The war brought things to a head, exposing the utter falsity and rottenness of Kautskyism from its very first day.

Karl Kautsky

Unity is strength, L’union fait la force, La union hace la fuerza, ἡ συνήθεια εἶναι δύναμις, "اتحاد قدريت أست", đoàn kết là sức mạnh, Jedność jest siła, ykseyn on kesto, ἡ συνήθεια εἶναι δύναμις, Midnimo iyo waa awood, hundeb ydy chyryfer, Einheit ist Stärke, Всеединство прочность, единство наша сила, vienybės jėga, bashkimi ben fuqine, "وحدة هو القوة", Ní neart go chrur le céile, pagkakaisa ay kalakasan, jednota is sîla.

Workers of the World Unite—There Is No Planet B!
achieving sexual and individual freedom women need to fight in the class struggle in general to overthrow class society itself. We cannot leave the struggle against women’s oppression until the revolution but must recognise it as one of the most fundamental aspects of the revolutionary struggle itself or we will never make that revolution. We therefore reject the reactionary “intersectional” theory as hostile to Marxism, to the class struggle and to revolutionary socialism.

11. We also support the fight of all other specially oppressed including lesbians and gay men, bisexuals and transgender people and the disabled against discrimination in all its forms and their right to organise separately in that fight in society as a whole.

12. We fight racism and fascism. We support the right of people to fight back against racist and fascist attacks by any means necessary. Self-defence is no offence, we support it. 14. 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.

13. Revolutionary internationalism

16. We were and are for the immediate withdrawal and/or defeat of imperialist armies in wars like Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and Ukraine. Whilst giving no political support to the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Sunni and Shia militias in Iraq, Hamas or Fatah in Palestine, Gaddafi (as was) in Libya, Assad in Syria, the ‘Islamic State’ in Syria and Iraq, the theocratic regime in Iran or the Donbass leadership in Eastern Ukraine we recognise US-led world imperialism as the main enemy of humanity and so advocate critical support and tactical military assistance from the working class to all those fighting for the defeat of imperialism as part of the perspective of Permanent Revolution.

18. We are for the overthrow of the Zionist state of Israel and for a Multi-Ethnic workers’ state of Palestine as part of the Socialist Federation of the Middle East.

19. As socialists living in Britain we take our responsibilities to support the struggle against British imperialism’s occupation of the six north-eastern counties of Ireland very seriously. For this reason we have assisted in founding the Irish Republican Prisoners Support Group and we will campaign for political status these Irish prisoners of war and for a 32-county united Socialist Ireland. We reject all ‘two nations in Ireland’ theories.

21. We are for the re-creation of a World Party of Socialist Revolution, a revolutionary international, based on the best traditions of the previous revolutionary internationals, critically understood, particularly the early Third and Fourth Internationals, with their determination to combat and overcome both reformism and centrism. ▲
Introduction

Nick Rodgers, in line with CPGB theorists Jack Conrad and Mike McNair and fellow thinkers Lars T Lih and Eric Blanc, rejects the tradition of the Russian Revolution and seeks to falsify the nature of the Bolshevik party. In place of that great tradition they seek to rehabilitate the renegade Karl Kautsky and his political and philosophical outlook. *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, one of the greatest theoretical work by Lenin, directly refutes all our afore-mentioned anti-Leninist and anti-Trotskyists theorists, on the history of the Russian Revolution.[1] In line with this ignoble offensive they seek to rehabilitate the organisational forms of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and its relationship to the masses.

Nick Rodgers in *Lenin’s misreading of Marx*, (Part 1, 1.8) [2] and *Marx’s vision* (Part 2, 8.8) [3] has got himself into a great old muddle about the transition from socialism to communism and distinct phases, etc. in his misreading of Chapter 5 of Lenin’s *State and Revolution* such that he really does seem to imply that the ‘undemocratic ideology’ of Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks led to Stalin.

Noteworthy in these two pieces and in the article that he wrote in WW issue 830, on 25/8/2010, *Communist Transition*, [4] Comrade Rogers completely fails to reference the experience of the Soviets or indeed to make any serious reference to Chapter 3 of *State and Revolution*. This is where Lenin traces back his understanding of revolutionary socialism to the Paris Commune of 1871 and asserts in such an inspiring manner his faith in the ability of the oppressed masses in France back then, and his then current faith in the Russian masses to make the revolution themselves, given the correct leadership. This he had fought for so determinedly since 1905.
For that reason, he critically evaluated the Communards in 1871, what they got right and where they failed and noted the one issue that caused Marx and Engels to correct their Communist Manifesto of 1848. As Lenin recounts in that Chapter 3:

“On April 12, 1871, i.e., just at the time of the Commune, Marx wrote to Kugelmann: “If you look up the last chapter of my Eighteenth Brumaire, you will find that I declare that the next attempt of the French Revolution will be no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, but to smash it [Marx’s italics—the original is zerbrechen], and this is the precondition for every real people’s revolution on the Continent. And this is what our heroic Party comrades in Paris are attempting.” (Neue Zeit, Vol.XX, 1, 1901-02, p. 709.) (The letters of Marx to Kugelmann have appeared in Russian in no less than two editions, one of which I edited and supplied with a preface.) The words, “to smash the bureaucratic-military machine”, briefly express the principal lesson of Marxism regarding the tasks of the proletariat during a revolution in relation to the state. And this is the lesson that has been not only completely ignored, but positively distorted by the prevailing, Kautskyite, “interpretation” of Marxism!” [5]

Note that the smashing of the state is the work of the masses and that work is clearly only possible via the Soviets, which Lenin retrospectively saw in embryo in 1871 in Paris, encountered in real life in 1905 and promoted so strongly in his April Theses only a few months after writing State and Revolution: “All power to the Soviets”. We have recorded elsewhere the opposition of Kamenev, Muranov and Stalin to this vital document which swung the whole Bolshevik party, with those notable exceptions back then (Zinoviev was later to join this Right Opposition), towards the second, October revolution. [6] Those Rightists have their champions today in the above-mentioned theorists.

Comrade Jack Conrad replied to Nick on 15 August, The two phases of Communism. He made many correct points, the failure to assess the isolation of the revolution and the capitulation to socialism in a single country sounds Trotskyist:

Rather the Russian Revolution, having been isolated by imperialism, having failed to spread to Europe (crucially to Germany), having being forced into full-scale retreat with the New Economic Policy, turned in on itself. Stalin’s doctrine of socialism in one country was a nationalist adaptation to isolation. His first five-year plan unmistakably marked the horrendous counterrevolution within the revolution. After that, reform - even
a political revolution - became impossible.

And, of course, he is correct to dismiss Comrade Rogers’s contention of two separate phases: “There were two phases of the future society: a beginning and a full realisation.”

But he retains the essential Third Campist dismissal of the central necessity of the Soviets as the vehicle for human liberation, preferring the Democratic Republic. None of the features listed by Lenin, and endorsed by Comrade Jack, from Chapter 3 of State and Revolution are possible without the Soviets. Lenin is clearly endorsing that view in State and Revolution, in complete contrast to both Comrade Rogers and Conrad.

Comrade Conrad has only one passing reference to the necessity to produce the superabundance of wealth:

"Until then, when it comes to consumption, while there exists the principle of need, it is at least partially checked by the “bourgeois” principle of work done. The reason I highlighted partially should be obvious.

That really needs to be spelled out in some detail to fully expose what is wrong with socialism in a single country. But then the CPGB ambiguity the Brexit debate means that Third Campism can only make a passing reference to this indispensable necessity for communism.

Lastly, before taking up Comrade Rog-

ers articles in detail, let us recall that the State and Revolution and the April Theses were the product of two further works where Lenin developed his internationalism which still shines out so brightly for revolutionary socialists over more than a century that has passed since the 1915 work by Nikolai Bukharin, Imperialism and World Economy, for which Lenin wrote the introduction [7] and Lenin’s own Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, 1916. [8] An intimate knowledge of these four works is necessary to appreciate the global political and social significance of the Russian Revolution.

The irreconcilable difference between Kautsky’s organisational forms and Bolshevism

Mike McNair’s 8/8/19 article, Widening the frame of debate, says the following:

The Bolsheviks were deeply rooted in the working class and based on the model of Germany’s SPD, Mike Macnair begins an examination of the ‘Kautsky debate’ that is taking place in the US left. … The SPD’s organisational forms were adopted in the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party in 1905-06, initially by the Mensheviks. Though submerged in clandestinity, they were applied in Bolshevism through 1917 and into the civil war period, when they were partly replaced with ‘military centralism’ for reasons of the imperatives created by the destruction of the majority support for the Soviet government by the Brest-
Litovsk treaty, and by the practical needs of conducting the civil war. [9]

We contend that this is profoundly wrong. Trotsky continually asserted that the Bolsheviks led the revolution in 1917 because they learned the lessons of 1905. We would assert that what the Bolsheviks learned from 1905 was:

1. The need for the united front and transitional politics. In seeking to develop these the realisation developed this was the application of the dialectic and a new approach to the UF was needed.

2. The need to study and develop the dialectic itself to defend and develop dialectical and historical materialism against Mach and Bogdanov. Lenin began this work as early as 1906.

Lenin’s aspiration in 1902 was to recruit the entire vanguard and his schema equated the revolutionary leadership with the vanguard and denied the existence of other forces and the necessity to relate to them in struggle—Kautsky’s ‘party of the whole class’ approach. The Bolsheviks were devastated by the fact that Trotsky and the Mensheviks had led much of the failed revolution of 1905 and they were marginalised. They had to reassess their attitude to the masses, and other groups claiming to be revolutionary and to re-arm themselves theoretically for 1917. Lenin even railed against soviets for a few weeks in 1905, unable to see the content behind the form.

Democratic centralism (DC) now became much more like the ‘seething internal democracy’ that Trotsky asserted in *The Revolution Betrayed* the Bolsheviks operated. The principle of DC as outlined in the *Transitional Programme* now began to operate:

> Without inner democracy – no revolutionary education. Without discipline – no revolutionary action. The inner structure of the Fourth International is based on the principle of DC: full freedom in discussion, complete unity in action.

Did Lenin and the Bolsheviks become soft on Trotsky and the Mensheviks after 1905? No. They realised their tactics were proved to be hopelessly inflexible. The consciousness of the working class was not simply either bourgeois ideology or social-democratic Marxism as represented by themselves. There were many intermediate stages and different levels. It could veer sharply to the left but not knock on their door. They had to fight for it, and therefore for the leadership of the class, in a different way.

This is Lenin’s *What is to be Done?* controversial formulation for the develop-
ment of class consciousness:

We have said that there could not have been Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. [10]

It was not simply that the Mensheviks turned left after 1905 but the Bolsheviks, in a sense, had to turn right. They knew that they were correct about the working class having to lead the revolution, but the task was to convince the workers to accept their leadership. Hence the reunification moves with the Mensheviks and consequent intensified political struggles. It we look at Lenin’s revised views after 1905 we see he changed his opinion on the first, more elemental, definition of revolutionary consciousness, only. He did not, and could not, revise his opinion on the second, more profound, meaning.

In a 2011 polemic with the US League for a Revolutionary Party we quote them:

This very question illustrates the relation between the revolution and the proletariat: we have been arguing. And it occurs even where communist leaders themselves come from non-proletarian backgrounds. Lenin first recognised the inherent revolutionary capacity of the working class through (the experience?) of the 1905 revolution!

Yes, but what is the nature and extent of this ‘inherent revolutionary capacity’? They quote Lenin:

The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social Democratic and more than ten years of work put in by the Social-Democracy has done a great deal to transform this spontaneity into consciousness. [11]

And they quote from Lenin’s ‘The lessons of the (failed 1905) revolution’:

In combat with this enemy (the capitalist class) the worker becomes a socialist, comes to realise the necessity of a complete reconstruction of the whole of society, the complete abolition of all poverty and oppression. [12]

Yes, the first quote is from Volume 10, written during the 1905 revolution. The second quote, from several years after the event (in Volume 16 of the Collected Works, 1910) describes the class conscious worker who has come to see the need for revolution (how? without political intervention?) but not one who is a Marxist, not a scientific socialist. What the 1905 revolution showed was that in 1905 at any rate, the working
class might be ‘instinctively, spontaneously Social-Democratic’ but many opted for the wrong Social Democrats, the Mensheviks and Trotsky!

Moreover, the phrase ‘the Social-Democracy’ implies the Mensheviks also had to be credited with developing the revolutionary consciousness of the masses. But this did not mean that Lenin was therefore about to concede leadership of the revolution to them. He understood that a socialist revolution cannot succeed without the construction of a revolutionary Marxist vanguard party to lead it. And this party must have learned scientific socialism as first elaborated by Marx and Engels and as developed by various others, chief among whom nowadays must be counted Lenin and Trotsky. This was surely contained within Lenin’s 1902 formulation above along with the confusion. It permeates all his writings before and after and we must defend that whilst rejecting his 1902 bias which amounted to a measure of party sectarian voluntarism, a la Kautsky. Political theory like this cannot evolve ‘spontaneously’. Marxism cannot spontaneously arise in the working class no more than a building worker could enter a hospital operating theatre and suddenly discover he or she could perform intricate brain surgery.

This struggle shows how Lenin developed the theory for a very opposite type of a party to the one that Kautsky and the Social Democrats constructed. And history records that in the test of revolutionary times and situations the German Social Democrats failed miserably, and Lenin’s Bolsheviks succeeded brilliantly. And yet Mike McNair can claim that Lenin based himself and his Bolsheviks on the organizational structures of the SPD and others claim that Kautsky was doing brilliantly right up to the 4th August 1914 when the German SPD betrayed the working class in Germany and internationally by voting those war credits to the Kaiser to persecute WWI. Rosa Luxemburg saw that coming before either Lenin or Trotsky.
John Reese, in his *Algebra of Revolution* [13] Kautsky, Centrism and the failure of Mechanical Marxism, shows us that Kautsky had not suddenly politically collapsed after August 1914 but he had a long history of centrist vacillating. In fact, he can be counted as the very first centrist. We evaluated this in 2011 in *In Defence of Trotskyism* No 2.

**Lars T Lih: the renegade’s champion**

The young Kautsky was not so fundamentally different from the renegade. We cannot adopt the pre-1914 German Social Democratic Party (SPD) methods as Lih proposes. John Reese, in his book *The Algebra of Revolution* (Routlidge 1998) makes a powerful case for the mechanical, undialectical, Darwinian centrism of Kautsky’s Marxism and points out that he never fought Bernstein on methodology, only Rosa Luxemburg did this. His pseudo-orthodoxy hid the real class relations within the SPD; in reality the corrupt trade union bureaucrats controlled the membership. Should we not accept Trotsky’s advice to Burnham in January 1940 “beware of the infiltration of bourgeois scepticism into your ranks. Remember that socialism to this day has not found higher scientific expression than Marxism. Bear in mind that the method of scientific socialism is dialectic materialism. Occupy yourselves with serious study! Study Marx, Engels, Plekhanov, Lenin and Franz Mehring.” No mention of Kautsky unlike Lenin in 1920 but certainly no total, irresponsible rejection of the Marxist tradition of the Second International as a whole that some do from the other side.

The CPGB and Lih are using many basic Marxist concepts so ably propagated by Kautsky, Mehring, Wilhelm Liebknecht and others to smuggle in the Erfurt programme of separation of Minimum programme and Maximum programme which characterised the German SPD and led to its shipwreck after their appalling 4th August vote for the Kaiser’s war credits already alluded to, one of the blackest days in the history of the world workers’ movement. Crucially, was Kautsky “the Pope of Marxism”, and the SPD correct to pursue the model of the “party of the whole class” armed with the Erfurt Programme as opposed to Lenin and Trotsky’s revolutionary party armed with a Transitional Programme (workers’ united front 1920, TP 1938)?

Or was Marcel Liebman’s *Leninism under Lenin* (Amazon) the more balanced assessment of why Lenin took such a fundamentally different attitude to WWI from the SPD? The fundamental difference which we will seek to establish is that Lenin led the Bolsheviks with an increasingly different theory and practice after learning the lessons, crucially on the need for Soviet/workers councils, from the failed revolution of 1905. We will establish that the goal of Lieb-
man is to defend the Marxist theory and practice of the revolutionary party and programme as developed by Lenin which was so spectacularly successful in leading the Russian Revolution.

It was this heritage that Trotsky defended. The goal of Lih is counter-revolutionary and reactionary; to deny the new generation of revolutionists these indispensable weapons today in the struggle to forge the leadership to make the socialist revolution in the revolutionary crises that this crisis will produce in the coming months and years.

Lenin made a major practical break with SPD methods of organising after 1905 and deepened this after August 1914, by evolving a different theory on the party type and programme. This was empirical at first; attributing the centralism and struggle for theoretical clarity at least in part to illegal Russian conditions but increasingly it became conscious because of the revolutionary practice of the party. This resulted in breaking with the German Social Democratic party type such that by 1917 the Bolsheviks were a totally different type of party, capable of leading a socialist revolution.

In contrast the SPD top leadership formed the spearhead of the counter-revolution and their model “party of the whole class” splintered disastrously into its constituent elements: open counter-revolutionary reformism leading older, more demoralised and conservative skilled workers in the main, syndicalism, centrism and a small and confused revolutionary current. This is Liebman’s implicit proposition. And it is into this Kautskyite blind alley Lars T Lih and the CPGB seek to divert us.

Lars T Lih seeks to prove that,
1. Lenin never broke theoretically from the pre-1914 Kautsky and
2. that therefore the revolution triumphed by the use of the min-max SPD Erfurt Programme of 1891 and
3. implicitly the 1921 united front offensive by Lenin and Trotsky and the 1938 Transitional Programme were reformist backsliding by the great revolutionists as Max Shachtman, Hal Draper, the CPGB and the AWL have sought/seek to prove.

In developing his Marxism after 1905 Lenin no longer used the medium of Kautsky or even Plekhanov in the main but went straight to Marx and Engels and eventually, in 1914, to Hegel as the intellectual source of the dialectic. But the CPGB wishes to devel-
op a Kautskyite Marxism as a fail-safe against revolutionary Trotskyism. And Lars T Lih is the unwitting, or maybe willing, cat’s paw in this project. Closely related to this is the question of what lessons we draw from the history of the Russian Revolution and the subsequent history of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st in terms of the party and programme? We also need to restate the fundamental character of Lenin’s break with the old Bolshevik Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Peasantry in the 1917 April Theses following his famous analysis *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism* in 1916 and its essential coincidence with Trotsky’s 1904 theory of Permanent Revolution.

Lih says that Lenin remained a Kautskyite all his life, only repudiating the open crossing of class lines when he progressed from centrism to counter-revolution by attacking the Russian Revolution. But in truth Lenin’s collected works are full of re-examination of what went wrong with the German Social Democracy and we make so bold as to suggest that he corrected his earlier illusions in them sufficiently to lead the greatest revolution in history, so he got the bulk of that one about right, it is fair to assert. Nevertheless, we must all be more Kautsky than Lenin today is the message Lih proposes, much to the delight of the CPGB’s Macnair and Conrad.[14]

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**Five Successive Phases of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat**

Let us now examine the five successive phases of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the USSR from October 1917.

1. The rule of the soviets, October 1917 to the period just prior to the death of Lenin, January 1924 and the Fifth Congress of the Comintern, June/July 1924. A new and far more progressive form of democracy (the Soviets, workers’ councils) rules, there is a separation of the Executive; the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Legislature; the Party Congress decisions carried out by the Central Committee and a relatively independent Judiciary operates, due process and Soviet legality obtains. It must be stressed, however, that this is still a real dictatorship, the Executive is obliged to prevent the degree of separation between the three arms of the state that a free bourgeois democracy has. The capitalist class is suppressed, they cannot vote, and their parties are not allowed to operate; for or against the revolution is the criterion for all legality and freedom of speech etc. But inner-party democracy still operated, albeit restricted by the unfortunate decision of the 10th Party Congress “ban on factions” in 1921.

2. The Interregnum, 1924-1928. Still relatively democratic in inner-party democracy to begin with but an increasingly repressive period of political
struggle between Zinoviev, Stalin, Bukharin, Kamenev and Trotsky. Zinoviev dominant initially, Bukharin in alliance with Stalin latterly, Stalin emerged at the top in 1928.

3. Consolidation of the rule of the bureaucracy, Stalin as its central representative, 1928-1934, the end of the original Bolshevik party as a political entity. Some non-Bolshevik opposition still existed, increasingly repressed. The working class is now totally politically expropriated by the bureaucracy, yet that same bureaucracy still rules on its behalf as shown in the universal free welfare, health and education systems, the total absence of unemployment and homelessness, paid holidays for all, etc. Production is according to the central state plan (albeit hideously undemocratic and bureaucratically distorted) and not for profit.

4. The Great Purges etc., December 1934 (assassination of Kirov) to March 1953 (death of Stalin) and execution of Beria in December 1953. The secret police (OGPU/NKVD/MGB/KGB) mass executed and assassinate all real and imagined opponents unchecked on Stalin’s instructions in this time. The heads of the secret police in this period were: Yagoda 1934–36 (shot), Yezhov 1936–38 (shot), Beria 1938–43, again Beria 1953 (Mar–Jun). He ruled the NKVD by proxy from 1943 to death of Stalin in March 1953, arrested in June 1953, shot December 1953). The distorted dictatorship of the proletariat still remains in the economy and in the welfare state.

5. Return of rule of bureaucracy, 1953-91, the “Red Army” smash the rule of the NKVD and the secret police become an arm of the entire bureaucracy again as in 1928-34. (Defence Minister Nikolai Bulganin ordered the Kantemirovskaya Tank Division and Tamanskaya Motor Rifle Division to move into Moscow to prevent security forces loyal to Beria from rescuing him in June 1953.)

The five successive stages of the dictatorship of the proletariat above have another thing in common apart from the economic plan and the welfare provisions mentioned above. As a real dictatorship the separation of powers in the three sections of the healthy workers’ state was largely abolished under Lenin and the Bolsheviks up until 1924, with the important exceptions pointed to in phase 1, the rule of the Soviets, above up to 1924.

The Soviets collapsed from the early to mid-1920s due to defeats of revolutions in Germany, Italy and Hungary and lost pre-revolutionary situations elsewhere. This retreat of the working class internationally and the dimming of the prospects for world revolution demoralised the class.

Stalinist bureaucratic repression was the expression of this. Consequently, the Executive, the Legislature and the
Judiciary merged fully by 1928 with Stain’s ascendancy. The personal dictatorship of Stalin, 1934-53, that of Mao, 1949-76 (with some interruptions), many in Eastern Europe from 1948-89 and North Korea today are extreme forms of personal dictatorship that nevertheless do not abolish the distorted forms of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The safeguards in phase 1 above are eliminated but nonetheless the degenerate and deformed workers’ states continued to exist.

We say that far from Lenin misunderstanding or misreading Karl Marx it is Comrade Rogers and his miseducators in the CPGB and elsewhere who have failed to understand either Marx or Lenin on these crucial questions for revolutionary perspectives today. In other words, in rejecting Soviet, i.e. workers’ democracy in favour of bourgeois democracy the CPGB, and Comrade Rogers, opt for a leftist version of Stalin’s 1951 *British Road to Socialism* via parliament and enabling acts, etc. [15]

**What is Wrong with Comrade Nick’s understanding of Marx and Lenin**

The following extract from Comrade Rogers’s *Marx’s vision* is philosophically idealistic and takes no account of the world situation and the isolation of the revolution as the central cause of the degeneration of the resolution:

“The key problem with Lenin’s misreading and his addition of a stage he called ‘socialism’ to the Marxist conception of the transition to communism is that, during the decade between October and the final Stalinisation of Soviet society, it opened up a space for ideas that were im- imical to making a priority of restoring and strengthening democratic forms. A focus on democracy during the period of transition to a new society would have been the only way of creating the preconditions for a society of freely associated producers.”

Lenin did not misread or misunderstand Marx, *State and Revolution* is a brilliant exposition and development of Marx’s works for the world in 1916, a great, classic work of Marxism. It is Comrade Nick who misunderstands both Marx and Lenin. As we will elaborate later it was not wrong ideas that led to Stalin’s rise, but the defeat of the global revolutionary wave that the Russian Revolu-
tion was just one, national expression.

The difference between 1871 and 1917, or indeed 1905, is the development of the organisations of the working class worldwide and their advance in class consciousness. That was how the class historically became a class for itself rather than just objectively a class in itself.

The Bryant and Mays Matchgirls and the Docker Tanner strikes in Britain in 1888 and 89 were global phenomena and got global support. Similarly, the British Great Unrest of 1910-14 and the Triple Alliance of 1914-21 were national expressions of global mass movements of the class.

Comrade Rogers misunderstands the global nature of the fight for communism; he is still a victim of socialism in a single country. So, he focuses on the situation in the USSR alone to discover why Stalin triumphed.

There is a famous incident when Trotsky was proved correct over the dire consequences of capitulating to Chiang Kai-shek in China when Stalin’s honorary member of the Executive of the Communist International massacred the 5,000 communists in the Shanghai Soviet in 1927 and Zinoviev asserted that now the Joint Opposition would win because their predictions were proved correct. No, said Trotsky, revolutions are not won by defeats. Of course, Stalin then proceeded to capitulated to the Left Kuo Ming Tang with equally predictable dire consequences. [16]

And exactly why could the USSR alone not build socialism, or progress to communism? And how is this connected to the loss of democratic rights of the working class under Stalin? Trotsky explained all this in detail in *The Revolution Betrayed*:

Two years before the Communist Manifesto, young Marx wrote:

> A development of the productive forces is the absolutely necessary practical premise [of Communism], because without it want is generalized, and with want the struggle for necessities begins again, and that means that all the old crap must revive.

This thought Marx never directly developed, and for no accidental reason: he never foresaw a proletarian revolution in a backward country.
Lenin also never dwelt upon it, and this too was not accidental. He did not foresee so prolonged an isolation of the Soviet state. Nevertheless, the citation, merely an abstract construction with Marx, an inference from the opposite, provides an indispensable theoretical key to the wholly concrete difficulties and sicknesses of the Soviet regime.

On the historic basis of destitution, aggravated by the destructions of the imperialist and civil wars, the “struggle for individual existence” not only did not disappear the day after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, and not only did not abate in the succeeding years, but, on the contrary, assumed at times an unheard-of ferocity. Need we recall that certain regions of the country have twice gone to the point of cannibalism? [17]

Or Trotsky’s famous quote in The Revolution Betrayed:

The basis of bureaucratic rule is the poverty of society in objects of consumption, with the resulting struggle of each against all. When there are enough goods in a store, the purchasers can come whenever they want to. When there is little goods, the purchasers are compelled to stand in line. When the lines are very long, it is necessary to appoint a policeman to keep order. Such is the starting point of the power of the Soviet bureaucracy. It “knows” who is to get something and who has to wait. [18]

**Democratic Rights under Capitalism and in the USSR**

Marx made the first socialist criticism of the bourgeois secular regime of rights in 1843 in *On the Jewish Question*, the ideological foundation for his later critique of capitalism as a whole. The basic argument is that the secular regime of rights as developed by the American and French Revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century represented civil but not human emancipation. He examines *The Rights of Man and Citizen* (1789) and passages from other constitutions to make his point. It equally applies to the UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. As Marx shows in *On the Jewish Question* these rights presuppose increasing inequality because they bifurcate human lives and psyches, the citizen equal before the law and in voting rights and as he really exists in society, alienated, oppressed and exploited:

There were seven votes against the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights; South Africa and Saudi Arabia, for obvious repressive reasons, and the USSR and four satellites for two contradictory reasons. One was repressive but the other was progressive; they objected to the Declaration because it contained no reference to collective rights like food, water, housing,
healthcare, education etc. The Soviet societies claimed their legitimacy because they partially compensated for their repression by providing a measure of these welfare needs. Social justice versus greedy capitalist individualism was their propaganda stance. In the Cold War, the ‘non-aligned’ movement tended to be dictatorial like Syria, Iraq or Nasser’s Egypt which talked a lot about Arab socialism and provide some welfare.

The USSR provided a rationale for patronising welfare and repression which had independent economic developmental prospects; it was grudgingly tolerated by the poor because it was better than outright repression with no welfare by those such as the US supported and/or installed regimes like Mobuto’s Zaire or Pinochet’s Chile.

These arguments had some force while the USSR existed; the neo-liberal offensive, led by the US and Britain, was additionally kept at bay by working class resistance and defence of the welfare states in the advanced metropolitan countries. When the British miners were defeated in 1985 and the USSR fell in 1991 history was supposedly ‘ended’ (Fukuyama) by these dual and closely related defeats suffered by the world working class in terms of the triumph of the free market over social justice.

Few doubt that Russian President Vladimir Putin’s rejection of liberalism is the worst of both worlds. The USSR welfare state is gone so the loss of democratic rights has no compensatory factors to soften the blow. He statements are unalloyed reaction:

“There is also the so-called liberal idea, which has outlived its purpose. Our western partners have admitted that some elements of the liberal idea, such as multiculturalism, are no longer tenable. When the migration problem came to a head, many people admitted that the policy of multiculturalism is not effective and that the interests of the core population should be considered – although those who have run into difficulties because of political problems in their home countries need our assistance as well. That is great, but what about the interests of their own population, when the number of migrants heading to western Europe is not just a handful of people, but thousands or hundreds of thousands? … the liberal idea presupposes that nothing needs to be done. The migrants can kill, plunder and rape with impunity because their rights as migrants must be protected. What rights are these? Every crime must have its punishment.” [19]
His reactionary stance enabled hypocritical bourgeois commentators to attack him. EU President Donald Tusk slammed Putin’s comments, saying he “strongly disagreed” with the Russian leader. Speaking from the G20 summit in Osaka, Japan, Tusk said: “Whoever claims that liberal democracy is obsolete also claims that freedoms are obsolete, that the rule of law is obsolete and that human rights are obsolete.” These are “essential and vibrant values” for Europeans, he added. “What I find really obsolete are authoritarianism, personality cults, the rule of oligarchs, even if sometimes they may seem effective.” [20]

**Statement of revolutionary principles**

As we have seen above the overthrow of capitalism requires both a defence of workers democratic rights and a statement of revolutionary principles. Trotskyism is revolutionary socialism. It affirms with Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky its confidence in the socialist and communist future of humanity. We defend four key principles of revolutionary socialism:

1. In the future communist society, the level of the productive forces, freed from the death grasp of the antiquated and grossly destructive economic and political system called capitalism, will rise exponentially to produce the super-abundance of life’s necessities in planned production for human need. This is possible only on a global scale, by the victory of world revolution. Then we can obtain from each according to his or her ability and to each according to his or her needs.

2. We recognise that the global class struggle consists in the life or death confrontation between the last two remaining great classes, the capitalist class now guided by the global hegemon, US finance capital and its allied subordinate imperialist powers and their associated transnational corporations, and the global working class organised in national sections whose class consciousness is determined in large part by this world-wide class struggle.

3. To make a socialist revolution the working class must overthrow the capitalist states in their separate national redoubts by mass mobilisations and insurrection with an internationalist perspective and replace them with workers’ states based on democratic workers’ councils/soviet and workers’ democracy to suppress the inevitable counter-revolution of private capitalist private profit against socialist planned production for the satisfaction of socialised human need. In Marxist terminology this is called ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat’.

4. With Marx we affirm that the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working
classes themselves. No peasant-based or invading ‘Red Army’ or bureaucratic decrees by left Labour/Social Democratic governments with Enabling Acts can substitute for this. As Marx observed in *The German Ideology*:

Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.

These four principles in summation are:

1. The necessity to raise the level of wealth to superabundance to satisfy all human need by planned production on a global scale,
2. The class character of the era of imperialism consists of two remaining great classes, the capitalist/imperialist and the working class/proletariat,
3. The indispensable need for workers’ councils/soviets and workers’ democracy to suppress the capitalist class, the real meaning of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and
4. The self-emancipation of the class to achieve social and economic equality.

**Conclusion**

We can see from this that the terrible muddle Comrade Rogers has gotten into over rights in the USSR is a confused, partial capitulation to the neoliberal ideological offensive of imperialism itself and a partial ideological capitulation to Stalinism’s socialism in a single country. He also fails to distinguish between the revolutionary, progressive violence of the oppressed and the reactionary, repressive violence of the oppressor. We will never equate the violence of the slave to break his or her chains with the violence of the slave owner to keen them enslaved. Similarly, with the counterposed violence of oppressed and oppressor nations and the class struggle itself.

He fails to assess the loss of democratic rights in the context of the loss of the revolutions in Germany, Italy, Hungary, etc. He fails to assess the necessary emergence of a bureaucracy in circumstances of universal want where famine and cannibalism made its appearance at the end of the Civil War in 1921-2 and in the forced collectivisation famine of 1932–33.

And he implicitly endorses the explicit Stalinist rejection of world revolution and capitulation to imperialist pressure in the Popular Front from 1935.

The struggle for human liberation is contested by those who call themselves Marxists. The Stalinist view is that a national elitist and privileged bureaucra-
can deliver to the masses via state-controlled planning with little regard for human rights or democracy.

The production of superabundance, the material precondition for human liberation, is only possible on a global scale. Stalinist ‘socialism in a single country’ (North Korea!) is even more unthinkable now. The Marxist aspiration is world revolution and one world planned economy producing for human need. That is the difference between a civil regime of rights which presupposes inequality and a human regime of real economic and social equality based on the production of the superabundance of wealth, which Marx outlined in *The German Ideology*. [21]

Notes


[4] Nick Rogers, 5.08.2010, *Communist transition, Nick Rogers discusses the transition to communism in the context of the CPGB’s ‘Draft programme’*, https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/830/communist-transition/


[8] Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage*
The German Ideology

Marx: Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.


[9] See Mike McNair, 8/8/2019, Widening frame of debate, where he denies the revolutionary character of the Bolsheviks as opposed to the German Social Democrats: https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1263/widening-frame-of-debate/


[18] Ibid.


[20] Ibid.