

World Socialist Revolution is the answer to imperialist war and fascism

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David North delivered lectures online at the invitation of Social Democracy clubs at Bilkent University and Middle East Technical University, both located in Ankara, Turkey. This lecture was delivered on February 19.

I welcome this opportunity to speak to you from Detroit, and allow me to express my gratitude to the Social Democratic Club for extending this invitation.

This meeting is being held under conditions of immense crisis. There is an imminent danger of a US and Israeli attack on Iran. According to a report published several hours ago in the *New York Times*:

The rapid buildup of U.S. forces in the Middle East has progressed to the point that President Trump has the option to take military action against Iran as soon as this weekend, administration and Pentagon officials said, leaving the White House with high-stakes choices pursuing diplomacy or war. ...

Israeli forces, which have been on heightened alert for weeks, have been making preparations for a possible war, and a meeting of Israel's security cabinet was moved from Sunday to Thursday [today], according to two Israeli defense officials.

The International Committee of the Fourth International, the Socialist Equality Party in the United States, and the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site* denounce the planned war on Iran. It is an open violation of international law. It falls under the category of a "crime against peace," which was the principal charge brought against the Nazi leaders in the 1945–46 trials in Nuremberg.

The fascistic Trump government is capable of any crime. It conducts foreign policy in the manner of Hitler's Third Reich.

In just the last six weeks, Trump's regime has attacked Venezuela and kidnapped its president. It has imposed a blockade of Cuba, aimed at depriving it of oil and starving its population. It is supporting the ongoing Israeli genocide of the people of Gaza.

Whether or not the war begins within the next few days, or within several weeks or even months, there will be war. Even if there is a sudden announcement of a diplomatic breakthrough, it will do no more than change the timetable of an attack. The objectives of US imperialism—the domination of the planet—cannot be achieved peacefully. War against Iran is, for the United States, an essential stage in its preparation for the coming conflict with China.

War will not be stopped by appeals to imperialist and bourgeois governments. The international working class confronts a situation comparable to that which existed on the eve of World War II. But the comparison is inadequate, because the consequences of war today would be infinitely more terrible than they were 87 years ago. Humanity faces

the imminent danger of a nuclear catastrophe that could result in the destruction of all human life.

This is the situation that imparts to the words of Leon Trotsky, written in 1938, an overwhelming urgency: "Without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind."

This is why today's meeting is so important. One cannot speak seriously about socialist revolution without turning to a careful study of the life and work of Leon Trotsky.

Among the most important years of Trotsky's life were spent in Turkey, most of that time on the island of Büyükada. Between 1929 and 1933 Trotsky wrote his autobiography, *My Life*, and his incomparable *History of the Russian Revolution*. He also wrote the great political documents that analyzed the political situation in Germany and warned that the disastrous policies of the German Communist Party were clearing the path for the coming to power of Hitler's Nazi Party. Finally, on the eve of his departure from Büyükada, in July 1933, Trotsky issued the call for the building of the Fourth International.

What were the events that led to Trotsky's exile?

In January 1929, Leon Trotsky was expelled from the Soviet Union by the bureaucratic regime led by Stalin. During the previous five years he had led the struggle of the Left Opposition, founded in October 1923, against the bureaucratic degeneration of the workers state created by the 1917 October Revolution. Notwithstanding the lies of the Stalinist regime, it is a historical fact that Trotsky's role in the Bolshevik Party's conquest of power and the survival of the Soviet regime in the struggle against imperialist intervention between 1918 and 1921 was comparable to that played by Lenin.

This assessment of Trotsky's role is based on the following:

The perspective that culminated in the Bolshevik seizure of power was based on Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, which he had developed in the aftermath of the revolution of 1905. Trotsky foresaw that the bourgeois democratic revolution in Russia would assume the form of a socialist revolution, in which the working class would overthrow the capitalist class and take power in its own hands. Moreover, the workers revolution in Russia would be not only a national event; its fate would be inextricably linked to the development of the world socialist revolution.

This was the perspective that Lenin adopted in April 1917 upon his return to Russia. As a consequence of the outbreak of the first imperialist world war in 1914, Lenin altered his appraisal of the class dynamic of revolution in Russia. He abandoned the Bolshevik Party's longstanding program of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry and argued that the task arising from the overthrow of the tsarist regime was the conquest of power by the working class.

In the course of the world war, which exposed the reactionary role of the Second International and its Menshevik adherents in Russia, Trotsky came to recognize the correctness of the struggle that Lenin had waged since 1903 against opportunist and centrist tendencies.

Thus, the change in the Bolshevik Party program, and Trotsky's acceptance of Lenin's farsighted principles of party organization, brought to a conclusion the earlier pre-1917 factional conflicts between these two historic figures. Trotsky and many of his co-thinkers entered the Bolshevik Party. As Lenin was to write in September 1917, there was no better Bolshevik than Trotsky.

In September–October 1917, Trotsky—as chairman of the Military-Revolutionary Committee of the Soviet—was the principal tactician and organizer of the seizure of power.

In the spring of 1918, Trotsky was appointed Commissar of War and Supreme Commander of the newly created Red Army. During the next three years, Trotsky played the most critical role in its victory over the counterrevolutionary forces backed by all the major imperialist powers.

Lenin and Trotsky played the decisive role in the founding of the Third International, and were the most influential figures in the first four congresses of the Comintern held annually between 1919 and 1922. Trotsky wrote the historic Manifesto of the Second Congress, and delivered many of the most important speeches at these critical congresses. Stalin, by contrast, did not deliver a single speech at any of the first four congresses.

The political strategy which underlay the founding of the Communist International (Comintern) and guided its first four congresses was that the victory of the October Revolution marked the beginning of the World Socialist Revolution. In fact, the strategic calculations that guided the policies pursued by the Bolsheviks after Lenin's return to Russia in April 1917 were based, first and foremost, on an appraisal of international, rather than national, conditions.

The issues that initially led to the formation of the Left Opposition were related to economic policies, the bureaucratization of the Russian Communist Party (RCP) and the suppression of inner-party democracy. But the even more significant division within the RCP emerged in 1924. In the aftermath of Lenin's death, the factional attacks on Trotsky intensified. The anti-Marxist essence of the campaign against Trotsky was revealed in December 1924 in an essay written by Stalin, where for the first time he advanced, in opposition to the internationalist strategy of the October Revolution, the national-chauvinist program of "socialism in one country."

Crudely falsifying the history of the October Revolution and the writings of Lenin, Stalin denounced the program of permanent revolution and declared that the survival of the USSR and the building of socialism did not require the victory of socialism in the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe and North America, that there existed within Russia sufficient national resources for the development of a socialist society.

He attacked Trotsky's insistence that, in Stalin's own words, "the victory of socialism in one country is impossible, that that victory of socialism is possible only as the victory of several of the principal countries of Europe (Britain, Russia, Germany), which combine into a United States of Europe; otherwise it is not possible at all."

Stalin attacked with particular vehemence the following statement by Trotsky:

As long as the bourgeoisie remains in power in the other European countries we shall be compelled, in our struggle against economic isolation, to strive for agreements with the capitalist world; at the same time it may be said with certainty that these agreements may at best help us to mitigate some of our economic ills, to take one or another step forward, but real progress of a socialist economy in Russia will become possible only after the victory of the proletariat in the major capitalist countries.

These words, declared Stalin with his characteristic dishonesty, cynicism and pragmatic short-sightedness, amounted to the "final shipwreck" of the theory of permanent revolution.

More than a century has passed since the Stalinist bureaucracy launched its assault on Trotsky and the program of permanent revolution. The repudiation of the program of world socialist revolution culminated 35 years ago in the "final shipwreck" of the Soviet Union. Notwithstanding the genuine achievements of the Soviet Union and the extraordinary sacrifices of the Soviet working class, especially during World War II, socialism was never built. The program of "socialism in one country" led to innumerable political disasters, culminating in the dissolution of the USSR in 1991.

Even in the aftermath of the voluntarily dissolution of the USSR by the Soviet bureaucracy, the reactionary remnants of the old Communist parties, as well as groups of pseudo-left petty-bourgeois radicals and nationalists, proclaim Stalin as their hero. They declare their solidarity with the man who not only ordered the murder of Lenin's closest comrades in the leadership of the Bolshevik Party but also instigated the bloody terror that exterminated hundreds of thousands of Marxist workers, intellectuals and artists between 1936 and 1940. Among Stalin's victims were socialist leaders beyond the borders of the USSR, including the leader of the Spanish POUM, Andreu Nin, and, finally, Trotsky himself.

The strategic conceptions of Trotsky have been vindicated by the entire course of history. Indeed, Trotsky's analysis of the global crisis of the capitalist system retain an extraordinary level of political relevance.

In 1928, exiled to Alma Ata in Kazakhstan, Trotsky wrote a detailed critique of the Draft Program of the Comintern. It was a withering analysis of the theoretical and strategic bankruptcy of the program of socialism in one country. In one of its most critical passages, Trotsky advanced this evaluation of the historical epoch:

In our epoch, which is the epoch of imperialism, i.e., of world economy and world politics under the hegemony of finance capital, not a single communist party can establish its program by proceeding solely or mainly from conditions and tendencies of developments in its own country. This also holds entirely for the party that wields the state power within the boundaries of the USSR. On August 4, 1914, the death knell sounded for national programs for all time. The revolutionary party of the proletariat can base itself only upon an international program corresponding to the character of the present epoch, the epoch of the highest development and collapse of capitalism. An international communist program is in no case the sum total of national programs or an amalgam of their common features. The international program must proceed directly from an analysis of the conditions and tendencies of world economy and of the world political system taken as a whole in all its connections and contradictions, that is, with the mutually antagonistic interdependence of its separate parts. In the present epoch, to a much larger extent than in the past, the national orientation of the proletariat must and can flow only from a world orientation and not vice versa. Herein lies the basic and primary difference between communist internationalism and all varieties of national socialism.

As a result of its nationalist orientation, the draft program drafted by Bukharin, with Stalin's approval, failed to understand the contradictions of the imperialist world system, and, especially, the explosive implications of the rise of American imperialism. Trotsky insisted that without a precise analysis of the role of the United States, the prospects for world

socialist revolution could not be correctly formulated. Trotsky stressed the dominant role of the United States. However, he did not draw from this analysis the conclusion that the United States was invincible. Instead, with astonishing perspicacity, Trotsky wrote that:

it is precisely the international strength of the United States and her irresistible expansion arising from it, that compels her to include the powder magazines of the whole world into the foundations of her structure, i.e., all the antagonisms between the East and the West, the class struggle in Old Europe, the uprisings of the colonial masses, and all wars and revolutions. On the one hand, this transforms North American capitalism into the basic counter-revolutionary force of the modern epoch, constantly more interested in the maintenance of “order” in every corner of the terrestrial globe; and on the other hand, this prepares the ground for a gigantic revolutionary explosion in this already dominant and still expanding world imperialist power.

Trotsky continued:

In the period of crisis the hegemony of the United States will operate more completely, more openly, and more ruthlessly than in the period of boom. The United States will seek to overcome and extricate herself from her difficulties and maladies primarily at the expense of Europe, regardless of whether this occurs in Asia, Canada, South America, Australia, or Europe itself, or whether this takes place peacefully or through war.

These words, written 98 years ago, describe with astonishing exactitude the present policy of the Trump administration. If I may be permitted to quote from an essay that I wrote last week:

Trotsky did not only predict a general tendency toward imperialist conflict. He identified, with extraordinary specificity, the geographic scope of American imperialism’s predatory ambitions and the ruthlessness with which they would be pursued. Nearly a century later, Trump threatens the sovereignty of Canada, threaten to seize control of the Panama Canal, invades Venezuela, demands the cession of Greenland from Denmark and menaces Iran with military destruction.

In 1934, with the rise of German fascism and the approach of a second world war, Trotsky further developed his analysis of US imperialism: “The world is divided? It must be redivided. For Germany it was a question of ‘organizing Europe.’ The United States must ‘organize’ the world. History is bringing humanity face to face with the volcanic eruption of American imperialism.”

That phrase—the volcanic eruption of American imperialism—is not a metaphor that has aged. It is a scientific prognosis that is being fulfilled.

Eighty years after the end of the Second World War, the United States bluntly proclaims that it seeks to reorganize the world under its control on the basis of a reactionary program that Hitler would applaud.

On February 14, Secretary of State Marco Rubio delivered a speech at the Munich Security Conference that is an overtly fascist justification of imperialist militarism, national and racial chauvinism, and the repudiation of international law.

That the speech was delivered in Munich imparts to it an irony that its authors were either too ignorant or too cynical to acknowledge. Munich is not only the city where the postwar security conference has been held since 1963. It is the city where Adolf Hitler launched his political career, made his first attempt to overthrow the Weimar Republic in November 1923, where the Nazi Party held its earliest mass rallies, and where, in September 1938, the governments of Britain and France dismembered Czechoslovakia and handed it to Hitler. The British and French ruling classes were prepared to sacrifice an ostensibly democratic republic to a fascist dictator in the hope that the Nazi war machine would continue to focus on the east, toward the Soviet Union, and leave their empires intact. The consequences of this connivance with Hitler are well known: the most catastrophic war in human history, the Holocaust, and the deaths of tens of millions.

Rubio does not mention the crimes of fascism. Rather, for the American secretary of state, the downfall of the Third Reich was a tragic historical turning point:

For five centuries, before the end of the Second World War, the West had been expanding—its missionaries, its pilgrims, its soldiers, its explorers pouring out from its shores to cross oceans, settle new continents, build vast empires extending out across the globe.

But in 1945, for the first time since the age of Columbus, it was contracting. Europe was in ruins. Half of it lived behind an Iron Curtain and the rest looked like it would soon follow. The great Western empires had entered into terminal decline, accelerated by godless communist revolutions, and by anti-colonial uprisings that would transform the world and drape the red hammer and sickle across vast swaths of the map in the years to come.

The scaffolding of Rubio’s speech is the concept of “Western civilization” as a singular, organic entity stretching back millennia. “Thousands of years of Western civilization hung in the balance,” Rubio declares of the Cold War. He invokes “the lessons of over 5,000 years of recorded human history.” He speaks of “the greatest civilization in human history.”

This is not history. It is mythology. The Secretary of State can’t even count. Five thousand years reaches back to Sumer and dynastic Egypt—civilizations that were geographically Middle Eastern and North African and that belong to the heritage of all humanity. The ancient Greeks did not consider themselves “Western.” The concept of “Western Civilization” is a dubious and relatively modern intellectual construct forged largely in the service of European colonial expansion.

After the fall of Rome, most of Greek philosophy was lost to Latin Christendom for centuries. Its recovery depended on Arab and Persian scholars who preserved, translated, and extended Greek thought while Europe remained an intellectual backwater. The mathematical foundations of modern science are no less indebted to the East: algebra originated in ninth-century Baghdad; the decimal numeral system came from India; paper, printing, the compass and gunpowder came from China. None of this is acknowledged in Rubio’s speech. “The West” is presented as a civilizational miracle owing nothing to anyone.

Rubio, who is as ignorant as he is reactionary, is unaware of the fact that the American Revolution was proclaimed by its leaders to a new development in the evolution of humanity, not a continuation of a timeless and eternal civilization, backward traditions and obsolete forms of government. As the revolutionary thinker Tom Paine wrote in his famous pamphlet *Common Sense*, “We have it in our power to begin the world anew.”

What Rubio's speech leaves out is as revealing as what it contains. The words "democracy," "equality," and "human rights" do not appear anywhere in the text. Neither does the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Bill of Rights, or the Emancipation Proclamation.

These omissions are deliberate. The democratic revolutions were founded on universalist principles irreconcilable with the politics Rubio articulates. The Declaration of Independence asserts that "all men are created equal." The Declaration of the Rights of Man proclaims that "men are born and remain free and equal in rights." The Bill of Rights protects the individual against the power of the state. The speech cannot mention these documents because their logic leads to conclusions—the equality of all human beings, the universality of rights, the subordination of power to law—that the speech repudiates.

Rubio's hatred of the Enlightenment replicates that of the Nazis. On April 1, 1933, Goebbels declared: "The year 1789—the beginning of the French Revolution—is hereby erased from history."

Rubio's speech is based on an anti-Enlightenment and fascistic ideology deeply rooted in bourgeois thought. Though undermined and driven into the background by the defeat of the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini in 1945, fascist ideology has resurged since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Rubio's Munich speech represents the legitimization of fascism. The institutions of liberal modernity—international law, multilateral cooperation, the restraint of state power by legal norms—are obstacles to be swept aside. What must replace them is a hierarchical order rooted in ethnic and racial identity and upheld through authoritarian dictatorship and war. There is nothing in this speech that Goebbels would not have endorsed enthusiastically.

The Secretary of State's glorification of "Christian civilization" is shot through with deceit and hypocrisy. He fails to mention the Inquisition and its centuries of systematic torture, forced conversion and the burning alive of heretics, Jews and accused witches.

The "vast empires" the speech romanticizes were built on countless atrocities, which included the Atlantic slave trade and the systematic plunder of India by the British East India Company, which transformed one of the world's wealthiest regions into a colonized hinterland and produced famines that killed tens of millions. King Leopold's empire in the Belgian Congo was based on the extraction of rubber through forced labor, mutilation, and mass killing that reduced the population by an estimated 10 million. Countless other examples could be given.

A critical clarification must be made here—one that distinguishes the Marxist analysis of these historical crimes from Rubio's framework and from the liberal critiques that merely invert his civilizational mythology.

The slave trade, the destruction of Indigenous peoples, the plunder of India, the horrors of the Congo—these were not the products of an abstraction called "Western civilization." They were not the emanations of a cultural essence or a racial inheritance. They were the products of a historically specific mode of production: capitalism, which, as Marx wrote, "comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt."

The so-called primitive accumulation of capital—the violent expropriation of the peasantry, the slave trade, colonial plunder—was not an incidental feature of capitalist development. It was its precondition. As Marx wrote in *Das Kapital*:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signaled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief

momenta of primitive accumulation.

Rubio's speech obscures this sordid history by attributing the power of the capitalist epoch to a timeless "Western civilization"—a mystification that serves several purposes.

First, it naturalizes capitalist domination by presenting it as the flowering of an eternal racial, ethnic and religious essence. Second, it provides a justification for oppression and the most heinous of crimes. Third, it provides a substitute for a scientific analysis of the socioeconomic foundations of society and, above all, the class struggle. Trotsky's description of the reactionary and irrational fantasies of the Nazi ideologists can be applied without modification to Rubio's racial-ethnic-religious theory of history. In his 1934 essay, "What Is National Socialism?" Trotsky wrote:

In order to raise it above history, the nation is given the support of race. History is viewed as the emanation of the race. The qualities of the race are construed without relation to changing social conditions. Rejecting "economic thought" as base, National Socialism descends a stage lower: from economic materialism it appeals to zoologic materialism.

Though Rubio does not recognize the class struggle, he is obsessed by it. Rubio's narrative of the 20th century is preoccupied with the struggle against Marxism and socialist revolution. This aligns the administration with the most reactionary tradition in American foreign policy. It is the tradition that justified every Cold War atrocity, from the overthrow of Mossadegh in Iran and Arbenz in Guatemala to the Vietnam War and the support of military dictatorships across Latin America, Africa and Asia, as a defense of "Western civilization" against "godless communism." By invoking this tradition without qualification, the speech signals that the same justification will be used to legitimate whatever military and covert actions the administration undertakes.

The speech's most ominous passages celebrate the administration's use of unilateral military force and explicitly dismiss international law. Rubio recites a catalogue of violence with evident pride: the bombing of Iran, the seizure of a head of state in Venezuela. He declares that "those who blatantly and openly threaten our citizens" cannot be allowed to "shield themselves behind abstractions of international law." He calls for an alliance "that does not allow its power to be outsourced, constrained, or subordinated to systems beyond its control" and "that asks for permission before it acts."

In another passage, Rubio states: "Armies do not fight for abstractions. Armies fight for a people; armies fight for a nation. Armies fight for a way of life." Rubio's statement amounts to the reduction of countries, including the United States, into ethnic and racial tribes. As for his claim that armies "do not fight for abstractions," how does Rubio explain the revolutionary war of independence waged by the Americans between 1775 and 1783? The population was mobilized on the basis of the "self-evident" and abstract "truths" defined by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence. In 1863, at the battlefield of Gettysburg, Lincoln declared that the Union soldiers had fought and died in defense of the "*proposition* that all men are created equal."

A renowned historian and biographer of Lincoln wrote to me earlier this week, in response to Rubio's speech: "Half a million Union soldiers lost their lives in a civil war that was all about an idea."

The "truths" invoked by Jefferson and the "proposition" defended by Lincoln were "abstractions" that had a profound historical, social and democratic content, rooted in the materialist philosophy of the

Enlightenment, and which prepared the foundations for the revolutionary movements of the late 18th and 19th centuries.

Rubio, denouncing the “abstractions” of democratic thought, glorifies the irrational abstractions of fascism: “People,” “nation,” and “way of life,” which are of a mystical character and contribute nothing to a scientific understanding of the history and socioeconomic structure of society. The fact that Rubio’s fascistic idiocies received a standing ovation at the conclusion of his address demonstrates that the Trump administration’s repudiation of democratic principles is shared by the European bourgeoisie.

The speech did not fall from the sky. The Trump administration is the product of interrelated economic and social processes: 1) the protracted decline in the global industrial supremacy of the United States. 2) the malignant growth of financialization, which is characterized by the overwhelming dominance of financial markets, instruments and institutions over the real economy, production and labor. Profits are generated not through productive investment, but through speculative activities such as leveraging, asset inflation, credit expansion and mergers. 3) the emergence of a new aristocracy—it can also be described as an oligarchy of mega-millionaires and billionaires—whose fortunes derive not from production, but from the management and manipulation of financial assets. The basis of their wealth is a massive expansion of fictitious capital. 4) The growth of staggering levels of social inequality. In the United States, the wealth of the richest 0.1 percent of the population is five times greater than the total wealth of the bottom 50 percent of the population.

These objective economic and social conditions underlie the breakdown of bourgeois democracy, the turn to fascism and the eruption of militarism. The domestic and foreign policies of the Trump administration are a manifestation of crisis. It is seeking to reverse the drastic deterioration of its global economic position through war. It is attempting to impose the burdens of the massive national indebtedness—now over \$38 trillion—through the intensified exploitation and impoverishment of the working class.

It is instructive to measure the distance the American political order has traveled. Franklin Roosevelt, in his 1941 State of the Union address, defined American war aims in terms of four universal freedoms (i.e., “abstractions”)—freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear—“everywhere in the world.” These were not the privileges of Western civilization or Christian peoples. They were declared the birthright of “every person in the world.” Roosevelt understood that war could only be justified as a struggle against fascism.

Roosevelt could not have delivered Rubio’s speech. He believed that he was compelled to legitimate American power in democratic and universalist terms. That compulsion was maintained, in no small measure, by the pressure exerted by the existence of the Soviet Union and the threat of socialist revolution. Rubio’s speech marks the point at which the ruling class has dispensed with this obligation altogether. The revolutionary democratic tradition is repudiated, and what replaces it is the counterrevolutionary ideology of blood, faith and civilizational destiny against which the democratic revolutions were fought.

The speech’s visceral anti-communism expresses a class hatred that is, if anything, more intense today than during the Cold War, precisely because the crisis of the capitalist system that produced the revolutionary upheavals of the 20th century has returned.

What Rubio, Trump and the European ruling elites assembled at Munich are seeking to resurrect is the world that was shattered on October 25, 1917, when the Russian working class, led by the Bolshevik Party under Lenin and Trotsky, seized state power and established the first workers state in history. The October Revolution was not merely a Russian event. It was a world-historical earthquake. It demonstrated, in practice, that the capitalist system was not eternal, that the ruling class was not invincible,

that the working class could take power and begin the construction of a new social order. It set into motion a wave of revolutionary struggles—in Britain, Germany, Hungary, Italy, China and throughout the colonial world. It raised the political consciousness of hundreds of millions who had been told, for centuries, that their subjugation was the natural order of things.

The October Revolution contributed significantly to the victory of the progressive national movement in Turkey over imperialist-backed forces.

Starting in 1920–1921, Soviet Russia provided significant aid to the Ankara government, including gold, arms, and ammunition. This was critically important because the Turkish nationalists were fighting on multiple fronts. Without the critical support of the Soviet government, the independence of the Turkish state would not have been secured.

Of course, this did not prevent Atatürk’s bourgeois nationalist regime from brutally suppressing the communist movement within Turkey.

As a consequence of the October Revolution, the ideological framework within which the imperialist powers had justified their domination—the mythology of civilizational superiority, the divine right of “advanced” nations to rule “backward” peoples—was dealt a blow from which it has never recovered.

This is what Rubio’s speech is attempting to undo. When he mourns the “contraction” of Western civilization after 1945, he is mourning the consequences of October. Rubio demands that the West stop “atoning for the purported sins of past generations,” that they stop apologizing for the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Treblinka.

Rubio is demanding that the ruling class free itself from the moral and political constraints that the threat of socialist revolution imposed upon it. The welfare state, the concessions to democratic rights, the formal commitment to international law—all were, in substantial measure, products of the bourgeoisie’s fear of revolution. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the ruling class concluded this threat had passed and the concessions could be withdrawn. The Munich speech is the ideological expression of that withdrawal, carried to its logical conclusion in the open embrace of imperialist militarism and the repudiation of democratic norms.

The vehemence of the anti-communist rhetoric—in 2026, more than three decades after the dissolution of the USSR—betrays a deep anxiety about the stability of capitalism. Leon Trotsky once wrote that the American bourgeoisie is the most frightened of all ruling classes. What terrifies the ruling class is the prospect that the working class will again find its way to a genuinely Marxist revolutionary program—that the objective crisis of the capitalist system, which is producing levels of inequality, instability and geopolitical conflict not seen since the 1930s, will generate the same revolutionary impulses that produced October.

And no historical figure frightens the imperialists more than Leon Trotsky. His significance extends far beyond 1917, immense as that was. It was Trotsky who, in the theory of permanent revolution, provided the strategic conception that guided October and that retains its validity today: the understanding that in the epoch of imperialism, the democratic tasks in the oppressed countries, and in the most advanced imperialist countries as well, can be completed only through the conquest of power by the working class as part of the world socialist revolution. It was Trotsky who defended the program of international socialism against the Stalinist perversion of “socialism in one country.” And it was Trotsky who, in founding the Fourth International in 1938, established the programmatic continuity of genuine Marxism through the darkest period of the 20th century.

It is well-known that Hitler as well as his imperialist adversaries, including Churchill, would respond with rage to the mere mention of Trotsky’s name. Noting this fact, Trotsky wrote in 1939: “These gentlemen like to give a personal name to the specter of revolution.” The hatred that was directed against him personally, Trotsky explained,

reflects their fear “that their barbarism will be conquered by socialist revolution.”

The ruling class has devoted enormous resources to the suppression of Trotsky’s legacy. Stalin’s assassination of Trotsky in 1940 was the culmination of a campaign of political genocide—the Moscow Trials, the extermination of an entire generation of Bolshevik leaders—that served the interests not only of the Soviet bureaucracy but of the world bourgeoisie. The falsification of the history of the Russian Revolution and the suppression of Trotsky’s legacy have been central to the ideological armory of the ruling class. The “death of communism” narrative that followed the Soviet dissolution depended on the identification of socialism with Stalinism—the deliberate conflation of the revolutionary program of October with the bureaucratic counterrevolution that betrayed it.

Rubio’s speech conflates Stalinism with socialism and treats the bureaucratic regimes of the postwar period as though they were the realization, rather than the negation, of the October Revolution’s program.

The identification of Stalinism with socialism by imperialist propagandists is a political necessity. If the distinction between the revolutionary program of Lenin and Trotsky and the bureaucratic tyranny of Stalin is acknowledged, then the collapse of the Soviet Union proves nothing about the viability of socialism. It proves only what Trotsky predicted: that the Stalinist bureaucracy, by strangling workers’ democracy and subordinating the world revolution to its own national interests, would ultimately destroy the workers state and restore capitalism—which is precisely what happened. The “triumph of Western civilization” that Rubio celebrates was the triumph of the Stalinist counterrevolution—the final act in the bureaucracy’s long betrayal of October, carried out with the enthusiastic collaboration of the imperialist powers.

The implications are profound. If the crisis of socialism in the 20th century is understood not as the failure of the revolutionary program but as the consequence of its betrayal, then the program itself—the program of international socialist revolution, of workers power, of the planned reorganization of the world economy on the basis of social need rather than private profit—retains its full historical validity.

The working class must recognize Rubio’s speech for what it is: a celebration of unilateral military violence, the dismissal of international law, the identification of migration as civilizational threat, the mourning of lost empires, the demand for historical innocence, the erasure of the democratic revolutions and the fascist catastrophe from the historical record.

But the ruling class confronts a problem no amount of civilizational mythology can resolve. The objective crisis of the capitalist system—staggering inequality, the eruption of imperialist war, the breakdown of democratic institutions, the destruction of the environment—is driving the working class into struggle. The strike waves sweeping every major capitalist country, the mass protests, the growing radicalization of youth, the collapse of confidence in the established parties—these are the initial expressions of a revolutionary process that arises from the irresolvable contradictions of capitalism itself.

It is in this context that the legacy of October and the theoretical heritage of Leon Trotsky acquire their most immediate contemporary significance. The *World Socialist Web Site*, published by the International Committee of the Fourth International, has, for more than a quarter century, provided the consistent Marxist analysis of the crisis of world capitalism and the political orientation for the struggles of the working class. It has insisted, against every form of demoralization and revisionism, on the central lesson of the 20th century: that the crisis of the working class is a crisis of revolutionary leadership, and that its resolution requires the building of a mass revolutionary party of the international

working class, guided by the program of permanent revolution and organized for the conquest of political power.

Rubio’s Munich speech is the voice of a doomed social order. The “Western civilization” it celebrates is not a timeless essence but capitalist imperialism—a system that has exhausted its progressive potential and now threatens humanity with barbarism. The alternative is not a reformed capitalism, nor a more enlightened imperialism. The alternative is socialism—the reorganization of economic life on the basis of social ownership, democratic planning and international cooperation, carried out by the only class with both the interest and the power to accomplish it.

The imperialists are right to be afraid. The specter of October has not been laid to rest because the contradictions that produced it have intensified. The international working class is larger, more interconnected and more powerful today than at any point in history. What it lacks is the conscious political leadership that can transform the growing resistance of working people into a unified movement for socialist transformation. The building of that leadership—the construction of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in every country—is the decisive political task of our epoch.

Permit me to conclude this lecture by citing words written by Trotsky in 1930 on the island of Büyükdada:

The completion of the socialist revolution within national limits is unthinkable. 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 nation state. From this follows on the one hand, imperialist wars, on the other, the utopia of the 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.

It is the responsibility and privilege of your generation to fight for and achieve “the final victory” of socialism envisioned by Leon Trotsky.



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