

A letter on Witnesses to Permanent Revolution

27 April 2010

This letter was sent in response to David North's review of *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution: the Documentary Record*, edited and translated by Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido. (See, "A significant contribution to an understanding of Permanent Revolution")

Dear WSWs,

Thank you very much for David North's review of the Day and Gaido anthology, *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution* (Brill, 2009). Despite the length of the piece, I came away from it with a significantly greater appreciation of Karl Kautsky.

I confess that I had, despite my awareness of Kautsky's positive influence on Vladimir Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?* (1902), been almost entirely inclined to see the German socialist leader in the light of three terms: Kautskyism, renegade, and ultra-imperialism.

Lenin's *Imperialism* (1916) and *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (1918), as well as Trotsky's *Terrorism and Communism* (1920), are the works that influenced my view of Kautsky. My approach as a reader, however, was too one-sided.

Another aspect of the review that stood out to me was mention of David Ryazanov, who founded the Marx-Engels Institute. I have thought very highly of this notable historian and archivist since my encounter with his *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels* (1927).

I have also admired Ryazanov for his criticism of Stalin at the Tenth Party Congress in 1921: "Koba, don't embarrass the people. Theory is not your strong point." Of course, no one knew Stalin would become a

mass murderer and finish off Ryazanov in 1938.

Regarding Stalin, I did think it curious that the review did not discuss his reactionary position on the Marxist internationalist theory of permanent revolution. There was also no reference to his nationalist and autarkic counter-theory of "socialism in one country."

As chapter three of the notorious *Foundations of Leninism* (1924) confirms, Stalin knew very well that "permanent revolution" was Marx's idea. Stalin's claim, however, was that the "permanentists" (i.e., Trotsky and the Left Opposition) altered it and spoiled it.

Stalin even appealed to the pre-1917 Lenin and quoted from "On the Two Lines in the Revolution" (1915), which criticized Trotsky and permanent revolution. How convenient to omit the fact that Lenin's "April Theses" (1917) adopted Trotsky's position.

Perhaps it would have burdened a review of *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution* to go into Stalin and his politics. This, after all, was a man who made no contribution whatsoever to Marxist theory nor to the cause of the international working class.

Sincerely yours,

AD

24 April 2010



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