

# ISSE Introductory Reading List

## **Friedrich Engels - Socialism: Scientific and Utopian - 1880**

In this popular pamphlet, Engels describes the greatest accomplishment of Marxism - that of transferring Socialism from the realm of abstract morality and basing it upon the laws and potentialities of the world as it exists. He explains the relationship between previously-existing types of socialism, which ultimately considered the reorganization of society as a question of appealing to the better sentiments of the ruling class, and that of Marxism, which recognizes the material basis for the antagonism between capitalist and worker, and, with the aid of this knowledge, seeks to reorganize society through the class struggle.

## **Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels - The Communist Manifesto - 1848**

The manifesto, written in the months prior to the revolutionary wave of 1848 and distributed throughout Europe, is the first definitive statement of the methods and aims of the Communist movement. It introduces the materialist conception of history and of the class struggle, explaining how bourgeois society, having sprung up amid the formation of a world market, simplifies and intensifies class antagonisms by creating the proletariat, a class which has no property aside from its own ability to labor. It explains and refutes objections to the basic demands of the Communist movement, and offers remarkably concise yet profound statements of many of the fundamental tenets of Marxism—for instance, the state as a "committee for managing the affairs of the entire bourgeoisie," internationalism ("workingmen have no fatherland"), and the role of the political party: "Every class struggle is a political struggle." It closes with an analysis and criticism of other parties, socialist ideologies, and oppositional tendencies.

## **Vladimir Lenin - Karl Marx (Granat Brothers Encyclopedia entry) - 1914**

This work, written from July-November 1914 for publication in one of Russia's most popular encyclopedias, contains a general overview of the Marxist doctrine as well as a biographical sketch of Marx. It is perhaps the most comprehensive overview of Marxism in so short a document, and is infused with Lenin's distinctive polemical vein; here, as in all of his writings, Lenin defends the international and revolutionary essence of Marxism at a time when the majority of the leaders of the Second International were contorting Marx's teachings into a doctrine of reformism lining up behind their ruling classes in the First World War.

## **Karl Marx - Wage-Labor and Capital (1891 revised edition) - 1849**

This book began in 1849 as a series of leading articles by Marx in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, seeking to concretely explain to the working masses the basic questions of political economy. When the document was to be re-issued for political-educational purposes in 1891, Engels made modifications to the text to incorporate Marx's economic discoveries of the 1850s-1860s, e.g. as in the Critique of Political Economy and Capital. The 1891 edition explains profit as the difference between the price a capitalist receives for the products of his workers' labor and the price he paid them (their wage) for their labor-power, which they sold him on the labor market. It explains the variations in wages and profits via the theory of commodities and markets. It sets out the trend towards increasing mechanization of production, proletarianization of the population, and ruination of the middle class.

## **Karl Marx – Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy - 1859**

In this short excerpt, Marx outlines the relationship between objective and subjective factors in the class struggle that come out of his study of political economy. He identifies the necessity for revolution in the conflict between the development of the productive forces and property relations that, having initially facilitated the construction of these productive forces, "become their fetters."

### **David North - Marxism Versus Revisionism on the Eve of the 20th Century - 2005**

This short lecture deals with the origins and extraordinary growth of the German Social Democratic Party in the second half of the 19th century, its ideological struggles, and the forces that led the party to grant war credits to the German Reich on August 4, 1914. The origins and ideology of Revisionism, most clearly expounded by Eduard Bernstein, are analyzed in relation to the Party's abandonment of revolutionary principles and practice. The abandonment of the revolutionary perspective led the way not to some dreamy pacifism, but to extraordinary bloodshed; the party was responsible for the murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, and obstinately anti-revolutionary policy left it, together with the Stalinist KPD, powerless to prevent the Nazi takeover in 1933.

### **Vladimir Lenin - What Is To Be Done? (Selections) - 1902**

#### **David North - The Origins of Bolshevism and What Is To Be Done? - 2005**

Lenin's 1902 pamphlet, *What is to be Done?*, discusses the relationship between the revolutionary party and the working class. The document was written against the Economists, those Russian "Marxists" claiming that workers had no use for politics, and that the revolutionists must limit themselves to commenting on trade-union matters. In contrast to this, Lenin stresses that the party must fight to bring its political perspective to the workers, and in so doing seek to make the working class conscious of its own role in history. Lenin argues that the fundamental workings of society, and the political tasks that spring from it, can be understood only with the set of analytical tools developed by Marx and Engels; the revolutionary party must not only present these tools to the workers, but show how they are used in the practical analysis of day-to-day political events. David North's 2005 lecture analyzes the historical significance of this book and the manifestation of its ideas in the program of the SEP.

### **Leon Trotsky - In Defense of October - 1932**

Delivered before a meeting of Social-Democratic students in Copenhagen in November 1932, this is a concise presentation of the main driving forces of the Russian Revolution. Trotsky defends the gains of October 1917, explains how it occurred ("Why did the proletarian revolution conquer in one of the most backward countries in Europe?") and addresses those who doubt the revolution because of its great costs ("Has the October Revolution stood the test of time?"). He illustrates the role of the peasantry, the national question, the war, and the Bolshevik Party; but more broadly, he evaluates the role of the October Revolution not only in Russian and European, but world history.

### **Leon Trotsky - Lessons of October - 1924**

In this document, written just months after the failure of the Communist Party to take power in Germany in the fall of 1923, Trotsky analyzes the struggle that unfolded within the Bolshevik Party from February 1917 through the October Revolution of 1917. Just as the leaders of the October Revolution were steeped in the lessons of the Great French Revolution, the Revolution of 1848, the Paris Commune, and the 1905 Revolution in Russia, Trotsky urges that the international workers' movement undertake a serious study of October 1917. This history shows that the fundamental instrument of proletarian revolution is the party, and Trotsky analyzes the crisis that almost inevitably arises within the revolutionary party in the transition from preparatory revolutionary activity to the direct struggle for power. This work was met with furious attacks by Stalin, Zinoviev, Kamenev and other Bolsheviks who fought against the Left Opposition led by Trotsky.

### **Leon Trotsky - Three Conceptions of the Russian Revolution - 1940**

Written as an appendix to Trotsky's projected biography of Lenin, and included in his unfinished biography of Stalin, this work contrasts the perspectives of the Russian Revolution advanced by Plekhanov, Lenin and Trotsky. He outlines the Menshevik position ("The social relations of Russia have ripened only for the bourgeois revolution"); Lenin's pre-1917 theory of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" (which Lenin discarded when he wrote his April Theses in 1917); and his own theory of permanent revolution, "the original sin of Trotskyism." He also traces Stalin's attitude to the debates as they unfolded, and shows how the theory of "socialism in one country" was a bureaucratic reaction against the October Revolution.

### **Leon Trotsky - Report on the World Economic Crisis and the New Tasks of the Communist International - 1921**

In this brilliant report, Trotsky introduces the concept of the curve of world capitalist development and uses it to elucidate the revolutionary potential of the world situation. He details the titanic politico-economic shifts unleashed by World War I – the ruination of Europe, the development of industry especially in the US and Japan, and the unstable financial trickery that had permitted the re-establishment of a certain capitalist equilibrium in post-war Europe. Against those, both inside the USSR (the Stalinists) and outside, who drew pessimistic conclusions concerning the revolutionary potential of the world situation, Trotsky explained the tensions building up inside the capitalist system: the risk of a crisis of overproduction and the continued development of militarism – a remarkable anticipation of the twin crises of the Depression and World War II.

### **Leon Trotsky - Culture and Socialism - 1927**

This work concisely explains the fundamentals of a Marxist approach to culture and art, explaining the link between the growth of technological culture and mass acquisition of artistic and spiritual culture in the 1920s USSR. Trotsky begins by discussing the different components of culture: technology and material culture, philosophy, the natural sciences, and the arts and humanities. After polemicizing against views—then promoted by the growing Soviet bureaucracy under the name "proletarian culture"—that art from previous epochs of mankind's history should be disregarded due to their dangerous class influences, Trotsky explains the material realities of the early USSR which the Marxist movement had to confront in order to allow a general rising of culture in the population.

### **Leon Trotsky - Stalinism and Bolshevism - 1937**

This is one of the clearest rebuttals to those claiming that Stalinism is the natural outcome of Marxism and Bolshevism. In responding to anarchists, Mensheviks and other critics who were using Stalin's Moscow Trials as a pretense to attack Bolshevism, Trotsky presents the theoretical heritage which only the Fourth International was able to defend: "an analysis of the imperialist epoch as an epoch of wars and revolutions; of bourgeois democracy in the era of decaying capitalism; of the correlation between the general strike and the insurrection; of the role of party, soviets and trade unions in the period of proletarian revolution; in its theory of the soviet state, of the economy of transition, of fascism and Bonapartism in the epoch of imperialist decline, and finally in its analysis of the degeneration of the Bolshevik party itself and of the soviet state."

### **Leon Trotsky - The Transitional Program (The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International) - 1938**

This is the founding document of the Fourth International, published in September of 1938. It was previously drafted by Trotsky and discussed widely by sections of the Trotskyist movement. Assessing the historical lessons of the betrayal of the working class by both the Second and Third Internationals, Trotsky outlines the principles upon which to build a new proletarian leadership for the struggles against world imperialism and Stalinism. The strategic task of the upcoming period—"the overcoming of the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard"—is linked to the program of transitional demands that embodied the experience of the revolutionary movement to this point.

### **Leon Trotsky - A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition in the SWP - 1938**

Trotsky deals here with a skeptical-eclectic petty-bourgeois tendency that had arisen in the US Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the late 1930s, led by James Burnham and Max Schachtman. After reviewing the theoretical issues over which disagreements had first arisen—notably the materialist dialectic, to which Trotsky gives a masterful introduction—Trotsky reviews the organizational and political consequences of Burnham's and Schachtman's desertion of Marxist theory: e.g. the growth of factionalism, and of ambiguous and abstentionist positions on the question of the USSR and international politics.

### **James P. Cannon - A letter to Trotskyists Throughout the World - 1953**

#### **David North - The Heritage We Defend - Chapters 17 and 18 - 1986**

By the early 50s, parts of Fourth International, demoralized by Stalinist domination of working-class movement in Europe and postwar conservatism of US trade union movement, began to seek an accommodation with the bureaucracies that dominated the workers' movement. Led by Michel Pablo of the Fourth International's International Secretariat in Paris, they began carrying out bureaucratic attacks against the orthodox Trotskyists in the Fourth International's different national sections. In 1953, as their assault on Marxism helped underwrite a betrayal of a surge of strikes and social struggles on the European continent, US SWP leader James Cannon wrote an open letter to the world Trotskyist movement exposing the political orientation of Pablo and his co-thinkers, and calling for a thorough political and organizational break with them. The above-noted excerpts from *The Heritage We Defend*, David North's history of the Trotskyist Movement in the postwar period, provide the historical background of Cannon's *Open Letter* and analyze its historical significance.

### **David North - Notes on the Political and Economic Crisis of the World Capitalist System and the Perspective and Tasks of the Socialist Equality Party - 2008**

David North delivered this report at a national aggregate meeting of the Socialist Equality Party in January 2008. The document appraises the condition of capitalism and the current geopolitical political order, on the eve of what looks to become the greatest US and World economic downturn in decades. North frames the foreclosure and credit crisis within the general decline of American Imperialism, explaining that the current bout of economic instability is a symptom of the breakdown of the political order established in the postwar period. The crisis of capitalism will spark an intensification of the class struggle in every country, presenting ever more urgently the tasks of the SEP and ISSE.