

REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNISM

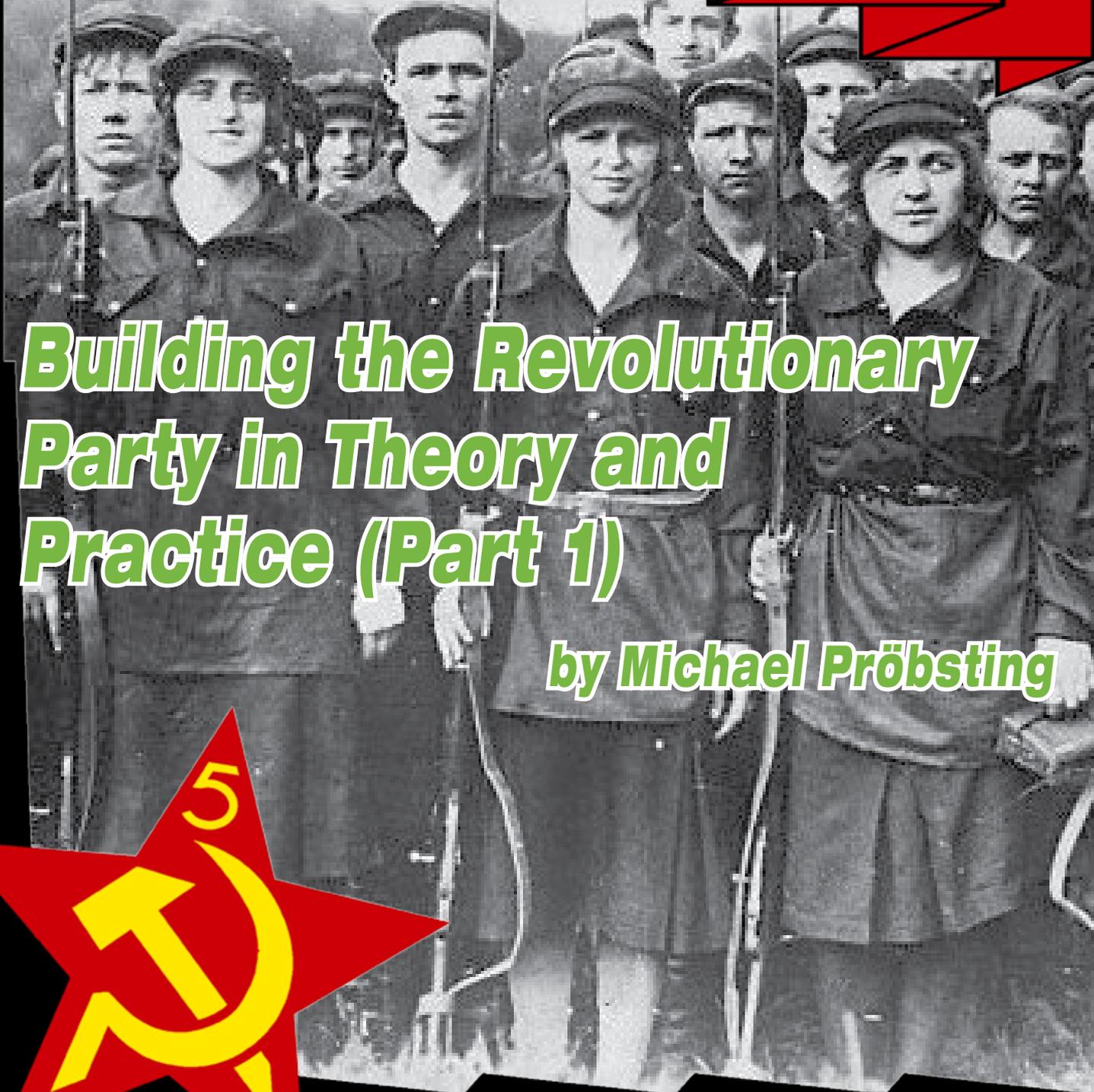


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Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice (Part 1)

by Michael Pröbsting

WORKERS AND OPPRESSED UNITE!

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**www.thecommunists.net - rcit@thecommunists.net
Füchselhofgasse 6, 1120 Vienna, Austria**

BUILDING THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE (PART 1)

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

By Michael Pröbsting, *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT)*, December 2014

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 Bolshevick-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 Bolshevick 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.



Workers during the Uprising of the Paris Commune 1871

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* (“*partiinost*” 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

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 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 “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 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



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

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-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.

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 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 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 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 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. 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.

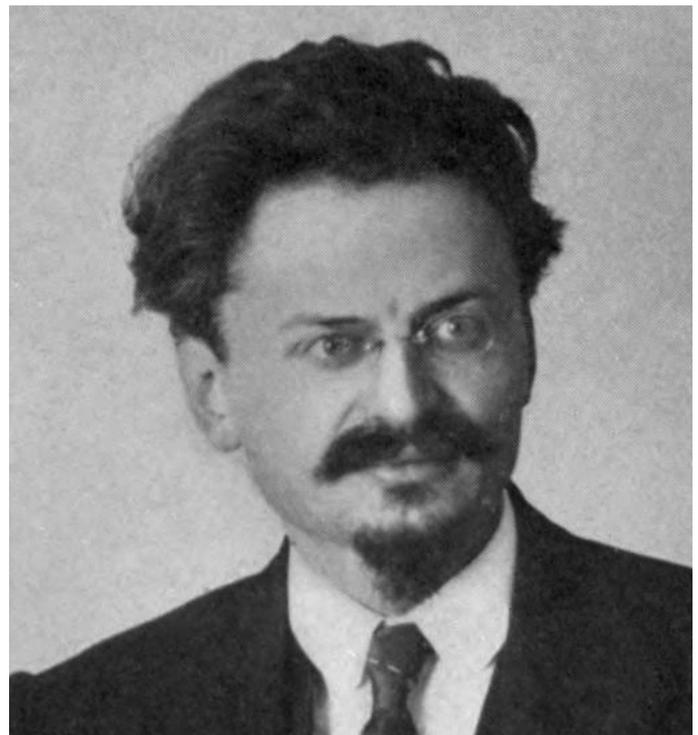
Lenin summarized the experience of the Bolsheviks in his book *'Left-Wing' Communism* on the role of the leadership: „The first questions to arise are: how is the discipline of the proletariat's revolutionary party maintained? How is it tested? How is it reinforced? First, by the class-consciousness 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 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 Bolsheviks, 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



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

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 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 through 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.

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 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

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* 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



Bolshevik Women who played a key role in leading the Revolutionary Party: Nadeshda Krupskaja (left) and Inessa Armand (right)

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

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: 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.

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.



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.

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



Leaders of the Bolshevik Party at the time of Lenin: Gregory Zinoviev (left) and Nikolai Bukharin (right)

*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. Luppel, 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:

*„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, 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 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 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.



Bolshevik Women who played a key role in leading the Revolutionary Party and the Russian Revolution: Evgenia Bosh (left) and Konkordiiia Samoilova (left)

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 career 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 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 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” 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 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, Marxists 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 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.

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, 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

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 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

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 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 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.

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 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

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 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 adaptation 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 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, 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

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 Bordighists, 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 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.

The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto Programme of the RCIT

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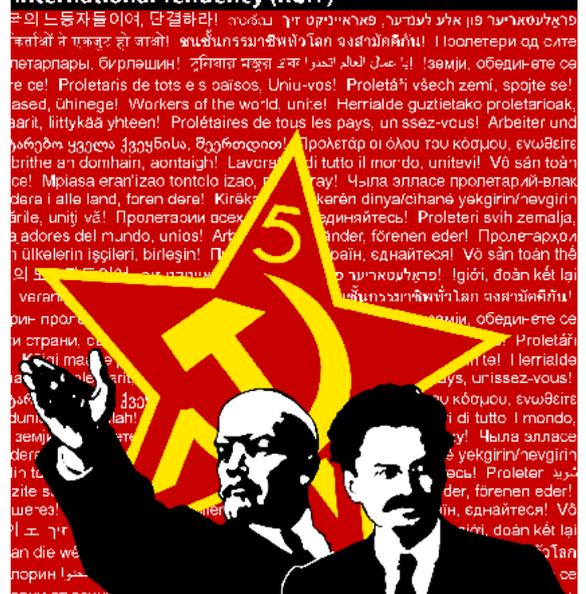
From armed insurrection and the dictatorship of the proletariat towards socialism!

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The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto

Programme of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT)



FOOTNOTES

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.

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 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. Luppel, 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. Luppel: *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)

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)

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

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

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 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

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.

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

27 Leo Trotzki: Fragen des Alltagslebens (1923), Berlin 1973, pp. 23-24; in English: Leon Trotsky: Man Does Not Live by Politics Alone (1923), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1923/11/politics.htm>

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 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 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)

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

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)

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

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)

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

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 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 Hineingetragen] 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

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 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 proletarian 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 proletarian 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. Pokrowski: Russische Geschichte, Berlin 1930, p. 244)

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

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

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. Luppel: Lenin und die Philosophie. Zur Frage des Verhältnisses der Philosophie zur Revolution (1928), S. 115

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)
- 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)
- 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.)
- 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
- 71 Leon Trotsky: The New Course (1923), in: The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25), S. 96
- 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
- 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
- 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
- 82 V. I. Lenin: Revolutionary Marxists at the International Socialist Conference, September 5- 8, 1915 (1915), in: LCW Vol. 21, pp. 391-392
- 83 Communist International: Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of their Work, p. 258
- 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 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
- 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-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 oftenest 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

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

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

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

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)

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

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)

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

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. 147-148

110 Leon Trotsky: Unifying the Left Opposition (1930); in: Writings 1930, p. 99

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

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

Revolutionary Communist International Tendency:

What does the RCIT stand for?

The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) is a fighting organisation for the liberation of the working class and all oppressed. It has national sections in various countries. The working class is the class of all those (and their families) who are forced to sell their labour power as wage earners to the capitalists. The RCIT stands on the theory and practice of the revolutionary workers' movement associated with the names of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

Capitalism endangers our lives and the future of humanity. Unemployment, war, environmental disasters, hunger, exploitation, are part of everyday life under capitalism as are the national oppression of migrants and nations and the oppression of women, young people and homosexuals. Therefore, we want to eliminate capitalism.

The liberation of the working class and all oppressed is possible only in a classless society without exploitation and oppression. Such a society can only be established internationally.

Therefore, the RCIT is fighting for a socialist revolution at home and around the world.

This revolution must be carried out and lead by the working class, for she is the only class that has nothing to lose but their chains.

The revolution can not proceed peacefully because never before has a ruling class voluntarily surrendered their power. The road to liberation includes necessarily the armed rebellion and civil war against the capitalists.

The RCIT is fighting for the establishment of workers' and peasant republics, where the oppressed organize themselves in rank and file meetings in factories, neighbourhoods and schools – in councils. These councils elect and control the government and all other authorities and can always replace them.

Real socialism and communism has nothing to do with the so-called "real existing socialism" in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba or Eastern Europe. In these countries, a bureaucracy dominated and oppressed the proletariat.

The RCIT supports all efforts to improve the living conditions of workers and the oppressed. We combine this with a perspective of the overthrow of capitalism.

We work inside the trade unions and advocate class struggle, socialism and workers' democracy. But trade unions and social democracy are controlled by a bureaucracy. This bureaucracy is a layer which is connected with the state and capital via jobs and privileges. It is far from the interests and living circumstances of the members. This bureaucracy's basis rests mainly on the top, privileged layers of the working class - the workers' aristocracy. The struggle for the liberation of the working class must be based on the broad mass of the proletariat rather than their upper strata.

The RCIT strives for unity in action with other organizations. However, we are aware that the policy of social democracy and the pseudo-revolutionary groups is dangerous and they ultimately represent an obstacle to the

emancipation of the working class.

We fight for the expropriation of the big land owners as well as for the nationalisation of the land and its distribution to the poor and landless peasants. We fight for the independent organisation of the rural workers.

We support national liberation movements against oppression. We also support the anti-imperialist struggles of oppressed peoples against the great powers. Within these movements we advocate a revolutionary leadership as an alternative to nationalist or reformist forces.

In a war between imperialist states we take a revolutionary defeatist position, i.e. we don't support neither side and advocate the transformation of the war into a civil war against the ruling class. In a war between an imperialist power (or its stooge) and a semi-colonial country we stand for the defeat of the former and the victory of the oppressed country.

The struggle against national and social oppression (women, youth, sexual minorities etc.) must be lead by the working class. We fight for revolutionary movements of the oppressed (women, youth, migrants etc.) based on the working class. We oppose the leadership of petty-bourgeois forces (feminism, nationalism, Islamism etc.) and strive to replace them by a revolutionary communist leadership.

Only with a revolutionary party fighting as its leadership can the working class win. The construction of such a party and the conduct of a successful revolution as it was demonstrated by the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky in Russia are a model for the revolutionary parties and revolutions also in the 21 Century.

For new, revolutionary workers' parties in all countries!
For a 5th Workers International on a revolutionary basis!
Join the RCIT!

*No future without socialism! No socialism without a revolution!
No revolution without a revolutionary party! ■*



