

# Lecture four: Marxism, history and the science of perspective

## Part 5

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*This is the fifth part of the lecture “Marxism, history and the science of perspective,” delivered by World Socialist Web Site Editorial Board Chairman David North at the Socialist Equality Party/WSWS summer school held August 14 to August 20, 2005 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The lecture will be posted in six installments. Part 1, 2, 3 and 4 were posted on September 14-17.*

*This is the fourth lecture that was given at the school. The first, entitled “The Russian Revolution and the unresolved historical problems of the 20th century” was posted in four parts, from August 29 to September 1. The second, entitled “Marxism versus revisionism on the eve of the twentieth century,” was posted in three parts on September 2, 4 and 5. The third, entitled “The origins of Bolshevism and What Is To Be Done?” was posted in seven parts from September 6 to September 13. These lectures were also authored by David North.*

Lenin addressed this weakness in his analysis of the Russian Revolution. What were the historical tasks, Lenin asked, associated with the great bourgeois revolutions? That is, what were the critical problems of social and economic, as well as political, development that were tackled in the bourgeois revolutions in earlier historical periods?

The main tasks undertaken by these bourgeois revolutions were the liquidation of all remnants of feudal relations in the countryside and the achievement of national unity. In Russia, it was the first problem that loomed largest. The carrying through of the bourgeois-democratic revolution would entail a massive peasant uprising against the old landlords, and the expropriation and nationalization of their large estates.

Such measures, however, would not be welcomed by the Russian bourgeoisie, which, as a property-owning class, did not relish nor seek to encourage expropriation in any form. Though the nationalization of the land was, in an economic sense, a *bourgeois measure* that would in the long term facilitate the development of capitalism, the bourgeoisie was too deeply rooted in the defense of property to support such a measure. In other words, the Russian bourgeoisie was not to be relied on to carry through the bourgeois revolution. In Russia, therefore, the bourgeois revolution of the early twentieth century would have a social dynamic and assume a political form fundamentally different from the earlier bourgeois revolutions. The tasks of the bourgeois and democratic revolutions could be carried through only in the face of a determined counterrevolutionary alliance of the tsarist autocracy and the big bourgeoisie, on the basis of an alliance between the Russian working class and the dispossessed and impoverished peasant masses.

The question remained: what was to be the political form of the state power that would emerge from this great worker-peasant upheaval? In what amounted to a clear break with Plekhanov’s perspective of a more-or-less conventional bourgeois-democratic parliamentary regime, Lenin proposed a new and very different political outcome to the overthrow of the autocracy: *a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry*.

With this term, Lenin indicated that he foresaw a government of the most radical democratic character, formed on the basis of an alliance of the Russian Social Democracy and the most politically radical representatives of the peasantry. However, he denied

explicitly that such a revolutionary democratic regime would attempt to carry out measures of a socialist character. He wrote in March 1905:

“If Social Democracy sought to make the socialist revolution its immediate aim, it would assuredly discredit itself. It is precisely such vague and hazy ideas of our ‘Socialist-Revolutionaries’ that Social Democracy has always combated. For this reason Social Democracy has constantly stressed the bourgeois nature of the impending revolution in Russia and insisted on a clear line of demarcation between the democratic minimum program and the socialist maximum program. Some Social Democrats, who are inclined to yield to spontaneity, might forget all this in time of revolution, but not the Party as a whole. The adherents of this erroneous view make an idol of spontaneity in their belief that the march of events will compel the Social Democratic Party in such a position to set about achieving the socialist revolution, despite itself. Were this so, our program would be incorrect, it would not be in keeping with the ‘march of events,’ which is exactly what the spontaneity worshippers fear; they fear for the correctness of our program. But this fear ... is entirely baseless. Our program is correct. And the march of events will assuredly confirm this more and more fully as time goes on. It is the march of events that will ‘impose’ upon us the imperative necessity of waging a furious struggle for the republic and, in practice, guide our forces, the forces of the politically active proletariat, in this direction. It is the march of events that will, in the democratic revolution, inevitably impose upon us such a host of allies from among the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry, whose real needs will demand the implementation of our minimum program, that any concern over too rapid a transition to the maximum program is simply absurd.”[17]

*To be continued*

**Notes:**

[17] *Permanent Revolution* (London: New Park, 1971), p. 240.

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