struggle was the character of centrism and how to fight it. When we had a debate about the Grantite IMT, the leading Austrian comrade, who was in the camp of the LFI majority, claimed that they are *"one of the many currents of Marxism,"* albeit not revolutionary Marxists. He said that some centrist organisations belong to the reformist camp and others to the Marxist camp. This was a justification for his refusal to publish any criticism of the IMT group (or any other centrist group) for their opportunist role during a 6-week long university strike in the autumn of 2009.

When the LFI was still a revolutionary organization it had a Marxist characterization of centrism as a petty-bourgeois current.

„Secondly, it is a mistake to argue that the centrism of the Fourth International fragments is "special" because it does not "constitute a direct reflection of social forces foreign to the proletariat". All centrism precisely reflects the social weight of the petit-bourgeoisie, a stratum which vacillates between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Since the labour aristocracy in the imperialist countries has, due to its sharing in the feast of super profits, the life conditions of a comfortable petit-bourgeois, such consciousness is not (as the WSL theoreticians like to think) limited to shop-keepers or people with a college education. The history of the Fourth International after 1948 is the history of capitulation to these forces, either to the petit-bourgeois utopian programmes of the Stalinists - e.g. the Chinese and Vietnamese Communist Parties, or to petit-bourgeois

¹⁶⁹ Leo Trotzki: Was nun? Schicksalsfragen des deutschen Proletariats (1932); in: Schriften über Deutschland, pp. 246-247; in English: What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat

*nationalists - e.g. Algeria, Nicaragua. The suggestion that these antics and betrayals do not represent a "complete break from the programme of Bolshevism" is to besmirch the programme of Lenin and Trotsky."*¹⁷⁰

Similarly, the LFI refused as nonsense any such characterizing of centrism as a variation of Marxism. We stated among the objectives of a Marxist organization: *"Thus the polemical defence of Marxism from all varieties of revisionism, reformism, centrism, economism-chvostism, Stalinism, Maoism, populism, post-modernism, syndicalism, opportunism, sectarianism and anarchism are among the very first tasks of the communist pre-party organisation."*¹⁷¹

However, the LFI of today "discovers" that centrism is a variation of Marxism. Instead of criticising their comrade, the other LFI majority leaders attacked us for being "sectarian" and "one-sided": *"We have also heard extremely one sided and, therefore, false, characterizations concerning centrism from Michael Pröbsting too - at the IEC. He said that centrism is simply "not Marxist" or that its essential feature is that it "betrays". This ironing out of contradictions, quoting only the "in the final analysis" positions of the Marxist classics, could lead to just as severe mistakes as errors made in the opposite direction. It is possible to make sectarian errors towards centrist formations as well as opportunist errors."*¹⁷² The majority also argued that *"the essence of centrism is its motion."*

These statements showed that the comrades had broken with the Marxist understanding of centrism which is first and foremost – including its many zigzags – its adaptation to the labor bureaucracy and the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia. Hence, it was also the traditional understanding of the LRCI that centrism was not *"one of many currents of Marxism."* Quite the opposite, we understood centrism as a current alien to Marxism and its method.

*"Unable to unite theory and practice, centrism's theoretical 'new' reality tramples on the doctrine and method of Marxism."*¹⁷³

This deviation also reflected that the LFI leadership was increasingly adapting to this milieu. To give one example: In the summer of 2009 – in the midst of the Great Recession – a conference of the leadership of the European Social Forum (ESF) took place in Vienna where, at the same time, the LFI was having its leadership meeting. As usual, nothing came out of the ESF conference and its leaders just mourned about their impotence to do anything. When Pröbsting stated at an internal LFI leadership meeting in June 2009 that the failure of the ex-Stalinist *European Left Party* (ELP) and trade union leaders at the ESF to mobilize for a program of struggle against the generalized attacks of the bourgeoisie represented a *"betrayal"* and the centrists' failure to criticize them

170 "Workers Power/Irish Workers Group: The Death Agony of the Fourth International and the Tasks of Trotskyists today (1983), S. 82

171 LFI: The Method and Principles of Communist Organization (2007), in: Documents of the League for the Fifth International, Vol. 1, 2009, p. 76

172 IS Majority: It is time to call a halt! A reply to the "Bolshevik Opposition", in: Internes Bulletin der Liga der Sozialistischen Revolution Nr. 386, 2.3.2011

173 LRCI: The Trotskyist Manifesto, p. 133

for this reflected their "*cowardice*," this was met with strong opposition from the LFI majority leaders (in fact the incident in the LFI quoted above refers to this IEC meeting).

In an LFI Internal Bulletin published a year after our expulsion, the leadership summarized that it had become increasingly clear to them in 2010 that we were "*opponents of our [Editor: the LFI's] strategic orientation.*" This was obvious for them because of Pröbsting's "*one-sided emphases of the positions he presented at the Congress itself but became clearer in his interventions at the subsequent ESF.*"¹⁷⁴ Indeed, at the European Social Forum in Istanbul in summer 2010, comrade Gunić and Pröbsting dared to criticize the ESF's leaders' failure to build a proper militant and democratically-structured movement during all the previous years and to mobilize against the strategic offensive of the capitalists since the onset of the Great Recession. While the LFI majority leaders were annoyed by this (which of course they didn't tell us openly) because they feared this would undermine their "friendly" relations with these ESF leaders, our speeches received support and applause from a considerable part of the participants of the summit who were also deeply disappointed of the inactivity of the ESF leadership. By the way: despite all the LFI's leaders' diplomatic efforts, they gained no advantage because the ESF bureaucrats simply ignored them. The correctness of our criticism was soon proven by reality. The ESF's bankruptcy during the capitalist crisis was so obvious to anyone – including themselves – that the summit in Istanbul in 2010 turned out to be its last one. Since then, the ex-Stalinist bureaucrats of the ELP have replaced them with their own so-called *Alter Summits*.

We could do no more than shrug our shoulders in response to the majority's accusations against our so-called "*sectarianism.*" Over many years we have proven through our exemplary mass work in Austria that we could – much more than the other LFI sections – do mass work and engage in united front work with social democrats, Stalinists, community leaders, and centrists. While the majority leaders erroneously believed that they could charm the centrists by replacing criticism with diplomacy, we knew from long experience that these forces were prepared to cooperate with revolutionaries only if the latter had built a sizeable organization which matters.

In fact the LFI majority leaders were preparing their adaption to centrism. They rarely use the term "centrism" in their propaganda and prefer instead just categories like "*radical left*" or "*revolutionary left.*" They are hoping for an unprincipled rapprochement with centrist forces. As a result, after our expulsion, Workers Powers consecutively joined several "*pluralist left unity*" projects like the "*Anti-Capitalist Network*," after this they paid court to the "*International Socialist Network*," and currently they place their hopes in "*Left Unity.*" The first two were petty-bourgeois projects which soon collapsed or degenerated, in the case of *Left Unity*, into an utter reformist bonsai electoralist project composed

174 LFI: IS Report to Council, April 2012, in: IIB 221 (April 2012), p. 9

of demoralized old leftists and some post-modernist university students. The German section similarly orients to another centrist rapprochement called "*New Anticapitalist Organization*." In its statement announcing our expulsion, the Austrian section called the left groups to come together and participate in "*a left conference to discuss and overcome differences*." Unsurprisingly, not a single left-wing group paid even the slightest attention to the call of these fools.

When the LRCI/LFI was a revolutionary organization, it was unambiguous about the necessity to openly fight against all forms of centrism. As we wrote in the "*Trotskyist Manifesto*": "*The struggle against centrism of all sorts has been a decisive feature of the construction of every revolutionary international*."¹⁷⁵ It is the task of the RCIT to continue this tradition which the LFI deserted.

In the end, the LFI's capitulation to centrism has demoralized many members and, as a result, between 2011 and 2013, they lost half of their membership in Europe.

Split, Decline, and Further Political Degeneration of the LFI

Naturally, the majority of LFI leadership considered us as an obstacle in this course towards centrism. As mentioned above, they secretly started to prepare a struggle against us in the second half of 2010. With massive intervention from other sections and last minute recruitment of new members in the Austrian section, they managed to defeat us at the conference of Austrian sections in February 2011. In public statements, they announced that the Austrian section would begin "*a critical assessment of our own political history*"¹⁷⁶ which included a critical approach to their (i.e., our decades-long) consistent solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle against Zionism. In short, we faced a political and organizational turn both on programmatic issues (centrism, the question of migration, methods of tactics like how to apply the general strike slogan, etc.) as well as party-building issues (orientation to university students and labor aristocrats versus the lower and middle strata of the working class and the oppressed). We therefore formed a faction called "*Bolshevik Opposition*" in order to fight for a return to the revolutionary line and to discuss these issues with the entire LFI membership. Fearing such a discussion, they decided to get rid of us and to preemptively expel us. Hence, a few weeks later they suspended us and banned us from attending branch meetings of the Austrian section. Similarly, they suspended the author of these lines from attending meetings of the International Secretariat despite being an elected member of it. On 1 April 2011 an international leadership meeting took place in Vienna and, as the first point on the agenda, we – two long standing members of the international leadership and three leaders of the Austrian youth organization – were expelled.

¹⁷⁵ LRCI: The Trotskyist Manifesto, p. 134

¹⁷⁶ Siehe: AST: Spaltung in der LSR, 1.4.2011, <http://arbeiterinnenstandpunkt.net/?p=7>; AST: LSR wird wieder AST, 14.6.2011, <http://arbeiterinnenstandpunkt.net/?p=61>

In the final speech before our expulsion we warned these comrades that without us they would lose the revolutionary corrective and descend into centrism. They would soon prove us correct, as we saw during the August Uprising in Britain. Furthermore, a few months after expelling us, the LFI faced a new faction fight. Their right-wing, which was strongly based on their university student cadres and which was particularly energetic in driving us out of the LFI, accelerated their adaption to centrism. In the end, this right-wing renounced the concept of the Leninist vanguard party and proposed a liquidationist line. Among the leaders of this liquidationist group were Luke Copper and Simon Hardy from the British section, Roman Birke (the central leader in Austria), Gunnar W. (the longtime central leader in Sweden), and Ales S. (the longtime central leader in the Czech Republic). As a result, Workers Power has been thrown back numerically to where they were at their foundation in 1976, the youth organization in Britain, Sweden, and Czech Republic have been dissolved, the Czech section no longer exists, the Austrian section retains a handful of university students, only a shadow of its past, etc.

Theory and propaganda have suffered significantly as well. The LFI had to cease the publication of their English-language journal *Trotskyist International* which had been issued twice a year in book format until the summer of 2010. While *Trotskyist International* began to appear again as an A4-Journal in the summer of 2014, Workers Power had to reduce the frequency of its paper – which was published on a monthly basis in the past – to five issues a year.

Programmatically, the LFI has accelerated their centrist deviation from the revolutionary program. They repeatedly failed to take a revolutionary anti-imperialist stand. When the LRCI/LFI still was a revolutionary organization it sided with the military struggle of the Taliban – the Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan – against the imperialist occupiers. In its 2014 Action Program, Workers Power has dropped its slogan for support of the anti-imperialist struggle in Afghanistan.¹⁷⁷ In addition, the centrist LFI refused to side with the Muslim popular masses when they attacked the Western imperialist embassies in many countries in September 2012, with the military struggle of the Islamists in Mali against the French occupation force in 2013, or with the Islamists in Iraq and Syria who are being attacked by the US and their allies since August 2014. Similarly, they supported the petty-bourgeois campaign for the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Assange to Sweden – a long-time demand of US imperialism. When the LRCI/LFI was still a revolutionary organization, it didn't send greetings of condolence to the family of a fallen soldier of the British army. This has changed now, and Workers Power expressed publicly that it "*sympathizes with the family of the victim*" after Islamists killed a British soldier in service during the Woolwich attack in May 2013.¹⁷⁸

177 Workers Power: An Action Programme for Britain, <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2014/04/an-action-programme-for-britain/>

178 See RCIT: After the Woolwich attack in Britain: Stop imperialist war-drive and racism! Socialists

Another example of the LFI's rapid degeneration into centrism is their adaption to Russian imperialism. This has been manifested by the LFI's grotesque defense of its participation and active role in the notorious pro-Russian imperialist *Yalta conference* in July 2014 in support for the Donbass Republics in the Ukraine. This conference was organized by Aleksey Anpilogov and the Russian left-wing intellectual Boris Kagarlitzky. Anpilogov is a proponent of extreme Great Russian chauvinism and regular collaborator of the Russian anti-Semitic right-wing paper *Zavtra*. The two declarations of the latter conference were drafted respectively by the LFI's Richard Brenner and by Maxim Shevchenko, a member of Putin's "*human rights council*" as well as of the *Izborsky Club*. The *Izborsky Club* is a Eurasian, right-wing chauvinist "think tank" headed by Aleksandr Prokhanov, the publisher of *Zavtra*, and has among its members Aleksandr Dugin, the leader of Russia's extreme right-wing Eurasian movement, and Putin's advisor Sergey Glazyev. Another important figure at the conference was Vladimir Rogov and his right-wing chauvinist *Slavic Guard*. In other words, the conference lent "socialist" credentials to proponents of extreme Great Russian chauvinism and imperialism as well as the Putin regime.¹⁷⁹

The LFI now scandalously tries to present this Yalta conference as a progressive manifestation and claims that its leading figures are "left-wing" and "Stalinists" (e.g., the right-wing Putin supporter Shevchenko is called a "*leftwing journalist*").

must not solidarize with Britain's professional army but with the anti-imperialist resistance!, 24.5.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/britain-woolwich-attack/>; Workers Power: Statement on the killing of a British soldier in Woolwich, 23.5.2013, <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2013/05/british-soldier-killed-woolwich-london>

179 See on this e.g.

Manifesto of the People's Front for the Liberation of Ukraine, Novorossiia and Transcarpathian Rus, 24.07.2014, <http://solidarityantifascistukraine.wordpress.com/2014/07/24/manifesto-of-the-peoples-front-for-the-liberation-of-ukraine-novorossiia-and-transcarpathian-rus/>

No to the war in eastern Ukraine! Yalta Declaration, <http://www.rogerannis.com/no-to-the-war-in-eastern-ukraine-declaration-of-yalta-crimea-antiwar-conference/>

Paul Goble: Izborsky Club Says Only a Eurasian Empire Can Save Peoples of Russia, September 23, 2013, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.ca/2013/09/window-on-eurasia-izborsky-club-says.html>

Paul Goble: Influential Izborsky Club has No Time for Liberalism, Human Rights or Diversity, Commentator Says, January 10, 2013, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.co.at/2013/01/window-on-eurasia-influential-izborsky.html>

Izborsky Club proposed the idea of big bang of the Russian Federation, 25.6.2009, <http://survincity.com/2009/06/izborsky-club-proposed-the-idea-of-big-bang-of-the/>

Izborsk's energy, 28.9.2012, <http://ru-facts.com/news/view/2703.html>

AWL: A Popular Front for Russian Nationalism, 23 July, 2014, <http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2014/07/23/popular-front-russian-nationalism>

Dale Street: A reply to Richard Benner on the Yalta conferences, Ukraine and Russia, AWL, 29 September, 2014, <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/23934>

International Yalta Conference "The Global Crisis and Confrontation in Ukraine", 26.07.2014, <http://rusvesna.su/english/1406322126>

¹⁸⁰ Similarly, the LFI downplays the participation of Russian chauvinists by stating that they are just “nationalists” and by equating this with participating in a conference with Arab nationalists. As so often happens to them nowadays, they “forget” the small detail of taking into account the different *class character* of nationalist movements. For Marxists it is principled to collaborate with *petty-bourgeois nationalist movements from semi-colonial countries* on the basis of the united front tactic (e.g., like the IRA in the 1970s and 1980s, the Columbian FARC or Hamas today). However, it is impermissible for Marxists to collaborate with *nationalists of a Great imperialist power* (like Russia) who are aggressively promoting the expansion of this empire!¹⁸¹

180 The LFI defense of the Yalta conference is expressed in its two articles on this subject: Richard Brenner: The Yalta Conference on Solidarity with the Resistance in South East Ukraine, LFI, 23/09/2014, <http://fifthinternational.org/content/yalta-conference-solidarity-resistance-south-east-ukraine>

Marcus Halaby: Smears and social-imperialism, the politics of the “third camp” on Ukraine, LFI, <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2014/11/smears-and-social-imperialism-the-politics-of-the-third-camp-on-ukraine/>

181 For the RCIT’s analysis and position on the civil war in the Ukraine see:

Michael Pröbsting: The Uprising in East Ukraine and Russian Imperialism. An Analysis of Recent Developments in the Ukrainian Civil War and their Consequences for Revolutionary Tactics, 22.October 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/ukraine-and-russian-imperialism/>

RCIT: After the Fascist Pogrom in Odessa: Advance the Struggle against the Counterrevolution in the Ukraine! Commemoration for the Fallen Fighters in the Struggle against the Counterrevolution! All Out for the International Day of Antifascist Solidarity on 8 May! 6.5.2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 23, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/after-odessa-pogrom/>

RCIT: Counterrevolution and Mass Resistance in the Ukraine, 17.4.2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 22, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/mass-resistance-in-ukraine/>

Joint Statement of the RCIT and the Movement to Socialism (MAS, Russia): Ukraine: Rivalry between Imperialist Powers escalates after Right-Wing Coup: Stop the Imperialist Saber-Rattling! 2.3.2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 21, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/ukraine-war-threats/>

MAS: Ukraine/Russia: The victory over the imperialist colonialism is impossible without the proletarian revolution! in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 21, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/mas-declaration-5-3-2014/>

RCIT and MAS: Right-Wing Forces Take Power in the Ukraine: Mobilize the Working Class against the New Government! 25.2.2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 19, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/right-wing-coup-in-ukraine/>

MAS: No to the Terror of the Bandera-Fascists! Stop the Repression against the Communists of Ukraine! 22.2.2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 19, <http://www.nuevomas.blogspot.co.at/2014/02/no-to-terror-of-bandera-fascists-stop.html>

RCIT: “Ukraine: Neither Brussels nor Moscow! For an independent Workers’ Republic!” 18.12.2013, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 18, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/ukraine-neither-brussels-nor-moscow/>

For an detailed analysis of Russia as a great imperialist power, see:

In fact the Yalta conference was one which was organized and led by proponents of the imperialist Putin regime and the extreme right-wing Eurasian movement in Russia. In short, it was a conference in support of Russian imperialism. It was the Russian equivalent of a conference, let us say, for the Syrian rebellion organized by a US right-wing institute like the *American Enterprise Institute* or the Zionist *American Israel Public Affairs Committee*. By the way: a few weeks later, the same Aleksey Anpilogov organized a second conference in the very same hotel in Yalta to which leading European fascists and semi-fascists were invited such as the British BNP, the French National Front, Hungary's Jobbik, Belgium's Vlaams Belang, and others.¹⁸²

While the Austrian section played an active and prominent role in the Palestine solidarity movement until our expulsion in 2011, their rump didn't show up at a single demonstration either during the 2012 or 2014 Gaza wars – with one exception in which they marched literally at the end of a demonstration of 20-30,000 people in order to display their distance from the Muslims! The German youth group already calls the Palestinians to “bomb (...) the war-mongers and oppressors, Netanyahu, Hamas, Fatah, Obama or Merkel”. In other words, they equate US and Israeli imperialism with Palestinian organizations like Fatah and Hamas! In contrast, when the LFI and REVOLUTION still followed a revolutionary program, we unconditionally sided with the Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupiers and even defended bourgeois and petty-bourgeois Palestinian organizations against the Zionists and imperialists.¹⁸³

On an ideological level, the LFI has deepened its theorization of the leading role of intellectuals in communist pre-party organizations. In a programmatic document it wrote:

“The core of the Marxist strategy for the achievement of socialism has always been

Michael Pröbsting: Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power. On the Understanding and Misunderstanding of Today's Inter-Imperialist Rivalry in the Light of Lenin's Theory of Imperialism. Another Reply to Our Critics Who Deny Russia's Imperialist Character, August 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-theory-and-russia/>

Michael Pröbsting: Russia as a Great Imperialist Power. The formation of Russian Monopoly Capital and its Empire – A Reply to our Critics, 18 March 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 21, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-russia/>

Michael Pröbsting: Russia and China as Great Imperialist Powers. A Summary of the RCIT's Analysis, 28 March 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 22, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-china-and-russia/>

Michael Pröbsting: More on Russia and China as Great Imperialist Powers. A Reply to Chris Slee (Socialist Alliance, Australia) and Walter Daum (LRP, USA), 11 April 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 22, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/reply-to-slee-on-russia-china/>

182 On this, see: Anton Shekhovtsov: Russian and European fascists reverse the 1945 Yalta Conference, 28 August 2014, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.co.at/2014/08/1984-russian-and-european-fascists.html>

AWL: Another Yalta conference, 29 August, 2014, <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/23635>

183 REVO Germany: 3. Intifada? 21. November 2014, <http://www.onesolutionrevolution.de/allgemein/3-intifada/>

*recognition of the need to fuse the theoretical conquests of the socialist movement, which historically were developed by intellectuals, with the leading elements of the working class' own organisations and movements. Distinct stages or phases can be seen historically in the development of this fusion; from very small numbers of revolutionary intellectuals committed to the working class cause who form an ideological current and first begin the task of promoting the revolutionary programme within the working class, through propaganda groups able to take the first steps in developing working class cadres and then cadre parties, predominantly composed of working class activists and constituting a recognised political current within the working class."*¹⁸⁴

In the end, its orientation towards the progressive petty-bourgeois left milieu and its programmatic degeneration – all in the name of avoiding “sectarianism” and becoming part of a “strong and united radical left” – led the LFI into political confusion and numerical decline. Opportunism doesn't pay off.

184 LFI: Trotskyism in the Twenty-First Century, 14.2.2014, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/trotskyism-twenty-first-century>

v) An Ongoing History: The Foundation and Rise of the RCIT since 2011

As we have said, our expulsion was a preemptive strike in order to avoid critical debates among the membership of the LFI. Naturally, this put us in a very difficult situation. We were five militants in a single country. To a certain degree we were reminded of Trotsky's declaration in 1929, after the expulsion of the Left Opposition in the USSR and the resulting tremendous setback to their forces: *„Let there remain in exile not three hundred and fifty who are true to our banner, but thirty-five or even three; the banner will remain, the strategic line will remain, and the future will remain.“*¹⁸⁵

However, we didn't see any reason to despair because we were confident in our program, our analysis of the world situation, our strategic line, and our experience. We decided that as Bolshevik-Communists we had the duty to continue the revolutionary tradition which the LFI had now deserted, to develop Marxist theory and its program further and to rebuild – enriched with our experience from the past – the revolutionary organization both nationally and internationally. Despite our initially very small size we were optimistic because we knew that we were like a small but extremely sharp axe compared to the organization we had left, which had become a large hammer made of foam rubber. While we emerged from the split with a clearer understanding what we needed to do and what we must avoid, the comrades we left behind were in a state of confusion which resulted in yet further splits, decline, and the formation of political swamp.

We were aware that we faced the threat of national isolation and that we had to build an international organization simultaneously with the national organization. While our sudden expulsion cut us off from discussing the critical issues with other LFI members, we had established a certain reputation among them. We were contacted by members and former members in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the USA, and soon established close relations with them. Comrades in Pakistan, around Central Committee member Shujat Liaqat and the Kashmir branch, formed a faction in protest against the leaderships' adaption to the trade union bureaucracy and its failure to consistently support the national liberation struggles in their country. Tamil comrades in Sri Lanka, including M. Thangavel who was the only Tamil member of the leadership and responsible for the work among the plantation workers, joined us and started to organize work with plantation trade unions. The comrades fused later with a Trotskyist group of mostly Tamil workers around K. Kamalanathan. In addition, various members of the Austrian section and their youth organization also joined us.

We drafted an international program for the international organization which

185 Leon Trotsky: How to help the Centrists? (1929); in: Writings 1929, p. 398

was adopted after discussions and amending.¹⁸⁶ As a result we founded the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* in April 2012 with sections in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the USA, and Austria. Later, in April 2013, we were joined by the *International Socialist League* (ISL) in Israel/Occupied Palestine the most prominent member of which, Yossi Schwartz, has amassed a record of five decades fighting as a Jewish communist against Zionism and in solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle. Soon after, discussions with a small group of Brazilian trade unionists led to a fusion and they formed the *Corrente Comunista Revolucionária*. In addition we won supporters in Yemen and Sweden.¹⁸⁷ We collaborate and debate with various other socialist organizations and activists in other countries. As a result of the growth of our sections and the winning over of new groups, today former members of the LFI constitute only a small minority of the RCIT's membership.

Growth and Exemplary Mass Work

Without doubt, our expulsion put us in a very difficult starting position given our numerical weakness and our initial national isolation. However, it also proved a tremendous advantage: we could develop Marxist theory and propaganda as well as implement our methods of party building without any obstructions and compromises. In hindsight, all this far outweighed the difficulties.

Contrary to our own position, the LFI leaders convinced themselves that small communist groups have to be dominated by intellectuals, students, and labor aristocrats. However, practical experience has closed this discussion: we built an organization – both internationally as well as in Austria – which from the beginning has been dominated by workers and proletarian youth both in membership and leadership and which has a high share of migrants and members of national minorities.

Despite our initial small size we understood that we must not retreat into study circles but have to build the organization by a combination of theory, propaganda and agitation, and exemplary mass work.

Our comrades in Pakistan are working under extremely difficult conditions, given the state repression against organizations which consistently support national liberation struggles. Nevertheless they experienced massive growth through trade union work, participation in workers' and student protests as well as protests against national oppression and Marxist education work.

Comrades in Sri Lanka focus on organizational work among Tamil plantation workers. They are doing this in the context of an extremely difficult domestic

186 See RCIT: The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto, 2012, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/>

187 See, for example, the websites of our comrades in Brazil (<http://elmundosocialista.blogspot.com>), Israel/Palestine (<http://www.the-isleague.com/>), Sweden (<http://vansterparlan.v-blog.se/>), and Austria (<http://www.rkob.net>).

situation marked by the historic defeat which the Tamils suffered in 2009 when President Mahinda Rajapaksa smashed the de facto independent Tamil state led by the LTTE and killed tens of thousands of Tamils.

In Palestine/Israel comrades stand up against the Zionist chauvinist wave and openly support the Palestinian liberation struggle – including calling for the defeat of the Israeli army and the military victory for the Hamas-led resistance of the people of Gaza during the recent wars.¹⁸⁸ One of our younger members, 16-year old Hila Slutzky, has gained national prominence by initiating a campaign against sexist dress codes in schools directed against young women.¹⁸⁹

In Brazil, the CCR's leading member Joao Evangelista, a long-standing local trade union leader, played an active and prominent role during the longest teachers' strike in Brazilian history in the spring of 2014.¹⁹⁰

In Austria, one of our comrades led an occupation in a factory during a national metal workers strike in October 2011.¹⁹¹ Our prominent role in the Palestinian solidarity movement during the Gaza war in November 2012 led to a (failed) attempt of the Zionists to bring our comrade Johannes Wiener to court for "sedition" because of a speech he gave at a demonstration.¹⁹² We founded

188 See numerous articles from our ISL comrades at <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/> as well as on their website <http://www.the-isleague.com/>.

189 See Women's Oppression in Israel: Studs? Rather we need more Amazons and real heroes! Interview with Hila Slutzky by the Youth Organization RED*REVOLUTION, 7 September 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/women-in-israel-1/>; Hila Slutzky: Israel: Violence against Women during the Gaza war, 19.08.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/violence-women-gaza-war/> as well as <https://www.facebook.com/mafsikot?fref=photo>

190 See Brazil: Speech from RCIT trade union activist at Teacher's Congress, Speech from J.Evangelista, member of the leadership of a local trade union branch in São Paulo and delegate at the national congress of SINPEEM in Brazil, 4.11.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/brazil-speech-at-trade-union-congress/>; CCR: Brazil: Report and Video from CCR (RCIT Brazil) on Teachers Trade Union Assembly on 4 April 2014, 8.4.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/report-sinpeem-4-4-2014/>; CCR: Report on Teachers Trade Union Assembly on 11 April 2014, 19.4.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/report-sinpeem-11-4-2014/>

191 See Metallerstreik: Vorläufiger Erfolg bei der Betriebsbesetzung in Kärnten, Interview mit Christian Hoff, Mitglied des Streikkomitees und Aktivist des RKOB, <http://www.rkob.net/inland/interview-mit-hoff/>

192 See Victory! The Charge against RKOB Spokesperson and Palestine Solidarity Activist Johannes Wiener has been dropped! Austria: Israelite Cultus Community suffers defeat in its attack on Free Speech and Palestine Solidarity, Statement of the RKOB, 10.1.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/solidarity-with-wiener-won> ; Austria: Israelite Cultus Community attempts to criminalize partisanship for the Palestinian Resistance! Charge of "Sedition" against RKOB Spokesperson and Palestine Solidarity Activist Johannes Wiener is a Pretext for Attack on Freedom of Expression, Statement of the RKOB, 20.12.2012, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/no-criminalization-of-solidarity-with-palestine>; Austria: Pro-Israeli War-Mongers try to throw 20-year old Palestine Solidarity Activist into Prison. RKOB spokesperson Johannes Wiener is accused of „sedition“

a new youth organization called RED*REVOLUTION which initiated two school student strikes in December 2013 – in the second strike, 15,000 students participated – and gained national prominence (including TV appearances of its spoke person Marc Hangler).¹⁹³ In addition we played a prominent role in the solidarity movement with the struggle against the military dictatorship in Egypt and built close relations with this migrant community.¹⁹⁴ We also won over the majority of activists of the largest and most proletarian branch of the social democratic youth organization in Vienna and jointly formed with them a new workers' organization called RED RESISTANCE.¹⁹⁵ Both the youth organization RED*REVOLUTION as well as RED RESISTANCE are affiliated with the Austrian section of the RCIT. Today, the Austrian section is stronger than it has ever been throughout its entire history. In addition to Pröbsting, leading working class comrades include Johannes Wiener (a gardener), Marc Hangler (a waiter), Nina Gunić (a waitress), Marko Nikolić (a social worker), and high school students from the middle strata of the working class like Simon Müllauer. The national secretary is Rebecca Stauder, a 16-year old high school

because of a Pro-Palestine speech during the Gaza War, Statement of the RKOB, 13.12.2012, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/no-to-criminalization-of-rcit-activist>; Statements in Solidarity with RCIT Activist Johannes Wiener, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/solidarity-with-johannes-wiener>.

193 See our reports in English: Austria: School Students protest against attack on education rights! 25.11.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/austrian-school-students-protest/>; Austria: School Students go on strike for their education rights! 5.12.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/austria-school-student-strike/>; Austria: Successful School Student Strike on 6.December 2013! 6.12.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/austria-successful-school-student-strike/>; Austria: Red*REVOLUTION calls for a second School Student Strike on December 12! 10.12.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/austria-2-school-student-strike-on-12-12/>; Austria: The Great Second School Student Strike on December 12! (with Photos and Videos), 12.12.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/austria-the-great-second-school-student-strike/>; For more reports in German language go to the website of Red*REVOLUTION at: <http://www.redrevolution.at>

194 You can find at <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/numerous-reports,pictures-and-videos-of-solidarity-demonstrations-against-the-egypt-dictatorship>. Here are two Egypt: Report with Videos from Demonstration in Austria against the Military Dictatorship on 20.4.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-solidarity-demo-in-austria-20-4-2014/> with two speeches from Michael Pröbsting: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDS2DdNSg0E&list=UUCSUT4RYehM3d6by9iI4AIw> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pP3hcl-O0-o&list=UUCSUT4RYehM3d6by9iI4AIw>; See also a speech from Marc Hangler at a rally on 14.8.2014, <http://www.rkob.net/wer-wir-sind-1/rkob-aktiv-bei/schweigemarsch-%C3%A4gypten-14-08-2014/>; a speech from Johannes Wiener at a rally on 4.5.2014, <http://www.rkob.net/wer-wir-sind-1/rkob-aktiv-bei/freies-aegypten-demo-04-05-2014/>.

195 See Austria: Founding Conference of a new Workers Organization, 11.11.2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/austria-roter-widerstand/>

student from the lower strata of the working class. These leaders reflect well the class composition of our entire section.

The growth of our sections and our expansion in new countries has brought into our ranks many comrades with different experience from countries with highly diverse class struggle conditions. This continues to give us the opportunity to learn quite a lot. While we already shared fundamental programmatic agreement with the ISL on the tasks of permanent revolution in Israel/Occupied Palestine, the discussion and collaboration with these comrades helped both the former LFI cadres as well as them to deepen and further develop our theoretical analysis and perspectives. Similarly, we gained from the rich trade union experience of our Brazilian comrades as well as a group of Tamil comrades which were former members of a Healyite group in Sri Lanka. The same holds true for the former social democratic youth group in Austria which we won over.

Marxist Theory and Propaganda

The foundation of the RCIT also enabled us to advance our theoretical work independent of the LFI's leaders' eclecticism. Besides elaborating a new program, we also elaborated Action Programs for Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Israel/Palestine and Austria. In addition we made serious advances in the field of Marxist theory. While the LFI always spoke about the need to develop the theory of imperialism (but had not done so until now), the RCIT has published a comprehensive book which analyses the development of imperialism and the super-exploitation of the semi-colonial world in the past decades as well as the program of Marxist anti-imperialism. We also published a book which analysis the capitalist restoration in Cuba and the program of social revolution.

In addition, the RCIT has published a number of studies and booklets on the Arab Revolution, the History of Israel's Wars and our program of permanent revolution for the Palestinian liberation struggle, China's rise as an imperialist power, the development of Russian imperialism, the civil war in the Ukraine, the rise of inner-imperialist rivalry, alcoholism and the Bolshevik tradition of struggling against it, migration and revolutionary integration, liberation struggles and imperialist interference, the history of centrist degeneration of the Fourth International, capitalism and class struggle in Bangladesh, the coup d'état in Egypt, crisis and class struggle in Greece, and the August Uprising in Britain. In addition we have published educational material which introduces workers and youth to Marxism.¹⁹⁶

The RCIT publishes a monthly English-language journal and a website with new articles every 1-2 days. We manage to cover the most important international

196 See, for example, Johannes Wiener: 100 Questions and Answers on Socialism, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/100-q-a-on-socialism/> (This pamphlet has been published in German, English, Portuguese, and Hebrew languages); Johannes Wiener: Das ABC des Marxismus. Teil 1: Die Welt in der wir leben

events and publish regular reports about important events in the countries where we have sections and our work. Our website contains material in English and 15 other languages. The Austria section also publishes a German-language theoretical journal in addition to its monthly paper.

Of course there is no reason for complacency. We still have to travel a very long road to achieve our goal of building strong revolutionary parties and the Fifth Workers' International. Compared with what is needed to achieve these goals, we are still very small. But we have seen through our experience that we have the correct analysis to understand world developments, the correct program to fight against capitalist exploitation, and the correct methods to build communist fighting organizations, which can grow in periods like the present one. This gives us the assurance to continue this work and to look confidently towards the years ahead.



Contingent of the RCIT's Austrian Section at the MayDay Demonstration in Vienna in 2014



Supporters of the RCI's Pakistani Section and Delegates of Flood Victims in the Hattizabad district before a Meeting with Officials in Lahore on 16.11.2014



Leading comrades of the RCIT Section in Sri Lanka at a Conference in January 2012



Contingent of RED*REVOLUTION - the Youth Organization of the RCIT's Austrian Section - at the School Student Strike on 12.2.2013



Leaders of the RCIT Austrian Section speaking at Public Events: Nina Gunić (top left), Michael Pröbsting (top right), Marc Hangler (below left) and Johannes Wiener (below right).



Yossi Schwartz (RCIT Israel/Occupied Palestine, top left), Joao Evangelista (RCIT Brazil, top right), M. Thangavel (below left) and K. Kamalanathan (below right), both from the RCIT Section in Sri Lanka



Leaders of the RCIT's Austrian Section: Rebecca Stauder (top left) and Marko Nikolić (top right),
Simon Müllauer (below left) and Clemens Pollheimer (below right)

IV. Lessons for the Future

Our work of 25 years in building a Bolshevik organization nationally and internationally has provided us with rich experience. Below we summarize the most important lessons.

Centrality of the Bolshevik Organization – Nationally and Internationally

Looking back on 25 years of Bolshevik party building we can say unequivocally – despite the setbacks we have experienced in addition to our successes – that a democratically and centrally organized tendency is indispensable to defend the revolutionary program and to educate new layers of communist militants. In contrast, petty-bourgeois intellectuals and their post-modernist circles all come and go and leave behind some “theories” which nobody remembers after a year. Various amorphous “pluralist” groupings like the “*Anti-Capitalist Network*” or the “*International Socialist Network*” in Britain are just a few of the most recent examples of this.

Similarly, we have seen how indispensable it is for revolutionaries to avoid national isolation and to regularly collaborate and convene with comrades around the world who belong to the same organization. While this does not guarantee avoiding mistakes, if a group complacently accepts its national isolation it is doomed to degenerate politically. To prevent this, the RCIT invests a great deal of effort in producing international propaganda in various languages, including books in English.

The Unity of Theory and Practice Must Be Implemented in all Areas of Party Work

The strictest implementation of the unity of theory and practice must be followed in all areas of party work. Naturally this doctrine has to be applied according to the concrete circumstances. The program must never be presented as a set of purely general principles, but these principles have to be combined with tactics and slogans for the struggle. This has enabled us to present the program as a concrete action program and thus explain to militants what the practical conclusions of the communist principles are in the present period. Similarly, the principle of the unity of theory and practice allows us to combine propaganda with exemplary mass work. By this we can demonstrate our program in action to a wider vanguard and reach new layers of militants.

In addition, this also assures us that we haven’t attracted phrase mongers but rather militants who are willing to fight for our program. Related to this is also

our approach that organizational work of the party or pre-party organization is no less important than its propaganda or theoretical work. In the LFI we were faced with a widespread dilettantish attitude on the tasks of party building which could not be corrected despite intensive effort by various comrades. A revolutionary organization must have a serious approach to the organizational side of party-building as it was personified in leading Bolsheviks like Nadezhda Krupskaja, Yelena Stasova, Jakow Sverdlow or Leonid Krasin. Hence we appraise comrades with organizational and technical skills as no less important than those who are good propagandists or theoreticians.

Related to this is an understanding that, in order to build a communist pre-party organization in its initial stages, it is not sufficient to have individual comrades with these or those talents. One needs a collective of militants who combine the necessary skills – an understanding of the Marxist theory, capable propagandists as well as agitators and disciplined organizers – and together form a homogenous team. This does not come automatically or by adopting resolutions, but requires conscious planning and supervision during periods of training and selection. And this is not a onetime event, but rather a process which has to be continually repeated to renew and expand such a collective of militants.

Furthermore, we not only proclaimed the goal of building a workers' organization but have also – after long internal struggles in the LFI – succeeded in accomplishing this with the founding and development of the RCIT. Despite petty-bourgeois skepticism, we have proved in deeds that it is desirable, possible, and necessary to build communist pre-party organizations as well as leaderships with a predominately proletarian class composition.

Another form of implementing the unity of theory and practice is the ability of the revolutionary organization to avoid tendencies of routinism and to react quickly and in a determined manner to sudden events of the class struggle. Such an application of Lenin's policy of "*brusque turns*" has repeatedly played an important role in the history of our tendency. It has enabled us to repeatedly play an initiating and leading role in organizing mass actions like a number of student strikes and other protests.

All this shows the central importance of the leadership in a revolutionary party as well as in a pre-party organization. The leadership – which usually comprises the most experienced and dedicated comrades – bears a central role in quickly understanding new developments in the class struggle, in opportunities for party building as well as difficulties and potential dangers for the organization. Such a leadership must not consist one-sidedly of only comrades with theoretical and literary skills, but also of those who are key in organizational tasks and mass work.

Finally the unity of theory and practice is also indispensable in judging the development of organizations and militants. When we view a centrist group which is in a process of change, we judge them not only by their programmatic

declarations (as important as they are) but we also look carefully what is their class composition, what are their activities, what is the outlook of its activists. The same is true in the assessment of individual militants.

Such an assessment also has to take into account the specific national conditions and the character of the period in which revolutionaries are operating. An overemphasis of propaganda is always wrong. It is, however, less of a problem under counter-revolutionary conditions where comrades have to swim strongly against the current. Overemphasis on agitation and lack of propaganda and theoretical education is also always a problem. But it is less of a problem during upswings of class struggle than during reactionary cycles.

The Centrality of the Revolutionary Program

We have often stated that without a correct program the party has no political compass. We always rejected those centrists who claimed that it was “*impossible to elaborate a revolutionary program*” without having first built “*a sizeable party*” or “*experienced a successful revolution.*” With such arguments, Marx and Engels could not have written the *Communist Manifesto* and the Russian Marxists could not have elaborated a party program in 1903. Just as the working class needs a revolutionary party at all times, a revolutionary organization must always possess a political compass at every possible political conjuncture. It needs this regardless of whether it is numerically weak or strong. Refusing to elaborate a revolutionary program assures a road leading towards political confusion and degeneration. A communist program lays an indispensable foundation for building and further developing revolutionary continuity.

Revolutionaries have to learn from the experience of the workers’ movement as well as from their own personal experience. As we have stated in the RCIT Program: “*The programme of us Bolshevik-Communists is the codification, the summary and generalisation of the lessons of past class struggles and the successful and failed attempts at building a world revolutionary party.*”¹⁹⁷

Indeed, without our programmatic achievements in the past decades our tendency could not have survived as a revolutionary force. Our program pointed us in the right direction during such historic events like the collapse of Stalinism, the imperialist “*wars on terror,*” or the workers’ struggles and uprisings of the oppressed. Without the program we would have ended up like the centrists who were rather driven by the varying sentiments of bourgeois public opinion, the labor bureaucracy, and the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia. This results in an unprincipled zigzag-policy which reflects both the incomplete radicalization of workers or youth (i.e., those with roots among the masses) as well as capitulation to non-proletarian forces. In addition, our serious approach to the program has enabled us to further develop it wherever it had weaknesses and to struggle against deviations inside our tendency.

197 RCIT: The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto, p. 5

Further Development of Program and Theory

Understanding the necessity of a revolutionary program must go hand in hand with the desire to continually develop further the program and theory of Marxism. This is necessarily an ongoing task given the permanent progression of the objective reality and the class struggle. In the RCIT Program we wrote:

*“Does this mean that our programme is “the last word”? Of course not. There is no “last word” because the world never stands still. Just as society continually develops, the workers and oppressed always gather new experiences, so a programme, by its very nature, must continue to evolve. It must reflect and include new developments, new experiences and new lessons. If this does not occur, it degenerates into a lifeless dogma. (...) As previously stated, we consider our programme not as a “last word.” Many experiences of the revolutionary movements worldwide could not sufficiently be reflected therein due to our limited presence in a few countries as the RCIT is currently a small international organisation with activists in Asia, Europe and North America. We are, therefore, fully aware of the limitations of our programme.”*¹⁹⁸

Similarly Lenin insisted on such an approach to Marxist theory:

*„We do not regard Marx’s theory as something completed and inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that it has only laid the foundation stone of the science which socialists must develop in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life. We think that an independent elaboration of Marx’s theory is especially essential for Russian socialists; for this theory provides only general guiding principles, which, in particular, are applied in England differently than in France, in France differently than in Germany, and in Germany differently than in Russia. We shall therefore gladly afford space in our paper for articles on theoretical questions and we invite all comrades openly to discuss controversial points.“*¹⁹⁹

We therefore don’t see our accomplishment of elaborating a revolutionary program as reasons for complacency. We have seen that joint discussions and collaboration with revolutionaries in other countries has helped us to advance our understanding. This will obviously continue to be so in the future.

In addition, we have recognized various areas of theoretical work in which we had weaknesses in the course of our movement’s history. Consequently, we have already corrected several past weaknesses or blind spots (e.g., on migrants, the Black question, the national question, distortions of Lenin’s understanding of the labor aristocracy, party building theory, the workers’ government slogan, on the mandatory military service, on semi-colonial European countries and their accession to the EU, etc.)

However, more theoretical and research work has to be done. To name just a few examples we need to deepen our analysis of the labor aristocracy or the program for women liberation in the semi-colonial world. Another important task for Marxists is the further development of Marxist philosophy drawing on

¹⁹⁸ RCIT: The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto, Vienna 2012, pp. 4-5

¹⁹⁹ V. I. Lenin: Our Program (1899), in: LCW Vol. 4, pp. 211-212

the elaboration of dialectical materialism in the USSR in the 1920s by the Deborin School and rejecting the various revisionist deviations like structuralism or the Frankfurter School.

Importance of Exemplary Mass Work

Our experience has strongly emphasized the importance of exemplary mass work even for a small communist pre-party organization. Without such work, a small group is doomed to become a passive-propagandist sect even if it has the best program in the world. Such work helped us gain important experience and to recruit new militants tested in the class struggle.

At the same time, we saw groups both inside and outside the LFI which were not willing or capable of undertaking mass work and which degenerated into sects. A group cannot retain an internal healthy communist and militant spirit over a longer period if it does not regularly undertake regularly work among the popular masses as communists. Of course communists must make sure that such mass work is combined with communist propaganda and agitation and fighting under the open banner of the Bolshevik organization in order to recruit new militants. Naturally one might be forced to make exceptions in cases where serious dangers exist for the communist militants, thereby endangering the party's work in this area. Similarly, communists will alter the emphasis between propaganda, theory and education on one side and agitation and mass work on the other, according to the character of the period. For example, during a counter-revolutionary phase the weight will be more on the side of the propaganda, theoretical, and educational tasks.

Another important aspect in choosing the areas for exemplary mass work is the criterion of how to make such a choice. It is not relevant for us which areas of work the petty-bourgeois left has chosen. For us, the main criterion is which subjects and which struggles are important for the lower and middle strata of the working class and the oppressed, since it is these layers which we primarily want to attract to our ranks.

Splits and Fusions

During our history, we have experienced a number of splits and fusions. If methodical differences become irresolvable and lead to endless paralysis, usually a split is preferable. Taking the experience of the Austrian section we can sum up the balance sheet and see that each time we suffered a split we ultimately emerged not only politically more mature and resolute but also – two or three years after the split – numerically stronger than we were before it. Similarly we can say that if we would not have split with the LFI majority, we would have programmatically and organizationally degenerated and declined.

Toleration of systematic deviations from authentic Marxism by hoping that such

inner-party problems can automatically be resolved is a method which leads to certain degeneration. This was an important lesson which the *Left Opposition* drew in 1927:

*“The workers who constituted the immense majority of the socialist parties of the West before the imperialist war were undoubtedly opposed to an opportunist deviation. But they did not overcome in time the opportunistic mistakes of their leaders, which were not at first very great. They underestimated the significance of these mistakes. They did not understand that the first serious historical disturbance after that prolonged period of peaceful development which had given birth to so powerful a workers bureaucracy and aristocracy, would compel not only the opportunists but the centrists also to capitulate to the bourgeoisie, leaving the masses at that critical moment disarmed. If you can reproach the revolutionary Marxists, who were the left wing in the Second International before the war, with anything, it is not that they exaggerated the danger of opportunism when they called it a national-liberal labour policy, but that they relied too much upon the working-class composition of the socialist parties of those days. They relied upon the revolutionary instincts of the proletariat and upon the sharpening of class contradictions. They underestimated the real danger and mobilized the revolutionary rank and file against it with insufficient energy. We are not going to repeat that mistake.”*²⁰⁰

Naturally, there is no reason for communists to light-mindedly seek a split. But neither should they be afraid if differences prove too deep and irreconcilable. Building a party is impossible without splits. This is why Engels once remarked:

*„Incidentally, old man Hegel said long ago: A party proves itself victorious by splitting and being able to stand the split. The movement of the proletariat necessarily passes through different stages of development; at every stage part of the people get stuck and do not participate in the further advance; and this in itself is sufficient to explain why the ‘solidarity of the proletariat’, in fact, everywhere takes the form of different party groupings, which carry on life-and-death feuds with one another, as the Christian sects in the Roman Empire did amidst the worst persecutions.”*²⁰¹

An important instrument of reducing the danger of splits is the ability of the leadership to anticipate possible problems in the party’s work and to intervene quickly in order to minimize the possible damage. In addition, such a sensitive and flexible attitude of the leadership helped us repeatedly to support comrades who faced this or that problem in his or her development in overcoming it without unnecessary tensions or conflicts.

On the other hand, we also have had a number of positive experiences with fusing with organization coming from different political backgrounds. We consider agreement about the program for the revolutionary struggle in the present historic period as well as about the strategic tasks and methods in party building as essential for fusion. In contrast to various sects, we don’t see

²⁰⁰ Leon Trotsky: Platform of the Joint Opposition (1927)

²⁰¹ Friedrich Engels: Letter to August Bebel, 20. June 1873. in: MECW 44, p. 514

agreement about past historical events having no direct relevance for the present period as a necessary precondition for fusion. One could say that a consistent revolutionary line must lead to agreements to past as well as present events. To this we reply, yes this is true, but a revolutionary party, as well as a pre-party organization, will unavoidably have comrades and groups among its ranks that are not “consistent.” Life is full of contradictions, and revolutionaries would be foolish and sectarian to preclude the possibility of joining forces and working with others with whom deep methodologically agreement might eventually emerge. When fusing their forces in August 1917, the Bolsheviks never demanded from Trotsky’s *Mezhraionka*, to renounce their incorrect approach towards the question of unity within the Russian Social Democracy. Neither did Trotsky demand from Sneevliet and his *Revolutionary Socialist Party*, who opposed the Left Opposition’s orientation to reform the Communist International before 1933, to undertake such self-criticism when they joined the Fourth International forces in 1934/35. The same holds true for Trotsky’s approach to the *Block of Four* tactic which included the SAP led by Jakob Walcher who supported Brandler’s erroneous approach to the failed German revolution in autumn 1923.

This method of party-building helps us attract groups and individual militants who have different political origins and traditions than the initial cadre of the RCIT. It has enabled us to gain different experiences both in our four initial sections as well by winning over new groups. Today, nowhere outside the US section do former LFI members constitute even a sizeable minority of our membership.

Building the Communist Pre-Party Organization in the Working Class

We have seen that, in the long run, the class composition of a revolutionary organization has tremendous consequences for its political destiny. Naturally, it is possible that a small group starts with a proletarian-poor class composition and has mainly intellectuals and labor aristocrats in its ranks. This is not a tragedy ... as long as the comrades are aware of this problem and take measures to systematically try to improve their class composition.

If it fails in this task, its comrades will invariably cultivate bad habits and it will become more and more difficult to recruit workers and proletarian youth. Similarly, we have seen during our struggle inside the LFI how strong comrades come under the influence of passing fads of the progressive petty-bourgeois intelligentsia (post-modernist skepticism, attraction to pluralist left unity projects, lack of dedication, difficulties in talking with and winning over workers and proletarian youth, etc.)

Any revolutionary organization which seriously wants to build itself up as a mass-group of members of the working class and oppressed – and not of the intelligentsia and labor aristocracy – must from the beginning put strong

emphasis on orienting its members to work opposite the popular masses. It must fight against all forms of aristocratic prejudices and test whether its members are willing and able to learn to work among the proletarian masses.

According to our experience, it is equally important that a revolutionary organization actively promotes the cadre development of members from the lower strata of the working class and the oppressed. Furthermore it must consciously select dedicated members and help them to develop into leaders. It is a crucial test for the success or failure of a revolutionary organization as a proletarian combat organization whether it has succeeded to develop a number of cadres from the lower layers of the working class and oppressed so that they represent a significant share of its leaders. All in all it should desire to have a primarily proletarian composition of its leadership.

Comrades coming from non-proletarian backgrounds, who are prepared to break with their class affiliation with its privileges, relative wealth, and chances for a career; who dedicate all their time to the organization as full-time party workers, or consciously take on a proletarian job within the lower strata of our class; who view with hostility middle-class careerists; and who humbly do their best to assist working class comrades develop as cadres – these kinds of dedicated communists will always be welcome among our ranks, regardless of their original class background.

Struggle against Left-Reformism and Centrism

A Bolshevik organization can only fight for the revolutionary program if it is determined to fight against those who distort the ideas of Marxism. The struggle for ideas does not take place in a vacuum but reflects the struggle between classes. Hence, it can only take place as a struggle between groups of people (parties, unions, institutions, etc.). Marxists fight against those who reject Marxism's revolutionary conclusions in the name of "Marxism." They take up this struggle because these left-reformist and centrist forces can only confuse the vanguard.

Discussions and collaborations with such groups are useful if they – or sectors of them – are in a process of questioning and breaking away from their centrist roots. Equally it can be necessary to pay tactical attention to left-reformist and centrist groups where they represent radicalized new layers of the working class and the oppressed.

Outside of such situations it is wrong to orientate to this petty-bourgeois left milieu. A revolutionary organization usually should orient to winning over new workers and youth who are joining the class struggle and are looking for an alternative. These layers are fresh forces in the class struggle and are free (or more free) from distorted Marxist ideas.

In one of our documents on the perspectives of the world situation we noted with regard to the issue of orientation of party-building:

“It is because of its orientation to the labor bureaucracy and the petty-bourgeoisie intelligentsia that the bulk of the centrist and left-reformist milieu is increasingly poisoned by pessimism, skepticism, moaning about the lack of “left unity”, hysterical renunciation of the “Leninist hyper-centralism” and the “vanguard party” concept as well as praising of liquidationism. Authentic revolutionaries however orientate towards the new, militant layers from the working class and the oppressed who are looking for a program and a strategy to fight against exploitation and oppression. This is where our optimism and firmness stems from. Those who wish to develop in a revolutionary direction must break from an orientation towards the centrist and left-reformist swamp and look for rooting themselves in the healthy, militant proletarian milieu.

This does not mean that revolutionaries should ignore the reformist parties or the centrist groups. The policy of the united front tactic remains in full force as well as the need for a hard struggle to remove these revisionists’ influence in the workers vanguard. But in the first line the RCIT orientates towards new militants and initiatives from the ranks of the workers and the oppressed. From these layers only, new promising forces and a new dynamic will come. And such developments might affect healthier elements from the ranks of left-reformism and centrism and help them to break with the revisionists’ rotten method.

Revolutionaries have to understand in depth that not only has capitalism entered a new historic period of massive instability and sharp turns, but the international workers’ movement has done so too. No stone is left unturned. Those forces, who don’t understand the character of the period and its corresponding tasks, are doomed to degenerate more and more and get pushed to the right. For those forces, however, who are coming closer to an understanding of the sharply antagonistic nature of the present period, who are willing to join the masses in their struggles – in particular the lower strata of the working class and the oppressed – without arrogantly sneering about their “backward consciousness” and who are at the same time determined to fight intransigently for the revolutionary program and who ruthlessly attack the reformist and centrist traitors – those forces can revolve themselves and play a healthy and utterly positive role in the struggle to build the new World Party of Socialist Revolution. Being aware of the limitations of historic analogies, one has to see that to a certain degree the present period bears similarities to the years after the outbreak of World War I in 1914. In this period the workers’ movement went through sharp crises, splits and transformations. In this period the rottenness of the centrist majority of the Second International – which already existed before 1914 but was less obvious – came to full light. The orientation and tactics of Lenin and his supporters are highly instructive for the Bolshevik-Communists today.”²⁰²

Such are a number of lessons which we in the RCIT have drawn from our experience. Since we live and act in ongoing history, we are certain that the next

²⁰² RCIT: The World Situation and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Communists (March 2013). Theses of the International Executive Committee of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency, March 2013, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 8, p. 42, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-march-2013/>

years will bring us even more experiences. In order to utilize the opportunities ahead, we will continue to work on the basis of our Marxist program and tested methods of party building. We call upon revolutionaries around the world to join us in the struggle for the most important goal as long as the capitalist exploiter system continues to exist: the building of revolutionary parties and the Fifth Workers' International!

The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto

Programme of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency

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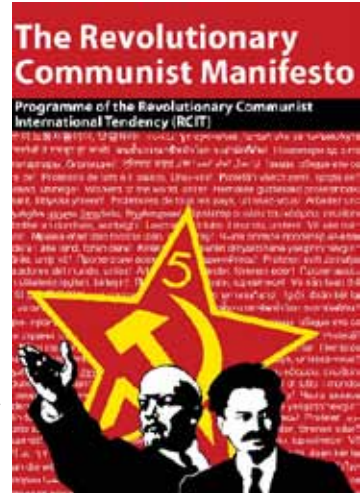
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The Great Robbery of the South

***Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation
of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital***

***Consequences for the Marxist Theory
of Imperialism***



By Michael Pröbsting

Published by the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency*

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Cuba's Revolution Sold Out?

*The Road from
Revolution to the
Restoration of Capitalism*



By Michael Pröbsting

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Look for details of the books at www.cuba-sold-out.net

Russia as a Great Imperialist Power

By Michael Pröbsting, March 2014

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V. Summary

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.



Michael Pröbsting is a revolutionary activist since 30 years. He is the author of numerous articles and pamphlets in German and English language. He published books on the World Economy (2008), Migration (2010), the Arab Revolution (2011), Imperialism and the Third World (2013) and Cuba (2013). He is the International Secretary of the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency*.