

Lecture to the SEP 2025 Summer School

The theory of Permanent Revolution and the origins of Trotskyism

Christoph Vandreier
20 August 2025

The following lecture was delivered by Christoph Vandreier, the national secretary of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Germany), at the Socialist Equality Party (US) International Summer School, held between August 2-9, 2025. It is the first part of a two-part lecture on the Origins of Trotskyism.

The WSWS is also publishing two primary source documents written by Leon Trotsky to accompany this lecture, the “Manifesto of the Communist International to the Workers of the World,” delivered at the First Congress of the Communist International, and Chapter 10 of Trotsky’s work “The Permanent Revolution.” We encourage our readers to study these texts alongside this lecture.

The WSWS will be publishing all the lectures at the school in the coming weeks. The introduction to the school by SEP National Chairman David North, “The place of Security and the Fourth International in the history of the Trotskyist movement” was published on August 13.

Introduction

The Security and the Fourth International investigation was not simply a detective story about the murder of Leon Trotsky. By launching an investigation into Trotsky’s assassination and exposing the role of the Stalinists and imperialists inside and outside the movement, the IC connected itself more deeply to the history of the revolutionary movement.

Unlike the Pabloites or the Robertson group, it took the history of the movement and the political clarification in that history seriously, because it understood that the key to resolving the crisis of revolutionary leadership, and thus the crisis of humanity, lay in the continuity of the Fourth International, that is the continuity of Bolshevism.

The perspective and historical principles embodied in the ICFI are the only basis on which the working class can be enabled to overthrow the capitalists and build a socialist society. This explains the mortal enmity of the Stalinists and imperialists toward our movement.

It is therefore essential to begin a school on security and the Fourth International with a presentation of the very perspective that has been defended and developed in its course: The perspective of Trotskyism, of international socialism.

In the 2017 New Year’s Perspective, Comrades Joseph Kishore and David North identified the following three political and theoretical foundations on which the October Revolution was based:

1. The defense and elaboration of dialectical and historical materialism, in opposition to philosophical idealism and anti-Marxist revisionism, as the theoretical basis of the education and revolutionary practice of the working class.

2. The unrelenting struggle against the many forms of opportunism and centrism that obstructed or undermined the fight to establish the political independence of the working class.

3. The working out, over many years, of the strategic perspective that oriented the Bolshevik Party toward the struggle for power in 1917. In this latter process, Lenin’s adoption of the theory of permanent revolution, developed by Trotsky during the previous decade, was the critical advance that guided the strategy of the Bolsheviks in the months leading up to the overthrow of the provisional government.^[1]

As for the second point, Lenin waged an unyielding struggle for the independent perspective of the working class. Already in his writings against the populists in the 1890s, Lenin insisted that the working class must take up its independent class position against these bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces. In *What Is To Be Done*, he argued against the Economists that the independence of the working class could only be achieved through a continuous practical, political, and theoretical struggle against bourgeois and spontaneous consciousness, and on this basis he split with the Mensheviks in 1903.

Lenin understood that in this struggle for an independent line and against all opportunism, a materialist conception of history and society is indispensable. Only if the revolutionary party scientifically understands the class struggle can it intervene in it and raise the consciousness of the working class. As Lenin brilliantly summed up in his important work *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*:

The highest task of humanity is to comprehend this objective logic of economic evolution (the evolution of social life) in its general and fundamental features, so that it may be possible to adapt to it one’s social consciousness and the consciousness of the advanced classes of all capitalist countries in as definite, clear and critical a fashion as possible.^[2]

This was the working basis of Lenin, Trotsky, and the other great Marxists. They understood Marxism not as a template to be imposed on historical development, but as a tool for accurately understanding objective development in order to develop the independent line of the

working class. From this standpoint, they approached the comprehensive changes that capitalism had undergone since the end of the 19th century. In Russia, these questions were particularly acute.

Three conceptions of the Russian Revolution

“The basic principle of Marxism is that social revolution—that is, the process of replacing one ruling class with another—takes place only when the development of productive forces is no longer possible within the framework of the existing relations of production,” as Comrade Kishore put it in his lecture on the Russian Revolution.^[3]

But when Marxism arrived in Russia, these processes were still in their infancy. The country was largely agrarian, with a peasant population of 100 million. Although serfdom had been abolished in 1861, rural structures remained essentially feudal, dominated by some 60,000 extremely wealthy, mostly aristocratic landowners. At the same time, industry in the urban centers was very modern. Three to five million workers produced about half of the national income, often in large factories with over 1,000 employees.

Under these conditions, an intense discussion took place within the Russian socialist movement about the character of the revolution in Russia, which was of great importance for international Marxism and formed the basis for the October Revolution. Essentially, there were three concepts.

The father of Russian Marxism, Georgi Plekhanov, understood the necessity of building an independent party of the working class committed to international socialism. As early as 1848 in Germany, it had become clear that the bourgeoisie, fearing a proletarian uprising, would rather seek an alliance with the feudal powers than push forward the democratic revolution. “The revolutionary movement will triumph in Russia as a workers’ movement, or it will never triumph,” Plekhanov therefore declared at the founding congress of the Second International in 1889.

But Plekhanov formally transferred the development of capitalism in Western Europe to the situation in Russia and therefore understood the revolution as a purely bourgeois revolution. The workers had to drive it forward, but ultimately hand over power to the bourgeoisie so that capitalism could fully develop in Russia. As a Menshevik leader, he ultimately openly promoted an alliance between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. With the revolution of 1905 the limits of this perspective became obvious. As David North explained:

The events of 1905—that is, the eruption of the first Russian Revolution—generated serious questions about the viability of Plekhanov’s theoretical model. The most significant aspect of the Russian Revolution was the dominant political role played by the proletariat in the struggle against tsarism. Against the background of general strikes and insurrection, the maneuverings of the political leaders of the Russian bourgeoisie appeared petty and treacherous. No Robespierre or Danton was to be found among the bourgeoisie. The Cadet Party (Constitutional Democrats) bore no resemblance to the Jacobins.^[4]

In the midst of these revolutionary events of 1905, Lenin developed a position opposed to Plekhanov. In solving the tasks of the bourgeois revolution, the proletariat could not rely on the bourgeoisie, which reacted to every independent movement of the working class by moving closer to the landowners and the tsarist regime.

Lenin argued that the working class had to solve the tasks of the bourgeois revolution independently of and against the bourgeoisie. In doing so, he relied on an alliance with the peasantry. Instead of bourgeois parliamentarism, he demanded a “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry”; instead of cooperation with the bourgeoisie, he called for the mobilization of the rural working population. But even Lenin saw the tasks of this revolution, above all the solution of the land question, as bourgeois. As Lenin explained:

But of course it will be a democratic, not a socialist dictatorship. It will be unable (without a series of intermediate stages of revolutionary development) to affect the foundations of capitalism. At best, it may bring about a radical redistribution of landed property in favor of the peasantry, establish consistent and full democracy, including the formation of a republic, eradicate all the oppressive features of Asiatic bondage, not only in rural but also in factory life, lay the foundation for a thorough improvement in the conditions of the workers and for a rise in their standard of living, and—last but not least—carry the revolutionary conflagration into Europe.^[5]

Lenin’s conception was undoubtedly a significant step forward because it reformulated the class relationship in the revolution and in the new form of rule and already placed the revolution in Russia within the context of the European revolution. But his formula of democratic dictatorship left unanswered the question of the class character of the new government and remained rather formal with regard to the politics of the new government. Trotsky pointed out as early as 1905 that Lenin wanted to resolve the contradiction between the class interests of the workers and the objective conditions of Russia’s backwardness through self-restraint on the part of the workers.

Whereas the Mensheviks, proceeding from the abstract notion that “our revolution is a bourgeois revolution,” arrive at the idea that the proletariat must adapt all its tactics to the behavior of the liberal bourgeoisie in order to ensure the transfer of state power to the bourgeoisie, the Bolsheviks proceed from an equally abstract notion—“democratic dictatorship, not socialist dictatorship”—and arrive at the idea of a proletariat in possession of state power imposing a bourgeois democratic limitation upon itself. It is true that the difference between them in this matter is very considerable: 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.^[6]

With this, Trotsky already outlined the basic features of the theory of permanent revolution, which he systematically expounded a year later in *Results and Prospects*. Both Lenin and Trotsky understood that the working class must lead the peasantry, which is incapable of independent politics. But they disagreed on the class nature of the revolutionary regime that would replace the autocracy. Trotsky explained that the revolution led by the working class was permanent in the sense that once the workers had seized power, they could not stop at bourgeois-democratic measures, but would be compelled to take socialist measures.

However, the question arose as to how this could be possible in backward Russia, where capitalism had not yet developed and the vast majority of the population consisted of peasants. And here, based on a detailed study of the development of the world economy and the

contradictory development in Russia, Trotsky developed the central element of the theory of permanent revolution, which is of utmost importance not only for the backward countries, but also for the strategy of the socialist world revolution. Both he and Lenin understood the revolution in Russia not as an isolated, national event, but as part of the world revolution. But Trotsky drew the most far-reaching conclusions from this. In 1905, he wrote:

Imposing its own type of economy and its own relations on all countries, capitalism has transformed the entire world into a single economic and political organism... From the very outset, this fact gives currently unfolding events an international character and opens up majestic prospects. Political emancipation, led by the Russian working class, is raising the latter to heights that are historically unprecedented, providing it with colossal means and resources, and making it the initiator of capitalism's worldwide liquidation, for which history has prepared all the objective preconditions.^[7]

Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution was not a utopia but was based on an understanding of global capitalist development. In 1931, Trotsky aptly summarized this insight in his work *The Permanent Revolution*:

One of the basic reasons for the crisis in bourgeois society is the fact that the productive forces created by it can no longer be reconciled with the framework of the national state. From this follows on the one hand, imperialist wars, on the other, the utopia of a bourgeois United States of Europe. The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena. Thus, the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word; it attains completion only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet.^[8]

In *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*, David North sums up how fundamental this analysis was to the strategy of world socialist revolution:

Proceeding from the analysis of the historical development of world capitalism and the objective dependence of Russia on the international economic and political environment, Trotsky foresaw the socialist development of Russia's revolution. The Russian working class would be compelled to take power and adopt measures of a socialist character. Yet in proceeding along socialist lines, the working class in Russia would inevitably come up against the limitations of the national environment. How would it find a way out of its dilemma? By linking its fate to the European and world revolution of which its own struggle was, in the final analysis, a manifestation.

Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution made possible a realistic conception of world revolution. The age of national revolutions had come to an end—or, to put it more precisely, national revolutions could only be understood within the framework of the international socialist revolution.^[9]

Permanent Revolution in Russia: From the April Theses to the October Revolution

The theory of permanent revolution was first confirmed in the World War, the collapse of the capitalist nation-state system, and then in every respect in the Russian Revolution.

The February Revolution had already been initiated primarily by the working class and led in particular by workers who had been educated by the Bolsheviks. They led the uprising to victory, but without a centralized party they were unable to immediately place power in the hands of the proletarian vanguard. This gave rise to dual power between the provisional government, led by the liberal bourgeoisie, and the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

As Trotsky had foreseen, the bourgeoisie tried everything to suppress the revolution and defend the tsar. After the tsar's abdication, the provisional government attempted to disarm the workers, dissolve the Soviet, and continue the war. The Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, who initially had a majority in the Soviet, supported the provisional government and, in particular, the continuation of the war—in line with their belief that the working class must support the bourgeoisie, even if the latter was openly hostile to the revolution.

Under these conditions, a fierce debate developed within the Bolshevik Party over the relationship to the provisional government and the continuation of the war. Kamenev and Stalin, who jointly headed the editorial board of Pravda, argued that the Bolsheviks must critically support the provisional government in order to create the best conditions for the “democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants.” They even openly called for support for the continuation of the war.

Lenin, on the other hand, had already moved closer to Trotsky's positions during the war in his fundamental analysis of imperialism. In *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, he explained how capitalism had developed into a “world system of colonial oppression and financial strangulation of the vast majority of the world's population by a handful of ‘advanced’ countries.” His slogan “Turn the war into a civil war” put the socialist revolution in all European countries on the agenda.

Even before his return to Russia, Lenin described any support for the provisional government in his *Letters from Afar* as a betrayal of the cause of the proletariat and rejected the continuation of the imperialist war. As soon as he arrived in Russia, he discussed the April Theses within the party, on the basis of which he was not unjustly accused of “Trotskyism.”

In his theses, Lenin emphasized that the Bolsheviks' position must not change, that the war on the Russian side remained an imperialist war of plunder. Precisely because the mood among the masses was that the war was a defense of the revolution, it was necessary for the Bolsheviks to reveal the true background of the war. It was necessary to prove “that without overthrowing capital it is impossible to end the war by a truly democratic peace, a peace not imposed by violence.”

This was an important point because Lenin proceeded from the objective conditions and not from the immediate consciousness of the working class, as he had already explained in *What Is To Be Done?* the logic of class struggle would reveal the counterrevolutionary character of Kerensky and the Mensheviks, Lenin explained. At the decisive stage, the convergence of the party program and objective conditions would enable the Bolsheviks to win the masses of the working class for the perspective of socialist revolution.

In the second point of his theses, Lenin clearly backed the idea of permanent revolution by calling for the proletariat to take power. He said that the Bolsheviks shouldn't have any illusions about the provisional government but should oppose parliamentarianism with the rule of the councils. The police, army, and civil service had to be abolished and replaced.

In addition to nationalizing the land, Lenin also demanded direct control of the banks by the Soviets and workers' control over production and distribution. The Social Democratic Labor Party of Russia should be renamed the Communist Party, and the founding of a Communist International should be undertaken, directed against both the social-chauvinists and the centrists.

David North aptly summarizes Lenin's development toward Trotsky's position:

Lenin's political program—which signaled the alignment of his strategy with Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution—was not based primarily on an appraisal of nationally determined circumstances and opportunities as they existed in Russia. The essential question confronting the working class was not whether Russia, as a national state, had achieved a sufficient level of capitalist development that would allow a transition to socialism. Rather, the Russian working class confronted a historical situation in which its own fate was inextricably bound up with the struggle of the European working class against the imperialist war and the capitalist system from which it arose.^[10]

Lenin's new orientation was also clearly evident in his draft program for the proletarian party, which he also wrote in April 1917. It states:

The war is not a product of the evil will of rapacious capitalists, although it is undoubtedly being fought only in their interests and they alone are being enriched by it. The war is a product of half a century of development of world capitalism and of its billions of threads and connections. It is impossible to slip out of the imperialist war and achieve a democratic non-coercive peace without overthrowing the power of capital and transferring state power to another class, the proletariat.

The Russian revolution of February-March 1917 was the beginning of the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war. This revolution took the first step toward ending the war; but it requires a second step, namely the transfer of state power to the proletariat, to make the end of the war a certainty. This will be the beginning of a "breakthrough" on a worldwide scale, a breakthrough in the front of capitalist interests; and only by breaking through this front can the proletariat save mankind from the horrors of war and endow it with the blessings of peace.^[11]

While Lenin had thus joined the theory of permanent revolution, Trotsky gained a deeper understanding of Lenin's unyielding struggle for a complete break with the opportunists who had turned into social patriots and defenders of the fatherland in the course of the war and revolution in Russia. Since Trotsky had ruled out a union with the Mensheviks, "there was no better Bolshevik," Lenin declared in October 1917.

Lenin had already placed the struggle against opportunism in the workers' movement at the center of his program in *What Is To Be Done?* and had completed the break with the Mensheviks in 1912. With the outbreak of war, Lenin pressed internationally for a total break with the defenders of the fatherland and especially with the centrists who wanted to prevent this break.

In Russia, this was confirmed by the counterrevolutionary role played by the Mensheviks. Instead of fighting against the bourgeoisie and the Black Hundreds, they fought against the Bolsheviks and supported the hunt for them after the July protests. Trotsky was imprisoned and Lenin

had to go into hiding. Kerensky, who was supported by the Mensheviks, even collaborated with General Kornilov to disempower the Soviet and destroy the revolution. The question of state power came to a head, and the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries who supported Kerensky were discredited among the masses.

During this period, Lenin devoted himself to his fundamental study *State and Revolution*, in which he vehemently opposed the reformists' position that the bourgeois state apparatus could be taken over by the working class. Based on Marx and Engels, Lenin demonstrated the class character of the state and proved that the working class had to smash the bourgeois state and replace it with its own. Trotsky rightly described the work as a "scientific introduction to the greatest revolution in history"; it was the preparation for the seizure of power. After the workers, led by the Bolsheviks, had defeated the Kornilov putsch, Lenin wrote, while still working on *State and Revolution*:

The question of state power cannot be evaded or brushed aside because it is the key question determining everything in a revolution's development. ...

The slogan "Power to the Soviets," however, is very often, if not in most cases, taken quite incorrectly to mean a "Cabinet of the parties of the Soviet majority..." [Not so.] "Power to the Soviets" means radically reshaping the entire old state apparatus, that bureaucratic apparatus which hampers everything democratic. It means removing this apparatus and substituting for it a new popular one, i.e., a truly democratic apparatus of Soviets, i.e., the organized and armed majority of the people—the workers, soldiers, and peasants. It means allowing the majority of the people initiative and independence not only in the election of deputies, but also in state administration, in effecting reforms and various other changes.^[12]

Lenin's orientation against any half-measures and compromises with the bourgeoisie or its agents in the ranks of the working class undoubtedly laid the foundation for the October Revolution. Lenin and Trotsky could only take this stance because of their strategic orientation toward the socialist world revolution, for only the international working class provided the objective basis for this tremendous revolutionary upheaval.

This was also evident immediately before the October Revolution, when Zinoviev and Kamenev rejected the Bolsheviks' seizure of power. The doubters looked exclusively at the national conditions in Russia, under which they considered a revolution impossible. Instead, they demanded that the Constituent Assembly be convened and that the bourgeoisie be forced to solve the democratic tasks. They repeated—at a higher stage of development—the disputes of April.

Lenin and Trotsky understood Russian developments as part of the international class struggle and therefore came to completely different conclusions.

It was precisely in the situation in which the Bolsheviks had won the majority of the Soviets and knew that they had considerable sections of the army behind them that the conflicts over the orientation broke out most sharply. In this situation, it was precisely the theoretical and political struggles that Lenin and Trotsky had fought over the previous 15 years that mattered. David North summarizes the significance of the party in his reasons why the Russian Revolution must be studied:

The Bolsheviks provided the working class with an example of what a genuine revolutionary party is, and the irreplaceable role of such a party in securing the victory of the socialist revolution. A

careful study of the revolutionary process in 1917 leaves no doubt that the presence of the Bolshevik Party, with Lenin and Trotsky in its leadership, was decisive in securing the victory of the socialist revolution. The movement of the Russian working class, supported by a revolutionary uprising of the peasantry, assumed gigantic dimensions in 1917. But no realistic reading of the events of that year permits the conclusion that the working class would have come to power without the leadership provided by the Bolshevik Party. Drawing the essential lesson of this experience, Trotsky later insisted: "The role and the responsibility of the leadership [of the working class] in a revolutionary epoch is colossal." This conclusion remains as valid in the present historical situation as it was in 1917.^[13]

In *Lessons of October*, Trotsky sums up this idea:

Events have proved that without a party capable of directing the proletarian revolution, the revolution itself is rendered impossible. The proletariat cannot seize power by a spontaneous uprising. ... One propertied class is able to seize the power that has been wrested from another propertied class because it is able to base itself upon its riches, its cultural level, and its innumerable connections with the old state apparatus. But there is nothing else that can serve the proletariat as a substitute for its own party.^[14]

Soviet Russia and the strategy of world socialist revolution: The first four congresses of the Communist International, 1919-1922

The October Revolution was an international event in every sense of the word. On the one hand, more than a dozen foreign powers intervened in Russia to support the White Army and overthrow the working class. On the other hand, the years following the October Revolution saw numerous uprisings and revolutions around the world.

The most significant was the November Revolution in Germany. Here, the importance of the revolutionary party was confirmed in a negative way. The left wing of the Social Democracy had hesitated to break with the SPD and later with the centrist USPD and build an independent revolutionary party. There were complex historical and political reasons for this, but the result was that the discredited SPD, with the support of the centrist USPD, was able to disempower the workers' councils and strangle the November Revolution.

When the left wing of the SPD finally broke away and founded the KPD on January 1, 1919, it took only two weeks before its leaders Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were brutally murdered by right-wing Freikorps soldiers during the Spartacus uprising at the behest of the SPD government. The bourgeoisie, for its part, had learned its lesson from the October Revolution and plastered posters all over Berlin reading: "Schlagt ihre Führer tot!" – "Kill their leaders!" This episode is not insignificant for the discussion of Security and the Fourth International.

Seven weeks after the assassination of Luxemburg and Liebknecht, the founding congress of the Comintern took place. Lenin and Trotsky drew the conclusion from the October Revolution and the experiences in Germany that Communist parties modeled on the Bolsheviks must be built in every country of the world in order to enable the spread of the revolution and make the socialist world revolution a reality. The manifesto of the founding congress, written by Trotsky, states:

Our task is to generalize the revolutionary experience of the working class, to purge the movement of the corroding admixture of opportunism and social-patriotism, to unify the efforts of all genuinely revolutionary parties of the world proletariat and thereby facilitate and hasten the victory of the Communist revolution throughout the world. ...

If the First International presaged the future course of development and indicated its paths; if the Second International gathered and organized millions of workers; then the Third International is the International of open mass action, the International of revolutionary realization, the International of the deed.^[15]

These were not just words. The Comintern adopted very definitive organizational principles that were intended to rule out any half-heartedness toward opportunists and any centrism, and which were expressed in the 21 Conditions for Membership in the Comintern. The manifesto of the Second Congress, at which the conditions were adopted, stated in no uncertain terms:

The Communist International is the party of the revolutionary education of the world proletariat. It rejects all those organizations and groups which openly or covertly stupefy, demoralize and weaken the proletariat, exhorting it to kneel before the fetishes which are a facade for the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie: legalism, democracy, national defense, etc.

Neither can the Communist International admit into its ranks those organizations which, after inscribing the dictatorship of the proletariat in their program, continue to conduct a policy which obviously relies upon a peaceful solution of the historical crisis. Mere recognition of the Soviet system settles nothing. The Soviet form of organization does not possess any miraculous powers. Revolutionary power lies within the proletariat itself. It is necessary for the proletariat to rise for the conquest of power—then and only then does the Soviet organization reveal its qualities as the irreplaceable instrument in the hands of the proletariat.^[16]

The irreconcilable attitude toward opportunists stood in direct interaction with the unconditional internationalism of the Comintern. Already in its founding manifesto, the connection between opportunism and nationalism was pointed out and contrasted with the concept of a truly international party that allows nothing other than the independent line of the working class. It states:

As far back as 1889, these parties came together in the Congress of Paris and created the organization of the Second International. But the center of gravity of the labor movement during that period remained wholly on national soil, wholly within the framework of national states, upon the foundation of national industry, within the sphere of national parliamentarianism. The decades of reformist organizational activity gave birth to an entire generation of leaders, the majority of whom recognized in words the program of the social revolution but renounced it in deeds, becoming mired in reformism, in a docile adaptation to the bourgeois state. The opportunist character of the leading parties of the Second International has been completely exposed; and it led to the greatest collapse in world history at a moment when the march of historic events demanded revolutionary methods of struggle from

the working-class parties. If the war of 1870 dealt a blow to the First International, revealing that there was as yet no fused mass force behind its social-revolutionary program, then the war of 1914 killed the Second International, revealing that the mightiest organizations of the working masses were dominated by parties which had become transformed into auxiliary organs of the bourgeois state!^[17]

The Comintern did not simply understand internationalism as solidarity between workers. Rather, it understood revolution as an international process that could only be accomplished through a precise understanding of world development and the experiences of the working class in each individual country as part of the wealth of experience of the entire movement. It was not simply an internationalist perspective; it was the perspective of world revolution. Trotsky explained this brilliantly in his response to the accusation that the Bolsheviks were forcing the Russian perspective on the other Comintern sections:

From our standpoint, the world economy is viewed as an organic unity on whose ground the world proletarian revolution evolves; and the Communist International takes its orientation from the entire world economic complex, analyzing it by means of the scientific methods of Marxism and utilizing all the experiences of past struggles. This does not, of course, exclude but rather presupposes that the development of each country has its own peculiar features, that specific situations have their peculiarities, and so on. But in order to correctly evaluate these peculiarities, it is necessary to approach them in their international context.^[18]

Understanding the entire world situation through the historical experiences of the movement in each country in order to develop a revolutionary strategy is the concretization of Lenin's call in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, and it remains the foundation of our party to this day.

Here, too, the Comintern drew very definitive organizational conclusions. One of the 21 conditions was to work under the authority of the Comintern and its Executive Committee. For the first time, a truly international party had been created in this way. In preparation for the Second Congress, Trotsky wrote:

Let us repeat, the Communist International is not an arithmetic sum of national workers' parties. It is the Communist Party of the international proletariat. The German Communists have the right and the obligation to raise pointblank the question: on what grounds is Turati [2] a member of their party? In reviewing the question of the entry of the Independent German Social Democrats and of the French Socialist Party into the Third International, the Russian Communists have the right and the obligation to pose such conditions as would, from their viewpoint, secure our international party against dilution and disintegration. Every organization entering the ranks of the Communist International acquires in turn the right and the opportunity to actively influence the theory and practice of Russian Bolsheviks, German Spartacists, etc., etc.^[19]

Looking at the manifestos and discussions of the first four congresses of the Comintern as a whole, one encounters a language that is unique and found today only among us. The intense striving to penetrate the objective

class dynamics and world development and at the same time to write directly for the struggle, to intervene in this development with all one's might. At all times uncompromising toward all attempts to water down the program and adapt to national pressures.

At its third and fourth congresses, the Comintern recognized that the revolutionary upsurge had temporarily ebbed, but presented thorough analyses of why capitalism could not return to its pre-war stability and why new storms were coming. Under these conditions, the Comintern paid great attention to the question of how the Communist parties could maneuver in the tide of class struggle, win the confidence of the class, and break the workers' masses from the reformist organizations. Trotsky summed up the significance of the Third Congress as follows:

The Third Congress took note of the further falling apart of the economic foundations of bourgeois rule. But it has at the same time forcibly warned the advanced workers against any naive conceptions that from this flows automatically the death of the bourgeoisie through an uninterrupted offensive by the proletariat. Never before has the bourgeoisie's class instinct of self-preservation been armed with such multiform methods of defense and attack as today. The economic preconditions for the victory of the working class are at hand. Failing this victory, and moreover unless this victory comes in the more or less near future, all civilization is threatened with decline and degeneration. But this victory can be gained only by the skillful conduct of battles and, above all, by first conquering the majority of the working class. This is the main lesson of the Third Congress.^[20]

These questions of leadership were soon to come to a head again when a revolutionary situation developed in Germany in 1923. The discussions that then took place in the Comintern were already an expression of the growing conflicts between the Marxists and the growing bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. But Joe will speak about that now.

I would like to conclude by noting that, despite international terror and historical slander, Stalin was unable to wipe out this tradition. It lives on in our movement. With the work on Security and the Fourth International, the Workers League not only strengthened its ties to this history, it also carried it forward in the best tradition by directing its fire at the Stalinists and imperialists and, above all, at the revisionists, and by understanding the historical significance of this struggle. It demonstrated that the Pabloites had broken in every respect with the revolutionary struggle for the independence of the working class, with the tradition of the October Revolution and the Comintern.

North, David & Kishore, Joseph, "Socialism and the Centenary of the Russian Revolution," in: *Why study the Russian Revolution?*, Volume 1, p. 13 (Oak Park: Mehring Books 2017)

V. I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, "Collected Works, Vol. 14 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), p. 325

Kishore, Joseph, "Spontaneity and Consciousness in the February Revolution, in: *Why study the Russian Revolution?*, Volume 1, p. 92 (Oak Park: Mehring Books 2017)

North, David, *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*, p. 14 (Oak Park: Mehring Books, 2010)

Quoted from: North, David, *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished 20th Century*, pp. 353 (Oak Park: Mehring Books, 2014)

Trotsky, Leon "Our Differences," in *1905*, pp. 314-317 (New York: Random House, 1971)

Day, Richard & Gaido, Daniel, *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution*, pp. 444-445 (Brill 2009)

Trotsky, Leon, *The Permanent Revolution*,

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tpr/index.htm>

North, David, *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*, p. 18 (Oak Park: Mehring Books, 2010)

North, David, "Why Study the Russian Revolution," in: *Why Study the Russian Revolution?*, Volume 1, p. 32 (Oak Park: Mehring Books 2017)

Lenin, "The Tasks of the Proletariat in our Revolution," p. 67, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, Moscow 1964)

Lenin Collected Works Volume 25, pp. 366-368 (Moscow: 1964)

North, David, "Why Study the Russian Revolution," in: *Why Study the Russian Revolution?*, Volume 1, pp. 20-21 (Oak Park: Mehring Books 2017)

Trotsky, Leon, *Lessons of October*,
<https://www.wsws.org/en/special/library/lessons-of-october-leon-trotsky-1924/01.html>

Trotsky, Leon, "Manifesto of the Communist International to the Workers of the World,"
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/ffyci-1/ch01.htm>

Trotsky, Leon, "Manifesto of the Second World Congress,"
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/ffyci-1/ch12b.htm>

Trotsky, Leon, "Manifesto of the Communist International to the Workers of the World,"
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/ffyci-1/ch01.htm>

Trotsky, Leon, "On the Policy of the KAPD,"
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/ffyci-1/ch13.htm>

Trotsky, Leon, "On the Coming Congress of the Comintern,"
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/ffyci-1/ch10.htm>

Trotsky, Leon, "The Main Lesson of the Third Congress,"
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/ffyci-1/ch25.htm>

[1] North, David & Kishore, Joseph, "Socialism and the Centenary of the Russian Revolution," in: *Why study the Russian Revolution?*, Volume 1, p. 13 (Oak Park: Mehring Books 2017)

[2] V. I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, "Collected Works, Vol. 14 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), p. 325

[3] Kishore, Joseph, "Spontaneity and Consciousness in the February Revolution, in: *Why study the Russian Revolution?*, Volume 1, p. 92 (Oak Park: Mehring Books 2017)

[4] North, David, *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*, p. 14 (Oak Park: Mehring Books, 2010)

[5] Quoted from: North, David, *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished 20th Century*, pp. 353 (Oak Park: Mehring Books, 2014)

[6] Trotsky, Leon "Our Differences," in *1905*, pp. 314-317 (New York: Random House, 1971)

[7] Day, Richard & Gaido, Daniel, *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution*, pp. 444-445 (Brill 2009)

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tpr/index.htm>

[9] North, David, *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*, p. 18 (Oak Park: Mehring Books, 2010)

[10] North, David, "Why Study the Russian Revolution," in: *Why Study the Russian Revolution?*, Volume 1, p. 32 (Oak Park: Mehring Books 2017)

[11] Lenin, "The Tasks of the Proletariat in our Revolution," p. 67, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, Moscow 1964)

[12] *Lenin Collected Works* Volume 25, pp. 366-368 (Moscow: 1964)

[13] North, David, "Why Study the Russian Revolution," in: *Why Study the Russian Revolution?*, Volume 1, pp. 20-21 (Oak Park: Mehring Books 2017)

<https://www.wsws.org/en/special/library/lessons-of-october-leon-trotsky-1924/01.html>

[15] Trotsky, Leon, "Manifesto of the Communist International to the Workers of the World,"
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/ffyci-1/ch01.htm>

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/ffyci-1/ch12b.htm>

[17] Trotsky, Leon, "Manifesto of the Communist International to the Workers of the World,"
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/ffyci-1/ch01.htm>

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/ffyci-1/ch13.htm>

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/ffyci-1/ch10.htm>

[20] Trotsky, Leon, "The Main Lesson of the Third Congress,"
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/ffyci-1/ch25.htm>



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)