

Traditions of Revolutionary Socialism

A Solidarity Working Paper

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Solidarity 7012 Michigan Ave. Detroit, MI 48210
(313) 841-0160 www.solidarity-us.org Solidarity@igc.org

INTRODUCTION

Why should activists in the labor movement and other major social movements of today give attention to long-dead revolutionary socialists such as Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, and Leon Trotsky?

While these people are dead, there are some things that are very much alive:

- The global capitalist system, which they spent so much effort to analyze;
- The exploitative, oppressive, and incredibly destructive problems generated by capitalism, which they spent so much effort struggling against;
- The working class, still exploited and oppressed, in some ways more knocked around than ever, certainly bigger than ever, to whose cause they were all committed, and which they saw as having the potential power for creating a better world;
- The need for socialism – the social ownership and democratic control of the economy, for the purpose of providing a decent life and free development for all people;
- The lessons of the struggles of the labor and socialist movements – victories and defeats, brilliant innovations and instructive mistakes, secured by the toil and tears and laughter, sometimes the blood and always the honest sweat of hundreds and thousands and millions of the workers and the oppressed and the audacious radicals and revolutionaries – of which Marx and Engels, Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky were an important part;
- Related to all of the above, an insightful, dynamic, informative, useful way of thinking – which they helped to develop -- about history and current events and our own lives.

Reconsider what has just been said. Arising and evolving through capitalist exploitation, the

working class needs to liberate itself through the creation of socialism. Especially since the dominant practice of self-proclaimed “socialists” in the twentieth century has been the so-called “socialism” from above of reformist bureaucracies and Stalinist tyrants, we need to be clear: a genuine socialism that truly replaces the oppressive nature of capitalism can only be created by the laboring majority of the Earth’s people. Animated by this truth, the revolutionaries discussed in this Working Paper established and continued the process of developing a materialist method for ending exploitation through the struggles of the exploited workers themselves. They especially learned from the revolutionary upsurges of their era – the democratic tidal wave of 1848, the Paris Commune of 1871, the mass strikes and uprisings of 1905, and the 1917 revolutions in Russia replacing tsarist autocracy with the quest for workers’ democracy. The struggles of our own time, and the hope for our own future, are bound up with the life experience and struggles of masses of working people which generated the insights developed by the revolutionaries discussed here.

The four contributions to this Working Paper by Steve Bloom, Dianne Feeley, Peter Olson and Paul Le Blanc are based on presentations made at the 2001 Socialist Summer School held by Solidarity in Pittsburgh.* Each of those presentations were infused by an understanding that these particular individuals have had a profound impact on the current of the socialist movement that Solidarity is part of, and should be taken seriously – valuing what they did and said, but also looking at such things critically. This means critically evaluating these revolutionaries in relation to their own historical contexts, but also critically assessing their relevance for our own context.

* We are also including in this Working Paper brief biographies of the revolutionaries discussed here, plus bibliographies, based on those in Paul Le Blanc, *From Marx to Gramsci: A Reader in Revolutionary Marxist Politics* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1996), itself a useful source on the revolutionary socialist tradition.

Indeed, the Summer School focused on a variety of contemporary issues and developments – experiences and organizing efforts among present-day workers, struggles around racism and feminism and sexuality, struggles around globalization and ecology, new student movements, contemporary anarchism, cultural and multi-cultural innovations, and more. Revolutionary Marxism can make sense only by being open to, by embracing, and by absorbing the new challenges, experiences and lessons of our time.

Obviously, there are differences among members of Solidarity – and among the contributors to this Working Paper – on how best to interpret and assess and utilize one or another element in the revolutionary socialist tradition. There is no “orthodoxy” among us on such matters. But probably most of us feel that there is something of value in efforts to understand and collectively discuss the thinking and activities of revolutionary socialists who went before us. There are many other socialists and revolutionaries whose lives and ideas are also worth looking at, and we anticipate that future Working Papers will help focus our attention on some of them. We hope that this initial offering will help to stir the thinking, and even add to the knowledge, of our sisters and brothers in the struggles of today and tomorrow.

KARL MARX AND FREDERICK ENGELS

by Steve Bloom

There are different ways that people study historical figures. Most often we get biographical studies (that is, a discussion of who they were) or ideological studies (what they thought). Both of these are perfectly valid. But I want to approach Marx a bit differently today. You already have a short biography. And I will talk about essential ideological contributions. But mostly I want to focus on Marx in still a third kind of way: philosophically or methodologically.

Good, nobody got up and walked out of the room. You don't need to get nervous. I won't use words that nobody (including me) can understand. All I mean by this is that we are going to talk about *how* Marx thought, rather than simply what he thought or who he was.

Also, before we begin, I want to stop for a moment to acknowledge the essential role of another figure whose name is usually coupled with Marx's: Friedrich Engels. Engels was Marx's friend, sponsor, and cothinker, jointly responsible for the development of Marxist ideas. When Marx died, his most important work, *Capital*, remained unfinished. Engels took the unfinished notes and turned out the manuscript to be published. And he continued to be the most authoritative spokesperson for Marxist ideas until his own death in 1895. So whatever we say about Marx today is also true of Engels. His contribution was key.

A Scientific Method

What was Karl Marx's revolution in philosophy and methodology? This is often talked about. I think most of you have probably heard the name “Scientific Socialism” before. I will argue, however, that this concept has been little understood.

Socialist ideas had been around for a long time before Marx came along. But they were simply treated as a set of good ideas, with no thought to what social forces would be able to actually make socialism happen. In other words: why would anyone who *could* introduce socialism actually do so?

Marx was interested in that question: How can socialism emerge from the present economic/social/political reality which exists in the world? And he determined that there was an actor on the historical stage, the working class, which had both an interest in introducing socialism and the socio-economic power to do so. But it would take a social revolution to achieve such a transformation.

The general study of this problem: the relationship of the working class to other social classes, the relationship of the socialist revolution to previous social revolutions, and the ways individuals and organizations can act to either advance or retard the development of the socialist revolution, all these things came to be wrapped up together in the concept of “scientific socialism.”

But because of how badly this notion has been misunderstood we need to talk a bit more about what the term actually means, *and what it does not mean!* First, what we do not mean: We do

But because of how badly this notion has been misunderstood we need to talk a bit more about what the term actually means, *and what it does not mean!* First, what we do not mean: We do not mean that social forces, and the outcomes of their interactions, can be predicted and controlled the way a chemist might predict and control a chemical reaction in a laboratory, or the way a physicist can predict what will happen when subatomic particles interact (even if only as probable outcomes of specific events), or the way we can predict eclipses of the sun and moon.

Perhaps this seems laughable. But it is actually the approach to "scientific socialism" asserted by the Stalinist school of "Marxism-Leninism." This has opened Marxism up to ridicule from those who would like to discredit any idea of "scientific socialism," but it is the furthest thing in the world from what Marx and Engels actually meant when they used this term. (Marx and Engels never explicitly developed this concept in the way I am about to describe, but subsequent Marxists did—including theoreticians of the Second International and others.)

In reality there are many kinds of scientific endeavors, not all experimental, and many extremely imprecise. We could talk a lot about this, but to keep it short just think about the single best scientific analogue with Marxism: medicine.

Is there a scientific basis to the practice of medicine? Of course. Can a doctor therefore precisely diagnose and treat every patient without uncertainty as to the causes of symptoms or ambiguity about what particular treatments will do to the body? Of course not. Medicine is not a "science" like the prediction of eclipses. And doctors make plenty of mistakes.

The measure of a good doctor is that she or he learns from mistakes, tries to correct them in time, and is better prepared the next time they see a similar condition. Likewise with the practice of scientific socialism by revolutionaries. We need to accumulate knowledge with every revolution, every social struggle we are involved in. We need to plan, and take action confidently based on previous experience. But we also have to realize that mistakes are inevitable. So we will need to correct and learn from them.

This is the method that Marx and Engels actually practiced. It represented a genuine revolution in social philosophy and methodology. Marx and Engels did not develop a scientific theory of revolution that was a set of iron laws. Rather, scientific socialism constitutes a broad set of guidelines to help us recognize the similarities in diverse situations so we can deal with them more effectively. It also involves understanding that each situation is different and has to be approached as a unique experience. The key is being able to combine these two perspectives. Again it is like the problems faced by physicians. Each case, no matter how similar to previous cases is also different, and the *art* of medicine, like the *art* of revolution (the part that cannot be quantified in a "scientific" way) involves sorting through what is similar and what is different, making creative judgments about how to address each aspect, and being prepared to adjust and change as the reality changes, and as our experiences reveal new aspects of reality to us.

As I say, we could go on for some additional time about this whole question of scientific socialist methodology, but if you keep the analogy with medicine in mind it will serve you pretty well as a guideline.

Dynamic View of Reality

Now we must deal briefly with another aspect of Marx's revolution in philosophy (again I ask you not to get nervous), a set of principles called "Dialectical Materialism." We could take up a whole class session on this, indeed we could have many classes. But here is the very brief 5-minute version:

A generation before Marx, a German philosopher by the name of Hegel developed a system of logic that was different from the logic developed originally by Aristotle and taught as gospel for centuries. Aristotelian logic is characterized by two statements: First "A equals A" and second "Not A does not equal A." These statements are certainly true in important ways, which is why Aristotelian logic has been such a powerful analytical tool for centuries. But they deal with the world as if it was filled with static and unchanging entities which either are, or are not, a particular thing.

Hegelian logic insists on precisely the opposite relationship between things. The world is filled with things that are constantly changing and

becoming transformed into something else. Things both share characteristics and are unique at the same time. (Does this remind us of what we said a moment ago about medical patients and social struggles—they are both like the previous patients and struggles we have seen, but also different?)

Hegelian logic explores the ways in which things change and the complex interrelations between things that are both like each other and different at one and the same time. The attraction of such a logic to a revolutionary (who wants, after all, to change what is) should be obvious. So Marx and Engels became prominent supporters of dialectics as a way of thinking about the world.

But they also had a philosophical difference with Hegel. Hegel believed that his logic was very useful in the real world, but its utility was a result of the fact that the real world itself was only an external expression of the ideas we have in our heads. In other words: the world works the way it does because our minds work the way they do. All we can really talk about, according to this way of thinking, is the interaction between our minds and the world.

Hegel's approach belongs to one great historical philosophical school which is called "idealism." Idealism, in this technical sense, has nothing whatsoever to do with the idealism we all share: an insistence that a better future is possible for humanity. No, philosophical idealism means simply that when we think or speak what we are thinking and speaking about is our own ideas, that the actual connection of these ideas to the real world is unknown, and fundamentally cannot be known.

Marx and Engels, along with subsequent generations of Marxists, have subscribed to the opposite philosophical school, called "materialism." Again, materialism in this technical sense has nothing to do with the grasping and acquisitive "materialism" that so many exhibit in our capitalist culture. Rather, philosophical materialism means simply a belief that the real material world exists and is the primary cause of both what happens in it and of our thoughts about it. Human beings are a part of this real world, but it exists independently of us, and the measure of our philosophy is the degree to which our ideas correspond in fact to the reality of that material world. We can tell the extent of this correspondence by the degree to

which we can predict the consequences of the things we do, or of things that happen independently of us in the material world.

So Marx and Engels adopted Hegel's logic, but rejected his idealism, and founded the philosophical school which has come to be known as "dialectical materialism." As with Marxist thought generally, there have been many distortions of dialectical materialism over the years. But these should not be allowed to discredit the validity of the concept as properly applied, any more than the prevalence of incompetent, even criminally negligent, doctors should discredit the practice of medicine.

Understanding History and Economic Reality

Dialectical materialism had a specific application to the study of history, and particularly to the question of social revolution (the concern of "scientific socialism"). And it is this investigation of the dialectics of revolution to which Marx and Engels devoted most of their time, not to the abstract development of philosophy for its own sake. The application of dialectical materialism to the question of history also has a name: "historical materialism."

The basic thesis of historical materialism is that all history, when it gets down to fundamentals, is the history of class struggle—by which we mean the relations between human beings in the process of producing or otherwise acquiring the necessities and luxuries of life. The goal of acquiring more material goods, or dominance in society which will enable further enrichment of individuals, or clans, or tribes, or social classes, is the root cause of wars and revolutions, of great political transformations and upheavals, of all historical motion generally. Ideological rationalizations (God and country, morality, or whatever) are always raised to justify wars and revolutions and political transformations. But these can, if we look deeply enough, always be understood as simply the ideological form through which the underlying class struggle is expressed—given the systems of thought which are actually available to people in a particular time and place.

My favorite illustration of this is the Protestant reformation in Europe during the Middle Ages. There had been many attempts to reform the Catholic church before Martin Luther came

along. But all those who had tried previously ended up being burned at the stake. Why did Luther's heresy succeed in founding a new religion?

I would suggest that it was not because of anything special about its doctrine, or about Martin Luther's personal character. Rather, Martin Luther came along at just the right historical moment, when a rising bourgeois class in Germany had developed to the point where it had enough social and economic power to effectively attack the economic and political power of the Medieval church. Martin Luther thus gained a strong political ally, and both the new religion and the rising social class benefitted from their alliance—the bourgeoisie by gaining an ideological cover for its goal of stripping the church of its lands and economic preeminence in feudal society. Thus, the competing interests of the old feudal ruling class and the new capitalist class was the main variable in the equation. If Martin Luther, with his particular religious doctrine, hadn't come along at just the right moment, it would have been somebody else with a different doctrine.

Historical materialism asserts that the existence of such economic struggles for dominance between groups of people has shaped every aspect of our existence for millennia, including all of our present-day social and cultural institutions. This is not to say that economics determines all social and cultural institutions in some absolute, mechanical, or predetermined sense. Rather, it constrains them, sets parameters which limit their possible paths of development in any society. There is a famous quotation from Marx which sums this up: "Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted."¹

I want to present two key concepts of historical materialism that it will be useful for you to remember (again, keep in mind that this is the quick outline):

The first is something called "modes of production." This refers to the different systems

by which society organizes itself to produce what people want and need. The prominent modes of production (in Western society) have been: Primitive Communism, Slavery, Feudalism, Capitalism, and (we project, since we have not yet seen this) Socialism. Keep in mind that in life these different modes of production do not usually exist in some pure and distinct state; but are messy, mixed, and overlapping. Each evolves in turn (or, in the case of socialism, the potential for it evolves) and comes into conflict with the previous mode of production. Revolutions mark the transition points at which an old mode of production, outmoded by the development of new technology but still holding onto power through structures of the state, is replaced by a new mode of production as the dominant social force, through new state institutions.

The second concept it is worth noting here is what we call "relations of production." This refers to the way people are divided up into social classes, with particular relations to the means of production, and the interactions between these classes which are constrained by those relations. In the beginning there was the primitive collective of equals (more or less), where each individual related to other individuals in particular ways—based on a voluntary sharing of resources. Then there were slaves and slave owners, who related to each other differently from the individuals in the primitive collective, feudal lords and serfs, Capitalists and workers. Again, real life is always marked by messiness and complexity: Slave cultures begin to emerge in bits and pieces, while the primitive collective of equals still remains dominant, for example. Most capitalist societies today also have individual farmers or peasants, and other small producers who are neither capitalists nor workers. Many nations still have significant remnants of old feudal relations, and in some slavery is practiced, or primitive communist forms of production, even while a global market dominates social relations overall.

Historical Materialism is the study of how all of this developed, shaped the world in which we live, and continues to shape and reshape it today.

A Program for Activists

It is also important to keep in mind that Marx and Engels were not just theorists and analysts. They were also activists who put forward, in the

¹ Karl Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in Karl Marx, *Surveys from Exile*, (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 146.

Communist Manifesto and other works (and activities), a political program for the working class. They actively worked to build a mass movement, and organizational expressions of working class struggle.

This activist work of Marx and Engels was centered on a few key political themes:

a) forming larger, stronger, socially-conscious trade unions;

b) organizing broad struggles for various reforms to improve the conditions and advance the interests of the working class—including things like a shorter work day, ending child labor, democratic right (extending the right to vote, civil liberties, etc.), women's rights, foreign policy questions (opposing British government support for the slave South during the US Civil War, opposing militarism, etc.);

c) political independence from the capitalist class by building an independent labor party;

d) struggling to "win the battle for democracy" through a working-class majority taking control of the state and using the political power which results to bring about the socialist reconstruction of society.

This is the classic program which forms the basis for understanding many of the debates between—and contributions of—Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, and Trotsky, who we will also be studying during these two classes, along with many other Marxist thinkers of their day and later.

In fact, I would argue that as a practical study in the scientific socialist method we cannot do better than take up the question of the interaction between the development of theory and practical work. Each of these is dependent on the other. Neither is primary, both are essential. Without the practical struggles in which they engaged Marx and Engels could never have developed their theoretical contributions. Without the development of their theories they could not have understood what to do on a practical level.

This subject, like so many others I have touched on, is also worth a class or two in its own right. But due to the limits of time I will have to leave my comment there. Once again you can think about our analogy with medicine: What would

medical theory be without medical practice? What would medical practice be without medical theory?

Revolutionary Character

Now, I would like to say that all of what I have told you so far is, in a certain sense, a prelude to the main point I would like everyone to remember when you leave the room today. It's important stuff in its own right, things we have to understand, of course. But simply understanding these things is not enough. That's because, as I say, we can study the basic concepts of "scientific socialism," or "dialectical materialism," or "historical materialism" at length, or the specific activist themes developed by Marx and Engels, we can even read Marx and Engels until we have every word memorized, *and still get it wrong*. Many do get it wrong, precisely because they approach the study of Marxism as if it were a set of mathematical formulas.

The way to avoid this is to look at something else, in addition to the basic concepts we have just discussed, what I like to call the "revolutionary character" of Marx and Engels, the personal qualities which caused them to approach the world as they did and make these important contributions. This revolutionary character I am going to talk about is not something unique to Marx and Engels. I think that if we look at the other three revolutionaries who are being covered in these two classes, and many others who might be covered, they all exhibit precisely the same set of qualities. And I'm going to boil it down to two fundamental principles. Everything else, I would suggest, flows from these two.

The first is summed up in my favorite passage from the *Communist Manifesto*, one that I quote constantly:

"[Communists] have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.

"They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement."

Think again of our physician who has no interests separate and apart from those of the

patient. This is essential to the proper practice of medicine.

Every great revolutionary has put the struggle, and the needs of the struggle, before any personal consideration. Every truly revolutionary organization asks only: "What is needed to advance the working class, or other oppressed grouping in society, towards its collective goals?" It then seeks to advance itself through the process of advancing this broader struggle, and *only* through that process. As soon as any person or political group begins to think first in terms of promoting themselves and their own position in relationship to others they will inevitably act in a way which is contrary to the broader collective goals. (Do you recognize any sectarian organizations out there which you can fit into this picture?)

This takes us to the second revolutionary "quality" which Marx and Engels also exemplified (a fundamental consequence of materialism): Revolutionaries are interested in the truth. We have no use for comfortable fictions about ourselves, our organizations, or the reality we are working to change. If you want to establish a scientific view of how the world works in order to change it, only the truth is meaningful.

Marx himself summed this up in two famous phrases: "A ruthless critique of everything existing"² and "Doubt everything." He did not mean, of course, that everything believed previously must be wrong, but rather that everything must be tested, and retested, and then tested once again as the world changes and as we break free from the fictions about the world which bourgeois ideology works so hard to instill in us from birth. The test of our ideas (and, as noted, here we go back to the essence of a

materialist philosophy) has to be based not on what we would like to be true, what will make us feel comfortable and validate our viewpoint, but what is actually true, what is honest, what is real in the material world.

Attaining this standard of objectivity is hard. I mean it is really, really hard. Subjectivity in response to data about the world is probably a universal reaction. We all tend to see what we want to see. And yet a real revolutionary needs to bend every effort to overcome this, to look squarely at the world as it is and judge their own ideas, and the ideas of others, accordingly.

(One word of caution here. I say that we seek the truth. That search is essential. However, revolutionaries, like others, will get into a lot of trouble if they ever believe that they have actually found "THE TRUTH" in any kind of absolute sense. Too often people who called themselves Marxists have done horrendous things because they believed they knew "THE TRUTH," and therefore had a right to impose their ideology on society against the collective will, or use the worst kinds of factional methods—up to and including physical violence—against other activists and revolutionaries who did not subscribe to their "truth." But such methods can never be justified. No scientific endeavor—not even the most rigorous and experimental—ever has "THE TRUTH" in such an absolute sense. Truth is always something we are striving for, without ever being able to achieve it. There are two reasons for this: 1) because there are inherent limits to human knowledge in every sphere of our lives. Our knowledge will always be imperfect. And 2) because as dialecticians we know that real truth is a moving target. It is constantly shifting and changing, staying at least several steps ahead of us even when we are at our most brilliant in analyzing the world.)

Keeping these two fundamental principles in mind we can look at all the other qualities we note in great revolutionaries, or great artists or scientists for that matter, and see that they derive from them directly. When summing up the life of Malcolm X, for example, George Breitman in the final paragraph of the introduction to his book: *The Last Year of Malcolm X—Evolution of a Revolutionary* used two words to describe Malcolm: "uncompromising" and "incorruptible." I think I might add that he was completely honest about what he thought, both

² This is the popular and often cited phrase. The original source is a letter to Arnold Ruge in which Marx wrote: "If we have no business with the construction of the future or with organizing it for all time, there can still be no doubt about the task confronting us at present: the ruthless criticism of the existing order, ruthless in that it will shrink neither from its own discoveries nor from conflict with the powers that be." Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1975), p. 207.

with himself and with others. These three things—an uncompromising spirit, incorruptibility, total honesty about ideas—are essential ingredients for success as a revolutionary leader. Marx and Engels established the model of such behavior for the rest of us to emulate.

If we recognize the fact that we, as revolutionaries, have no interests separate and apart from the broader struggle we are attempting to advance, and if we take our comfort from seeking the truth, no matter where that leads us, we will be incapable of compromising with the oppressive reality of capitalism, or of selling out our principles for personal gain, or of lying to ourselves, to our fellow revolutionaries, or to the masses of people we hope will one day follow our lead. Once we act in accord with these principles it becomes possible for us to live up to the legacy of Marx and Engels, of Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, Malcolm X, and so many others.

Further Study

I will close simply by recommending two key works which every young revolutionary should put on their “must read” list. If you read not simply with the idea of learning specific facts about what Marx and Engels thought, but also with the goal of seeing the historical-materialist method at work, along with the revolutionary qualities I have described, you will get the most out of your reading.

The first text is *The Communist Manifesto* which was coauthored by Marx and Engels. When you read the *Manifesto* keep in mind that, as with any great historical work, there are some aspects which stand the test of time, while others seem hopelessly outdated and even naïve based on what we know now. We cannot sanctify the text as a result of its enduring validity, nor villify it as a result of its inadequacies. The proper approach is to maintain a commitment to what remains essential, learn from the portions that were mistaken or need revision today, and build on that knowledge. This was the approach which Marx and Engels themselves took in all of their own historical study, and with regard to their own work.

The second booklet I will recommend is by Engels: “Socialism, Utopian and Scientific.”

This is not necessarily an easy read—especially if you are not already familiar with some of the historical figures or philosophical questions Engels is discussing. But it is still worth making your way through it. You will get at least a good sense of the kinds of issues Marx and Engels were concerned with, and some of the thinking that distinguished their approach to socialist theory from the utopian models which had come before. And then, as you learn more, this—like all the other Marxist classics—is a text which you can return to. You will get additional insights. I reread it in preparation for giving this talk, and once more found a new appreciation of aspects I had not understood on previous occasions.

Obviously, if you really want to become an educated Marxist there is a lot more. But if you start with these two it will provide a good foundation for further reading.

It may surprise some of you that I do not suggest reading *Capital*. That's not because a study of Marxist economics does not remain important. Gaining at least a basic knowledge is essential, in fact, if you really want to understand historical materialism. Unfortunately there is no 5-minute version of Marxist economic theory, and so I could not really do justice to this subject in my presentation today. And *Capital* is not something most people, especially those new to Marxist politics, can sit down and read on their own. It's best to find a good class, with a competent teacher and a group of others who are studying as well.

For self study of Marxist economics I recommend Ernest Mandel's two volumes on *Marxist Economic Theory*. Mandel also has a good small pamphlet called, “An Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory.”

OK, I'll close there, and turn it over to Dianne to talk about Rosa Luxemburg. We can return to anything and everything during the discussion.

ROSA LUXEMBURG

by Dianne Feeley

August 4, 1914 is a watershed date for socialists. On that day the entire 110 delegates of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) voted war credits to the government. The party of one million members received 4.5 million votes in 1912, more than twice its nearest rival. How could the crown jewel in the Second International have made such a decision? (And it's important to point out that socialists in most of the European parliaments voted war credits to "their" governments as well.)

Let's look at the fine resolution passed on militarism and war at the Second International's Congress in 1907, in Stuttgart. You will notice that only the last two paragraphs discuss what might be done. That's not just because they wanted to outline the problem and then put forward the solution. That resolution was one of compromise. The German delegation didn't really want the point on the agenda, but if necessary, they'd restate the general principle and do no further thinking about the question. Others, most notably Jean Jaures from France, felt that socialists would be able to prevent a war from happening, or stop it quickly if it came, so there wasn't the necessity to outline *specific* antiwar strategy. The Russians and Polish delegations, whose speaker was Rosa Luxemburg, argued that in the case war did break out, social democratic agitation should not only be against the war, but should use the war to hasten the general collapse of capitalist rule. Luxemburg and Lenin wrote the resolution that became the last two paragraphs of the text. (See Stuttgart Resolution from Nettl, 269-70)

When the crisis at Sarajevo broke out in July 1914, the German SPD Executive Committee responded on July 25th with a manifesto:

"The class-conscious proletariat of Germany, in the name of humanity and civilization, raises a flaming protest against this criminal activity of the warmongers. It insistently demands that the German Government exercise its influence on the Austrian Government to maintain peace, and, in the event that the shameful war cannot be prevented, that it refrain from belligerent intervention. No drop of blood of a German soldier may be sacrificed to the power lust of the

Austrian ruling group [or] to the imperialistic profit-interests." (Schorske, 286)

Between July 26-30 antiwar demonstrations were held throughout Germany. But as the more conservative members of the SPD Executive Committee returned from holidays and it became clear that war was going to break out, the body reconvened on July 30th and drafted a second manifesto, announcing that the international proletariat had done its duty to make war an impossibility but had proved to be unsuccessful. Given the imposition of military law, "ill-considered actions, needless and falsely understood sacrifices" would harm both the individual and the socialist cause. (Schorske, 287)

Why the turn around? Surely fear of repression was a looming factor. While the SPD dispatched two of its top leaders and its treasury to Zurich, trade union officials approached the Office of the Interior to inquire about their status under wartime conditions. The government's answer was "reassuring." There are no plans to go after the trade unions and their leaders, provided there are no difficulties. In fact, the government is glad to have labor organizations to help in the administration of social work.

On August 2nd, the conference of trade union representatives met and called off all strikes in progress or pending. Just to make sure the message was clearly understood, they suspended all strike support payments, which were to be diverted to unemployment relief and war victims. Later they reached an agreement with the hated employers' associations that during the war there would be an automatic extension of contracts and the banning of strikes and lockouts. That is, the SPD trade union officials publicly threw their full weight to the war effort two days *before* the vote on war credits. Thus the SPD trade union officials and delegates in the Reichstag (one fourth of whom were trade union officials) made the decision to subordinate "foreign policy" issues in the hopes of a later payback in which they would be rewarded with domestic reforms. But, of course, there were no such reforms. The German working class paid for the war with their lives, deteriorating conditions both at home and work, and physical hunger.

The SPD went from being a party whose governmental slogan was "For this system, not one penny, not one man" to "In the hour of

danger, we shall not leave the Fatherland in the lurch."

On the night of August 4th, Luxemburg called a meeting at her house in Berlin to organize opposition to the SPD vote. She sent 300 telegrams to SPD officials thought to be oppositional--only Clara Zetkin, who sat on the party's Control Commission and was a longtime leader of the SPD's women's organization, immediately and unconditionally cabled support. By September a letter, signed by Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehring, Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin appeared in two Swiss papers, announcing that an opposition to the SPD policy existed within the party but noting that martial law made it impossible for them to state their point of view publicly. From that point until her assassination in 1919 Luxemburg was the co-leader of the opposition to the chauvinistic betrayal by the German social democracy. Along with Karl Liebknecht, who as an SPD deputy broke with the SPD caucus to vote against all further war credits, she co-led the opposition and worked to construct a revolutionary alternative.

They attempted to build a joint May Day demonstration but no centrist group was willing to take the step so they decided to organize it with a few supporters. When Karl Liebknecht addressed the crowd of a few hundred that evening, he began, "Down with the government, down with the war" and was instantly arrested.

Her Background

Who was Rosa Luxemburg? Born in 1871 and assassinated in 1919, she was an important leader in the German Social Democratic Party and a historic leader of one wing of the Polish social democracy (which was allied with the Russian social democracy, particularly with its Bolshevik wing) and played a pivotal role in the debates of the Second International.

Whatever mistakes Rosa Luxemburg made, she was a revolutionary with a backbone. She brought her intelligence and academic training to the revolutionary movement and never shrank from acting on the conclusions she reached both as a writer and as an orator. In reading her articles one is struck by both the clarity of her arguments and the passion in her writing.

Born into a moderately well off and assimilated Jewish family in Zamosc, in southeastern Poland

that had been under Russian control from 1815, she was the youngest of five children. The household languages were Polish and German. The family moved to Warsaw before Rosa was three years old, fulfilling her father's dream of living in the capital where there were more cultural and business opportunities. Shortly afterwards she developed a disease of the hip which was incorrectly diagnosed, resulting in a permanent deformation that caused her to walk with a slight limp although taking long walks was part of her daily routine.

Luxemburg was admitted to a prestigious girls high school where students spoke only Russian. During the mid 1880s the Proletariat Party had considerable influence in urban high schools and universities. Luxemburg became so politically active that despite her grades she was not awarded the gold medal for achievement her grades merited. Two years after her graduation she escaped arrest by leaving for Switzerland hidden under the straw in a peasants' cart. The next year she enrolled at the University of Zurich where she studied the natural sciences (botany and zoology) and mathematics, but soon transferred to the law department, which housed the social sciences. Her thesis was, *The Industrial Development of Poland*, in which her economic analysis showed that Russian Poland had become an integral part of the Russian empire and that growth could not have taken place without the substantial Russian market.

After the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) was founded as a unification of the various socialist groups at the end of 1892 all émigré groups adhered to it. But in July 1893 a newspaper, *The Workers Cause*, appeared in Paris with a political line that combined the struggle against capitalism with solidarity with the Russian working classes in their struggle against the Tsarist autocracy. It stressed the international character of working-class movements and said nothing about Polish independence. Luxemburg and her companion, Leo Jogiches, were part of the paper's nucleus; by March 1894 the group founded a new party, the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland (SDKP). Their immediate aim was a liberal constitution for the entire Russian empire with territorial autonomy for Poland. The SDKP (later SDKPiL), was made up of young émigrés who created a dynamic leadership team and over the years played an important role in both the German and Russian social democratic parties.

Although Luxemburg was part of the inner core of this fantastically talented revolutionary group, you could say that she was the quintessential "outsider." She was a woman with a Ph.D. in political economy who married only to obtain German citizenship--leaving her "husband" on the steps of the registry office. She wasn't quite five feet tall, walked with a limp, was clearly of Jewish origin, was a leader of the German Social Democracy despite the fact that she was a "foreigner," a woman in a party that was 90% male, and won her role by taking on such historic leaders as Karl Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein and August Bebel. She was an extremely disciplined and private person.

The First Battle for the Heart of German Social Democracy

Just about the time Luxemburg moved to Berlin in May 1898, Eduard Bernstein was publishing a series of articles in the SPD's theoretical journal. These were later published as the book *Evolutionary Socialism*. In the articles he discussed factors that he felt showed that capitalism had been able to overcome its contradictions. He suggested that socialism could come about through gradual reforms, particularly through trade union struggles and the extension of political democracy. And certainly Europe in the 1880s and '90s was characterized by the growth (not the decay) of capitalism, where there were no big economic crises or European wars. Bernstein concluded that the Marxist view of capitalist crises was outdated.

By September Luxemburg had written her first response and by the following March completed the second part. These two articles make up her book, *Reform or Revolution*. She began by examining Bernstein's attempts to demonstrate that capitalism is so adaptive it no longer faces the possibility of crises. She explained how he drew erroneous conclusions from the economic data and suggested these will *aggravate*, not eliminate, capital's contradictions. While Bernstein wanted people to pursue reforms out of a sense of justice, Luxemburg thought the jettisoning of the socialist program's historical materialist base was a step backward to pre-Marxist utopian socialism.

For Bernstein, trade unionism and socialist participation in parliament would bring reforms that would ultimately add up to

socialism—which he conceived as a well-regulated stratified welfare economy. From a Marxist perspective, however, this activity has quite a different purpose—it prepares the proletariat, organizing as a conscious class, that is to say, it creates the *subjective* factor for the socialist transformation. Reforms do not eliminate the class struggle—in fact they are quite limited because the proletariat cannot control market forces. For example, trade unions cannot suppress the law of wages but can only impose on the capitalist the "normal" limit at that moment. Even the best labor laws cannot *suppress* capitalist exploitation but merely *regulate* it. Luxemburg characterizes Bernstein's conclusion as true only "if it were possible to construct an unbroken chain of augmented reforms leading from the capitalism of today to socialism." But that, she declares, is sheer fantasy: "...the chain breaks quickly, and the paths that the supposed forward movement can take from that point on are many and varied." (Waters, 59)

[I'd like to point out that this understanding distinguishes socialists today from other activists. For them, getting a particular reform passed is a concrete step forward. A good example is the legal right to abortion. How can it be, people wonder, that 30 years after "winning" the legal right to abortion, we are faced with the fact that it's still difficult to obtain. Most hospitals don't perform them, most U.S. counties don't have abortion facilities, many insurance policies specifically exclude abortions from coverage, women on Medicaid are unable to obtain funded abortions except under rare circumstances, a number of laws place restrictions on an abortion procedure that would be seen as totally invasive if there were such laws for other medical care, in the majority of states a minor seeking an abortion must obtain the consent of one, or sometimes both, parents. Some of the media portray women who have abortions as selfish and medical personnel who perform them as greedy. And so on. But the reality is that while U.S. capitalism doesn't have an objective need to outlaw abortion, it is interested in social control not in helping women gain greater control over their bodies. Social gains embedded in laws are no guarantee that social equality will be carried out, as surely the history of women's rights and Black rights in U.S. history demonstrates.]

There are four additional points Luxemburg takes up that I want to mention:

- Reform or revolution are not, as Bernstein proposes, different methods. Those who conterpose them and choose reform “do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the same goal, but a different goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface moderation of the old society....not the realization of socialism, but the reform of capitalism.” (Waters, 77-78)

For Luxemburg, “work for reform does not contain its own force, independent from revolution....in each historic period work for reforms is carried on only in the framework of the social form created by the last revolution.” (Waters, 77)

- Her statement of democratic rights for the working class:

“If democracy has become superfluous or annoying to the bourgeoisie, it is on the contrary necessary and indispensable to the working class. It is necessary to the working class because it creates the political forms (autonomous administration, electoral rights, etc.), which will serve the proletariat as fulcrums in its task of transforming bourgeois society. Democracy is indispensable to the working class, because only through the exercise of its democratic rights, in the struggle for democracy, can the proletariat become aware of its class interests and its historic task.

“In a word, democracy is indispensable not because it renders superfluous the conquest of political power by the proletariat, but because it renders this conquest of power both *necessary* and *possible*.” (Waters, 80-81)

- Bernstein warned the social democracy against the danger of acquiring power too early, for fear that such a policy might lead to defeat. Luxemburg’s response was that it would always too

early. In fact, these “premature” attacks of the proletariat against state power is the *method* through which the working class learns. Bernstein’s warning is nothing less than a renunciation of socialism itself. (Waters, 82-83)

- Luxemburg concluded the article by tying Bernstein’s theories to the opportunistic current that had developed in the German Social Democracy. She named names and pointed out the practices. (See Waters, 86-87) She concluded by stating that such “opportunism is incompatible with socialism (the socialist movement) in general, that its internal tendency is to push the labor movement into bourgeois paths, that opportunism tends to paralyze completely the proletarian class struggle.”

Luxemburg’s argument against Bernstein is very clear, bold and dialectical. Her two articles were written when she was not yet 30, and she debated the issues at the 1898, 1901 and 1903 SPD Congresses as well as at the 1904 Congress of the Second International. Having alerted the party and the International to the problem of revisionism and opportunism, she recognized that while she “won” the debate, it was a phyrric victory. In the end even Bernstein voted for the resolution.

Lenin was shocked by the reality that social democrats voted for an imperialist war in 1914, and especially by the capitulation of the German Social Democracy. But looking back on history, it’s clear that vote for war credits was the logical consequence of past actions and nice but vague resolutions, not an aberration. Or as Auer, the SPD secretary, wrote to Bernstein in 1899, “My dear Ede, one does not formally make a decision to do the things you suggest, one doesn’t *say* such things, one simply *does* them.” (Nettl, 101)

The Second Fight for the Heart of the SPD

Between 1903-4, the formal resolution of the debate, and the SPD voting for war credits in 1914, there was one extremely important contribution Rosa Luxemburg made to the German SPD—her analysis of the 1905 Revolution and its lessons for the social democracy. Luxemburg was a participant in the revolution as a leading member of the Polish

social democratic wing that was antinationalist. At the beginning of 1905 her group was composed at most of several hundred secret activists and a leadership in exile. One year later they had 30,000 members and a wide sphere of influence. By early 1906 the SDKPiL leadership understood that the mass strike, however glorious, by itself could not overthrow Tsarist rule. Armed insurrection was the next step, but it could only come with the next wave of action. To prepare for that, the leadership did two things: it sent a comrade to Belgium to buy arms and propagandized for the need to replace autocracy with a constituent assembly for the whole of Russia, freely elected and with the power to decide the state's constitution. That is, the armed insurrection is not in place of the mass strike, rather the mass strike grows over into the insurrection. It is not an act of desperation carried out by a few individuals or by a military organization of the party but by the participants of the mass strikes—only more of them and more determined. It is not the party that calls for the insurrection but the masses, or in the words of Luxemburg "the masses as usual at any turning point of the battle only push the leaders spontaneously to more advanced goals." (Nettl, 227)

Luxemburg was the SDKPiL's writer and theoretician, analyzing events and writing about what needed to be done. Her analysis of the revolutionary process was similar to the Bolsheviks—it was an action led by the working class in the interests of the people. It was important to maintain the leadership of the working class in order to make what was essentially a bourgeois revolution because the bourgeoisie was so willing to compromise with the autocracy. That is, the revolution would smash the autocracy, set up a system of legality and equality taken from the examples of the French revolution and add some German social democratic features: with direct, not indirect taxation, a people's militia, progressive labor legislation, compulsory and free education. However there was no talk of the dictatorship of the proletariat, instead the achievement of the working class would provide the conditions for the next stage of confrontation, against the bourgeoisie. Luxemburg characterized the struggle in three steps:

1. The achievement of a constituent assembly.

2. Defeating reaction and forcing the bourgeoisie not to compromise but to remain loyal to the revolution.
3. Setting up a workers provisional government until the constitutional forms could take effect.

Presumably the provisional government would then dissolve and the power would flow to the newly elected republic, in which the bourgeoisie would dominate. She did not postulate, as Trotsky and Parvus were attempting to do, that the bourgeois revolution would need to grow over into a socialist revolution fairly quickly because the working class would need to implement its own aims. At that time she also did not see that the soviets developed out of the 1905 revolution were anything more than a means to an end.

But the next wave did not develop. The first mass strikes of January 1905 brought the disparate forces of the working class together in a symphony of strikes, the second and third waves in October and December forced the bosses to meet the workers' demands for a decrease in the workday and rise in wages. Even when the authorities had threatened to use arms, the October strikes intensified. On October 30th the Tsar issued a manifesto, promising a constitution and a Duma with some power and granted amnesty to political prisoners and émigrés.

Eleven days later a state of siege was imposed and bosses resorted to lockouts. On November 15th St. Petersburg launched another general strike and the government responded by arresting Trotsky and most of the leaders of the St. Petersburg soviet. The strike failed. The Bolshevik soviet in Moscow carried out an armed uprising with the entire infantry including the Cossacks remaining inactive. By the middle of January it was clear that there was a lull in the strike wave; by March the government launched a counteroffensive: mass arrests and sometimes summary executions. The repression, combined with rising unemployment resulting from lockouts, cut off further waves of protest. While 1905 saw nearly 3 million workers on strike, 1906 had slightly more than a million.

Luxemburg, who gone to Cracow for a month in August, and then for a quick trip in September, returned to Warsaw only during the last days of 1905. She was arrested in early March and her

true identity quickly established. Imprisoned until July, she was released because of illness and the payment of an appropriate bribe. She did not appear at her trial but traveled to Finland where she met with Bolshevik leaders and wrote, as she had been commissioned to do so by the Hamburg SPD, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party & the Trade Unions*, explaining not only the dynamics of the revolution but its lessons for the German working class. Although written to have an impact for the party congress scheduled for Mannheim in September 1906, it could not be circulated as a "radical brief" for the delegates because the SPD Executive requested a toned-down version and therefore it could not be ready in time.

Whereas in her debate with Bernstein Luxemburg was defending Marxist tradition—specifically the historical materialist method against idealism—here she began by explaining how the Marxist critique of the anarchist conception of the spontaneous general strike was rendered out of date by the experience of 1905. She begins the pamphlet by quoting Engels' 1873 critique. (Waters, 155-6) She points out that the anarchist conception is based on a mechanical call for a general uprising whereas the experience of the Russian Revolution demonstrates that the mass strike is a historical, and not an artificial, product. It is a new form of struggle precisely because of its massive character, in which political demands are intertwined with economic demands. It is not an action willed or controlled by a political grouping but bursts forth as a general popular uprising.

Luxemburg also had to convince the German social democracy that they had something to learn from the Russians, who were still living under Tsarist autocracy and therefore had few democratic rights. What lessons could they learn from "backward" Russia? What could they learn from the Russian social democracy, which hadn't even been able to unify?

The pamphlet has eight sections: the first and second discuss why the mass strike was of burning relevance in 1906. At the end of the second section, Luxemburg explained why the German SPD's resolution of 1905 in support of the mass strike contradicts the experience of the revolution. In Jena the SPD agreed to adopt the mass strike as a weapon of the socialist arsenal, but only as a *political* strike, in case the

government took away suffrage. Luxemburg pointed out that the resolution makes the mass strike a mere appendage of parliamentarism, *limiting it to a defensive weapon*—narrowing and artificially smothering its social importance.

The third section outlined, in about twenty pages, not only the major battles and phases of the revolution in 1905 but pointed to its being unleashed by a wave of strikes that began with the St. Petersburg general strike in 1896. The fourth part explained how the mass strike combines both economic and political demands, emphasizing its adaptability, efficiency and changeable character. The fifth section outlined the lessons of the Russian working-class movement that were applicable to Germany. Here she raised all the arguments in favor of Russian exceptionalism and proceeded to refute them. In the sixth section she pointed out that the active involvement of unorganized workers, who were the most oppressed by capital and the state, was key to the struggle. This was how the unorganized workers would, in fact, be organized and educated—in the heat of action. Her seventh section examined the mass strike in the light of the tasks and forms of other revolutions. The Russian Revolution of 1905 was not a specifically Russian product, but a *form* of the class struggle erupting out of the present stage of capitalist development and class relations. Her last section, entitled the Need for United Action of Trade Unions and Social Democracy was a war cry against the trade union bureaucracy who were frightened when their day-to-day tasks of negotiating and administering were threatened by a violent confrontation with the employer and perhaps even the state. Their specialization as trade union officials and the naturally-restricted horizon that is bound up with disconnected economic struggles leads to bureaucratism and a certain narrowness of outlook. (Waters, 214) She opposed a unity between trade union leaders and party leaders because to do so would be "to build a bridge at the very spot where the distance is greatest and the crossing most difficult." (Waters, 218) Rather the unity must be built below, among the proletarian masses.

Unknown to Luxemburg and the radical wing of the SPD, and in departure from established practice, a secret meeting between the SPD Executive Committee and the general commission of the trade unions was held on February 6, 1906. Trade union officials had been

extremely unhappy about even the watered-down version of the resolution on the mass strike that passed the September 1905 congress. The secret conference adopted a series of points as a tentative basis of party-trade union cooperation on the question of the mass strike. The Executive Committee would not propagate for the mass strike, in fact they pledged to try to prevent one from happening. If one should nonetheless break out, the party would assume the sole burden of leadership and although the trade unions would not participate in it officially, they would "not stab it in the back." Costs of the mass strike were to be assumed by the party alone but the trade unions would contribute if, after the mass strike was called off, strikes and lockouts continued. The content of the agreement was clearly a victory for the trade unionists, and the agreement did not remain secret very long. It was soon leaked out through local trade union press, dampening the growing suffrage movement and poisoning the atmosphere within the SPD.

At the 1906 SPD Congress in Mannheim, then, there was a debate over the basis of unity between the party's political and economic wings. The Executive Committee's proposal, which August Bebel made, was to recognize parity between the two wings. Rosa Luxemburg remarked it was like a peasant marriage in which "On matters of question between us, when we agree, you will decide; when we disagree, I shall decide." (Schorske, 52) The political implications became immediately apparent in the section dealing with the mass strike. It stated that party resolution of 1905, advocating the use of the strike under certain circumstances, was "not in contradiction" with an earlier trade union congress that forbade even discussion on the topic. The resolution then enjoined the SPD Executive to consult with the trade unions "as soon as it considers the necessity for a mass strike is at hand." (Schorske, 49)

Recognizing the checkmate situation, the party radicals amended the resolution to assert the party's moral discipline--that every party comrade should feel bound by decisions of the party congresses in trade union activity. Observers felt that the amendment would pass, but the Executive Committee outmaneuvered the radical delegates at the last moment by incorporating the first part of the amendment but leaving out the clause that spoke of enforcement. From this point on, the Executive Committee showed its subservience to the trade union

officialdom and its willingness to use its power and authority to maneuver within the party.

Over the next several years the German SPD passed general socialist resolutions that lacked action orientations. Therefore the reformists, whether within the trade unions or within the Reichstag, were able to act while the radicals, who had to secure the consent of the trade union officials in order to carry out a mass action perspective, were blocked from action.

Between 1908-10 there was a growing movement for suffrage reform in the various German provinces with inequitable electoral systems. By 1910 the SPD had organized demonstrations and inaugurated parliamentary actions in a half dozen provinces, the most important of which was in Prussia, where there was a three-class system. The Prussian SPD called a congress in early January to determine further suffrage tactics. The reformist wing opposed the use of demonstrations as premature and, given the level of police violence, they claimed these actions would sidetrack suffrage into a fight over the right to demonstrate in the streets. Reformists also opposed demonstrations because it upset the more centrist parties with whom they hoped to maintain a coalition. Edward Bernstein devised a legislative strategy based on the power of the various political delegations and then intricately outlined how to maneuver with each in order to secure the reform. The social democracy's chief duty, according to Bernstein, was to create the right atmosphere so that the Progressives, the closest allies of the SPD, could persuade the National Liberals to support the bill. This, not mass action, would insure its passage.

The left put forward a strategy of using all means in the fight for suffrage, most specifically to employ Luxemburg's conception of a mass action that could grow and intensify. The radicals dominated the congress and called for a "suffrage storm." When the government released the draft bill the following month, the proposal was so inadequate it infuriated the population. While maneuverings continued in parliament, there were meetings and street demonstrations not only throughout Prussia, but throughout Germany. Most impressive was the March 6th Berlin demonstration. Held without police authorization and only advertised by word of mouth, 150,000 rallied in central Berlin.

Between February and April a suffrage storm had been unleashed. At the same time, the economy was recovering from the 1909 depression and the number of work stoppages was rising. By April the employers' association announced a lockout for the whole building industry, affecting 175,000 workers. State SPD organizations were formally petitioning the Executive Committee to take up the issue of using the mass strike and local SPD organizations were discussing the issue. Half-day demonstration strikes were held in Frankfurt and Kiel.

Luxemburg wrote "What Further?" and sent it in March to *Vorwärts*, the daily paper jointly owned by the national SPD and its Berlin local. In it she argued that the movement could not go on indefinitely at the present level of intensity. Either it would have to be driven forward, perhaps into a general strike, or it would weaken and collapse. She urged official encouragement of the demonstration strikes and a general discussion of employing the mass strike—a process of testing the depth of mass sentiment. The editors returned the article with a note that party instructions forbade them from printing propaganda for the mass strike.

Karl Kautsky, editor of the *Neue Zeit*, previously associated with the radical wing and a collaborator of Luxemburg, accepted the article but then changed his mind and returned it. He said that it would have been a premature mass strike, one destined to fail and therefore dangerous for the party. His serialized article, entitled "What Now?" urged the demonstrations to continue as long as equal, direct suffrage was not won, but ended by urging the party to turn its attention to campaigning for the upcoming Reichstag elections.

Luxemburg had attempted to educate the German social democracy on the meaning of the mass strike in preparation for a time in which they could utilize it. But when the time arrived, she found herself censored. She and her allies wanted to use the moment to tie the national construction workers' lockout into the political struggle for suffrage. She was trying to find ways to build up revolutionary consciousness among masses in action and was prepared to risk the SPD—and certainly its attractiveness to the centrist parties—because even if the movement failed to win its objective, the class consciousness of the working masses and its

hostility to the existing order would have increased.

Two Additional Factors

There were two other factors that deepened the degeneration of the SPD. First is the growth of the party bureaucracy. After its electoral setback in 1907, the SPD built regional structures that resulted in diminishing the left's influence, which was greater in the industrial centers and larger cities than in the rural areas. As the party expanded it was the Executive Committee that gained the power to appoint national and regional secretaries. In many cases the people chosen were "above party politics." That is, they had no particular politics and were "loyal" to the apparatus. Finally, when the reformists violated policy voted on at congresses—for example, voting for state budgets—no action was taken against them. When the left attempted to propagandize ideas that had been discussed and *approved* at congresses, it was censored and they were outmaneuvered.

The final factor was the lack of debate in the SPD over imperialism and war. At the Bremen Congress (1904) Karl Liebknecht urged the party to develop anti-militarist propaganda among potential recruits but the resolution was rejected. At just about every subsequent congress, he raised the issue again. But in general the Executive Committee didn't want to touch the issue. At the Mannheim Congress (1906) Bebel argued that Germany would not start a war because if she did, it would unleash a European-wide war (which presumably would not be in her interest) and, secondly, when the war came the military would take over and any resistance would be folly. Luxemburg criticized Bebel's approach by contrasting his attitude toward fighting for suffrage with his attitude toward war. Why employ one method for a domestic issue and another for an international one?

In fact, as a Reichstag delegate August Bebel made it clear in the debates over the 1907 military budget he was *for* compulsory pre-military training for youth, as if the main problem were "defending" Germany from foreign invaders. The SPD failed to side uncompromisingly with the African people as Germany begun to build its empire there and it did not reexamine the idea of Germany's right to self-defense in the new era of imperialist expansion. With this background, it's easy to see

why the German emperor made sure Germany was "invaded" at the beginning of World War I—and correctly bet that the SPD delegation would vote war credits for a "defensive" operation.

Luxemburg and Liebknecht —from Prison to Assassination

Luxemburg was imprisoned from March 31, 1915 until the beginning of 1916 for her antiwar agitation. She was rearrested and held in preventive detention from July 16, 1916 until November 9, 1918. Liebknecht was able to remain outside prison longer as a member of the Reichstag. The SPD evicted him from their caucus January 12, 1916 and he was arrested during the antiwar May Day demonstration. Sentenced to two and a half years in prison on June 28th, he was resented by a higher military court to four years and one month. Liebknecht was among the first released under the government's political amnesty and returned to Berlin on October 23, 1918.

While in prison Luxemburg followed the outbreak and unfolding of the Russian Revolution, which she thought would bleed to death, not so much because of its economic backwardness but because of the cowardice of the social democratic leaders throughout Europe. Yet as early as April 1917 she wrote "It *must* and *will* have a salutary effect on the whole world, it must radiate outwards into the whole of Europe; I am absolutely certain that it will bring a new epoch and that the war cannot last long." (Nettl, 423)

She opposed the Russian-German settlement of the war because she saw that it freed German troops to pursue the war on the Western Front. This she saw as a victory for German imperialism. As an anti-nationalist, she saw that the Bolshevik's assertion that nations have the right to self-determination provided the counter-revolution with space in which they could mobilize opposition to the revolution. This, in turn, diminished civil rights within Russia. She saw that the key to the revolutionary process lay not in terrorism but in expanding democracy:

"Lenin is completely mistaken in the means he employs. Decree, dictatorial force of the factory overseer, draconic penalties, rule by terror, all these things are not palliatives. The only way to rebirth is the school of public life itself, the most

unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion. It is rule by terror which demoralizes." (Nettl, 434)

Yet Luxemburg saw these problems as the result not so much of mistaken Bolshevik policies, but the fact that revolutions operate under difficult conditions. As she wrote to one of her Polish comrades:

"I shared all your reservations and doubts, but have dropped them in the most important questions, and in others I never went as far as you. Terrorism is evidence of grave internal weakness, but it is directed against internal enemies, who ... get support and encouragement from foreign capitalists outside Russia. Once the European revolution comes, the Russian counter-revolutionaries lose not only this support, but—what is more important—they must lose all courage. Bolshevik terror is above all the expression of the weakness of the European proletariat." (Nettl, 445)

But by September 1918 the tide had turned and Western Front collapsed. The German military staff at the end of the month informed the emperor that an armistice was vital to avoiding a catastrophe. On October 12th the Prussian state and some of the other provincial governments declared an amnesty for political prisoners.

At the beginning of the war Luxemburg conceived of the revolutionary left remaining inside the SPD. When on January 16, 1917 the SPD party council declared that a meeting between the left grouping, called Spartakus, and the left centrists separated them from the SPD—a fact not true under party statutes—it seemed inevitable to devise some other organizational form. But neither the cooperative structure of the Independent Socialist Democratic Party of Germany (USDP), which combined these two forces in a loose federation, nor the independent organization of the Spartakus in January 1919 as the German Community Party (KPD) produced an organizational structure to help build a revolutionary party adequate for the period ahead. Luxemburg's two organizational answers during that period were wide of the mark.

In so far as she projected any organizational vision, it was to build an anti-centralist, anti-bureaucratic grouping, essentially attempting to deal with the problems a left-wing minority faces

in a reformist party. Her second answer was not a party at all, but about the centrality of Workers and Soldiers' Councils, which would assume governmental control. She could not envision a council that would be willing to hand the power back to a reconstructed version of the old order, which is what it did.

Although she had initially opposed the January 5, 1919 insurrection, Luxemburg, Liebknecht and the KPD were out in the streets. But the action failed and the military occupied Berlin. On the run, she wrote that despite the fact that a victory was not on the agenda, the revolt had not been pointless:

"It was a matter of honour for the revolution to ward off this attack with all its energy, if the counter-revolution was not to be encouraged to further efforts...It is an inner law of revolution not to stand still on its achievements.... (Nettl, 486)

But time had run out. The military captured Luxemburg and Liebknecht on the evening of January 15th and, on order from the SPD leadership in the government, murdered them later that night.

I want to conclude by reading from a letter Rosa Luxemburg wrote to Tilde Wurm, whose husband Emmanuel Wurm, had once been a friend. It was written right after Christmas, 1916, while she was in prison:

"You are 'not radical enough,' you suggest sadly. 'Not enough' is hardly the word! You aren't radical at all, just spineless. *It is not a matter of degree but of kind.* 'You' are a totally different zoological species from me and never have I hated your miserable, acidulated, cowardly and half-hearted existence as much as I do now....

"Had enough of my New Year's greeting? Then see to it that you remain a *human being*. To be human is the main thing, and that means to be strong and clear and *of good cheer* in spite and because of everything, for tears are the preoccupation of weakness. To be human means throwing one's life 'on the scales of destiny' if need be, to be joyful for every fine day and every beautiful cloud—oh, I can't write you any recipes how to be human, I only know how to *be* human and you too used to know it when we

walked for a few hours in the fields outside Berlin and watched the red sunset over the corn. The world is so beautiful in spite of all the misery and would be even more beautiful if there were no half-wits and cowards in it.

"Come, you get a kiss after all, because you are basically a good soul. Happy New Year!" (Nettl, 408-9)

Suggested Reading:

Rosa Luxemburg (abridged edition) by Peter Nettl (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). A very political biography.

Rosa Luxemburg, Her Life and Work by Paul Frolich (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

This is a biography by a comrade of Luxemburg's.

Rosa Luxemburg Reflections and Writings edited by Paul Le Blanc (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999).

Some reflections by Marxist writers along with some of Luxemburg's writings. (I'm sure Luxemburg would disagree with Luise Kautsky's remembrance.) Good bibliography.

Rosa Luxemburg Speaks edited by Mary-Alice Waters (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970). Contains "Reform or Revolution," "The Mass Strike," "The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in the German Social Democracy," along with some other wonderful articles, especially one against capital punishment and another on socialism and religion.

German Social Democracy 1905-1917 by Carl E. Schorske (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955).

Extremely focused study of the evolution of the German SPD from revolutionary party to reformist party.

Two Souls of Socialism by Hal Draper

A section contrasts Bernstein and Luxemburg's methods.

--excerpts--

Wars are encouraged by the prejudices of one nation against another, systematically purveyed among the civilized nations in the interest of the ruling classes, so as to divert the mass of the proletariat

The Congress holds therefore that it is the duty of the working classes, and especially their representatives in parliaments, recognizing the class character of bourgeois society and the motive for the preservation of the opposition between nations, to fight with all their strength against naval

Should war break out in spite of all this, it is their duty to intercede for its speedy end, and to strive with all their power to make use of the violent economic and political crisis brought about by the war to rouse the people, and thereby to hasten the abolition of capitalist class rule.



VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

by Peter Olson

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, the most prominent theoretician and political leader of the Russian Revolution of 1917, has been regarded clear across the left-right political spectrum as one of the most compelling, important, and influential historical figures of the 20th century. It's also the case that the ideas and political activities of Lenin have perhaps been the subject of more misunderstanding, distortion, and falsification than those of any other major figure of the 20th century.

Moving Past Distortions of Lenin

What was mainstream conception of Lenin's historical legacy on *both* sides of the Cold War? Namely, that he was the principle architect of what was to become the "Soviet Empire."

Of course this orthodoxy took on radically different forms on each side of the Cold War divide. In the capitalist West, Lenin was painted as a brilliant and ruthless conspirator who led a coup, bringing a party clique to political power and proceeding to build a totalitarian state using unlimited violence and terror to advance its aims. On the other side of the divide, in the Soviet Empire itself, Lenin was held up as a near deity. Statues and portraits of him were erected by the thousand after his death, and the term Marxism-Leninism eventually became synonymous with a rigid set of politics in which the Communist Party had a monopoly on all truth.

Throughout the Cold War period, these two official conceptions of Lenin's historical legacy were presented as opposites. On one side of the line he was held up as a hero, and on the other, a monster. But underlying both of these official stories, the fundamental logic was always the same. A useful analogy is this: we all know that in Christianity there is a very big difference between God and the Devil. Yet we can also recognize that underlying this difference is a common belief system and set of assumptions -- namely, that God and the Devil and Heaven and Hell and everything that goes along with them exist.

In the case of the West and the Soviet Empire during the Cold War the common belief system was that, whatever one's value judgment might

have been, the Soviet Union and its satellite states *were* the logical extension of the aims of the Russian Revolution of 1917. In both versions of this official story, after Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin essentially proceeded to finish what Lenin had started.

A Strategy Animated by Workers Democracy

This discussion of Lenin will start from a very different set of assumptions. In large part, the ruling elites both in the West and in the Soviet Empire had to cling as tightly as they did to their shared belief system to protect themselves from the ongoing danger presented by what I will argue is the real legacy left by Lenin and the Bolsheviks of 1917 -- a legacy which had at its core a vision of socialism as a radically democratic society based upon an international mass movement of the working class and oppressed.

It is this legacy which we need to explore in this workshop -- and it is in this context that we should examine Lenin in particular. This legacy has been passed on to us by generations of 20th century revolutionaries who fought to popularize this radical democratic and internationalist leninism, often against incredible odds. And in this post-Cold War globalized world, there are fresh opportunities for revolutionaries and newly radicalizing activists to uncover this legacy and help make it relevant to the challenges and struggles we face today.

In particular, I will focus on three inter-related aspects of Lenin's politics:

1) First, his evolving conception of organization. By organization I mean both the ways that socialists who are committed to revolution organize themselves under capitalism to build support for revolutionary ideas and strategies, and also what kind of working class organization is ultimately necessary to lead the class to political power and build a socialist society.

2) Second, the development of the principle of internationalism, summed up by that most famous line of the *Communist Manifesto*, "Workers of the World, Unite!"¹

¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, originally published in 1848, in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels*

3) Third, the principle of workers power. This was the very heart and soul of Lenin's politics, and all other considerations flowed from it. This driving principle raises the following kinds of questions: What does it mean for society to be run by the working class? What kinds of institutions will be the basis for a new socialist society, and where will they come from?

The body of Lenin's thought was fundamentally shaped both by his consistent participation in the Russian working class movement through all of the ups and downs of its development over the course of three decades -- and his deep and ongoing study of marxism as a method of understanding the world. In looking at these three areas of concern, we need to keep in mind that Lenin's ideas were far from static. Rather, they were in a constant state of evolution and development that involved ongoing debate and discussion with other socialists, with the working class movement as a whole, and in relation to often rapidly changing historical circumstances. I'll zero in on a few crucial moments to give a sense of this evolution, focusing on the years leading up to the revolution.

We should also keep in mind that as brilliant as Lenin was, he and his comrades made some serious mistakes at certain points, particularly in the years immediately following the revolution--under profoundly difficult circumstances, when the Russian working class faced all out counter-revolution, brutal civil war, and invasion by foreign armies. I speak here in the spirit of what has been called a "critical leninism," a view that Lenin's ideas and practice cannot be ripped out of their historical context and applied to the world as if they were a mathematical equation, but rather that it is precisely the dynamism of Lenin's marxism and the flexibility of his tactics that have much to offer those of us organizing against global capitalism today.

Some people have made the point that his views on the question of organization essentially flowed from two of the basic insights of Marx.

Reader (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978), p. 500. Translated here as "Working Men of All Countries Unite!"

Workers' Struggles, Working-Class Consciousness, Organization

Marx said that "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves."²

He also said that, "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force."³

By the first statement he meant that if socialism was to be the rule of the working class, then a socialist society could only be created by working people themselves. Nobody else, no benevolent government, no elite terrorist group or guerrilla army, no separate party acting by itself *on behalf* of the working class could do it -- it had to be based on working class self-organization.

In the second statement, Marx is pointing out that because the ruling class has primary control over of the main ideological institutions of society-- the media, the schools, the churches, and so on-- their ideas are dominant. This means that under capitalism, no matter how objectively rotten the daily conditions of exploitation are for the working class, capitalist *ideology*, in all of its varied forms, is still dominant.

So the question is posed -- how can the working class rise up to overthrow capitalism and create a new society if it is dominated by capitalist ideas or other ideas associated with the existing society? The partial answer to this lies with what Marxists have called "mixed consciousness." By consciousness we mean the way that people understand the world around them. Consciousness is "mixed" in the sense that the working class, far from being a homogenous group, is filled with all kinds of people who have all kinds of different experiences, and thus have draw all kinds of

² Karl Marx, *General Rules of the International Workingmen's Association*, originally published in 1864, Marx & Engels Internet Archive (marxists.org) 2000.

³ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, originally published in Marx & Engels Internet Archive (marxists.org) 2000, section I:B:iii.

different conclusions about why the world is the way it is. Even in the most conservative periods, there is always within this sea of mixed consciousness at least a small minority of workers who for any number of reasons strongly identify as part of the working class and have elements of a radical critique of capitalism. This radical class consciousness may or may not take the form of socialist or revolutionary ideas, but these are often the people who are at the forefront of day to day organizing in the labor movement and other social movements.

So the key question that Lenin grappled with in terms of organization was how this minority of class conscious workers could organize themselves around a set of socialist politics in such a way that they could interact with and politically influence broader and broader sections of the working class. This is the real meaning of the term vanguard, the root of which simply means "at the front."

We can see these basic questions coming up again and again in the first decades of Lenin's political life. Lenin was part of the first generation of Russian marxists that became politically active in the 1880s and 90s. Unlike the previous generation of Russian radicals who had advocated a strategy of terrorist acts against the monarchy which they hoped would spark a peasant based revolution, these local marxist groups saw in the growing industrial working class (still a tiny minority of the overall population) in the cities the possibility of a different kind of revolutionary movement. Throughout this early period, Lenin argued that these study circles, initially made up primarily of intellectuals but gradually linking up with more and more radical workers, had to strive to move beyond discussion and self-education and integrate this with agitation in the factories.

A few years down the road, when the Russian socialist movement (still quite small) had developed a much deeper level of participation in industrial workplace struggles, a new set of problems arose.

This is the context in which in 1902 Lenin wrote *What Is To Be Done?*, which is considered one of his seminal works on the question of organization. I'm going to quote the following short passage, not because it's my favorite, but because it's the one that's been the most often cited by Lenin's critics to argue that he advocated

an elitist conception of the Party, so I think it's important that we try to understand it.

Here Lenin wrote that, "the history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e. the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labor legislation, etc." Later he wrote that "class political consciousness can only be brought to the workers from without, that is only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers."⁴

Here Lenin is contrasting what he calls "trade union consciousness," or a basic awareness of the need for the working class to organize to win economic concessions and political reforms, and what he calls "class political consciousness," or "socialist consciousness", which includes a more far-reaching awareness of the role of the state as an instrument of capitalist class rule and an understanding of the irreconcilable nature of class divisions in society.

There is no question that Lenin is making a one-sided and overstated assertion when he says that socialist consciousness must be brought to the workers "from without." But it is important to understand who Lenin is addressing this point to. During this time there is growing current in the socialist movement known as "economism." The economists basically argued that socialists should stick to participating in the workers struggles for better wages and working conditions, and by default leave the broader political struggle, in this case the struggle against the Tsar, to the more mainstream middle class liberals.

By stating that the working class would not spontaneously become socialist, Lenin was trying to hammer the point home that organized socialists needed to raise more than just workplace issues. In the course of labor struggles, socialist workers and agitators would need to point out broader issues such as the role of the state, and the connection of class exploitation to other forms of oppression, such as

⁴ V.I. Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*, quoted in Tony Cliff, *Lenin Vol. I: Building the Party* (London: Bookmarks, 1986), pp. 79-80.

those of national minorities. This is summed up by another quote: "the Social-Democrat's ideal should not be the trade union secretary, but the tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of people it affects, who is able to generalize all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation."⁵

Lenin was also stressing the point that an effective working class socialist movement would need to be truly independent from the middle class liberals, and would have to take on the problem of the Tsar themselves. It is important to keep in mind that in almost every piece of Lenin's writing, he is addressing concrete questions and problems facing the movement, and often emphasizing certain points over others in order to make his position clear in debates that were going on between socialists and within radical circles in general.

Much has been said as well as of Lenin's assertion that socialists need to organize themselves into what he called a "party of a new type," one that is led by "professional revolutionaries." At first reading this gives the impression of a party leadership cut off from the working class. Indeed, throughout the pre-revolutionary period in Russia, many leading socialists did have to be geographically and hence socially cut off from the working class. Lenin himself had to spend many years in exile, straining to keep up with events on the ground through intense correspondence with comrades participating directly in struggles in Russia. But this aspect of the role of the "professional revolutionary" had more to do with the necessity of underground political work in an atmosphere of extreme state repression than it did with a general principle. I think the general meaning we should take away from it is that revolutionaries can't be half-assed. They have to be serious, organized, ready to act, driven forward by a commitment to the movement and the socialist future.

Learning From Revolutionary Struggle

⁵ V.I. Lenin, quoted in Paul Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1990), p. 67.

The Revolution of 1905 was another key moment in the development of this set of ideas. In that year there was a working class uprising which transformed the whole political atmosphere in Russia. The event that sparked the uprising was a march of around 200,000 striking metalworkers and their supporters, who under the leadership of a priest, went to the Winter Palace with a petition asking for "justice and protection" from the Tsar. The march reflected on the one hand the growing working class radicalization in Russia's cities, and on the other the persistence of belief in the benevolence of the Tsar. When the Tsar's troops opened fire on the crowd, killing hundreds of people, this belief was shattered for hundred of thousands of Russian workers. What followed was a mass strike wave that swept through the cities and gave birth to a new form of mass organization--the soviet. The soviet, meaning workers council, was a body of democratically elected worker representatives that took on the day to day responsibilities of coordinating strike activity. It was a form of organization that was to re-appear more than a decade later and play a crucial role in the revolutions of 1917.

An important point here is that the Bolsheviks, the left wing current in the socialist movement which Lenin was part of, played very little role in the 1905 Revolution, especially in its early phases. Many Bolsheviks underestimated and both the mass labor movement of the time and the soviets that emerged out of the mass insurrectionary strike. Lenin was one of the only Bolshevik leaders that argued that these were profoundly significant steps forward for the movement, and suggested that "politically the Soviet of Workers Deputies should be regarded as the embryo of a provisional revolutionary government."⁶

Lenin's debates with his comrades in this period are important for several reasons. First, they show how under conditions of revolutionary ferment, the political situation can change drastically in a very short period of time, often catching politically sophisticated revolutionaries by surprise and making it necessary for them to run to catch up with new developments. Historical moments such as these underscore the danger of revolutionaries becoming so convinced

⁶ Lenin, quoted in Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*, p. 116.

that they are correct that they fall into a sectarian trap and end up on the sidelines when the struggle heats up. Only through intense debates over these issues could the Bolsheviks move into a position where they were able to play a more important role in the final phases of the 1905 uprising, before it was crushed by Tsarist repression. This also is a good example of the fact that, far from being a monolithic party without a culture of debate and discussion, the Bolsheviks were always an organization where fierce differences of opinion played a crucial role in its political evolution. This was true, not only in these early days, but right through the 1917 revolution, and this was by no means the last time that Lenin would find himself in the minority.

All of this-- both the growth of the workers movement and the growing body of experience of left wing socialists within it -- laid the basis for the Bolsheviks evolving into a much more serious political force in the following decade. There is no way that I can cover all the ingredients that went into this process, it will have to be enough to say that by 1912 when the Bolsheviks decisively formed a separate party, they had a substantial working class membership and the political differences separating them from the more moderate wings of the socialist movement had deepened considerably.

Imperialism and Internationalism

The international crisis that led to the Revolutions of 1917 was the outbreak of World War I in 1914. The Bolsheviks, and Lenin in particular, had consistently argued that because capitalism was an international system, socialist revolution would have to be international. Lenin's writings are filled with quotes similar to the following, which have a familiar ring to those of us involved in discussions of globalization today. He said, "Capitalist Domination is international. That is why the workers' struggle in all countries for their emancipation is only successful if the workers fight jointly against international capital... International capital has already stretched its hand out to Russia. The Russian workers are stretching out their hands to the international labor movement."⁷ A big part of Lenin's

internationalist perspective was a recognition of the different circumstances faced by workers in the big imperialist powers, and those in the dominated countries. He was a staunch supporter of the right of smaller oppressed nations to self-determination and independence, but this was always in the context of the goal of worldwide working class solidarity. Again and again Lenin made the point that there could be no successful Russian Revolution without successful revolutions across Europe, and ultimately across the world. For Lenin, the idea of "socialism in one country," later to become a central slogan of Stalin's regime, was simply an impossibility. He said, "It is not open to the slightest doubt that the final victory of our revolution, if it were to remain alone, if there were no revolutionary movement in other countries, would be hopeless... Our salvation from all of these difficulties, I repeat, is an all-European Revolution."⁸

These ideas were put to the test by the outbreak of World War. From the standpoint of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, WWI was an inter-imperialist war whose sole purpose was to determine how both the European continent and the various colonies would be divided up among the imperial superpowers of that time. They argued that the workers movement should fight to turn this imperialist war into a civil war, or in other words, an international class war. This position set the Bolsheviks apart from all of the other socialist currents in Russia, and from most of the major socialist parties throughout Europe, who soft-peddled the question of internationalism in favor of giving lukewarm support to their own country's stake in the war. So the Bolsheviks found themselves at the head of the militant anti-war socialist minority worldwide, a position that has everything to do with their success in 1917. Again, this principle of internationalism flows directly from the firm commitment to workers power, the principle that the working class must maintain complete political independence from its class enemies.

1917: Workers' Revolution

It was in the context of this continuing brutal war and deepening popular hatred for the Tsarist

⁷ Lenin, quoted in Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*, p. 24.

⁸ V.I. Lenin, quoted in John Rees, "In Defense of October", *International Socialism* #54, Autumn 1991, p. 7.

regime that in February 1917 a broad coalition of left wing socialists, anarchists, moderate socialists, and middle class liberals were able came to power through a mass uprising that overthrew the Tsar and ended centuries of monarchy in Russia. From the beginning, there was a deep class division within the coalition emerging from February 1917. Although the provisional government that was established after the overthrow of the Tsar was dominated by the liberals and moderates, the social force that had created the revolution was the organized working class mobilized in the factories, the small peasants fighting for land reform, and radicalized soldiers who were overwhelmingly drawn from these two social sectors. The key questions raised by the revolution were the land (that is, how it would be redistributed), the war (and Russia's role in it), and the factories (who would control them, how they would run them). The government led by liberals and moderates proved utterly incapable of addressing any of these three fundamental questions, and this is what provided the opening for the militant Bolshevik wing of the movement to win mass support for a more thorough going working class revolution over the course of 1917.

What emerged in the course of 1917 is what is called dual power, or a struggle between two parallel forms of government that were based on opposing class forces. On the one hand was the official legal government, the provisional government, and on the other were the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers organized in the soviets, the same grassroots democratic form that we saw come up in 1905, only this time on a much wider scale. The basic demands being put forward by the Bolsheviks in this period, which included land redistribution and end to Russia's involvement in the war, could not be met by the moderate government -- as basic as they were, they implied workers power. By consistently arguing around these basic points, the Bolsheviks eventually won a majority in the Soviets. Lenin was careful to argue against a premature insurrection before when the sentiment for revolution was not evenly spread throughout Russia, but by October of 1917, the Bolshevik slogan of "all power to the soviets" was being raised throughout the country.

It's heartbreaking to have to compress everything that happened in the year 1917 into a few sentences, as this was an incredibly complicated process, and entire books, such as Trotsky's

monumental *History of the Russian Revolution* and John Reed's *Ten Days that Shook the World*, go into great detail the process through which the Bolshevik revolution took shape. It's also too bad that in this talk I don't have to mention more than in passing the rise and fall of soviet democracy in the years immediately following the revolution, or the terrific influence and inspiration that these events had on the workers movements internationally. Hopefully all of this can be drawn out a bit more in the section on Trotsky and in the discussion.

But what I have tried to do in this talk is outline some of the key political principles that underlay the success of the Russian Revolution: revolutionary internationalism, independent working class organization, and the intervention of organized socialists. These are the key points because they are as relevant as ever today.

Questions for Today's Activists

So I'll conclude by outlining three questions that I hope can be central to our discussion:

1) How is this tradition of revolutionary internationalism relevant to radical activists today who are trying to build an international movement across borders uniting workers in the imperialist countries with workers in the so-called Third World?

2) As this new movement struggles to articulate alternatives to the rule of global capital, in what ways is this longstanding socialist vision of a new society based on workers power relevant?

3) Early in my talk I outlined the conception of the vanguard as a class conscious leadership that is an organic part of the working class. Today there is not a broad class conscious leadership of this kind that would be the basis for a real revolutionary socialist party. Part of our role as organized socialists in this period must be to work closely with non-socialists in the labor and social movements to help rebuild such a leadership that will ultimately create a broader audience for socialist ideas. How are Lenin's ideas on organization relevant to us in this process?

HISTORICAL TIME-LINE RELATED TO LENIN AND TROTSKY

Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) is formed for purpose of advancing workers' power through unions to defend against capitalist exploitation, and democratic revolution to overthrow tyrannical monarchy (Tsarism) -- and later, after a period of capitalist and democratic development, a socialist revolution. It is part of the Second (Socialist) International.

Lenin develops analysis of nationalism distinguishing oppressor nations from oppressed nations, also writes *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*.

Stalin initiates incredibly violent forced collectivization of land at expense of peasants, and rapid industrialization at expense of workers, plus intensified state control of culture and intellectual life, as his version of "socialism." When Great Depression begins, Third International makes destructively sectarian ultra-left zigzag.

Nazi movement takes power in Germany, in part due to sectarianism of German Communists in failing to make a united front with moderate Socialists to stop Hitler.

In What Is to Be Done?
Lenin calls for a more cohesive and efficient organizational structure for RSDLP.

RSDLP splits into radical Bolshevik and moderate Menshevik factions

Revolutionary uprising of Russian workers and peasants -- rise of revolutionary-democratic councils, (soviets). Trotsky develops theory of permanent revolution.

Bolshevik-Leninists establish separate revolutionary socialist party

Workers upsurge in Russia under Bolshevik leadership derailed by the eruption of imperialist slaughter -- World War I. Second International shatters. Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg lead militant anti-war socialists

Feb/March revolution overthrows Tsarism, Oct/Nov revolution led by Bolsheviks gives power to soviets. Lenin writes *State and Revolution*.

Soviet democracy disintegrates with brutal civil wars and foreign assaults. Third (Communist) International formed.

Lenin dies after failed efforts to push back bureaucracy and Stalin's power. Confrontation between Trotsky and Stalin. Stalin commits to building socialism in a single country.

United Opposition opposes bureaucratic dictatorship of Stalin but is defeated. Third International makes compromises with British union bureaucrats and with Chinese Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek -- with disastrous consequences.

Third International adopts reformist Popular Front orientation -- building left-liberal coalition to save "capitalist democracy" from fascism.

Murderous purges against real and suspected opposition in Soviet Union. Spanish Civil War between Popular Front defending Republic and right-wing alliance. Stalinists use violence against Spanish revolutionaries, right-wing defeats Republic. Trotsky writes critique of Stalin's dictatorship -- *The Revolution Betrayed*, and helps form a Fourth International made up of small groups of revolutionary socialists. Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact -- World War II begins.

Trotsky, in Mexican exile, is murdered by Stalinist agent.

1898 1902 1903 1904 1905 1912 1914 1915-16 1917 1919 1924 1926-29 1929-30 1933 - 1935 1936-39 1940

LEON TROTSKY

by Paul Le Blanc

Leon Trotsky was one of the most impressive revolutionaries of the twentieth century, and his example and ideas have profoundly affected successive generations of labor and socialist activists—including many who are part of Solidarity. He was certainly one of the finest writers associated with the Marxist movement, as I hope will be clear from the excerpts quoted in this talk. He was also one of the central leaders of the Russian Revolution of October/November 1917, the organizer and leader of the Red Army that defended the early Soviet Republic in the face of civil war and foreign invasions, a founder and leader of the Communist International, later a defender of the original ideas and ideals of the 1917 Revolution and of the early Communist movement against the bureaucratic tyranny that overwhelmed them in the 1920s and 1930s, a founder of the Fourth International, and more.*

* The Fourth International was founded in 1938, made up of handfuls of revolutionary socialists who formed themselves into organizations in various countries. They came to be known as Trotskyists. Due to a variety of political differences, there were later splits in the Fourth International, and today there are a diverse number of groups — many of whom are antagonistic toward each other, and some quite different from each other — all calling themselves “Trotskyist.” Some of these I find sectarian and politically sterile — with others I find I share much common ground. Many revolutionary socialists influenced by Trotsky insist they “come out of the Trotskyist tradition” but are not comfortable with the label “Trotskyist.” (Personally, I am as comfortable with the term Trotskyist as I am with the labels Leninist and Marxist — and I apply all of them to myself without hesitation because I accept the political framework implied by each. But I find that more important than the labels people choose to apply to themselves is what the labels mean for them in life — that is, what they actually do in struggles for social and economic justice and for human freedom. More important than labels is theory — one’s actual values, way of thinking, ideas, understanding, analysis, insights — and theories mean almost nothing if divorced from life and struggle.)

In this short talk it will be impossible to do justice to all that Trotsky was and all that he said and wrote. It will also be impossible to offer a critique of shortcomings that can certainly be found in his long and dynamic political career. Here I will limit myself to introducing certain aspects of his theoretical and political contributions to the labor and socialist movements: Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution, his critique of Stalinist and reformist bureaucracy, and his approach to revolutionary strategy. In the discussion period I anticipate we will grapple with the extent to which Lenin and Trotsky are relevant to struggles of today and tomorrow.

The Nature of Revolution and Revolutionaries

I bracket Lenin and Trotsky together because—in my opinion—Trotsky absorbed into his own political orientation, from 1917 until his death in 1940, the fundamental perspectives that guided Lenin and the radical Bolshevik current in the Russian socialist movement. I would argue that, although Trotsky was a critical and original thinker, his theories and analyses involve a creative elaboration and application (or in some cases a parallel development) of ideas that we can find in Marx, Luxemburg, and Lenin.

In particular, Trotsky shared with these people the commitment to an incredibly radical form of democracy represented in the notion of *workers’ power*. Consider this passage from the introduction to his classic *History of the Russian Revolution*:

The most indubitable feature of a revolution is the direct interference of the masses in historic events. In ordinary times the state, be it monarchical or democratic, elevates itself above the population, and history is made by specialists in that line of business—kings, ministers, bureaucrats, parliamentarians, journalists. But at those crucial moments when the old order becomes no longer endurable to the masses, they break over the barriers excluding them from the political arena, sweep aside their traditional representatives, and create by their own interference the initial groundwork for a new regime...The history of a revolution is for us first of all a history of the forcible entrance of the masses

into the realm of rulership over their own destiny. (p. xvii)

For Trotsky there is a fundamental harmony between this view of revolution and the quality of socialism that he felt must be the goal of a working-class revolution. "Socialism signifies a pure and clear social system which is accommodated to the self-government of the toilers...Socialism implies an uninterrupted growth of universal equality...Socialism has as its goal the all-sided flowering of the individual personality...Socialism would have no value apart from the unselfish, honest, and humane relations between human beings..." (*Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1936-37*, pp. 328-329.)

From the very beginning, Trotsky shared with Lenin and other revolutionary Marxists the belief that the working class under capitalism has the creativity, the latent power, the potential consciousness that would be required to bring about this transformation. The more *advanced layers* of the working class, joined by radicalized students and intellectuals, must—as Trotsky saw it—organize themselves in order to help the laboring masses realize this revolutionary potential.

There is a striking harmony between his vision of socialism and the qualities that he believed must animate revolutionary activists. This quotation from a female veteran of Russia's revolutionary movement of the early 1900s, offered with the author's obvious agreement, appears near the beginning of Trotsky's biography of Stalin, his final book: "Turning over in my mind the mass of comrades with whom I had occasion to meet, I cannot recall a single reprehensible, contemptible act, a single deception or lie. There was friction. There were factional differences of opinion. But no more than that. Somehow everyone looked after himself [and herself] morally, became better and more gentle in that friendly family." Trotsky added: "The measure of ambition was to last as long as possible on the job [of engaging in labor and socialist activity] prior to arrest; to hold oneself steadfast when facing the gendarmes; to ease, as far as possible, the plight of one's comrades; to read, while in prison, as many books as possible; to escape as soon as possible [into] exile abroad; to acquire wisdom there; and then return to revolutionary activity in Russia." (Trotsky, *Stalin*, p. 54.)

Trotsky frequently insisted that "revolutionary discipline has nothing to do with blind obedience," that any revolutionary worthy of the name "does not take anything on [just someone else's] word. He judges everything by reason and experience." (*Writings...1932*, p. 326; *Writings...1932-33*, p. 199.) The organic connection between revolutionary commitment and integrity comes through in Trotsky's comments—in the early 1920s—about the qualities of a genuine Bolshevik:

A Bolshevik is not merely a disciplined person; he is a person who in each case and on each question forges a firm opinion of his own and defends it courageously and independently, not only against his enemies, but inside his own party. Today, perhaps, he will be in the minority in his organization. He will submit, because it is his party. But this does not always signify that he is in the wrong. Perhaps he saw or understood before the others did a new task or the necessity of a turn. He will persistently raise the question a second, a third, a tenth time, if need be. Thereby he will render his party a service, helping it to meet the new task fully armed or to carry out the necessary turn without organic upheavals, without factional convulsions. (*Challenge of the Left Opposition, 1923-25*, p. 127.)

Such a description is consistent with Trotsky's own character as a revolutionary. This first became clear with the development of his theory of permanent revolution—for many years a minority position among Russian socialists, until it was, in practice, embraced by Lenin and the Bolshevik party in 1917.

The Theory of Permanent Revolution

The majority of Russian Marxists insisted that the absolute monarchy and semi-feudal nobility in Russia must be overthrown by a democratic revolution that would also allow for an industrial capitalist development that could provide the material basis for socialism, which would be achieved by a later working-class revolution. The Menshevik faction among Russian socialists called for a worker-capitalist alliance to lead the democratic revolution. The Bolshevik faction insisted that the capitalists could not be trusted, that only a working-class

alliance with Russia's impoverished peasant majority would result in a victory of the democratic revolution. In this, Trotsky agreed with the Bolsheviks but then went much further.

Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution linked the struggle for democracy—freedom of expression, equal rights for all, and rule by the people—with the struggle for socialism, a society in which the great majority of people would own and control the economic resources of society to allow for the free development of all. It also linked the struggle for revolution in Russia with the cause of socialist revolution *throughout the world*.

Trotsky's theory contained three basic points. One held that the revolutionary struggle for democracy in Russia could only be won under the leadership of the working class with the support of the peasant majority. The second point held that this democratic revolution would begin in Russia a transitional period in which all political, social, cultural, and economic relations would continue to be in flux, leading in the direction of socialism. The third point held that this transition would be part of, would help to advance, and would also be furthered by an international revolutionary process.

The first aspect of Trotsky's theory was related to his understanding that the relatively weak capitalist class of Russian businessmen was dependent on the tsarist system, and that the capitalists would be too frightened of the revolutionary masses to lead in the overthrow of tsarist tyranny. The struggle for democracy and human rights could only be advanced consistently and finally won under the leadership of the working class, which was capable of organizing labor unions and political organizations in Russia's cities and towns. Allied with the workers would be the vast peasantry hungry for land, as well as other oppressed social layers—women, oppressed ethnic and national groups, religious minorities, and dissident intellectuals. A victorious worker-led revolution would bring the working class to political power. In other words, democratic revolutions in so-called "backward" countries such as tsarist Russia must spill over into working-class revolutions.

The second aspect of Trotsky's theory was related to the understanding that the masses of victorious revolutionary workers would not be

willing to turn political power over to their capitalist bosses. Instead, they would—with the support of the peasants—consolidate their own rule through democratic councils (known in Russia as "soviets") and their own people's army. Under working-class rule there would be dramatic efforts

- to spread education,
- to create universal literacy,
- to make the benefits of culture available to all,
- to provide universal health care to all as a matter of right,
- to ensure that decent housing would be available for all,
- to secure full and equal rights for women and all others oppressed (for example, on the basis of nationality, race, religion) in the old society,
- and to include all people in building and developing an economy that would sustain the free development of all.

Increasingly and fairly rapidly, the development of society in this transitional period would go beyond the framework of capitalism and in the direction of socialism.

The third aspect of Trotsky's theory was related to his understanding that capitalism is a global system that can only be replaced by socialism on a global scale. It was his conviction that it would not be possible to create a socialist democracy in an economically underdeveloped country such as Russia surrounded by a hostile capitalist world. In fact, a working-class revolution in one country would inevitably generate counter-revolutionary responses in surrounding countries—with efforts to repress the revolution. At the same time, it would inspire the workers and oppressed of countries throughout the world. The Russian revolution would be one of a series of revolutions in country after country throughout the world. This would come about not only because of the example of revolutionary Russia, but especially because of the desire of more and more workers and oppressed people in all countries to end the exploitation and hardship that, Trotsky believed, are the inevitable result of capitalism. The process of socialist revolution can begin within a single country, but socialism can only be created on a global scale.

It is worth commenting on the connection between Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution and his approach to revolutionary strategy in general. But first we should also explore the link between the theory and Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism.

Opposing Bureaucratic Tyranny

Trotsky explained that the Russian revolution's isolation—resulting from the failure and defeat of revolutions elsewhere—led to the bureaucratic and murderous distortions of the Stalinist dictatorship in the Soviet Union. "On the foundation of the dictatorship of the proletariat—in a backward country," Trotsky wrote, "surrounded by capitalism—for the first time a powerful bureaucratic apparatus has been created from among the upper layers of the workers, that is raised above the masses, that lays down the law to them, that has at its disposal colossal resources, that is bound together by an inner mutual responsibility, and that intrudes into the policies of a workers' government its own interests, methods, and regulations." Given the economic underdevelopment and general poverty of Soviet Russia, many in the Communist Party and government apparatus were inclined to translate their political power into personal economic privileges, and they were motivated by the desire to defend of such power and privilege. Even this bureaucracy's policies for developing the country's economy were carried out in a bureaucratic manner. "Industrialization and collectivization are being put through by the one-sided and uncontrolled laying down of the law to the laboring masses by the bureaucracy," Trotsky pointed out. "The bureaucracy cannot exercise its pressure upon workers and peasants except by depriving them of all possibility of participating in decisions upon questions that touch their own labor and their entire future." (*The Struggle against Fascism*, pp. 213, 219, 220.)

Increasingly the most undemocratic, unjust, and inhumane policies became associated with the "general line" of the bureaucratized Soviet Communist Party, headed by Joseph Stalin. Trotsky was scathing in his comments on the bureaucratic functionary "who manipulates the general line like a fireman his hose." In this description, written in 1932, we see similarities between labor bureaucrats inside and outside of Stalinist Russia:

He eats and guzzles and procreates and grows himself a respectable potbelly. He lays down the law with a sonorous voice, handpicks from below people who are faithful to him, remains faithful to his superiors, prohibits others from criticizing himself, and sees in all of this the gist of the general line....

The ruling and uncontrolled position of the Soviet bureaucracy is conducive to a psychology which in many ways is directly contradictory to the psychology of a proletarian revolutionist. Its own aims and combinations in domestic as well as international politics are placed by the bureaucracy above the tasks of the revolutionary education of the masses and have no connection with the tasks of the international revolution. In the course of a number of years the Stalinist faction demonstrated that the interests and the psychology of the prosperous peasant, engineer, administrator, Chinese bourgeois intellectual, and British trade union functionary were much closer and more comprehensible to it than the psychology and needs of the unskilled laborer, the peasant poor, the Chinese national masses in revolt, the British strikers, etc. (*The Struggle against Fascism*, pp. 213-215.)

The Revolutionary Socialist Defense of Democracy Against Fascism

Just as there is a link between Trotsky's view of labor bureaucracies inside and outside of the Soviet Union, there is a connection between the theory of permanent revolution and Trotsky's approach to revolutionary strategy in general. Every genuine and consistent struggle for democratic rights, he believed, must, if it was to be fought through to victory, be based on and led by the working class—by critical-minded working-class activists organically connected to and followed by masses of working people throughout society. Such democratic struggles and victories always have a revolutionary dynamic and pose the question of workers' power. In Trotsky's time there were a number of major right-wing attacks on democratic rights, including:

- in Russia of 1917, the attempted military coup by General Kornilov between the March and November revolutions;
- in Mussolini's fascist onslaught to take over Italy in the 1920s;
- in the rise and final 1933 triumph of Hitler's Nazis in Germany;
- in the Spanish civil war initiated by the 1936 military-fascist-conservative uprising against the new democratic republic.

In each case, Trotsky rejected proposals for broad and far-reaching political alliances of working-class organizations with liberal capitalist forces for the purpose of defending capitalist democracy against the right-wing threat. He always insisted on remaining true to the Marxist perspective of working-class political independence. He therefore favored a united front of all working-class forces to uncompromisingly defend genuine democracy and the interests of the workers.^{*} The victory of such a working-class defense of democracy would, as had happened in Russia of 1917, create the immediate possibility of the workers taking

^{*} Lenin and Trotsky held that a **united front** could also be made with other class forces – including pro-capitalist liberals – around limited struggles (for democratic rights, for specific reforms, or against war), but never in a manner that compromised the political independence of the working class. Such united front efforts, for example, existed during the struggle against tsarism – but Lenin and Trotsky rejected the Menshevik orientation of turning this into the far-reaching strategy of a worker-capitalist alliance. In later years, Trotsky and his followers were prepared to form united fronts with bourgeois liberals to aid the Spanish Republic against fascist attack (while rejecting the far-reaching worker-capitalist alliance of the **Popular Front**), to expose the falseness and criminality of the Stalin's Moscow Trials (the Dewey Commission), and to oppose war (support for the Ludlow amendment in the U.S.). A central thrust of the united front tactic, however, was always to make more effective the struggles of the working class in the defense of its interests – and to the extent that this is successful, a revolutionary dynamic is set in motion.

political power and initiating a socialist transition.

Trotsky's analysis of fascism is also linked to his revolutionary strategic orientation. Fascism involves the rise of right-wing mass movements whose goal is the creation of a permanent dictatorship dedicated to the systematic destruction both of democratic rights and of independent workers' movements, combining a radical-populist rhetoric (often laced with racism) with super-patriotic and aggressive nationalism, and with the glorification of militarism and war. It developed in Italy and in Germany (taking an especially racist form) in the 1920s and '30s. Trotsky believed fascism resulted from a social and economic crisis generating on the one hand a radical upsurge of the workers' movement and on the other hand deep fear from the upper classes and among the so-called "middle classes." If the workers failed to take political power (and failed to begin a transition to a socialist solution to the crisis), then right-wing demagogues with fascistic "solutions" would gain an ever-greater hearing among the frightened "middle classes" and disappointed masses, and powerful upper-class elements would offer such movements substantial economic and political support. The rise of fascism indicates revolutionary socialist possibilities that have remained unrealized – and the only effective way to defeat fascism is to develop an uncompromising working-class defense of democracy that pushes in a revolutionary socialist direction.

Workers Democracy Against Reformism and Capitalism

One of the greatest obstacles to the forward movement of the working class, in Trotsky's opinion, was the development of bureaucracies (in some cases Stalinist, in others moderate socialist, in many other cases anti-socialist, or "business unionist") that had developed and become encrusted in the leaderships of working-class organizations—creating a great divide between the functioning of organizations claiming to represent the workers and the actual workers themselves. The ideology of the labor bureaucrats in capitalist countries was often labeled *reformism*, which held that the accumulation of reforms—won through pressuring and negotiating with the capitalists—makes socialist revolution

unnecessary. "Both Marxism and reformism have a solid social support underlying them," according to Trotsky. "Marxism expresses the historical interests of the proletariat [that is, the working class]. Reformism speaks for the privileged position of the proletarian bureaucracy and [higher-paid labor] aristocracy within ... capitalist [society]." (*The Struggle against Fascism*, p. 211.) Obviously, such elements in the labor movement would be inclined to establish far-reaching alliances with liberal capitalist politicians not only to oppose fascism but also to continue accumulating modest reforms. Near the end of his life, Trotsky observed that this was leading to something new as powerful capitalist corporations became increasingly entwined with the state apparatus:

The trade unions in the present epoch cannot simply be the organs of democracy as they were in the epoch of free capitalism and they cannot any longer remain politically neutral, that is, limit themselves to serving the daily needs of the working class...The trade unions of our time can either serve as secondary instruments of imperialist capitalism for the subordination and disciplining of workers and for obstructing the revolution, or, on the contrary, the trade unions can become the instrument of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. (*On the Trade Unions*, p. 71.)

From Trotsky's standpoint, there would be a need for unions, and other organizations of the working class, to be democratically controlled by their members for the purpose of defending their own interests and the interests of the working class as a whole. Active participation, serious and far-reaching political education, the self-organization and self-mobilization of workers at the rank-and-file level would be required to secure improved working and living conditions, to defend the democratic and human rights of all, and to overcome the multifaceted social crises of our time. This could only be realized through socialism. "Life is beautiful," Trotsky wrote in 1940. "Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression, and violence, and enjoy it to the full." [*Writings, 1939-40*, p. 159] The eloquence of that challenge should not blind us to its continued relevance.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES AND SUGGESTED READING

The ideas of the individuals discussed in this Working Paper on "The Revolutionary Socialist Tradition" can best be understood by relating them to the lives and times of those individuals, and also by actually reading their writings. What follows provides some basic information on their political biographies, plus suggestions on further reading. A very substantial annotated bibliography can be found in Paul Le Blanc, *From Marx to Gramsci: A Reader in Revolutionary Marxist Politics* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1996), from which some of the following is adapted.

MARX AND ENGELS

Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Frederick Engels (1820-1895) were born in what would soon become Germany, sons respectively of a well-to-do lawyer and a prosperous textile manufacturer. As youths and university students, both were profoundly influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, as well as the radical-democratic political thought generated by the French Revolution and the immense changes that were being generated by the Industrial Revolution. As they sought to understand the world around them, they drew from German philosophical currents (especially those developing radical interpretations of G.W.F. Hegel, such as Ludwig Feuerbach), French political and historical works, and the studies in political economy advanced in Britain by Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Utopian socialists such as Charles Fourier, Claude Henri Saint-Simon, and Robert Owen were also an important influence. The two young men were most profoundly affected by the rise of an organized working-class movement – the Chartists, who struggled to extend the right to vote to the working class in England, early efforts at trade unionism in various countries, numerous reform activities, radical and socialist study groups, and so forth.

In the late 1840s they joined the predominantly working-class Communist League (with members in a number of European countries), for which they agreed to write a manifesto to explain the group's general outlook and political orientation. This was the *Communist Manifesto*,

which appeared just as a revolutionary upheaval swept through Europe in 1848. Diverse currents of revolutionary nationalism, liberalism, constitutionalism, radical democracy, and working-class social reform animated this mass upsurge, which seemed on the verge of sweeping away a variety of monarchist, semi-feudal, reactionary obstacles to "progress." Instead, the revolutionary wave broke apart as liberal capitalist forces turned against the radicalizing working class. In their 1850 "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League," in Engels's *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany*, and in Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, the two comrades sought to draw the lessons of this experience, in which they were very active participants.

The Communist League collapsed under the weight of the defeated revolutions; Marx and Engels – who had formed an intimate political-intellectual partnership lasting for the rest of their lives – concluded that, since industrial capitalism was obviously going through a period of powerful expansion, many more years would pass before a working-class movement could arise that would be capable of bringing about socialism. Marx turned his attention to economic studies of capitalism – a project to which Engels lent considerable intellectual and (with his profits from running a capitalist enterprise) financial support. The result was a massive feat of scholarship, yielding *A Critique of Political Economy* (1859), culminating in 1867 with the first volume of Marx's masterwork, *Capital*.

The early 1860s saw a resurgence of working-class organizations and radical currents throughout Europe and North America, many of which joined in the International Workingmen's Association (IWA, later known as the First International) in 1864. Marx became a central figure and guiding spirit within the IWA, translating the perspectives of the *Communist Manifesto* into a form relevant to non-revolutionary times in, for example, his "Inaugural Address of the International Workingmen's Association." In 1871, however, an unexpected revolutionary uprising in France created the world's first working-class government – the short-lived Paris Commune. Marx defended the Commune and sought to draw the lessons taught by its life and death in *The Civil War in France*, advancing key ideas on the state and revolution which would be

elaborated especially by Lenin in future years. The defeat of the Commune and the sharp increase of government repression throughout Europe – combined with controversies within the IWA dividing trade union moderates, revolutionary socialists, and anarchists – resulted in the IWA being moved to the United States, passing out of existence in Europe. (Eventually, North American remnants of the IWA evolved into the Socialist Labor Party and the American Federation of Labor.)

In the last decade of his life, Marx was forced to cope with the precipitous decline of his wife's health and his own. Nonetheless, he labored to complete the final two volumes of *Capital*, at the same time initiating important new research on Asia and Russia, as well as in anthropology, plus assisting Engels with the popularization of their ideas contained in the 1877-78 polemic *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science (Anti-Dühring)*, portions of which provided the basis for Engels's important pamphlet *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880). Throughout these years Marx also maintained an extensive and intensive correspondence with Engels and with working-class and revolutionary activists and organizations throughout Europe and North America. At certain points he made significant interventions in debates and discussions – for example, in his "Critique of the Gotha Program" (1875) of the newly united German Social-Democratic Party, and in his 1881 response to Vera Zasulich on issues facing Russian revolutionaries.

After Marx's death, Engels sought to continue his work – bringing out the second and third volumes of *Capital* (1885, 1894) and producing the origin of *The Family, Private Property and the State* (1888), among other works which helped to explain and popularize the approach, analyses, and political orientation which Marx and he had developed. Through a voluminous correspondence and personal contacts he also helped to strengthen the growing labor and socialist movements in a variety of countries, which in 1889 established the Socialist International (the Second international). The general orientation of this new International was essentially Marxist. As its member parties gained ground in Europe, however, there was a growing tendency toward moderating or diluting the revolutionary politics essential to the orientation of both Marx and Engels. Despite tensions with some of his comrades over this,

Engels was optimistic that the ongoing impact of capitalist oppression and experience of class struggle would win working-class majorities throughout the world to the revolutionary socialist orientation he had shared with Marx.

Many individual works by Marx and Engels have been kept in print by International Publishers, though some are also available from other publishers. The almost completed fifty-volume *Collected Works* is being published by International Publishers in conjunction with Lawrence and Wishart in Britain and the Russian Independent Institute of Social and National Problems (formerly the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, before the collapse of the USSR) in Moscow.

An eight-volume edition of Marx's writings – including new translations of *Capital*, and the first English-language publication of his massive *Grundrisse* – was overseen by the British journal *New Left Review* and published in the 1970s and early '80s by Penguin Books in Britain and Vintage Books in the United States. The writings of Marx and Engels (especially Marx) are sometimes anthologized separately – for example, Eugene Kamenka, ed., *The Portable Karl Marx* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983) and W.O. Henderson, ed., *Engels: Selected Writings* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1967). More useful are collections which combine selections from their works, such as Lewis S. Feuer, ed. *Marx and Engels, Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1959) and Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Second Edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978).

A fairly capable, sophisticated short work by a prominent non-Marxist scholar is Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx*, Fourth Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), and a more substantial account is David McClellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974). There are classic but out-of-print biographies by Franz Mehring, Otto Ruhle, Gustav Mayer (on Engels), and Boris Nicolaevsky – but especially worth looking for is David Riazanov's succinct dual biography *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974). Blends of political biography and accounts of theoretical development can be found in Ernest Mandel, *The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl*

Marx (New York: Monthly Review press, 1971), Steven Marcus, *Engels, Manchester and the Working Class* (New York: Random House, 1974), Richard N. Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*, 2 vols. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974, 1984), and August H. Nimtz, Jr., *Marx and Engels: Their Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000).

Hal Draper's unfinished *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, 4 vols. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977-1995) is also worth studying.

LUXEMBURG

Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) was born in Poland (then divided under German and Russian domination), into a fairly well-to-do and cultured family which enabled this exceptionally bright daughter to pursue an education in Warsaw and then Zurich. By the early 1890s she was active in the Polish revolutionary movement, soon moving to Germany in order to play a more substantial role in the massive and internationally influential German Social-Democratic Party. Here she took the lead, with her polemic *Reform or Revolution*, in opposing a reformist dilution of Marxist theory and politics that was being spearheaded by the "revisionist" spokesman Eduard Bernstein.

At the same time, Luxemburg was concerned that the bureaucratic organizational apparatus of the German Social Democracy would – despite the formal adherence to Marxist "orthodoxy" – fail to reach out to working people in a manner that would facilitate the development of the revolutionary energy which she felt was latent within them. This highlights the importance of her insistence that Marxism must not be allowed to stagnate. It also helps explain her negative reaction to Lenin's emphasis on organizational centralism in Russia, although – in the wake of the 1905 wave of strikes and workers' uprisings throughout eastern Europe – she and Lenin soon found themselves standing closer together. By contrast, the 1905 experience compelled Luxemburg to write her 1906 classic *Mass Strike, Political Party and Trade Unions*, which criticized the bureaucratic conservatism permeating so much of the German labor movement, and which analyzes the actual dynamics of revolutionary situations which are animated by spontaneous upsurges of largely

unorganized masses unexpectedly swept into motion.

Luxemburg's opposition to those who stood for "business as usual" in trade unions and party (even the "pope" of Marxist orthodoxy, Karl Kautsky) placed her unambiguously in the revolutionary wing of the German Social Democracy. Refusing to occupy a "safer" and marginalized position as a women's spokesperson in the socialist movement, she nonetheless had a vibrant sense of the interpenetration of women's liberation and working-class liberation. But her focus was on issues such as the development of capitalism into a new imperialist phase which threatened to bring about a devastating world war. Her major economic work, *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), was inevitably followed up by a more practical and tragic political critique of 1915, *The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis of German Social Democracy*. This was written from a prison cell because of her opposition to the German war effort – while a majority of the de-radicalized, bureaucratic Social-Democratic Party rallied to the "fatherland" during the First World War.

Luxemburg joined with a relative handful of revolutionary Marxists in Germany to organize the oppositional Spartakusbund. When kindred spirits in Russia – led by Lenin's Bolsheviks – brought about a workers' revolution in 1917, she was elated. Not uncritical of some of Lenin's and Trotsky's policies in Russia, she nonetheless strongly identified with what they represented, and she helped form the German Communist Party at the end of 1918. The monarchy had just collapsed, to be replaced by the Weimar Republic and a moderate Social-Democratic government, in the wake of the devastation and defeat of World War I. Amid the chaos and revolutionary ferment, masses of workers were rallying to the orientation with which Luxemburg was identified. But her enemies (including the Social-Democratic bureaucracy) were spreading vicious and provocative slanders about "Red Rosa," and right-wing paramilitary units were being organized to combat insurgent workers and kill revolutionary militants. An abortive uprising in early 1919 was used as a pretext to murder Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and others.

For some who reject revolutionary and Marxist perspectives, Rosa Luxemburg is seen as a

“good” Marxist ... good in spite of her Marxism. But as she actually lived her life, her Marxism was interwoven with her admirable personal qualities and inseparable from her penetrating analyses.

The best single collection of Luxemburg's writings in English is Mary Alice Waters, ed., *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), but also useful are Dick Howard, ed., *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), Robert Looker, ed., *Rosa Luxemburg: Selected Political Writings* (New York: Grover Press, 1974), Stephen Bronner, ed., *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, New Edition (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1993), and most recently Paul Le Blanc, ed., *Rosa Luxemburg: Reflections and Writings* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000).

Luxemburg's economic work can be explored in *The Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Monthly Review press, 1968) and in the more accessible *The Accumulation of Capital – An Anti-Critique* (with Nikolai Bukharin, *Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital*), ed. by Kenneth Tarbuck (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972). Other works can be found in the narrowly focused volume edited by Horace B. Davis, *The National Question: Selected Writings of Rosa Luxemburg* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976).

Perhaps the best biography of Luxemburg was written by her comrade Paul Frolich, *Rosa Luxemburg, Her Life and Work* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), though J.P. Nettl's *Rosa Luxemburg*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) contains much of value. Norman Geras, *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg* (London: Verso, 1983) offers insightful discussions of Luxemburg's views, and interesting commentary can also be found in Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

LENIN

V. I. Lenin (1870-1924) was born Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov in the Russian city of Simbirsk, into a moderately well-to-do family animated by cultural interests and liberal values. In the early

1890s young Ulyanov was already recognized as a brilliant Marxist thinker and activist committed to the overthrow of the tsarist autocracy. Among his writings were the massive study, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1898), and such polemics against the populist (as opposed to working-class Marxist) revolutionaries as *What the "Friends of the People" Are*, as well as writings related to educational and organizing efforts among factory workers. Under repressive political conditions he utilized a number of aliases, Lenin being the best known.

By 1903 Lenin had organized the intransigently revolutionary wing of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party known as the Bolsheviks (majority faction), as opposed to the Mensheviks (initially the minority faction). The Bolsheviks called for a worker-peasant alliance and the blending of struggles for democratic rights and social reforms into a strategy that would overturn the regime. Essential for achieving such a goal, Lenin had repeatedly emphasized, was the development of a highly disciplined revolutionary party, the specifics of which were discussed in such polemical works as *What Is To Be Done?* (1902) and *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* (1904).

In the underground, from prison, and from exile, Lenin worked tirelessly to build such an effective revolutionary organization – sometimes in thoroughgoing opposition to the more moderate Menshevik faction, whose perspective of a worker-capitalist alliance to overthrow tsarism was the target of Lenin's 1905 polemic *Two Tactics in the Democratic Revolution*. In the wake of the 1905 revolutionary upsurge, he sought to work in common with the Mensheviks. But growing political differences pulled the two currents onto divergent paths, with significant elements among the Mensheviks adapting to a non-revolutionary orientation. On the other hand, Lenin broke with some of his comrades in the Bolshevik faction whom he considered to be wedded to a sectarian and inflexible, ultra-left approach to the actual struggles of the working class. By 1912, Lenin and like-minded Bolsheviks organized themselves into their own completely separate party. Over the next two years the Bolsheviks became a powerful force in the growing workers' movement, although intensified government repression brought a temporary reversal of Bolshevik fortunes with the beginning of World War I.

During the war, Lenin was among the most unyielding critics of imperialism – in 1916 he wrote the economic popularization *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* – and opposed support to any of the governments of the combatant nations. He urged the workers to “turn the imperialist war into a civil war,” that is, to bring about the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist regimes responsible for the mass slaughter and suffering of “the Great War.” There was a dramatic deepening of his thinking on the relationship of democracy and revolution, as well as on the right of oppressed nations to self-determination, and in this period he began to retrieve the revolutionary perspectives on the state developed by Marx, but subsequently diluted by many Social-Democratic theorists. Lenin explained and documented these perspectives in his 1917 study *The State and Revolution*.

In 1917 the tsarist government was overthrown by masses of discontented working people, who organized themselves into *soviets* (democratic councils) while at first also supporting a Provisional Government consisting of pro-capitalist liberal and conservative politicians allied with some moderate socialist representatives. The Provisional Government stalled on land reform and other desired social changes, continuing Russian involvement in the unpopular war effort, and proving unable to overcome food shortages in the cities. The Bolsheviks called for “peace, bread, land” and “all power to the soviets,” and Lenin interwove this in vibrant polemics with his analyses of imperialism, the state, workers’ democracy, and revolution. Despite fierce government repression, the Bolsheviks soon won decisive majorities in the working-class soviets by October and went on to lead a successful insurrection. Lenin became head of the Soviet government and also of the Communist International (the Third International), formed in 1919 for the purpose of helping revolutionary socialists of other countries to aid each other and win similar victories. In his 1920 polemic *Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder* he criticized currents in the Communist International that inflexibly held to sectarian and ultra-leftist positions that would isolate them from many radicalizing workers.

Although Lenin’s goals and perspectives had been permeated by a radically democratic orientation, his Bolshevik (renamed Communist)

party regime implemented increasingly dictatorial policies in the face of a bitter civil war, military interventions involving fourteen different countries (including Britain, France, the United States, Germany and Japan), and a devastating blockade which contributed – along with mistakes in Communist economic policy – to the almost total wrecking of Soviet Russia’s economy. While accused by hostile critics of being “the architect of totalitarianism,” and bearing some responsibility for the infamous Red Terror of the civil war period, Lenin spent his last years in desperate efforts to reverse the authoritarian economic measures of “war communism” and to push back conservative and bureaucratic tendencies that were undermining the Soviet regime and Communist movement as genuinely revolutionary forces.

To his critics he remains a fanatical and malevolent figure. In death he was turned into an icon to lend authority to the bureaucratic dictatorship which triumphed in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin (whose power Lenin attempted, too late, to eliminate). By his own lights, however, he was one of many dedicated to the liberation of the working class and all the oppressed – and Lenin’s powerful intellect applied Marxist theory to the realities around him in a manner which helped, perhaps more than anyone else in the 20th century, to move those realities in a revolutionary direction.

There are many editions of Lenin’s writings. In addition to the 45-volume *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960-1970) and many individual titles available through International Publishers (which also published a one-volume and three-volume edition of his *Selected Works* in the 1960s), one can find a reasonable selection in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Lenin Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975).

The best single-volume biography is not the recent publication by the hostile Robert Service, but rather Ronald W. Clark, *Lenin: A Biography* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988). Books by three different authors, taken together, also provide a good biographical account – Leon Trotsky, *The Young Lenin* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1972), N.K. Krupskaya, *Reminiscences of Lenin* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), and Moshe Lewin, *Lenin’s Last Struggle* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978). Also valuable as

an informative political biography is Tony Cliff, *Lenin*, 3 vols. (London: Bookmarks, 1986).

Useful studies of Lenin's political thought are provided in Marcel Liebman, *Leninism Under Lenin* (London: Merlin Press, 1980), Neil Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought*, 2 vols. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975, 1981), and Paul Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1993).

TROTSKY

Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) was born into a relatively prosperous farming family in the Ukraine, and at the age of ten was sent to live with a relative in Odessa in order to attend school. By the age of eighteen he was drawn into the socialist movement. Embracing Marxism and the struggle of the working class, he took on the pen-name Trotsky in the revolutionary underground.

At first close to Lenin's revolutionary orientation in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, Trotsky rejected the organizational intransigence of the Bolshevik faction – against which he polemicized in *Our Political Tasks*. A leading figure in the early Petersburg soviet during the 1905 revolutionary upheaval, Trotsky came to the conclusion that the kind of worker-peasant alliance advocated by Lenin was superior to the notion of a worker-capitalist alliance favored by the more moderate Menshevik faction. But he went further than most others in the revolutionary movement by arguing that such an alliance could bring the working class to power and put a transition to socialism on the agenda in backward Russia, if revolutions were also sparked in more industrially advanced countries. This outlook, reflected in his theoretical contribution *Results and Prospects* and his narrative account of the revolutionary struggle 1905, became identified as the theory of permanent revolution.

While advocating unity among Russian socialists for many years, Trotsky found that those willing to participate in an all-inclusive unification could not maintain a coherent organization, and that the goal became utterly impossible when some of the Russian Social-Democrats supported their "own" government during World War I. He himself joined with many other international

socialists (including Lenin and Luxemburg) to organize open opposition to the imperialist war. By 1917, after the overthrow of the Tsar and the recreation of workers' soviets, Trotsky and some of his co-thinkers joined the Bolsheviks to help organize a working-class revolution to win "all power to the soviets."

Becoming a central leader of the Bolshevik (soon renamed Communist) Party and the new Soviet state, Trotsky was the organizer and commander of the Red Army, which beat back foreign invaders and triumphed over all enemies in the Russian Civil War. He was also a key figure in the newly organized Communist International and the author of its founding 1919 "Manifesto of the Communist International to the Workers of the World." Associated through works such as *Terrorism and Communism* (1920) with positions favoring dictatorial "expediency" in Soviet Russia, he soon joined with Lenin to oppose conservative, undemocratic, and bureaucratic developments that were wearing away the revolutionary fiber of the Communist regime, putting forward his views in the 1923 work *The New Course*.

After Lenin's death, Trotsky labored to build a Left Opposition to uphold and advance – in Russia and the Communist International – the original Bolshevik-Leninist perspectives, reiterated in numerous works, including analyses of politics and economics and culture in the Soviet Union, important discussions of the class struggle in Britain and China, and in a 1928 intervention into the Communist International later entitled *The Third International After Lenin*. A number of prominent old Bolsheviks joined with Trotsky in this struggle, at least for a short time (including Lenin's widow Nadezhda Krupskaya), but their efforts were decisively defeated by the state and party apparatus led by Joseph Stalin, and Trotsky was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1929.

While in exile (in Turkey, France, Norway, Mexico), Trotsky wrote volumes of brilliant political works, including a restatement and elaboration of the distinctive theory, *The Permanent Revolution* (1930), and his three-volume classic *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932-33). No less important were the critique of the bureaucratic dictatorship developed in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), and his call for a political revolution to establish soviet democracy

and working-class control of the economy in the Soviet Union.

More than this, Trotsky attempted to rally working-class militants and revolutionary-minded activists of the Communist and Socialist movements to an effective opposition against the rise of Hitlerism in Germany and the spread of fascism throughout Europe, against the dilution and abandonment of revolutionary perspectives by Stalinism, against the imperialist stranglehold on Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and against the oncoming renewal of imperialist slaughter in a second world war. He insisted that an application of the revolutionary Marxist orientation was necessary to comprehend and reverse the devastating developments of what turned out to be the *interwar* period.

After 1933, when Trotsky finally concluded that the Communist Parties of the Third International could not be reformed, he sought to organize revolutionary activists into a Fourth International, which was formally proclaimed in 1938 with the *Transitional Program*. Condemned to death in absentia during the bloody purge trials of 1936-38 orchestrated in the Soviet Union by Stalin, Trotsky was finally murdered by a Stalinist agent in 1940. Ignored among innumerable revolutionary-minded people for many years – largely due to the slanders, pressures, and political influence of Stalinism – even today form a residue of hostility sometimes taking the form of flippant dismissal. But revolutionary Marxism of the 20th century lacks coherence without the contributions of this heroic figure.

Single-volume collections of Trotsky's writings can be found in Irving Howe, ed., *The Basic Writings of Leon Trotsky* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), Isaac Deutscher (with George Novack), ed., *The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology* (New York: Dell, 1964), and Sarah Lovell, ed., *Leon Trotsky Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972). None of these does justice to his major works – *History of the Russian Revolution*, three volumes in one (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1936), *The Revolution Betrayed* (New York: Doubleday Doran, 1937), *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), as well as separate collections on Britain, China, Germany, Spain, culture, military science, specific factional disputes, etc.

Trotsky's writings of 1923-1929 can be found in Naomi Allen and George Saunders, eds., *The Challenge of the Left Opposition*, 3 vols. (1975-81), and the bulk of his later writings can be found in George Breitman and others, eds., *The Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1929-1940*, 14 volumes (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973-79). His first full-scale book was *1905* (New York: Vintage, 1972) and his last was *Stalin* (New York: Stein and Day, 1967) – and all of this barely covers of half his writings.

Trotsky's own discussion of his first fifty years can be found in *My Life: An Attempt at Autobiography* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970). A biography by his wife and a sometime comrade can be found in Victor Serge and Natalia Sedova, *The Life and Death of Leon Trotsky* (New York: Basic Books, 1975). One of the greatest biographies written in the English language is Isaac Deutscher's three-volume work – *The Prophet Armed, Trotsky: 1879-1921* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), *The Prophet Unarmed, Trotsky: 1921-1929* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), and *The Prophet Outcast, Trotsky: 1929-1940* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963). A short, critical biography by an ex-Trotskyist who became a reform-socialist can be found in Irving Howe, *Leon Trotsky* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1978). A valuable resource – critical but seeking to do justice to his subject -- is provided by Tony Cliff, *Trotsky*, 4 vols (London: Bookmarks, 1989-1993).

Michael Lowy's *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development: The Theory of Permanent Revolution* (London: Verso, 1981) and Ernest Mandel's *Trotsky As Alternative* (London: Verso, 1995) provide interesting expositions of Trotsky's thought by latter-day partisans.