

October 1, 1979

THE TWO RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS, and  
ONCE AGAIN, ON THE THEORY OF PERMANENT REVOLUTION

Dear Friends:

1979 is the hundredth anniversary of Leon Trotsky's birth. Because the negative features of Trotskyism today far outweigh his historic contributions to two great revolutions, it became impossible for me to write the type of commemorative article that a hundredth anniversary generally calls forth. Martyrdom has such a numbing effect on revolutionaries that the tragedy makes it very nearly impossible to learn the urgent lessons for the day. Thus, the brutal murder of Rosa Luxemburg long held back a serious critique of her economic theory in Accumulation of Capital, though it was a serious deviation from Marx's theory. The situation was not quite the same in regard to Trotsky, both because we broke before his brutal murder, and because nothing could possibly have kept us from shouting NO! to his call for the defense of Stalin's Russia despite the Hitler-Stalin Pact which gave the green light to World War II. It became imperative to separate ourselves not only from the state-capitalist monstrosity that Russia had become, but also from the Trotskyists who were its tail-enders.

Nevertheless, on a hundredth anniversary, it becomes easier to write this present critique in the form of a Political-Philosophic Letter to News and Letters Committees. Clearly I do not disregard Trotsky's historic contributions, but it must be made equally clear that those contributions do not stand in the way of a critique which will clear away the debris accumulated around the theory of Permanent Revolution, especially in the present circumstances of the work on Rosa Luxemburg, who was one of the three banners on which Trotsky built the Fourth International -- Lenin, Luxemburg, Liebknecht.

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The Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 have forever enshrined Trotsky's great historical role. The same two Revolutions, however, tell a very contradictory story about the theory with which Trotsky's name will likewise always be connected as he is the creator of the 20th century version of the theory of the Permanent Revolution. The expression, "contradictory story," is not a reference to the critiques of that theory, mine included.<sup>1</sup> Rather, the phrase refers both to Trotsky's own claims and to the development of the theory as it related, on the one hand, to Lenin's analysis of and participation in these revolutions; and, on the other hand, to Rosa Luxemburg. It is these three revolutionary leaders who have put their unique stamp on history not only as past, but as present, and this is sure to extend into the future.

Recently, in restudying the 1905-07 Revolution as turning point in Rosa Luxemburg's life, the 1907 London Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party\* became crucial, not just in regard to her views, but to those of Lenin and Trotsky -- and, for that matter, all other tendencies in Russia, as it was that united Congress of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks that, for once, all tendencies attended. In 1922, in reproducing his book, 1905,<sup>2</sup> to be included in the Moscow publication of his Collected Works, Trotsky included among the Appendices: (1) an article entitled "Our Differences", in which he had attacked the Bolsheviks as well as the Mensheviks, and which had been published in Luxemburg's Polish journal in 1909; and (2) his main speech on "The Relationship of the Social-Democracy to Bourgeois Parties" to the 1907 RSDLP London Congress. These two articles, especially the first, became the springboard for an attack on Trotsky which has never abated. Indeed, in 1930-32, he returned to both points again in the Appendices to nothing less than his monumental History of the Russian Revolution.<sup>3</sup>

What was not included in the Appendices to either work, although it was a continuation of the 1909 article on "Our Differences", was his 1910 article in the Neue Zeit entitled "The Development of the Tendencies of Russian Social-Democracy."<sup>4</sup> It has not been

\* In Russian, this is abbreviated RSDRP; in English, RSDLP

translated into English, to my knowledge, to this day. Yet it is this which is the undercurrent of all the disputes; Lenin's article, "The Historical Meaning of the Internal Party Struggle in Russia"<sup>5</sup> was in answer to and critique of this 1910 article by Trotsky.

It poses the question at issue: What is theory? What is the relationship of theory to practice? and how do both relate to the objective situation? To get to that nub, let's begin at the beginning, with Trotsky's participation in the 1907 Congress which revolved around the 1905 Revolution.

Let's remember that this occurs after Trotsky had reached the highest point of activity with the General Strike led by the St. Petersburg Soviet, which he headed. Not only was that a highpoint of revolution. It became the highest point of Trotsky's theoretical development, as he drew from it what later became known as the theory of Permanent Revolution. Absolutely no-one, including Lenin and Luxemburg, matched the leap in cognition which proclaimed that backward Russia, involved in a bourgeois revolution, could be the one not only to have the revolution before the advanced countries, but -- in Absolutist Russia -- to reach for socialism "in an unbroken chain." That expression, "unbroken chain," which referred concretely to the 1905 Russian Revolution -- and not just the concept of permanent revolution which Marx had developed in his 1850 Address to the Communist League<sup>6</sup> -- was the issue in dispute.

It is Trotsky's original projection, which was later to become known as the theory of Permanent Revolution but which was not on the agenda of that 1907 Congress because Lenin's proposal to discuss "The Present Moment of Revolution" was defeated by the Mensheviks -- with Trotsky's help. Here is what Trotsky said in that dispute:

"What I want is that the Congress, from beginning to end, be political, that it be a gathering of revolutionary representatives of the Party, and not a club, be it of doubtful or even non-doubtful Marxists, bent on general discussions. I need political directives, and not your general philosophical deliberations about the character of the present moment of our revolution... Give us a formula for action! That's what I need." <sup>7</sup>

When the Congress got down to discussing the one "general", i.e., theoretical, question -- the relationship of Social-Democracy (as Marxism was then called) to bourgeois parties -- and Luxemburg spoke quite eloquently on her concept of the Russian Revolution and its relation to practice -- Trotsky said:

"I can testify with pleasure that the point of view that Luxemburg developed in the name of the Polish delegation is very close to mine, which I have defended and continue to defend. If between us there is a difference, it's a difference of shading, and not of political direction. Our thought moves along one and the same materialistic analysis." 8

But Luxemburg did not speak on the theory of permanent revolution and neither did Trotsky as he continued with his own speech on the question of the relationship of Social-Democracy to bourgeois parties. He did develop his opposition to the Menshevik position which had maintained that, since this was a bourgeois revolution, it "has to be carried out by the democratic bourgeoisie." Whereupon, Trotsky said:

"As materialists, we must first of all ask ourselves the question of the social foundation of a bourgeois democracy. In what classes, what strata of the population, can it find support? ... It is true that we have enormous masses of revolutionary peasantry ... the peasantry, however revolutionary it may be, is not capable of playing an independent, still less a leading political role..." (1905, p. 276)

"I have not had an answer to my central question, though I have asked it many times. You have no prognosis for revolution. Your policy lacks perspective." (1905, p.283)

Trotsky did not present a resolution different from the one the Bolsheviks presented, though he tried to amend that one. Indeed, he reproduced his speech in the 1922 edition of 1905 precisely to show that he opposed the Mensheviks and voted with the Bolsheviks. Yet in the years immediately following the Congress he wrote a whole series of articles attacking the Bolsheviks as well as the Mensheviks. The major one (and the one he was proud enough to reproduce in the 1922 edition of his 1905) was the article that had been published in Luxemburg's paper in 1909. Here is how it concluded:

"... while the anti-revolutionary aspects of Menshevism have already become fully apparent, those of Bolshevism are likely to become a serious threat only in the event of victory." (1905, p. 316)

As if that were not a fantastic enough statement to make in 1909 in "predicting" the future revolution, Trotsky in 1922 -- that is to say, nearly five years after Lenin had led the greatest revolution in history -- superciliously footnoted the 1909 statement as follows:

"Note to the present edition. This threat, as we know, never materialized because, under the leadership of Comrade Lenin, the Bolsheviks changed their policy line on this most important matter (not without inner struggle) in the spring of 1917, that is, before the seizure of power. (Author)." (1905, p. 317 ftn.)

Trotsky evidently didn't think it supercilious because the aim he had in mind, as is clear from the 1922 Preface to the whole volume, was to reiterate sole authorship of the theory of permanent revolution and claim it as the reason for the success of the 1917 Revolution. Here is what he wrote:

"It was precisely in the interval between 9 January and the October strike of 1905 that those views which came to be called the theory of 'permanent revolution' were formed in the author's mind. This rather high-flown expression defines the thought that the Russian Revolution, although directly concerned with bourgeois aims, could not stop short at those aims ... Despite an interruption of 12 years, this analysis has been entirely confirmed." (1905, pp. vi - vii)

The point is what did happen in those intervening 12 years? As we already saw, in 1907 he did not wish to discuss the nature of the present moment of the revolution. In 1909 he published the above cited criticism of Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. In 1910 he followed it up with the article in Neue Zeit, where the first point Trotsky made was: "Theory cannot replace experience."

As if 1905 meant, not the greatest experience ever -- be it for him or the Russian proletariat and peasantry, as well as for the world working class, but only factional disputes between "Economists", Mensheviks and Bolsheviks; as if Russian Marxism arose merely out of fighting a "primitive ideological viewpoint" (i.e., the Narodniks), Trotsky reached the following conclusion regarding those factional disputes between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks: the differences arise out of "the process of adaptation of Marxist intellectuals to the class struggle, i.e. the political immaturity of the Russian proletariat." What such argumentation betrays, I would say, is that it

isn't only the "nature" of the peasantry about which Leon Trotsky had a low opinion; it is the proletariat which he considered backward -- "politically immature." Trotsky's logic, however, led him to accuse the Bolsheviks, Lenin especially, of "ideological fetishism," "sectarianism," and "intellectual individualism."

Far from returning to his theory of Permanent Revolution, much less to the Luxemburgian view of the advanced nature of the Russian proletariat, Trotsky veered off to psychology, talk against "lack of morality" and "piracy" (a reference to expropriations), not to mention "sexual anarchy."

It all sounds as if somebody was writing a farcical caricature about Trotsky. But unfortunately, it is not a caricature. It is not somebody writing about Trotsky. It is Trotsky's own writing only a few years after he had projected nothing short of a theory of Permanent Revolution; after he had separated from both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks and declared he was out to unite all factions into one Social-Democratic Party. And that was, indeed, the grand climax of the 1910 article: "What is needed is a party united and capable of action." Further to separate both action and organization from theory, not to mention reducing the concept of organization to "apparatus," he adds that, of course, to achieve unity of disparate tendencies: "what is needed is the re-organization of the party apparatus."

Those who say that -- since that was the period climaxed by the infamous "August Bloc" which Trotsky acknowledged was a "fundamental error", and since he accepted Lenin's characterization of him as "conciliationist" -- Trotsky's joining of the Bolshevik Party, like his revolutionary activities in 1917, "eliminated all differences," show they understand nothing of either theory or organization. The whole point of Marxist theory, and organization to correspond, is that they are inseparable from the goal -- the revolutionary road to a classless society. If one creates a theory of revolution but thinks a "Party" can reach the end of that long trek without that theory, he is, indeed, underestimating what theory is. That is the only reason Trotsky could have written that "theory cannot replace experience."

It is the only reason he could have failed to put his theory on that 1907 Agenda and refused to discuss any theory of the "nature of the present moment of revolution" -- and then proceeded to try to unite all tendencies, not by forging a theoretical basis for a revolutionary party, but by proposing the "reorganization of the Party apparatus."

Lenin did not criticize Trotsky only for organizational conciliationism. Quite the contrary. He took issue with the specific 1910 article because of Trotsky's "utter lack of theoretical understanding,"<sup>9</sup> and because Trotsky was arguing, not about the objective nature of the Russian Revolution, but subjectively reducing even his own "philosophy of history" to "the struggle for influence over the politically immature proletariat."

The point here is not so much whether Lenin or Trotsky was right in this or that dispute. Rather, the amazing fact is that Trotsky, the creator of the theory of Permanent Revolution, was practicing not just organizational but theoretical conciliationism -- and the theoretical conciliationism was not only against "others" but against himself. In a word, not a single serious point Trotsky made in 1905 was either developed or related to anything he did in those 12 long years between 1905 and 1917.

How, then, did the question of his theory mature when, finally, in 1917 a proletarian revolution did, indeed, succeed and was led by Lenin and himself? The November, 1917 Revolution remains the highest point of proletarian revolution and is magnificently retold in The History of the Russian Revolution. This book is a landmark of historical writing by one who was both a leader of a revolution and an historian of it. All the Appendices in the history of 1917 are expressions of Trotsky's view of his theory of the Permanent Revolution. That is natural enough. What isn't natural is some rewriting of history in the Appendices, especially as it relates to Lenin and the theoretic division between the two on Lenin's slogan, "the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry," which is almost always abbreviated by Trotsky as just "bour-

geois-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry." To prove how that kept the Bolsheviks from understanding the course of 1917, he shows how hard Lenin had to work "to rearm the Party."

That, in part, is true but the whole truth is that it was not the theory of Permanent Revolution that "rearmed the Party", but Lenin's famous April Thesis. To try to claim that the April Thesis somehow implied Lenin's conversion to Trotsky's theory is to skip entirely Lenin's philosophic-dialectic reorganization which, far from bringing him closer to Trotsky, led to the most fundamental dispute between them over Lenin's slogans -- "Defeat of your own country is the lesser evil;" "Transform the imperialist war into civil war." It was not Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution, but the dialectics of revolution that led Lenin both to the April Thesis and to the writing of State and Revolution, as well as to putting conquest of power on the agenda of the Bolshevik Party. And it was then that Trotsky joined Lenin, not Lenin Trotsky.

In The History of the Russian Revolution there is, finally, a quite serious development of the theory of Permanent Revolution. As against 1905, which has not a single word to say of Marx's 1850 Address, which first projected the slogan "revolution in permanence" for the German proletariat who had fought and lost the 1848 revolution, this 1932 Appendix is well-rooted in Marx. Trotsky here introduces a concretization of his theory by his analysis of the law of combined and uneven development, which relates to Marx's statement about the industrially more advanced country showing the less developed country the image of its own future. Methodologically, Trotsky shows that Marx there had in mind, not the world economy but the single country as a type. He proceeds to show the differences between England's industrial development revealing the future of France "but not in the least of Russia and not of India." And he concludes that because the Mensheviks "took this conditional statement of Marx unconditionally," they refused to see where the Russian Revolution was moving and ended up agreeing with the liberals.

On the other hand, another statement of Marx, that no



social formation disappears until all productive forces have developed, has a different point of departure. This time Marx is talking, not about individual countries but about "the sequence of universal social structures (slavery, medievalism, capitalism)." The Mensheviks, however, applied this to a single country, thus acting as if productive forces develop in a vacuum. By disregarding both the class struggle and the world context, they, instead of confronting the actual Russian capitalists, produced nothing but "abstract economic possibilities." (The History of the Russian Revolution, Vol.III, p.378)

So much for answering Menshevism. But what about what Trotsky called "ideological restoration"? (Vol. III, p.381) Here once again we see the inner contradiction within Trotsky. By shifting the debate to the context of the Stalinist slanders about him and Stalin's revisionism about the world revolution, confining it to the nationalistic "socialism in one country," the "ideological restoration," insofar as Lenin's position in 1905 and in 1917 is concerned, gets quite lost. He quotes (I should add for the first time, having shown no awareness of them when they were written in 1905<sup>10</sup>) some very beautiful passages from Lenin which referred to the "beginning of a decisive struggle for the socialist revolution ... it will be the beginning of the real struggle of the proletariat." And he also quotes Lenin's statement of Sept. 1905: "From the democratic revolution we will immediately begin to pass over, and in the exact measure of our strength, the strength of a conscious and organized proletariat, we will begin to pass over to the socialist revolution. We stand for a continuous revolution. We will not stop half-way." (Vol.III, p.382)

But Trotsky does so, not so much to prove that the theories of the two, irrespective of the slogans, were not as far apart as factional debates made them appear, as to maintain the difference that compelled a "rearming" which, allegedly, would have been unnecessary had Lenin himself been armed with Trotsky's theory! Thus, Trotsky explains away the affinity of ideas by quoting another passage from Lenin on another occasion when Lenin wrote of the fact that revolutionists have the right "to dream," as if Lenin had said it only as "a dream."

Since Lenin's article did relate to the fact that the workers in Europe would also rise up "and show us 'how it is done'," Trotsky correctly extends this international aspect to his whole struggle against Stalin's "theory" of socialism in one country vs. the Marxian concept of world revolution. But, though the Appendix is, as a totality, directed against Stalin, and profoundly presents Lenin's internationalism, Trotsky does a great deal less justice to Lenin's position on the peasantry, very nearly attributing to Lenin his own view that the peasantry is "an unreliable and treacherous ally." (Vol. III, p. 385) ll

Above all, what stands out is Trotsky's failure to grasp the totally new theoretical point of departure on that question which Lenin introduced in his Theses on the National and Colonial Questions at the Second Congress of the Communist International. Trotsky's reference to that thesis is limited to the context of his fight with Stalin -- internationalism vs. nationalism -- and not the pivotal point of the revolutionary live force of the peasantry, of the national question, and of the perspective that, since world revolution has not come via Berlin, "then perhaps" it can come via Peking. That new point of departure in theory was not grasped, much less developed, by Trotsky.

His attempt, retrospectively, to credit the 1917 Revolution's success to his theory of Permanent Revolution, was not, of course, at the bottom of the Trotsky-Stalin struggle that ensued after the death of Lenin. No. More objective causes are at the root -- the new stage of world capitalism, reflected in Stalin's revisionist capitulation to the capitalistic impulse as he moved in the opposite direction of the workers' demands. But, of course, Stalin took advantage of the specific dispute over the additions to the 1922 edition of Trotsky's 1905 as he began his usurpation of the mantle of Lenin.

Though that is beyond the shadow of a doubt, there is also no way to evade grappling with what Lenin called Trotsky's "lack of theoretical understanding" in the period of 1907-1912. It is that which led Lenin to characterize Trotsky as "conciliationist" in theory as well as in organization. Indeed, because the conciliationism was

theoretical, it, at one and the same time, led Trotsky to a rather checkered organizational alliance with the Mensheviks, and made it nearly impossible for him to develop even his own theory.

The nodal points of a serious revolutionary theory are rooted in self-activity of the masses who make the revolution, and the leadership's singling out of those live forces of revolution, not only as Force, but as Reason. And that holds true when facing either a concrete revolution or a counter-revolution. The 1917 Revolution was certainly a spontaneous mass outpouring. Its success can hardly be attributed to a single factor. Lenin's contribution was the greatest, but that doesn't mean that it was spotless -- least of all in his concept of the party-to-lead, and especially so in the elitist way it was first spelled out in 1902.\* That Trotsky bowed to that in 1917 only further weighed down Trotsky's own great contribution to that revolution.

Whether the theory of Permanent Revolution was confirmed or unconfirmed in 1917 is not proven, as we showed before, by the mere repetition of the theory of 1905-06 in 1922. The real point at issue by the time of the writing of The History of the Russian Revolution in the early '30s was whether one has a theory to meet the challenge of the new stage of world capitalism -- the Great Depression which brought on state-capitalism as a world phenomenon. Although Trotsky

\* Contrast what Lenin wrote in 1902 to what he wrote once the 1905 Revolution broke out: "The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social-Democratic, and more than ten years of work put in by Social-Democracy has done a great deal to transform this spontaneity into consciousness." ("Reorganization of the Party," p. 32, Vol. 10 of Collected Works) See also, in Vol. 13 of Collected Works, Lenin's "Preface to the Collection 12 Years":

"What Is To Be Done? is a summary of Iskra tactics and Iskra organizational policy in 1901 and 1902. Precisely a 'summary': no more and no less ... Nor at the Second Congress did I have any intention of elevating my own formulations, as given in What Is To Be Done?, to 'programmatic' level, constituting special principles ..." (p. 102 and p. 107)

"The transition to a democratically organized workers' party, proclaimed by the Bolsheviks in Novaya Zhizn in November 1905, i.e., as soon as the conditions appeared for legal activity -- this transition was virtually an irrevocable break with the old circle ways that had outlived their day." (p.105)

-12-

by the mid-1930s had fought the Stalin bureaucracy for a solid decade, had written The Revolution Betrayed, he denied the transformation of Russia into a state-capitalist society.<sup>12</sup> And he ended up tailending Stalinism, calling for the defense of Russia as a "workers' state, though degenerate" at the very time, as we stated earlier, when the infamous Hitler-Stalin Pact had given the green light to World War II.

Which is why it becomes imperative to see the two revolutions, not weighed down with factional disputes, much less slanted to theoretical conclusions, but with eyes of today turned to future revolutions.

-- Raya Dunayevskaya

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FOOTNOTES

- 1- See Chapter 4, "Leon Trotsky as Theoretician," in my Philosophy and Revolution (New York: Dell, 1973).
- 2- Leon Trotsky, 1905 (New York: Vintage Books, 1972; England: Penguin Press, 1972).
- 3- See Vol. I, Appendix II to Chapter on "Rearming of the Party"; Vol. III, Appendix II, "Socialism in a Separate Country?"; and Vol. III, Appendix III, "Historic References on the Theory of 'Permanent Revolution'" in Leon Trotsky's The History of the Russian Revolution (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1932).
- 4- "Die Entwicklungstendenzen der russischen Sozialdemokratie" by Leon Trotsky, Neue Zeit Year 28, Vol. 2, Sept. 9, 1910, pp. 860-871.
- 5- V.I. Lenin, Selected Works (New York: International Publishers, 1943), Vol. III, pp. 499-518.

6- See especially the final paragraph of the Address, included in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works (Moscow: 1969), Vol.1,

p. 185: "But they themselves must do the utmost for their final victory by clarifying their minds as to what their class interests are, by taking up their position as an independent party as soon as possible and by not allowing themselves to be seduced for a single moment by the hypocritical phrases of the democratic petty bourgeois into refraining from the independent organization of the party of the proletariat. Their battle cry must be: The Revolution in Permanence."

7- From Minutes of the 1907 Fifth Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party, in Pyatyi (Izodonskii) S'ezd RSDRP, April'-mai 1907 goda, Protokoly (Moscow, 1963), p. 49. (My translation.)

8- Ibid., p. 397. This paragraph was omitted when Trotsky reproduced his speech as an Appendix to his 1905 in the 1922 edition.

9- V.I.Lenin, op. cit., p.515

10- A much more consistent and thorough series of quotations from all of Lenin's writings of 1905-07 is reproduced by the Menshevik, Solomon M. Schwartz in his The Russian Revolution of 1905 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967). Of course he has his ulterior motives -- to try to prove how allegedly "dictatorial" both Lenin and Trotsky were. The only way to see what Lenin did stand for is to read his own Collected Works -- and there are no less than six volumes (Vol. 8 through 13) devoted to the years 1905-07.

11- See also my analysis of Trotsky on the peasantry in "Leon Trotsky as Man and Theoretician" in Studies in Comparative Communism, Spring/Summer 1977.

12- See Part V, Section One ("Russian State Capitalism vs. Workers' Revolt;" "Stalin;" "The Beginning of the End of Russian Totalitarianism") in my Marxism and Freedom (English edition by Pluto Press, fourth edition 1975), pp.212-257.

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