

# Class Warrior

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## Russia, China, and the Unfinished Permanent Revolution



2015 Henan Chinese steelworkers strike

*Facing a chronic global crisis of capitalism and intensifying inter-imperialist rivalry between the US and China blocs, the most urgent task facing revolutionaries today is to provide program for a new Trotskyist international that can lead workers in the struggle to defeat nationalism and imperialism and to the victorious socialist revolution. At a public meeting in London on 11 April 2015 the question of Russia and China as imperialist powers is being debated by the Liaison Committee for the Fourth International (LCFI) and the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT). We of the Liaison Committee of Communists (LCC) argue that the centrist method of both tendencies cannot provide the answers workers need. We argue that both the LCFI and RCIT revise Lenin on imperialism and nationalism. In summary, both turn Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution into a petty bourgeois program adapting to bourgeois democracy.*

### **Centrism and Social Imperialism**

Centrism as we understand it is a tendency on the revolutionary left that vacillates between the Marxist program and opportunist adaptation to the bourgeoisie. It functions to divert workers from revolutionary

consciousness and action. In our view the material roots of post-war centrism in the Trotskyist movement are the petty bourgeoisie of the imperialist countries. This is what we define as social imperialism. While it originates in the imperialist countries, it becomes expressed in the semi-colonies as national Trotskyism. *Social Imperialism*

is fundamentally the political program of the imperialist labour aristocracy adapting to imperialism on the material basis of relatively privileged living standards. *National Trotskyism* is the reverse side of this coin, the political program of the semi-colonial petty bourgeoisie who adapt to bourgeois nationalism on the basis of material rewards flowing from the defence of the popular front regimes.

As Trotsky lamented in the years just before his death, the crisis of Marxism was reflected in the [abandonment of dialectics](#), and its substitution by empiricism and pragmatism. These latter are idealist philosophies that reflect the surface reality of capitalism, the alienated exchange relations which in the imperialist countries are expressed as relatively high living standards. Both the LCFI and RCIT originated in tendencies that broke from Trotsky's dialectic method as a result of their materialist roots in the imperialist petty bourgeoisie. Neither tendency has recognised nor completely broken with these historic roots as we will show.

In the case of *Socialist Fight*, its roots are in the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) under Healy. In reacting against Pabloism which liquidated the party into Stalinism, Healy liquidated the proletarian party into social democracy in the imperialist countries, and the radical parties of the national bourgeoisie in the semi-colonies. While the Pabloites adapted to the labour bureaucracy oriented to the Soviet Union, the Healyites adapted to the anti-communist Labour Parties and anti-communist 'Third World' populist leaders.

Below we show that *Socialist Fight's* program today represents this particular brand of social imperialism, adapting to Bonapartist dictators such as Gaddafi, Assad and Putin as the enemies of US imperialism. It subordinates workers to Anti-imperialist United Fronts (AIUF) with bourgeois leaders in league with imperialism.<sup>1</sup> It is even worse when it regards Russia and China as oppressed states (semi-colonies or sub-imperialist) and calls for an AIUF against US imperialism! This for us explains why the LCIF social imperialist method continues to reinforce national Trotskyism upon the Latin American members of the LCFI

and the Parity Committee so that popular front regimes like that of the PT in Brazil are defended as part of an AIUF with Russia and China against US imperialism.

In the case of the Austrian *Revolutionary Communist Organisation for Liberation* (RKOB) the mother section of the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT), its historical roots were in a factional split from the state capitalist Cliffite tendency in Britain in 1975. In summary, our position is that the factional split with the Cliffites in 1975 which led to the formation of the LRCI in 1989 was an incomplete break with Cliffism. Its programmatic statement on the workers states [The Degenerated Revolution](#) in 1982 defined degenerated workers states as a "dual state" with workers property relations in contradiction with bourgeois norms of distribution which were the basis of the bureaucracy's privileges.



*Yeltsin stands on tank with capitalist restorationists.  
LRCI/Workers Power supported Yeltsin in 1991.*

This meant that when [put to the test by Yeltsin in 1991](#), the League for the Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) backed bourgeois democracy represented by Yeltsin against the Stalinist dictatorship opposed to Yeltsin. According to [The Degenerated Revolution](#), political revolution was a

struggle against the bureaucracy's defence of bourgeois distribution relations leading to overthrow of workers production relations. Under the pressure of imperialist public opinion against the Stalinist bureaucracy the LRCI blocked with the pro-imperialist restorationist Yeltsin against the Stalinist military command instead of blocking with workers in the defence of workers property against both Yeltsin and the military.<sup>2</sup>

While coming from different traditions, in breaking from Trotskyism and the transitional (or dialectic) method, both tendencies, in adapting to social imperialism, end up in the camp of imperialism. This is evident because the revolutionary agency of the working class is always subordinated to the petty bourgeois program. It is always conditioned by the mechanistic or schematic method of the popular front in which sections of the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie guide workers through

the struggles for bourgeois democracy, in particular national self-determination. For both tendencies national self-determination as a bourgeois democratic right is always 'progressive' even if it is a counter-revolutionary 'democratic dictatorship' of imperialism.

### **National Self-Determination**

We see social imperialist adaptation as a fundamental break from permanent revolution which states that in the epoch of imperialism bourgeois democratic rights can only be won and defended by proletarian revolution - that is by 'workers' democracy'. *In other words the democratic revolution in the epoch of imperialism can no longer be spoken of as the 'bourgeois national democratic' revolution. The formation of new capitalist nation states can only serve the interests of bourgeois imperialism and the unfinished tasks of that revolution cannot be realised other than by the proletarian revolution.*<sup>3</sup>

So the LCFI regarded Gaddafi's rule in Libya as a genuine expression of self-determination against imperialism despite Gaddafi's role in serving US imperialism and emerging Chinese imperialism. The LCFI denied the agency of the rebels fighting Gaddafi as an agent of imperialism by painting them as CIA agents or jihadists. Today the rebels are fighting both the US puppet Hefter and the newly branded Islamic State (IS) in Libya. The logic of this has escaped the LCFI because it cannot imagine that Arab and other masses in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are capable of carrying through permanent revolution against both imperialism and against the reactionary Islamic jihadists who are the agents of imperialism. One key aspect of social imperialism is its Eurocentrism, expressed today as Islamophobia.

The RCIT was on the right side in Libya in supporting the revolutionary agency of the rebels. They called for the defense of Gaddafi from NATO, like the LCFI, but did not call for the rebels to form an AIUF with Gaddafi against NATO, unlike the LCFI, since Gaddafi was attacking the revolution. Only the revolutionary brigades can open the permanent revolution against both imperialism and its national dictator. Like the LCC they called for the revolution to fight on two fronts, against Gaddafi, and against NATO and its stooge the National Transitional Council. The permanent revolution has since stalled in Libya but so has imperialism which is unable to defeat the resistance and find a new bourgeois regime that can replace Gaddafi. This stalemate can only be overcome and the permanent revolution completed in Libya with the revival of the Arab revolution led by the workers' and poor

peasants' armed resistance in Syria and Palestine, supported by internationalist workers.

However, the RCIT's slavish application of the bourgeois democratic schema as progressive can be seen in Egypt when the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces (SCAF) dismissed the Muslim Brotherhood, elected to power on a reactionary constitution that defended the military regime. The Muslim Brotherhood was a weak Islamic bourgeoisie of the bazaar seeking to replace the dominant military fraction. The RCIT called this dispute between two fractions of the bourgeoisie a coup against 'bourgeois democracy' and an 'historic defeat' for the working class when the election of the Muslim Brotherhood did nothing to advance the interests of the working class. This was proven by the millions of workers who marched against it. Such 'bourgeois democracy' was in reality a reactionary bourgeois regime seeking to appease imperialism and imposing a theocratic barrier to revolution. Its removal meant that the SCAF was now seen openly as the power base behind the Mubarak regime and that it had always been the dominant fraction of the national bourgeoisie.

*What the national revolution in MENA proves beyond question is that democratic rights are only in the interest of the working class if they actually advance the struggle for proletarian revolution. In the current crisis of imperialism there is no bourgeois democratic halfway house that workers must defend since the very act of doing so is to take the side of the counter-revolution. The same applies to the semi-colonial struggles elsewhere in the world. We will concentrate here on the struggles in Latin America since in this continent, in our view, Trotskyism is in a much stronger position against Stalinism and Social Democracy than in Asia and Africa. The barrier to revolution on this continent is renegade Trotskyism!*

### **Latin America**

In Latin America (LA) the permanent revolution was subordinated to national self-determination. The fate of permanent revolution can be captured in one word - populism. The impact of the social imperialism on the 4<sup>th</sup> International after Trotsky's death was to abandon permanent revolution and lock 'national Trotskyism' into the left wing of the popular front. The IEC sent [SWP member Sherry Mangan](#) to Argentina in 1941 to unify the different Trotskyists groups. He succeeded in creating a united organisation but his 'eclectic' method of downplaying national oppression as a 'secondary question' only confused the understanding of the program of permanent revolution. The Argentine Trotskyists continued

to be split between those reducing the national question to socialist revolution, and those succumbing to national Trotskyism and joining popular fronts with bourgeois nationalists like Peron.<sup>4</sup> This explains why most Latin American Trotskyists put the national struggle against US imperialism before class politics. In one country after another, the working class has entered popular fronts with alien classes to fight imperialism, inevitably facing defeat at the hands of military, usually inspired or backed by the US. *The Trotskyist program of the working class leading the struggle for national independence requires class independence from those classes that are in alliance with imperialism.*

Most of the Latin American tendencies remain more or less trapped in national Trotskyism insofar as the main enemy is not capitalism but the United States.

*We discovered this first hand in the [internal fight](#) we had in the Fraccion Leninista Trotskista Internacional (FLTI) in 2009-10 over the question of [Chinese imperialism](#).*

While we proved that China was accumulating capital despite its semi-colonial exploitation by the established imperialist powers we could not convince the FLTI that it was possible for an ex-workers state to become imperialist. We put this

down to the incomplete break of the FLTI in its founding section the Democracia Obrera (LOI-CI) of Argentina with the national Trotskyism of Moreno. This was the inverted social imperialism of US pseudo Trotskyism which presents a unipolar world in which US hegemony is an insuperable barrier to semi-colonies emerging as rival imperialist powers.

We can see why it is easy for the LCFI to form a Liaison Committee with groups that see the world as dominated by only one imperialist power, and are blinded to the huge impact that Russian and Chinese imperialism is having on Latin America, in particular the [restoration of capitalism in Cuba](#). *The LCFI continues the tradition of social imperialism in 'colonising' Latin American groups that adapt the semi-Pabloite version of the AIUF in which a section of the semi-colonial national bourgeoisie*

*is defended as the 'lesser evil' against US imperialism. Permanent Revolution for these groups means an alliance with the 'progressive' bourgeoisie and running left cover for the popular front.*

### LCFI in Latin America

The LCFI has recently formed a Parity Committee (PACO) with a number of left groups in Brazil. The LCFI plays the leading role as its positions on [Libya](#), Syria, Ukraine, etc., are adopted by the PACO. *We are proposing here that the social imperialism of the LCFI is finding a corresponding echo in the incomplete break with national Trotskyism of these groups.* Let us quote the Coletivo Lenin (CL) on the members of the PACO who are now producing a common journal. We will then run through the positions on the important questions that relate to permanent revolution vs national Trotskyism.



*Brazil right-wing rallies against the government on March 15th, 2015. Dilma popular front government leads to growth of the right-wing and fascists.*

*“The FDT, Press organ until then the comrades of the Communist League, comes to 22 and five years of existence, it is now journal Joint Committee, an international alliance of organizations and militant communist workers, composed of the [Communist League](#), [Lenin Collective](#), [Resistance Revolutionary People](#), [Marxist space](#) and also by*

*the Liaison Committee for the Fourth International, which comprises the [Socialist Fight](#) (Socialist Struggle), the UK, and the [Militant Tendency Bolshevik](#), Argentina.”*

The Communist League is a founding member with Socialist Fight of the LCFI. It leads the PACO in Latin America. The [statement put out by the PACO](#) on the mobilisation of the March 15th pro-coup demonstration against the PT states:

*“As signaled since 2014, there is a coup movement in all Latin American countries that make up commercial and political alliance with the Russian-Chinese bloc. The Yankee and European imperialism are on the offensive over the resumption of spheres of influence and territory lost in the 2008-2009 crisis to the Eurasian bloc; and to resume its market positions and prevent the political and economic rise of China, has been focusing on manufacturing coup*

*d'états and civil wars, as seen in Ukraine, Middle East, Paraguay and Honduras. In this context, the coup in Brazil would be a way to resume the geopolitical space in Latin America."*

We can see here clearly that the PACO is endorsing the line of the LCFI that Russia and China are sub-imperialist states, yet at the same time the US and EU is prepared to unleash *coup d'états* to regain

"spheres of interest and territory lost ...to the Eurasian bloc." With the current threats of coups in Venezuela and Brazil we can see how easily the default position of social imperialism and national Trotskyism pressures workers back into supporting the popular front.

***But how does imperialism lose spheres of interest to the "Eurasian bloc" without Russia and China emerging as imperialist rivals?***

The short answer from the LCFI seems to be that the threat to the US is not coming from newly emerging imperialist states, but a global anti-imperialist bloc of states commonly referred to as the BRICS but clearly centred on the "Eurasian Bloc" of Russia and China. The US is determined to impose its hegemony totally in the spheres where this bloc has some influence. Politically, since the leading BRICS are "sub-imperialist" they must be defended against the US bloc. This leads to a position of defense of Russia and China in wars with the US – the basic LCFI line.

*This global AIUF leads to a return to national Trotskyist popular front politics nationally as a 'lesser evil' to US imperialism. This is confirmed by the Joint Statement of the Communist League (LCFI) and Coletivo Lenin (PACO) calling for a vote for the PT in the second round of the Presidential Elections. The LCFI justified this position in a recent [article](#) about the defection of one of its members, Laurence Humphries, to the RCIT:*

*"Laurence's final complaint is that the Liga Comunista and the Coletivo Lenin (whom he does not mention) advocated a vote for Dilma Rousseff, the Workers Party leader, against Aécio Neves in the Presidential election and the RCIT man in Brazil wanted us to cast a null vote. Considering that*



*BRICS leaders rally*

*the masses would have faced a direct agent of US imperialism if Neves had won as opposed to a victory for Dilma which maintained at least a measure of national independence and defence of workers' rights (as in the Yeltsin, Putin dichotomy above) it is criminally irresponsible not to take the principled anti-imperialist united front stance that they did."*

Furthermore, on the question of the threatened coup d'état, the PACO [statement](#) calling for mobilising on the streets on March 13th (against March 15th) says the power of workers in the streets is necessary because the PT and PCdoB Government do not have the power to resist further austerity or to defeat a coup. There is no statement that in this 'united front' against a *coup d'état* revolutionaries have a duty to condemn the popular front for trapping workers in parliament and preparing the way for fascism. For example it accuses the fake left of Unified Socialist Workers Party (PSTU), Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL,) etc. for a 'political error' in its 'third way' policy of abstaining from the March 13th protest against the coup. Yet in protesting the coup threat it fails to call on those with illusions in the PT to demand that it break from the popular front. It is waiting for the "conditions to mature" for those with illusions in the "bourgeois and manipulative" policies of the government to break from the PT. The danger is that "mature conditions" may not arrive before the popular front death trap springs on the workers. Thus the popular front is depicted as the 'lesser evil' and not a trap that must be 'sprung' by the proletariat before it can be snap shut by a fascist coup d'état.

How is it that other groups have joined the LCFI in the PACO around this line which adapts to the popular front? Let's take the example of the Coletivo Lenin which began its life in 2007 with the [Manifesto of the Collective Luiza Mahim](#). It became the Coletivo Lenin in 2009 when it produced [a program](#) under the influence of the IBT.<sup>5</sup> The Coletivo Lenin's [new program](#) (2011 to today) reflects a break from the IBT's ultra-left position on the national question but runs the risk of an opportunist swing back to national Trotskyism. As we have seen the concept of "sub-imperialism" extended from Brazil, India, etc., to Russia and China by the LCFI means calls for revolutionary

defence of the BRICS in wars with US imperialism.

*This leads to an adaptation to the popular front at home in defence of BRICS and/or Bolivarian 'socialism'. Thus as noted above, the CL advocated a vote for the PT in the second round because it was the lesser evil to the Brazilian right backed by the US against the BRICS and Bolivarian bloc. We conclude that because CL refuses to accept the reality that Russia and China are, or can be, imperialist rivals to the US led bloc,*

*the LCFI is continuing to 'colonise' Latin American comrades as national Trotskyists – today in a worldwide popular front with the BRICS bloc against US imperialist hegemony. The LCC began its existence in a split with the FLTI precisely over this question in 2009/10 and we have continued to argue that unless Latin American comrades recognise Russia and China as imperialist, they will remain trapped in national Trotskyism as the subordinate inversion of pseudo Trotskyist social imperialism.*

### RCIT in Latin America

In Latin America what we see is the method of the LRCI/LFI inherited by the RCIT. We argued above that this semi-Cliffite method fetishises 'bourgeois democracy' so that the concept of permanent revolution becomes stageist in practice. It defends popular front parties against military dictatorship in Egypt and [Thailand](#). The workers must go through the democratic stage in preparation for the socialist stage. The Workers States still have a 'dual state' state form of bourgeois distribution relations on top of workers property! Therefore political revolution in defence of workers property requires the overthrow of Stalinism by bourgeois democracy! The LRCI held that the counter-revolution was not complete in the 'Moribund' workers states until workers property was replaced by capitalist market relations. Imperialism bombs Yugoslavia and creates new nation states in [Bosnia](#) and Kosovo!

*This is social imperialism. The workers lead the fight against feudalism and imperialism but they do so by reproducing the fetishised social relations of bourgeois democracy as a precondition for socialist revolution.*



*Lenin and Trotsky on Second Anniversary of the Russian Revolution. The Russian Revolution was the first test of Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution.*

We define 'democracy' today as concerned only with 'workers democracy'. Lenin talked of the epoch of the bourgeois 'national democratic' revolution as the formation of states unifying national markets. In the epoch of imperialism where monopoly capital dominates, nations and the ideology of nationalism are reactionary forces that divide the international proletariat. National oppression in the imperialist epoch has only one historic solution, the socialist republic within a

world-wide union of socialist republics. This was the goal of the Bolsheviks before the Russian Revolution was isolated and bureaucratised. It was the program of the healthy Fourth International while Trotsky lived. Unconditional defence of the Soviet Union as part of the world revolution would usher in the epoch of the 'international proletarian revolution'.

In Latin America the RCIT method is for the AIUF against the US bloc *and* the Russia/China bloc against the default national Trotskyists position of a continental popular front with the Bolivarians and the BRICS against US imperialism. However, because of its social imperialist method of fetishising bourgeois democracy, the RCIT is pressured to adapt to the national Trotskyist popular front. So in its [recent statement](#) on the threatened coup d'état the RCIT Brazilian section did not call for opposition to the coup to defend bourgeois democracy to advance workers democracy.

*Revolutionaries had to call for workers to mobilise against the coup, and against the popular front government. The clarion call of Trotsky in the Transitional Program was "break with the bourgeoisie!"* The only way for workers to take advantage of bourgeois parliament in the epoch of imperialism is to use it as a revolutionary forum to break reformist workers from bourgeois parliament. This cannot be done while reformist parties are part of popular fronts with the bourgeoisie. There is no way to smash fascism without breaking workers from the popular front that strangles the workers struggle against fascism. This cannot be done in stages, first defending bourgeois democracy against the coup, and then second, smashing the popular

front.

According to the RCIT:

*“For workers, what is of least importance is the supposedly democratic formality; but what is essential for them is the political struggle and the class interests hiding behind appearances.*



Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain. Trotsky warned of popular front paving the way for fascism.

***From this perspective, what is at stake here and now is the replacement of a reformist Popular Front government with a government of bourgeois sectors most directly linked to the US and European imperialism. Thus, these sectors are, by their very nature, freer to abrogate more workers' rights than the PT could possibly do. Among the objectives of the more right-wing sector are to: increase the profits from surplus value; lower workers' pensions; privatize the only still partially state-owned banks (Bank of Brazil and Caixa Economica); lower the measly minimum wage of just 300 dollars; increase privatization of oil reserves in Pré-Sal Petróleo and consequently fully privatize Petrobras; deepen the anti-worker reforms of social security; cancel the major- and medium-importance rights achieved by organized labor (such as abolishing or decreasing the thirteenth salary paid in December as a Christmas bonus, unemployment insurance, maternity leave, etc.).*** [Our Emphasis]

While the RCIT calls for independent workers mobilisation without giving any “political support” to the Government or appealing to the institutions of the state it *does not insist that workers break from the popular front to build their independent struggle.* It states that workers cannot remain neutral in a fight between the popular front and a right wing coup on the basis that the popular front is the ‘lesser evil’ because the program of the rightwing coup would be much worse than that of the austerity attacks of the Government on workers. Workers therefore must form a “united front” within an AIUF (actually ‘popular front’ of the Bolivarians and BRICS against US imperialism) against a coup before they can free themselves from the PT bloc and break with the bourgeoisie!

*This position breaks with Trotsky's permanent revolution where workers fight independently to defeat both imperialism and the treacherous national bourgeoisie that acts as its agent. The weapons of workers facing an imperialist*

*backed coup are the workers councils, militias, the general strike and the insurrection. A military bloc with a popular front government against a right wing coup such as the Provisional Government in Russia 1917 must be based on the armed independence of the soviets only for the purpose of breaking the popular front because it was a death trap not merely a ‘lesser evil’.* <sup>6</sup>

Thus at the same time it is adapting to the *practical defence* of a “reformist popular front”, the RCIT tries to *theoretically break* the popular front by convincing Latin American comrades that Russia and China are imperialist powers. This is difficult, as the almost universal objection is that Russia and China are not, and cannot become, imperialist. Following Lenin they say that in the epoch of imperialism, no semi-colony can become imperialist. Today they now generalise that position in a non-Leninist fashion to include former workers states which have been defeated and restored as capitalist semi-colonies, or have perhaps become ‘sub-imperialist’ at most.

In a [recent exchange](#) with the *Corriente Socialista Revolucionaria - El Topo Obrero* -CSR (Venezuela) and *Partido de la Causa Obrera* PCO (Argentina) the RCIT argued the evidence that Russia and China were imperialist, and that there was no universal law against capitalist semi-colonies becoming imperialist. There were special conditions under which Russia and China were able to make a transition from former workers states to new imperialist state, but this was nothing exceptional. We commented on the RCIT letter:

*...the argument loses clarity and force when you try to show that any country under special circumstances can*

*become imperialist. This has the effect of over-riding the lawful necessity that a country must be 'independent' from imperialism to emerge as a new imperialist country. Of course 'independence' must mean 'economic independence' from semi-colonial exploitation. This is the sticking point for the LA [Ed.: Latin American] comrades who see that Japan was always independent and the other countries who were not, like the US had to fight wars of national liberation, or emerged like Norway and Czechoslovakia as small imperialists as fallout from the re-partition of the imperialist world then under way. But since WW1 no oppressed country has become imperialist except via the sui generis route of Russia and China.*

*The LA [Ed.: Latin American] comrades are correct therefore to say that with the onset of the imperialist epoch when the world is divided that countries without economic independence can only become so via permanent revolution. And this is our strongest argument. Since in both Russia and China the bourgeoisie was overthrown and independence from imperialism won (albeit that was not the Maoist's intention) and this independence was not sacrificed by the capitalist counter-revolution." [Personal communication]*

In other words the Leninist theoretical objection of the comrades of the CSR and PCO (and also of the FLTI who made the same argument against us in 2009) is correct, that once the world economy is divided between imperialist powers, there is no prospect that any colony or semi-colony can break out of its dependent status except through permanent revolution. The last time any new imperialist powers emerged was during WW1 as the result of the military re-partitioning of the world. Japan was already imperialist before the war and increased its sphere of interest as a result of the war while Czechoslovakia declared its independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, both as allies of the victorious imperialist powers.

The RCIT is therefore wrong to deduce that new imperialist powers could emerge since WW1 on the basis of:

*"...an important shift in the production of capitalist value from the old imperialist countries of the North to the South. We have seen the economic as well as political and military decline of the leading imperialist power, the US, as well as that of Japan and the EU. Under such conditions, is it so surprising that new imperialist powers emerge and fill the void?"*

This is fundamentally wrong on two counts. First, the shift in value production from North to South in the post WW2

period is a totally non-Marxist and non-Leninist conception of the world economy. This ignores that from the onset of the imperialist epoch value production in the 'South' was and still is largely owned by the finance capital of the 'old' imperialist powers of the 'North'. Second, with the concentration and centralisation of capital in this epoch, it does not follow that the decline of some existing imperialist powers must call forth new ones. The imperialist powers will contest one another and the pecking order will change during and after wars, but no new imperialist powers have made the transition from capitalist semi-colony since WW1. We have [argued this](#) is the reason that the so-called 'sub-imperialist' powers in the BRICS such as India, Brazil and South Africa can never be more than privileged semi-colonies.

The point being missed here is that imperialism sets up relations between oppressor and oppressed states and that the extraction of super-profits does not allow the oppressed states to accumulate sufficient value to conduct anti-imperialist wars to assert their economic independence from the oppressor states except by means of permanent revolution.

*Therefore, the rise of China and Russia as new imperialist powers does not break the rule of permanent revolution – [it proves the rule!](#) It is consistent with what Lenin and Trotsky wrote about both imperialism and workers states. Thus the Latin American comrades (not only them!) will only be convinced of this if they can be shown that *Russia and China have become imperialist powers precisely because they opened the permanent revolution, through wars of independence from imperialism, and the overthrow of the national bourgeoisie to become 'workers states', albeit with incomplete permanent revolutions. The degeneration of the Russian revolution and the creation of bureaucratically degenerated states at birth after WW2 halted the permanent revolution, preventing it from completing its task of building healthy workers states. The failure to complete the permanent revolution led directly to the counter-revolutionary restoration of capitalism.**

## **Russian and Chinese imperialism**

The position of the LCFI on Russia and China is that they are sub-imperialist and must be defended against the US imperialist bloc. If you read [the article](#) by *Socialist Fight* on Russia it's clear that it falls back on empirical evidence of who owns the flows of surplus value in and out of Russia. Its argument is that Russia (and by extension China) has not accumulated sufficient capital to require massive export of capital because US finance capital dominates these

economies. This is a bald reference to Lenin's theory where export of capital is the key feature of imperialism. On the other hand for the RCIT, Russia and China are imperialist on the same criteria, because Russian and Chinese state capitalism dominates the economy, not US finance capital. And, moreover, there is nothing stopping other states from following Russia and China providing the necessary conditions are present.

By the same token there is nothing in the LCFI method to prevent Russia and China becoming imperialist if the facts of ownership of surplus value change. It seems that the LCFI shares a similar analysis with the RCIT despite disagreeing over the results. Nations can become imperialist if conditions allow an over-accumulation and export of capital. The fact that they disagree on their conclusions come down to which empirical facts they select as critical in the outcome. This empiricist method is a feature of petty bourgeois Marxism and ignores the deeper dialectic and transitional method of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky.

*Most importantly they are empiricist readings of Lenin's theory of imperialism.* We will show here how [Lenin's theory, correctly understood](#), allows us to claim that new imperialist countries cannot arise unless they have been able to escape the semi-colonial oppression of the existing imperialist countries to become economically independent. We will then prove that it is consistent with Lenin's theory that only countries that have been able to meet those conditions since the First Imperialist War (WW1) are those that went through permanent revolution to become workers states.

In his *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin [drew heavily on Marx](#) to theorise the transition from competitive capitalism to the epoch of imperialism in which the major developed capitalist economies were forced to counter the Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall (TRPF) by exporting capital to the colonial and semi-colonial world. This created a new form of state monopoly capitalism – or imperialism – that was parasitic upon the world economy growing at the expense of other nations, creating relations of dominance between oppressor and oppressed states, and ultimately acting to destroy the forces of production in depressions and wars.

This was the 'iron law' of *Capital's* unwritten volumes on *international relations* and the *world market* as summarised as a "popular outline" 50 years later by Lenin. By this point, imperialism could only cannibalise itself through economic and military wars so that the oppressor states grew more centralised and concentrated and the oppressed states grew

relatively weaker and deprived. The question of whether oppressed states could become imperialist therefore did not arise. The divided capitalist world could be re-divided but only among the strong, never the weak. Unless, of course, permanent revolutions forced the 'redivision' of the capitalist world by the creation of a socialist "sphere of influence."

As we know, victorious socialist revolutions did overthrow the national bourgeoisies and break from imperialist economic control though not from imperialist political and economic encirclement and warfare. Isolated from the world market and the law of value, the workers states developed the forces of production beyond that possible for capitalist semi-colonies. However, because the workers states were forced to rely on their own resources and the resulting bureaucratic caste failed to plan efficiently, they did not develop the forces of production to the level possible with workers control of the socialist plans. Economic stagnation forced the parasitic caste to reintroduce the market and restore capitalism. But conversion of the bureaucracy into a state capitalist class did not allow Western imperialism to overturn all the gains of the workers state. Despite opening up to imperialist finance capital the 'red bourgeoisie' retained control over the economy and took advantage of investment and new technology to launch domestic capitalist production.

Thus there was no re-colonisation of the ex-Workers States to force them back to semi-colonial status. Not because like Russia they were never colonies, or were imperialist before the revolution, or like both Russia and China inherited strong centralised states and dominated former soviet republics or internal colonies, or because of the decline of the US, and so on. None of these conditions (or all of them together) is sufficient to allow new imperialist powers to emerge. They could equally have created the perfect conditions for the parasitic re-colonisation and breaking up of the former workers states by the existing imperialist powers! This indeed was the imperialists' goal in numerous wars, hot and cold, to defeat the workers states from the 1917 Revolution until their collapse in the 1990s. And they succeeded with a vengeance in the former Yugoslavia.

*No. The necessary condition was and is the **unfinished permanent revolution** that broke from imperialism to create a socialist 'sphere of interest' but which could not prevent the bureaucracy from staging a counter-revolution and turning itself into a class of state capitalists to exploit the developed forces of production (raw materials, technology, labour, etc.) under the law of value and compete successfully in the world market. Now functioning as independent capitalist*

*countries the accumulation of capital unleashed the laws of capitalist development including the overaccumulation of capital that required capital export and the emergence of new imperialist powers.*

## Conclusion

It is our view that the conditions that led to the emergence of Russia and China as new imperialist powers in the last two decades are consistent with Lenin's analysis of imperialism 100 years ago. Lenin's method was that of Marx's *Capital*, completing the unfinished volumes made concrete in the heat of the First Imperialist War. Second, it is consistent with the fact that the Russian Revolution opened the revolutionary 20<sup>th</sup> century, 'repartitioning' the world economy by opening the *permanent revolution*, and creating a 'Soviet' sphere of influence. The 'economic independence' of the workers states that followed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century allowed them to survive the counter-revolutionary defeat of capitalist restoration so that the new bourgeoisies were able to transform Russia and China into new imperialist powers forming a counter-hegemonic bloc to the US hegemonic bloc. To repeat, not as a bloc of semi-colonies and sub-imperialist states that are a progressive alternative to US imperialism, but a rival imperialist bloc that in challenging US hegemony, conditions the course of revolution and counter-revolutionary struggles today.

The *unfinished permanent revolution* that succumbed to capitalist counter-revolution must be reopened on the basis of the historic gains that were not destroyed. In the workers states the forces of production leapt beyond those of capitalist semi-colonies before being halted by bureaucratically planned stagnation and the capitalist counter-revolution. The gains of the new forces of production have been forced back into the shell of the old decrepit capitalist relations driving an explosive contradiction today manifested in the heating up of the global rivalry between the two major imperialist blocs.

*Permanent revolution against imperialism today must be led by the international proletariat capable of making the revolution to smash the imperialist powers and create a united states of socialist republics of the world. In the process our most important task is the formation of a new Leninist Trotskyist international that revives the dialectic method and program of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky and eliminates the barriers of social imperialism and national Trotskyism and so advances to the victorious socialist revolution! Back to dialectics! Break with social imperialism and national Trotskyism!*

March, 2015

Liaison Committee of Communists

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## (Endnotes)

1 The [Fourth Congress](#) interpreted the AIUF as a temporary military alliance between communists and 'national-revolutionary' (bourgeois) forces in the colonies and semi-colonies. Trotsky argued that 'national-revolutionary' forces could include national dictators or fascists, provided they were in a military struggle against imperialism.

However, to call for an AIUF with Gaddafi when he was attacking the popular revolution and appealing for peace with imperialism is a criminal travesty of revolutionary communism.

2 As we have been at pains to point out to the RCIT for some years now, this flaw in its method is reproduced in its program today. While revolutionary workers defend bourgeois democratic rights they do so only when that defence advances the interests of the socialist revolution. *Yet the RCIT has a tendency to turn the permanent revolution into a slavish defence of bourgeois democratic rights, when that defence is clearly not in the interests of workers but serves the bourgeois counter-revolution.* Defending bourgeois democracy against the Stalinist military was not an unconditional defence of workers property in Soviet Russia, nor in Yugoslavia. Today the RCIT regards [Bosnia and Kosovo](#) as expressing the national rights of national minorities when in reality these 'nations' were the creations of imperialism (NATO and the UN) in the enforced break-up of Yugoslavia. Here the Leninist support for national self-determination is turned on its head as the support for the creation of new NATO capitalist protectorates! (See the [LCC letter to RCIT of June 2012](#))

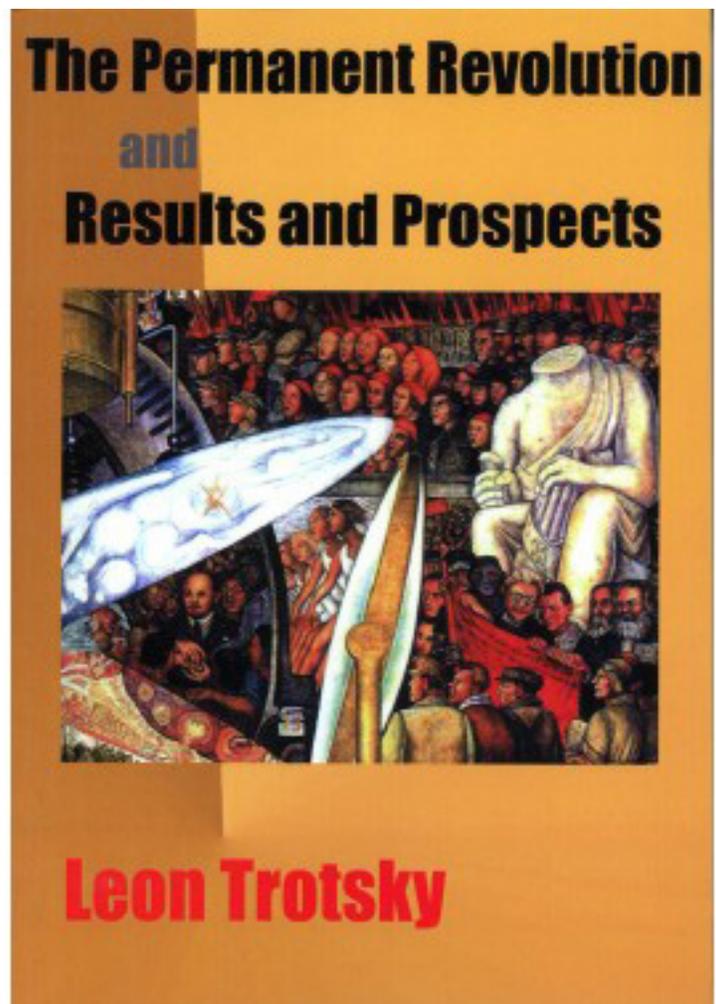
3 Lenin's position on the National Question was a tactic to break workers from nationalism to socialism. National oppression is a reality that must be overthrown on the way to socialism. Revolutionaries must defend the right to national self-determination to prove to nationally oppressed workers that national oppression is ultimately class oppression. It is a democratic demand in the Transitional Program that can only be realised by Permanent Revolution. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jan/x01.htm>

4 A similar thing happened in Indo-China when the IEC during WW2 did not insist that the Trotskyists break with the Stalinists and their popular front politics. The revolution would only happen in the colonies or semi-colonies if it first went through a democratic national revolution in which the Stalinist model of the 'bloc of four classes' would ensure a break from imperialism. The lesson of China where the proletarian vanguard was destroyed by the Kuomintang was lost. One could adapt to this Stalinist stageism by either tailing the Stalinists or by tailing the anti-communist national bourgeoisies.

5 This program was an ultraleft swing away from the popular front to an ultra-left version of national Trotskyism. The Coletivo Lenin adopted the IBT position of dual defeatism in the Malvinas wars; Brazil as sub-imperialist; and dual defeatism in the Arab-Israeli wars; all

reducing the national question (and national Trotskyism) to the schematic proletarian revolution. This was the IBT loyally applying its 1941 SWP-US social imperialism to Brazil. Against national Trotskyism and the popular front its answer was do not fight for national independence from US imperialism and challenge the US labor aristocracy to take sides, but have a proletarian revolution now.

6 The Bolsheviks offered to fight alongside the Kerensky popular front Provisional Government against Kornilov in August 1917 (Trotsky's phrase was "use them as a gun rest") only on the basis of their armed independence since they knew that Kerensky would prove himself to be in league with Kornilov. The Bolsheviks were already calling for all power to the soviets and there was no reference to the Provisional Government as 'the lesser evil' to Kornilov. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/aug/30.htm>



## 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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