

# Class Warrior

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## Why are Russia and China imperialist powers and not capitalist semi-colonies?

### Developing Lenin and Trotsky on post-soviet Russia and China

There are big debates going on about whether Russia and China are imperialist powers [today](#). This arises when it becomes obvious that the major local and regional wars around the globe, such as in Ukraine, are in reality proxy wars between the established imperialist powers led by the US, and the upstarts, Russia and China. With the rapid rise of [inter-imperialist rivalry](#) between the US and China-led blocs this question has become urgent since it involves a policy of defeat for both sides if they are imperialist or the defence of Russia and/or China if they are not. Unlike much of the left that thinks that the old debates of the workers states are no longer important today, we argue here that the fundamental differences that arose over the workers states nearly a century ago carry over into the 21<sup>st</sup> century revisionist politics of new batches of Mensheviks who substitute the petty bourgeois for the revolutionary agency of the proletariat.

The usual approach of Leninist-Trotskyists is to apply Lenin's criteria from *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*, which essentially reduces to the overproduction of capital in the great powers which requires capital export to colonies and semi-colonies to raise the rate of profit at home. The argument goes back to Marx's *Capital* to establish the foundations of the theory, and forward to see if the theory applies to Russia and China today. The problem is therefore framed in terms of whether [Russia](#) and [China](#) today are imperialist on Lenin's criteria. A second important question that flows from this approach, however, is not just "if" this is the case, but "how". This is because to be consistent with Lenin's theory, more needs explaining than the theory underpinning capital export and whether Russia and China qualify in these terms. Lenin as well as explaining the rise of imperialism also argued that the world had been divided among the imperialist powers. Some have taken this to mean that there is no room for new imperialist powers to emerge, not least former workers' states!

In summary, Lenin's theory draws on Marx's *Capital* to posit imperialism as a necessary stage of finance capital that arises out of its inherent crisis tendencies. Driven by crises of over-production of capital at home to export capital to get access to cheap raw materials and labor, the competing imperialist powers carve up the world market among them. From that point on the world market can be re-divided among these powers only by means of trade, political and military wars until such time as wars produce revolutions capable of defeating imperialism and making the transition from capitalism to socialism.

Therefore it follows that there is no provision in the theory for the emergence of new imperialist powers escaping colonial or semi-colonial servitude. They lack the pre-condition for such a transition – that is, they lack genuine political and economic independence from imperialism. They are oppressed states and as such will remain oppressed by one or other imperialist power. So not only must Lenin's theory be developed to explain the emergence of Russia and China as imperialist, we must prove "how" this is possible. In the process we can demolish all the rival theories that arrive at false conclusions based on a non-Marxist, non-dialectical method, that is, a bourgeois eclectic, empiricist method.

## Thailand: Defeat the Coup d'etat - A Polemic and Program in response to the RCIT

The Revolutionary Internationalist Communist Tendency (RCIT) never tires of displaying their neo-Cliffite understanding of the actual democratic content of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. Everywhere they invest elected governments with a democratic legitimacy. It is no accident that they have never been able to bring themselves to criticize the Workers Power (L5I) position of support for Yeltsin in 1991. In Yeltsin they saw the promise of greater democratic rights and opportunities for self organization of the working class, completely misunderstanding the true obtaining situation as a contest between two capitalist restorationist forces for the leadership of the counter-revolution against all survivals of the October revolution.

More recently we have seen the RCIT invest the Mursi government of Egypt with a similar democratic legitimacy based on a popular vote. That this election was a set up and that the real power was the deep state that has ruled Egypt at all times since 1952 makes no impression on our Viennese semi-Cliffites. The reassertion of direct control by the Egyptian Army high command (SCAF) was for the RCIT a military coup of the character of the Greek Colonels of 1967 or the Pinochet coup of 1973. The RCIT initially called for a United Front with the Muslim Brotherhood in defense of the Mursi government. Shortening their jib after this gaffe, they still continued to call for the restoration of the Mursi government claiming it was democratically elected and called for a united front to accomplish this restoration, and failing that called for a constituent assembly to assemble democratic forces to fight the "coup."

The May 20<sup>th</sup> coup by the commanders of the Thai army is indeed a military coup by any classical criteria. Nevertheless, we are not champions of the kind of "democratic elections" that bring pro-Thaksin Pheu Thai party politicians to power, anymore than elections that lead to Democratic Party governments. ***It is not permissible for socialists to call upon the workers to shed their own blood for the defense or the restoration of any of these "democratically elected" governments!*** You cannot pass off any such call as a Leninist United Front tactic. This has nothing to do with Lenin and everything to do with Menshevism, Kautskyism and even Stalinism. We reject the agency of alien class forces and institutions as the necessary precondition for entry of the masses onto the revolutionary road.

It is non-dialectical and it is schematic in the extreme to keep repeating this idea that the workers movement must pass through a stage of bourgeois parliamentarism when concrete conditions show that the bourgeoisie has no especial confidence in or patience for bourgeois parliamentarism. Not only will they not fight for it themselves, but in the general world crisis of capitalism they find "democracy" unnecessarily expensive and dispense with it at their earliest opportunity. *Trotsky in 1938 thought bourgeois democracy might prove too expensive even for the bourgeoisie of the U.S.A.* In the concrete circumstance of the masses own discontent with the Thaksin dynasty to call for the restoration of the status-quo ante is to pronounce a retreat in a revolutionary advance. [*the word "in" should be deleted; it was a typo in the original*]

The RCIT analysis of the Thaksin government invests bourgeois democracy with real democracy it never had and this is methodologically of one piece with their previous errors.

**We must first show that Lenin's theory, because it is grounded in Marxist method, is powerful enough to explain why Russia and China can emerge as imperialist nations late in the imperialist epoch. That is, far from being 'exceptions' to the rule, they prove the rule; that, in the epoch of imperialism, only nation states that have made successful national revolutions and become independent of imperialism, are capable of making the transition to imperialism. The measure of 'independence' is not the 'political independence' of neo-colonialism, but economic independence won by the expropriation of imperialist property, and the property of comprador national bourgeoisies that act as agents of imperialism.**

### The Imperialist Epoch

We can illustrate this briefly by reviewing the history of those imperialist states that existed at the time Lenin wrote *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism*. Imperialist states by his definition are oppressor states that extract super-profits from oppressed states. Here we will show that those that became imperialist, like Spain, Italy, Britain, Japan, Russia and the USA, inherited pre-capitalist territories and expanded through wars of independence or conquest. All these countries were imperialist by 1914. They divided the world market among them and since then no colony or semi-colony that won their 'political independence' has succeeded in breaking free from imperialism, *unless that revolution went further than the bourgeois democratic revolution and expropriated the bourgeoisie*. Russia is the classic case of a workers revolution where the bourgeoisie were expropriated. Less clear are the post-ww2 national revolutions in China, Vietnam and Cuba, that ended up expropriating the bourgeoisie only because the bourgeoisie refused to make peace with a predominantly peasant-based government.

Those colonies and semi-colonies that underwent national revolutions that fell short of expropriating capitalist and imperialist property have remained oppressed countries failing to break free from imperialism. Since some of these are considered by many to be imperialist (or sub-imperialist), it is important to demonstrate why that cannot be the case. This question has arisen mainly in relation to the [BRICS](#) –that is, the grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. These states are grouped together because they appear to be similar on the surface. They are large developing or emerging countries that exercise some regional economic influence and export some capital. For this reason not only do Russia and China appear to have both semi-colonial and imperialist features, so too do India, Brazil and even South Africa. Yet by Lenin's criteria only Russia and China make the grade because they alone have a history of national liberation struggles that expropriated the bourgeoisie. India, Brazil and South Africa never completed their national revolutions and so never achieved the level of independence from the existing imperialist powers to make possible their own transition to imperialism. That is, the accumulation of capital in those countries was largely expropriated by the imperialist countries leaving them incapable of developing their productive forces to the point of causing crises of overproduction leading to capital export.

### Russia and China are different

In stark contrast, Russia and China *did* complete their national revolutions to break from imperialism to a point sufficient to develop the forces of production beyond that possible in a capitalist semi-colony. The only possible explanation for the economic growth of Russia and China outside the global capitalist economy is that they were post-capitalist planned economies that accumulated a social surplus product. What makes Russia and China different from the rest of the BRICS is their independence as post-capitalist economies, outside the sphere of interest of any existing capitalist power, allowing these degenerated workers states to develop independently of the law of value. Yet at the same time their almost complete isolation from the global capitalist market forced them to backslide into economic stagnation as the parasitic bureaucracy consumed the surplus as its privileged income at the expense of the further development of the forces of production. While this isolation and stagnation ultimately led to the restoration of capitalism, their independence from imperialism allowed them to escape semi-colonial oppression when they re-entered

the global capitalist system and to make the transition to imperialism.

This analysis allows us to develop Lenin's theory to the new situation of restored former workers states. We do this by integrating Lenin's theory with Trotsky's theory of the degenerated workers states. These are *not* the same as the classic 'limits to growth' faced by capitalist semi-colonies promoted by development theorists like Walt Rostow. As Trotsky [had predicted](#), if the working class was unable to mount a political revolution to resist the growing distributional inequalities resulting from the stagnation of the plan, the bureaucracy could overturn workers property and restore the law of value to stimulate economic growth and convert itself into a new capitalist class. The gradual step by step bureaucratic reintroduction of the Law of Value (LOV) became a total transformation in the class character of the state between '89-'92 in Russia and China, when the bureaucracy decided to restore capitalism and, given the laws of motion of capital, created the pre-conditions for the necessary emergence of imperialism.

We will see how a range of empiricist non-Marxist theories fail to explain this concrete reality in Russia and China today. We exclude from this analysis the Stalinist Communist Parties and their associated currents. They defended the Soviet Union (SU) uncritically and many still see the SU and China as 'socialist' (in Stalin's language) despite the inroads of global capitalism. We limit the analysis here to those self-described Trotskyists in the tradition of the 4<sup>th</sup> International. We target these groups to demonstrate that *Lenin's theory of imperialism and Trotsky's theory of the workers state are both necessary in the case of Russia and China today to prove that alternate empiricist theories based on impressions, or appearances, of the concrete reality, fail to provide a guide to revolutionary practice. The programmatic consequence of such a bourgeois anti-Marxist method is a bourgeois program directed against the revolutionary program of the proletariat.*

As we argue here, this empiricist method leads to the theory/practice of a refusal to defend workers states or to fight for the political revolution. In both cases this liquidation of the Trotskyist program contributed to the defeat of the workers states. Some recognise this as an historical defeat, others as a victory over Stalinism, but neither owns up to their rotten role in liquidating the Trotskyist program of world revolution in defence of the workers states. In the recent debates over the role of imperialism in a number of conflicts across the globe, the big majority of reformist and 'centrist' currents reject Marxist dialectics for an empiricist and eclectic method of Menshevism. This rejects the Bolshevik party as the proletarian vanguard and turns the socialist revolution into an evolutionary process a la Kautsky or Stalin in which the petty bourgeoisie substitutes itself for the revolutionary agency of the proletariat. As Trotsky argued in *In Defence of Marxism* (IDOM), empiricism is the hallmark method of the petty bourgeois intellectuals who select facts in isolation to promote their interests as a *class or caste that acts as the labour agents of capital*.

### Empiricism versus Dialectics

Empiricism is the method of the bourgeoisie because it corresponds to capitalism at the level of exchange where the exploitative relations of production appear in a fetishised form as relations of exchange. When the petty bourgeois empiricists 'select facts' they are those facts that accord with this fetishised view of capitalism, in which they play a mediating role in the market between employers and workers. Petty bourgeois intellectuals along with the labor bureaucracy therefore act as the agents of the bourgeoisie subordinating the working class to its rule. The class struggle is a constant battle between revolutionary Marxists who represent the general and historical interests of the proletariat, and the petty bourgeois reformists, who attempt at every turn to subordinate the proletariat to the bourgeoisie. The Russian Revolution succeeded because the revolutionary Bolshevik party prevailed over the reformists and Mensheviks and led the workers and poor peasants to victory. The degeneration of the Russian revolution and the failure of the German revolution resulted from the failure of workers to form Bolshevik parties and break from the petty bourgeois currents in the labour movement outside the SU and the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy inside the SU.

The Russian revolution is the pivotal event in the history of the proletariat. It was the single event that proved the Bolsheviks superior to the Mensheviks. Acting as the agents of the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie in general rejected the revolution as premature. For example, the Mensheviks and Kautskyites did not think the pre-conditions for socialist revolution were present in Tsarist Russia. First there had to be a bourgeois revolution. Hence the Bolshevik revolution was regarded as a coup rather than a genuine revolution because it skipped over the bourgeois revolution. The Bolsheviks broke from the Mensheviks to overthrow the bourgeoisie and make a socialist revolution and the Mensheviks wanted their revenge. They regarded themselves as vindicated by history and rewound events in their heads to start again. Either the bureaucracy became the agents of the bourgeoisie in preparing the ground for socialism, or they became a new bourgeoisie to create a new or more advanced version of capitalism.

These Mensheviks fell into two camps, pro-Stalinist and anti-Stalinist depending on their attitude towards the historic role of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Both camps objectify the proletariat in order to eliminate its subjective role in the revolutionary process substituting the petty bourgeoisie as the subjective agency of history. *Thus one identifies with the Stalinist bureaucracy as progressive in this process and so credits the bureaucracy with the subjective revolutionary agency of the proletariat. The other reverses the signs and attributes to the Stalinist bureaucracy the subjective agency of a bourgeoisie or a new ruling class.* They both mask their conservative role in collaborating with the bourgeoisie by blaming the working class as unprepared for the historic tasks. Both represent a degeneration of Trotsky's dialectics that puts the revolutionary agency of the proletariat, and in particular the proletarian revolutionary party, at the heart of its program and characterises the Stalinist bureaucracy as a counter-revolutionary 'caste' inside the working class which is dependent on workers property for its privileges.

### (1) The Pro-Stalinists

By crediting the Stalinist bureaucracy with an independent progressive role in the transition to socialism, the pro-Stalinists liquidate the revolutionary party and program. Usually they are identified as Pabloites after the leader of the FI in the immediate post-war period. The [Pabloites](#) paid lip-service to the defence of the SU but in reality betrayed the revolution by liquidating the revolutionary party capable of leading the revolution. They responded to the restoration of capitalism in the SU and EU, as well as China in the 1990s, by recognising it as a counter-revolution but without taking any responsibility for it in their liquidating of Trotskyism into neo-Stalinism!

A recent example of this is [Barry Sheppard's](#) apologetics for Pabloism. Sheppard admits that the official United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) went soft on Stalinism and began to see the political revolution as an objective process. But he doesn't think that it had any responsibility for the counter-revolution in the SU. He claims that the USFI always defended the SU despite Stalinism and did not capitulate like the 'third camp'. Of course this is formally true; the SU was not capitalist, nor imperialist. But this does not absolve the Pabloites from any blame for the collapse of the SU. If you liquidate the party by underestimating the counter-revolutionary role of the bureaucratic caste, you are relying on objective forces outside the revolutionary party to defend workers property. In some ways this submission to evolutionary socialism is worse than the 'third camp' since it defaults the task of political revolution to the Stalinist bureaucracy. Sheppard exposes his unreconstructed Pabloism by justifying the Socialist Workers Party (SWP-US) liquidation into the Cuban bureaucracy on the basis of its mass support and break from 'Stalinism'. Since Cuba was a healthy workers state (however limited by its size and isolation) it did not need a political revolution. Not surprisingly, by such criteria Cuba remains a workers' state today.

Most Pabloists see restoration as a transformation of Degenerate Workers States (DWS) into new capitalist semi-colonies. So facing the current global crisis and intensification of inter-imperialist rivalry they defend Russia and China from imperialism. We wrote a detailed critique of this when we were in the [FLTI](#). The latest attempt to dredge up theoretical excuses against Russia as imperialist is that of Sam

Williams at the [Critique of Crisis Theory Blog](#). The author seems to be in the Pabloite tradition. He is orthodox on Tendency for the Rate of Profit to Fall (TRPF), etc., but shows he has no grasp of Marx's method. His concept of capitalist crisis is flawed by his failure to understand that Lenin developed Marx's concept of *finance capital* by grasping its fusion of banking and productive capital at the concrete level of state monopoly capital. No surprise then to find that Williams substitutes for Lenin's concept of imperialism an eclectic empiricist fact book. For him finance capital is banking capital. So Russia cannot be imperialist because it has no major private banks. Already 100 years ago Lenin had defined Russia as a special hybrid case of imperialism in fusing its capitalist state banks with the Tsarist Empire as an example of state monopoly capital. Never mind, William's empiricist litmus test is banking capital above per capita \$100,000. So NZ is imperialist! Yet Russia and China is below the cut-off point so they cannot be imperialist. William's second main criterion of imperialism is a military machine. Russia lacks a military machine? Such a method is a caricature of Marxism and Leninism.

Other [pro-Stalinists](#), refusing to recognise the reality of capitalist restoration, deny that a counter-revolution has taken place, still looking for some progressive faction in the bureaucracy that will rescue the workers states from capitalist restoration. For some, Russia has undergone restoration while China has not. What accounts for the restoration of one and not the other is the empiricist 'selection of facts' according to some historical schema. In Russia the Yeltsin counter-revolutionary coup led to the outlawing of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), whereas in China the Communist Party (CPC) remains in power. This 'fact' is sufficient, backed by selected Trotsky quotes, to account for restoration in the SU but not in China. But by equating restoration with the defeat of the Communist Party, these pro-Stalinists confess to their bankruptcy in crediting the Communist Party with the ability to stop restoration and develop the forces of production as a historically progressive petty bourgeois caste.

### (2) The Anti-Stalinists

Anti-Stalinists are of two sorts. First there are those 'Trotskyists' who see the Stalinist bureaucracy as totally counter-revolutionary. The bureaucracy is a caste dependent for its privileges on workers property and it does this by usurping workers power and administering the plan on bourgeois norms. In this respect the Stalinist bureaucracy is seen as the class equivalent of the bourgeoisie. For anti-Stalinists there can be no political bloc with the Stalinists even to defend workers' property.

The second group of anti-Stalinists are those who saw the Stalinists not merely substitute for the bourgeoisie but actually converting into a bourgeoisie in the 1920s or 1930s restoring capitalism and imperialism.

Both comprise the 'third camp' which Trotsky subjected to a cutting class [analysis](#):

*"...this new anti-Marxist grouping which appears under the label of the 'Third Camp'. What is this animal? There is the camp of capitalism; there is the camp of the proletariat. But is there perhaps a 'third camp' – a petty bourgeois sanctuary? In the nature of things, it is nothing else."*

We will give most space to our critique of the 'third camp' since it was the major break from Lenin and Trotsky on the Workers State, and the concept of a new class state in the SU led to the first major revision in Lenin's theory of imperialism. Moreover, Trotsky was quick to see the implications of the method underlying this concept of the USSR as 'imperialist'.

### 'Third camp' vs Trotsky

For the 'third camp' in general, the object was to re-define the SU as not-a-workers-state since the Stalinists and not the proletariat ruled the state. Whatever 'new society' they arrived at it involved a major revision of Marx's *Capital* so we have to retrace our steps somewhat to uncover the origins of the 'third camp' and why it survives today. In short the 'third camp' arose out of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP-

US) in the late 1930's under pressure of liberal public opinion opposed to Stalinist 'totalitarianism.' Against Trotsky who argued that workers must defend the Soviet Union unconditionally, despite the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy, the 'third camp' equated the Soviet Union with its Stalinist regime. When that regime joined forces with fascism and invaded Finland, such was the liberal outrage that the 'third camp' had to look for a new theory of the workers state to justify refusal to defend it. What followed was an attempt to rewrite Marx's theory of capitalism, so that capitalism could exist without a market, nor any of the laws of motion that capitalism is notorious for, like booms and slumps, crises and wars.

The 'third camp' in the SWP-US began their retreat from unconditional defence of the USSR by identifying the workers' state with its bureaucratic regime. First they falsified the unconditional defence slogan they recently shared. Instead of defence of workers property relations *despite the bureaucracy*, it became defence of the bureaucracy. Then as the bourgeoisie saw the bureaucracy's foreign policy as no different to that of Hitler, the petty bourgeois opposition agreed and Stalin's foreign policy became 'imperialist'. "*Disagreeing among themselves on the class nature of the Soviet state, the leaders of the opposition agree on this, that the foreign policy of the Kremlin must be labelled 'imperialist' and that the USSR cannot be supported 'unconditionally'.* (IDOM, 99). "*Our innovators cover the holes in their position with violent phrases. They label the policy of the USSR 'imperialist'. Vast enrichment of the sciences! Beginning from now on both the foreign policy of finance-capital and the policy of exterminating finance-capital will be called imperialism. This will help significantly in the class education of the workers!* (p. 75) *It is necessary to add that the stretching of the concept of 'imperialism' lacks even the attraction of novelty. At present not only the 'democrats' but also the bourgeoisie of the democratic countries describe Soviet policy as imperialist. The aim of the bourgeoisie is transparent –to erase the social contradictions between capitalist and Soviet expansion, to hide the problem of property, and in this way to help genuine imperialism.*" (p. 76.)

Here is Trotsky destroying the credibility of petty bourgeois intellectuals and their empiricist apologetics for refusing to *unconditionally* defend the workers' states:

*"Throughout the vacillations and convulsions of the opposition, contradictory though they may be, two general features run like a guiding thread from the pinnacles of theory down to the most trifling political episodes. The first general feature is the absence of a unified conception. The opposition split sociology from dialectic materialism. They split politics from sociology. In the sphere of politics they split our tasks in Poland from our experience in Spain –our tasks in Finland from our position on Poland. History becomes transformed into a series of exceptional incidents; politics becomes transformed into a series of improvisations. We have here, in the full sense of the term, the disintegration of Marxism, the disintegration of theoretical thought, the disintegration of politics into its constituent elements. Empiricism and its foster-brother, impressionism, dominate from top to bottom... Throughout the vacillations and convulsions of the opposition, there is a second general feature intimately bound with the first, namely, a tendency to refrain from active participation, a tendency to self-elimination, to abstentionism, naturally under cover of ultra-radical phrases. You are in favour of overthrowing Hitler and Stalin in Poland; Stalin and Mannerheim in Finland. And until then you reject both sides equally, in other words, you withdraw from the struggle, including the civil war."* (IDOM, 114-115)

Trotsky labels the opposition's position on the USSR "conjunctural defeatism:

*"Let us now check up on how Shachtman, aided by a theoretical vacuum, operates with the 'realities of living events' in an especially vital question. He writes: "We have never supported the Kremlin's international policy...but what is war? War is a continuation of politics by other means. Then why should we support a war which is the continuation of the international which we did not and do not support? The completeness of this argument cannot be denied; in the shape of*

*a naked syllogism we are presented here with a rounded-out theory of defeatism...Since we never supported the Kremlin's international policy, therefore we ought never to support the USSR...Since we are against Stalin we must therefore be against the USSR too. Stalin has long held this opinion. Shachtman has arrived at it only recently. From this rejection of the Kremlin's politics flows a complete and indivisible defeatism. Then why no say so?"*

The reason Shachtman and the opposition do not recognise this as defeatism is their empiricist method of splitting the function of war from the organ of class rule, the state:

*"Shachtman holds it possible that a function, namely, war, can be studied 'concretely' independently of the organ to which it pertains, i.e., the state. Isn't this monstrous? This fundamental error is supplemented by another equally glaring. After splitting function away from organ, Shachtman in studying the function itself, contrary to all his promises, proceeds not from the abstract to the concrete but on the contrary dissolves the concrete in the abstract. Imperialist war is one of the functions of finance capital, i.e., the bourgeoisie at a certain stage of development resting upon capitalism of a specific structure, namely monopoly capital. This definition is sufficiently concrete for our basic political conclusions. But by extending the term imperialist war to cover the Soviet state too, Shachtman cuts the ground away from under his own feet. In order to reach even a superficial justification for applying one and the same designation to the expansion of finance capital and the expansion of the workers' state, Shachtman is compelled to detach himself from the social structure of both states altogether by proclaiming it to be –an abstraction. Thus playing hide and seek with Marxism, Shachtman labels the concrete as abstract and palms off the abstract as concrete! This outrageous toying with theory is not accidental. Every petty-bourgeois in the US without exception is ready to call every seizure of territory 'imperialist', especially today with the US does not happen to be occupied with acquiring territories."* IDOM, 162-3)

Trotsky sums up the petty bourgeois opposition as a whole just after the split in the SWP (US) in April 1940 in his article, ['Petty-Bourgeois Moralists and the Proletarian Party'](#):

*"The petty-bourgeois minority of the SWP split from the proletarian majority on the basis of a struggle against revolutionary Marxism. Burnham proclaimed dialectical materialism to be incompatible with his moth-eaten 'science'. Shachtman proclaimed revolutionary Marxism to be of no moment from the standpoint of 'practical tasks'. Abern hastened to hook up his little booth with the anti-Marxism bloc...Only the other day Shachtman referred to himself in the press as a 'Trotskyist'. If this be Trotskyism then I at least am no Trotskyist. With the present ideas of Shachtman, not to mention Burnham, I have nothing in common...As for their 'organisational methods' and political 'morality' I have nothing but contempt. Had the conscious agents of the class enemy operated through Shachtman, they could not have advised him to do anything different from what he himself has perpetrated. He united with anti-Marxists to wage a struggle against Marxism. He helped fuse together a petty-bourgeois faction against the workers. He refrained from utilising internal party democracy and from making an honest effort to convince the proletarian majority. He engineered a split under the conditions of a world war. To crown it all, he threw over the split the veil of a petty and dirty scandal, which seems especially designed to provide our enemies with ammunition. Such are these 'democrats', such are their 'morals!'"*

### **Bureaucratic Collectivism**

Trotsky's damning verdict on the petty-bourgeois "third camp" exposed the theoretical fraud of determining the character of the workers state from the 'concrete' foreign policy of its Stalinist regime. This means defining social relations or production in terms of its political relations, or economics by power relations. This reduces Marxism to common liberalism. Agreement on the Soviet Union as 'imperialist' left the problem of what form of class society is engaged in such 'imperialist' expansion. Under the heat of Trotsky's ridicule, a new theory of the class character of the Soviet Union was needed to account for Stalin's

‘imperialism.’ Max Shachtman, ever the eclectic according to Trotsky, abandoned his abstract ‘workers state’ (i.e., isolated from class relations,) for a version of the theory of ‘bureaucratic collectivism’ and rise of the bureaucracy as a ‘new class.’

Trotsky critiqued the theory of ‘bureaucratic collectivism’ in [‘The USSR and War’](#). For Bruno R: “...the new bureaucracy is a class, its relation to the toilers is collective exploitation, the proletarians are transformed into the slaves of totalitarian exploiters...Bruno has caught on to the fact that tendency of collectivisation assumes as a result of the political prostration of the working class, the **form** of bureaucratic collectivism. The **phenomenon** itself is incontestable. But what are its limits, and what is its historical weight? What we accept as a deformity of a transitional period, the result of the unequal development of multiple factors in the social process, is taken by Bruno R for an independent social formation in which the bureaucracy is the ruling class.” [Our emphasis]

Bruno R. equates the regimes of Stalinism with fascism and the ‘New Deal’. He abstracts this form of collectivist regime from two specific social formations, capitalism and a new social formation. But he produces no analysis in support of a new bureaucratic collectivist social formation in which a new class of bureaucrats exploits workers as slaves. Shachtman later attempts to adapt Bruno R’s concept. He says that in 1939 Stalin became “Hitler’s agent” in an “aggressive military alliance.” This means that Stalinism is an “[imperialism](#)” peculiar to the Stalinist bureaucracy in its present stage of degeneration”. The basis of this imperialism is [‘bureaucratic collectivism’](#):

*“Now to summarize our position: What then exists in Russia? We call it a bureaucratic collectivist state – anti-proletarian and anti-socialist, but also anti-capitalist. The ruling class is a bureaucracy. The possibility of such a bureaucracy was foreseen by Marx. I’ve already published without challenge that the leader next to Trotsky of the Russian opposition said in 1931 that in Russia there is a unique ruling class. Bukharin said that in degeneration a peculiar ruling class could emerge. Trotsky allowed for its possibility and concluded therefore that if it occurred Marxism would have proved to be a utopia. I don’t agree with his conclusions but nevertheless he allowed for the theoretical possibility. Our theory arose from our analysis of the developments in Russia. It is impossible for the working class to maintain power indefinitely in one country and it is impossible to create socialism in one country. We thought that the capitalists would be restored but the Russian bourgeoisie proved to be too weak to retake power. Capitalism can come to Russia primarily from the outside. But world capitalism didn’t and couldn’t do it because it was too weak and too torn by its own internal contradictions. In the midst of this mutual impotence, to maintain the revolution or to re-establish bourgeoisie rule, the unique ruling class brilliantly foreseen by Bukharin came to pass by smashing both the working class and the remnants of the bourgeoisie in Russia. The bureaucracy came to power and expanded production – not socialist production or capitalist production, as the international capitalists know it. The working class does not exist in its capitalist form or in its workers’ state form. Even less does the old bourgeoisie exist.”*

Shachtman develops Bruno R. to characterise Stalinism as imperialism to justify rejection of unconditional defence of the SU. This is the eclectic/empiricist method in full view. On the one hand he quotes Lenin to say that imperialism always existed. “Every war in which two belligerent camps are fighting to oppress foreign countries or peoples and for the division of booty must be called imperialist”. On the other hand, Stalinism is a ‘peculiar’ form specific to a degenerated ‘bureaucratic collectivism’. The SU does not live up to Shachtman’s definition of capitalism or socialism as neither a property owning bourgeoisie exists, nor does the proletariat control state power, so he must invent a new society. He never developed this theory beyond an [outline sketch](#) of a new society to fill in the blank page in his blueprint. Meanwhile, the ‘third camp’ had already largely abandoned ‘bureaucratic collectivism’ for the theory/practice of ‘state capitalism.’ Note that we are using ‘third camp’ here in Trotsky’s class sense as the ‘sanctuary’ of the petty bourgeoisie.

## State Capitalism vs Trotsky

### (1) Dunayevskaya vs Trotsky

Dunayevskaya was [Trotsky’s secretary](#) in Mexico but resigned in 1939 when Stalin signed a pact with Hitler. She was a prominent member of the opposition in the SWP (US) that rejected unconditional support of the SU. After the split in the SWP the opposition formed the Workers Party. Dunayevskaya was the first to develop the state capitalist theory within the 4<sup>th</sup> International against Shachtman’s ‘bureaucratic collectivism’ theory. Despite his blueprint approach to reality, Shachtman was correct to reject the state capitalist position as misrepresenting the LOV under capitalism. The LOV cannot operate under capitalism unless commodities are produced for sale in the market. Value is thus only realised or valorised by means of exchange. Dunayevskaya abstracts from the market and quotes Marx to say that the LOV does not require a market to be produced and valorised. She argues Marx theoretically anticipated the concentration and centralisation of capital to the point of a single state capitalist: that this is a general tendency within capitalism globally so the SU is not an isolated case. But while the tendency has not yet under fascism or the New Deal reached the point of a fully developed state capitalism, in the case of the SU there are [no theoretical grounds](#) against such a development where a single ‘collective’ capitalist in the form of the state can both produce and exchange value in terms of the LOV.

Unfortunately for Dunayevskaya, *Marx used the term state as ‘collective capitalist’ as an abstraction. The state is derived from production relations where capitalists compete at the level of the firm, at the level of monopoly, and at the level of the nation state to destroy their rivals!* In the workers state the LOV as managed by state planning and exchanging of value according to administrative prices is no longer the form of the LOV that defines capitalism, any more than it is the LOV under feudalism or an imagined ‘bureaucratic collectivism’. It is the ‘collective labourer’ in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Marx’s theoretical projections are at a level of abstraction that only bear fruit when the capitalist laws of motion are concretised by experience and observation as the ‘many determinations’ that manifest at the level of everyday society.

Lenin and Trotsky applied Marx’s method through the theory and practice of an organised revolutionary international party to both ‘interpret’ and ‘change’ the course of events of the ‘uneven and combined development’ of global capitalism in all of its everyday reality. They took the TRPF that Marx theorised in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century to show how this produced periodic crises of overproduction that gave rise to the epoch of imperialism and monopoly state capitalism which determined the historically specific struggle between classes and nations. A long time before Marx’s theoretical ‘collective capitalist’ could become a reality then, capitalist crises, wars and revolutions would bring about the revolution and the transition to socialism.

Far from the SU becoming the first case of the realisation of the ‘collective capitalist’, it was the result of capitalist crisis exploding imperialism at its ‘weakest link’ where workers rose up to expropriate the bourgeoisie and build a workers’ state. Compared with Dunayevskaya’s attempt to cut and paste Marx’s abstraction of ‘collective capital’ to the concrete, complex, reality of a specific, isolated and backward workers’ state, Lenin and Trotsky applied Marx’s dialectics to the practical problem of making and defending the revolution from the ongoing counter-revolution. The qualitative point at which the revolution would turn into a counter-revolution would be reached when the LOV was re-established in its capitalist form. That is, whatever the level of centralisation or ‘statification’ of the economy, when the LOV is no longer expressed by administered prices, but determined by the market.

### (2) Cliff vs Trotsky

The next move was made by [Tony Cliff](#). After the war Trotskyists tried to explain the expansion of Stalinism into Eastern Europe, and Cliff succumbed to anti-Stalinist liberal public opinion that saw this expansion as that of a ‘communist empire’. To overcome the logical fantasy of a ‘new class society’ that mysteriously appears between capitalism and

socialism Cliff takes the easy way out and invents a new theory of state capitalism dating back to 1929. Cliff said that capitalism was restored at precisely the time that Stalin smashed the limited market of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and collectivised agriculture. Capitalism arose with Stalin's ruthless suppression of the law of value. In this respect Cliff was closer to Marx than Dunayevskaya. It is obvious that the LOV under capitalism requires exchange value and therefore a market. Since it was *not* operating inside the SU, Cliff tried to rescue [his version of state capitalism](#) by claiming that the LOV was introduced into the SU through its foreign trade. It was enough for the SU to compete on the world market to be dominated by the LOV! This is Cliff's claim to fame. Yet obviously, state monopoly of foreign trade negated the LOV and its effects inside the SU. So there is no way that the sale of military goods on the international market was a transmission belt to mean that the capitalist LOV operated in the SU. Cliff's 'innovation' was to junk Marx.

As [Paul Morris](#) points out, far from the SU foreign trade (largely in military goods) transmitting exchange value into the SU internal economy, its trade and foreign relations were designed to reproduce 'use-values' inside the SU. That is, even though the SU had to 'compete' on the global market it did this on the basis of bureaucratic price setting at the expense of the workers' wages:

*"... Cliff concedes that Russia's [SU] military competition with the West forced it to produce useful weapons and not accumulate large sums of value. In the end, therefore, the whole argument hinges on the following assertion: 'Because international competition takes mainly a military form the law of value expresses itself in its opposite, viz. a striving for use values'. Cliff gives the example of a capitalist society in war subordinating the production of butter to the production of guns, introducing technical innovations which in peacetime are prevented by the profit making needs of cartels. Is this an example of the law of value expressing itself through its opposite? Only if we consider why the capitalist state goes to war; namely to expand its sphere of extraction of surplus value, to expand its sphere of capital accumulation."* [ibid](#)

In other words, only if the SU is competing globally to expand its sphere of capital accumulation, rather than expand its production of use-values domestically, could it be seen as capitalist and imperialist. Capitalist imperialism negates the LOV in the production of military use-values for destruction as a means of defending, reproducing and expanding the accumulation of exchange values. But the SU does not suppress the LOV in its military competition since it is defending a system of producing use-values. "It is producing use-values to defend the production of use-values". [ibid](#)

This is important because it completely knocks out any attempt to claim that the SU was 'imperialist' in reproducing the LOV and super-exploiting its 'colonies' like capitalist imperialism. If the LOV had actually operated in the SU it would have led to the super-exploitation of its labor power to, and its colonial servitude by, imperialism. But the SU was neither a capitalist imperialism nor were its 'satellites' capitalist semi-colonies. The form of 'exploitation' that took place inside the SU and within its satellites was based on administrative price fixing.

Thus all the other questions that arise about the nature of the SU as state capitalist: are its workers exploited capitalistically? Is the bureaucracy a new ruling class? Is state capitalism the highest stage of capitalism? Does the SU exhibit the capitalist laws of motion, in particular crises of overproduction, etc., and how to explain the collapse of Stalinism etc., become nonsensical in the absence of the LOV. Labour power is not a commodity; the bureaucracy does not collectively own the means of production; state capitalism does not replace state monopoly capitalism as the highest stage; crisis in the SU is not the overproduction of commodities but stagnation in the production of use-values; and the collapse of Stalinism exposes the myth that the LOV existed in the SU and that it reproduced it as a 'soviet imperialism'. [ibid](#)

Today the Cliffites continue to [claim continuity](#) with Marx and Lenin to explain the existence of Russian imperialism and the its role in conflicts such as the breakup of the Ukraine. They say the cold war was an inter-

imperialist struggle between two imperialist super-powers. 'Soviet imperialism' was defeated in the 1990s by US imperialism only to see imperialism return as a revived Great Russian imperialism mounting a challenge to US hegemony? This is a dizzy switchback ride for the Cliffites and any workers who unfortunately fall for them.

### (3) Daum vs Trotsky

Neither the wartime 'third camp' nor the post-war Cliffites could provide a convincing alternative to Trotsky's theory/practice of the Degenerated Workers State (DWS). Not until the collapse of the SU in 1991 did another 'innovation' appear on the stage. This was Walter Daum's *'Life and Death of Stalinism'*. Much of what follows is drawn from the [critical review](#) of Daum's book by the LRCI in 1994. Daum recognised that earlier attempts to 'improve' on Trotsky while he was alive ran into the problem of Trotsky's powerful Marxist method. Trotsky had ridiculed both 'bureaucratic collectivist' and 'state capitalism' theories. Neither Shachtman nor Dunayevskaya had been able to prevail against Trotsky's theory of the 'workers state' and his polemics against the 'petty bourgeois opposition'. Cliff revived 'state capitalism' after the war but in doing so was seen to be breaking from Trotsky in the process. Daum revived the theory of state capitalism at a time when Trotskyism was facing the historic defeat of the SU. He claimed that state capitalism had existed since the 'counter-revolution' in 1939, and what is more, the theory of state capitalism, corrected elaborated, was in true continuity of Marx's method and the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky.

His theory was not new. It was a development of that of Dunayevskaya. First, Daum had to argue that the LOV existed under the workers state. He did this by re-defining the workers state in transition to socialism as a *stage of capitalism*. This rests on the fact that the workers state is the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Since the proletariat still exists (but as the ruling class) then so did wage-labor and wage exploitation. What constitutes an advance over earlier stages of capitalism, however, is that the workers who are now in power decide how their surplus-value is distributed on the basis from each according to the work, and to each according to the labor; i.e. bourgeois norms of distribution. However, when that power is gradually hijacked by the Stalinist bureaucracy after 1924 it leads to bourgeois norms of distribution being transformed into capitalist property relations in the form of state capitalism. In Daum's view the qualitative turning point in restoration of capitalism was Stalin's elimination of all proletarian opposition to the bureaucratic dictatorship in 1939.

However Daum's claim to improve on Trotsky falls at the first hurdle by misrepresenting Marx's concept of the [capital-labor relation](#) at the level of production. The proletariat certainly survived in the SU as the ruling class. After all the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is another name for a workers' state. But this is not a proletariat defined by the labor-capital relation. The labor-capital relation was obliterated except for exceptional forms where capitalist firms were allowed to survive or the NEP which encouraged peasants to produce food to sell on the market. But such exceptions proved the rule that the labor-capital relation was subordinated to administrative prices under the proletarian dictatorship. Second, Daum rewrites Marx at the level of exchange. The LOV can only operate by means of market exchange. Value is not realised as value unless it is exchanged on the market. Hence even where exceptional forms of capitalist production survived, subordinated to the plan in the SU, the LOV did not set the prices in the whole economy. When Lenin talked of a 'bourgeois state' without the bourgeoisie, he was faithfully developing Marxism. The workers were in power but under the conditions of an isolated, backward economy, the workers state was forced to use of bourgeois methods of production and distribution norms, subordinated to and directed at creating the pre-conditions for socialist production.

### Conclusion

We can conclude that post-war Trotskyism contributed to the defeat of the legacy of the Bolshevik revolution by abandoning the proletariat as the revolutionary class, and liquidating the Bolshevik-Leninist-Trotskyist party. In its place the main currents of post-war Trotskyism

degenerated into a petty-bourgeois Menshevism, worshipping the objective development of the revolution under the subjective leadership of Stalinism and the labor bureaucracy; the conservative, indeed reactionary, layers of the working class that acted as the agents of the bourgeoisie in the labor movement. One camp of pro-Stalinists, the Pabloists, worshipped Stalinism as a progressive force in the labor movement. Another camp of anti-Stalinists, the 'third camp', turned the SU into a capitalist imperialism between 1929 and 1939; their intent was to paint the SU as imperialist so that it did not need to be defended. Fortunately, the vast majority of the world's workers did not equate the SU under Stalinism with fascism and willingly defended the SU against fascism. As we have seen such was the role of Stalinism in defeating fascism that it was widely seen as 'progressive' even by a large section of the Fourth International.

The original 'third camp' inside the Workers Party (US) had no great influence during the war as it merely mirrored one current of petty bourgeois opinion, and its adherents soon abandoned Trotskyism. Dunayevskaya and Cliff revived the 'third camp' however, as forms of state capitalism and 'soviet imperialism', abandoning the defence of the SU and appealing to workers to take no side during the Cold War. Daum arrived only at the funeral of the SU, perhaps to assuage the guilt of those who did not defend the SU over the previous 50 years, and today justifying this betrayal as a qualification for leading the class struggle against Russian (but not yet Chinese) imperialism! The Daumites are unique in the 'third camp' since they can claim a spurious unbroken continuity with Marx since for them Russian imperialism today is a continuation of Tsarist and Soviet imperialism! Hypocritically, they refuse to take any responsibility for the betrayal of the DWSs and their world-historic defeat at the hands of capitalist imperialism, and yet claim credit for the world-historic defeat of Stalinism.

Other anti-Stalinists, who 'defended' the SU despite the Stalinists, like the International Committee under Gerry Healy, substituted for the hated Stalinists, 'progressive' nationalist petty bourgeois leaders like Paz Estenssoro in Bolivia and Gaddafi in Libya who betrayed the colonial revolutions with their popular fronts with imperialism. In other words they were fake Trotskyists who substituted for Stalinists to bloc with the national bourgeoisie and imperialism in popular fronts for 'national roads to socialism'. While they did not abandon the SU, they propped up the Western imperialists against the SU, rather than defend it by Leninist-Trotskyist means – making the world revolution! They were not alone. The pro-Stalinist Pabloists also abandoned the proletariat and the Leninist Party for petty bourgeois social movements, propping up imperialism while handing over by default the leadership of the political revolution to the Stalinists for centuries.

We stick with Trotsky. We defended the SU, China, Vietnam and Cuba until their defeat at the hands of the counter-revolutions of the imperialist powers, aided and abetted by the petty bourgeois renegades of Trotskyism. These renegades have no credibility as Marxists, Leninists or Trotskyists, having abandoned the unconditional defence of the SU they attempt to take credit for explaining imperialism in Russia and China today, junking Marxism, Leninism and Trotskyism. The theory of state capitalism cannot sustain the notion of 'Stalinist imperialism' or 'Maoist imperialism'. There is no continuity between 'soviet imperialism' and Russian and Chinese imperialism today. It is their history as degenerated Workers States that explains why both Russia and China have re-emerged as imperialist powers today.

That is why we insist that the question of Russian and Chinese imperialism is at the heart of the transitional program today. We arrive at our analysis using Trotsky's dialectics to demonstrate that the qualitative transformation of Russia and China from DWSs into new imperialist states accounts for the fundamental reality today. It is a betrayal of one's revolutionary duty to turn one's back on the current terminal crisis of capitalism in which two imperialist blocs led by the US and China battle each other to re-divide the world in the struggle for survival. All concrete political and social questions posed today are in the last analysis determined by this inter-imperialist rivalry. To fail to understand this is to fail to build a new world party of socialism on Trotsky's transitional method, and to doom the international proletariat, and with it humanity, to destruction, and almost inevitably, extinction.

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To make this criticism does not mean we reject correct slogans which are easy enough to raise. In this case where a real military coup d'état has taken place it is correct to organize a revolutionary constituent assembly for the defense and extension of real democratic rights and based in the real organizations of the working class and the peasant masses.

The coup shows that bourgeois democracy demobilizes the workers while the ruling class factions do deals over their heads. The interests of workers are to fight for *workers democracy* by mobilising for a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly (RCA) and a Workers and Peasants Government.

Still we wonder why the RCIT raises a special slogan for the establishment of a republic? What would the class character of such a republic be? And what does the establishment of a republic have to do with the permanent revolution? The world has seen many dictatorships that have been republics. The whole history of the west is littered with them. Connelly's program for a workers republic in Ireland and the Socialist Republics of the USSR were qualitatively different than any republic established by capitalists. The five republics of French history have solved none of the problems of humankind's future existence. So this is not an idle question for us. We wonder while reading the RCIT's program how many stages the workers must endure before they can establish their own state?

In place of this call for an abstract republic we suggest that what is needed right now are military blocs with anti-coup d'état forces to defeat the coup. We say this with the understanding that it is only the socialist revolution that will suppress the power not only of the army command but of those who organized the coup and for whom the army works at all times. Until bourgeois power is suppressed by socialist revolution another military coup is always possible as demonstrated in the modern history of Thailand. What are required above all are the organization of worker and peasant councils and militia and a convening of their delegates in a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly and an indefinite general strike to pull the economic rug out from under the military coup.

- Defeat the reactionary coup d'état! Prepare for mass demonstrations and an indefinite general strike!
- Organize workers and peasants councils.
- Form up soldiers councils; elect your own officers and abolish the authority of the army command and the constitutional court!
- For a Revolutionary Constitutional Assembly controlled by armed, mass organizations of the workers and peasants!
- Repudiate the reactionary constitution! Publish all secret treaties. The Thaksin government has a worldwide reputation for corruption; open the government's books.
- For the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a workers' and peasants' republic!
- Expropriate big business and nationalize the banks! Place large industrial and service enterprises under workers' control! Nationalize the media under workers' control!
- Expropriate the big landowners and distribute the land to the poor peasants!
- Unconditional support for the right of national self-determination for the Muslim people of Patani in the south of Thailand
- For a Workers' and Peasants' Government!
- For a Federation of Socialist Republics in South-East Asia!
- For a World Party of Socialism!

## Forward to the Permanent Revolution in Thailand! An open letter to all members and supporters of the RCIT



Workers at the Yuan Jiao Garment factory in Mae Sot, Thailand, gather outside the compound, April, 2014.  
(Photo: Migrant Workers Rights Network)

### Introduction

As history will have it current events continue to raise methodological questions which trace back decades and which when left only partially corrected continue to plague the workers movement's ostensible vanguard. The nature of the workers state, and how to defend it, is a central question for revolutionaries. Our polemic with the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT) has demonstrated that getting it wrong on the workers state is a failure of method that shows up on every other question. History always returns to bite those who abuse it.

The RCIT leadership and the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) before them, took close to 7 years to discover that their "united front" with Yeltsin was flawed and based on false theory. It was not a united front but a popular front with imperialism for the restoration of capitalism. While trying to break from Cliffism to Trotskyism the RCIT's Workers Power (WP) progenitors theorized that the post-WW2 transitions to post-capitalist degenerate workers states originated not with the intention and trajectory of the regime that took state power (the key lessons of *The Revolution Betrayed*<sup>1</sup> and *In Defense of Marxism*<sup>2</sup>) but instead characterized the state as a degenerate workers state (DWS) only when the nationalizations, the ascendancy of the plan and the monopoly of foreign trade were implemented, thus suppressing the Law of Value and depriving the bourgeoisie of their profit source.

This entry point into the DWS guided their theory on the nature of the state during the counter-revolutions as well. So despite understanding that Yeltsin was as much a capitalist roader and even a fast tracker compared to the slow trackers behind Yanayev and Pugov they saw him as allowing more of an opening for the working class to self organize. They did not see his coming to power being the collapse of the workers state and the construction of the bourgeois state as the army and parliament turned their allegiance toward the fast track 500 day plan. While the economy still rested to a large extent on the state economy, the LRCI (now the League for a Fifth International-L5I) confounded the government and the state, arriving at the Moribund Workers State Theory to cover for their adaptation to 'democratic' imperialism with the revival of the power of the parliament as a democratic opening through which the workers could advance as they broke from the clutches of Stalinism.



This mistake confounded and destroyed the Trotskyist program for Political Revolution in the degenerate workers states and instead guided the workers to embrace the counter-revolution. This hangover from the Cliffite tendency to adapt to all bourgeois democratic forms is what guided them to collapse into the counter-revolutionary Yeltsin camp. Instead of charting an independent course for the workers political revolution to rebuild the democratic soviets by the workers themselves, the LSI reverted to a semi-Cliffite method. Given their characterization of the period as ‘revolutionary,’ they projected a political revolution that would rebuild an independent trade union movement and elect labor parliamentarians while propagandistically raising revolutionary slogans. But the workers state had collapsed and an immediate independent self-mobilization to defend social property was urgently required.

Although the LRCI/LSI made incremental self-corrections in 1997 and 2000, they never shed the reflexive knee jerk response to liberal opinion and continued to make opportunist adaptations to the forms of bourgeois democracy in successive crisis conjunctures for the workers movement. In each of these they sought to make “united fronts” with the most wretched of bourgeois forces as if they had never studied the Chinese Revolution. Today the 1991 adaptation to the “democratic” restorationist Yeltsin turns into an adaptation to the “democratic” “red shirts” and the dynasty of the bourgeois billionaire Thaksin Shinawatra. There is a thread that connects these two capitulations and retreats from Marxism and our intention is to convince those truly committed to building a revolutionary workers international to consider that the half way correction of the LSI is incomplete as it stands, and is a recipe for class collaborationist disasters for the workers and the oppressed.

In our polemic, [Thailand: Defeat the Coup d'etat - A Polemic and Program in response to the RCIT](#)<sup>3</sup>, responding to their statement, [Thailand: Smash the Developing Military Coup!](#)<sup>4</sup>, we pointed out their catering to illusions in bourgeois democracy. This is not a recent gaffe, but is a recurring programmatic thrust to their politics that can be traced back to their political heritage in LRCI. It was the LRCI who in Yeltsin in 1991 “*saw the promise of greater democratic rights and opportunities for self organization of the working class, completely misunderstanding the true obtaining situation as a contest between two capitalist restorationist's forces for the leadership of the counter-revolution against all survivals of the October revolution.*”<sup>5</sup> The destruction of the Soviet Workers state, albeit bureaucratically degenerated, was almost complete with the triumph of the Yeltsin counter-coup and was a major defeat for the international working class. The Triumph of the Yeltsin faction with the Gorbachev-Yeltsin alliance of August, 1991 put the slow road restorationists of the Stalinist bureaucracy out of power altogether and greatly accelerated the collapse of the DWS, with the immediate implementation of the Fast Track restoration plan followed by the banning of the Communist Party and then the dissolution of the USSR in December, 1991.

For any serious Marxist, the lessons of history are vitally important. Those who cannot defend a proletarian revolution, who cannot analyze the past and learn from mistakes, are certainly not going to lead new workers' revolutions today. In their analysis of current events in Thailand and their advice and prescriptions for the Thai left they have compounded their methodological error afresh. This time, the masses are told to re-conquer an abstract democracy, in support of a popular front government of a bourgeois-democratic party that is a family dynasty, with connections to the Bush family and the Carlyle Group. The Shinawatras are CIA contractors represented by the “color revolution” manufacturing firm of Amsterdam and Peroff, behind whom stand James Baker, the former U.S. secretary of State, and an alliance of high power public relations groups for the U.S. ruling class. The RCIT urges the “Red Shirts,” whose official name is The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship, to form a “united front” against the coup and the dictatorship and in favor of the return to power of the “democratically elected” Pheu Thai party government!

Nowhere in the verbose pronouncements of the RCIT do we see the real operating historical materialism. They rush to embrace a popular front and pass it off as a Leninist-Trotskyist united front tactic. They

call us bonehead sectarians who do not understand the united front, but we understand perfectly Dimitrov's intentional confusion of the united front with the popular front when the Comintern adopted the Peoples Front strategy in 1934. And we understand what adaptations to the backward consciousness of the masses are. And we can and will quote Trotsky in the Transitional Program to Pröbsting et.al, although they don't want to hear it.

The year-on-year industrial output of Thailand was down 3.9% for the year 2013, as reported by BBC America TV on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. The Business Report editorially opined that they hoped Thailand would be “back on track now” in the wake of the coup. The BBC said this was a revised and more negative figure for 2013 than had previously been reported and likewise the growth forecast for 2014 was reduced by their experts from 2.5 to 1.5 percent. If these figures seem bleak, consider the Thai Chamber of Commerce Report cited in [China Economic Net](#)<sup>6</sup>: “*Thailand witnessed a decrease of 3.18 percent in production output index in 2013, with production capacity utilization rate lowered according to the Office of Industrial Economics [on] Wednesday. In 2013, the country's capacity utilization rate fell to 64.38 percent from the previous year's 66.02 percent amid the escalating political instability. ...the Thai Chamber of Commerce earlier said the country's Gross Domestic Product is expected to fall below 3 percent in 2014 if anti-government protest is prolonged into the second quarter, as operation of businesses, especially the small and medium enterprises, has been severely impacted, resulting in declining orders from clients.*”

Here any astute observer would see the petit bourgeoisie crying out for another coup d'état, and in a country that has witnessed 19 coups in the last century. The consciousness of the masses has not broken with monarchism. In the monarch they see the great stabilizer and they have not made the connection between great fluctuations in employment and the contest between the rival imperialist blocs, U.S. vs. China, in Thailand's more recent development. The Shinawatra family, nominal democrats, have been playing the monarchical succession game right alongside the army and the “Yellow Shirts” of the Democrat Party. In these circumstances the downward revision of the growth forecast for 2014 was a virtual announcement of the [coup d'état](#)<sup>7</sup>. We said in [Class War Vol. 1 No. 6 Winter 2013](#)<sup>8</sup>, pp. 3, 10:

*“In Thailand the masses are righteously furious with their Bonapartist racket of a state, where one family permits various bourgeois parties to sit in a parliament AND BRIBES THEM ALL! The masses drove Thaksin Shinawatra from power and into exile, but of course they could not shut off his phone to his sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, who might as well be him and the Thai masses know it. The movement of the “Yellow Shirts” contains dangerously reactionary elements of the urban middle class, bourgeois democrats, monarchists, and can be characterized as a bourgeois movement opposing Thaksin Shinawatra with support for Constitutional Monarchy. Not only due to their own ambitions and calculations, three former Prime Ministers have joined in the call for her ouster, because there is a danger of a military coup by generals in the pocket of U.S. imperialism. None of these nationalist options are cause for any hope of improved material well-being. Thais need a section of their own of a world party of socialist revolution!”*

The Party program of the Liaison Committee of Communists (LCC) is not the Cliffite one of subordinating the struggle for socialist revolution to bourgeois democratic rights, but the historical program of the workers movement fighting for the Marxist program in the imperialist countries and specifically for Permanent Revolution in the semi-colonies under the yoke of imperialism, such as Thailand and Egypt (see In Living Marxism, [In Defence of Trotskyism: An Open Letter to All Members and Supporters of the LRCI](#))<sup>9</sup>. We are not indifferent to the defense of democratic rights, and in fact are the best defenders of such rights as the defense of the working class and the oppressed masses, as part of the struggle for socialist revolution. But workers must always fight under their own independent banner! The popular front, the political alliance with bourgeois forces and the suppression of the workers program, is a recipe for nothing but defeat; a lesson that has been written in workers'

blood in [China](#), [Spain](#), and Chile.<sup>10</sup>

In the RCIT's second statement, [Thailand: Shall Socialists Defend the Government Against the Military Coup?](#)<sup>11</sup>, (their 5/24/14 reply to the LCC polemic of 5/22/14), Michael Pröbsting accuses the LCC of "ultra-leftism," of "neo-Bordigism", of "bonehead sectarianism" and "politically senile stubbornness" for not "defending a bourgeois democratically-elected (emphasis ours) government against a coup d'état." Just like Yeltsin shelling the Russian parliament to put it out of business, or like Tsar Nicholas dissolving the Duma, Yingluck Shinawatra, the RCIT's democrat, dissolved the Thailand parliament before turning over power to the interim Prime Minister, another member of the Shinawatra capitalist group, at the behest of the constitutional court. It was Niwatthamrong Boonsongpaisan the army overthrew on 5/20/2014 **and he was elected by nobody!** Even "senile couch potatoes" from 14,000 miles away could notice that.

Here is how the RCIT put it on 5/21/14 in their article [Thailand: Smash the Developing Military Coup](#), "...we have repeatedly maintained that the united front tactic must be employed by the "Red Shirts" movement to defend the democratically-elected government against the utterly reactionary coup d'état orchestrated by the constitutional court and army command." The LCC in contrast does not defend bourgeois democracy in the form of the Pheu Thai popular front party as more progressive than the army dictatorship. To do that would put us on the left wing of the popular front. The popular front is far more dangerous than the military dictatorship because it politically disarms the workers movement and prevents workers from militarily arming themselves, telling the workers to trust the army to remain outside politics. More than that, as Chavez and Morales show, the Popular Front regime attacks and kills members of the workers vanguard. This is no bald assertion. The succession of Shinawatra governments have assassinated and [massacred more than 10,000](#)<sup>12</sup> opponents, many of them among the Malay-speaking Muslims of the south between 2004 and 2014. This is the record of the "democratically elected" government the RCIT would have the masses restore.

### The RCIT semi-Cliffite impressionism:

The constitutional monarchy government of Thailand under the predominant Pheu Thai Party has been a corrupt popular front regime. We have repeatedly pointed out, but apparently without making an adequate impression, that this is a family racket more than a government and one that pleases U.S. imperialism. The Shinawatras and the leading layers of the Pheu Thai Party are elected bourgeois parliamentarians principally because they are billionaires. For the RCIT the overarching characteristic of the Pheu Thai party government is its elevation to power by bourgeois elections. This is not a small difference.

Even the liberal bourgeois pundits at [The Daily Beast](#) have noted....,

*"...Westerners reflexively trust elections, and we do not hesitate to recommend them to others who know better. In Thailand, a political machine that purchases votes in the millions makes a mockery of the exercise, a phenomenon that penetrates down to the village level and must be seen to be believed. Skeptics are incredulous that vote-buying on such a scale occurs. It does. Every inhabitant of my family's village in Isan got paid for their votes, election after election, until this time, when the government left farmers holding the bag for unpaid rice."*<sup>13</sup>

Thus the Pheu Thai electoral campaigns historically are actually more like the Nazis campaigning for votes with truckloads of free bread than like social programs such as Lula's "bolsa de familia", which are used to secure the favela base for the Workers' Party (PT-Partido dos Trabalhadores) Popular Front government.

As socialist blogger John Moore wrote in [Deformed class war in Thailand – Part 3](#) in 2009:

*"A progressive outcome will not occur through the ascendancy of the Red Shirts' pro-Thaksin leadership. This element has*

*shown their reactionary nature in the past with the right wing measures carried out by the former Thaksin led government. This government was conspicuous for its record of human right abuses including a curtailing of press freedom, attacks on Muslims in the South and with its 'war on drugs'. Coupled with these abuses, the Thai Rak Thai government implemented a neo-liberal agenda which put it in direct conflict with public sector unions.*

*The Red Shirts movement contains all the contradictions of Thaksin's former political party, which implemented populist social measures for the poor coupled with elements of a neoliberal reforming programme. It is understandable that tens of thousands of Thailand's poor have aligned themselves with the 'Red' movement that calls for the defence of social welfare initiatives as well as for a 'peoples' revolution' against the traditional elite."*<sup>14</sup>

The RCIT measure the neo-liberal program to be next to nothing in their analysis, but Thaksin Shinawatra's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party delivered a free trade agreement with the U.S.A. in 2004, just as it had committed Thai troops to the U.S.A.- led invasion of Iraq the year before and joined the CIA's special rendition prison and torture scheme component of the imperialists' "war on terror."

While neo-liberal warmongering and institutionalized torture is also the calling card of social democracy, the TRT predecessor to the Pheu Thai party did not have the support of the organized working class:

*"One immediate reason for organised labour's absence from the latest political conflicts can be linked to the anti-working class agenda of the Red Shirts' self-declared leader, Thaksin Shinawatra. From 2001 to 2007 Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai government instituted a mixture of populist policies for the urban and rural poor as well as a number of neo-liberal reforming measures which put the government in direct conflict with elements of the union movement. Populist measures such as the implementation of the universal health care were combined with corporatisation and proposed selling off of state assets along with an opening up of the Thai economy to Western corporate interests.*

*The Thaksin-led government also gave strong support for US foreign policy in the hope of gaining a United States-Thailand Free Trade Agreement. Working class resistance to the neo-liberal aspect of the TRT government policies culminated in the mass strike of 200,000 electrical sector workers throughout 2004 against electricity privatisation. It is therefore understandable that the most class-conscious of Thailand's working class would be reluctant to align themselves with the former TRT bosses who are now the bourgeois leaders of the Red Shirts movement. (emphasis ours)"*<sup>15</sup>

This regime is far from being a left bourgeois government, such as those in Republican Spain or Allende's Chile, where the politics of the Popular Front betrayed and doomed the workers struggles. Thailand is a prime example of the correctness of Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution where he explained that in the colonial and semi-colonial countries with combined and uneven development under imperialist exploitation, the national bourgeoisie in these nations is tied to social backwardness and the remains of feudalism and also to imperialist capital, and are incapable of carrying out the unfinished democratic tasks of the great bourgeois revolutions. Trotsky insisted that these tasks fell to the working class in countries with belated capitalist development, that "democracy and national emancipation is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses."<sup>16</sup> The RCIT tells us not to quote Trotsky to them!

Even in terms of their democratic credentials as opponents of the monarchy, the Pheu Thai Party opposition rings hollow. The 'down but not yet out' power behind the scenes, former prime minister Thaksin, has been making a play to cozy up to the crown prince, paying off

his gambling debts with hopes that he will be the puppeteer who manipulates the crown prince once he is in power, and thus be able to nationalize the holdings of the monarch under Shinawatra (not workers!) control.

*“Thaksin has a plan for the day the King dies, counting on the ascension of the Crown Prince to the throne. The Crown Prince is as reviled among the Thai people as the King, Rama IX, is beloved..... Thaksin has his eye on the prize: He covets the \$35 billion dollar holdings of the Crown Property Bureau, and he envisions himself a president of a Thai republic that would nationalize royal assets.”* - [The Daily Beast](#), [“The Real Crisis in Thailand is the Coming Royal Succession”](#)<sup>17</sup>

*“Since being ousted as Thailand’s prime minister in a 2006 military coup, Thaksin Shinawatra has been a very busy man. The billionaire bought and sold England’s Manchester City football club, acquired a titanium mine in Zimbabwe, started a lottery in Uganda and acquired a Nicaraguan passport. He met with Vladimir Putin and Nelson Mandela.”* - [“Thailand’s self-exiled ex-PM may never return home”](#)<sup>18</sup>

Now in the period of the obvious decline of U.S. imperialism we see the Shinawatra dynasty shopping for other imperialist sponsors including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and we can surmise from the Mandela meeting that Thaksin is fully informed of the details of the “win-win” South African economic plan and its Chinese imperialist dimension. [Mazibuko Jara speaking in May](#)<sup>19</sup> at the Niebyl-Proctor Marxist Library by invitation of Priority Africa, answering a question about Chinese penetration into South Africa (SA), indicated that although much of SA is under US/UK imperialist domination, the ANC has welcomed Chinese capital to use it as a secure foundation and foothold for projecting its business interests continent wide.<sup>20</sup>

We find the RCIT on a trajectory to the right in its continued semi-Cliffite impressionism. As late as 1991 the leadership of today’s RCIT and we, ourselves, subscribed in practice to the program of the original 1989 edition of the [Trotskyist Manifesto](#)<sup>21</sup>:

*“The repeated utilisation of such dictatorships by the imperialists and their agents means that the demand for political democracy remains a burning issue for millions of proletarians and non-proletarians around the globe, from Indonesia to Paraguay. Wherever the proletariat fights alongside petit bourgeois and bourgeois forces for democratic rights it must do so from the standpoint of its strategic goal: workers’ council power.*

*What it defends within bourgeois democracy is essentially its organisations of struggle, those legal and constitutional concessions wrung from the bourgeoisie and those forms of bourgeois democracy (parliaments etc) that the working class uses as a tribune to mobilise and agitate among the masses. But workers’ council power is the most democratic form of class rule in history and it supersedes the democratic republic as a strategic aim in the imperialist epoch.*

*Despite our rejection of the confinement of the revolution to a separate democratic stage, we cannot conclude, like the sectarians, that democratic slogans are unnecessary. Brutal dictatorships constantly give rise to democratic aspirations and to illusions in bourgeois democratic institutions.*

*Only hardened sectarians, disdainful of the necessity of relating to what is progressive in the democratic illusions of the masses can believe that it is possible to “skip over” the consciousness of the masses. If these illusions are to be broken in practice more than the demand for socialism is necessary.*

*Where the ruling classes attempt to deny the full democratic rights of the masses, we mobilise around democratic slogans including that of the sovereign constituent assembly. We must fight for an election process in which there are no prior limitations or secret*

*agreements, one which is really democratic for the masses: universal, direct, secret and equal suffrage with no property or literacy qualifications.*

*There should be freedom of publications and assembly for all the parties of the workers and peasants, defended by an armed militia. We must also demand the proportional representation of all parties in the assembly according to votes received, without any minimum threshold.*

*However, recognising the importance of such demands does not mean embracing the opportunist methods of the centrists who have turned the fight for the constituent assembly into a democratic stage through which the masses must pass. Centrism of a Trotskyist origin (Lambertism, Morenoism, the United Secretariat of the Fourth International) has consistently tailed the Stalinists or petit bourgeois nationalists by using the constituent assembly slogan in a way which relegates the fight for workers’ councils and workers’ power until after such an assembly has been won.*

*At the same time the centrists have sown illusions in the “socialist” potential of such assemblies. The “anti-imperialist” left Bonapartists have shown themselves equally adept at this. Be it the Dergue in Ethiopia, Mugabe’s “one party state”, Ortega’s powerless “popular committees”, or Qadhafi’s people’s committees, these organisations are actually used to deprive the workers and peasants of their freedom to organise.*

*The constituent assembly, therefore, contains no inherently progressive essence. It can be, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred has been, merely a bourgeois parliament charged with drawing up a constitution. Worse, in semi-colonial countries (Brazil 1982), and even in some imperialist countries (Portugal 1975) it is only convened subject to military Bonapartist restrictions on its powers, and with a prior pact already made between the reformist parties and the military as to the constitutional outcome.*

*Often constituent assemblies have proved reactionary bodies counterposed to the revolutionary organs of struggle and power of the workers and peasants. This can happen in the semi-colonies where the huge weight of the peasantry can be used by the bourgeoisie against the working class. The capitalists mobilise the equal votes of all “citizens” to act as a brake on the revolution. For this reason it is essential to fight for, and convene, the constituent assembly through the building of workers’, soldiers’ and poor peasants’ councils. Only then can the assembly be a weapon of revolutionary democracy and not a tool of Bonapartism, only then can the assembly be pushed aside by the workers’ and poor peasants’ councils when its role has been exhausted.*

*Even under constitutional regimes in the semi-colonial countries, massive elements of Bonapartism exist and are repeatedly used against the working class: the presidency with its power to declare states of emergency; the senate, with its ability to check legislation; the unelected judiciary, and above all the paramilitary police and the standing army. All these offices and forces repeatedly reduce “democracy” to a completely empty shell.*

*Against these assaults on democratic rights, the working class should raise in its action programme the abolition of the presidency and the senate and the creation of a single chamber assembly elected at least biennially, with the power of the electors to recall their deputies. To this we should add the demand for the dissolution of the paramilitary squads, the police and standing army and the creation of an armed popular militia.”*<sup>22</sup>

Scarcely had the ink dried on the Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency’s (RTT) adherence to this program (CWG-US leading members were

then in the RTT), when Workers Power trashed this understanding in practice with their support for the program of the Yeltsin counter-revolution. At the time, in 1991, they freely acknowledged that Yeltsin represented the “democratic restorationist” forces yet they called for a limited “united front” against the Yanayev coup. In their bizarre propaganda, they called upon Yeltsin to lead a general strike and create a workers militia to face down the Yanayev coup.<sup>23</sup> Soon afterwards, they were maintaining that the USSR was a Moribund Workers State and that Yeltsin’s coup did not signal a change in the class character of the state. Workers Power’s confusion about both the class character of the state and the date of the triumph of the restoration persisted until their Fifth Congress in 2000. Nevertheless, they never did understand how profoundly they had crossed the class line with their support for Yeltsin. We called this an opportunist deviation and a retreat back toward their Cliffite origins. Today we see the RCIT proposing a “united front” with the Shinawatra family’s “Red Shirt” movement to restore such bourgeois democracy as Thailand enjoyed until recently under the government of Yingluck Shinawatra and they call for this united front to restore her government. Writ small, this is the same old error.

Not only in hindsight did it seem criminally wrong in our view to maintain that the concept of “united front” permitted agreement for any objective with class enemy political forces. This is never permissible for us and it goes right to the heart of the 1903 split between Lenin and the Mensheviks. Making matters worse, indeed as bad as they could be, Worker’s Power proposed a “united front” with Yeltsin exactly at the moment of the triumph of the capitalist restoration. Like for Shachtmanism in days of old, for Cliffism, liberal public opinion is everything and it leads them by the nose. Therefore, bourgeois democratic rights mean more to Cliff than workers’ social property and its defense. So here we had Yeltsin in August, 1991 counterpoising his popular front with U.S. imperialism in the name of an abstract democracy (in reality his 500 day shock therapy plan) to a united front of the workers for workers democracy and defense of social property, something that was eminently possible. Indeed, Kagarlitzky’s Mensheviks were calling for workers to strike to defend socialized industry. We understood and opposed both factions of the Moscow bureaucracy. We called for the strictest independence of mobilization by the working class against both Stalinisms, the fast-track Yeltsinites and Yanayev’s slow-road variant, as they would later come to be known.

As we have said, at succeeding historic conjunctures we have seen the RCIT, the offspring of the LRCI/L51 collapse in the semi-Cliffite trajectory to the right. Even before failing the critical test of the July, 2013 Cairo events, we saw Pröbsting (then in the L51 leadership) supporting the “Workers Caravan,” U.S. imperialism’s democratic Bosnia project, and more recently calling for the freedom of organization of bourgeois political parties in the conditions of the ongoing capitalist counterrevolution in Cuba, all in the name of the extension of an abstract democracy. Indeed it is their method. This opportunism they habitually excuse with the commandment thou shalt not skip over the consciousness of the masses.

The RCIT devotes scant space to the neo-liberal project but they make a big theoretical fuss over the lack of the Republic. Of course Thailand is not a Republic, while Egypt has been the SCAF’s republic since 1952. What are Trotskyists supposed to know about republics in the semi-colonial world? With no political prescription for the class character of the proposed Republic, we don’t share the illusion that achievement of this political project would advance the interests of workers and oppressed, nor would it offer any special hope for political stability. As we said, Thailand has experienced 19 coup d’états in the last century.

### The illusions of the masses

Thailand has lived for decades in a state of political instability between coups and “democratic” elections. The RCIT comrades want to make the Thai masses think that now with capitalism in its biggest crisis for generations and with political and social instability on the rise everywhere around the world, the bourgeoisie will be able to offer the masses a stable democratic regime and Republic in Thailand.

Precisely because the “yellow” and “red” bourgeoisie are not able to grant democracy, democratic rights, and end the occupations of public buildings and the barricades on the streets, is why the coup was necessary to assuage big capital’s fears. The RCIT justifies their policy of supporting a bourgeois “democratic” government, upon the supposed illusion of the masses in the Pheu Thai party government.

As a consequence of the RCIT’s descent into idealism, their politics and analysis leads to a forecast of a ‘reality’ determined by the masses’ consciousness. The masses’ consciousness is reified as an objective condition that they cannot overcome with no resolution of the crisis of proletarian leadership in sight. Hence, consciousness is made to determine being, and in the negative, so the masses will have to pay the price of the global crisis of capitalism with the neo-liberal austerity program because they lack the consciousness and will to break with the popular front and fight for the permanent revolution. This is much like the Maoist position that defeats are good for the workers because they learn from them.

The onset of a structural crisis of capitalism creates a pre-revolutionary situation in all countries where workers are refusing to pay its costs. The truth is that democratic regimes are being challenged around the world precisely because they cannot make concessions to the masses and instead bring misery as the only way to overcome capitalism’s crisis. This affirms what Trotsky said, that when the bourgeois democratic regimes are no longer able to contain the masses, out they go, and the choice for the bourgeoisie is either the military coup or fascism. Without a revolutionary international in existence it is all the more necessary for Trotskyists to re-double their efforts to expose those who capitulate to the popular front and raise clearly the program for permanent revolution! Facing this double crisis of capitalism and revolutionary leadership, the analysis of the left generally presents the current events as merely the outcome of the struggle between the bourgeois fractions and turns the struggle between antagonistic classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat into a total abstraction. Worse, they only consider the national bourgeoisies, who are increasingly weak and dependent on imperialism, and do not consider that the main dispute within the semi-colonial national bourgeoisie is the inter-imperialist dispute. Where in the past it was a foregone conclusion that Thailand was in the U.S. camp by virtue of its membership in SEATO and while the present shake up and coup do not signal an immediate change the future allegiance of Thailand will at least be influenced by its dominant trading partner. For the present the Thai military is supplied by the Pentagon’s Military Assistance Program (MAP) and the Thai government is a recipient of U.S. foreign aid largesse. Washington wants Thailand to sign on to the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) but this question may finally be settled by the succeeding monarch.

Part of the fight against the TPPA with its ruinous provisions aimed at the international proletariat and military provisions aimed at China, is the struggle against the monarchy and we see that the RCIT has raised the slogan for an end to the monarchy and in favor of a republic. And as we have noted the Red Shirt movement is nominally republican. But in fact, unlike in Spain, there is no mass republican anti-monarchical sentiment being expressed in the streets today. Please don’t tell us this sentiment is only being repressed by the coup because you could not find this sentiment on the streets in February, March or April. We have to ask what the class character of such a republic would be because for us the greatest democracy and the only worthwhile republic issues from the conquest of power by the government of workers and peasants councils. For the RCIT comrades it is not the absence of a revolutionary party causing the lack of advance of the fight for a socialist revolution, but the consequence of the “consciousness of the masses.” Blame the masses in their struggle against the “yellow” and then later against the “reds” for not having had a revolutionary direction.

At times, the bourgeois regimes will adopt a pose of embarking upon a revolutionary course until there is a revolutionary upsurge by the masses fighting for their democratic rights, whereupon the regime’s fundamental rightism is quickly exposed. Certainly the “mass consciousness” at the beginning of such upsurges is for the bourgeois

democratic regime, and not the consciousness of the program of the socialist revolution. Yet, Trotsky said many times against those who feared being ahead of the workers, that the task of revolutionaries is not to match the mood of the workers but to change that mood!

So what is the mood of Thai workers and peasants? The Pheu Thai political leadership is being released and General Prayuth Chan-ocha promises elections in a year but the masses' demonstrations are being suppressed today (6/1/14). Just as in the eastern Ukraine, we notice that the majority of the protesters are NOT calling for the return of the former regime, i.e. there's neither a desire to have Yanukovich back nor in Thailand do the masses want Yingluck Shinawatra back. The social media has been shut down and the press has been censored. The release of the Pheu Thai and "Red Shirt" leadership signifies some level of cooperation, some established procedural agreement between factions of the bourgeoisie over the heads of the masses. No faction of the bourgeoisie has a special allegiance to the forms or content of bourgeois democracy. Like the 1989 version of the *Trotskyist Manifesto* we will defend the gains the workers and peasant masses have made under any bourgeois democratic regime and even the parliamentary institutions themselves against the military coup d'état, but once such a coup has taken place we insist upon not idealizing any bourgeois democratic program, strong man or woman or any of the past and instead champion the demands of the workers own historical program as the alternative solution to the neo-liberal bourgeois-democratic scam.

Two passing trains will be instantaneously at the same location in a photograph even while they head in opposite directions, thus both we of the LCC and the RCIT call for a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly (RCA), but the content of our concept of the RCA derives from Lenin while theirs derives from the adaptation to the "consciousness of the masses..." (here's Lenin)

*"The Congress resolution states that a provisional revolutionary government on its own — one, moreover, that will be the organ of a victorious popular insurrection — can secure full freedom of agitation in the election campaign and convene an assembly that will really express the will of the people. Is this postulate correct? Whoever took it into his head to dispute it would have to assert that it is possible for the tsarist government not to side with the reaction, that it is capable of being neutral during the elections, that it will see to it that the will of the people is really expressed. Such assertions are so absurd that no one would venture to defend them openly; but they are being surreptitiously smuggled in under liberal colours, by our liberationists (our emphasis). Somebody must convene the constituent assembly, somebody must guarantee the freedom and fairness of the elections; somebody must invest such an assembly with full power and authority. Only a revolutionary government, which is the organ of the insurrection, can desire this in all sincerity and be capable of doing all that is required to achieve this. (our emphasis) The tsarist government will inevitably counteract this. A liberal government, which will come to terms with the tsar, and which does not rely in full on the popular uprising, cannot sincerely desire this, and could not accomplish it even if it most sincerely desired to. Therefore, the resolution of the Congress gives the only correct and entirely consistent democratic slogan."<sup>24</sup>*

What is the "democratic" bourgeois sector that RCIT in their fight against "sectarianism" defends unity of action with, against the military government? These must be, and we can derive no other conclusion from the RCIT's statements, the very same "Red Shirt" leaders who are being released by the General Officers' regime. The world wide "Occupy" experience has not led either to a rise of vanguard revolutionary working class consciousness, nor to a rise in the general level of militancy of the masses, and the analyses of the left fail to explain this in terms of the absence of the crystallization of mass workers revolutionary parties. Instead much of the left idealizes the spontaneism of the international movement, as heterogeneous and anti-programmatic as it has been. In the Ukraine this left the political door to the Maidan wide open to every rightist and neo-fascist thug in the western Ukraine. In the east the lack of a crystalized revolutionary

party means that it has proved so far impossible to galvanize the real mass opposition to a Yanukovich return in favor of a united Ukraine that is not a subject nation of either the western imperialist bloc or Russian imperialism.

In Egypt the RCIT paints the picture of an amnesiac working class that is only interested in improving its wages, hours and conditions of work and does not care that a 'democratically' elected Muslim Brotherhood government has been deposed. ***We would say that in fact the Muslim Brotherhood government was overthrown by the masses*** for failing to fulfill the program of the January 25<sup>th</sup> revolution, but were cheated out of their victory by the prompt reassertion of control by the ultimate power, the deep state of the SCAF. For the RCIT the form is more important than the content, the consciousness of the masses was duped by the SCAF and the Mursi government was overthrown by a military coup, dealing the Egyptian Revolution such a defeat as to necessitate a retreat to a fight for an action program of democratic demands. The implication of calling the July Days a "strategic defeat" signals a retreat from the revolutionary field of battle for Transitional demands for the Egyptian revolution, while mass strikes were defying the anti-Muslim Brotherhood crackdown and the naked re-imposition of total political control by the SCAF. To characterize a SCAF takeover as a military coup and opportunistically call for the return of the Muslim Brotherhood government was to completely miss the point of the actual situation, was objectively to quit offering solutions and leadership and constituted a headlong retreat to a defensive program of democratic demands as the operative crisis program.

Not unlike Egypt, the Thai military has always played a central role in the semi-colonial state. *"The military has never come under full control of the civilian government in Thailand," said Aim Sinpeng, a scholar at the University of British Columbia's Liu Institute of Global Issues.*<sup>25</sup> *"The military remains one of the most important institutions in the governing of the country. Some powerful sections of Thailand see the military as the institution of conflict resolution. (emphasis added)"*. In Marxist terms this means that the military is always the main agent of imperialist rule in semi-colonies like Thailand and Egypt which we characterize as military Bonapartism. Sisi's recent election in Egypt proves that the threat of popular revolution to meet the crisis of global capitalism has forced the army to return to direct rule, exposing bourgeois democracy as no more than a figleaf. In Thailand, over a succession of coups interspersed with the return to power of an 'elected' government, the military and the popular front can be clearly seen to work together, proving correct Trotsky's dictum that the popular front is the question of the epoch. The return of the popular front to power and the army to its barracks only perpetuates the illusion that the army is politically neutral. That is why we insist that the masses must oppose both the coup and break from the Thaksin popular front party to defeat military Bonapartism. Like in Egypt, the masses will defeat military Bonapartism only by splitting the army and uniting its ranks with the revolutionary workers and peasants.

### Popular Front and United Front

As John Moore asserts in *Deformed class war in Thailand – Part 2*<sup>26</sup>, Thaksin was able to incorporate the Thai Communist Party (CPT) Maoists into his party, personifying their Stalinist progressive bourgeoisie and the bourgeois democratic stage of two-stage revolution. Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT) government was not leftist but 'populist,' as it introduced IMF neo-liberalism while at the same time introducing "reforms" for peasants. Thaksin's failure to get the official unions as allies is in part due to the impact of the neo-liberal reforms on urban workers. The TRT followed the Maoists to the countryside but then cleansed the CPT members to get their base in order to qualify for the 'bourgeois democracy' franchise (i.e. from the U.S.). The TRT Party was a 'Popular Front party' following Trotsky's analysis of Latin American populism (e.g., the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance - APRA of Peru,) albeit a rightwing one. The APRA example showed that a Popular Front government can be based on ONE cross-class party. The popular front character of the Thaksin regime is derived from the popular front party and not a governmental cross-class bloc of multiple parties (e.g. the CPT was dissolved).

This is the political legacy that defines the Pheu Thai party and “Red Shirt” movement today. For Trotsky, the Popular Front was not a tactic but a betrayal:

*“The question of questions at present is the People’s Front. The left centrists seek to present this question as a tactical or even as a technical maneuver, so as to be able to peddle their wares in the shadow of the People’s Front. In reality, the People’s Front is the main question of proletarian class strategy for this epoch. It also offers the best criterion for the difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism. For it is often forgotten that the greatest historical example of the People’s Front is the February 1917 revolution. From February to October, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, who represent a very good parallel to the ‘Communists’ and Social Democrats, were in the closest alliance and in a permanent coalition with the bourgeois party of the Cadets, together with whom they formed a series of coalition governments. Under the sign of this People’s Front stood the whole mass of the people, including the workers’, peasants’, and soldiers’ councils. To be sure, the Bolsheviks participated in the councils. But they did not make the slightest concession to the People’s Front. Their demand was to break this People’s Front, to destroy the alliance with the Cadets, and to create a genuine workers’ and peasants’ government.*

*All the People’s Fronts in Europe are only a pale copy and often a caricature of the Russian People’s Front of 1917, which could after all lay claim to a much greater justification for its existence, for it was still a question of the struggle against czarism and the remnants of feudalism.” - Leon Trotsky, “The Dutch Section and the International” (15-16 July 1936), in Writings of Leon Trotsky (1935-36)*

The legacy of Workers Power’s bad method for wanting to always form cross-class blocs lives on today in the RCIT. This same [debate took place in the LRCI](#) and was raised by the Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency (RTT) over 20 years ago:

*“Comrades may ask, what does the united front with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards and Khomeini have to do with the united front with Yeltsin? The answer is: everything. The method is the same. It is not permissible to form a cross class bloc with reactionary forces at a time when they are destroying the historical gains of the working class. In the case of Khomeini it was the gains from the Iranian revolution – in the case of Yeltsin it is the workers’ state. A cross-class bloc is permissible only in strict times when the bourgeois forces are engaged in a progressive struggle despite themselves. In such strict cases a victory, even if the bourgeoisie remains in the leadership, would be progressive. Thus, in the case of the Gulf war, for example, a victory to Hussein and Iraq would have meant revolutionary struggles throughout the Middle East and even in the US, because the defeat of US imperialism would have had a devastating effect on the imperialist order, far greater than the negative effects of Hussein’s dictatorship. Thus, given the overall progressive character of the war against imperialism, one could not exclude in advance a strict and limited critical military united front with the Iraqi regime (in the sense that workers’ militias and the Iraqi army would be shooting in the same direction). But the cases of Khomeini and Yeltsin were the exact opposite, where a united front could have only led to the historical defeat of the masses.*

*When we started discussions with the LRCI (then the MRCI) we were aware that the leadership tends to make a **fetish** out of the united front tactic. We were also aware that the differences involved principled differences. In the case of Khomeini and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, the LRCI’s position was a capitulation to progressive petty bourgeois opinion in the centrist Left, which (up to 1981) viewed Khomeini and company as progressive fighters. In the case of Yeltsin, the same public opinion viewed him as a “defender of democracy”.....”*

*“Despite our sharp criticism, we welcome the change of position. But we are worried that a leadership which refuses to admit that it made a mistake (if the leadership has made an internal criticism, the RTT does not know about it) will not change its method. We are worried that it is not willing to look at the method that led to its wrong opportunist position. We repeat, the method is a simple centrist method: whenever the majority of the people support independence, the LRCI supports the “struggle for independence”, even when it is led by semi-fascists in the struggle for capitalist restoration (Croatia). When Winter was in London he heard the arguments again and again: how can we not support and call for a united front with the Croatian government when it is supported by the masses? How can we just support a phantom workers’ militia when it does not exist? The comrades from the ASi went so far as to sell their paper at right-wing Croatian demonstrations in Austria which called on imperialism to intervene on behalf of Croatia!!!*

*So we are back to square one. When we discuss the national question, it boils down to a united front with reactionary forces, who are in the process of destroying the gains of the working class and the toiling masses. That has been the discussion between the RTT and the LRCI in each case: Khomeini and the semi-fascist Pasdaran; the Bonapartist dictator Yeltsin; the reactionary nationalists in Lithuania, and the semi-fascists in Croatia. The discussion between us is about the difference between a popular front and a united front. We have barely started it. We ask every member of the LRCI not to allow the leadership to break fraternal relations. This is the most important discussion that the LRCI has held – a discussion that delimits Marxism from centrism. (“A centrist swears readily by the policy of the united front, emptying it of its revolutionary content and transforming it from a tactical method into a supreme principle.” Trotsky, Writings, 1933-4, p 234).” - In Defence of Trotskyism: An Open Letter to All Members and Supporters of the LRCI<sup>27</sup>*

## For Permanent Revolution!

The democratic demands alone do not make the program that will complete the democratic revolution. For these demands (such as national independence, land reform, etc.) to be realized in the epoch of imperialism requires socialist demands and the socialist revolution itself, i.e., permanent revolution. The call to defend a popular front party in the name of defending bourgeois democracy against a military coup is a capitulation to imperialism. Only the armed workers leading the peasantry and other oppressed groups based on Trotsky’s transitional program can finish the bourgeois democratic revolution as the socialist revolution. As part of that transitional program we do not fight for a bourgeois republic but a workers and peasants republic. The demand for the Revolutionary Constituent Assembly is raised as a transitional demand towards a Workers & Peasants *socialist* republic. The point of the Revolutionary Constituent Assembly is to drive the revolution from the bourgeois to the socialist revolution – that is permanent revolution.

The call for a Workers & Peasants republic is used in the same sense as a call for a Workers & Peasants government, which as we all should know is shorthand for the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’. While the RCIT may call for a break from the Thaksin government/party, **it also calls for its defense even after the coup, maintaining this as a progressive step against the coup.** The LCC says no, it is not progressive to reinstall a popular front only then to break from it. The popular front was already in danger of breaking up. The “Red Shirts” threatened to intervene, against the instruction of the government (which was toadying with the army), finally forcing the army to intervene (still talking with the Thaksin leadership even now!).

All this proves that the popular front is but the preparation for the military dictatorship or fascism. It is necessary to politically break the working class and peasant base from the “Red Shirt” leadership. To break the vicious partnership of coup and popular front, the workers must unite across city and countryside under the leadership of a Leninist Trotskyist party with a program of permanent revolution.

And despite the wishes of the RCIT, we will unabashedly quote from the [Transitional Program](#):

*“The relative weight of the individual democratic and transitional demands in the proletariat’s struggle, their mutual ties and their order of presentation, is determined by the peculiarities and specific conditions of each backward country and to a considerable extent by the degree of its backwardness. Nevertheless, the general trend of revolutionary development in all backward countries can be determined by the formula of the permanent revolution in the sense definitely imparted to it by the three revolutions in Russia (1905, February 1917, October 1917).*

*The Comintern has provided backward countries with a classic example of how it is possible to ruin a powerful and promising revolution. During the stormy mass upsurge in China in 1925-27, the Comintern failed to advance the slogan for a National Assembly, and at the same time forbade the creation of soviets. (The bourgeois party, the Kuomintang, was to replace, according to Stalin’s plan, both the National Assembly and soviets.) After the masses had been smashed by the Kuomintang, the Comintern organized a caricature of a soviet in Canton. Following the inevitable collapse of the Canton uprising, the Comintern took the road of guerrilla warfare a peasant soviets with complete passivity on the part of the industrial proletariat. Landing thus in a blind alley, the Comintern took advantage of the Sino-Japanese War to liquidate “Soviet China” with a stroke of the pen, subordinating not only the peasant “Red Army” but also the so-called “Communist” Party to the identical Kuomintang, i.e., the bourgeoisie.*

*Having betrayed the international proletarian revolution for the sake of friendship with the “democratic” slavemasters, the Comintern could not help betraying simultaneously also the struggle for liberation of the colonial masses, and, indeed, with even greater cynicism than did the Second International before it. One of the tasks of People’s Front and “national defense” politics is to turn hundreds of millions of the colonial population into cannon fodder for “democratic” imperialism. The banner on which is emblazoned the struggle for the liberation of the colonial and semi-colonial peoples, i.e., a good half of mankind, has definitely passed into the hands of the Fourth International.”<sup>28</sup>*

- **Defeat the reactionary coup d’état! Prepare for mass demonstrations and an indefinite general strike!**
- **For a Revolutionary Constitutional Assembly convened and defended by armed, mass organizations of the workers and peasants!**
- **Organize workers and peasants councils.**
- **Form up soldiers councils elect your own officers and abolish the authority of the army command and the constitutional court!**
- **Repudiate the reactionary constitution! Publish all secret treaties. The Pheu Thai government has a worldwide reputation for corruption; open the government’s books.**
- **For the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a workers’ and peasants’ republic!**
- **Expropriate big business and the banks and run them under workers’ control! Place industrial and all large service enterprises under workers’ control! Nationalize the media under workers’ control!**
- **Expropriate the big landowners and distribute the land to the poor peasants!**
- **Unconditional support for the right of national self-**

**determination for the Muslim people of Patani in the south of Thailand**

- **Build a Leninist-Trotskyist Workers Party in Thailand! For a Workers’ and Peasants’ Government!**
- **For Permanent Revolution in South-East Asia! For a Federation of Socialist Republics in South-East Asia!**
- **For a World Party of Socialism!**

(Endnotes)

- 1 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1936/revbet/>
- 2 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/idom/dm/>
- 3 <http://cwgusa.wordpress.com/2014/05/22/thailand-defeat-the-coup-detat-polemic-and-program/>
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- 6 [http://en.ce.cn/Business/ged/201401/30/t20140130\\_2237162.shtml](http://en.ce.cn/Business/ged/201401/30/t20140130_2237162.shtml)
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- 16 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tpr/pr10.htm>
- 17 <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/02/22/the-real-crisis-in-thailand-is-the-coming-royal-succession.html#>
- 18 <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/thailands-self-exiled-ex-pm-may-never-return-home>
- 19 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnSIbxeIuOU>

20 Those like the FLTI who see Chinese overseas investment as a transshipment of Wall St. capitals and Chinese stock markets as the clearing houses for the U.S. bourgeoisie fail to explain the significance of the SCO and the increasing collisions between the Russia/China bloc and the designs of the U.S.A.-led bloc both in Europe and the Pacific. Neither do they take into account the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement project or the U.S. military Pacific Pivot. This failure is informed by a target fixation on Imperialismo Yankee and permits an adaptation to apologism for the Bolivarian left and the World Social Forum and Popular Fronts in the ALBA

## What we Fight For

### We fight to overthrow Capitalism

Historically, capitalism expanded world-wide to free much of humanity from the bonds of feudal or tribal society, and developed the economy, society and culture to a new higher level. But it could only do this by exploiting the labour of the productive classes to make its profits. To survive, capitalism became increasingly destructive of “nature” and humanity. In the early 20th century it entered the epoch of imperialism in which successive crises unleashed wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions. Today we fight to end capitalism’s wars, famine, oppression and injustice, by mobilising workers to overthrow their own ruling classes and bring to an end the rotten, exploitative and oppressive society that has exceeded its use-by date.

### We fight for Socialism.

By the 20th century, capitalism had created the pre-conditions for socialism –a world-wide working class and modern industry capable of meeting all our basic needs. The potential to eliminate poverty, starvation, disease and war has long existed. The October Revolution proved this to be true, bringing peace, bread and land to millions. But it became the victim of the combined assault of imperialism and Stalinism. After 1924 the USSR , along with its deformed offspring in Europe, degenerated back towards capitalism. In the absence of a workers political revolution, capitalism was restored between 1990 and 1992. Vietnam and China then followed. In the 21st century only North Korea survives as a degenerated workers state. We unconditionally defend the DPRK against capitalism and fight for political revolution to overthrow the bureaucracy as part of a world socialist revolution.

### We fight to defend Marxism

While the economic conditions for socialism exist today, standing between the working class and socialism are political, social and cultural barriers. They are the capitalist state and bourgeois ideology and its agents. These agents claim that Marxism is dead and capitalism need not be exploitative. We say that Marxism is a living science that explains both capitalism’s continued exploitation and its attempts to hide class exploitation behind the appearance of individual “freedom” and “equality”. It reveals how and why the reformist, Stalinist and centrist misleaders of the working class tie workers to bourgeois ideas of nationalism, racism, sexism and equality. Such false beliefs will be exploded when the struggle against the inequality, injustice, anarchy and barbarism of capitalism in crisis, led by a revolutionary Marxist party, produces a revolutionary class-consciousness.

### We fight for a Revolutionary Party

The bourgeoisie and its agents condemn the Marxist party as totalitarian. We say that without a democratic and a centrally organised party there can be no revolution. We base our beliefs on the revolutionary tradition of Bolshevism and Trotskyism. Such a party, armed with a transitional program, forms a bridge that joins the daily fight to defend all the past and present gains won from capitalism to the victorious socialist revolution. Defensive struggles for bourgeois rights and freedoms, for decent wages and conditions, will link up the struggles of workers of all nationalities, genders, ethnicities and sexual orientations, bringing about movements for workers control, political strikes and the arming of the working class, as necessary steps to workers’ power and the smashing of the bourgeois state. Along the way, workers will learn that each new step is one of many in a long march to revolutionize every barrier put in the path to their victorious revolution.

### We fight for Communism.

Communism stands for the creation of a classless, stateless society beyond socialism that is capable of meeting all human needs. Against the ruling class lies that capitalism can be made “fair” for all, that nature can be “conserved”, that socialism and communism are “dead”, we raise the red flag of communism to keep alive the revolutionary tradition of the Communist Manifesto of 1848, the Bolshevik-led October Revolution, the Third Communist International until 1924, and the revolutionary Fourth International up to its collapse into centrism, with the closing of the International Center. We fight to build a new Communist International, as a world party of socialism capable of leading workers to a victorious struggle for socialism.

### Join us:

**Where overthrowing capitalism is all in a days work !!!**

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