

THE THEORY OF PERMANENT REVOLUTION

ITS VALIDITY AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE LEFT

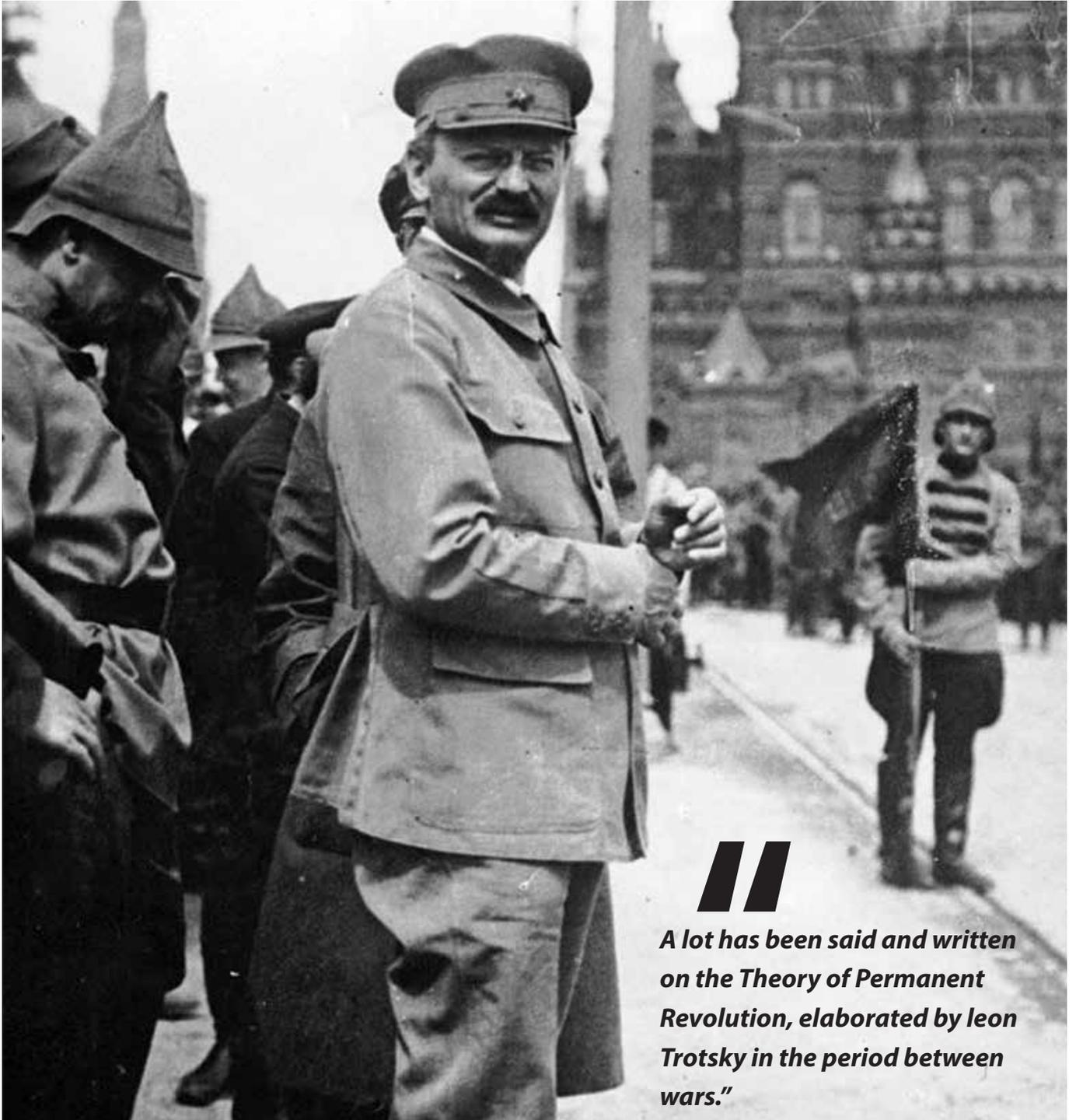
We present in this dossier a polemic on Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution and its validity for revolutionaries.

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A lot has been said and written on the Theory of Permanent Revolution, elaborated by Leon Trotsky in the period between wars.

The currents of the Fourth International and its later spoils have chopped up time and again its postulates, in some cases turning it into a “school of quotations” and in others transforming it in its opposite. But the matter here is not to measure the validity of a theory on the basis of the “usages” of Trotsky (if we may use this term, so inherent to post-modernism), but to use the methodological tools that it offers us to establish the dynamics of the future development of international class struggle and let us approach to the permanentist idea of the party.





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INTRODUCTION

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEORY OF THE PERMANENT REVOLUTION

There are different analysis on the elaborations of Trotsky on the Theory of Permanent Revolution since 1905 (captured in Results and Prospects, and Conclusions) until the publishing of the Theses in 1928. The most ordinary is to present it as a theoretical whole, in which Trotsky would apply to all the countries in the World in '28 what he sketched for Russia in '05. Trotskyites in the postwar period talked about a "generalization" of the Theory of Permanent Revolution (hereinafter TPR) at an international scale, based on the application of the conceptions of '05 to the different countries that were going through revolutionary processes in the '30s, a sort of "extension" of the permanentist thought beyond the Russian borders and "adding" the question of the revolutionary party, which he would deny in '05.

But even though there is a coherence in the thought of Trotsky since the beginning of the Century to his death, and there is a continuity in his elaborations –as he himself has expressed-, Marxism is a living current that must be sophisticated on the basis of the great events of class struggle. To put an equal sign between the Trotsky of 1905 and the one that took part of the Revolution of 1917, the one that saw the dictatorship of the proletariat turn into its contrary and that at last witnessed the rise of American imperialism at the dawn of the Second World War, would mean to reduce the TPR to a dead sketch to be “applied” according to each country. Trotsky, in the light of the processes in Russia in 1905, established a dynamics of the revolution¹ which would be then fundamental for his later elaborations. On the one hand, the conditions of Socialist Revolution in Russia were given by the fundamental fact that Russian capitalism appeared as a son of the State. So the delimitation line between the political form –the feudal, obsolete, archaic State- and the social content –the capitalist, young, contradictory and uneven between the countryside and the city foundation of economy- tend to vanish by a national particularity that, as Lenin understood later by following other paths, was the product of the exhaustion of the conditions of expanding capitalism and the exacerbation of its inner contradictions, capable of generating a new epoch of decay and decomposition: imperialism. In this definition Trotsky presented the problem of the State, and showed that political form and social content are not antagonistic –as petty bourgeois democracy said- but complementary opposites. Kautsky, as well as Trotsky, put the condition of class struggle above productive forces as regards revolutionary dynamics. That young, backward and uneven capitalism implied, in the political sphere, the weakness of the Russian agrarian bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie compared to the great force of the industrial proletariat, destined to play a leading role. For Trotsky this question set the foundations for a revolution under the leadership of the industrial pro-

letariat, that would overpass the division between minimal and maximal program. The second fundamental component is tinged by a subjectivist and idealist conception of the leadership and proletarian domination. Trotsky had no notion of the *dictatorship of the proletariat* and replaced it with a parliamentary body with labor majority, a Congress of deputies convoked by a labor leadership, inspired in democratic equality and free self governance. This radical democratism that Trotsky sketched is complementary opposite to the idea of the dictatorship posed by Lenin, who, if with an algebraic character of a coalition between workers and peasants, pointed out the need to establish –through the violent imposition of a popular dictatorship led by a centralized party- a relation of forces that would be favorable to socialist planning. Trotsky’s movementist conception of the party then cannot be detached from this fundamental aspect of his theory or, rather, it is a result of it. It is not about Trotsky denying the idea of the party, but he didn’t have a finished comprehension of the proletarian dictatorship. Therefore it is a vulgar sketch to pose that Trotsky went from a national conception of socialist revolution in ’05 to an international conception of socialist revolution in ’28; because if we part from revolutionary Marxism, we cannot talk about socialist revolution without talking about proletarian dictatorship. Of course, the difficulties that Kautsky as well as Trotsky had, come inevitably from the restriction of their elaborations to the field of the Russian peculiarity, confusing the national basis of a revolutionary process with its inner character, that cannot be other than international. In favor of both, we may say that they were in a historical stage in which the monopolistic trends of capitalism had not yet expressed in all their force and therefore the inter-states contradictions that would predominate during the 20th century were not yet in the horizon of revolutionaries. Nevertheless, both understood the existing contradiction- that could not have a character other than international- between the levels of capitalist development. That

is why they point out the existence of a powerful bourgeoisie and an industrial proletariat with incipient revolutionary organizations in Western Europe, in opposition to the weakness of the bourgeoisie before the working class of a backward country such as Russia, due to the low level of capitalist development. Precisely, here we may find the genesis of the law of uneven and combined development that Trotsky would develop two decades later, which is a fundamental element of his permanentist conception of the revolution. The permanentist idea of revolution is no exclusive patrimony of Trotsky. Already Marx gives an idea in this regard, parting from class struggle in France and Germany. Rosa Luxemburg, with her “revolutionary situation in permanence”, Lenin and Kautsky posing “uninterrupted revolution”, etc. They note the huge revolutionary processes that took place before the eyes of Marxists, which lead them to the early elaborations that accounted for the determinations of the relation among bourgeoisie, proletariat and State, i.e., the theoretical knot of the driving forces of the revolution. The setback of class struggle implied for Kautsky the abandonment of the permanentist conception. On the contrary, Lenin and Trotsky incorporated the question to a more general theoretical body, which allowed them to keep their revolutionary sharpness.

THE PROBLEM OF THE OVERGROWTH OF BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION INTO PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

The theoretical dilemma before the Russian Revolution spun around the problem of the *overgrowth* of bourgeois revolution into proletarian. There were, in face of this, three variants that characterized the whole thinking of the Marxist *intelligentsia*: the stageist-menshevik line, Lenin’s idea of a revolutionary government based on a labor-peasant coalition, and Trotsky’s the democratic-permanentist line.

The epoch of crisis, wars and revolutions obliged Marxists to think the world system as a whole. In this regard, the *overgrowth* of bourgeois revolution into proletarian can only happen under a socialist revolution. This was Trotsky's innovation in his first analysis, although, as we said above, his incomprehension of the dictatorship of the proletariat made his theory a bit abstract. As the epoch of bourgeois revolutions is over, "democratic" tasks are not "bourgeois". We made this remark, because the whole centrist thought has always confused these two terms, considering them equal². On the contrary, Trotsky incorporated the idea of transformation of democratic revolution into socialist under a new content: the *overgrowth* of proletarian revolution into world revolution. That is to say, as stated in the thesis of the TPR, socialist revolution only consummates with the definitive victory of the new society in the whole planet. But it was the Russian Revolution what marked an inflexion point in this regard, when class struggle acquired a new, international, content in the light of a bourgeois state that had to walk through a concrete and tortuous transition, in Trotsky's words "*a socialist dictatorship provisionally enclosed within the national borders*"³. It was here where Lenin wrote on *the State and Revolution*, that, along with the *Congresses of the III International* constitute the greatest contribution to Marxism in the programmatic sense. However, it was not then when Trotsky re-elaborated his stances from 1905. "*The proletariat, thus, once in power – he says in 1919- should not limit to the framework of bourgeois democracy, but it must deploy the tactic of permanent revolution, that is to say, void the limits between minimal and maximal program of the Social democracy, go further into social reforms ever deeper and seek the direct and immediate support in the revolution in the West of Europe*"⁴.

The sophistication of the TPR

It was only when the leadership of the CI passed to counterrevolution; the defeat of the Chinese revolution and the Anglo-Rus-

sian committee when Trotsky re-elaborated the TPR. And that was so because he found himself compelled to do it when the international conditions had roundly changed: on the one hand, imperialism had exacerbated its contradictions and prepared for the massive destruction of its productive forces; and on the other, it arose, before the eyes of the world working class, the struggle between two systems. Trotsky started from three key ideas: 1) if productive forces are to be destroyed internationally, then they must be internationally built; 2) the peculiarities in the relation among States mark the rhythm and the times of revolution, but not its tasks and dynamics; 3) the movements that are in their essence national and trade unions, also national, are an arena for the intervention of revolutionaries but the proletariat can only be able to reach true political centrality in an International. Therefore it is very important the way in which the TPR develops the character of revolution, its inner nexus and the method of international revolution in general. Trotsky drew as a lesson that in Russia the democratic revolution had compressed, discarding the old scheme that gave it a character of necessary stage. The Left in general has kept the primitive idea of overgrowth, in which the stages may have a formal logical order, destroying the totalizing idea of world revolution and condemning themselves to the analysis of peculiarities. From there comes the centrist notion of "program and slogans" that put the party in a tight relation with the immediate situation but not with its historical interest; it places the working class and its present consciousness over historical consciousness, liquidating the idea of vanguard, fragmenting a global vision of world economy and losing, therefore, the idea of totality.

The permanentist character of the party

The primitive conception of overgrowth (from bourgeois to proletarian revolution) involves a specific type of revolution (democratic); a determined subject (the revolution itself) and an idea of organi-

zation that is no other than a movement. The ordinary notion of "democratic revolution" implies the realization of the unfinished tasks that the bourgeoisie didn't do in its expansion stage. In this regard, the revolutionary subject would have as an aim the (late) development in the national territory of the expansive characteristics of capitalism, which are already impossible in the decadent epoch. This has been a very important point of debate as regards backward countries, that on the one hand haven't reached a full development of their productive forces in any phase, and on the other, were not able to constitute as full and independent nation-states and instead there arose semi states or artificial states imposed by imperialist agreements. Likewise, the revolutions in China, Cuba, Vietnam, etc, were also part of this debate, where phenomena of national nature unleashed revolutions from the need of national independence and the late constitution of the nation state. Precisely, it was this struggle between two systems what enabled these revolutionary processes to embrace a semi communist program and come into the orbit of the USSR. The subjectivist normative of centrism placed them as "exceptions" to the TPR (restricting Marxist theory to a series of statements plausible of empirical observation), when actually they were complex phenomena from class struggle in that period. The second imperialist postwar period put in the center of politics the problem of inter-state relations. In the backward countries there were mass actions that sought national independence. Imperialism gave as a response the creation of artificial states over the defeat of the masses, such as in Middle East by establishing an American enclave that functioned as regional gendarme: Israel. The USSR, on its part, took under its leadership the processes in the Balkans and in Asia, and to a lesser extent in Latin America. Because the Pact of Yalta could not suppress class struggle and the "struggle between two systems" determined class confrontations during all that period. But it is not a matter of "exceptions". The imperialist policy was doomed to failure

sooner or later because the second imperialist war, at the same time it placed USA as the hegemon, developed in an ever deeper way the inner tendency of imperialism: the incapability, because of its reactionary character, of monopolist capitalism to create national states. The only states that can be created in the current epoch of imperialist decay are workers' states, transitional to socialism. That is why the USSR's policy was also destined to fail: because it intended to resolve the problem of the State from the point of view of democratic revolution turned into socialist by decree. In our Argentina, the old formula of overgrowth was developed specially by the Communist Party, which had as its main referent the pseudo gramscian current of Agosti and its "uninterrupted revolution". The Trotskyite currents, in the different stages of their development, broke up with these conceptions but only in the point of the need of an urban and not peasant revolution, but they didn't draw conclusions to the end from the TPR, restricting their analysis to superficial expressions of phenomena more specifically in the field of political regimes, and advancing the sum of national programs, to reach the Morenist extreme of programs of the democratic revolution, or the Lambertist-Altamirist theory of the fields and anti imperialist united front. Thus, they typified revolutions according to different revolutionary "subjects". The logical consequence of these stances could not be other that movementism, blocks, "tactical" fronts, etc. The abandonment of the program and the Leninist theory of organization, is therefore not a product of a simple adaptation to petty bourgeois democratism. Its germ is a deep deviation in the field of theory, that cannot be solved with "tactical turns", but rather, through a total and resolved break up with the theories of postwar Trotskyism. In other words, the foundation of the TPR is not the "rhythm" with which backward and developed countries reach socialism. Neither is the lack of independence of the peasants and the contraction of the stage of democratic revolution. All of them are important elements but not the essence

of permanentism in the imperialist epoch. The most urgent for the international Trotskyite movement is to conceive the permanentist character of the dictatorship of the proletariat, that may be temporarily contained or enclosed within the national borders of a certain country, but its development is and will always be worldwide... or it will not develop at all. And if the proletarian dictatorship has a permanentist character, its vehicle, the revolutionary party, also does. That is what the permanentist character of the party about.

The TPR and the present stage of imperialist decomposition

We must part form a crucial question: the nation state is surpassed, as a "framework" for the development of the productive forces, as regards the "foundation" for class struggle, and, therefore, as a "state form" of the dictatorship of the proletariat⁵. This doesn't mean that national States have ceased to exist, neither do chauvinist or nationalist ideas. The well-know "globalization" that promised a sophisticated capitalist World with no borders is nothing but the fight among decaying States of the great metropolis for the markets in crisis; and the condemnation of semi States to survival under the world division of labor. The development of class struggle in the Middle East and Eastern Europe jeopardizes the fragile imperialist agreements to maintain a geopolitical status quo that burst out along with the world crisis. When we say that the bourgeois State is already surpassed as a "framework" for the development of productive forces, we part from two main questions: inter-imperialist concurrence is exacerbated in the framework of economic antagonisms, that means, an imperialist country can only develop its productive forces or overpass a crisis at the expense of another; and productive forces, as a result of capital's transnationalization, have internationalized in such a way that they structurally join from a border to another and poses

new programmatic and organizational challenges for the labor movement. These trends, that Trotsky could see at the dawn of the Second World War, today have deepened up to historical magnitudes and demand the revolutionary left to make a qualitative leap in its elaborations. Therefore, the nation state cannot be and will not be the foundation for class struggle. That sectors of the masses or movements provoke the downfall of governments or changes in the regimes does not deny at this asseveration. All on the contrary, the huge actions of the masses find their limits before the inexistence of revolutionary leaderships that fights for power, that means, that parts from the conception that the best way to confront bourgeois State is in the field of capitalist production, i.e., the field where there are objective links that unite the international working class. Class struggle in the epoch of crisis, wars and revolutions can only have one content: the confrontation between revolution and counterrevolution, between the proletarian dictatorship and the capitalist dictatorship. The thousands of intermediate forms that are result of class struggle are essential to the program, the tactics and the action of revolutionaries, but they cannot lead to loose sight of historical perspective. As it would be ridiculous to think capital's dictatorship as a rule in the national field by the bourgeoisie in the imperialist system, to conceive the proletarian dictatorship as a state form enclosed within the framework of a nation state would be to turn it into its contrary. Insurrections and revolutionary processes may happen -even isolated in one country, as we have seen- but the dictatorship of the proletariat will be international or will not be at all (that means, it will become a counterrevolution). If we analyze it from the historical examples given by the proletariat, the Russian revolution (in a backward country that was late to the process of formation of bourgeois states), didn't produce a national dictatorship of the proletariat, but an international one: the USSR, that means, the socialist federation as the state form of the proletarian dictatorship. Stalinism,

with its counterrevolutionary policy of socialism in one country, turned the federation into a charade, that under its steel fist looted the countries of the region to serve the great Russian chauvinism in sovietic clef. Stalinism's policy in China, which liquidated the possibility of a federation of republics of the East with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia also resulted in a tragedy for the development of the international revolution, and the division of Germany and the former Yugoslavia annexed as satellites and not as socialist republics are more examples of the same. In these cases, the proletarian dictatorship became its contrary, ending up in capitalist restorations. All this shows that revolutions, even in countries that are weak yet to impose at the global scale, -given the economic interdependence- tend to develop internationally. If, paraphrasing Trotsky, 1914 marked the end of national programs, the present capitalist crisis must put an end to the already obsolete ideas of national revolutions. A permanentist conception of revolution parts from the fact that it begins on a national basis, but it cannot end there, given the nowadays economic, political and military interdependence of the States in Europe and USA; question that was demonstrated in the Second World War as well as in the imperialist postwar period and in the current economic world crisis. When fighting against the imperialist forms of economic centralization, socialism not only doesn't attack that trend, but it, on the contrary, turns it into its leading principle. The greater decomposition of imperialism has configured a greater reactionary centralization of economy. But this centralization is so on the basis of a greater interdependence on the relations among national states in the framework of imperialist penetration in the great branches of industry; thus configuring uncountable labor semi aristocracies in semi colonial countries and labor aristocracies with greater political power in imperialist countries. The creation of multinational organisms in the postwar period, after having divided the world into influence zones (not without the opening of revolutionary processes, some

of them victorious) is a sample of what imperialism, in the process between wars had given in as regards social legislation, and it had to give in, already in the postwar period, by giving a greater political formal independence to the former colonies, and economic interdependence of these states in formation with the imperialist countries.

All in all

To try to go back to national programs and void the process of the USSR in the name of the downfall of the Berlin Wall means not to understand that Trotsky's defense of the Sovietic Russia and its programmatic expression challenges the barriers of time as long as it is the defense of the proletarian dictatorship; that in the beginnings may be enclosed in the national framework but in its development must irremediably expand internationally and end up in the world scale. Also, this fight between two systems continues as long as we talk about the socialist inherence of the workers' state in the capitalist society. Therefore, those who intended or intend to update the Transitional Program in national clef can only stutter national slogans, because they are compelled to prevaricate the past in order to justify -in the field of their theory- their methodological disruption. The imperialist epoch determined the end of national programs and therefore of national parties. This, that is obvious for the revolutionaries of the two first decades of the 20th century, has been forgotten, and we think is our duty to recover it. We have tried to place the proletarian revolution and the proletarian dictatorship within the development of the permanentist dynamics of revolution, running away from a typology of revolutions (passive, democratic, victorious February, not-victorious, proletariat-passive revolution, etc.), in order to give an idea of a new dynamics of revolutionary processes that may be in the order of the day, according to how capitalist crisis develops. We don't want to live from analogies with the Russian revolution, even less with the inventions after '68, rather, we want to establish a method

for an international revolutionary program. The need of an international party is not a matter of internationalist "consciousness", nor of "will", but rather, it is objective in the face of transnationalization of economy. Likewise, in these conditions, the most elementary guarantee of success resides in the counterposition of revolutionary centralism to imperialist reactionary centralism. As Trotsky said, *"to count on a vanguard proletarian organization glued by a steel discipline, a true selected nucleus of tempered revolutionaries ready to sacrifice and inspired by an indomitable will to win. Only a party that doesn't fail to itself will be capable of systematically and diligently prepare the offensive to -when the decide hour comes- shep in the battle field all the force of the class without hesitating. It is precisely a party like this what the international proletariat needs"*⁶.

CHAPTER 1. THE CURRENT FORCE OF THE PERMANENT REVOLUTION

The permanentist dynamics: rhythms and times in the curve of imperialist development

In this point we cannot leave appart one of its main contributions to understand the dynamics of the processes in the imperialist era: the theory of the unstable equilibrium⁷. Trotsky tries to find a method for the international revolution, that in this historical process is nothing but to confront national states and its great imperialist industrial branches in order to blow the imperialist countries in their accumulation. In the first place we must establish the following: as a paradox, the development of the productive forces in the second postwar period has done nothing but accelerate the process of imperialist decomposition. This has had as consequence: The modification of the relations among

States. With the aim of leading it, imperialist States have seen themselves compelled to condense the economic contradictions, by which they have only achieved the exacerbation of the process. The fall of the great international pacts, the deterioration of the Welfare State, the insurrectional elements in the artificial States, are some elements that we may point out as a result of this trend. There have produced changes in the sphere of international division of labor. To the worldwide division between metropolis and semi colonies (that the bourgeois thought it was eternal after the fall of the "socialist block"), we must add a third factor, the countries on the way of assimilation. This makes more complex the idea of overgrowth of proletarian revolution into world revolution, for we must incorporate the element of capitalist restoration, which takes away from the order of the day the political revolution, but that adds the idea of transition "to the reverse" (the assimilation). This process of assimilation, without the mediation of revolutions, may end up in the disintegration, that means the inversion of the process, that of course will not go back to zero but will represent a great defeat for the world working class. On the other hand, the leap in the process of imperialist decomposition gives a new content to the idea of weak links, forged by Lenin to name the countries with a lower or slower level or late development, but that were not colonies, rather, they were part of the imperialist chain, such as Russia, in a moment in which capitalism was still able to give impulse to the development of productive forces. Taking into account the present stage of imperialism, we must rather say that an imperialist "weak link" is a country that finds itself at a greater level of decomposition than the rest. The example of the PIGs helps to illustrate this question. The leap in the transnationalization of capital gives a new content to the 11th theses of the TPR. The leap in the imperialist penetration in some semi colonial countries has re-configured their inner structure and sets new dynamics in the international revolutionary process. On the one hand, it

has submitted these countries to a greater impoverishment on the basis of looting, and on the other, it has developed a strong industrial proletariat with huge international links. What we are interested in highlighting is that imperialist penetration and the existence of big multinationals internationalizes *per se* the processes of class struggle of the proletariat. A revolution in Brazil, for example, has today a different content than it had before the postwar period, because it would attack the source of income of the main American multinationals. It would have more chances to reach socialism than before. Likewise, the leap in the imperialist decay poses us questions on the future problems that workers' states built in the metropolis would have to face.

The theory of Permanent Revolution and American imperialism

Trotsky re-elaborated in '28 the TPR, parting from important revolutionary events in the old English colonies such as China, confronting Stalinist stageism, which turned out to be disastrous for the raising proletariat. But this question has been misinterpreted or rather distorted by the postwar Trotskyites, with the aim of supporting in theory their practical interests of programmatic and organizational adaptation to petty bourgeois leaderships that ruled in the mass processes in the oppressed countries in the '60s and '70s, and then the "democratic" coalitions and the social movements in the imperialist countries. That is why they rushed to declare that the "generalization" of the TPR was based on the extension of the Russian peculiarities to the rest of the countries. However, we insist that it wasn't this what dominated in Trotsky's analysis. The elaboration of the TPR in '28 parted from a new fact: the establishment of American imperialism as leader of the world. "Since 1932 we had to fight for making the leadership of the Communist International bear, finally, to take into ac-

count the United States". Trotsky said in '29⁸. For him, the imperialist dictatorship of the US and "the constant oscillation of the European equilibrium in favor of North America" will be the source of crisis and revolutionary convulsions in Europe. This was not based on geopolitical questions, but on the quality leap that meant fordism as regard productivity of labor. "The serial manufacturing is linked to American technique, as the standard: is mass production (...) Thanks to mechanization and more rational organization of labor, in America the miner extracts twice and a half more coal and mineral than in Germany. The farmer produces twice more than in Europe"⁹. Such an organization of labor would be the material potential of the United States. Precisely, that would allow them to apply the old method of the British bourgeoisie of "feeding the labor aristocracy in order to have the proletariat submitted under its tutelage". For Trotsky, this world reformism that emerges in late '20s would have a new material foundation, secured with the indisputable upsurge of America at the expense of the decaying England. If for Lenin European labor aristocracy lived from the crumbs of colonies, for Trotsky, in this new configuration of the world, labor aristocracy in the USA lived from the crumbs of the European working class. This condition would persist in time, even at the end of the economic postwar boom the European labor aristocracy would confront their own Welfare States looking themselves in the mirror of USA. Trotsky takes notes of the fact that since the Versailles pact, through a process based on destruction, and the restorations, the United States would be looking at the European economies and invested capitals in Latin America. In this way, and taking the idea of economic antagonisms, the USA "tends to extend and Europe to compress", giving place to a new division of forces, of spheres of influence and world markets. But it is this, precisely, what will produce that America becomes the epicentre of imperialist contradictions. It growing extension by investing the superfluous part of its resources in Latin America, Europe, Asia

and Australia, Africa, will imply its growing dependence as regards countries and continents economic and politically unstable. To keep its inner equilibrium, the USA will need an ever bigger exit abroad, introducing in its economic regime a growing number of elements coming from the European and Asian disorder. Thus, “the advance of America’s world power implies that the whole system of American industries and banks –that huge capitalist skyscraper– is based more and more on the world economy”. In this way Trotsky will predict in an unparalleled way the crisis of ‘29.¹⁰ As we have seen, it was this configuration of the world what inspired Trotsky for his elaborations and it is present in his political confrontation with Stalinism. Another theoretical-political element that was enriched in the light of this question was the problem of *uneven and combined development*. For Trotsky, uneven development, deformed by Stalinists, rather than a law is a historical reality that notes that the countries develop with different rhythms. However, the capitalist world has become more uniform. “It is not about denying the existence of the law, but to explain it. In this occasion I tried to do it through the formula ‘combined development’ (...) the evolution has demonstrated that the backward countries complement their backwardness with the last progresses”¹¹. Trotsky develops in time this question in the light of the Russian reality, but he doesn’t stay there. “In the United States there exists another type of combined development. We have the most advanced industrial development combined with the most backward ideology for all the classes”. Thus, the foundation of the backward consciousness of the American workers is a process of “inner colonization”¹². The idea of uneven development combined in this level allows Trotsky to establish the possibility that the different stages that might exist are not “combined” but might be gone through very rapidly, as it happened with the democratic stage in Russia. Thus, the uneven and combined development, for Trotsky, is not based on a combinations

of stages, as Trotskyite centrism has confused for decades, but a problem of rhythms. The crisis of ‘29 would imply for Trotsky the opportunity to talk to the pragmatic American labor movement about its role in history. Far from a subjectivist vision, the key for him will be to organize the vanguard, parting from the concrete conditions of production, where “the national industry will organize following the model of your modern car factories of continuous production. The scientific planning will raise from the level of the individual factory to the whole economic system”¹³. This idea will be reinforced as the period between wars go forward, the dictatorship of the proletariat acquires for Trotsky a rapid international dimension, posing a “world socialist federation”¹⁴.

The concept of bonapartism in the present imperialist decay

Trotsky developed the concept of bonapartism in the imperialist era, as he called it: “bonapartism of decay”, making a difference with Marx’s formulation, that is to say, the young and thriving bonapartism that was the undertaker of the political principles of the bourgeois revolution as well as the defender of its social gains¹⁵. For Trotsky, bonapartism is a transitional regime, given the class contradictions proper to the structure of capitalist decay. In this phase, democracy is a “conciliation committee” between two classes, that maintains as long as class contradictions allow it. The tension of class contradictions provokes an explosion in democracy. This might give place to the dictatorship of the proletariat or the fascist dictatorship of monopolist capital. But before the triumph of any of those extremes over the other, there necessarily establishes within society a transitional regime of unstable equilibrium between both extremes, that paralyzes one another. Thus, the bureaucratic apparatus acquires, in its conditions of arbitrator and savior of the nation, exceptional independence and strength. Trotsky defines a bonapar-

tis government as a “supraparliamentary [government] of the big bourgeoisie that establishes the equilibrium between the two struggling extremes by leaning on the police and the army”. To defeat this “neo bonapartism” the labor vanguard must attack its auxiliary armed detachments, the police and the army, and therefore it is essential the idea of a workers’ militia.¹⁶ Trotsky’s notion of bonapartism is inspired in the impossibility of a development of a bourgeois democracy, so the bonapartist tendencies become the most ordinary forms in the period of imperialist decay.¹⁷

CHAPTER 2. COUNTRIES IN THEIR PROCESS OF ASSIMILATION. A THEORETICAL-PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGE

What do we call assimilation

Trotskyism in the second postwar period struggled between characterizations of “deformed workers’ States” and “capitalist States in the process of structural assimilation to the USSR”. The big mistake in this last asseveration was to suppose that a capitalist country could be structurally assimilated to nationalized property, as if States and classes didn’t exist. The establishment of nationalized property in the countries of the old Glacis debunked this theory. But instead, the inverse process, that means, the structural assimilation by the imperialist system of the former workers’ States implies a brutal destruction of productive forces in these countries, national dismemberment and State decentralization. After the fall of the wall –and later with the approach of some of these countries to the European Union on the one hand and to the sphere of American influence on the other– most of the imperialist countries created themselves illusions on a rapid restoration process in which it seemed that the reactionary forces of capital would be able to find a lung without contradictions.

On the contrary, it became more evident than ever the inability of capitalism to take any of its trends to the end. On the one hand, the very structural decay of imperialism prevented the extension of private investment in the region; on the other, the petty-bourgeois masses that flourished after the postwar period (and that were the political basis for restoration) and the inheritants of the bureaucracy that were seeking to turn into a proto-bourgeoisie, became the State's basis of a bonapartism that raises as a defense before the capital's destructive outpost. In this point, it is important to clarify the limits of an analogy with "soviet bonapartism" that Trotsky posed for the USSR in the period between wars. Trotsky established an analogy between the French Thermidorian bonapartism (which preserved the bourgeois property rights) and soviet bonapartism, parting from the fact that the former was about a consolidation of the bourgeois revolution through the liquidation of its principles and political institutions, and the latter of a consolidation of the workers'-peasants' revolution through the crashing of its international program, its leading party and its soviets¹⁸. The analogy parted from the idea that the soviet bureaucracy must preserve the workers' State to survive, in the face of a hostile approach to which imperialist capital submitted it. However, at the end of the World War, and with the development of productive forces in Europe as well as in the USA and also in the USSR and its satellites, the bureaucracy started to see the degenerated workers' State as an obstacle for the development of a class layer, that is to say, from aristocratic caste to owning class. That is why the restorationist bureaucrats, after the Warsaw pact, whose main referents were Jrushchov, Brézhnev, Andrépov, Chernenko and at last Grbachov, consciously committed themselves to destroy the rests of the workers' State, smashing the federation and accelerating the process of capitalist restoration. For this, as we said, they counted on a huge social basis that was the petty bourgeoisie emerged from the postwar years. Nonetheless, the assault

of private capital, that means, imperialism's destructive forces menaced even this path from bureaucracy to owning class, so Vladimir Putin's bonapartism is very far from being like the old soviet bonapartism. Soviet bonapartism aimed to maintain the degenerated workers' State for its own survival, the present Russian bonapartism -as well as the Chinese- aim to lead -as centralized as possible- the tortuous assimilation of these countries to the imperialist world system. Of course this process, that should aim to the desmemberment and incorporation of regions to the world division of labor as semi colonies, has lots of contradictions and class struggle elements that put spokes in the wheel of a pacific reconstruction.

A thrilling example: Ukraine

We must take into account two questions to understand the complex situation in Ukraine: It is part of the assimilation process of the former workers' States of Eastern Europe; and it comes from one of the most important historical experiences of the proletariat: the USSR, that is to say, the Socialist Republics' Federation as a state form (clearly international) of the proletarian dictatorship. Ukraine proclaimed its independence in the 10th century, resisting Russian pressure to annex it. However, during the 18th century it began to loose its autonomy, ending up in the annexation. The vindication of national independence has always been very strong in that country, one of the engines of the revolution in 1905. When the Russian Revolution produced in 1917, the revolutionary process allowed Ukraine to proclaim itself an independent republic. But the civil war avoided this development, dividing it up into two countries, one under German rule and the other as a republic. Finally, the Bolsheviks defeated the Whites and at the end of the civil war it took place one of the most important tactics of revolutionary Marxism, which was the Soviet Socialist Republics' Federation, in which Ukraine was incorporated as the Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukraine, that means a federated workers' State. At this point it is important to remark that

the tactic of federation was based on the region's specific conditions. It could be said that the Easter European countries, even Germany, were late to the process of conformation of nation states that took place during the previous centuries. Far from what intellectuals predicate, the formation of nations states in the world wasn't a product of bourgeois revolutions, but of reactions. As Trotsky poses when referring to the French Thermidor, it was not about a counterrevolution in the sense of a return to feudalism, but *the Thermidor was the reaction acting over the social foundations of the revolution*¹⁹. Already Marx denounced this in the case of France, where the French revolution could not solve the bourgeois tasks and only could bonapartism, a century later, achieve national union in a reactionary form and the building of a strong State with expansionist ambitions. The same happened in England, with the reactionary agreement between the bourgeoisie and the monarchy. The history of English colonies deserves a whole chapter for its own²⁰. But in the case of Spain and Italy in the West, and Germany and Russia in the East, we could say that the inability of those bourgeoisies to solve the national problems had as a consequence their "late" arrival to the processes of States' formation. Because what bourgeoisies couldn't solve in the epoch of free expansion, became impossible to solve in the epoch of imperialist decay. The raise of monopoly and inter imperialist concurrence was an obstacle for the processes of independence and national union. These questions drove to revolutionary processes, but except for the case of the USSR, where there was a victorious revolution, in the rest of the countries it was (partially) solved by imperialist bourgeoisies, that means in counterrevolutionary clef, as it couldn't be otherwise in the epoch of crisis, wars and revolutions. Germany is an example, only reaching national union after the defeat of the revolution in 1919; Spain, by the hand of Franco; Italy, by the hand of Mussolini; all of the having submitted their working class and drowning the problems

of nationalities -problems that subsist today and that emerge in every bourgeois crisis²¹. So the tactic of Soviet Federation, as a response to this problem and to the huge economic backwardness on the one hand, and national states based on the old bureaucratic monarchic administration on the other, was a great contribution of revolutionary Marxism to the national question in the backward countries; still weak to impose a world revolution but giving the first steps to go forward into the international dictatorship of the proletariat. At the end of World War 2 Stalinism handed in Ukrainian territories that had belonged to Czechoslovakia, Romania and Poland. Khrushchev gave in Crimea in 1954. That means, the formation of Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea was a result of the postwar conditions, which today have been destroyed by the world crisis and that let old contradictions to resurge. With the fall of the USSR, national feelings of a Slavic petty bourgeoisie that flourished during the postwar period reappeared. After the failed coup against Gorbachev in '91, the president of the Ukrainian Parliament, Leonid Kravchuk (that would then be chosen president), proclaimed independence, ratified in a referendum on December 2nd. Leonid Kuchma won the presidential elections to Kravchuk in '94, in the middle of strong economic and political frictions with Russia, and in 1996 the Parliament voted one of the first bourgeois constitutions in the region, and Ukraine became a loyal partner to imperialism. With the so called "Orange Revolution" in 2005 (which implied a defeat for the pro Russian Yanukovich), Yushchenko came to power and Russia unleashed a strong offensive against Ukraine, as it could be seen with the gas conflict. Crimea, with a majority of the population of Russian origin, has been willing to gain independence from Ukraine ever since the fall of the wall and it has been able to keep a relative formal autonomy. The bourgeoisie is trying to take advantage of the crisis between Ukraine and Russia (and the economic crisis that hits the region) to propose its independence and annexation to Russia.

This process has become a strong crisis point, in which Putin toys with forces that he might not be able to control. That is why we mustn't forget that this conflict is not inscribed in a classical "national problem", or about independence, as intellectuals predicate. It is rather a product of capitalist assimilation of the zone. There are several provinces in Ukraine that sympathize with Russia, nostalgic of the golden years, and that have curbed imperialist interests to incorporate Ukraine to the EU. The Russian working class is the only one that can give a revolutionary response to this problem, not Putin's bonapartism, to whom Crimea means a military and political interest. American and German imperialism (that are the ones that have been preparing to dispute Eastern Europe) will only be able to guarantee a greater disintegration and productive decay of the region.

Retake the tasks of the transition

The whole of the Trotskyite left haven't been able to escape a particularity vision on the Ukrainian situation. They understand the process as a result of a "national" problem of self-determination or democratic struggle. At the extreme there is the LIT-CI, that asserts that "the fall of Yanukovich has been a huge victory of the masses" (in a polemy with SoB –June 2014). But we can also find a singular narrow mindedness on the national field in the PO, that affirms that "Our slogan is: a unite, independent and socialist Ukraine" (Jorge Altamira, March 2014); or PTS, that proclaims that the fight must be "for a workers' and socialist Ukraine with democratic rights for all the ethnic and national groups", which would be "a lever for social revolution in Russia and Europe, where, ultimately, the future of Ukraine will be defined". This last general statement, that under a cloak of internationalism advances a program that is restricted to a series of national State's measures (for they have always confused State-ism with socialist planning)²² illustrates how far from the Marxist method centrists are, since they have forgotten that the proletariat, in

its own revolutionary historical experience, can never go back to the starting point zero. It isn't about assessing the geopolitical status of the region, but to establish what is the task of the most conscious international vanguard –that means, Trotskyism, in the light of this complex process of capitalist assimilation of Eastern Europe and China. It is the Russian proletariat the one that has the ability to make the present crisis in the region twist. In this regard, the task of Trotskyism, of the ones that raise the banners of the 4th International, is to regenerate a labor vanguard in Russia that recovers the transitional tasks that were truncated in the past century. But they don't start from zero, but from the highest point of the historical experience, the dictatorship of the proletariat and its international State form, the Socialist Federation, the USSR. Saying that the highest point of their historical experience must be the starting point of the transition is not in vain, it means that the proletarian dictatorship must extend internationally, otherwise there won't be possible transition. But out centrists will say: The Ukrainians cannot do anything until the Russian proletariat comes up? The key to the answer is to give a response to the problem of Crimea! We must present a way out to the democratic expectations of the masses! To think this way is to deny the revolutionary experience of the masses in Eastern Europe and to underestimate the working class, that, despite the imperialist capital's efforts, has not yet been destroyed from a historical point of view. It is to deny the tasks of the 4th International and therefore its reconstruction. The Russian proletariat has something to speak out to the world. Not only is in their hand to avoid the assimilation process of these countries, but also to intervene in the world capitalist crisis picking up the thread of the transitional tasks and socialist planning.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

The international conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat, as an overcoming

of the national character of insurrection, was patrimony of Lenin and Trotsky and banished by Stalin, provoking a historical lagoon that Trotskyite centrism of the postwar period was unable to solve. Already in the Congress of the Councils of Public Economy, the leaders of the workers' State would plan that "the dictatorship of the world proletariat becomes historically unavoidable... Thus, the development of the whole society in the world is determined, so as in each particular country. The institution of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and its sovietic form of government in the other countries, will make possible the establishment of very tight economic relations between countries, the international division of labor in the sphere of production, finally the organization of international economic services".²³ In the theses on the national and colonial question presented to the 2nd Congress of the CI, Lenin defined the general task of socialism as an overcoming of the national stages of the struggle, the realization of a "universal economic plan" which application would be controlled by the proletariat y every country. Lenin based his analysis on an objective trend that was already manifesting in the capitalist regime, and that should be inherited by socialism. As Trotsky would say: "Lenin drove the proletariat to the seizure of power, to ensure the victory through his leadership, and to provide a leadership for the first workers' State in the history of humanity and to an International whose immediate task was to establish a world dictatorship of the proletariat. The titanic work of this supreme revolutionary strategy may, fairly, be placed at the same level of the titan's supreme work of proletarian theory".²⁴ The State form that the dictatorship of the proletariat acquired was the USSR (as an response to the specific conditions of the uneven combined development). That experience was first theorized by Lenin and then by Trotsky, with the formulation of United States of Europe, United States of America, etc. In this regard, the international conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat

is fundamental for the comprehension of the Theory of the Permanent Revolution: its character, in which the dictatorship of the proletariat carries out the democratic revolution (1st law); its inner nexus, given the permanent advance of the phase of temporary economy of the proletarian dictatorship; the method, which is the one of the world revolution, that Trotsky establishes in general and that is a task of a new generation of revolutionary Trotskyites to develop it in particular. This implies that Theory of the Permanent Revolution inscribes itself in the idea of the *overgrowth* of the proletarian revolution into world revolution. Those who have abandoned the Marxist method have reduced the permanent revolution to the analysis of combinations of stages in each country, when what is most important in the present epoch of crisis, wars and revolutions is the acceleration of the rhythms; hypotheses that is maintained by Trotsky when he develops the one of the uneven and combined development, and which conceives the dictatorship of the proletariat as a political period that joins the economic and the political factors (passing over the reactionary idea of mature and not mature countries). The Theory of the Permanent Revolution parts from seeing the world economy as a whole, in which imperialism tries to take all its contradictions to the sphere of the nation state, which is historically already superseded and surpassed by monopoly and transnationalization of capital. This contradiction is the engine of class struggle and of all kinds of political phenomena. Historical experience doesn't deny this affirmation, rather, it reinforces it. Although in Russia it was not possible to revolution the economic factors, but only try to keep up with the developed countries, socialist planning, centralized, accelerated the economical rhythms achieving in a few years what took centuries to imperialist countries. But even though the dictatorship of the proletariat acquired an incipient international shape (the federation), it couldn't extend internationally and became its contrary. In the countries of the "Glacis" the federation,

being economic units based on the bureaucratically planned cooperation, in Yugoslavia under the "self-management", in China with the state-leading of the backward economy and in Cuba under the emulation and dependence; the proletariat was not able to push forward to the end its potential as regards the development of the productive forces and the transitions were aborted and entered –at the end of the postwar period– a process of assimilation to the capitalist system –full of contradictions–, that in the main countries gave birth to bonapartist governments as a response to the destructive voracity of imperialist capital. The task of the proletariat in these countries is to confront these bonapartisms to retake the tasks of the transition, starting from the most advanced historical experience. That is why the work of "supreme titan of the proletarian theory" is the recovery of the Theory of the Permanent Revolution, its sophistication in the light of the new events in the world arena; not to destroy it and analyze "what law is fulfilled, either the first, the second or the third", in the fashion of the old Trotskyites currents of the postwar period; rather, to start from the revolutionary Marxist method as a tool of a new generation of Trotskyites that are able to reconstruct the Fourth as part of the regeneration of the international workers' vanguard.

Endnotes

1. About this, see Results and prospects (1906) and Conclusions of 1905 (1909).
2. About this, there is a distinction to be made. The early Marxists always referred to the problem of the "overgrowth" of the bourgeois revolution into proletarian, which is a historical process. Nowadays centrism, when they talk about "overgrowth of the democratic revolution into socialist", put an equal sign between democratic tasks and bourgeois revolutions that is not innocent at all, but it rather conceals a stageist conception. On the contrary, the dynamics that Trotsky ascribes is immerse in the revolutionary process itself, in which there is a *compression* of the democratic revolution

that implies its transformation into socialist.

3. The war and the Fourth International. June 10, 1934.

4. Preface to the 1919 edition of Results and Prospects.

5. About this, see Trotsky: "War or Revolution, Bolshevik Socialism versus Capitalistic Imperialism".

6. Manifest of the IV International on the imperialist war and the world proletarian revolution. May, 1940.

7. As Trotsky said in 1921: *"The capitalist equilibrium is a complicated phenomenon; the capitalist regime builds this equilibrium, it breaks it, it rebuilds it and it breaks it again, widening, by the way, the borders of its rule. In the economic sphere, this constant break ups and restorations of the equilibrium take the shape of crisis and booms. In the sphere of class relations, the breaking up of the equilibrium consists in strikes, lock-outs, revolutionary struggles. In sphere of relations among States, the breaking up of the equilibrium is the war, or, more underhand, the war of customs tariffs, the economic war or blockade. Capitalism has then a dynamic equilibrium, which is always in process of break up and restoration. At the same time, such equilibrium has a great force of resistance; the best sample of it is that the capitalist world still exists"*. (Shcool of Revolutionary Strategy.)

8. *Disarmament and the United States of Europe. The Militant, December 7, 1929.*

9. Wither England, Europe and America. 1926.

10. Idem.

11. The uneven and combined development and the role of American imperialism, 1933.

12. Idem.

13. If America should go communist.

14. See Writings 1926, 1929 and 1933.

15. About this, see Workers' State, Thermidor and Bonapartism.

16. See Writings 1930-1932.

17. Idem.

18. Idem.

19. Idem.

20. In the case of the United States, although the Independence declaration in 1776 was an impact for republican bourgeoisies all over the world, what bourgeois intellectuals presente as a triumph of the American revolution, that is to say, the Constitution of 1787, is a reactionary line based on the bourgeois federal principle that drawned the revolutionary process that had begun with the Tea Mutiny and that ended up in repression, as seen with the Acts of foreignets and sedition, etc. Once the war with England ended in 1875, the reactionary policy of the American bourgeoisie expressed itself in the most brutal way in the war against Mexico from 1820 to 1830, the bourgeois pact to exit the civil war in 1858, etc.

21. A special mention to the "solution" that imperialism as well as the USSR tried to give to the problem of the Middle East, by establishing the military Israeli enclave and the "artificial" semi States of the region. About this, read COR's Perspectiva Marxista # 1.

22. "...the only realistic perspective for Ukraine to be independent is to expropriate the oligarchs –the new capitalists that kept the big public enterprises-, stop paying the external debt, nationalize the banks, foreign trade and the main resources of economy and put them to serve the workers' and popular sectors' interests". (Declaration of the Fracción Trotskista – Cuarta Internacional, April 7th, 2014.)

23. December, 1918.

24. Trotsky, "Philosophical tendencies of bureaucratism".