

The Theory of  
**PERMANENT  
REVOLUTION**

*A Critique*

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## PREFACE

The Trotskyism Study Group consists of a group of Communist Party members engaged in the study of various aspects of the history, theory, and politics of Trotskyism. As part of our work we intend to publish a series of articles and documents dealing with some of the controversial questions that Communists and Trotskyists have debated over the past 50 years. The first of these is the present pamphlet which discusses possibly the most contentious issue of that continuing debate — Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution. For those readers wishing to examine the issues involved more fully a brief reading list is appended at the back.

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# The Theory of *Permanent Revolution*: A Critique

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The theory of “Permanent Revolution”, as elaborated by Leon Trotsky, constitutes a central doctrine of the various groups which internationally form the “trotskyist” tendency within the Marxist movement. For the Trotskyist groups, the theory of Permanent Revolution is not just an analysis of the dynamics of the Russian revolution, but, more importantly, a major “tool” by which they interpret contemporary social reality, and upon which they construct their strategies for revolutionary transformation.

In writings in defence of the theory of Permanent Revolution, one can discern two general strands of argument on the relationship between Trotsky’s theory and the analyses developed by Lenin in 1905-07 and 1917-18. The first emphasises the *closeness* of Trotsky’s theory with the positions developed by Lenin in 1905-07, apart from a few minor differences; [1] the second emphasises the *distance* between them in 1905-07, but claims that in 1917-18, Lenin, implicitly, if not explicitly, adopted positions identical with the theses of Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution. [2]

I want to examine these two strands of argument by, firstly, looking at the debate that took place within the Russian Social-Democratic Movement, prior to 1917, on the character and forces of the Russian revolution. In doing this, I hope to settle the question concerning the theoretical relationship between the strategy developed by Lenin in 1905-07, and that adopted by Trotsky. Secondly, I want to supplement this examination by looking at the perspectives developed by Lenin in 1917-18, in order to determine if any theoretical and political mutation in his thought took place.

## THE FIRST RUSSIAN REVOLUTION: TROTSKY

Trotsky based his theory of Permanent Revolution on a specific conception of the peculiarities of Russia’s historical development, which emphasised the role of the Tsarist state in social and economic development, and consequently, in the development of social classes. [3] From this, he made the observation that in Russia, there did not exist an independent capitalist class capable of leading a nation-wide revolution against Tsarism; alongside an emasculated bourgeoisie, Trotsky discerned a strong, revolutionary proletariat. From his general observations on the character of the social classes in Russia, Trotsky derived one of his central theses concerning the Russian revolution.

*...the struggle for the emancipation of Russia from the incubus of absolutism which is stifling it has become converted into a single combat between absolutism and the industrial proletariat, a single combat in which the peasants may render considerable support but cannot play a leading role. [4]*

We should note two points here: Firstly, the notion of a “single combat” between two opponents. The contradictions of the Russian social formation are reduced to a conflict between Tsarism and the proletariat; secondly, the relationship of other classes to this basic class

contradiction remains indeterminate. The peasants *may* render support.... We shall return to these points at a later stage.

One of the criticisms that has been levelled at Trotsky as a result of his characterisation of the main class contradiction in Russia is that he advocated skipping or “leaping over” the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. This is an erroneous view and fails to understand the basic features of Trotsky’s analysis of the Russian revolution. Trotsky recognised that the immediate, objective tasks of the revolution were “bourgeois-democratic” in essence, that is, against the remnants of feudal economic and political relations. Like Lenin, he recognised that:

*The general sociological term bourgeois revolution by no means solves the politico-tactical problems, contradictions and difficulties which the mechanics of a given bourgeois revolution throw up. [5]*

An adequate critique of Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution cannot, then, rest on the notion that he advocated “skipping” necessary historical tasks, it can only rest on an examination of the principles underlying the thesis that:

*In the revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century, the direct objective tasks of which are also bourgeois, there emerges as a near prospect the inevitable, or at least the probable, political domination of the proletariat. [6]*

Or, more explicitly that:

*...the democratic tasks of the backward bourgeois nations lead directly, in our epoch, to the dictatorship of the proletariat and that the dictatorship of the proletariat puts socialist tasks on the order of the day. [7]*

The error of Trotsky’s analysis arose from the contention that the nature of social relations in Russia laid the whole burden of the bourgeois revolution upon the shoulders of the proletariat...” [8] From this argument, he developed the thesis of the necessity, if not inevitability, in a victorious revolution against Tsarism, of the proletariat seizing political power. The bourgeois revolution against the remnants of feudalism would lead *directly* to the dictatorship of the proletariat, which would, of necessity, by the very logic of events and the position of the proletariat in the state, be compelled to implement socialist measures. Despite the fact that Trotsky was to claim in 1929 that “... at no time and in no place did I ever write or propose such a slogan ...” [9] it is not surprising that Lenin characterised Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution by the slogan formulated by Parvus: “No Tsar, but a Workers’ government.” [10]

The importance of Trotsky’s thesis that the proletariat would seize state power in the course of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, is that his entire conception of the problems of strategy and tactics in the transition to socialism rest upon it. In exactly the same way, the strategies or “prognoses”, of contemporary Trotskyists on the question of the transition to socialism in countries subject to fascist, military or colonial rule, also rest on the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat arising from what are essentially democratic or national — that is, “bourgeois” — revolutions.

Before examining the propositions which buttress this thesis of the theory of Permanent Revolution, I want to look at the central issues which divided Lenin from the theorists of the Menshevik faction of the R.S.D.L.P. — those concerning the *character* and the *forces* of the first Russian revolution.

## THE MENSHEVIKS

The Mensheviks believed that because of the low level of development of the productive forces in Russia, and because of the continued existence of feudal economic and political relations, the Russian revolution would be “bourgeois” in its essence, leading to the political dominance of the bourgeoisie in the state, along the lines of the classic revolutions of Western Europe. Martynov, a leading theorist of the Menshevik faction, argued that:

*The proletariat cannot win political power in the state, either wholly or in part, until it has made the socialist revolution. [11]*

From this generally held position, he went on to argue that:

*...the coming revolution cannot realize any political forms against the will of the entire bourgeoisie, for the latter will be the master tomorrow... [12]*

At the Unity Congress of the R.S.D.L.P. in 1906, Ptitsyn, one of the Menshevik delegates, claimed that:

*...the revolution which Russia is expecting is, according to its content, bourgeois! [13]*

There was nothing controversial about this statement. It was a view shared by all Russian Social-Democrats, including Trotsky. Differences arose, however, on the interpretation of the thesis concerning the bourgeois character of the revolution. According to Ptitsyn:

*The Russian revolution turmoil will pass away, bourgeois life will return to its usual course, and unless a worker's revolution takes place in the West, the bourgeoisie will inevitably come to power in our country. [14]*

Similar propositions were advanced by other Mensheviks. [15] If we compare the Menshevik position to the one elaborated by Trotsky, we have what appears, on the surface at least, two starkly opposed ‘prognoses’.

Trotsky: The victorious Russian revolution — bourgeois democratic in its immediate objective tasks — will inevitably lead directly to the dictatorship of the Proletariat.

Menshevik: The Russian revolution is, in its essence, bourgeois- democratic; it can only lead to the political dominance of the bourgeoisie.

## LENIN

Lenin, like the Mensheviks, believed that “the transformation of the economic and political system in Russia along bourgeois-democratic lines is inevitable and inescapable.” [16] By this, he meant that, concretely, Russia was undergoing a process of transformation which did not:

*...depart from the framework of the bourgeois, i.e., capitalist, socioeconomic system. A bourgeois revolution expresses the needs of capitalist development, and, far from destroying the foundations of capitalism, it effects the contrary — it broadens and deepens them. [17]*

Lenin did not insist on this because he was mechanically applying some supra-historical law of development to Russia, but because, on the basis of a concrete study of the Russian social formation [18] he saw that what was actually taking place was a complex transitional process involving the elimination of the conditions of existence of feudal social relations, and the creation of the conditions necessary for extended capitalist production.

The question that Lenin posed, however, in contrast to both Trotsky and the Mensheviks was:

what were the possible paths of capitalist development in the Russian social formation? Lenin believed that this was a fundamental question for Russian Social-Democracy, and the fact that he posed it, set him apart from the other theorists of the R.S.D.L.P. We shall see that this was not accidental, but rooted in the specificity of Lenin's Marxism.

Lenin insisted that there were two concrete paths along which Russia could travel in the process of transition from feudalism to capitalism.

*The survivals of serfdom may fall away either as a result of the transformation of landlord economy or as a result of the abolition of the landlord latifundia, i. e., either by reform or by revolution. Bourgeois development may proceed by having big landlord economies at the head, which will gradually become more and more bourgeois and gradually substitute bourgeois for feudal methods of exploitation. It may also proceed by having small peasant economies at the head, which in a revolutionary way, will remove the "excrescence" of the feudal latifundia from the social organism and then freely develop without them along the path of capitalist economy. [19]*

Both these two paths were objectively possible, and in evidence, in the Russian social formation. Lenin believed that the 1861 "emancipation" reforms, and those introduced by Stolypin after the defeat of the first Russian revolution, represented stages in the process of capitalist development along what he called the "Junker" or "Prussian" path; the 1905-07 revolution represented an attempt to push Russia onto the "American" or peasant path of capitalist development. This brings us to Lenin's crucial thesis concerning the Russian revolution. In 1905, he declared that, objectively, there were "...two possible courses and two possible outcomes of the revolution in Russia." [20] That is, corresponding to the two possible paths of agrarian-capitalist development, were two possible forms of bourgeois-democratic revolution:

*the combined action of the existing forces... may result in either of two things, may bring about either of two forms of... transformation. Either i) matters will end in- 'the revolution's decisive victory over tsarism', or ii) the forces will be inadequate for a decisive victory, and matters will end in a deal between tsarism and the most 'inconsistent' and most 'self-seeking' elements of the bourgeoisie. [21]*

The important thing to grasp, is that from Lenin's point of view, the question of which path of Russia's capitalist development would ultimately prevail could not be answered from any teleological conception of historical development or by the application of a 'general model' derived from the experience of Western Europe. The path taken by Russia in the process of eliminating feudal social relations would be determined by the *form* of her bourgeois revolution. However, the outcome of the revolution — the *form* of the bourgeois-democratic revolution — was not pre-given; it could not be pre-determined by a specification of the character of the classes present in the Russian social formation; it would be determined by the *struggles* of the contending social and political forces, by the *material means of struggle* at their disposal, by the forms assumed by those struggles — in fact by the *outcome* of extensive, mass class conflicts.

The Stolypin agrarian reforms, which followed a line of capitalist evolution along the landlord, "Junker" path, at the expense of the mass of peasants, had as its political "condition of existence", the defeat of the proletariat and the peasantry in the first Russian revolution. Tsarism, and the classes whose interests it "represented", survived the onslaught of the "people" and initiated a series of reforms designed to perpetuate its existence by winning allies amongst sections of the urban and rural bourgeoisie; this represented a stage in the transformation of the absolutist state into a bourgeois monarchy. The alternative to this line of "bourgeois-democratic"

development, was a “decisive victory over tsarism”, which would create the political conditions necessary for the rapid development of capitalist agriculture on nationalised land, and a consequent speeding up of the transformation of the peasantry into a rural bourgeoisie and a rural proletariat. This decisive victory, in Lenin’s opinion, could only be carried out by the “people” — the proletariat and the peasantry. He formulated the slogan of the “Revolutionary-Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry”, in order to conceptualise this alternative economic and political line of development. What function did this slogan serve? Its most important purpose was that of drawing lines of demarcation between the positions of revolutionary Social-Democracy, and those of other “revolutionary” and “oppositional” tendencies (the Mensheviks, the S-R’s, and the Cadets), on the crucial questions thrown up by the first Russian revolution. This slogan, firstly, defined the class forces which could perform a revolutionary function in the class struggles of 1905-06 — the proletariat and the peasantry; secondly, it defined the content of the revolution — the creation of a democratic political system (a Republic), the elimination of feudal social relations, the removal of the obstacles hindering the development of the class struggle in the towns and the countryside; thirdly, it specified the forms and methods of the class struggle required to bring about these transformations — it would have to be a revolution based on an armed insurrection leading to a dictatorship of classes led by the proletariat. Lenin therefore used this slogan to define what he meant by the “revolution’s decisive victory over tsarism”.

#### BOLSHEVISM v. MENSHEVISM

If we compare the resolution “On a Provisional Revolutionary Government” adopted by the Bolsheviks at their congress in 1905 [22] with the corresponding resolution “On the Seizure of Power and Participation in a Provisional Government”, adopted by the Mensheviks at their conference, [23] the differences between Bolshevism and Menshevism become more apparent. The Bolshevik resolution, ascertaining the need for *political freedoms* for the proletariat to wage its struggle for socialism, recognised that the autocracy would have to be replaced by a *democratic Republic*, which would be established by a victorious uprising of the people, led by the proletariat, with the formation of a *provisional revolutionary government* guaranteeing the conditions necessary for the conviction of a Constituent Assembly. The resolution established that in *principle*, Social-Democrats could participate in such a provisional government, but that the practical expediency of so doing could not be derived from principles, but would depend on an assessment of the “.. alignment of forces and other factors which cannot be precisely defined in advance ...” [24]

In contrast to the Bolshevik resolution which spoke *solely* in terms of a popular uprising of the people as the most radical and far-reaching form of the bourgeois revolution the Menshevik resolution spoke of both this form and also of a political transformation by way of “reform” — by the decision of a representative institution to organise a Constituent Assembly.

*The decisive victory of the revolution over tsarism may be marked either by the establishment of a provisional government — issuing from the victorious popular uprising — or by the revolutionary initiative of one or other representative institution which will decide, under the direct revolutionary pressure of the people, to organise a national Constituent Assembly.*  
[25]

The crucial distinction here, is that the Menshevik resolution placed on equal footing, two forms of bourgeois revolution. From the Bolshevik point of view, without the decisive defeat of tsarism by an armed uprising, any “revolutionary initiative” by a “representative institution”, would be a

“victory of the revolution *in words* only”. [26] In order to convene a Constituent Assembly, in *actual fact*, the “people” had to have the power to do so. A “decisive victory” of the revolution in the form of a “representative assembly convened by the tsar”, would be a revolution “in which the *landlord and big bourgeois* element will preponderate”. The Bolshevik resolution, on the other hand, was premised on the form of the bourgeois revolution “in which the peasant and proletarian element will preponderate”. [27]

The Mensheviks were never able to distinguish between these two types of bourgeois revolution. Though they specified that the “decisive victory of the revolution over tsarism” could be effected by either one of two methods, they did not differentiate between the class forces which would constitute the motive forces of these two types or forms of the democratic revolution. This is apparent from the fact that though the Menshevik resolution spoke of a “popular uprising” in one form, and the “revolutionary pressure of the people” in the other, they nonetheless believed that the bourgeoisie in general, in an abstract sense, would be the class which would assume political power, regardless of the form of achieving the revolution. Because the outcome was the same in their strategic scenario, they were unable to pose the question of which form of the revolution was best suited to the interests of the proletariat’s struggle for socialism.

For an understanding of the theoretical point of view of the Mensheviks, their position on Social-Democratic participation in a provisional- revolutionary government is most revealing. In order to preserve the independence of Social-Democracy from the parties of the bourgeoisie, it

*... should not set itself the goal of seizing or sharing power in a provisional government, but must remain the party of the extreme revolutionary opposition.* [28]

Whereas the Bolsheviks regarded Social-Democratic participation in a provisional government not as a matter of principle, but a concrete question, depending on the situation and the alignment of class forces, for the Mensheviks, it was purely a matter of principles. Martynov, who seems to have had a strong ideological influence on the development of the Menshevik strategy in 1905, argued that:

*We must firmly remember that Social-Democracy is and must remain, right up to the socialist revolution, the party of the extreme opposition ...* [29]

The Mensheviks opposed the idea of Social-Democracy “sharing” power in a provisional government because this would compromise it with the bourgeoisie and represent the sanctioning of the “institutions of the political dominance of the bourgeoisie — the army and the officer ranks, the police and the jailers, the bureaucracy and the magistracy...”; [30] furthermore, they opposed a “seizure of power” by Social- Democracy because this was identified with a socialist revolution, whereas the impending Russian revolution could only be a bourgeois revolution, representing the “...political self-emancipation of Russian bourgeois society...” [31]

## THE SEIZURE OF POWER

What is interesting is that the question of a “seizure of power” in the bourgeois-democratic revolution was raised both by the Mensheviks and Trotsky, but not by Lenin. In 1906, Martynov, at the Unity Congress of the R.S.D.L.P. claimed that:

*Already at the end of 1904, before the January events, I predicted — in my Two Dictatorships, that Lenin, of necessity would arrive at the theory of the seizure of power, because this flows not from his estimation of the current moment, but from his entire world*



*outlook, from his entire method of thinking.* [32]

Plekhanov, also discerning the idea of a “seizure of power” by Social- Democracy in Lenin’s thinking, made the point that:

*Our point of view is that the seizure of power is obligatory for us, but only when we make the proletarian revolution. And as the revolution which is now in prospect can only be a petty bourgeois revolution, then we are obliged to repudiate the seizure of power.* [33]

It is clear, however, from Lenin’s speeches and writings of this period, that he nowhere advocated a seizure of political power by Social- Democracy in the bourgeois revolution. [34] Indeed he said that:

*...the question of the “conquest of power” in general, etc., does not at all come into the picture ... because the political situation in Russia does not by any means turn such questions into immediate issues.* [35]

Why then, did the Mensheviks ascribe to Lenin the notion of a “seizure of power”? Martynov, in his pamphlet “Two Dictatorships”, argued that Lenin:

*...clearly revived the ancient, long buried theory of the People’s Will (Narodnaya Volya) concerning the “seizure of power” and even about the coincidence of the immediate Russian revolution with the socialist revolution.* [36]

Martynov derived this conclusion from his interpretation of Lenin’s theory concerning Social-Democracy’s “hegemonic” role in the bourgeois revolution, [37] Lenin’s strategy, according to Martynov, was premised on the idea of an organisation of professional revolutionaries timing and carrying out a national armed uprising, which if successful, would constitute a “seizure of power” by Social-Democracy. Martynov’s characterisation of Lenin’s strategy was based on “logical” deductions from propositions formulated by him concerning the “special features” of Lenin’s “world outlook.” Imagine said Martynov...

*...the realization of Lenin’s utopia. Imagine that the party whose composition of members has been narrowed down to only professional revolutionaries, has succeeded in preparing, timing and conducting the national armed uprising. Is it not obvious that the national will would appoint precisely this party to be the provisional government immediately after the revolution? Is it not obvious that the people would entrust the immediate fate of the revolution to precisely this party and to no other? Is it not obvious that this party, not wishing to betray the confidence previously shown to it by the people, would be forced, would be obliged to take power into its hands and preserve it, until it had consolidated the victory of the revolution by revolutionary measures?[38]*

In this scenario, Martynov *deduced* the fact that Social-Democracy would have power thrust into its hands if it attempted to implement and lead a national, armed uprising. The logic of this mode of reasoning is that a seizure of power by Social-Democracy would represent the political domination of the proletariat; this domination would necessitate the implementation of measures corresponding to the class interests of the dominating class, i.e., socialism. Social-Democracy, according to the logic of Martynov’s propositions, would be faced with the dilemma of having to implement its maximum programme, which would not correspond to the degree of development of the material forces and relations of production. According to Lenin, the error of Martynov’s deductions was that he...

*...confounds the provisional revolutionary government in the period of the overthrow of the autocracy within the requisite domination of the proletariat in the period of the overthrow of the bourgeoisie; he confounds the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry with the socialist dictatorship of the working class. [39]*

This error was based on Martynov's deduction that the party which prepared and led a successful armed uprising would have power thrust into its hands — that is, from his characterisation of the class nature of state power by an identification of the *leader* of the revolution. If Social-Democracy led a successful armed revolution, this would represent the dictatorship of the proletariat. Parvus, a prominent theoretician of International Social-Democracy, and with Trotsky, the “co-author” of the Theory of Permanent Revolution, formulated the same logical scenario as Martynov:

*...the revolutionary provisional government in Russia will be a government of working class democracy. If Social-Democracy will be at the head of the revolutionary movement of the Russian proletariat, then this government will be a Social-Democratic government. [40]*

Parvus differed from Martynov in that he advocated the implementation of this scenario, whereas Martynov warned against it. Parvus, like Trotsky, believed that: “The revolutionary uprising in Russia can only be carried out by the workers.”[41] From this assumption he constructed the same logical scenario as the one formulated by Martynov in his characterisation of a revolution prepared, timed and conducted by Social-Democracy: if the working class led a successful “bourgeois” revolution, then the provisional revolutionary government would be a workers’ government. As Social-Democracy stood at the head of the workers’ movement, the provisional government would contain a Social- Democratic majority. Or, as Trotsky put it:

*In the event of a decisive victory of the revolution power will pass into the hands of that class which plays a leading role in the struggle — in other words, into the hands of the proletariat. [42]*

Lenin, in criticising Parvus's conception of the revolutionary process said it was *impossible* because:

*...only a revolutionary dictatorship supported by the vast majority of the people can be at all durable... The Russian proletariat... is at present a minority of the population... It can become the great, overwhelming majority only if it combines with the mass of semi-proletarians, semi-proprietors, i.e., with the mass of the petty-bourgeois urban and rural poor. Such a composition of the social basis of the possible and desirable revolutionary-democratic dictatorship will, of course, affect the composition of the revolutionary government and inevitably lead to the participation, or even pre-dominance, within it of the most heterogeneous representatives of revolutionary democracy. If that windbag Trotsky now writes ... that “a Father Gapon could appear only once”, that “there is no room for a second Gapon”, he does so simply because he is a windbag... [43]*

In revealing the “error” of the conception of the Russian revolution developed by Parvus and Trotsky, Lenin also provided a key to the critique of the arguments advanced by Martynov and the Mensheviks. The Bolsheviks did not fall into the error of advocating a “seizure of power” by Social-Democracy because they recognised the bourgeois- democratic nature of the Russian revolution and advocated a dictatorship of the two classes capable of implementing the most radical form of the Russian bourgeois revolution — the proletariat *leading* the peasantry.

Martynov's point of departure — the site of his criticism of Lenin's analysis — was that in his theoretical mode of reasoning, a revolution *led* by the working class — an armed uprising prepared, timed and conducted by Social-Democracy — *necessarily* led to a seizure of power by Social-Democracy, which would then be forced to implement measures corresponding to the class it represented leading to defeat and demoralisation because of the backwardness of Russia's economic development. In order to avoid the dangers of sharing, or seizing outright, political power, Social-Democracy, according to the Mensheviks, should remain the party of the “extreme revolutionary opposition”, whose role would consist of exerting “revolutionary pressure on the will of the liberal and radical bourgeoisie”, in order to “... compel the ‘upper strata’...” of society ... to lead the bourgeois revolution to its logical conclusion,” [44] or in the words of Martynov, to develop the bourgeois revolution” ... from *below* by the pressure of the proletariat on the democrats in power.” [45]

The essence of Martynov's strategy was that the working class had to conduct a struggle *against* the bourgeoisie, in order to force the bourgeoisie to carry the revolution to its conclusion — that is take state power into their hands. The Bolsheviks, in contrast, based their tactics on a conception of a particular form of democratic revolution in which the proletariat would lead the peasantry in an assault on the bastions of tsarist state power. The character of the new state power that would arise from a successful revolution would be a “revolutionary- democracy” in which the interests of both the peasants and the workers were represented in a basically capitalist social formation. The Mensheviks ascribed to this strategy the notion of a “seizure of power” by Social-Democracy, because theoretically, they identified a revolution *led by* the working class, regardless of the social, economic and political transformations at stake, as a seizure of power by the working class. That is, they identified the class character of the state by an identification of the class which would *lead* the revolution. This mode of reasoning was also present in the analysis developed by Parvus and Trotsky in their theory of Permanent Revolution. We have already quoted Trotsky to the effect that:

*In the event of a decisive victory of the revolution, power will pass into the hands of that class which plays a leading role in the struggle...* [46]

Though Parvus and Trotsky on the one hand, and the Mensheviks on the other, employed the same theoretical mode of reasoning, one which differed radically from Lenin's, they nonetheless developed different political strategies; for instance, though both the Mensheviks and Trotsky derived their answers to the question of the conditions under which Social-Democracy should participate in a provisional government from the prior application of a general principle, they nonetheless arrived at different answers. The Mensheviks were opposed to participation, whereas Trotsky favoured it, though they both believed that it was inadmissible, in principle for Social-Democratic participation in a provisional government other than as a majority. Lenin, however, believed it was permissible in principle, but that the concrete conditions for it could not be defined in advance. [47] The Mensheviks opposed such a participation (as a majority) and Trotsky advocated it, precisely because both identified such a participation as a conquest of power by Social-Democracy.

## FORMS OF REVOLUTION

We have said that the question of a “seizure of power” was not raised by Lenin in the first Russian revolution. The central strategic question identified by Lenin was not that of a “seizure of power” in general, and it was not the alternative, “bourgeois” revolution or socialist revolution; rather, it was: which of the two possible forms of bourgeois revolution in Russia

would create the most favourable social, economic and political terrain for the working class to conduct its struggle for socialism? We have further said that the fact that Lenin, in contrast to the Mensheviks and Trotsky, raised the question in this way, was determined by the specificity of his Marxism. Lenin advanced the thesis that:

*Bourgeoisies differ. Bourgeois revolutions provide a vast variety of combinations of different groups, sections, and elements both of the bourgeoisie itself and of the working class. [48]*

From this *general* proposition, and on the basis of his concrete analysis of class forces in the Russian social formation, he went on to conclude that:

*Modern Russia has two bourgeoisies. One is the very narrow stratum of ripe and over-ripe capitalists who, in the person of the Octobrists and cadets, are actually concerned with sharing the present political power ... the other bourgeoisie is the very wide stratum of petty and in part medium proprietors, who have not yet matured but are energetically striving to do so. [49]*

At stake in the Russian democratic revolution was the question of whether the proletariat would succeed in leading that “wide stratum” of the petty bourgeoisie against the tsarist state, the feudal landowners whose class interests it represented, and against the “narrow stratum” of the bourgeoisie seeking to come to terms with the existing social order. This conception of the revolutionary process in Russia differed fundamentally from that developed by both Trotsky and the Mensheviks. This strategic difference was rooted in a fundamentally different interpretation of Marxist theory from the one employed by the Mensheviks on the one hand, and Trotsky on the other. We can ascertain the character of this difference by looking at Lenin’s conceptualization of the Marxist category “Bourgeois Revolution”. According to Lenin:

*A liberation movement that is bourgeois in social and economic content is not such because of its motive forces. The motive force may be, not the bourgeoisie, but the proletariat and the peasantry. [50]*

For Lenin, the Marxist category of “bourgeois revolution” was *not* defined by the class agents active in the process of revolutionary transformation, but by the character of the transformations themselves (“social and economic content”). His theoretical interpretation of this Marxist category produced the thesis that a “bourgeois” revolution may not, necessarily, be *led* by the “bourgeoisie”, or lead to its political dominance in the state. A corollary thesis, rejected by both Martynov and Trotsky, was that a revolution *led*, in the active sense, by the proletariat, may not necessarily be a socialist revolution, or lead to its “conquest of power”, but a particular form of the bourgeois revolution in which the proletariat is allied to, acts jointly with, or relies on, particular strata of the bourgeoisie (the peasantry for instance).

For Lenin, general concepts, like “bourgeois revolution”, were means of, or guides to, concrete analysis, and he totally rejected any mode of reasoning which attempted to derive answers to concrete problems by means of “deductions” from principles or concepts.

*To “deduce” an answer to the concrete problems of the Russian bourgeois revolution of the first decade of the twentieth century from the “general concept” of bourgeois revolution in the narrowest sense of the terms is to debase Marxism...[51]*

Lenin’s theoretical “mode of reasoning”, enabled him to distinguish between the *abstract concept* of “bourgeois revolution”, and the *specific forms* of concrete bourgeois revolutions. This was possible because his concept of bourgeois revolution made a distinction between the *content*

of a revolution in terms of specific transformations of social relations, and the *motive forces* of particular revolutionary processes — the specific class agents interested and active in certain kinds of class practices and social transformations. This enabled Lenin to pose the questions: What specific social transformations are at stake in the Russian democratic revolution? What are the *possible paths* of development in the transitional period? What social and political forces have an interest in the *possible* outcomes of that process of transformation? What means of struggle do they have at their disposal? What are the possible forms of outcome as a result of the development of the class struggle? His analysis, produced the conclusions that:

1. The liberal bourgeoisie was not interested in a radical revolution to eliminate the remnants of feudal relations in the Russian social formation, particularly the tsarist autocracy, but was more interested in sharing political power with the landowners. The effects of a “revolution” corresponding to the interests of the liberal bourgeoisie would be:
  - (a) the gradual transformation of the tsarist state into a bourgeois monarchy;
  - (b) restricted political liberties for the working class;
  - (c) agrarian “reform” designed to create a stable social base for tsarism in the countryside without radically undermining the class interests of the large landowners, at the expense of the mass of peasants.
2. Only the proletariat and the peasantry were interested in a “radical” bourgeois-democratic revolution and the establishment of a republic. The effects of this would have been:
  - (a) far-reaching freedoms for the working class to organise for the struggle for socialism;
  - (b) the elimination of all the remnants of feudalism; the rapid development of a peasant-capitalist economy on nationalised land and the consequent rapid differentiation of the peasantry into a rural proletariat and a rural bourgeoisie.

In the Menshevik “mode of reasoning”, there was a conflation of the elements which, in Lenin’s view, constituted the category of “bourgeois revolution” — a conflation which led them to an identification of the *content* of the revolution with the *motive force*. The effects of this conflation was to constitute the bourgeoisie as the *subject* of the democratic revolution — the class which “expressed” the *essence* of a bourgeois revolution. Lenin characterised this mode of reasoning as one which endeavoured...

*...to look for answers to concrete questions in the simple logical development of the general truth about the basic character of our revolution. [52]*

It was the fact that the Mensheviks identified the content of the revolution with the “motive force” (the class which *leads* and its political representatives) that led them to ascribe to Lenin the notion of a “Seizure of Power” by Social-Democracy, and which enabled Martynov to discern in Lenin’s analysis the idea of “... the coincidence of the immediate Russian revolution with the Socialist revolution”. [53]

## TROTSKY AND MENSHEVISM

I want to show in my following remarks that Trotsky employed a similar mode of reasoning, one which did not fundamentally depart from the Menshevik “problematic”. From the general truth of the *leading role* of the proletariat in the Russian democratic revolution, he was to constitute the proletariat as the *subject* of the process of transition from bourgeois to socialist revolution, deducing a direct, logical connection between two essentially different processes.

Before going back to Trotsky’s analysis of the Russian revolution, I want to briefly examine an aspect of Menshevik theory which has received little attention in most histories of Russian

Social-Democracy. We have seen that the Mensheviks were opposed to any attempt at a seizure of power by Social-Democracy in the bourgeois revolution because they would be placed in the impossible situation of having to implement their maximum programme in an economically backward country, where the level of development of the productive forces could not sustain the socialisation of the means of production. However, there were two concrete conditions in which the Mensheviks would have advocated the kind of seizure of power formulated by Trotsky and Parvus, and which was ascribed to Lenin by Martynov, Martov and Plekhanov etc. These were: 1) in the event of a socialist revolution breaking out, in the advanced countries of Western Europe; 2) in the event that the liberal bourgeoisie proved unwilling or unable, to “lead” the bourgeois revolution to its conclusion.

The resolution which we have already cited, adopted by the Mensheviks at their conference in 1905, specified that:

*In only one case should Social-Democracy take the initiative and direct its efforts towards seizing power and holding it as long as possible — and that is if the revolution should spread to the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe where conditions for the realisation of socialism have already attained a certain degree of maturity. In such a case ... it may become possible to set out on the path of socialist reforms. [54]*

And Martov, in a polemic directed partly against Trotsky and Parvus, and partly against Lenin, conceded that *if it was necessary* for the triumph of the revolution and the democratic republic, then Social-Democracy would “renounce its political independence”, and take into its hands “the direction of the ‘Ship of State’”. The concrete situation in which Martov thought it might be necessary for Social-Democracy to seize political power was if...

*...all the strong bourgeois-revolutionary parties fade, not having time to flourish. And in that event, the proletariat cannot turn its back on political power. But of course, having attained it in the course of social struggle, it cannot limit its use to the limits of the bourgeois revolution. If it receives power as a class (and we, with comrade Trotsky, speak only about such a possession of power) it must lead the revolution further, it must strive towards the REVOLUTION IN PERMANENZ — towards the direct struggle with the whole of bourgeois society. Concretely, this means — either a new repetition of the Paris Commune, or the beginning of the socialist revolution “in the West” and its transition to Russia. And we will be obliged to strive for the second. [55]*

Do we not have here the theory of Permanent Revolution conceived by the Mensheviks as a suitable strategy for the exceptional case that the bourgeoisie — as the “subject” of the “bourgeois” revolution — might prove incapable of carrying the revolution to its conclusion? Was not Trotsky’s theory of the Permanent Revolution developed precisely on a generalization of this “exceptional case” — on the incapacity of the bourgeoisie to lead a nation-wide democratic struggle against Tsarism because of the peculiarities of Russia’s historical development, which reduced “... the role of bourgeois democracy to insignificance...”? [56]

“... there exists no bourgeois class that can place itself at the head of the popular masses...” [57] claimed Trotsky, therefore, there existed in Russia the “... potential historical situation in which the victory of a “ ‘bourgeois’ revolution is rendered possible only by the proletariat gaining revolutionary power ...”[58] Furthermore, “Once in power, the proletariat not only will not want, but will not be able to limit itself to a bourgeois democratic programme. It will be able to carry through the Revolution to the end only in the event of the Russian Revolution being converted into a Revolution of the European proletariat.” [59] And in words reminiscent of

Martov's:

*...once having won power, the proletariat cannot keep within the limits of bourgeois democracy. It must adopt the tactics of permanent revolution, i.e., must destroy the barriers between the minimum and maximum programme of Social-Democracy ... and seek direct and immediate support in revolution in Western Europe. [60]*

At the London congress of the R.S.D.L.P. in 1907, Trotsky asked of the Mensheviks, "What if there is no bourgeois democracy capable of marching at the head of the bourgeois revolution?" [61] "Where", he said, "is the social class in Russia that could raise up a revolutionary bourgeoisie on its shoulders, could put it in power.... in opposition to the proletariat?" [62]

Trotsky in fact, remained trapped in the same theoretical "space" as the Mensheviks — that of the "subject" of the revolution ("Who leads?") There was no posing, in his theoretical framework, of the question of the *specific forms* of the Russian bourgeois revolution as a result of a specification of the possible outcome of determinate class struggles between the contending social and political forces in the Russian social formation.

It was because Trotsky shared the same theoretical framework as the Mensheviks, differing from them only in his assessment of the revolutionary capacity of the bourgeoisie, that he could claim in October 1915, in the paper "Nashe Slovo":

*A national bourgeois revolution in Russia is impossible because of the absence of a genuinely revolutionary bourgeois democracy. [63]*

And it was precisely because Lenin distanced himself theoretically from both Trotsky and the Mensheviks, that he replied to Trotsky by saying:

*Trotsky has not realised that if the proletariat induces the non-proletarian masses to confiscate the landed estates and overthrow the monarchy, then that will be the consummation of the "national bourgeois revolution" in Russia; it will be a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. [64]*

## THE PEASANTRY

It needs to be said that Trotsky was not "blind" to the presence of a huge mass of peasants in the Russian social formation. But, according to Trotsky:

*...the peasantry, however revolutionary it may be, is not capable of playing an independent, still less a leading, political role. Undoubtedly the peasantry can prove to be a tremendous force in the service of the revolution, but it would be unworthy of a Marxist to believe that a party of Muzhiks can place itself at the head of a bourgeois revolution. [65]*

Notice that for Trotsky, the paramount question is who leads the revolution; everything is reduced to this. The peasantry cannot create an independent party capable of leading the revolution; only the proletariat can do this ... therefore ... it is the proletariat which wields state power in the democratic revolution...

*...the representative body of the nation, convened under the leadership of the proletariat, which has secured the support of the peasantry, will be nothing else than a democratic dress for the rule of the proletariat. [66]*

In the polemics that took place in the communist party after the death of Lenin, one of the criticisms made of Trotsky was that he had underestimated the revolutionary potential and role of the peasantry in the Russian bourgeois-democratic revolution. Trotsky always denied this,

pointing, for instance, to the speech he made at the London Congress, and which we have already cited, as an example of his awareness and full appreciation of the role of the peasantry. In the post-revolution period, Trotsky claimed that there had been an identity of views between himself and Lenin on the question of the role of the peasantry and its relation to the proletariat. In his book *The Permanent Revolution*, Trotsky maintained that the sole, specific difference between his slogan of the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat relying on the peasantry”, [67] and Lenin’s slogan of the “Revolutionary-Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry”, was over the...

*... political mechanics of the collaboration of the proletariat and the peasantry in the democratic revolution. [68]*

According to this argument, Lenin

*...refused for a number of years to prejudge the question of what the party-political and state organisation of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry would look like... [69]*

By “party-political mechanics” of the class cooperation between the proletariat and the peasantry, Trotsky meant the *relationship*, in a provisional revolutionary government, between a party representing the proletariat (Social-Democracy), and a party representing the peasantry. The question thus becomes — which party constitutes the majority, thereby establishing the class character of the state power? [70] According to Trotsky, the “algebraic” character of Lenin’s analysis rested on the fact that he refused to pre-judge this question. For Trotsky, the prime question was: can the peasants create an independent party representing their class interests in the democratic revolution? He derived a negative answer from the characteristics he ascribed to the peasantry as a class. [71] The significance of this, is that in Trotsky’s mode of analysis, the correctness or relevance of Lenin’s theses rested on whether or not the peasants could create an independent political party.

*Were the peasants capable of creating their own independent party in the epoch of the democratic revolution, then the democratic dictatorship could be realized in its truest and most direct sense ... [72]*

If there were unable to do so, then the democratic-dictatorship was unrealizable, [73] and the actual class content of state power in a victorious democratic revolution would be a workers’ dictatorship. History, according to Trotsky, proved the correctness of his position, so that in the 1917 revolution, all the differences between himself and Lenin on the theory of Permanent Revolution were resolved. We shall return to this question.

In his post-revolution writings, Trotsky displaced the site of his difference with Lenin on the question of the role of the peasantry in the bourgeois-democratic revolution: firstly, he maintained that he had always upheld the revolutionary capacity of the peasantry and the need for a worker peasant alliance; secondly, he identified the sole difference between himself and Lenin on this question as consisting of the party-political forms of this alliance. On this second proposition advanced by Trotsky in defence of his theory of Permanent Revolution, we should note that Lenin proceeded from a fundamentally different theoretical perspective. Trotsky denied that the peasantry was capable of creating an independent party able to represent its class interests in the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Trotsky deduced this from the historical characteristics of the peasantry as a class (its lack of homogeneity, its conditions of existence etc.). Lenin, however, believed that the practice of the peasants class struggles against the semi-



feudal landowners would provide the answer to this question, and not deductions from the assumed characteristics of the peasants as a class. The answer to the question of whether or not parties would develop capable of articulating the class interests of the peasants could not be deduced from abstract principles, but from the practice of concrete class struggles. Again, whether or not peasant parties would constitute a majority or minority in a provisional revolutionary government would depend on the way the class struggle developed — its forms and outcomes — and, in any case would in no way effect the class character of the state power that would emerge in the event of a successful bourgeois-democratic revolution. No one, said Lenin,

*...at this stage can tell what forms bourgeois democracy in Russia will assume in the future. Possibly, the bankruptcy of the Cadets may lead to the formation of a peasant democratic party, a truly mass party, and not an organisation of terrorists such as the Socialist-Revolutionaries ... It is also possible that the objective difficulties of achieving political unity among the petty-bourgeoisie will prevent such a party from being formed... [74]*

Because Trotsky made Lenin's analysis of the "democratic dictatorship" hinge on whether or not an independent peasant party would be formed, he could claim that history had verified his analysis and not Lenin's, because in the revolutions of 1917, no such (independent peasant parties were formed. Leaving aside the question of the role of the Socialist-Revolutionaries in 1917, it is necessary to insist in the strongest terms, that Lenin's theses concerning the revolutionary- democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry *did not* hinge on the possibility of a powerful, independent peasant party, and consequently, the proof of the validity of Lenin's "pre-April 1917" theses do not rest on whether or not such a party concretely existed in 1917. Our reasons for insisting on this point will shortly become clearer.

On the first proposition advanced by Trotsky in his defence, if we examine the way in which he posed the question of the relationship between the proletariat and the peasantry, we can see that there were fundamental differences between his theses and those developed by Lenin. "The peasantry as a whole", said Trotsky, "represents an elemental force in rebellion." [75] But significantly, he went on to say:

*It can be put at the service of the revolution only by a force that takes state power into its hands. [76]*

The peasantry can play a revolutionary role ("put at the service of the revolution") only *after* state power has been captured by the proletariat. Trotsky's slogan of the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat relying on — or supported by — the peasantry, refers to a class relationship after the "single combat" between the autocracy and the proletariat has been resolved in favour of the proletariat. On the other hand, Lenin's slogan of the "Democratic-Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry" refers to the classes capable of consummating a *particular* form of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. In Lenin's analysis, the crucial political conditions for the decisive destruction of the tsarist state and all feudal relations, was the awakening of the peasantry to political life; the extent to which the proletariat managed to lead it against Tsarism would, in large measure, determine the kind of bourgeois revolution realized in the Russian social formation. In contrast to Lenin's analysis, Trotsky believed that:

*Many sections of the working masses, particularly in the countryside, will be drawn into the revolution and become politically organized only after ... the urban proletariat, stands at the helm of state. [77]*

If the decisive struggle against the Tsarist autocracy is resolved solely by the proletariat which seizes state power, and if large sections of the peasants do not have to be drawn into the revolution as a condition for its victory, then it is not surprising that Trotsky could write:

*In such a situation, created by the transference of power to the proletariat, nothing remains for the peasantry to do but to rally to the regime of worker's democracy. It will not matter much even if the peasantry does this with a degree of consciousness not larger than that with which it usually rallies to the bourgeois regime. [78]*

The radical difference between Lenin and Trotsky was revealed by Lenin himself in a polemic against Martov who repeated Trotsky's mistakes. [79] According to Lenin, the passage we have quoted above was "...the most fallacious of Trotsky's opinions that comrade Martov quotes.... The proletariat cannot count on the ignorance and prejudices of the peasantry as the powers that be under a bourgeois regime count and depend on them..." [80] Lenin believed that a radical bourgeois revolution was only possible to the extent that the proletariat succeeded in raising up the peasantry as a revolutionary force against Tsarism — that is, *before* the transfer of political power to the people — as a precondition for the establishment of the political terrain required by the proletariat to make its own socialist revolution.

#### INDEPENDENT AND LEADING ROLE

We have noted that the central thesis of Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution was the proposition that the proletariat would seize power in the bourgeois revolution, and then go directly to the introduction of its maximum, socialist programme. This thesis was buttressed by two propositions which require examination. These propositions were derived from two specific concepts — that of *independent role* and that of *leading role*. The peasantry, according to Trotsky, was incapable of either these functions. The notion of *leading role* enabled Trotsky to dismiss the idea that the peasants could play a hegemonic role in the bourgeois-democratic revolution. This, however, was a superfluous argument, since no Russian Social-Democrat ever assumed otherwise. The importance of the concept "leading role" — for Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution — is that it was the key concept which enabled him to characterize the class nature of state power, by an identification of the class which performed the hegemonic role in the revolution: The proletariat would *lead* the victorious revolution against Tsarism, therefore a worker's state would be established. This was the same reasoning employed by Martynov in his *Two Dictatorships* to warn against Social-Democracy playing the kind of hegemonic role supported by Lenin — because a workers' state, compelled to implement its maximum programme, could not hope to survive, unless the revolution spread to the West, and it was precisely the same reasoning used by Parvus in his preface to Trotsky's *Before the 9th of January*, and which Lenin severely criticized. [81]

The notion of "*Independent role*" is less easy to assess in Trotsky's analytical framework, because it was always associated with the notion of "*leading role*". One of the crucial propositions advanced by Lenin in the formulation of an agrarian programme for Russian Social-Democracy, was the idea that the emancipation of the peasants from semi-feudal exploitation had to be the act of the peasants themselves. In the agrarian programme adopted by the R.S.D.L.P. in 1903, [82] in the agrarian resolution adopted by the Bolsheviks at their congress in 1905, [83] and in the agrarian programme presented by Lenin to the Unity Congress in 1906, [84] one of the crucial demands was for the establishment of revolutionary peasant committees as the organizational form of the peasant movement. At the Unity congress, he defended his demand for the formation of peasant committees by saying:

*My draft proposes the formation of peasant committees as the direct levers of the revolutionary peasant movement, and as the most desirable form of that movement... peasant committees mean calling upon the peasants to set to work immediately and directly to settle accounts with the government officials and the landlords in the most drastic manner. Peasant committees mean calling upon the people who are being oppressed by the survivals of serfdom and the police regime to eradicate these survivals "in a plebeian manner"... [85]*

This was premised on the belief that the peasants were quite capable of coming out as a mass democratic force against their class enemy, the semi-feudal landowners. This was not an inevitable or logically derived necessity, but only a *possibility* arising from: "The class antagonism between the mass of the democratic rural population and the semi- feudal landlords..." [86] In a polemic against the Menshevik Y. Larin, Lenin made the point that:

*The outcome of our revolution will actually depend most of all on the steadfastness in struggle of the millions of peasants. Our big bourgeoisie is far more afraid of revolution than of reaction. The proletariat by itself, is not strong enough to win. The urban poor do not represent any independent interests, they are not an independent force compared with the proletariat and peasantry. The rural population has the decisive role not in the sense of leading the struggle (this is out of the question), but in the sense of being able to ensure victory. [87]*

This meant, according to Lenin, that:

*...the victorious outcome of the bourgeois revolution in Russia is possible, only in the form of a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. [88]*

The "peasants", then, had independent class interests (the elimination of the remnants of feudal social relations), and were quite capable of carrying out a class struggle for the realization of these interests; furthermore, they were capable of forming mass democratic organisations (peasant committees, political parties) in the course of their mass struggles. None of these things' were inevitable — they were only possibilities in the practice of the class struggle. The struggles of the peasants, however, could only be decisive if they were exercised in alliance with, and under the influence of, the proletariat. The proletariat would exercise its "leading" role by striving to draw the peasant masses onto the path of the democratic revolution against the landlords and the Tsarist state. It seems to me that Trotsky's use of the notions of "leading" and "Independent" role obscured the real problems of developing a strategy of winning the peasants to the side of the proletariat in the democratic revolution, particularly in his reduction of the problem to one of whether or not the peasants could form "independent" political parties.

## CLASSES AND THE STATE

We have seen that Trotsky deduced the class character of state power in a victorious democratic revolution from an identification of the class subject which "leads" the revolution. This rested on the following thesis:

*The whole problem consists in this: who will determine the content of the government's policy, who will form within it a solid majority? [89]*

Implicit in Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution, particularly in the notions of "leading" and "Independent" roles, is a view of the "representation" of classes and class interests at the level of the state, through the mechanism of political parties, rather than as "effects" of determinate political class struggles, in which parties, alongside other mass organisations, have a

role to play. The peasants, we are told, are unable to create an independent political party, therefore, there can be no democratic alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry, and, consequently, the “...representative body of the nation, convened under the leadership of the proletariat ... will be nothing less than a democratic dress for the rule of the proletariat.” [90] In this theory, the class struggles of the peasants do not “appear” at the level of the state, because of the absence of a peasant party able to articulate the interests of the peasants.

Lenin, at the Bolshevik congress in 1905, made the point that:

*The peasant committees are a flexible institution, suitable both under present conditions and under, let us say, a provisional revolutionary government, when they would become organs of the government.* [91]

In Lenin’s analysis, the peasants would be represented at the level of the state precisely because their mass democratic organizations would constitute organs of that state, regardless of whether or not a powerful, independent peasant party was formed. Lenin believed that the proletariat had a strong ally in the peasantry, against feudal social and political relations; this ally had its own objective class interests for which it was prepared to engage in struggle, therefore those interests could not but be represented at the level of state which would arise from the destruction of Tsarism. The peasants had “real needs” which gave rise to their struggles; a successful revolution, in order to survive against the inevitable resistance of the old order, had to recognise these interests, and ensure that they were expressed in policies benefiting the mass of peasants. It was this which made a dictatorship of workers and peasants both possible and necessary in the Russian democratic revolution. The actual composition of the provisional government — the relation of parties in that government — could not be determined in advance merely by designating which classes were present and then deducing answers from their class characteristics — the struggles of those classes, the forms of their struggles and their outcomes, would determine the composition of the revolutionary government and the relation of parties.

From what we have said so far, we can see that there were two levels of analysis in Lenin’s conception of the bourgeois revolution — the first level referred to the alliance of classes necessary for a radical consummation of the bourgeois-democratic revolution; the slogan of the democratic-dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry referred to this level of analysis. The second level referred to the composition of the provisional revolutionary government and the relation of parties to each other. At this level of analysis, it was left open as to the precise composition of the government; a powerful peasant party might or might not be in a majority in that government. The important theoretical point is that the second level of analysis could not be *deduced* from the first. It was a concrete question, which only the practice of the revolution would resolve. According to Trotsky, a coalition of the proletariat and the peasantry — the first level of analysis in Lenin’s analytical framework...

*...presupposes either that one of the existing bourgeois parties commands influence over the peasantry or that the peasantry will have created a powerful independent party of its own, but we have attempted to show that neither one nor the other is possible.* [92]

We can see that there is an analytical difference between Lenin and Trotsky. In Trotsky’s analysis the question of class alliances is collapsed into a question of the relation of parties: As the peasantry cannot — in the Russian revolution — be represented by an independent party — then there can be no alliance as envisaged by Lenin. Lenin, distancing himself theoretically from Trotsky, maintained that:

*A "coalition" of classes does not at all presuppose either the existence of any particular powerful party, or parties in general. This is only confusing classes with parties. A "coalition" of the specified classes does not in the least imply either, that one of the existing bourgeois parties will establish its sway over the peasantry or that the peasants should form a powerful independent party.... The experience of the Russian revolution shows that "coalition" of the proletariat and the peasantry were formed scores and hundreds of times, in the most diverse forms... [93]*

Whereas in Lenin's strategy there were two levels of analysis which could not be reduced to each other, in Trotsky there is a conflation of these two levels. We can therefore see that Trotsky's slogan of the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat supported by the Peasantry" was derived from a fundamentally different theoretical mode of analysis to the one employed by Lenin. It was this collapsing of levels of analysis which led Trotsky to reduce the question of the character of state power in a victorious democratic revolution to the question of which class subject would form a homogeneous majority within the provisional government. And it was because Lenin was careful to demarcate between these two levels, that he could say against both Trotsky and Martov:

*It is not true that "the whole question is, who will determine the government's policy, who will constitute a homogeneous majority in it".... The question of the dictatorship of the revolutionary classes ... cannot be reduced to a question of the "majority" in any particular revolutionary government, or the terms on which the participation of the Social-Democrats in such a government is admissible. [94]*

We have noted that Trotsky and the Menshevik theoreticians fundamentally shared the same theoretical and analytical framework, one that was criticised by Lenin; they derived the same logical conclusions, from the problematic of the "leading role of a class subject"; they both advocated Social-Democratic participation in a provisional revolutionary government solely on the basis of the dominance of Social-Democracy in that government; the Mensheviks opposed such a participation *in the Russian democratic revolution*, whereas Trotsky and Parvus supported it. For both Trotsky and the Mensheviks, this participation (as the dominant political force) constituted the conquest of political power by the proletariat through its political representative. The tactical difference (which of course had strategic implications), arose from the fact that whereas in the Menshevik strategy, it was the bourgeoisie which was constituted as the *subject* of the revolutionary process, [95] in Trotsky's strategy, through the notions of "independent" and "leading" role, it was the proletariat which was constituted as the subject of the revolutionary process. If the Mensheviks could be convinced, as Trotsky was, of the inability of the "bourgeoisie" to play a "leading" role in the bourgeois-democratic revolution, then the logic of their theoretical assumptions and mode of reasoning would compel them to accept Trotsky's prognosis of the Russian revolution. This is precisely what happened with substantial sections of the Menshevik faction at the height of the revolutionary storms in 1905, and this included such influential theoreticians of Menshevism as Martynov, Dan and Chereveanin (though not Martov, Aksel'rod or Plekhanov). According to Israel Getzler:

*Many Mensheviks began to lose faith in a bourgeois revolution. They dismissed the bourgeoisie either as treacherous and counterrevolutionary or as virtually non-existent ... [96]*

Theodore Dan, himself admitted that "Trotskyite themes" began to echo

*...more and more loudly in the utterances and articles of eminent members of the Iskra editorial board (first and foremost Martynov and the author of these lines) with the manifest approval of substantial segments of Mensheviks... [97]*

That it was possible to reconcile, what on the surface appears as radically opposed theoretical and political conceptions as those of Trotsky and the Mensheviks, is easily understood if we recognise that the decisive difference between them was not theoretical, but a very specific tactical-political difference — they gave a different answer to the question: which class will act as the “leader” of the revolutionary process? They gave different answers, initially, because they had a different estimation of the revolutionary capacity of the bourgeoisie in the Russian democratic revolution. When this difference of political estimation was resolved, then substantial sections of the Mensheviks made the transition to the strategy of the “Permanent Revolution”.

Martynov, in his *Two Dictatorships*, had argued that if Social- Democracy prepared, timed and conducted a successful armed uprising of the people, it would have political power in its hands which it could not retain and consolidate without attempting to put its maximum programme into effect. [98] This was precisely the same mode of reasoning used by Trotsky to characterise the *Permanent* nature of the revolution.

*Immediately ... that power is transferred into the hands of a revolutionary government with a socialist majority, the division of our programme into maximum and minimum loses all significance ... A proletarian government under no circumstances can confine itself within such limits. [99]*

*The very fact of the proletariat’s representatives entering the government, not as powerless hostages, but as the leading force, destroys the border-line between maximum and minimum programme; that is to say, it places collectivism on the order of the day. [100]*

The process of transition to socialism is *deduced* by Trotsky from the fact that the working class holds state power, which is *deduced* from the fact that the proletariat *leads* the successful bourgeois-democratic revolution. The transformation of the bourgeois revolution into the socialist revolution — the elimination of the distinction between the minimum and the maximum programme, is the logical effect of the leading role of a class subject — the proletariat — in the revolutionary process.

#### *SELF-ABNEGATION?*

In a polemical article against the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, [101] Trotsky argued that the consummation of the revolution against Tsarism required the transfer of power to a “revolutionary public force”. [102] Lenin had characterized this force as the “Revolutionary-Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry”. Trotsky’s critique of this formulation is very interesting. Lenin, he said:

*...draws a distinction of principle between the Socialist dictatorship of the proletariat and the democratic (that is, bourgeois-democratic) dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. He believes that this logical, purely formal operation can act as a perfect protection against the contradiction between the low level of productive forces and the hegemony of the working classes. [103]*

In Trotsky’s mode of reasoning, there exists a fundamental contradiction that between the low level of development of the productive forces and the leading role of the proletariat in the revolution. From within this problematic he ascribes to Lenin a solution to this contradiction

between the “proletariat’s class interests and objective conditions”, which consists of the “proletariat imposing a political limitation upon itself”. [104] Trotsky maintained that Lenin “solved” the problems arising from the specified contradiction by the proletariat’s “self-abnegation”, by a “class asceticism” — the proletariat *consciously* decides not to go beyond the democratic stage.

Trotsky’s “solution” to this contradiction, in contrast, is not any “self-limitation” by the working-class, but rather, is determined by the logic of the situation, in which the proletariat finds itself as the hegemonic class holding state power, and which forces it to go directly into the implementation of socialist measures, regardless of objective conditions (the level of economic development, the hostility of the property owning peasants.) The contradiction between the low level of the productive forces and the leading (“hegemonic”) role of the proletariat is displaced into a political contradiction between the proletariat in power, which is seeking to socialize the means of production, and the peasantry. The solution to this contradiction lies in the international character of the world revolutionary process. Lenin, said Trotsky “... transfers the objective contradiction into the proletariat’s consciousness and resolves it by means of a class asceticism...” [105] whereas, in fact, the correct place to transfer this contradiction was the international arena, where, in the words of the Menshevik resolution “On the Seizure of Power and Participation in a Provisional Government”, adopted in 1905, “... conditions for the realization of socialism have already attained a certain degree of maturity”. [106]

As is apparent, however, Lenin did not have a strategy of the proletariat in possession of state power imposing a bourgeois-democratic limitation upon itself. Rather, he believed that:

*Objectively, the historical course of events has now posed before the Russian proletariat precisely the task of carrying through the democratic bourgeois revolution {the whole content of which ...we sum up in the word Republic}', this task confronts the people as a whole, viz., the entire mass of the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry; Without such a revolution the more or less extensive development of an independent class organisation for the socialist revolution is unthinkable. [107]*

The form taken by the bourgeois revolution — landlord-bourgeois or peasant-bourgeois revolution — would determine the nature, of the terrain upon which the working class would conduct its struggle for socialism. The concrete forms of transition to the socialist revolution, the length of time between the bourgeois revolution and the socialist revolution, and therefore the length of time in which capitalism would have to expand and develop, could not be posed in the abstract. In the period of the first Russian revolution, all that could be concretely posed was the question of the *form* of the bourgeois revolution[ 108] which would be determined in the practice of the class struggle. As it was impossible to pre-determine this form, then one could not specify the forms of the process of transition to the socialist revolution. All that Lenin could say was that once the proletariat had advanced as far as it could alongside the petty bourgeoisie against the semi-feudal social system, then it would immediately begin, according to the measure of its strength, to strive for the socialist revolution.

## THEORIES OF TRANSITION

In the Menshevik conception of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the tactics and strategies derived from the classic bourgeois revolutions of Western Europe were transposed to the Russian context. A general theory -of transition was presupposed and applied to a concrete case. This conceptual framework was unable to pose the possibility of two concrete forms of the bourgeois revolution in the Russian social formation. The effects of this mode of reasoning were

apparent in Plekhanov's article *The Question of the Seizure of Power*, which appeared in *Iskra* No. 96, [109] and in which he defended the tactics developed by the Mensheviks, by their correspondence to the tactics formulated by Marx for the German revolution in 1850, [110] and the advice given by Engels to the Italian Socialists in 1894. [111]

*...this arch-revolutionary "Address" proposes precisely those tactics which are now recommended by the Russian comrades of Iskra....* [112]

Marx, said Lenin "... speaks only of the concrete situation; Plekhanov draws a general conclusion without at all considering the question in its concreteness." [113]

In Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution, the process of transition — a continuous process from bourgeois to socialist tasks — is deduced from the character of the class agents present in the Russian social formation. The revolution is "permanent" because the proletariat is constituted as the subject of the process of transition through all the "phases" of struggle. A general theory of transition from "bourgeois" to socialist revolution is produced, having at its centre, the notion of the proletariat consciously acting on an external reality to express the essence of its class interests — the maximum programme of Social- Democracy. All the concrete questions of the terms of transition, the tasks at each stage, and the question of allies at each specific moment disappear.

In Lenin's conceptual framework, there is no general theory of transition derived from constituting a particular class as the subject of the revolutionary process. All processes of transition are concrete and specific. The forms of transition from feudalism to capitalism cannot be deduced by designating the revolution bourgeois; neither can the forms of transition from bourgeois to socialist revolution be deduced from the fact that the proletariat acts as the "leading" class in the revolutionary process. Forms of transition are determined by the outcome of determinate class struggle which take place on a social and political terrain constituted by the forms and results of previous class struggles.

From what has been said above, I hope to have shown two things:

Firstly, the "distance" between Lenin and Trotsky in their theory, and the nature of their theoretical differences. Secondly, the fact that Trotsky and the Mensheviks largely occupied the same theoretical "space", and that their political differences, at any rate as far as they related to questions pertaining to the theory of Permanent Revolution, arose from their different estimations of the revolutionary capacity of the bourgeoisie, which led them to assign to a different class subject the role of "leading" force in the revolutionary process.

FEBRUARY-OCTOBER 1917

One of the persistent elements of Trotskyist mythology is the claim that Lenin, in 1917-18, implicitly, if not explicitly, came over to Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution.

*In 1917... Lenin changed his mind. In all essentials the thesis of the Permanent Revolution ... was adopted by his party.* [114]

This assumption is not made on the basis of an analysis of the theoretical and political positions of Lenin and Trotsky in 1905-07 or in 1917-18, but on a political observation: In 1905, Trotsky advocated the seizure of power by the working class in the bourgeois-democratic revolution, whereas Lenin did not; In 1917-18, Lenin advocated a seizure of power by the working class, and the Bolsheviks led a successful insurrection in the main urban centres of Russia; therefore, the reasoning goes, Lenin abandoned his old theory of revolution by stages, which was the



“political counterpoint” of an economic determinist view of history, and adopted Trotsky’s perspective of Permanent Revolution. [115] Mavrakis, quite correctly, characterises this mode of reasoning in the following way:

*Trotsky rewrites history. He isolates two moments: 1905 and 1917; he disregards the period that separates them ... and this is what the history of Bolshevism becomes. According to him, in 1905, Lenin formulated “a hypothesis”: revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. This hypothesis depended on an “unknown”: the political role of the peasantry. October 1917 reduced the unknown and Lenin’s hypothesis (which envisaged the possibility of a peasant party with a majority in the revolutionary government) was invalidated since it was the dictatorship of the proletariat alone which triumphed! [116]*

This mode of analysis — the isolation and comparison of two separate and distinct historical junctures — is the product of a theoretical framework which conceived of a general theory of transition in which the motive force is a class subject consciously active in all stages of the revolutionary process. As the process of revolutionary transformation is deduced from the active presence of a class subject (the class which assumes the “leading role”), and not in terms of the forms and outcomes of determinate class struggles at each specific stage of transformation, then the concrete peculiarities which allow an identification of the “breaks” in the historical process cannot be analysed. The Bolshevik slogan of 1905 is placed alongside, and judged by, the slogan of 1917; the verification of the correctness of the 1905 analysis, then, is not its adequacy with respect to the situation of 1905 (which reflection from the standpoint of 1917 sheds greater light), but what is assumed to have taken place in 1917. The concrete conditions which gave rise to the formulations of 1905 “disappear”, and need not be differentiated from the specific features giving rise to the perspectives of 1917. Forgotten in this mode of analysis, is that the concrete historical experiences which enabled Lenin to specify the stages of transition to the seizure of power by the working class in 1917 (the imperialist war, the democratic revolution of February 1917, the Soviets of worker’s and soldier’s delegates etc.) did not exist in 1905, when, in the absence of any knowledge as to the form in which democratic liberties would be established, and the legacy of the old semi-feudal system abolished, he was unable to establish the conditions in which the proletariat would have to conduct its struggle for power.

In 1905, Lenin made the point that:

*Concrete political aims must be set in concrete circumstances. All things are relative, all things flow and all things change.... There is no such thing as abstract truth. Truth is always concrete. [117]*

And again, in 1917:

*Marxism requires of us a strictly exact and objectively verifiable analysis of the relation of classes and of the concrete features peculiar to each historical situation. [118]*

The first observation that we need to make, is that from within Lenin’s conceptual framework, it is inadmissible to compare the political slogans of one historical moment with the slogans of another, without recognising that tactics and slogans are concretely derived from the specific features of each moment. The “concrete truth” of 1905 cannot be compared with the “concrete truth” of 1917 without realising that it is “concrete circumstances” which give them their validity, unless of course, one proceeds from the abstract truth concerning the “leading” role of the proletariat in the revolution, or from the “truth” that the revolution is bourgeois, therefore... What is important is not the fact that tactics and slogans have changed, but that these changes, if

they are “correct”, are a “scientific reflection” of the transformations in the concrete situation, without denying, for one moment, that the experience of later class struggles enable one to assess in a more comprehensive manner the adequacies and inadequacies of the slogans and tactics of preceding class struggles.

In the juncture inaugurated by the fall of Tsarism, Lenin emphasised the need to study “...the specific features of the new and living Reality.” [119] Something *new* has turned up, said Lenin, something we had never expected. Unless we can grasp what is uniquely new about the present situation, we cannot hope to develop a correct strategy for the working class. The “unique” features introduced by the democratic revolution of February 1917 were characterised by Lenin as “Dual Power”, which he defined as the *interlocking of two forms of class dictatorship*. [120]

One of the reasons why advocates of the theory of Permanent Revolution claim that Lenin discarded the formulations and positions he had adopted in 1905, in favour of Trotsky’s strategy of Permanent Revolution, is the fact that he dropped the slogan of the democratic-dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry in 1917. Lenin, however, nowhere rejected the correctness of the formulations he had adopted for the situation of the first Russian revolution. On the contrary, he maintained that *on the whole*, they had proved to be correct, but that their *concrete realization* had turned out differently. [121]

*The revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry has already become a reality [in a certain form and to a certain extent] in the Russian revolution, for this “formula” envisages only a relation of classes, and not a concrete political institution implementing this relation, this cooperation. “The Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies” — there you have the “revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” already accomplished in reality.* [122]

Remember that Trotsky identified the sole difference between himself and Lenin in 1905 as relating to the question of the “party-political and state organisation” of the democratic-dictatorship [123] Well, it seems that from Lenin’s point of view there could not have been a difference here, because his formula only envisaged a “relation of classes” in the democratic revolution, and not a “political institution implementing” that relationship. “The Soviet”, said Lenin in 1917, “is the implementation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the soldiers; among the latter the majority are peasants. It is therefore a dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.” [124] The uniqueness of the situation introduced by the February revolution, in which things had “turned out *differently*”, was in the “... extremely original, novel and unprecedented *interlacing*...” of the “...rule of the bourgeoisie (the government of Lvov and Cruchkov) and a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, which is *voluntarily* ceding power to the bourgeoisie ...” [125] It was because of the *unexpected* way in which the analysis of 1905 had been verified, and its formulas realized, that required them to be *amended* and *supplemented*. [126] They were not longer adequate to comprehend the concrete situation that had arisen from the way in which the transformation in class relations embodied in their formulation, had been realised. The old Bolshevik slogan of the democratic-dictatorship had to be “discarded”, not because of its incorrectness, but because it had *already* entered the realm of social reality in the form of the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, and ' because it was no longer adequate to comprehend a situation in which the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, in the form of the provisional revolutionary government, existed alongside, and with the support of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.

## NEW CONDITIONS

This unique situation was the product of a number of factors that Lenin had not expected in

1905-07 and which had arisen as a result of the way in which the class struggle developed up to February 1917. These factors were:

- 1 The bourgeoisie, under the pressure of the revolutionary people and because of the inability of the Tsarist government to conduct the way efficiently, and with the support of the Anglo-French alliance, had been able to act in a revolutionary way, and break with the Tsarist autocracy.
- 2 Lenin had expected that a peasant uprising against the landlords, would create the situation in which a mass, democratic peasant movement could develop against the Tsarist political system. In his 1905-07 analysis, two elements of bourgeois-democratic social transformation — the seizure of land and the conquest of political liberties — had been inextricably linked together. In fact however, it was the miseries of the Imperialist war which created the conditions in which a decisive section of the peasants — the peasants in uniform — developed as a mass, democratic force in alliance with the urban workers, before the movement to seize the land had properly developed.
- 3 Lenin had expected the proletariat to exercise an ideological influence over its ally, the peasantry; again, however, partly because of the efforts of the imperialist way, the proletariat had succumbed to the overwhelming influence of petty-bourgeois ideology, so that the soviets, representing the class dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, voluntarily ceded power to the bourgeois provisional government which refused to end Russian participation in the imperialist way and which was extremely reluctant to sanction any radical transformation in agrarian relations.

Neither Trotsky, nor his present-day supporters, have ever produced a serious theoretical examination of Lenin's writings in 1917-18 in order to justify the claim that from the April Theses onwards, Lenin operated according to the strategy of Permanent Revolution. Trotsky, in his *Permanent Revolution*, claimed that Lenin, only "occasionally" referred the realization of the democrat-dictatorship in the form of Dual Power. [127] According to Trotsky, however

*The Bolshevik slogan was realized in fact — not as a morphological trait but as a very great historical reality. Only, it was realized not before, but after October.* [128]

The evidence that is cited as proof of this contention and the correctness of the theory of Permanent Revolution, is that when the Bolsheviks seized political power in October 1917 in the main urban centres, the struggles of the peasants against the semi-feudal landlords had still not yet fully developed; this enables advocates of the theory of Permanent Revolution to present October 1917 as the consummation of the bourgeois-democratic revolution by the dictatorship of the proletariat, as predicted by Trotsky in 1906.

This mode of verification of the correctness of the theory of Permanent Revolution, conveniently overlooks a very specific concrete reality — the transformation in political class relations inaugurated by the *February 1917 democratic revolution*, which established the *political freedoms* required by the working class to wage its struggle for political power and the socialist revolution. It conveniently forgets Lenin's dictum that:

*The passing of state power from one class to another is the first, the principal, the basic sign of a revolution ...*[129]

It forgets that Lenin characterised February 1917 as a:

*...revolution of the proletariat, the peasantry and the bourgeoisie in alliance with Anglo-French*

*finance capital against Tsarism.* [130]

It forgets that:

*Before the February-March revolution of 1917, state power in Russia was in the hands of one class, namely, the feudal nobility...*

*After the revolution, the power is in the hands of a different class, a new class, namely, the bourgeoisie...*[131]

And that therefore:

*To this extent, the bourgeois, or the bourgeois-democratic, revolution in Russia is completed.* [132]

According to Trotsky, “Lenin spoke extremely conditionally of the ‘realization’ of the democratic dictatorship”, in order to, “argue against those who expected a second, improved edition of the independent democratic dictatorship. Lenin’s words only meant that *there is not and, will not be any democratic dictatorship outside of the miserable miscarriage of the dual power....*” [133]

If, however, we read Lenin’s *Letters on Tactics*, we get a different picture. Contrary to Trotsky’s statement that Lenin believed that there could be no “democratic dictatorship outside of the miserable miscarriage of the dual power”, Lenin himself declared that such an independent democratic dictatorship was “quite possible.” [134]

*Possibly the peasantry may seize all the land and all the power.* [135]

Lenin’s criticism of the “old” Bolsheviks did not rest on a denial of this possibility, but on the fact that they wanted to base party policy on the fact that the peasants might, in the future, break from the bourgeoisie, and seize the landlords land, at a moment in time when the peasants were under the influence of the bourgeoisie. The “old” Bolsheviks failed to understand the character of the “current moment”, they failed to understand that Dual Power, representing the interlocking of two forms of class dictatorship in the democratic revolution, was based on the fact that “... an *agreement*, of — to use a more exact, less legal, but more class-economic term — *class collaboration* exists between the bourgeoisie and the peasantry.”[136] The “old” Bolsheviks wanted to base party policy on the *possibility* that an independent democratic-dictatorship *might* develop at a time when the Soviets, representing that dictatorship, had not yet broken from the bourgeoisie. It was equally possible, depending on the way the class struggle developed, that the peasants would not break away from the influence of the bourgeoisie. According to Lenin:

*When this fact ceases to be a fact, [137] when the peasantry separates from the bourgeoisie, seizes the land and power despite the bourgeoisie, that will be a new stage in the bourgeois-democratic revolution....* [138]

The error of the “old” Bolsheviks was that they constituted the seizure of land by the peasants as the “essence” of a “pure” democratic-dictatorship, whereas for Lenin in 1905-07, the peasant movement to seize the landlords land had constituted the crucial condition from which the peasants could develop as an ally of the working class in the struggle to achieve democratic freedom by the smashing of the Tsarist autocracy. In February 1917, the effects of the Imperialist war provided an alternative condition of existence for the development of a mass, democratic peasant movement; this of course, did not rule out the possibility that the development of movement to seize the land could take the bourgeois-democratic revolution to a “new stage”.

If we turn to Lenin’s analysis of the “abrupt and original” turn experienced by the Russian

revolution at the end of August 1917, and with the defeat of an attempt at counter revolution, when he re-introduced the pre-July slogan of “All Power to the Soviets” in its original meaning of the peaceful development of the revolution, we can see that, despite the Trotskyite claim that Lenin, in April 1917, came over to the strategy of Permanent Revolution, despite Trotsky’s claims of the impossibility of peasant and petty bourgeois parties developing independently, despite his claim that Lenin believed that “there is not and will not be any democratic dictatorship outside of ... dual power”, Lenin, at the beginning of September 1917, was prepared to support a “government of S-Rs and Mensheviks responsible to the Soviets”, [139] and what is more:

*The Bolsheviks, without making any claim to participate in the government ... would refrain from demanding the immediate transfer of power to the proletariat and the poor peasants and from employing revolutionary methods of fighting for this demand. [140]*

In the very specific moment of September 1917, with the defeat of the Kornilov revolt, the very real *possibility* existed of winning the petty- bourgeois parties away from their alliance with the bourgeoisie, thereby guaranteeing the peaceful development of the revolution. One month before the Bolshevik seizure of power, Lenin envisaged the possibility of an independant democratic-dictatorship (“All power to the soviets”), in which governmental power would be held by a bloc of petty-bourgeois parties. The significance of this is that Lenin allowed for certain possibilities — depending on the way the class struggle developed — which were *inadmissible* on the basis of Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution. The fact that the revolutionary forces *failed* to break this alliance in September 1917 in no way means that the possibility did not concretely exist at specific moments of the class struggle. It was the outcome of determinate class struggles in concrete situations which led to the non-realization of a form of the democratic-dictatorship astride of Dual Power, and which created the *possibility* of an armed seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in the main urban centres. To assert otherwise would be to have a teleological view of history, in which the inevitable necessity of the present is read back into the struggles of the past.

We have referred to the fact that Trotsky believed that the bourgeois- democratic revolution was consummated by the proletarian revolution of October 1917. Support for their point of view can be obtained by isolating particular statements made by Lenin after the October seizure of power, For instance,

*The nationalization of the land that has been effected in Russia by the proletarian dictatorship has best ensured the carrying of the bourgeois-democratic revolution to its conclusion ... [141]*

*The victorious Bolshevik revolution meant the end of vacillation, meant the complete destruction of the monarchy and of the landlord system (which had not been destroyed before the October revolution). We carried the bourgeois revolution to its conclusion. The peasants supported us as a whole. [142]*

*It was the Bolsheviks... who, thanks only to the victory of the proletarian revolution, helped the peasants to carry the bourgeois democratic revolution really to its conclusion. [143]*

The Trotskyist argument obscures a number of factors. Firstly, its presentation reproduces the error made by the “old” Bolsheviks, that of conceiving of a “pure” democratic-dictatorship whose “essence” is the seizure of land by the peasants. As the seizure of land took place after the October revolution, then the dictatorship of the proletariat is presented as the consummation of the “pure” bourgeois revolution, or as Trotsky put it, the Bolshevik slogan of the democratic-

dictatorship was realized “*not before, but after October.*” [144] The error of this conception is its abstract presentation of the Marxist category of “bourgeois revolution”.

## PURE REVOLUTION

In general terms, the transition from feudalism to capitalism involves a series of economic, political and ideological transformations, whose motor is the class struggle, which destroys the conditions of existence of feudal social relations and establishes the conditions necessary for the reproduction of capitalist social relations. Because history does not proceed by logical stages in a straight line, and because the economic, political and ideological transformations which take place in any particular bourgeois revolution are determined by the forms and outcomes of complex class struggles at different levels of social reality, which are never pre-given, either by any logic of historical development or by the character of the class forces engaged in the struggle, then economic, political and ideological transformations proceed at different tempos — they have different historical times.

The implication of this is that there is no such thing as a “pure” revolution, either bourgeois or socialist — all revolutions are unique, involving a specific combination of social transformations. In February 1917, a very distinct political transformation took place in the Russian social formation — the capitalist class, with the support of the Anglo-French alliance, and the voluntary acquiescence of the proletariat and the peasantry, took political power from the defeated Tsarist autocracy. This political transformation signalled the completion of a particular, concrete form of the Russian bourgeois revolution, which, however, did not involve any economic transformations in the Russian countryside. Political liberties (Bourgeois democracy) were won in the towns, but feudal relations persisted in the countryside. In December 1918, Lenin pointed out

*Comrades, you are all very well aware that even the February revolution — the revolution of the bourgeoisie, the revolution of the compromises — promised the peasants victory over the landowners, and that this promise was not fulfilled.* [145]

In the course of the Russian revolution, bourgeois political freedoms were won by the working masses, and power transferred to the bourgeoisie, in the towns, *before* the peasant bourgeois revolution developed in the countryside.

Because of the acute state of the contradictions produced by the imperialist war, the conditions were created in the urban centres whereby the proletariat could seize political power from the bourgeoisie. This was a political transformation which eliminated one of the crucial conditions of existence of the capitalist mode of production; furthermore, the removal from power of the bourgeoisie also eliminated one of the political and ideological obstacles to the development of a radical peasant movement against the landlords — the peasant bourgeois revolution, which had already begun prior to October 1917, coincided with, and was consummated by, the proletarian revolution in the towns. It was this very specific concurrence of urban socialist revolution, with peasant-bourgeois revolution that constitutes the peculiarity of the Russian revolution.

## CONCLUSION

We should note two things in conclusion: 1) Lenin, as far back as 1905, recognised that this combination of elements of “bourgeois” revolution with the socialist revolution, was quite possible, so that its realization in 1917-18 in no way represented a departure from his theoretical presentation of the problem.

*...in actual historical circumstances, the elements of the past become interwoven with those of the future; the two paths cross ... But this does not in the least prevent us from logically and historically distinguishing between the major stages of development. We all contrapose bourgeois revolution and socialist revolution; we all insist on the absolute necessity of strictly distinguishing between them; however, can it be denied that in the course of history individual, particular elements of the two revolutions become interwoven ... will not the • future socialist revolution in Europe still have to complete a great deal left undone in the field of democratism?[146]*

2) Secondly, this characteristic form of the Russian revolution was not an effect of the nature and role of particular class subjects active in the revolution — rather it was the outcome of very specific class struggles, set in the context of the “weakest link” in the imperialist chain; it was not an outcome which could be concretely specified in advance by an identification of the class agents present in the Russian social formation, or the forms of their struggles.

The factors which enabled Lenin, in 1917, to conceive of the concrete stages of transition from the February democratic revolution, to the October socialist revolution were not present in the first Russian revolution. The decisive difference in 1917, as compared to 1905, was not that the experiences of the class struggle forced Lenin to re-think the basic theoretical premises of his analysis and to accept the strategy of the Permanent Revolution, but that those experiences, provided him with the material with which he could pose, concretely, the relation of the bourgeois revolution to the socialist revolution in the Russian social formation. In 1905, it had only been possible to pose the question of the forms of the bourgeois revolution, whereas their specific relationship to the Russian socialist revolution could only be posed in a general, abstract manner.

#### NOTES

1. Trotsky is an example of this tendency, referring to the close approximation of his theory of Permanent Revolution to the formula developed by Lenin in 1905. Trotsky reduced the difference between himself and Lenin to the question of “...what party-political and state form the revolutionary cooperation of the proletariat and peasantry would assume..L. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects* (hereafter *PRRP*), New York 1970, p. 197. See also the first volume of Deutscher’s biography of Trotsky.
2. D. Avenas, “Trotsky’s Marxism,” *International*. Vol. 3 No. 2, Winter 1976, p. 26. (She says of Lenin and Trotsky in 1905 that “their theories were quite dissimilar ...”). See also N. Geras, *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg*. NLB 1976, Chap. 2.
3. *PRRP* pp. 37-45 and L. Trotsky, *1905*, Harmondsworth 1973, pp. 21-41.
4. *ibid.* p. 66 (Trotsky is quoting, with approval, Karl Kautsky).
5. *ibid.* p. 67.
6. *ibid.*
7. *ibid.* p. 132.
8. *ibid.* p. 71.
9. *ibid.* p. 222.
10. Lenin, *Collected Works* (hereafter *CW*) 24, p. 150.
11. Martynov, *Dve diktatury*, Geneva 1905, p. 58.
12. *ibid.*
13. *Chetvertiyi(Ob"ediniteTnyi) s"ezd RSDRP, protokoly*, Moscow 1959, p. 112.
14. *ibid.* pp. 112-113.
15. *ibid.* p. 248 (Aksel’rod); P. Maslov, *Agrarnyi vopros v Rossii*, Moscow 1917, vol. 1, 5th ed.,

- p. 360.
16. Lenin, *CW9*, p. 55.
  17. *ibid.* p. 49,
  18. E.g. Lenin *CW3*.
  19. Lenin, *CW13*, p. 239. *Also CW3*, pp. 32-33.
  20. Lenin, *CW9*, p. 55.
  21. *ibid.* p. 55.
  22. *Tretii s'ezd RSDRP, protokoly*, Moscow 1959, pp. 451-52.
  23. *Pervaya obshcherusskaya Konferentsiya partiinykh rabotnikov, Otdel'noe prilozhenie, K No. 100 Iskra*, Geneva, 1905, pp. 23-24.
  24. *Tretii S'ezd...* pp. 451-452.
  25. *Pervaya obshcherusskaya ...* p. 23.
  26. Lenin, *CW9*, p. 33.
  27. *ibid.* p. 47.
  28. *Pervaya obshcherusskaya ...* p. 24.
  29. Martynov, *op. cit.* p. 55. His view was also endorsed by Martov in *Na ocheredi Rabochaya partiya i 'zakhvat vlasti', Kak nasha blizhaishaya zadacha, Iskra* No. 93, published in March 1905. What is interesting is that Trotsky, like the Mensheviks, derived an answer to the question of Social-Democratic participation in a provisional government from the prior application of a principle, and not, as with the Bolsheviks from concrete analysis. See *PRRP* p. 70.
  30. Martov, *loc. cit.*
  31. Martynov, *op. cit.* p. 55.
  32. *Chetvertyi (Ob 'edinitel'nyi)...* p. 193.
  33. *ibid.* p. 142.
  34. "We have never thus presented the question". *Tretii s'ezd ...* p. 186.
  35. Lenin, *CW9*, p. 25.
  36. Martynov, *op. cit.* p. 3.
  37. *ibid.* p. 9.
  38. *ibid.* pp. 10-11.
  39. Lenin, *CW8*, pp. 279-80.
  40. Trotsky, *Do devyatogo yanvary, s predisloviem Parvusa*, Munich January 1905, p. XI.
  41. *ibid.*
  42. *PRRP*, p. 69. (My emphasis).
  43. Lenin, *CW8*, pp. 291-92.
  44. Martynov, *op. cit.* p. 58.
  45. Martov, *Iskra* No. 93, 17th March 1905.
  46. *PRRP*, p. 69.
  47. Lenin, *CW9*, p. 30.
  48. Lenin, *CW11*, p. 413.
  49. *ibid.* pp. 572-73.
  50. Lenin, *CW12*, p. 335.
  51. Lenin, *CW1*, p. 413.
  52. Lenin, *CW3*, p. 32.
  53. Martynov, *op. cit.* p. 3.
  54. *Iskra* No. 100.



55. *Iskra* No. 93.
56. *PRRP*, p. 29.
57. 1905, p. 308.
58. *ibid.* p. 303.
59. *PRRP*, p. 31.
60. *ibid.*
61. 1905, p. 291.
62. *ibid.* p. 292.
63. *ibid.* p. 337.
64. Lenin, *CW21*, p. 419.
65. 1905, p. 292.
66. *PRRP*, p. 72 (My emphasis).
67. Or the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat supported by the peasantry”.
68. *PRRP*, p. 189.
69. *ibid.* p. 190.
70. *ibid.* pp. 190-91.
71. *ibid.* pp. 72-73.
72. *ibid.* p. 193.
73. *ibid.* p. 73.
74. Lenin, *CW15*, p. 121. (My emphasis).
75. *PRRP*, p. 181.
76. *ibid.* (My emphasis).
77. *ibid.* p. 70. (My emphasis).
78. *ibid.* p. 73. (My emphasis).
79. Martov, *Za chto borot'sya?*, *Sotsial-Demokrat*, No. 3. March 1909.
80. Lenin, *CW15*, p. 374.
81. Lenin, *CW8*, pp. 291-92.
82. *Vtoroi s'ezd RSDRP, protokoly*, Moscow 1959, p. 423.
83. *Tretii s'ezd ...* p. 454.
84. *Chetvertyi {ob}edinitel'nyi ...* p. 490.
85. Lenin, *CW13*, p. 119.
86. Lenin, *CW11*, pp. 342-343. (My emphasis).
87. *ibid.* p. 343.
88. *PRRP*, p. 69.
89. *ibid.* p. 72.
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92. Lenin, *CW15*, p. 371.
93. *ibid.* pp. 373-74.
94. Martynov, *Dve diktatury*, p. 58. (“... the impending revolution cannot realize any political forms whatever *against the will of the entire bourgeoisie...*”).
95. I. Getzler, *Martov: A Political Biography*, 1967, p. 110.
96. T. Dan, *The Origins of Bolshevism*, London 1964, p. 343.
97. See also Martov in *Iskra* No. 93.
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104. *ibid.* p. 330.
105. *Pervaya obshcherusskaya ...*
106. Lenin, C<sup>J</sup>F8, p. 298.
107. Lenin, C<sup>W</sup>16, pp. 377-79. Lenin C<sup>W</sup>34, pp. 408-09.
108. Plekhanov, *Sochineniya* XIII.
109. "Address of the Central Committee to the Communists League" in *The Revolutions of 1848*, Pelican 1973.
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111. Plekhanov, p. 208.
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114. For a defence of the position that economic determinism was at the root of Lenin's strategy prior to 1917 see Avenas *op. cit.*
115. K. Mavrikis, *On Trotskyism*, London 1976, p. 18.
116. Lenin, C<sup>W</sup>9, p. 86.
117. Lenin, C<sup>W</sup>24, p. 43.
118. *ibid.* p. 44.
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123. Lenin, C<sup>W</sup>24, p. 142.
124. *ibid.* p. 46.
125. *ibid.* p. 38. ("We must know how to supplement and amend old 'formulas' ... for while they have been found to be correct on the whole, their concrete realization *has turned out to be different*").
126. *PRRP*, p. 225.
127. *ibid.* p. 228.
128. Lenin, C<sup>W</sup>24, p. 44.
129. Lenin, C<sup>W</sup>26, p. 53.
130. Lenin C<sup>W</sup>24, p. 44.
131. *ibid.*
132. *PRRP*, p. 226. (My emphasis).
133. Lenin, C<sup>W</sup>24, p. 46.
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136. The fact of class collaboration.
137. Lenin, C<sup>W</sup>24, p. 47.
138. Lenin, C<sup>W</sup>25, p. 310.
139. *ibid.* p. 311.
140. Lenin C<sup>W</sup>8, p. 315. (My emphasis).
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