Trotsky’s theory proposed that the socialist revolution was necessary because of the combined and unequal character of the Russian economy. It had a highly concentrated working class at the centre of huge modern factories and a weak bourgeoisie at the centre of an overwhelmingly peasant economy. This would enable the working class to take power in Russia first.

However, this revolution had to be uninterrupted: it could only begin on a national scale, but it could not halt at the spontaneous democratic stage. Rather it must proceed directly to socialism. This could only be completed on the international scale, with the victory of the working class in advanced metropolitan countries, particularly Germany. This is the essential political content of the April Theses.

Charges of Trotsky’s failure to recognise the vital necessity for a democratic centralist party of professional revolutionaries deeply embedded in the leadership of the working class are immediately conceded, as Trotsky himself did in 1917, as soon as he realised his mistakes and whenever the issue later arose.
Where We Stand
WE STAND WITH KARL MARX: ‘The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves. The struggle for the emancipation of the working class means not a struggle for class privileges and monopolies but for equal rights and duties and the abolition of all class rule’ (The International Workingmen’s Association 1864, General Rules).

The capitalist state consists, in the last analysis, of ruling-class laws within a judicial system and detention centres overseen by the armed bodies of police/army who are under the direction and are controlled in acts of defence of capitalist property rights against the interests of the majority of civil society. The working class must overthrow the capitalist state and replace it with a workers’ state based on democratic soviets/workers’ councils to suppress the inevitable counter-revolution of private capitalist profit against planned production for the satisfaction of socialised human need.

We recognise the necessity for revolutionaries to carry out serious ideological and political struggle as direct participants in the trade unions (always) and in the mass reformist social democratic bourgeois workers’ parties despite their pro-capitalist leaderships when conditions are favourable. Because we see the trade union bureaucracy and their allies in the Labour party leadership as the most fundamental obstacle to the struggle for power of the working class, outside of the state forces and their direct agencies themselves, we must fight and defeat and replace them with a revolutionary leadership by mobilising the base against the pro-capitalist bureaucratic mis-leaders to open the way forward for the struggle for workers’ power.

We are fully in support of all mass mobilisations against the onslaught of this reactionary Con-Lib Dem coalition. However, whilst participating in this struggle we will oppose all policies which subordinate the working class to the political agenda of the petty-bourgeois reformist leaders of the Labour party and trade unions

We oppose all immigration controls. International finance capital roams the planet in search of profit and imperialist governments disrupts the lives of workers and cause the collapse of whole nations with their direct intervention in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan and their proxy wars in Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, etc.

Workers have the right to sell their labour internationally wherever they get the best price. Only union membership and pay rates can counter employers who seek to exploit immigrant workers as cheap labour to undermine the gains of past struggles.
A struggle for a democratic republic is clearly a false stage that will allow a socialist revolution (workers’ republic) to be fought for as the next stage in a revolution but in the indefinite future. This Menshevik position allows the CPGB/Weekly Worker to appear far more orthodox in relation to the RDG’s Democratic Republic in Britain programme than they really are by defending Lenin’s pre-1917 ‘democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’, condemning stageism, but crucially having the same governmental slogan for the democratic republic.

We will, therefore, analyse stageism and how revolutionaries understood the character of the coming revolutions in 19th century Germany and early 20th century Russia. We will look at its genesis in the writings of Marx and Engels, its relevance to the programmes of the German social democracy and its effects on the Russian SDLP (Bolshevik). Then to Lenin’s Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism of 1916 and its significance for the turn that he made in the April Theses and to the Russian Revolution itself, the failed revolutions in Germany in 1918-19 and 1923 the massacre of the Turkish Communists in 1920 by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and the failed Chinese revolutionary epoch which ended of 1927 with the massacre of the Shanghai Soviet.

The victory of Hitler in 1933, Stalinism’s abandonment of third-stage ultra-leftism and the adoption of popular frontism (total collapse into stageism) in 1934-35 signalled for Trotsky the need for the Transitional Programme as the programmatic perspectives of a new international. We have argued that
these perspectives and the programmatic orientation that flowed from them were fully justified by the revolutionary situations that developed at the end of World War II.[1] International revolutionary leadership was the prime question for humanity and the crushing of these revolutions by the alliance between Stalinism and world imperialism proved that point in the negative.

**Marx and Lenin, 1843 to 1905**

In 1843 Marx wrote *On the Jewish Question*, in which he argues with Bruno Bauer on the freeing of the Jews from the ghettos that “to be politically emancipated from religion is not to be finally and completely emancipated from religion because political emancipation is not the final and absolute form of human emancipation”.

He goes on to generalise this idea: abolishing political inequality in general fails to look at social and economic man. Several states in the US had abolished the property qualification for voting, “but the political suppression of private property not only does not abolish private property: it presupposes its existence”.

As CJ Arthur argues in his introduction to Marx and Engels’s *The German Ideology*:

“Marx considers even the most perfect democratic state [the CPGB’s “extreme democracy”?] is inadequate because it is based on this fundamental contradiction between the political state and civil society.”

And:

“In political democracy” man - not merely one man, but every man - is there considered a sovereign being, a supreme being; but it is uneducated, unsocial man... man as he has been corrupted, lost to himself, alienated, subjected to the rule of inhuman conditions and elements, by the whole organisation of our society - in short man who is not yet a real species-being.”[2]

However, in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* Marx developed this theory of alienation to locate it in the labour process itself and the working class as the revolutionary class. The products of his own labour in an ever-deepening crisis oppresses man. Congealed labour, capital, stands above him and outside of him and necessarily produces and reinforces private property, just as man creates a god in the sky as an idealised self and then becomes op-
pressed by his own creation.

Here is Marx setting out his break with Hegel and Feuerbach: his new world outlook, which really does demand a socialist and not a democratic revolution. The agency of the revolution, the working class, had not yet developed its organisational and political strength sufficiently to produce soviets until 1905 in Russia and so solve the dichotomy between the political and the social. Nevertheless, it was to social man that Marx devoted the rest of his efforts until his death in 1883.

When some Russian Marxists wrote to Marx to suggest that it might be possible to skip the stage of capitalist exploitation in their country he gave a conciliatory reply. Basically, the argument was that because of the overwhelming peasant nature of Russia it would be possible to move from the egalitarian rural economy of the Mir, (village council), where strips in fields were allocated according to the needs of the individual families to socialism without going through the capitalist sage. Possibly, thought Marx, if we get rid of the landlords.

But Lenin answered the question in the negative when he produced his work on Russian Agriculture in 1903. [3] The villages were already far too socially differentiated, capitalism had penetrated every pore of the village economy, the kulaks (rich peasants, who arose after the abolition of serfdom in 1862) were aspiring to the position of the landlords. The poorer peasantry was being ground underfoot even more viciously than ever. The stage of capitalist exploitation was unavoidable, he thought. Yes, as against the bogus egalitarianism of feudal rural relationships; no, as against the international socialist revolution. Therein lay the confusion lodged in ‘the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’.

Following the defeat of the 1848 revolutions Marx drew the political conclusion that the “revolution in permanence” from the bourgeois to the socialist was needed, together with an alliance with the peasantry in Germany - a “second version of the peasants’ war”. It would be nice to report that Marx and Engels then followed this political line consistently and imposed it on the German Social Democrats. Alas, no. Correct as it was, it was merely a brilliant guess when revolutionary times produced a glimpse of the future, reinforced by a further glimpse afforded by the Paris Commune of 1871.

Despite Marx’s repudiation of the Gotha programme in 1875, by 1891 clearly two revolutions with a historical stage between them are mooted at Erfurt and Engels, despite his critique of the draft, basically agreed to this. There were no Soviets to provide the link between the political state and civil society and therefore
no transitional demands to link the maximum and minimum. The Erfurt programme is understandable and arguably methodologically correct for its time and place. It did not inevitably lead to the August 4, 1914, betrayal of the leaders of German Social Democracy, but we really cannot ignore the world-historical changes then in train that produced the Russian Revolution or the effects of the negative experiences afterwards. The 20th century has not passed in vain.

When Mike Macnair proclaimed his repudiation of Lenin’s Imperialism at the CPGB’s ‘War and revolution’ school on December 2, it provided a logical reason for his championing the maximum-minimum Erfurt programme of 1891.

After all, if ‘the only thing that was new about global capitalism was Germany’ at the end of the 1890s, then it must make sense to look to extending democracy to socialism via red republicanism, as there was no qualitative change in the world economy that could be reflected in the consciousness of the world working class.

Of course, this position is a thousand times wrong because the world changed ineluctably and unalterably at the end of the 1890s to produce the modern world of imperialist exploitation.

In his Imperialism Lenin identified the emergence of the domination of finance capital over industrial capital (in Britain and France) as the prime feature of the new imperialism: “Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; at which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; at which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun; at which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.” wrote Lenin in 1916.

The dominance of the export of capital rather than the exports of manufactures (Britain overwhelmingly in the period up to 1914); the emergence of monopolies and cartels in Germany and the robber barons in the USA; and the carving up of the world economy between these rival gangs of imperialist robbers, which led to WWI - to analyse this raft of changes as quantitative rather than qualitative is manifestly incorrect, but does give Mike Macnair a more consistent position than Jack Conrad, who defends Lenin’s Imperialism, combined with a 21st century version of Erfurt.

It was this understanding of imperialism which underlies the internationalism of the April Theses and led Lenin to proclaim that he would sacrifice the Russian Revolution (certainly not gladly) for the German revolution.

Let us now lay another bogey to rest. After 1848 no genuine revolutionary socialist still believed that the bourgeoisie would lead a revolution in Ger-
many and none believed that they would do so in Russia after 1905. Apt quotations by comrade Conrad establish this point beyond doubt. The Menshevik programme that the bourgeoisie could do this identified them as capitulatory stageists and therefore provoked Lenin’s bitter opposition to them on this vital point.

They were willing to concede the leadership of the revolution to the bourgeoisie and constitute themselves as the extreme opposition, as comrade Conrad has pointed out.

However, Lenin did not think that a socialist revolution was possible in Russia - he foresaw a democratic revolution led by the working class in alliance with the peasantry carrying out the tasks of the bourgeoisie: democracy, industrialisation, education, etc. This was because he understood the bourgeoisie were too weak and cowardly, fearful of the working class and compromised by absolutism to do so itself.

But the confusion lodged in the algebraic ‘democratic dictatorship’ formula of the Bolsheviks masked a lack of understanding of how the working class might solve the contradiction of being in a tiny minority leading a revolution in an overwhelming peasant economy and how they could avoid being swamped by that backward peasantry. Although this was eventually the fate that befell the Russian proletariat certainly by 1928 (arguably as early as 1920), that revolution and its powerful international echoes would not have been possible had the old Bolshevik formula survived.

Lenin famously polemicised against the opponents of his April theses - Stalin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, etc - thus:

“Whoever now talks only about the ‘revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’ has lost touch with life, has, in virtue of this circumstance, gone over, in practice, to the petty bourgeoisie against the proletarian class struggle; and he ought to be relegated to the museum of ‘Bolshevik’ pre-revolutionary antiquities (or, as one might call it, the museum of ‘old Bolsheviks’).”

They would have compromised and destroyed the revolution by capitulat-
ing to national defencism in WWI and would have facilitated the victory of a semi-fascist bourgeois dictatorship. Kerensky’s bourgeois ‘democracy’ was not an option in 1917: the character of the world imperialist economy precluded it, as Lenin had analysed in his Imperialism the previous year.

An earlier understanding on the imperialist nature of the world economy and then his experience as the head of the Petrograd soviet in 1905 led Trotsky to propose and defend his famous theory of Permanent Revolution, developed in 1904. He saw the new form of participatory democracy embodied in the 50-odd soviets that sprung up throughout Russia at the time and knew this was the solution to Marx’s “contradiction between the political state and civil society”.

Trotsky’s theory proposed that the socialist revolution was necessary because of the combined and unequal character of the Russian economy. It had a highly concentrated working class at the centre of huge modern factories and a weak bourgeoisie at the centre of an overwhelmingly peasant economy. This would enable the working class to take power in Russia first.

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After the revolution
It would be nice to report that Lenin and Trotsky shook hands on the coming together of Permanent Revolution and the April Theses in 1917 and agreed to follow this line consistently thereafter in all countries and in every revolutionary situation. Alas, again no. The name, ‘Union of Soviet Socialist Republics’, was not adopted until 1922, arguably when it was no longer true.

And the Comintern, with Lenin and Trotsky’s acquiescence, adopted positions on Turkey which they had repudiated in Russia, and on Germany which were dictated by the diplomatic needs of the Soviet state rather than by the international revolution. Victor Serge’s report of Lenin’s comments in 1920 - “This is counterrevolution, but we shall not be guillotined: we ourselves shall impose the Thermidor” - sounds all too believable in the light
of subsequent events.

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk massacred the Turkish communists because he supposedly led a bourgeois revolution. The Communist party of Turkey was founded at a congress in Baku on 10 September 1920. The congress elected Mustafa Suphi as the party chairman and Ethem Nejat as the general secretary. After its foundation, the party was recognized as section of the Communist International.

The founding of TKP occurred in the midst of the Independence War, following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War. In order to counter the growing influence of Turkish communists, Mustafa Kemal set up a parallel puppet communist party (Turkish: Türk Komünist Fırkası).

The founders of TKP, Mustafa Suphi and his 14 other comrades, were killed almost certainly on the orders of Ataturk, an early version of the massacre of the Shanghai Soviet by Chiang Kai Shek in 1927.

Political confusion between the programme of the bourgeois and the socialist revolution was unresolved, as it was in Ireland in where the first and revolutionary Communist Party of Ireland (November 1921-1923) was dissolved on Comintern instructions in favour of Jim Larkin’s opportunist Irish Workers League. The Shanghai massacre in 1927 led Trotsky to universalise his theory of Permanent Revolution. One of the leaders of Atatürk’s fake communist party summed this up well, saying, “Only Turks can produce Bolshevism [revolutionary socialism], and Bolshevism can only be introduced from
above.” And Ataturk spelled out his real position on communism in 1926: “Communism is the greatest foe of the Turkish world. It must be crushed wherever it is seen.” (Faruk Şükrü Yerssel, Eskişehir Newspaper, 1926). Today the Turkish Communist party never mention the fate of Suphi and his comrades and lionise Ataturk. [5]

And, even worse, Trotsky’s ally, Karl Radek, eulogised Leo Schlageter in his June 1923 speech, ‘The Wanderer into the Void’, in an effort to conciliate the far right in Germany in the violent rejection of the Treaty of Versailles and the victorious allies:

“We are not sentimental romanticists who forget friendship when its object is dead, nor are we diplomats who say: by the graveside say nothing but good or remain silent. Schlageter, a courageous soldier of the counterrevolution, deserves to be sincerely honoured by us, the soldiers of the revolution.” [6]

Following the murders of Luxemburg, Liebknecht and Leo Jogiches in early 1919, the Social Democrats succeeded in destroying the revolutions in Germany and in the states of the former Austro-Hungarian empire dreadful confusion surrounded the events of October 1923. Trotsky was not in a position then to alter the Comintern’s centrist vacillations and the Schlageter affair demonstrated extreme confusion at the head of the Comintern.

It was not until 1926 that he really began an open fight for the Permanent Revolution and to universalise his and Lenin’s April Theses theory in books like The Third International after Lenin following the disastrous defeats in China of the previous year. Here the two stages were clear and open. The Comintern’s initial advice to enter Chiang Kai-shek’s Kuomintang was compounded by Stalin’s advice to enter the left Kuomintang following the massacre of the Shanghai Soviet in 1927.

**Transitional Governmental slogan**

Let us now address the governmental slogan, the prime transitional demand in revolutionary situations. In his Writings on China Trotsky advocates the slogan of the constituent assembly to address the democratic aspirations of the oppressed masses, but his orientation, and that of the Chinese Trotskyists, was always towards the working class in the big cities of Shanghai, Peking and Hong Kong.

‘All power to the Soviets’ was the successful Bolshevik formula, not ‘Forward to the democratic republic’, the Menshevik and Cadet formula.

Trotsky explains in The Third International after Lenin:

“If, consequently, we are to take as our starting point the Leninist analogy between China and Russia, then we must say: from the standpoint of the ‘political nature of the state’, all that could have been obtained through the democratic dictatorship in China has been put to the
test, first in Sun Yat-sen’s Canton, then on the road from Canton to Shanghai, which culminated in the Shanghai coup d’etat, and then in Wuhan where the left Kuomintang appeared in its chemically pure form - i.e., according to the directives of the ECCI, as the organiser of the agrarian revolution, but in reality as its hangman.

“But the social content of the bourgeois democratic revolution will fill the initial period of the coming dictatorship of the Chinese proletariat and the peasant poor. To advance now the slogan of a ‘democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry’ after the role not only of the Chinese bourgeoisie, but also of Chinese ‘democracy’ has been put to a thorough test, after it has become absolutely incontestable that ‘democracy’ will play even a greater hangman’s role in the coming battles than in the past, to advance this slogan now is simply to create the means of covering up the new varieties of Kuomintangism and to prepare a noose for the proletariat.”

Jack Conrad ignores the April Theses and its place in history in his polemics and only when pressed does he give a partial and misleading account of the significance of this world-historic document. This document rejected stageism and set the face of the Bolsheviks, after Lenin’s exceeding bitter internal struggle, towards the socialist revolution [4]

That is, not only towards the taking of power by the working class but the expropriation of the capitalist class and the institution of the proletarian dictatorship, the planned economy, and production for human need instead of profit.

Though it is true that the capitalists were not expropriated by the Bolsheviks until late 1918 and a planned economy was not instituted until after that, nevertheless no serious revolutionary socialist would question that this was the trajectory adopted in April 1917.

It was a workers’ state because the working class held political power and the capitalist were about to lose not only political but also all social and economic power.

If this did not eventually succeed, it was not the fault of that orientation but the international character of the world economy (the advent of modern imperialism) and the defeats of the international class struggle, particularly in Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy and then China.

If the Soviets degenerated and died as representative of the democratic will of the masses, this was not because of the machinations of Stalin or their inherent inferiority to bourgeois democracy, as Jack Conrad and others seem to suggest, but because of these international defeats, which caused the rise of the bureaucracy which then combined with the exhaustion of the masses and the revolutionary generation in the USSR.

The April Theses contain all the rele-
vant elements of the current debate about programme, because programme vitally rests on perspectives, and perspectives rest on our analysis of the international balance of class forces. There is no democratic republican stage between imperialism and the socialist revolution.

The Soviets and the constituent assembly did represent a conflict between two forms of democracy and the rule of two classes whose interests were irreconcilable. One had to suppress the other and it is clear that the peasantry would dominate the assembly, as was evident in the elections to that body.

The Bolsheviks won the cities, but the SRs took the countryside. Bourgeois democracy demanded that the Bolsheviks yield to the will of ‘the people’ and concede that the ‘democratic dictatorship’ meant the rule of the peasantry over the working class and thence capitalist restoration.

The Bolsheviks suppressed the constituent assembly because they represented the far more advanced participatory socialist democracy of the Soviets. What revolutionary socialist would say they were wrong to do so?

Leo Schlageter and Karl Radek. The latter’s tribute to the former at a plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, June 1923, makes for painful reading, indicating confusion on both the heritage of Lenin’s April Theses and Trotsky’s Permanent Revolution at the very top of the Comintern at that time, just months before the revolutionary German events of October 1923.

Notes