



## Leon Trotsky

### *Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution*<sup>1</sup>

The Revolution of 1905 came to be not only the “general rehearsal” of 1917 but also the laboratory in which all the fundamental groupings of Russian political life were worked out and all the tendencies and shadings inside Russian Marxism were projected. At the core of the arguments and divergences was, needless to say, the question concerning the historical nature of the Russian Revolution and its future course of development. That conflict of concepts and prognoses has no direct bearing on the biography of Stalin, who did not participate in it in his own right. The few propagandist articles he wrote on that subject are utterly devoid of theoretical interest. Scores of Bolsheviks who plied the pen popularised the same thoughts, and did it considerably better. Any critical exposition of Bolshevism’s revolutionary concepts naturally belongs in a biography of Lenin. But theories have their own fate. Although during the period of the First Revolution [1905] and subsequently, as late as 1923, at the time when the revolutionary doctrines were elaborated and applied, Stalin had no independent position whatever, a sudden change occurred in 1924, which opened an epoch of bureaucratic reaction and radical transvaluation of the past. The film of the revolution was unwound in reverse order. Old doctrines were subjected either to a new evaluation or a new interpretation. Thus, rather unexpectedly at first glance, attention was focused on the concept of “permanent revolution” as the prime source of all the fallacies of “Trotskyism”. For many years to come criticism of that concept formed the main content of all the theoretical – *sit venio verbo* – writings of Stalin and his collaborators. Since on the theoretical plane every bit of “Stalinism” has issued from the criticism of the theory of permanent revolution as it was formulated in 1905, an exposition of that theory as distinct from the theories of the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks, clearly belongs in this book, if only as an appendix.

Russia’s development is first of all notable for its backwardness. But historical backwardness does not mean a mere retracing of the course of the advanced countries a hundred or two hundred years late. Rather, it gives rise to an utterly different “combined” social formation, in which the most highly developed achievements of capitalist technique and structure are integrated into the social relations of feudal and pre-feudal barbarism, transforming and dominating them, fashioning a unique relationship of classes. The same is true of ideas. Precisely because of its historical tardiness, Russia proved to be the only European country in which Marxism, as a doctrine, and the Social-Democracy, as a party, enjoyed a powerful development even prior to the bourgeois revolution – and naturally so, because the problem of the relation between the struggle for democracy and the struggle for socialism were subjected to the most profound theoretical examination in Russia.

The idealistic democrats – for the most part, the Populists – superstitiously refused to recognise the advancing revolution as a bourgeois revolution. They called it

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<sup>1</sup> In the Russian revolution of 1905, Trotsky had been the leader of the Petersburg Soviet, the assembly of workers’ delegates. Together with Lenin, Trotsky led the revolution of October 1917. He went on to build and lead the Red Army in the ensuing civil war. He was forcibly deported from the Soviet Union by Stalin in 1929. This piece, written in August 1939, is an appendix to his unfinished biography of Stalin. He was assassinated in Mexico in 1940 on the orders of Stalin.

“democratic”, attempting to hide under that neutral political label – not only from others, but from themselves as well – its social content. But Plekhanov, the founder of Russian Marxism, in his fight against Populism, showed as far back as the eighties of the past century that Russia had no reason whatsoever to rely on preferential ways of development; that, like the “profane” nations, it would have to go through the purgatory of capitalism ; and that on this very path it would wrest political freedom, which was indispensable to the proletariat in its continuing fight for socialism. Plekhanov not only segregated the bourgeois revolution, as the immediate task, from the socialist revolution, which he in turn relegated to the vague future, but he foresaw distinct combinations of forces for each of them. The proletariat would secure political freedom jointly with the liberal bourgeoisie; then, after many decades, on a high level of capitalist development, the proletariat would proceed with the socialist revolution in direct conflict against the bourgeoisie.

“To the Russian intellectual...,” Lenin wrote toward the end of 1904, “it always seems that to recognise our revolution as bourgeois means to make it colourless, to humiliate it, to vulgarise it. ... The struggle for political freedom and the democratic republic in bourgeois society is to the proletarian merely one of the necessary stages in the struggle for the social revolution.” “The Marxists are thoroughly convinced,” he wrote in 1905, “of the bourgeois character of the Russian Revolution. What does that mean? It means that those democratic transformations ... which became indispensable for Russia, not only do not signify in themselves the undermining of capitalism, the undermining of the domination of the bourgeoisie, but, on the contrary, they will be the first to really clear the ground for a widespread and rapid, a European rather than an Asiatic, development of capitalism; they will be the first to make possible the rule of the bourgeoisie as a class.” “We cannot jump out of the bourgeois-democratic framework of the Russian Revolution,” he insisted, “but we can considerably broaden that framework” – that is, create within the bourgeois society more favorable conditions for the further struggle of the proletariat. To that extent Lenin followed in the footsteps of Plekhanov. The bourgeois character of the revolution, was the meeting of the crossroads for the two factions of the Russian Social-Democracy.

Under these circumstances it was quite natural that in his propaganda Koba [Stalin] should not have ventured beyond those popular formulae which formed the common heritage of Bolsheviki and Mensheviki. “The Constituent Assembly, elected on the basis of universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage,” wrote he in January, 1905, “is what we should now fight for! Only such an assembly will give us a democratic republic, extremely necessary to us in our struggle for socialism.” The bourgeois republic as the arena of a prolonged class struggle for the socialist objective – such was the perspective. In 1907, that is, after countless discussions in the foreign and the Petersburg press, and after the earnest verification of theoretical prognoses by the experience of the First Revolution, Stalin wrote: “That our Revolution is bourgeois, that it must end with the demolition of serfdom and not of the capitalist order, that it can be crowned only by a democratic republic – on that, it seems, everybody in our Party is agreed.” Stalin was not speaking of what the Revolution was to begin with, but of what it would end with, limiting it beforehand, and rather categorically, to “only a democratic republic”. In vain would we seek in his writings of those days for as much as a hint about the perspective of the socialist revolution in connection with the democratic insurrection. Such was to remain his position as late as the beginning of the February Revolution of 1917, until Lenin’s very arrival in Petrograd.

For Plekhanov, Axelrod, and the leaders of Menshevism generally the characterisation of the revolution as bourgeois had, above all, the political value of

avoiding the premature taunting of the bourgeoisie with the red specter of socialism and thus “frightening it away” into the camp of reaction. “The social relations of Russia have ripened only for a bourgeois revolution,” said Axelrod, the chief tactician of Menshevism. at the Unification Congress [of the RSDLP, held in Stockholm, 1906]. “While this general political lawlessness persists, we must not even so much as mention the direct fight of the proletariat against other classes for political power. ... It is fighting for the conditions of bourgeois development. Objective historical conditions doom our proletariat to an inevitable collaboration with the bourgeoisie in the struggle against our common enemy.” The content of the Russian Revolution was thus confined beforehand to changes that were compatible with the interests and the views of the liberal bourgeoisie.

This was the starting point for the fundamental divergence between the two factions. Bolshevism resolutely refused to acknowledge that the Russian bourgeoisie was capable of consummating its own revolution. With immeasurably greater force and consistency than Plekhanov, Lenin advanced the agrarian question as the central problem of the democratic revolution in Russia : “The crux of the Russian Revolution is the agrarian (the land) question. We must make up our minds about the defeat or victory of the revolution ... on the basis of accounting for the condition of the masses in their struggle for land.” At one with Plekhanov, Lenin regarded the peasantry as a petty-bourgeois class and the peasant land program as the program of bourgeois progressivism. “Nationalisation [of the land] is a bourgeois measure,” he insisted at the Unification Congress. “It will give impetus to the development of capitalism by intensifying the class struggle, by strengthening the mobilisation of land and the investment of capital in agriculture, by lowering the prices on grain.” Notwithstanding the admitted bourgeois character of the agrarian revolution, the Russian bourgeoisie was nevertheless hostile to the expropriation of the land owned by the landed gentry, and precisely for that reason strove for a compromise with the monarchy on the basis of a constitution after the Prussian model. To the Plekhanovite idea of union between the proletariat and the liberal bourgeoisie Lenin counterposed the idea of union between the proletariat and the peasantry. He proclaimed the task of the revolutionary collaboration of these two classes to be the establishment of a “democratic dictatorship”, as the only means for radically purging Russia of its feudal refuse, creating a free class of farmers and opening the way for the development of capitalism after the American rather than the Prussian model.

The victory of the revolution, he wrote, can be attained “only through dictatorship, because the realisation of the transformations immediately and unconditionally necessary for the proletariat and the peasantry will call forth the desperate resistance of the landlords, of the big bourgeoisie and of Tsarism. Without dictatorship it would be impossible to break that resistance, it would be impossible to defeat counterrevolutionary efforts. That would be, needless to say, not a socialist, but a democratic dictatorship. It would not be able to dispose of (without a whole series of intermediary stages in revolutionary development) the foundations of capitalism. At best, it would be able to introduce a radical redistribution of land ownership for the benefit of the peasantry, carry out a consistent and complete democratisation, including a republic; uproot all the oppressive Asiatic characteristics in the life of the factory as well as the village; lay down the beginnings of important improvements in the condition of the workers; raise their standard of living; and finally, last but not least, carry the revolutionary conflagration into Europe.”

Lenin’s conception represented a tremendous step forward, proceeding, as it did, from the agrarian revolution rather than from constitutional reforms as the central task of the revolution, and indicating the only realistic combination of social forces that

could fulfill that task. The weak point of Lenin's concept was its inherently contradictory notion, "the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry". Lenin himself emphasised the basic limitations of that "dictatorship" when he openly called it *bourgeois*. He was thus implying that, for the sake of maintaining unity with the peasantry, the proletariat would be obliged to forego posing the socialist task (directly during the impending revolution. But that would have meant the repudiation by the proletariat of its own dictatorship. The dictatorship was consequently, in essence, of the peasantry, although with the workers participating. On certain occasions that was precisely how Lenin spoke; for example, at the Stockholm Congress, when he replied to Plekhanov, who had rebelled against the "utopia" of seizing power: "What program are we talking about? About an agrarian program. Who in that program is supposed to seize the government? The revolutionary peasantry. Is Lenin confounding the government of the proletariat with that of the peasantry?" No, he said with reference to himself: Lenin sharply differentiated between the socialist government of the proletariat and the bourgeois-democratic government of the peasantry. "And how is a victorious peasant revolution possible," he exclaimed again, "without seizure of power by the revolutionary peasantry?" In that polemical formulation Lenin very clearly exposed the vulnerability of his position.

The peasantry was dispersed over the surface of an immense country, with cities as points of contact. By itself the peasantry was incapable even of formulating its own interests, for in each region they were differently conceived. Economic contact between provinces was established by the market and the railroads; but both the market and the railroad were in the city's hands. In trying to break through the confines of the village and pool their interests, the peasantry necessarily succumbed to political dependence on the city. Neither was the peasantry homogeneous in its social relations : its *kulak* stratum naturally strove to entice it to unite with the city bourgeoisie, while the lower strata of the village pulled in the direction of the city workers. Under these circumstances, the peasantry as a whole was utterly incapable of assuming the reins of government.

True, in ancient China revolutions brought the peasantry to power, or rather, the military leaders of peasant insurrections. That led each time to a redivision of the land and the establishment of a new "peasant" dynasty, after which history began all over again: new concentration of lands, a new aristocracy, new usury, new uprisings. So long as the revolution maintained its purely peasant character, society did not emerge from these hopeless rotations. Such was the basis of ancient Asiatic, including ancient Russian, history. In Europe, beginning with the emergence of the Middle Ages, each victorious peasant uprising did not place a peasant government in power but a Leftist burgher party. More precisely, a peasant uprising proved victorious only to the extent that it managed to establish the position of the city population's revolutionary sector. Seizure of power by a revolutionary peasantry was out of the question in twentieth-century bourgeois Russia.

The attitude toward the liberal bourgeoisie thus became the touchstone in the divergence between revolutionists and opportunists among Social-Democrats. How far the Russian Revolution could venture, what character would be assumed by the future provisional revolutionary government, what tasks would confront it, and in what order it would dispose of them – these questions could be correctly posed in all their importance only in reference to the basic character of the proletariat's politics, and that character was determined, above all by its relation to the liberal bourgeoisie. Plekhanov demonstratively and stubbornly shut his eyes to the fundamental object-lesson of nineteenth-century political history: wherever the proletariat appeared as an independent force, the bourgeoisie shifted to the camp of the counter-revolution. The

bolder the struggle of the masses, the quicker the reactionary transformation of liberalism. No one has yet invented a way to paralyse the workings of the law of the class struggle.

“We must prize the support of the non-proletarian parties,” Plekhanov was wont to repeat during the years of the First Revolution, “and not drive them away from us by tactless behavior.” With such monotonous moralisings the sage of Marxism demonstrated that he was unable to grasp the living dynamics of society. “Tactlessness” might drive away an occasional oversensitive intellectual. But classes and parties are drawn or repelled by their social interests. “It may be safely said,” Lenin retorted to Plekhanov, “that the liberals among the landed gentry will forgive you millions of ‘tactless’ acts, but they will never forgive incitements to take away their land.” And not only the landed gentry: the upper crust of the bourgeoisie, bound to the landowners by identity of property interests and even more closely by the banking system, as well as the upper crust of the petty-bourgeoisie and of the intellectuals, materially and morally dependent on the large and middling property owners, dreaded the independent movement of the masses. Yet in order to overthrow Tsarism, it was necessary to arouse scores upon scores of millions of the oppressed for a heroic, self-sacrificing, reckless, supreme revolutionary onslaught. The masses could be aroused to this uprising only under the banner of their own interests; hence, in the spirit of irreconcilable hostility toward the exploiting classes, and first of all, the landlords. The “frightening away” of the oppositional bourgeoisie from the revolutionary peasants and workers was therefore the immanent law of the revolution itself and could not be forestalled by “tactfulness” or diplomacy.

Each new month confirmed Lenin’s estimate of liberalism. Notwithstanding the fondest hopes of the Mensheviks, the Kadets [Constitutional Democrats] not only made no move to lead the “bourgeois” revolution but, on the contrary, more and more found their historic mission in fighting it. After the crushing defeat of the December insurrection, the liberals, who, thanks to the ephemeral Duma [elected lower house of the Tsar’s parliament], stepped out before the political footlights, strove with all their might to explain to the monarchy their insufficiently active counter-revolutionary behavior in the autumn of 1905, when the holiest pillars of “culture” were in danger. The leader of the Liberals, Miliukov, who carried on *sub rosa* negotiations with the Winter Palace, argued quite properly in the press that by the end of 1905 the Kadets were unable even to appear before the masses. “Those who now blame the [Kadet] party,” he wrote, “for not protesting then, by convoking meetings, against the revolutionary illusions of Trotskyism ... simply do not understand or do not remember the moods then prevalent among the democratic public that attended these meetings.” By the “illusions of Trotskyism” the liberal leader meant the independent policy of the proletariat, which attracted to the Soviets the sympathies of the cities’ lower classes, soldiers, peasants and of all the oppressed, thus alienating “cultivated” society. The evolution of the Mensheviks developed along parallel lines. Time and again they had to alibi themselves to the liberals for having found themselves in a bloc with Trotsky after October, 1905. The explanations of that talented publicist of the Mensheviks, Martov, came to this – that it was necessary to make concessions to the “revolutionary illusions” of the masses.

In Tiflis [now Tbilisi, capital of Georgia, where Stalin grew up and began his political activity] political groupings were formed on the same basis of principles as in Petersburg. “The smashing of reaction,” wrote the leader of the Caucasian Mensheviks, Jordania, “the winning and attainment of the constitution – will come from the conscious unification and single-minded direction of all the forces of the proletariat and

the bourgeoisie. True, the peasantry will be drawn into this movement and will invest it with the character of a natural force; nevertheless, it is these two classes that will play the decisive role, while the peasant movement will pour water on their mill.” Lenin made sport of Jordania’s misgivings that an irreconcilable policy toward the bourgeoisie might doom the workers to helplessness. Jordania “discusses the question of a possible isolation of the proletariat in the democratic insurrection and forgets the peasantry. Of the possible allies of the proletariat, he recognises and takes delight in the landed gentry of the county councils, but he does not recognise the peasants. And that in the Caucasus!” Lenin’s retort, essentially correct, oversimplified the question on one point. Jordania did not “forget” the peasantry, and, as is evident from Lenin’s own hint, could not have possibly forgotten it in the Caucasus, where it was then stormily rising under the banner of the Mensheviks. But Jordania saw the peasantry not so much as a political ally as a political battering ram which the bourgeoisie could and should utilise in union with the proletariat. He did not believe that the peasantry could become a leading or even an independent force of the revolution, and in that he was not wrong; but neither did he believe that the proletariat could secure the victory of the peasant uprising in the role of leader – and in that was his fatal error. The Menshevik idea of union between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie actually meant submission of the workers as well as the peasants to the liberals. The reactionary utopianism of that program proceeded from the fact that the far-gone dismemberment of the classes paralysed the bourgeoisie from the start as a revolutionary factor. In that fundamental question Bolshevism was right: the quest of union with the liberal bourgeoisie was perforce driving the Social-Democracy into the camp opposed to the revolutionary movement of the workers and peasants. In 1905 the Mensheviks merely lacked the courage to draw all the necessary inferences from their theory of “bourgeois” revolution. In 1917, pursuing their ideas to the bitter end, they broke their neck.

On the question of attitude toward the liberals Stalin sided with Lenin during the years of the First Revolution. It must be said that in that period, when it was a question of the oppositionist bourgeoisie, even a majority of the rank and file Mensheviks found themselves closer to Lenin than to Plekhanov. A disdainful attitude toward liberals was a literary tradition of intellectual radicalism. But it would be utterly useless to look for an independent contribution of Koba’s on that question, be it an analysis of social relations in the Caucasus or new arguments, or even so much as a new formulation of old arguments. Jordania, leader of the Caucasian Mensheviks, was incomparably more independent of Plekhanov than Stalin was of Lenin. “In vain do the Messieurs Liberals try,” wrote Koba after Bloody Sunday [1905], “to save the tottering throne of the Tsar. In vain do they proffer the hand of succor to the Tsar! ... The agitated masses of people are getting ready for revolution, not for conciliation with the Tsar... Yes, gentlemen, vain are your efforts! The Russian Revolution is unavoidable, as unavoidable as the sunrise! Can you stop the rising sun? – that is the question!” and so forth. Koba could not fly higher than that. Two and a half years later, repeating Lenin’s words almost literally, he wrote: “The Russian liberal bourgeoisie is anti-revolutionary. It cannot be the propeller, much less the leader, of the revolution; it is the sworn enemy of the revolution; and against it a persistent struggle must be waged.” It was on that fundamental issue that Stalin passed through a complete metamorphosis during the ensuing ten years, so that he greeted the February Revolution of 1917 as a supporter of the bloc with the liberal bourgeoisie, and, in consonance with that, as the herald of fusion with the Mensheviks into one party. Only Lenin, upon arrival from abroad, sharply terminated Stalin’s independent policy, which he called a mockery of Marxism.

Populists regarded all workers and peasants as simply “toilers” and “exploited ones,” who were equally interested in socialism, while to Marxists a peasant was a petty-

bourgeois, capable of becoming a socialist only to the extent that he either materially or spiritually ceased being a peasant. With a sentimentality characteristic of them, Populists saw in that sociological characterisation a dire insult to the peasantry. Along that line was fought for two generations the principal battle between the revolutionary tendencies of Russia. In order to understand the subsequent conflict between Stalinism and Trotskyism, it is necessary to emphasise that, in consonance with all Marxist tradition, Lenin never regarded the peasant as a socialist ally of the proletariat; on the contrary, it was the overwhelming preponderance of the peasantry which had led Lenin to conclude that a socialist revolution was impossible in Russia. That idea recurs time and again in all his articles that directly or indirectly touch upon the agrarian question.

“We support the peasant movement,” wrote Lenin in September, 1905, “in so far as it is revolutionary and democratic. We are preparing (at once, immediately preparing) to fight against it in so far as it asserts itself as a reactionary anti-proletarian movement. The whole essence of Marxism is in that twofold task. ...” Lenin saw the Western proletariat and to some extent the semi-proletarians of the Russian village as socialist allies, but never the whole of the peasantry. “At first, we support to the very end, with all means, including confiscation,” he repeated with persistence typical of him, “the peasant in general against the landed proprietor, but later (and not even later, but at the very same time) we support the proletariat against the peasant in general.”

“The peasantry will win in a bourgeois democratic revolution,” he wrote in March, 1906, “and thereby will completely exhaust its revolutionism as a peasantry. The proletariat will win in a bourgeois democratic revolution, and thereby will only begin really to unfold its true socialist revolutionism.” “The movement of the peasantry,” he repeated in May of the same year, “is the movement of another class; it is a struggle not against the foundations of capitalism but for their purging of all the remnants of serfdom.” That view may be traced in Lenin from article to article, from year to year, from volume to volume. Expressions and illustrations vary, but the basic thought is unalterable. Nor could it have been otherwise. Had Lenin seen a socialist ally in the peasantry, he would not have had the slightest basis for insisting upon the *bourgeois* character of the revolution and limiting it to “the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry,” to purely democratic tasks. On the occasions when Lenin accused me of “underestimating” the peasantry, he did not have in mind my failure to recognise the *socialist* tendencies of the peasantry but rather my failure to realise sufficiently, from Lenin’s point of view, the bourgeois-democratic independence of the peasantry, its capacity to create its *own* power and through it impede the establishment of the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat.

The revaluation of that question commenced only during the years of the thermidorian [post-revolutionary] reaction, the beginning of which [in the 1920s] coincided by and large with Lenin’s illness and death. From then on the union of Russian workers and peasants was declared to be in itself sufficient guaranty against the dangers of restoration and a firm pledge that socialism would be achieved within the borders of the Soviet Union. Having substituted the theory of socialism in a separate country for the theory of international revolution, Stalin began to call the Marxist evaluation of the peasantry “Trotskyism”, and moreover not only with reference to the present but retroactively to the entire past.

It is, of course, possible to ask whether the classical Marxist view of the peasantry had not proved erroneous. That theme would lead us far beyond the limits of this appendix. Suffice it to say for the nonce that Marxism never ascribed an absolute and immutable character to its estimation of the peasantry as a non-socialist class. Marx said long ago that the peasant is capable of judgment as well as prejudgment. The very nature of the peasantry is altered under altered conditions. The régime of the

dictatorship of the proletariat discovered very great possibilities for influencing the peasantry and for re-educating it. History has not yet plumbed to the bottom the limits of these possibilities. But it is already clear that the growing role of state compulsion in the U.S.S.R., far from refuting, has basically confirmed the very view of the peasantry that distinguished Russian Marxists from Populists. Yet, whatever the situation on that score today after twenty-odd years of the new régime, the fact remains that prior to the October Revolution, or rather prior to the year 1924, no one in the Marxist camp, and least of all Lenin, had regarded the peasantry as a factor of socialist development. Without the aid of a proletarian revolution in the West, he reiterated time and again, restoration is unavoidable in Russia. He was not mistaken: the Stalinist bureaucracy is nothing else than the first stage of bourgeois restoration.

Such were the divergent positions of the two main factions of the Russian Social-Democracy. But alongside them, as early as the dawn of the First Revolution, a third position was formulated, which met with practically no recognition in those days, but which we must explain – not only because it was confirmed by the events of 1917, but particularly because seven years after the Revolution, after being turned upside down, it began to play an utterly unforeseen role in the political evolution of Stalin and of the entire Soviet bureaucracy.

Early in 1905 I published in Geneva a pamphlet which analysed the political situation as it existed around the winter of 1904. I came to the conclusion that the independent campaign of liberal petitions and banquets had exhausted its possibilities: that the radical intellectuals, who had shifted their hopes to the liberals, had found themselves in a blind alley together with the latter; that the peasant movement was creating conditions favorable for victory yet incapable of assuring it; that the showdown could be brought about only through an armed insurrection of the proletariat; that the very next stage along that way must be the general strike. This pamphlet called, “Until the Ninth of January,” had been written prior to the Bloody Sunday in Petersburg. The powerful wave of strikes which began that day, together with the first armed clashes that supplemented it, was an unequivocal confirmation of the pamphlet’s strategic prognosis.

The preface to my work was written by Parvus, a Russian émigré, who had already become by then a prominent German writer. Parvus’s was an extraordinarily creative personality, capable of becoming infected with the ideas of others as well as enriching others with his ideas. He lacked the inward balance and application necessary to contribute anything worthy of his talents as a thinker and writer to the labour movement. There is no doubt that he exerted considerable influence on my personal development, especially with respect to the social-revolutionary understanding of our epoch. A few years before our first meeting Parvus passionately defended the idea of a general strike in Germany, but the country was passing through prolonged industrial prosperity, the Social-Democracy was adjusting itself to the Hohenzollern régime, and a foreigner’s revolutionary propaganda met nothing but ironical indifference. Having read my pamphlet in manuscript, the very next day after the bloody events in Petersburg, Parvus was overwhelmed with the thought of the exceptional role which the proletariat of backward Russia was called upon to play. Several days spent jointly in Munich were filled with conversations that clarified much to both of us and brought us personally close together. The preface Parvus then wrote to the pamphlet entered permanently into the history of the Russian Revolution. In a few pages he shed light on those social peculiarities of backward Russia which, true enough, were already well known, but from which no one before him had drawn all the necessary inferences.

“Political radicalism throughout Western Europe,” wrote Parvus, “as everybody knows, depended primarily on the petty bourgeoisie. These were artisans and generally all of that part of the bourgeoisie which was caught up by the industrial development but which at the same time was superseded by the class of capitalists. In Russia of the pre-capitalist period cities developed on the Chinese rather than on the European model. These were administrative centers, purely official and bureaucratic in character devoid of any political significance, while in the economic sense they were trade bazaars for the landlord and peasant milieu of its environs. Their development was still rather inconsiderable, when it was terminated by the capitalist process, which began to establish large cities in its own image, that is, factory towns and centers of world trade ... That which had hindered the development of petty bourgeois democracy came to benefit the class consciousness of the proletariat in Russia – the weak development of the artisan form of production. The proletariat was immediately concentrated in the factories ...

“Greater and greater masses of peasants will be drawn into the movement. But all they can do is to aggravate the political anarchy already rampant in the country and thus weaken the government; they cannot become a compact revolutionary army. Hence, as the revolution develops, an ever greater portion of political work will fall to the lot of the proletariat. At the same time its political awareness will be enhanced and its political energy will grow apace ...

“The Social-Democracy will be confronted with this dilemma: to assume responsibility for the provisional government or to stand aloof from the labour movement. The workers will regard that government as their own, no matter what the attitude of the Social-Democracy. In Russia only workers can accomplish a revolutionary insurrection. In Russia the revolutionary provisional government will be a government of the *workers’ democracy*. That government will be Social-Democratic, should the Social-Democracy be at the head of the revolutionary movement of the Russian proletariat ...

“The Social-Democratic provisional government cannot accomplish a socialist insurrection in Russia, but the very process of liquidating the autocracy and establishing a democratic republic will provide it with fertile ground for political activity.”

In the heyday of revolutionary events, in the autumn of 1905, I met Parvus again, this time in Petersburg. Remaining organisationally independent of both factions, we jointly edited *Russkoye Slovo*, (The Russian Word), a newspaper for the working class masses, and, in coalition with the Mensheviks, the important political newspaper, *Nachalo* (The Beginning). The theory of permanent revolution was usually associated with the names of “Parvus and Trotsky”. That was only partially correct. Parvus attained revolutionary maturity at the end of the preceding century, when he marched at the head of the forces that fought so-called “Revisionism”, i.e., the opportunistic distortions of Marx’s theory. But his optimism was undermined by the failure of all his efforts to push the German Social-Democracy in the direction of a more resolute policy. Parvus grew increasingly more reserved about the perspectives of a socialist revolution in the West. At the same time he felt that “the Social-Democratic provisional government cannot accomplish a socialist insurrection in Russia.” Hence, his prognosis indicated, instead of the transformation of the democratic into the socialist revolution, merely the establishment in Russia of a régime of workers’ democracy, more or less as in Australia, where the first labour government, resting on a farmerist foundation, did not venture beyond the limits of the bourgeois régime.

I did not share that conclusion. Australian democracy, maturing organically on the virgin soil of a new continent, immediately assumed a conservative character and dominated the youthful yet rather privileged proletariat. Russian democracy, on the

contrary, could come about only in consequence of a large-scale revolutionary insurrection, the dynamics of which would never permit the labour government to maintain itself within the framework of bourgeois democracy. Our differences of opinion, which began soon after the Revolution of 1905, led to a complete break at the beginning of the war, when Parvus, in whom the skeptic had completely killed the revolutionist, proved to be on the side of German imperialism and subsequently became the counselor and inspirer of the First President of the German Republic, Ebert.

After writing my pamphlet, "Until the Ninth of January," I repeatedly returned to the development and the grounding of the theory of permanent revolution. In view of the significance it subsequently acquired in the intellectual evolution of the hero of this biography [Stalin], it is necessary to present it here in the form of exact quotations from my works of the years 1905 and 1906.

"The nucleus of population in a contemporary city – at least, in a city of economic and political significance – is the sharply differentiated class of hired labour. It is this class, essentially unknown to the Great French Revolution, which is fated to play the decisive role in our revolution. ... In an economically more backward country the proletariat may come to power sooner than in a country more advanced capitalistically. The conception of a kind of automatic dependence of the proletarian dictatorship on a country's technical forces and means is a prejudice of extremely simplified 'economic' materialism. Such a view has nothing in common with Marxism. ... Notwithstanding the fact that the productive forces of United States industry are ten times greater than ours, the political role of the Russian proletariat, its influence on the politics of its own country and the possibility that it may soon influence world politics are incomparably greater than the role and significance of the American proletariat. ...

"It seems to me that the Russian Revolution will create such conditions that the power may (in the event of victory, *must*) pass into the hands of the proletariat before the politicians of bourgeois liberalism will find it possible fully to unfold their genius for statecraft. The Russian bourgeoisie will surrender all the revolutionary positions to the proletariat. It will also have to surrender revolutionary hegemony over the peasantry. The proletariat in power will come to the peasantry as the class liberator. The proletariat, leaning on the peasantry, will bring into motion all the forces for raising the cultural level of the village and for developing political consciousness in the peasantry. ...

"But will not perhaps the peasantry itself drive the proletariat away and supersede it? That is impossible. All historic experience repudiates that supposition. It shows that the peasantry is utterly incapable of an *independent* political role ... From the aforesaid it is clear how I look upon the idea of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry'. The point is not whether I deem it admissible in principle, whether I 'want' or 'do not want' such a form of political co-operation. I deem it unrealisable – at least, in the direct and immediate sense. ..."

The foregoing already shows how incorrect is the assertion that the conception here expounded "jumped over the bourgeois revolution," as has been subsequently reiterated without end. "The struggle for the democratic renovation of Russia ..." I wrote at the same time, "is in its entirety derived from capitalism, is being conducted by forces formed on the basis of capitalism, and *immediately, in the first place*, is directed against the feudal and vassal obstacles that stand in the way of developing a capitalist society." But the substance of the question was with what forces and by which methods could these obstacles be overcome. "The framework of all the questions of the revolution may be limited by the assertion that our revolution is *bourgeois* in its objective goals and consequently, in all its inevitable results, and it is possible at the same time to close one's eyes to the fact that the principal active force of that bourgeois revolution is

the proletariat, which is pushing itself toward power with all the impact of the revolution. ... One may comfort himself with the thought that Russia's social conditions have not yet ripened for a socialist economy – and at the same time overlook the thought that, upon coming to power, the proletariat would inevitably, with all the logic of its situation, push itself toward the management of the economy at the expense of the state. ... Coming into the government not as helpless hostages but as the leading force, the representatives of the proletariat will by virtue of that alone smash the demarcation between the minimal and maximal program i.e., *place collectivism on the order of the day*. At what point in that tendency the proletariat would be stopped will depend on the inter-relation of forces, but certainly not on the initial intentions of the proletariat's party. ...

“But we may already ask ourselves: must the dictatorship of the proletariat inevitably smash itself against the framework of the bourgeois revolution or can it, on the basis of the existing historical situation of the *world* look forward to the perspective of victory, after smashing this limiting framework? ... One thing may be said with certainty: without the direct governmental support of the European proletariat, the working class of Russia will not be able to maintain itself in power and transform its temporary reign into an enduring socialist dictatorship. ...” But this does not necessarily lead to a pessimistic prognosis: “the political liberation, led by the working class of Russia, will raise the leader to a height unprecedented in history, transmit to him colossal forces and means, and make him the initiator of the world-wide liquidation of capitalism, for which history has created all the objective prerequisites. ...”

As to the extent to which international Social-Democracy will prove capable of fulfilling its revolutionary task, I wrote in 1906: “The European Socialist parties – and in the first place, the mightiest of them, the German party – have developed their conservatism, which grows stronger in proportion to the size of the masses embraced by socialism and the effectiveness of the organisation and the discipline of these masses. Because of that, the Social-Democracy, as the organisation that embodies the political experience of the proletariat, may at a given moment become the immediate obstacle on the path of an open clash between the workers and the bourgeois reaction. ...” Yet I concluded my analysis by expressing the assurance that “the Eastern revolution will infect the Western proletariat with revolutionary idealism and arouse in it the desire to start talking ‘Russian’ with its enemy. ...”

To sum up. Populism, like Slavophilism, proceeded from illusions that Russia's course development would be utterly unique, escaping capitalism and the bourgeois republic. Plekhanov's Marxism concentrated on proving the identity in principle of Russia's historical course with that of the West. The program that grew out of that ignored the very real and far from mystical peculiarities of Russia's social structure and revolutionary development. The Menshevik view of the revolution, purged of its episodic stratifications and individual deviations, was tantamount to the following: the victory of the Russian bourgeois revolution was possible only under the leadership of the liberal bourgeoisie and must put the latter in power. Later the democratic régime would let the Russian proletariat, with incomparably greater success than heretofore, catch up with its elder Western brothers on the road of the struggle for Socialism.

Lenin's perspective may be briefly expressed in the following words: the backward Russian bourgeoisie is incapable of completing its own revolution! The complete victory of the revolution, through the intermediacy of the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry”, would purge the land of medievalism, invest the development of Russian capitalism with American tempo, strengthen the proletariat in city and village and make really possible the struggle for socialism. On the

other hand, the victory of the Russian revolution would give tremendous impetus to the socialist revolution in the West while the latter would not only protect Russia from the dangers of restoration but would also enable the Russian proletariat to come to the conquest of power in a comparatively brief historical period.

The perspective of permanent revolution may be summarised in the following way: the complete victory of the democratic revolution in Russia is conceivable only in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, leaning on the peasantry. The dictatorship of the proletariat, which would inevitably place on the order of the day not only democratic but socialistic tasks as well, would at the same time give a powerful impetus to the international socialist revolution. Only the victory of the proletariat in the West could protect Russia from bourgeois restoration and assure it the possibility of rounding out the establishment of socialism.

That compact formula discloses with equal distinctness the similarity of the latter two concepts in their irreconcilable differentiation from the liberal Menshevik perspective as well as their extremely essential distinction from each other on the question of the social character and the tasks of the "dictatorship" which must grow out of the revolution. The not infrequent complaint in the writings of the present Moscow theoreticians that the program of the dictatorship of the proletariat was "premature" in 1905, is beside the point. In an empirical sense the program of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry proved equally "premature". The unfavorable combination of forces at the time of the First Revolution did not so much preclude the dictatorship of the proletariat as the victory of the revolution in general. Yet all the revolutionary groups were based on the hope of complete victory; the supreme revolutionary struggle would have been impossible without such a hope. The differences of opinion dealt with the general perspective of the revolution and the strategy arising from that. The perspective of Menshevism was false to the core: it pointed out the wrong road to the proletariat. The perspective of Bolshevism was not complete: it correctly pointed out the general direction of the struggle, but characterised its stages incorrectly. The insufficiency in the perspective of Bolshevism did not become apparent in 1905 only because the revolution itself did not undergo further development. But then at the beginning of 1917 Lenin was obliged to alter his perspective, in direct conflict with the old cadres of his party.

No political prognosis can pretend to be mathematically exact; suffice it, if it correctly indicates the general line of development and helps to orient the actual course of events, which inevitably bends the main line right and left. In that sense it is impossible not to see that the concept of permanent revolution has completely passed the test of history. During the initial years of the Soviet régime no one denied that; on the contrary, that fact found acknowledgment in a number of official publications. But when the bureaucratic reaction against October opened up in the calmed and cooled upper crust of Soviet society, it was at once directed against the theory which reflected the first proletarian revolution more completely than anything else while at the same time openly exposing its unfinished, limited, and partial character. Thus, by way of repulsion, originated the theory of socialism in a separate country, the basic dogma of Stalinism.