

# **inqaba**

## **YA BASEBENZI**

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# Introduction

“While the democratic petty bourgeois want to bring the revolution to an end as quickly as possible, achieving at most the aims already mentioned (tax reforms, easy credit, constitutional democracy, better wages, etc—*Editor*), it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has conquered state power and until the association of the proletarians has progressed sufficiently far—not only in one country but in all the leading countries of the world—that competition between the proletarians of these countries ceases and at least the decisive forces of production are concentrated in the hands of the workers.”

Karl Marx, *Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League*, March 1850.

The article which follows was written by Leon Trotsky, one of the leaders of the Russian revolution, as an appendix to his biography of Stalin. Written at the end of Trotsky's life, it was first published in 1941, the year after his assassination by agents of Stalin's secret police.

The article outlines three different perspectives on the Russian revolution which were put forward in the years before 1917 by different tendencies within the political party of the Russian workers, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.

Every revolutionary movement needs perspectives for its struggle, to identify what it is fighting against, how victory can be achieved, and what will take the place of the old society.

With the forward thrust of the mass movement in South Africa there rages an unprecedented level of debate among the black workers and the youth about perspectives—about the character and the tasks of the South African revolution and the forces that must be mobilised to carry out these tasks.

The overwhelming majority of the people are subjected at one and the same time to the vicious degradation of white racism, and to the miseries of the cheap labour system imposed by capitalism. All these chains on the people must be broken.

Does the destruction of racism

and capitalism require two separate revolutions? Can national liberation be achieved unless the struggle against capitalism is victorious? On the other hand, some ask, can racist oppression and the domination of the capitalist class be destroyed together in the course of a single revolution?

Won't a programme of simultaneous struggle for national liberation and against capitalism lead perhaps to division in our ranks and a weakening of our forces—or is it rather the only basis on which successful unity in action of all the oppressed can be built?

Here important lessons can be learnt from the clash of ideas which took place over the character and tasks of, and the relation of forces in, the Russian revolution—and by the test which these ideas underwent in the heat of the revolution itself.

The three conceptions of the revolution outlined here are those of the Mensheviks; of Lenin and the Bolsheviks between 1905 and early 1917; and of Trotsky himself in this period.

All three conceptions were in agreement on the general character of the revolution that was impending in Russia: it was 'bourgeois' in that Tsarist absolutism and the power of a feudal landowning class needed to be overthrown.

But between the Mensheviks on the one hand, and Lenin and Trot-

sky on the other, there was a fundamental disagreement: on the relation of the classes in the society, and therefore on the forces that were capable of carrying out the tasks.

Trotsky explains these differences in the article, and sets out the basic idea of the *permanent revolution* (which from 1904 he had applied to the Russian situation). At the same time he explains certain differences which existed between him and Lenin on this question up until the beginning of 1917.

Their identical analysis of the actual course of the Russian revolution in 1917 brought them together on precisely the same practical standpoint. This course of events confirmed absolutely the position that Trotsky had taken: that to carry the revolution to victory required the working class to take state power.

In February 1917 a revolutionary movement of the workers and peasants forced the abdication of the Tsar (the Russian emperor). Workers everywhere came out on strike and organised themselves in the soviets (councils of delegates elected directly by the workers in their workplaces and districts).

## Workers' power

The peasantry began seizing land and national minorities rose up. Soldiers, sent to fight for the Russian state in the imperialist World War, began to mutiny and desert. The formation of soviets spread among the soldiers, sailors and the peasantry.

The conquest of power lay open to the masses. But the Mensheviks and other reformists, initially in the majority in the Soviets, entered a Provisional Government which remained based on the remnants of the old state and compromised with the bourgeoisie. The Provisional Government was unable to meet a single one of the basic demands of

the masses, which were summarised in a simple slogan of the Bolsheviks: "Bread, Peace, and Land".

Lenin, returning from exile in April, recognised that the immediate task for the working class was to prepare for taking power. This was summed up in the Bolshevik slogan: "All power to the Soviets". In the months which followed, growing numbers, seeing the paralysis of the Provisional Government, rallied to the Bolsheviks, giving them a majority in the crucial soviets in the main cities of Petrograd and Moscow.

On 25-26 October the revolutionary workers and soldiers overthrew the Provisional Government in an armed insurrection led by the Bolsheviks. Power passed to the soviets of workers', peasants' and soldiers' deputies.

Only on the basis of this revolution in October, by which the working class came to power, could the immediate tasks of the Russian revolution be carried out. The new soviet government immediately published a proclamation on the land question, calling on the local peasants' soviets to seize the land from the big landowners and share it among the peasants. The right of national minorities to self-determination was immediately recognised by the proletarian government.

These were precisely the main tasks of the revolution which had been identified in advance in all three conceptions of the Russian revolution outlined in the article published here. But, as Trotsky had anticipated (and as Lenin was in the forefront of arguing from April 1917), they could be accomplished only when the working class took power in its own right and established its own state. (Moreover, it took a workers' government to make the first moves to end Russia's part in the imperialist World War).

At the same time, taking power, the working class inevitably moved forward to crush capitalist exploitation and begin laying the foundations for socialism. Thus, in the period after 1917, the big factories and banks were soon nationalised and the basis of a planned economy laid. This process, too, Trotsky had anticipated in the theory of permanent revolution.

Thus it is completely false to regard the Russian revolution as having occurred in 'two stages': a 'bourgeois-democratic' stage in February, followed by a 'socialist' stage in October. Yet this is how every classic text of Marxism is footnoted in the editions produced in Moscow since the rise of Stalin.

The point is that the Provisional Government was unable, because it remained on a capitalist basis, to carry out any 'bourgeois-democratic' tasks. The October proletarian revolution at one and the same time carried through the immediate bourgeois-democratic tasks facing Russia and passed on to the socialist tasks.

## Internationalism

Equally, however, Lenin and Trotsky had always recognised that the socialist transformation of society could not be completed in one or even a few countries in isolation—let alone in the conditions of economic backwardness which prevailed in Russia. This has always been the ABC of Marxism.

A truly socialist society is possible only in conditions of material abundance together with the democratic rule of the working class. To consolidate their democratic rule and carry through the transition to socialism, the Russian working class depended on the victory of the working class in industrialised Europe.

As Marxism has always stressed, the socialist revolution is a world-wide process against the world-wide power of the capitalist class, bringing the commanding heights of the world economy under the control of the working class.

This lesson, the final aspect of the theory of permanent revolution, was fundamental to the internationalist policy of the Russian workers' state, governed by the Bolsheviks in the first years after the 1917 revolution.

Despite heroic revolutionary struggles by the workers in Western Europe after the First World War, the advance of the socialist revolution was halted and defeated for a whole period.

In isolation, the Russian workers' state degenerated. What Trotsky called the "thermidorian reaction" set in—a political counter-revolution which destroyed the democracy of the first workers' state, entrenched a privileged bureaucracy in power, and led to the dictatorship of Stalin.

Resting on (and defending, in its own interest) the framework of nationalised production and planning, this bureaucracy organised the development of the Russian economy. At the same time it monstrously deformed and corrupted the machinery of the workers' state, turning it into a dictatorship against the workers and peasants.

Seeking to build for itself a position of privilege on the basis of the national economy, it inevitably also turned its back on the international struggle of the working class for socialism.

Proclaiming (against all the fundamentals of Marxism) the possibility of building 'socialism in one country', as a cynical device to justify its narrow nationalism and abandonment of internationalism, it denounced the idea of permanent revolution—in reality, the method of Marxism itself—as the capital crime of so-called "Trotskyism".

Disastrously, the degeneration of the Soviet Union has contributed both to the delay in the world socialist revolution and to the eradication of Marxism as a mass force internationally for several generations. Since before the Second World War Marxist ideas have been defended and developed by only a slender cadre within the workers' movement.

## Stalinism

The 'Communist' leaderships today who claim the heritage of the party of Lenin have in fact abandoned Marxism for variations of nationalism and reformism. Nowhere in the world do they set before the working class the task of taking power.

Yet, as Trotsky remarks in the article published here, no power on earth has yet been discovered which

can halt the class struggle. The theory of permanent revolution is taking its own revenge on the bankrupt conceptions of Stalinism.

Today, throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the correctness of the permanent revolution is revealed starkly.

During the epoch of imperialism (roughly from the end of the nineteenth century) the world-wide development of capitalism has meant the imposition of the most modern forms of capitalist production within societies where the old social systems have not been fully destroyed. No room has existed for the development of strong national capitalist classes in a "Third World" dominated by a world market under the control of the imperialist bourgeoisie.

## Colonial revolution

The 'national' capitalist class in these countries where capitalism was late on the scene could develop only as a minor cog in the wheel of imperialism—leaning, for support against the masses, on the pillars of the old society. The all-round development of society has been impossible; the democratic tasks heap up, insoluble on the basis of capitalism.

Progress for the peoples in the colonial world has been possible only on the basis of breaking the stranglehold of capitalism.

The huge revolutions which have engulfed the "Third World" in the period since the Second World War confirm this central idea of the permanent revolution, if in a distorted way.

In countries where the proletariat is a decisive factor, only the proletariat can carry out the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution and then carry through the socialist revolution. Now historically since the Second World War it has been demonstrated that under certain conditions the peasants and the middle class in a caricatured form can carry out in part the bourgeois-democratic revolution and then pass on to the socialist tasks—but only in the form of deformed workers'

states.

In these struggles the decisive role has been played by the peasant masses, led and organised by middle class intellectuals, soldiers, etc. The working class, lacking independent organisation and leadership, has played an insignificant role. The middle-class leaders of these revolutions have invariably set out on the basis of programmes for national liberation and democratic reform—but without consciously linking these to the task of overthrowing capitalism.

But the very rottenness of capitalism, falling apart under the pressures of the masses, has left the leadership no alternative but to replace the capitalist system by nationalised production and planning.

Without workers' democracy—the conscious control and management of society by the working class itself—these new states have come into existence as deformed workers' states under bureaucratic domination from the outset.

The new basis of production gives the bureaucracy, for a whole period, an ability to develop the economy. At the same time the integration of the world market under the domination of monopoly capitalism places severe limits on what can be achieved within the framework of a single nation-state.

We will explain these processes of the colonial revolution in more detail in future supplements.

In South Africa, in contrast to much of the former colonial world, large-scale industry has developed, and the working class has emerged as the decisive force. Here too, the method of the permanent revolution is indispensable to understand the coming revolution.

Here, the development of capitalism has been possible only on the basis of the most monstrous dictatorship over the majority of the people, and the racial division and fragmentation of society. These conditions are summed up in the system of migrant labour—the basis of cheap labour and capitalist profitability.

National liberation, the reconquest of the land by the people, and the establishment of democracy remain in consequence as tasks to be

carried out.

There are those who still argue that national liberation can be achieved before the revolutionary struggle against the capitalist class is mounted. But the course of events themselves, in which the youth and the politically active workers increasingly recognise the inseparable interconnection between national oppression and capitalism, is causing this 'two-stage' theory to fall into disrepute.

More frequent today is the argument that, if there is such an inseparable connection, then mobilising for national liberation will in and of itself result in the defeat of the capitalist class. Did this not happen, after all, in Mozambique and Angola?

But, in contrast to Mozambique and Angola, the capitalist class in South Africa is strongly entrenched (even if on the defensive) and able to rely on potentially large forces of reaction. To hold back the movement of the workers the capitalist class will use every device, twisting and wriggling in all directions, seeking to crush, disarm, and deceive. The need for a conscious movement of the working class, developing a programme on the basis of Marxism, with a conscious leadership, becomes a decisive factor.

## Counter-revolution

There have been numerous instances, inside and outside the "Third World" where a working class with a decisive weight in society has pressed forward, to resolve all the daily burdens thrust upon it, to the point of revolution.

The capitalist class has been brought to its knees—yet the knockout blow has not been delivered. Invariably this has been the result of the failure on the part of the workers' leadership to put forward a conscious programme for workers' power, relying instead on the existing machinery of the capitalist state.

With society still locked in the grip of the system of profit, none of the fundamental tasks of concern to the masses can be carried out. The

forward movement ebbs; the masses become demoralised and divided; the middle classes desert them.

Granted a reprieve, its state machinery not yet smashed, the capitalist class rises from its knees like a wounded beast, and prepares for revenge.

In just such circumstances revolutionary movements of the workers and peasants have suffered crushing defeats—for example in Spain in the 1930's (leaving 1 million dead); in Indonesia in the 1960's (at least half a million Communists and trade unionists slaughtered); in Chile in 1973 (where 50-100 000 were shot or tortured to death).

History demonstrates that it is the failure to gather the struggles around all the unresolved tasks of society into a programme of strug-

gle for workers' rule which leads to fatal division of the masses.

By linking the national and democratic tasks to the socialist revolution the method of permanent revolution makes it possible for the workers' movement to advance a detailed programme to meet the needs of all oppressed sections of society. The essential element in this programme of unity is an implacable struggle to overthrow the bourgeoisie.

## Cadre

The conscious understanding of this lesson is vital for our struggle.

Armed with the lessons of the permanent revolution, the politically active workers and youth can build the ANC as a fighting mass organisation, drawing together all the oppressed. The struggle for decent wages and jobs for all, an end to the pass laws and migrant labour system, and the abolition of all forms of racial and national oppression will thus at the same time consciously become the struggle to overthrow the capitalist state and establish workers' democracy.

In this way the world socialist revolution, begun in Russia in 1917, will take a step nearer completion.

Towards this end, mastering the theory of the permanent revolution and learning how to apply it, will be a part of the essential development of every cadre.

# Three concepts of the Russian Revolution

By Leon Trotsky

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 popularized 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 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 focussed 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 "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 favourable 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—*Editor*) should not have ventured beyond those popular formulae which formed the common heritage of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. "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.

## The Menshevik theory of 'two stages'

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 spectre 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. "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 views of the liberal bourgeoisie.

### Struggle for the land

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 programme as the programme of bourgeois progressivism. "Nationalisation is a bourgeois measure," he insisted at the Unifica-

tion 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 realization 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 counter-revolutionary 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 re-distribution of land ownership for the benefit of the peasantry, carry out a consistent and complete democratization, 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 emphasized 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

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 by the railroads; but both the market and the railroads 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.

## Liberal bourgeoisie

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 paralyze 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 moralizings 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 unreconcilable 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.



