

Communist Party Marxist - Kenya defends counter-revolutionary Maoist strategy against Trotskyism—Part 3

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This is the third part of a four-part series. Parts one and two are available here.

The CPM-K's attacks on Permanent Revolution and the lessons of the Russian Revolution

In both “Building the Vanguard Party in Kenya” and Kaluka’s diatribe against Trotskyism, the central target is Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution. Trotskyism is dismissed as “skipping the NDR” stage, “pretending that a tiny urban working class alone can carry the revolution,” and adopting a “voluntarist line that has failed everywhere it was tried in the colonial world.” Kaluka accuses this author of demanding that the Kenyan working class “wait for this indefinite period, during which its alliance with other oppressed layers of the world unfolds globally, notwithstanding the different conditions around the globe.”

This attack is framed in the hysterical language of a petty-bourgeois nationalist. Trotskyism, he claims, is a “foreign import” unfit for the Kenyan “market”. But Kaluka turns reality on its head. It is not Trotskyism that is a counter-revolutionary export, but Stalinism and Maoism: the political products of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution of 1917.

When Kaluka deals with the Russian Revolution, he recycles Stalin’s lies against Trotsky and the Left Opposition for an immediate political purpose. Like every other line of his tirade and of “Building the Vanguard Party in Kenya”, it is aimed at subordinating the working class to the bourgeoisie.

Kaluka cites Stalin’s *Trotskyism or Leninism?* written in 1924 against Trotsky’s *Lessons of October*. He states that “comrade Stalin” said:

How could it happen that Trotsky, who carried such a nasty stock-in-trade on his back, found himself, after all, in the ranks of the Bolsheviks during the October movement? It happened because at that time Trotsky abandoned that stock-in-trade; he hid it in the cupboard. Had he not performed that operation, genuine cooperation with him

would have been impossible. The theory of the August bloc, i.e, the theory of unity with the Mensheviks, had already been shattered and thrown overboard by the revolution, for how could there be any talk about unity when an armed struggle was raging between the Bolsheviks and the mensheviks? Trotsky had no alternative but to admit that his theory was useless.

Stalin’s attack on Trotsky was part of the bureaucratic political counter-offensive that followed revolutionary defeats in Europe, especially the German Revolution in October 1923 and in Bulgaria. These defeats were widely interpreted inside the Russian Communist Party and among layers of the working class as the close of the revolutionary wave that had begun in Russia in 1917. They deepened pessimism over the prospects of a victorious revolution in an advanced capitalist country coming to the aid of the isolated Soviet workers’ state.

More than any other leader following Lenin’s death, Trotsky personified the link between October and the world socialist revolution. His *Lessons of October* provoked a venomous campaign by Kamenev, Zinoviev and Stalin—the ruling triumvirate inside the Communist Party of the Soviet Union—because it reviewed the real political struggles inside the Bolshevik Party from February to October 1917, above all the opposition of Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev to Lenin’s struggle for the seizure of power.

Trotsky’s *Lessons of October* aimed to educate the international working class and prevent future revolutionary crises from being betrayed or missed, and to reaffirm the international revolutionary strategy that the bureaucracy was beginning to repudiate in favour of “socialism in one country” —the nationalist conception that socialism could be built within the borders of the Soviet Union, separate from the struggle for world socialist revolution.

Kaluka presents as a Marxist authority the mass murderer and gravedigger of the revolution, Stalin: repeating his falsification of the history of 1917, denial of Trotsky’s role in the insurrection and the Civil War and attempt to portray Permanent Revolution as alien to Bolshevism. This initial campaign of lies would pave the way for the monstrous falsifications of the Moscow Trials, the extermination of an entire generation of Bolshevik revolutionaries

and socialist workers, and ultimately the assassination of Trotsky himself by a Stalinist agent in 1940.

Stalin's 1924 attacks were also written to conceal his own record in 1917. After returning from exile in March, Stalin, together with Kamenev, took control of the Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda* and shifted it sharply to the right, advocating conditional support for the capitalist Provisional Government "in so far as" it defended the revolution, and adopting a conciliatory attitude toward the Mensheviks.

In *Lessons of October*, Trotsky noted that Stalin and Kamenev's March 1917 line of conditional support for the Provisional Government differed in no essential way from Menshevik class collaboration. Lenin's return and his *April Theses* broke this orientation, rejecting the old formula of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" as inadequate to the new stage of the revolution and advancing the demand: "No support for the Provisional Government."

Against Stalin and Kamenev, who sought to confine the revolution within bourgeois-democratic limits, Lenin insisted that power had to pass to the proletariat, supported by the poorest peasants. This rearmed the Bolshevik Party for October and brought Lenin's position into alignment with Trotsky's. Stalin's later claim that Trotsky had to abandon his theory of permanent revolution to join Bolshevism reverses the truth: it was Stalin's own semi-Menshevik line that had to be defeated before the October Revolution could be won.

The subsequent Stalinist claim that Lenin's *April Theses* developed from the old formula of the democratic dictatorship was a falsification, designed to rehabilitate the national-democratic perspective that had nearly disarmed the Bolshevik Party in 1917.

The October Revolution also demolishes Kaluka's argument about a supposedly "tiny" working class in Kenya and Africa being unable to wage a struggle for socialism. In 1917, Russia's industrial proletariat numbered only a few million in a population overwhelmingly composed of peasants—far smaller relative to the total population than today's vast, young, urbanising and internationally interconnected African working class. Yet this concentrated and politically armed working class, led by the Bolshevik Party, conquered power, drew behind it the peasantry and oppressed masses, and opened a new epoch in world history.

Nor did the Russian Revolution remain a merely Russian event. It radicalised workers and oppressed masses across the world, confirming Trotsky's insistence: "The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena."^[1]

Between 1917 and 1923, Europe was shaken by revolutionary upheavals: the German Revolution of 1918–19, including the development of workers' and soldiers' councils across Germany, the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, factory occupations in Italy during the Biennio Rosso of 1919–20, mass strikes in France and Britain, and the defeat of the Kapp Putsch in Germany by a general strike in 1920. These events showed that October was the opening shot of a world revolutionary process.

Its impact extended into the colonial world, including Africa. The Comintern, founded in 1919, insisted that the liberation of the colonial masses and the socialist struggle of workers in the

imperialist centres were inseparably linked. It required Communist parties in the imperialist countries to expose their "own" colonial rulers, support liberation movements "not only in words but in deeds," and conduct propaganda among troops against the oppression of colonial peoples. Soon after, the Communist Party was founded in South Africa (1921) and in Egypt (1922).

In Kenya, the African working class launched the 1922 Nairobi general strike following the arrest of Harry Thuku, leader of the East African Association. Sparked by falling wages, rising taxation and colonial repression, the movement drew together workers and the urban poor before being drowned in blood by colonial police and armed white settlers. It marked the first major intervention of the Kenyan working class into political life, revealing already in the early colonial period the growing strength of the new social class that was emerging.

The Russian Revolution confirmed permanent revolution in the positive, refuting Kaluka's miserable claim that "no Trotskyist organization or movement has ever led a successful socialist advance in the world." In fact, it is permanent revolution that will always be remembered for having guided, in its essential strategic conceptions, the conquest of power by the working class in October 1917 under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky.

Leon Trotsky (1931) *The Permanent Revolution*, Chapter 10, "What is the Permanent Revolution? Basic Postulates". Available at Marxists Internet Archive: Leon Trotsky: The Permanent Revolution (10. What is the Permanent Revolution?)

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