

Chapter 12: The Struggle against Imperialist Aggressions and Wars: The Programme of the early Communist International and the Fourth International

As we have shown in this book the epoch of imperialism is an epoch of enormous sharpening of contradictions between the classes and states. This is why it is an epoch which is marked by conflicts – including wars – between imperialist powers and semi-colonial countries (or until 1991 also Stalinist-ruled degenerated workers states) and also between rivalling imperialist powers.

In his famous book on imperialism, Lenin emphasized that “...an essential feature of imperialism is the rivalry between several great powers in the striving for hegemony...”.⁶⁴¹ This is – as Lenin pointed out – inherently related to the tendency of the imperialist powers to subjugate the colonial and semi-colonial people: “Imperialism means the progressively mounting oppression of the nations of the world by a handful of Great Powers.”⁶⁴²

For this reason, imperialist pressure, conflicts and wars are inevitable in this epoch, as Lenin stated repeatedly: “...sums up, as it were, modern monopolist capitalism on a world-wide scale. And this summary proves that imperialist wars are absolutely inevitable under such an economic system, as long as private property in the means of production exists.”⁶⁴³ And the conference of the Bolshevik Party in Bern in 1915 declared similarly: “Under capitalism, particularly in its imperialist stage, wars are inevitable.”⁶⁴⁴

However, Marxists don’t put all wars in the same box. There are wars and wars. There are wars between rival oppressors and there are wars between oppressors and oppressed. Hence, there are reactionary, unjust wars and progressive, just wars. Marxists support those who wage a just war and fight against those who wage an unjust war.

Friedrich Engels and V.I. Lenin were big admirers of the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, who summarized the essence of any military conflict by the famous words: “War is a mere continuation of policy by other means.”⁶⁴⁵ In his book *On War* Clausewitz stressed and elaborated this point:

“War is an instrument of policy; it must necessarily bear its character, it must measure with its scale: the conduct of war, in its great features, is therefore policy itself, which takes up the sword in place of the pen, but does not on that account cease to think

⁶⁴¹ V. I. Lenin: *Imperialism. The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) ; in: LCW Vol. 22, p. 269

⁶⁴² V. I. Lenin: *The revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (1915); in: LCW 21, p. 409

⁶⁴³ V. I. Lenin: *Imperialism. The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) ; in: LCW Vol. 22, p. 190

⁶⁴⁴ V. I. Lenin: *The Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. Groups Abroad* (1915); in CW 21, p. 162

⁶⁴⁵ Carl von Clausewitz: *Vom Kriege* (1832), Hamburg 1963, p. 22; in English: Carl von Clausewitz: *On War*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1946/1946-h/1946-h.htm>

according to its own laws.”⁶⁴⁶

Translating this thoughtful words into the sphere of Marxist science, this means that the central question to determine the character of conflicts and wars is therefore to identify the political class interests of the classes which are participating in a given conflict or war. *For Bolshevik-Communists conflicts and wars are therefore a mere continuation of class struggles by other means.*

From such a class analysis of the participating classes follows the position which Marxists take in a given conflict or war. Our attitude is not determined in a given struggle between classes by whether it is being pursued by peaceful or military means. Reactionary goals are reactionary regardless of whether they are pursued with political, economic or military means. The same applies in reverse for progressive class interests.

Marxists were therefore never against war in principle but have distinguished between wars which serve the interests of the oppressed classes and those which only served the ruling classes. Wars between imperialist ruling classes or between reactionary ruling classes pursuing their anti-people interests are reactionary, unjust wars. The working class must oppose both camps and fight for the transformation of the imperialist war into a revolutionary civil war against the ruling classes. In wars between imperialist ruling classes and semi-colonial people or between reactionary ruling classes and oppressed classes or nationalities, such wars are unjust from the point of view of the imperialist/reactionary camp. But they are just wars from the point of view of the semi-colonial respectively oppressed people's camp.

i) Reactionary Wars and Conflicts between Imperialist States

The RCIT has summarized its position on imperialist wars in its programme in the following way:

*“In imperialist wars, we reject any support for the ruling class. We advocate the defeat of the imperialist state. Our slogan is that of Karl Liebknecht: “The main enemy is at home”. Our goal is to transform the imperialist war into a civil war against the ruling class.”*⁶⁴⁷

Hereby we have condensed the modern Marxist position on imperialist wars as it was elaborated by Lenin and the Bolsheviks at the beginning of the First World War. They consistently refused any form of support for the defense of the imperialist fatherland and stood for the defeat of their own ruling class. Because of this the Bolsheviks were often called “*porashenzy*” which means in Russian “defeatist”. Later the Bolshevik strategy against imperialist wars was termed “*revolutionary defeatism*”.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁶ Carl von Clausewitz: *Vom Kriege* (1832), Hamburg 1963, p. 221; in English: Carl von Clausewitz: *On War*, <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/OnWar1873/Bk8ch06.html#B>

⁶⁴⁷ RCIT: *The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto*, p.62

⁶⁴⁸ For a closer look on the elaboration of the Bolshevik concept of defeatism we refer to a study which the author of these lines has published some years ago in German language: Michael Pröbsting:

The core idea of Lenin's approach was the struggle against the imperialist wars through the methods of the class struggle and the utilization of the crisis caused by the war for the revolutionary overthrow of one's own bourgeoisie. Hence the unequivocal stance for the defeat of one's own government in the war:

*"During a reactionary war a revolutionary class cannot but desire the defeat of its government. This is axiomatic, and disputed only by conscious partisans or helpless satellites of the social-chauvinists."*⁶⁴⁹

This approach was combined with the struggle for the socialist revolution. Hence the central slogan of the Bolsheviks was the "civil war":

*"The conversion of the present imperialist war into a civil war is the only correct proletarian slogan,"*⁶⁵⁰

Lenin explained: *"Our task is not to force the cannons to be silent, but rather to make them serve our ends."*⁶⁵¹

This approach was not driven by a desire for a particularly radical phrase. It was rather deduced from the insight that an imperialist war inevitably leads to the full exertion of all forces in the society and that a military defeat creates a grave crisis for the ruling class. In other words, an imperialist war poses the question: which class is ruling? Who decides, if the war is continued or not, if butter or cannons are produced, if peace is concluded or not? The experience of both World Wars – the creation of revolutionary situations in East- and Central Europe 1918-23 and in Greece, France and Italy 1944-45 – confirms this thesis of the Bolsheviks. Hence Marxists always emphasized that imperialist wars can lead to revolutions and revolutionaries must do everything in their power to lead the masses towards the conquest of power.

Lenin and Zinoviev formulated this thought in their book *"Socialism and War"* in 1915:

"The war has undoubtedly created a most acute crisis and has immeasurably increased the distress of the masses. The reactionary nature of this war, and the unblinking lies told by the bourgeoisie of all countries to conceal their predatory aims with "national" ideology are, on the basis of an objectively revolutionary situation, inevitably creating revolutionary moods among the masses. It is our duty to help the masses become conscious of these moods, deepen them and give them shape. This task finds correct expression only in the slogan: convert the imperialist war into a civil war; all consistently waged class struggles in wartime and all seriously conducted "mass-action" tactics inevitably lead to this. It is impossible to foretell whether a powerful revolutionary movement

Umwandlung des imperialistischen Krieges in den Bürgerkrieg. Die Strategie Lenins und der Bolschewiki; in: Revolutionärer Marxismus Nr. 40 (2009), pp. 58-94, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/lenin-und-der-imperialistische-krieg>

⁶⁴⁹ V.I. Lenin: The Defeat of one's own Government in the Imperialist War (1915); in: LCW 21, p. 275

⁶⁵⁰ V.I. Lenin: The War and Russian Social-Democracy (1914); in: LCW 21, p.34

⁶⁵¹ This is how Leon Trotsky quoted Lenin in a report from the Zimmerwald conference in September 1915; see Leon Trotsky: The Work of the Zimmerwald Conference (1915); in: Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International, New York 1986, p. 331

will flare-up in connection with, during or after the first or the second imperialist war of the Great Powers; in any case it is our bounden duty to work systematically and unswervingly in this direction."⁶⁵²

While imperialist wars are thoroughly reactionary, civil wars as the war of the oppressed against the ruling class are highly progressive and deserve the full and unconditional support of every revolutionary, as Lenin and Zinoviev emphasized:

*"We regard civil wars, i.e., wars waged by an oppressed class against the oppressor class, by slaves against slaveholders, by serfs against landowners, and by wage-workers against the bourgeoisie, as fully legitimate, progressive and necessary."*⁶⁵³

The Bolsheviks concretized their strategy of transforming the imperialist war in a civil war in the following way:

*"The following should be indicated as the first steps towards converting the present imperialist war into a civil war: (1) an absolute refusal to vote for war credits, and resignation from bourgeois governments; (2) a complete break with the policy of a class truce (bloc national, Burgfrieden); (3) formation of an underground organisation wherever the governments and the bourgeoisie abolish constitutional liberties by introducing martial law; (4) support for fraternisation between soldiers of the belligerent nations, in the trenches and on battlefields in general; (5) support for every kind of revolutionary mass action by the proletariat in general."*⁶⁵⁴

Based on these principles, Marxists took a defeatist position in World War I in both imperialist camps – the Entente powers (Britain, France, Russia, USA) – and the Central Powers (Germany, Austria, Ottoman Empire). This means they put forward in all these countries the slogans of *"The main enemy is at home"*, *"Defeat of their own country is the lesser evil"* and the *"Transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war"*. During World War II, the Marxists – in the person of Trotsky and the Fourth International – took a similar position in the war between imperialist Germany and Japan on one hand and imperialist Britain, France and USA on the other hand. (In the war between imperialist Germany and the degenerated workers state USSR however, the Fourth International called for the defense of the later.)⁶⁵⁵

As we have described above such a position of revolutionary defeatism on both sides would also be the correct tactic in a possible war between imperialist Japan and/or USA on one side and imperialist China on the other side.

⁶⁵² V.I. Lenin/G. Zinoviev: Socialism and War (1915); in: LCW 21, p.313

⁶⁵³ V.I. Lenin/G. Zinoviev: Socialism and War (1915); in: LCW 21, p.299

⁶⁵⁴ V.I. Lenin: The Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. Groups Abroad (1915); in: LCW 21, p. 161

⁶⁵⁵ See e.g. Fourth International: Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution; Manifesto adopted by the Emergency Conference of the Fourth International in May 1940; in: Documents of the Fourth International, New York 1973, <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1938-1949/emergconf/fi-emerg02.htm>; Manifesto of the Fourth International: For Defense of the Soviet Union!, August 1941, Fourth International, New York, Volume II No. 8, October 1941, pp. 229-31, <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1938-1949/ww/1941-ww02.htm>

ii) Just Wars and Resistance of the Oppressed

As we said above, there exist also other types of wars, wars between imperialist ruling classes and semi-colonial people or between reactionary ruling classes and oppressed classes or nationalities. In such wars, revolutionaries stand for the victory of the semi-colonial and/or oppressed people's camp respectively. The RCIT has summarized its position on such types of wars in its programme in the following way:

*"In military conflicts between imperialist states and Stalinist degenerated workers states (such as Cuba or North Korea) or semi-colonial peoples and states, we call for the defeat of the former and for the victory of non-imperialist side. We defend the latter, even if they are led by bourgeois (e.g. Saddam Hussein), petty-bourgeois (e.g. Hamas in Palestine, Taliban in Afghanistan) or Stalinist-bureaucratic (e.g. the Communist Party of Cuba) forces. At the same time we desire to break away the working class and the oppressed from these forces and to win them for an independent class policy through the application of anti-imperialist united front tactics. This means putting demands on the existing leaderships for a common struggle against imperialism under our own banners. This principled stance distinguishes authentic Marxism from the Social Democratic, Stalinist and centrist variants of pseudo-Marxism who usually either refuse in a war, to openly call for the victory of the oppressed peoples against imperialism or they confuse military support with political adaption to the semi-colonial regimes (e.g. the pro-Qaddafi left during the civil war in Libya 2011)"*⁶⁵⁶

Again, this is a condensation of the Marxist position as it was elaborated by Lenin and Trotsky. The whole history of mankind has seen such progressive, just wars. For example, the slave revolt of Spartacus against the Romans was progressive, as well as the peasant uprisings of Thomas Münzer or of the Hussites in the 16th century. For the same reason Marx and Engels supported the Northern states against the slave owners in the South in the American civil war in 1861-65 or the uprisings of the Poles against Russian Tsarism in 1830, 1846 and 1863. Lenin and Zinoviev wrote:

*"There have been in the past numerous wars which, despite all the horrors, atrocities, distress and suffering that inevitably accompany all wars were progressive, i.e., benefited the development of mankind by helping to destroy most harmful and reactionary institutions (e.g., an autocracy or serfdom) and the most barbarous despotisms in Europe (the Turkish and the Russian). That is why the features historically specific to the present war must come up for examination."*⁶⁵⁷

This also applies to wars of oppressed nations who fight against the imperialist powers and their stooges. Lenin wrote:

"National wars waged by colonies and semi-colonies in the imperialist era are not only probable but inevitable. About 1,000 million people, or over half of the world's population, live in the colonies and semi-colonies (China, Turkey, Persia). The national

⁶⁵⁶ RCIT: The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto, pp. 62-63

⁶⁵⁷ V.I. Lenin/G. Zinoviev: Socialism and War (1915); in: LCW 21, p. 299

*liberation movements there are either already very strong, or are growing and maturing. Every war is the continuation of politics by other means. The continuation of national liberation politics in the colonies will inevitably take the form of national wars against imperialism.”*⁶⁵⁸

Lenin and Zinoviev conclude from this that it is the highest duty for all Socialists to take the side of the oppressed in such wars:

*“By a ‘defensive’ war socialists have always understood a ‘just’ war in this particular sense (Wilhelm Liebknecht once expressed himself precisely in this way). It is only in this sense that socialists have always regarded wars ‘for the defence of the fatherland’, or ‘defensive’ wars, as legitimate, progressive and just. For example, if tomorrow, Morocco were to declare war on France, or India on Britain, or Persia or China on Russia, and so on, these would be ‘just’, and ‘defensive’ wars, irrespective of who would be the first to attack; any socialist would wish the oppressed, dependent and unequal states victory over the oppressor, slaveholding and predatory ‘Great’ Powers.”*⁶⁵⁹

It was in this same spirit that the Communist International in 1920 called the active support of the national liberation struggle as a duty of every revolutionary in the imperialist states:

*“A particularly explicit and clear attitude on the question of the colonies and the oppressed peoples is necessary for the parties in those countries where the bourgeoisie possess colonies and oppress other nations. Every party which wishes to join the Communist International is obliged to expose the tricks and dodges of ‘its’ imperialists in the colonies, to support every colonial liberation movement not merely in words but in deeds, to demand the expulsion of their own imperialists from these colonies, to inculcate among the workers of their country a genuinely fraternal attitude to the working people of the colonies and the oppressed nations, and to carry on systematic agitation among the troops of their country against any oppression of the colonial peoples.”*⁶⁶⁰

In a speech at the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in 1922, Trotsky stated: *“Every colonial movement, which weakens the capitalist rule in the metropolises, is progressive, because it makes the revolutionary tasks of the proletariat easier to achieve.”*⁶⁶¹

Faced with the lack of support for liberation struggles of the oppressed people by the centrists, Trotsky emphasized this principle of revolutionary anti-imperialism:

“The struggle against war and its social source, capitalism, presupposes direct, active, unequivocal support to the oppressed colonial peoples in their struggles and wars

⁶⁵⁸ V.I. Lenin: The Junius Pamphlet (1916); in: LCW 22, p. 310

⁶⁵⁹ V.I. Lenin/G. Zinoviev: Socialism and War (1915); in: LCW 21, pp. 300-301

⁶⁶⁰ Communist International: Conditions of Admission to the Communist International, approved by the Second Comintern Congress (1920); in: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents. Selected and edited by Jane Degras, Volume I 1919-1922, p. 170

⁶⁶¹ Leo Trotzki: Auszug aus einer Rede zur französischen Frage auf dem IV. Weltkongreß der Kommunistischen Internationale (1922); reprinted in: Jakob Moneta: Die Kolonialpolitik der französischen KP, Hannover 1968, p. 22 (our translation)

against imperialism. A 'neutral' position is tantamount to support of imperialism." ⁶⁶²

Likewise, Trotsky explained unequivocally that the attitude of Marxist revolutionaries towards a war must not be derived from superficial appearances on the level of the political superstructure but must instead focus on the objective character of the classes involved. *It is important but not decisive for the formulation of the correct revolutionary tactic, if a given regime has a more democratic or a more fascistic character, if it is religious or secular, if it uses a more progressive rhetoric or not – what is decisive is its class character, i.e. which classes does it rest on and the which classes do its action serve and respectively strike against.* So taking the example of a war between a semi-fascist Brazil and a democratic Britain, Trotsky elaborated:

"I will take the most simple and obvious example. In Brazil there now reigns a semifascist regime that every revolutionary can only view with hatred. Let us assume, however, that on the morrow England enters into a military conflict with Brazil. I ask you on whose side of the conflict will the working class be? I will answer for myself personally—in this case I will be on the side of "fascist" Brazil against "democratic" Great Britain. Why? Because in the conflict between them it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place double chains on Brazil. If Brazil on the contrary should be victorious, it will give a mighty impulse to national and democratic consciousness of the country and will lead to the overthrow of the Vargas dictatorship. The defeat of England will at the same time deliver a blow to British imperialism and will give an impulse to the revolutionary movement of the British proletariat. Truly, one must have an empty head to reduce world antagonisms and military conflicts to the struggle between fascism and democracy. Under all masks one must know how to distinguish exploiters, slave-owners, and robbers!" ⁶⁶³

On the basis of these principles, Marxists always supported the liberation struggle of oppressed people even if they took place under the leadership of (petty-)bourgeois forces. Naturally they supported only the practical, military struggle without giving an inch of political support for those (petty-)bourgeois forces. Lenin, Trotsky and the Communist International called for the support of Turkey in its struggle against British imperialism and its Greek allies in the years after the end of WWI, despite the fact that Turkey was ruled by the bourgeois, anti-communist regime of Mustafa Kemal Pasha. They also supported the struggle of the Riffian Berbers under the leadership of Abd el-Krim in the 1920s against the Spanish and French imperialists drive to occupy their country. The French Communist Party (PCF) organized a militant anti-colonial mass campaign in solidarity with the Riffians – including a general strike on 12th October 1925. The PCF publicly expressed its support for the

⁶⁶² Resolution on the Antiwar Congress of the London Bureau (1936), in: Documents of the Fourth International, New York 1973, p. 99

⁶⁶³ Leon Trotsky: Anti-Imperialist Struggle is Key to Liberation. An Interview with Mateo Fossa (1938); in: Writings of Leon Trotsky 1938-39, p. 34

Riffians struggle until “*Moroccan soil was completely liberated*” from both Spanish and French imperialists.⁶⁶⁴

Leon Trotsky and the Fourth International continued this revolutionary anti-imperialism. They supported the struggle of the Chinese people against Japanese imperialism in the 1930s and 1940s despite the fact that it was led by the reactionary general Chiang Kai-shek. As we said, practical support for concrete steps against imperialism is obligatory for Marxists. This is relevant for all practical forms which hit the monopoly capitalists including – but not exclusively – military strikes. Hence the Trotskyists equally supported the nationalization of the British owned oil companies by the Mexican Cardenas government in March 1938. Trotsky characterized the expropriation as part of the national liberation struggle of a semi-colonial country: “*Semi-colonial Mexico is fighting for its national independence, political and economic. (...) Under these conditions expropriation is the only effective means of safeguarding national independence and the elementary conditions of democracy.*”⁶⁶⁵

In his balance sheet at the 90 year anniversary of the *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels, Leon Trotsky stressed the duty of the proletariat in the imperialist countries to support the national liberation struggles in the oppressed countries:

*“‘The Communists,’ declares the Manifesto, ‘everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things.’ The movement of the coloured races against their imperialist oppressors is one of the most important and powerful movements against the existing order and therefore calls for the complete, unconditional, and unlimited support on the part of the proletariat of the white race. The credit for developing revolutionary strategy for oppressed nationalities belongs primarily to Lenin.”*⁶⁶⁶

This policy was later continued by Marxists when they supported national liberation struggles without identifying with the policy of its (petty-)bourgeois leaderships. To name only a few examples: one had to support the Algeria and the Vietnamese people’s struggle against the French imperialists as well as the Vietcong’s struggle against US imperialism.

In the war between semi-colonial Argentina and British imperialism on the Malvinas islands in 1982, our predecessor organization – the then revolutionary British group *Workers Power* – called for the defeat of British imperialism and the victory of Argentina. In the first Gulf War in 1991 we Bolshevik-Communists called for the defense of Iraq against the imperialist attack without giving any political support to the Saddam Hussein regime.⁶⁶⁷ Similarly we stand on the

⁶⁶⁴ Quoted in: David H. Slavin: *The French Left and the Rif War, 1924-25: Racism and the Limits of Internationalism*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 26, No. 1, January 1991, p. 10; see also numerous documents from the PCF which are reproduced (in German language) in Jakob Moneta: *Die Kolonialpolitik der französischen KP*, Hannover 1968, S. 42-61

⁶⁶⁵ Leon Trotsky: *Mexico and British Imperialism* (1938), in: *Writings 1937-38*, p. 359

⁶⁶⁶ Leon Trotsky: *Ninety Years of the Communist Manifesto* (1937); in: *Writings 1937-38*, p. 25

⁶⁶⁷ See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *Am Beispiel des Iraks: Anti-Imperialistische Strategie und Taktik*,

side of the Afghan resistance against the imperialist occupiers since 2001 despite being led by the reactionary Taliban forces.⁶⁶⁸ And so we did in Iraq in 2003 and after.⁶⁶⁹ And on the same basis of Marxist anti-imperialism we supported the Hezbollah-led resistance in Lebanon in 2006, the Hamas-led resistance in Gaza in 2008/09 and 2012 against Israel as well as the Islamist-led resistance in Mali against the imperialist invaders from France, the EU and their African allies.⁶⁷⁰

For the Destruction of the Apartheid State Israel!

The oppression of the Palestinian people by the Zionist state Israel is a very important question not only because of its actuality but also since it touches fundamental principles of Marxism. Let us therefore briefly elaborate the position of the RCIT on this question.

We have always supported the national liberation struggle of the Palestinian people. That is why in the struggle between the Palestinians and the Israeli state we are on the side of the former – despite our absolute rejection of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces at the forefront of these struggles (like Hamas). All

ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt (October 1990); Michael Pröbsting: Kampf dem Imperialismus! Verteidigt den Irak!, in: ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt Nr. 32 (January 1991); Michael Pröbsting: Stoppt den imperialistischen Massenmord!, in: ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt Nr. 33 (February 1991); Workers Power (Britain): Working class action to defeat imperialism Victory to Iraq! (1991), <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/working-class-action-defeat-imperialism-victory-iraq>;

⁶⁶⁸ See e.g. Workers Power (Britain): Questions & Answers on the Afghan war (2001), <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/qa-afghan-war>; Michael Pröbsting: Die Lehren aus dem imperialistischen Sieg im Afghanistan-Krieg, in: ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt Nr. 118 (January 2002)

⁶⁶⁹ See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Krieg den Kriegstreibern!, in: ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt Nr. 126 (March 2003); Workers Power (Britain): Iraq: resistance grows to occupation (2003), <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/iraq-resistance-grows-occupation>;

⁶⁷⁰ See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Der israelische Terrorkrieg gegen das libanesische und palästinensische Volk, in: ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt Nr. 144 (August 2006); Michael Pröbsting: Der Libanon-Krieg und die Linke: Pazifistische Linke als verkleidete Diener des Imperialismus, in: Revolutionärer Marxismus Nr. 36 (2006), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/libanon-krieg-und-linke>; Michael Pröbsting: Solidarität mit dem palästinensischen Widerstand, in: BEFREIUNG Nr. 172 (January 2009); Nina Gunić: Islamismus – Was sind seine Ziele und was ist unsere Haltung?, in: BEFREIUNG Nr. 173 (February 2009); Michael Pröbsting: Palästina: Solidarität und Widerstand, in: BEFREIUNG Nr. 188 (June 2010); RCIT: New Wave of Israeli Terror against Gaza: Support the Palestinian Resistance! Defeat the Zionist killing machine! Statement from 15.11.2012, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa/defend-gaza>; Johannes Wiener: Nach dem Waffenstillstand im Gaza: Friede in Palästina? 22.11.2012, <http://www.rkob.net/international/nordafrika-und-der-arabische-raum/gaza-friede>; RCIT: Down with France's Colonial War in Mali! Solidarity with the Resistance! Let's transform Mali into another Afghanistan for imperialism! Fight for a Workers Government based on the Peasants and Poor! For Socialist Revolution in North Africa and the Middle East! Resolution from 19.1.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa/no-to-france-s-war-in-mali>; see also the remarks from the comrades of the *Fracción Leninista Trotskista Internacional* (FLTI) at <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa/flti-remarks-on-mali-resolution> respectively http://www.democraciobrera.org/Art%20aun%20no%20publicados/rcit/declaracion_mali.html; Speeches by Michael Pröbsting and Johannes Wiener at a protest rally on 25.1.2013 in Vienna: Victory to the resistance in Mali against the imperialist troops!, <http://www.thecommunists.net/multimedia-1/mali-rally-25-1-videos-and-pictures>

Palestinians must have the right to return to their homeland. Likewise, the land grab must be reversed and the Palestinians must get their land returned. The return of the displaced people of course means that the Palestinians will constitute the majority of the population.

This shows that Israel is not a “normal” capitalist class state. Its existence as a capitalist state is historically and indelibly intertwined with its existence as a colonial settler state, which can only maintain the expulsions and repression of the original Palestinian population by the means of apartheid and of direct terror. Israel is a capitalist state, whose essence is an indelible merger of class exploitation and national oppression. The abolition of class exploitation, therefore, can only go hand in hand with the abolition of national oppression, and vice versa, and this is possible only through the destruction of the State of Israel as a separate Jewish state. Although Israel is not an imperialist power like those in Western Europe, it is undoubtedly an exceptionally privileged capitalist state, which combines its role as a watchdog of the imperialist interests in the Middle East with the advancement of its own power interests.

We therefore reject the existence of a Jewish state in Palestine because it can only exist as long as the expulsion of the Palestinians continues to exist. Hence we reject a “two-state solution”. This would deny the Palestinians the right of return to their homeland. Likewise, a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza would be reduced to a Bantustan, a dependent de-facto colony of the much richer and more powerful Israel. The State of Israel must be destroyed and be replaced by a secular, workers’ and peasant republic in the whole of Palestine – from the river to the sea. In this state, the Palestinians and all those Jews, who accept the elimination of their privileges in the apartheid state of Israel, can live together equally and peacefully.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁷¹ See on this – in addition to the articles mentioned before which we have published on the various Israeli wars in the last years – the following documents of our movement: MRCl: Theses on Zionism, Israel, Palestine and Arab nationalism (1989), in: Trotskyist International No. 2, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/theses-zionism-israel-palestine-and-arab-nationalism>; Michael Pröbsting: Zur Geschichte des Zionismus: Von Anfang an reaktionär, in: Israel, Zionismus und Antisemitismus. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit den Mythen und Legenden der Antinationalen (2006); Michael Pröbsting: Über den politischen Charakter der Antinationalen, den Holocaust, den Zionismus, in: Israel, Zionismus und Antisemitismus (2006), <http://www.rkob.net/marxistische-theorie/politischer-charakter-antinationale>; Michael Pröbsting: Der Verrat der ‚Linken‘ im Gaza-Krieg. Warum ist Neutralität im Kampf zwischen Unterdrückten und Unterdrückern Verrat und warum scheitern die meisten „marxistischen“ Linken an der Solidarität mit dem palästinensischen Volk, in: Unter der Fahne der Revolution Nr. 4 (2009), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/gaza-krieg-und-linke>; RKOB: After the storming of the Israeli embassy in Cairo: The struggle against the Israeli Apartheid State is an integral part of the Arab Revolution (2011), <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa/israel-and-arab-revolution>; Johannes Wiener: Antinationale: Rassisten im „linken“ Gewand. Was bedeutet Zionismus, ist die Shoah einzigartig und was sind Antinationale? (2012), <http://www.rkob.net/marxistische-theorie/gegen-antinationale>. At this point it is useful to refer to the principled Marxist Antizionists in Israel in the *International Socialist League* around Yossi Schwartz who despite their small size and difficult working condition stood firm against the massive Zionist pressure. Their website can be viewed at <http://www.the-isleague.com>.

Excursus: Capitalism as a unity of economic, political and ideological Spheres

A precondition for a translation of the theory of permanent revolution into revolutionary tactics is a correct assessment of the concrete class composition of capitalist society in the age of modern imperialism. Faced with conflicts between imperialist powers and semi-colonial countries many centrist groups operate on the basis of an apparently Marxist, but in reality backward, unscientific understanding. Consciously or unconsciously *they reduce all political and military conflict in the modern class society to a single contradiction – namely those between capital and proletariat – and view this contradiction mainly from its economic side.* Such a view – which for example is typical for centrist organizations like the CWI or the IMT – really has nothing to do with Marxism and a lot with vulgar economism or, to put it in the words of Lenin, “*imperialist economism*”.

Such a wrong approach completely ignores the fact that capitalism as a social formation can only be understood in its totality – i.e. as the totality of the economic base and the political and ideological superstructure. It is an “*entire totality of the manifold relations of this thing to others*” – to borrow a phrase of Lenin.⁶⁷² Capitalism hence is a political and economic unity of the (class) opposites. It can only be understood as the totality of the economic relations of production and the political, social as well as the ideological superstructure. These different levels are mutually dependent and can only exist in mutual dependence. Capital and thus capitalism presupposes labor which is related to each other and hence is social labor. Therefore, capital can only exist if there is a social regulation and organization of the exchange of commodities and the valorization process of capital. Hence the importance of the state apparatus, laws etc. Furthermore capital can only exist if the workers – as value-creating commodity labor power – are constantly produced and reproduced, in other words if they can maintain their physical wellbeing to be able to work (eating, sleeping, etc.), recover regularly via social activities (leisure, family, etc.) and create new workers through the bearing and nurturing of children.

Karl Marx summarized these relationships in his famous preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

“The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, became the guiding principle of my studies can be summarised as follows. In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general

⁶⁷² V. I. Lenin: *Conspectus of Hegel’s Science of Logic* (1914); in: *Collected Works* Vol. 38, p. 220 (emphasis in the original)

process of social, political and intellectual life."⁶⁷³

As we said already in an earlier chapter, this is why Marx speaks of the *political economy*, not just the economy, and why Trotsky stated bluntly: "*Thus, pure economics is a fiction*". There could be no extraction of surplus value in the economic sphere if there would not also be a bourgeois state apparatus which ensures the according legal relationships and which intervenes, if necessary, with violent means. The imperialist bourgeoisie could not assert its interests in the world market if there would not be states which would secure their interests worldwide with political and military force if necessary (including by means of war and other acts of violence).

Maintaining the conflicting balance of society corroded by class antagonisms would be unthinkable without a finely woven, ideological web that binds the oppressed classes and strata to the ruling bourgeoisie and ensures that they accept to a certain extent their exploitation and oppression. Additionally, the capitalist mode of production itself creates commodity fetishism, i.e. against a background of an increasingly alienated form of work, the commodities produced by the working class itself are not seen as the product of their social labor and hence a social system of production, but are seen only as things which they have no power over.

Given the essence of the bourgeois social formation as the totality of capitalist economy and capitalist political and ideological superstructure, it follows that the class antagonisms of the capitalist order exist and appear at all these levels. Class struggle thus takes place not only on the enterprise level, but also on numerous political and democratic issues (e.g. questions of the constitution, suppression of the right to strike, increase of the surveillance power for the police, oppression of migrants or national minorities concerning their mother language, imperialist wars etc.) as well as on the ideological level (e.g. Anti-Islamic propaganda of the imperialist war-mongers, reactionary propaganda against women rights, against homosexuals etc.).

It is therefore very short-sighted, if imperialist economists like the CWI or the IMT reduce all conflicts to the scheme "Either A or B", i.e. they divide the world according to the rules of formal logic so that all those forces that do not belong to the proletariat, are automatically part of the other camp, the capitalists. With such a mechanistic, un-dialectical method these comrades ignore that capitalism can not be simply reduced to capital and proletariat. First the modern, imperialist capitalism knows – in addition to the capitalists and the proletariat – the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the salaried middle class as well as all the numerous layers in between (the semi-proletarian layers etc.). Secondly, we also have in the imperialist countries a strong stratification within the proletariat: at one pole, the privileged labor aristocracy, and on the

⁶⁷³ Karl Marx: Vorwort zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie (1859); in: MEW, Bd. 13, pp. 9-10; in English: Karl Marx: A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Preface (1859); <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/pol-econ/index.htm>

other pole the mass of the lower layers of the proletariat. Thirdly, one must not forget the division of the world into imperialist and semi-colonial countries, i.e. into oppressing and oppressed nations and thus the division into an imperialist bourgeoisie and a semi-colonial bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie.

Of course from this must not follow another deviation, a form of vulgar anti-imperialism, i.e. if one would support the bourgeoisie of the semi-colonial countries uncritically. The semi-colonial bourgeois quarrels with imperialism not out of a perspective of a classless society, but in order to strengthen its own position for the exploitation of the working class against the foreign bourgeoisie. Therefore, the correct anti-imperialist tactic in such cases can only be that communists support practical actions including military struggles of the semi-colonial bourgeoisie or petty-bourgeoisie when they are resisting imperialism. At the same time, we stress the need for the independent organization of the proletariat of each country. Also the anti-imperialist struggle must not be understood in isolation from the struggle for socialism. Rather, it can only be a real anti-imperialist struggle, if it is integrated from the beginning into the struggle for socialism. In other words, the struggle against imperialism must be integrated into the strategy of permanent revolution; it must be seen as the opening of a whole series of revolutionary upheavals up to the conquest of political power by the proletariat and the establishment of a planned economy.

iii) The Struggle for Class Independence and the Anti-Imperialist United Front Tactic

The intensification of the contradictions between the classes and between the oppressor and oppressed nations in the era of imperialism repeatedly provokes massive resistance from the working class as well as middle-class and sometimes even amongst bourgeois layers in the semi-colonial countries. Moreover, because of the weakness of the organized workers movement, it often happens that petty bourgeois or bourgeois forces constitute the leadership of national resistance movements. Indeed, this was the case in the times when Lenin and Trotsky lived and it is generally also the case today (see e.g. Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka etc.). What tactical conclusions arise from this situation for Marxist revolutionaries?

Revolutionary tactics are derived from the *strategy of independent class struggle*. This means that we advocate the independent class interests and the independent organization of the working class. What is class independence? A clearly and scientific answer to this question is a prerequisite for the development of an appropriate tactic in the class struggle.

Class independence of the proletariat is first and foremost a political category and means the independence the working class from all petty-bourgeois and bourgeois influence and domination. Class independence means the

recognition of the need by the working class of unceasing class struggle against the bourgeoisie; the recognition that it can advance its interests only if it makes itself the leading force in the resistance of the popular masses; that it has to create a political party out of its own ranks instead of subordinating to alien class forces and that it must itself become the ruling class through the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist rule and the creation of a global socialist society. Hence class independence means the struggle against all stooges of the bourgeoisie within the ranks of the workers movement – i.e. the reformist bureaucracy in the trade unions, in social democratic, ex-Stalinist and Stalinist parties – which hinder the working class in its struggle via numerous methods of appeasement, deception and open repression. Likewise, class independence means the political struggle against the bourgeois and petty bourgeois forces that are in the leadership of national resistance movements. The political nature of class independence must necessarily express itself in organizational forms. Therefore class independence means necessarily the struggle for the organization of the proletariat independent from the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy, and therefore the building of grassroots movements in the unions, a revolutionary youth movement, and above all a revolutionary workers party nationally and internationally.

Class independence means for Marxists, as the pioneers of such independence, permanent war against the imperialist bourgeoisie and their stooges. The working class is a class exploited and oppressed by capital. It is therefore exposed to the bourgeois pressure in all areas of life (work place, media, school, etc.). Accordingly, the revolutionary organization must act as a vanguard of the class in order to fight this bourgeois influence at all levels – economic, political and ideological-theoretical.

Such a struggle for class independence includes the application of the united front tactic. Revolutionaries take into account that the masses still have illusions in non-revolutionary forces. When the revolutionaries advocate calls to advance the class struggle – with the formation of action councils, mass demonstrations, occupations, strikes, general strikes etc. – they direct these calls not only to the broad masses of the workers but also to the mass organizations of the class (including their leaderships). The leadership of these organizations must be actively addressed for joint actions. Given the extreme minority status of the revolutionary forces they must seek to participate in mass struggles led by reformists and intervene in these struggles with practical initiatives, a sharp and independent propaganda profile including explaining and warning of the treacherous role of the non-revolutionary leaderships and by putting demands on these leaderships. In doing this the revolutionaries must not give the impression that they themselves believe in the good intentions of the reformist leaders, but that they want to help the masses to make their own experience. The goal of such a united front tactic, as it was developed by the Communist International under Lenin and Trotsky, is to break the influence of the non-

revolutionary forces amongst the masses and to rally them under the leadership of a Bolshevik party.

In the semi-colonial countries and amongst the oppressed people this approach also includes the anti-imperialist united front tactic. This tactic usually focuses on the terrain of minimum or democratic demands – like the struggle against imperialist domination, for national independence and unity, for democracy and democratic rights, against the domination of the domestic industries and markets by imperialist monopolies etc. Revolutionaries seek to draw into such a united front not only the workers' organizations but also those of the petit-bourgeoisie (the peasantry, the small urban property holders, the professionals etc.) and even sections of the national bourgeoisie itself, where even the latter is compelled to resist imperialism by the pressure of the masses.

The possibility of applying the anti-imperialist united front tactic also to sectors of the semi-colonial bourgeoisie is based on the fact that it is – as we already outlined – “*a semi-ruling, semi-oppressed class*” (Trotsky).⁶⁷⁴ In other words there is a material basis for frictions between imperialism and sectors of the semi-colonial bourgeoisie which of course can only be of a temporary nature since against a fighting working class they will join forces.

Exactly because of its capitalist nature, the semi-colonial bourgeoisie has more in common with its big imperialist class brothers and sisters than with the working class in its own country. This is why they can be – at best – only a very temporary and unreliable ally in the struggle against imperialism which will soon stab the workers in the back.

Indeed, most often the petty-bourgeois or bourgeois forces will reject the calls for forming an anti-imperialist united front. Or if they agree to form such a front, they will sooner or later – rather sooner than later – betray it. This is however not an argument against the anti-imperialist united front tactic since this is a general characteristic of the united front tactic. Usually the reformist labor bureaucrats also resist forming united front's with revolutionary forces or they betray it very soon. Let us not forget that it was the social democratic government of Ebert and Noske which ordered the suppression of the Spartacus Uprising and led to the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht in January 1919. But Marxists do not pursue the united front tactic (including the anti-imperialist united front tactic) because they believe it is very likely that either the bureaucracy or the semi-colonial bourgeoisie would be loyal partners in such a united front. They rather do so because these forces often have control over mass organization or state institutions (like the army) in which many workers and peasants have illusions. In order to break such illusions, the bureaucracy and the semi-colonial bourgeoisie must be permanently “bombaraded” with demands for joint actions. Only in this way can these treacherous forces be tested in practice and hence the masses can be supported to shed their illusions by their own experience.

⁶⁷⁴ Leon Trotsky: Not a Workers' and Not a Bourgeois State? (1937); in: Writings of Leon Trotsky 1937-38, p. 70

Hence the goal of the anti-imperialist united front tactic is to advance the independent organization of the workers, peasants and oppressed in action councils or similar forms of soviet-like organization and to break them away from these (petty-)bourgeois leaderships and to win them for the perspective of the socialist revolution.⁶⁷⁵

As all united fronts, the anti-imperialist united front too, must be focused on agreements for practical actions and not joint political programs. And also similarly, the (petty-)bourgeois leaderships will in nine out of ten times refuse to form such a united front. This however does not rob the united front tactic of its importance. Calling these leaderships for joint actions remains an important tactic in order to show the masses our willingness for the joint struggle and to expose these leaders – if they fail to fight – in the eyes of the masses. Joining any practical struggle against imperialism and its reactionary accomplices is an important necessity even if it is led by (petty-)bourgeois forces and even if they refuse any collaboration with the revolutionaries. Only by this can revolutionaries prove to the masses that they are the best fighters for national independence, democracy etc. Only by this can they win the trust of the masses and finally break them away from the rotten leaderships.

The Communist International developed the anti-imperialist united front tactic in its *“Theses on the Eastern Question”* at its Fourth Congress in 1922. It emphasized the progressive nature of the struggle against imperialist domination – even if it takes place under the leadership of (petty-)bourgeois forces:

“The chief task which is common to all national revolutionary movements is to bring about national unity and achieve political independence. The real and logically consistent solution of this question depends on the extent to which such a national movement is able to break with the reactionary feudal elements and to win over the broad working masses to its cause, and in its programme to give expression to the social demands of these masses.

*Taking full cognizance of the fact that those who represent the national will to State independence may, because of the variety of historical circumstances, be themselves of the most varied kind, the Communist International supports every national revolutionary movement against imperialism. At the same time it does not forget that only a consistent revolutionary policy, designed to draw the broadest masses into active struggle, and a complete break with all adherents of reconciliation with imperialism for the sake of their own class domination, can lead the oppressed masses to victory.”*⁶⁷⁶

The Communist International stressed that Marxists must have no illusions in (petty-)bourgeois forces at the top of national liberation movements. They must apply the united front tactic in order to maximize the mobilization power and

⁶⁷⁵ We have summarized our understanding of the anti-imperialist united front tactic in the MRCI Theses: The anti-imperialist united front (1986); in: Permanent Revolution No. 5.

⁶⁷⁶ Communist International: Theses on the Eastern Question, 5 December 1922, Fourth Congress of the Communist International, in: Jane Degras: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents Volume I 1919-1922, pp. 385-386

in order to weaken the influence of these leaderships.

*“The expediency of this slogan follows from the prospect of a prolonged and protracted struggle with world imperialism which demands the mobilization of all revolutionary elements. This mobilization is the more necessary as the indigenous ruling classes are inclined to effect compromises with foreign capital directed against the vital interests of the masses of the people. And just as in the West the slogan of the proletarian united front has helped and is still helping to expose social-democratic betrayal of proletarian interests, so the slogan of the anti-imperialist united front will help to expose the vacillation of various bourgeois-nationalist groups. This slogan will also promote the development of the revolutionary will and the clarification of the class consciousness of the working masses and put them in the front ranks of those who are fighting not only against imperialism, but also against the survivals of feudalism.”*⁶⁷⁷

However, we repeat that a pre-condition for this is the active participation of revolutionaries in these struggles as the most active fighters. Revolutionaries must join these struggles against imperialist dominations, for democratic rights, for national rights etc. where and as they concretely take place. They must not refuse participation in such movements because they are led by (petty-) bourgeois forces (as it is often the case today). Only with such an approach can revolutionaries break the influence of these leaderships and win the workers and oppressed for the class independent policy.

For these reasons communists and later Trotskyists participated in many national and democratic liberation struggles despite the fact that they were led by (petty-)bourgeois forces. In several cases these leaderships even tried to suppress and kill the communists by all means. For example, the Kemal Pasha leadership in Turkey or the Chinese Kuomintang.

Therefore, while Marxists sharply denounced such bourgeois leaderships they supported them insofar as they took concrete actions against the imperialist enemy. The Communist International and later the Fourth International of Trotsky refused a platonic anti-imperialism, i.e. an anti-imperialism which “in principle” supported a given semi-colonial country but refused to apply the united front tactic to the very concrete forces which were at the helm of these struggles. They opposed any political support for the bourgeois forces of a struggle against imperialism, but called for practical support and participation in these struggles even when it was under such bourgeois leaderships.⁶⁷⁸

The Soviet Union supported Turkey under Kemal Pasha in its struggle against British imperialism and its Greek allies. This policy was supported by the Communist International and also defended later by Trotsky. Trotsky also called for the critical but unconditional support of Chiang Kai-shek struggle against the Japanese invaders in the late 1920s and 1930s (despite the fact that

⁶⁷⁷ Communist International: Theses on the Eastern Question, p. 390

⁶⁷⁸ For an elaboration of the anti-imperialist united front tactic and a defense of their application by the Comintern and the Fourth International in German language see e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Am Beispiel des Iraks: Anti-Imperialistische Strategie und Taktik, ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt (October 1990)

the later murdered tens of thousands of communists in 1927!):

*“Quite so: as against imperialism it is obligatory to help even the hangmen of Chiang Kai-shek.”*⁶⁷⁹

The leader of the Fourth International sharply criticised those Ultra-leftists who refused to join an anti-imperialist struggle under a bourgeois leadership on the grounds that this would constitute a form of popular-frontism. He called revolutionaries in 1937 to participate and support the military struggle against Japan under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek as long as they are not strong enough to replace him. He compared the necessary tactic for revolutionaries with those during a workers strike under the leadership of reformist, treacherous bureaucrats. It would be the duty of every class-conscious worker to join such a strike without supporting the bureaucrats politically. Trotsky’s attitude becomes clear from a document he wrote on the Chinese war against Japan in 1937 from which we quote here extensively:

“But Chiang Kai-shek? We need have no illusions about Chiang Kai-shek, his party, or the whole ruling class of China, just as Marx and Engels had no illusions about the ruling classes of Ireland and Poland. Chiang Kai-shek is the executioner of the Chinese workers and peasants. But today he is forced, despite himself, to struggle against Japan for the remainder of the independence of China. Tomorrow he may again betray. It is possible. It is probable. It is even inevitable. But today he is struggling. Only cowards, scoundrels, or complete imbeciles can refuse to participate in that struggle.

Let us use the example of a strike to clarify the question. We do not support all strikes. If, for example, a strike is called for the exclusion of Negro, Chinese, or Japanese workers from a factory, we are opposed to that strike. But if a strike aims at bettering — insofar as it can — the conditions of the workers, we are the first to participate in it, whatever the leadership. In the vast majority of strikes, the leaders are reformists, traitors by profession, agents of capital. They oppose every strike. But from time to time the pressure of the masses or of the objective situation forces them into the path of struggle.

Let us imagine, for an instant, a worker saying to himself: “I do not want to participate in the strike because the leaders are agents of capital.” This doctrine of this ultraleft imbecile would serve to brand him by his real name: a strikebreaker. The case of the Sino-Japanese War, is from this point of view, entirely analogous. If Japan is an imperialist country and if China is the victim of imperialism, we favor China. Japanese patriotism is the hideous mask of worldwide robbery. Chinese patriotism is legitimate and progressive. To place the two on the same plane and to speak of “social patriotism” can be done only by those who have read nothing of Lenin, who have understood nothing of the attitude of the Bolsheviks during the imperialist war, and who can but compromise and prostitute the teachings of Marxism. (...) But Japan and China are not on the same historical plane. The victory of Japan will signify the enslavement of China, the end of her economic and social development, and the terrible strengthening of Japanese imperialism. The victory of China will signify, on the contrary, the social revolution in Japan and the free development, that is to say unhindered by external oppression, of the

⁶⁷⁹ Leon Trotsky: *The Defense of the Soviet Union and the Opposition* (1929); in: *Writings 1929*, p. 262

class struggle in China.

But can Chiang Kai-shek assure the victory? I do not believe so. It is he, however, who began the war and who today directs it. To be able to replace him it is necessary to gain decisive influence among the proletariat and in the army, and to do this it is necessary not to remain suspended in the air but to place oneself in the midst of the struggle. We must win influence and prestige in the military struggle against the foreign invasion and in the political struggle against the weaknesses, the deficiencies, and the internal betrayal. At a certain point, which we cannot fix in advance, this political opposition can and must be transformed into armed conflict, since the civil war, like war generally, is nothing more than the continuation of the political struggle. It is necessary, however, to know when and how to transform political opposition into armed insurrection.

During the Chinese revolution of 1925-27 we attacked the policies of the Comintern. Why? It is necessary to understand well the reasons. The Eiffelites claim that we have changed our attitude on the Chinese question. That is because the poor fellows have understood nothing of our attitude in 1925-27. We never denied that it was the duty of the Communist Party to participate in the war of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie of the South against the generals of the North, agents of foreign imperialism. We never denied the necessity of a military bloc between the CP and the Kuomintang. On the contrary, we were the first to propose it. We demanded, however, that the CP maintain its entire political and organizational independence, that is, that during the civil war against the internal agents of imperialism, as in the national war against foreign imperialism, the working class, while remaining in the front lines of the military struggle, prepare the political overthrow of the bourgeoisie. We hold the same policies in the present war. We have not changed our attitude one iota. The Oehlerites and the Eiffelites, on the other hand, have not understood a single bit of our policies, neither those of 1925-27, nor those of today.

In my declaration to the bourgeois press at the beginning of the recent conflict between Tokyo and Nanking, I stressed above all the necessity of the active participation of revolutionary workers in the war against the imperialist oppressors. Why did I do it? Because first of all it is correct from the Marxist point of view; because, secondly, it was necessary from the point of view of the welfare of our friends in China. Tomorrow the GPU, which is in alliance with the Kuomintang (as with Negrin in Spain), will represent our Chinese friends as being "defeatists" and agents of Japan. The best of them, with Chen Tu-hsiu at the head, can be nationally and internationally compromised and killed. It was necessary to stress, energetically, that the Fourth International was on the side of China as against Japan. And I added at the same time: without abandoning either their program or their independence.

The Eiffelite imbeciles try to jest about this "reservation." "The Trotskyists," they say, "want to serve Chiang Kai-shek in action and the proletariat in words." To participate actively and consciously in the war does not mean "to serve Chiang Kai-shek" but to serve the independence of a colonial country in spite of Chiang Kai-shek. And the words directed against the Kuomintang are the means of educating the masses

for the overthrow of Chiang Kai-shek. In participating in the military struggle under the orders of Chiang Kai-shek, since unfortunately it is he who has the command in the war for independence—to prepare politically the overthrow of Chiang Kai-shek . . . that is the only revolutionary policy. The Eiffelites counterpose the policy of “class struggle” to this “nationalist and social patriotic” policy. Lenin fought this abstract and sterile opposition all his life. To him, the interests of the world proletariat dictated the duty of aiding oppressed peoples in their national and patriotic struggle against imperialism. Those who have not yet understood that, almost a quarter of a century after the World War and twenty years after the October revolution, must be pitilessly rejected as the worst enemies on the inside by the revolutionary vanguard. This is exactly the case with Eiffel and his kind!”⁶⁸⁰

We see that Trotsky continued the application of the anti-imperialist united front tactic. In his critique of the Stalinist Draft Programme for the Communist International, he defended such a tactic on a general basis:

*“It goes without saying that we cannot renounce in advance such rigidly delimited and rigidly practical agreements as serve each time a quite definite aim. For example, such cases as involve agreements with the student youth of the Kuomintang for the organization of an anti-imperialist demonstration, or of obtaining assistance from the Chinese merchants for strikers in a foreign concession, etc. Such cases are not at all excluded in the future, even in China.”*⁶⁸¹

He repeats this idea of a united front tactic even towards reactionary figures like Chiang Kai-shek:

*“By its absurd conditions, which serve to paint the bourgeoisie in bright colors in advance, the draft program states clearly and definitely (despite the diplomatic and incidental character of its thesis) that involved here are precisely long-term political blocs and not agreements for specific occasions concluded for practical reasons and rigidly confined to practical aims. But in such a case, what is meant by demands that the bourgeoisie wage a “genuine” struggle and that it “not obstruct” the workers? Do we present these conditions to the bourgeoisie itself, and demand a public promise from it? It will make you any promises you want! It will even send its delegates to Moscow, enter the Peasants’ International, adhere as a “sympathizing” party to the Comintern, peek into the Red International of Labor Unions. In short, it will promise anything that will give it the opportunity (with our assistance) to dupe the workers and peasants, more efficiently, more easily, and more completely to throw sand in their eyes -- until the first opportunity, such as was offered in Shanghai.”*⁶⁸²

On the basis of such an understanding of the united front tactic in order to break their basis away, Trotsky considered even an entry tactic into such bourgeois mass parties with an active rank and file of workers as a principled possibility for revolutionaries. While he sometimes was not sure if the entry

⁶⁸⁰ Leo Trotzki: Über den chinesisch-japanischen Krieg (1937), in: Schriften 2.2, pp. 865-867; in English: Leon Trotsky: On the Sino-Japanese War (1937), <http://marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1937/10/sino.htm> (Emphasis in Original)

⁶⁸¹ Leon Trotsky: The Third International After Lenin (1928), New York 1970, p. 168

⁶⁸² Leon Trotsky: The Third International After Lenin, pp. 169-170

tactic of the Chinese Communist Party in the Kuomintang in the early 1920s has been right or wrong from the beginning, he certainly was not in principle against such tactics. Such he wrote:

"The participation of the CCP in the Guomindang was perfectly correct in the period when the CCP was a propaganda society which was only preparing itself for future independent political activity, but which, at the same time, sought to take part in the ongoing national liberation struggle." ⁶⁸³

He repeated his support for the principled character of such an entry tactic several times: *"The temporary entry into the SFIO, or even the Kuomintang, is not an evil in itself; however, it is necessary to know not only when to enter, but also how to leave."* ⁶⁸⁴

The Trotskyists tried – with their limited forces – to put the anti-imperialist united front tactic into practice. Ch'en Pi-lan, a leading Chinese Trotskyist and the wife of the most prominent Trotskyist leader in China, Peng Shu-tse, reports that the Chinese section of the Fourth International decided at a conference in 1937 to *"support the armed struggle being waged by the Kuomintang government against Japanese imperialism. Accompanying this was a criticism from the political point of view of the government's reactionary policy."* ⁶⁸⁵

Gregor Benton reports in his study on the Chinese Trotskyists how they tried to enter the ranks of the official army and to participate in the anti-Japanese struggle and to build revolutionary cells at the same time. They even formed guerilla units during the war. A leading cadre of Chinese Trotskyists, Wang Fanxi, reports the same. Needless to say, that all this was conducted under the most difficult circumstances and with heavy losses. ⁶⁸⁶

Our understanding of anti-imperialism finds a clear expression in the Communist International's condemnation of all those pseudo-Marxists who refused to support a concrete struggle against imperialist forces led by (petty-) bourgeois forces with the argument that this would be in contradiction with class independence: *"The refusal of the communists in the colonies to take part in the struggle against imperialist tyranny, on the ground of the ostensible 'defence' of their independent class interests, is opportunism of the worst kind, which can only discredit the proletarian revolution in the East."* ⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸³ Leon Trotsky: Die Kommunistische Partei Chinas und die Guomindang (1926); in: Schriften 2.1, p. 104; in English: Leon Trotsky on China, New York, 1976, p. 114

⁶⁸⁴ Leon Trotsky: Against False Passport in Politics (1935); in: The Crisis in the French Section (1935-36), New York 1977, p. 116 (Emphasis in original). See also Leo Trotzki: Brief an Harold Isaac (1.11.1937); in: Schriften 2.2, p. 889 and Leon Trotsky: The Opposition's Errors – Real and Alleged (1928); in: Leon Trotsky: The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1928-29), p. 90

⁶⁸⁵ Ch'en Pi-lan: Looking Back Over My Years with Peng Shu-tse; in: Peng Shu-tse: The Chinese Communist Party in Power, New York 1980, p. 37

⁶⁸⁶ Gregor Benton: China's Urban Revolutionaries. Explorations in the History of Chinese Trotskyism, 1921-1952, New Jersey 1996, pp. 81-84. Wang Fanxi: Erinnerungen eines chinesischen Revolutionärs 1919-1949, Frankfurt a.M. 1983, pp. 256-286

⁶⁸⁷ Communist International: Theses on the Eastern Question, p. 389

iv) Liberation Struggles, Imperialist Interference and the Dual Military Tactics

History has shown that liberation struggles in semi-colonial countries against domestic reactionary forces or foreign imperialists can face the problem of imperialist interference. In the following we will give a brief presentation of the general method of how the RCIT approaches national democratic liberation struggles in semi-colonial countries which are intermingled with imperialist interference.⁶⁸⁸ Let us start by quoting the summary of our method in our programme *The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto*:

“Particularly, where authoritarian regimes or the military openly trample on democratic rights, mass movements rise and fight with determination for their rights. Other states and even great imperialist powers try to exploit such domestic crises and are only too happy to expand their influence. The Bolsheviks-Communists support any real movement of the popular masses against the suppression of democratic rights. We reject any influence of reactionary forces and defend the national sovereignty of semi-colonial countries against imperialism. This can not mean that revolutionaries renounce the support of revolutionary-democratic movement. In reality, the imperialist meddling is no help for the revolutionary-democratic struggle, but threatens to undermine it. That is why we have supported progressive liberation struggles of the masses against dictatorships, but at the same time rejected sharply imperialist interventions. (E.g. the struggle of the Bosnians 1992-95, the Kosovo Albanians in 1999, the uprising against the Gaddafi dictatorship in Libya in 2011). Only when the imperialist intervention is becoming the dominant feature of the political situation, revolutionaries must subordinate the democratic struggle to the fight against such an intervention.

*Similarly, this is the case in the still-existing degenerated workers states (such as Cuba or North Korea). We support real mass movement against the ruling bureaucracy (such as those in Eastern Europe, China and the USSR, 1989-91) and advocate for political revolution. However, we defend the achievements of the workers’ state (planning, state ownership, foreign trade monopoly, etc.) against any attempt for the introduction of capitalism.”*⁶⁸⁹

Let us now elaborate our approach. Many leftists fail to understand the correct relationship between anti-imperialism and international working class solidarity. We are anti-imperialist because we are consistent supporters of the working class and oppressed peoples liberation struggle for which imperialism is the biggest enemy. *Our anti-imperialism is a consequence of our fundamental*

⁶⁸⁸ This sub-chapter “*Liberation Struggles, Imperialist Interference and the Dual Military Tactics*” is an edited version of a section of an essay by Michael Pröbsting: “*Liberation struggles and imperialist interference. The failure of sectarian “anti-imperialism” in the West: Some general considerations from the Marxist point of view and the example of the democratic revolution in Libya in 2011*”, in: *Revolutionary Communism*, No. 5 (English-language Journal of the RCIT), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/liberation-struggle-and-imperialism>

⁶⁸⁹ RCIT: *The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto*, pp. 45-46, www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/revolutionary-struggle-for-democracy.

position on the class struggle and not an overriding principle, which resides above the class struggle.

This is why Marxists are capable to come to positions which are independent of the imperialist and petty-bourgeois 'public opinion' and 'dependent' on the class interests of the international working class. This is why we don't get confused when the imperialist and petty-bourgeois 'public opinion' supports a just national or democratic liberation struggle. Marxists don't make – like Pavlov's dog – a minus where the Western imperialists make a plus. We however make sure that we develop an independent class position.

Our method is that during such just democratic or national liberation struggles we are on the side of the liberation fighters (who are mostly under bourgeois or petty-bourgeois leaderships) and we support their military victory. We sharply differentiate between these progressive liberation struggles and the interests of the imperialist powers. While we support the first, we totally oppose the later. Hence we Bolshevik-Communists reject any imperialist interference and call for the defeat of the imperialist forces.

The Public Opinion in the Imperialist World must not be the Starting Point for developing a Position towards a War!

Sectors of the centrist left in the West defend a sectarian version – or let us better say a caricature – of anti-imperialism. They don't look at a given struggle in its totality with all the various and often contradictory aspects. Instead they try to assess what is the official position of Western imperialism. They usually do this by looking to the so-called public opinion, i.e. the rhetoric of the bourgeois officials and media. And where the Western public opinion makes a plus, the sectarian makes a minus. In other words he or she sympathizes with those side in a given war with the Western public opinion despises. As examples for such an attitude we mention the *Workers World Party* in the USA, the *World Socialist Web Site* of David North, the *Liaison Committee for the Fourth International* (Socialist Fight in Britain, Liga Comunista of Brazil, Tendencia Militante Bolchevique of Argentina).⁶⁹⁰ The latter dedicated a special polemic against the RCIT on this question.

Thus they arrive to *one and the same* position in all *different* kinds of wars: the Iraq war 1991, the Bosnian war 1992-95, the Kosova war 1999, the Afghanistan war 2001, the Iraq war 2003 and the Libyan civil war 2011. This is completely wrong. *For Marxists the imperialist public opinion, while a factor which has to be taken*

⁶⁹⁰ See e.g. Workers World Party: U.S. Hands of Libya (2011), <http://www.workers.org/ebooks/Libya2011.pdf>; Alex Lantier, WWSWS: The CIA proxy war in Syria and the pro-imperialist "left", 3.8.2012, <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2012/aug2012/pers-a03.shtml>; Liaison Committee for the Fourth International (LCFI): Those who 'howled along with the wolves' and those who took a neutral position on the war in Libya, 14 September 2011, in: Socialist Fight No. 7 (2011); LCFI: What a strange but delightfully dialectical face 'liberation' has in Libya today! Reply to Michael Pröbsting (RCIT), in: Socialist Fight No. 11 (2012)

into account, is neither the starting point nor the most important factor in deriving to revolutionary positions!

Let us give a few historic examples: During the Slavs national liberation struggle in the Balkans against the Ottoman Empire in 1912/13, Russian imperialism was full of sympathy for it – of course because of its expansionist own class interests. However Lenin and the Bolsheviks did not conclude from this that one should not support their national liberation struggle. Which conclusion did Trotsky and the Fourth International drew from the fact that the imperialist and petty-bourgeois public opinion in Western Europe and Northern America was strongly in favor of the Republican antifascist government in Spain in 1936-39 or for the national liberation struggle of the Chinese toilers under Chiang Kai-shek's leadership against Japanese imperialism from 1937 onwards? They certainly did not succumb to the imperialist and petty-bourgeois 'public opinion' when they gave critical but unconditional support to the Republican antifascist government's or the Chinese struggles, but pursued the independent and internationalist working class viewpoint.

Marxists must not start from the consideration: *"How can we as revolutionaries fighting in Western imperialist countries best oppose the pressure of 'our' bourgeoisie."* This is one-sided and thus opens the door to serious mistakes. It would be anti-imperialism for fools. One must start thinking from the viewpoint *"what is the independent class policy in the interest of the international working class and the oppressed people"*. In other words, how can we strengthen the working class's struggles, organizations and consciousness? This is the *only* legitimate method how to approach questions of the class struggle. Otherwise one would descend to leftists in imperialist countries that start and end thinking around the question how to oppose their bourgeoisie.

Trotsky explained this approach very well in an article in which he polemicized against the sectarian method:

*"In ninety cases out of a hundred the workers actually place a minus sign where the bourgeoisie places a plus sign. In ten cases, however, they are forced to fix the same sign as the bourgeoisie but with their own seal, in which is expressed their mistrust of the bourgeoisie. The policy of the proletariat is not at all automatically derived from the policy of the bourgeoisie, bearing only the opposite sign – this would make every sectarian a master strategist; no, the revolutionary party must each time orient itself independently in the internal as well as the external situation, arriving at those decisions which correspond best to the interests of the proletariat. This rule applies just as much to the war period as to the period of peace."*⁶⁹¹

⁶⁹¹ Leon Trotsky: Learn to Think: A Friendly Suggestion to Certain Ultra-Leftists (1938); in: Writings of Leon Trotsky 1937-38, pp. 332-333. (Emphasis in the Original) The RCIT re-published this text in Revolutionary Communism No. 5 (2012).

How to approach various Forms of imperialist Military Interventions?

In which respect can we speak about different forms of imperialist military interventions? Let us explain this by dealing with some examples of the past two decades. What was the difference between the Iraq wars in 1991 and 2003, the Afghanistan in 2001 on one hand and Bosnia 1992-95, Kosova 1999 and Libya 2011? What is our common method? Why did we defend Afghanistan in 2001 (albeit the Taliban were certainly not less dictatorial than Gaddafi) and why did we continue to support the democratic revolution in Libya against the Gaddafi regime despite the imperialist limited military campaign against the regime? The sectarians accuse us of capitulation to “the bourgeois-democratic public opinion in the imperialist countries”? But has there been a difference in the imperialist and petty-bourgeois ‘public opinion’? One can hardly say that the public opinion was less hostile against the Taliban than against Gaddafi. Rather the opposite. Many imperialist governments had public meetings with Gaddafi, made a number of good business deals, and had to hastily eliminate the pictures from their official websites where one could see Sarkozy, Berlusconi, Blair etc. shaking hands and exchanging jokes with the Libyan dictator.

So, what was the difference between the Iraq wars in 1991 and 2003, the Afghanistan in 2001 on one hand and Bosnia 1992-95, Kosova 1999 and Libya 2011 on the other hand? The answer is pretty simple. As historical materialists we first look to the developments of the classes. In Bosnia the war began in April 1992 as a national liberation struggle of the workers and peasants under the leadership of the Izetbegovic bureaucracy against the threatening oppression by the Serbian chauvinist state. Since 1987 the Milosevic regime in Serbia had initiated a virulent campaign of Serbian chauvinism which targeted, in particular, the Kosova-Albanians but also most other nationalities in Yugoslavia. By this the Serbian bureaucratic caste wanted to secure its dominant position in the process of capitalist restoration. The Croatian bureaucracy tried to counter this by increasing the oppression of their Serbian minorities in Krajina and Slavonia. This increasing national oppression was related to the capitalist restoration to divert the masses attention from its social consequences. It was this background which started the series of Balkan wars in 1991 and into which various imperialist powers tried to interfere.

It was the same in Kosova which had a history of murderous oppression by the Serbian state since its annexation in 1913 and many national liberation uprisings since then. The last one started in March 1998.⁶⁹² The Libyan and

⁶⁹² We published in the late 1980 and the 1990s a lot of analytical and programmatic material – including two booklets – about the history of Yugoslavia and the Balkan wars in German language and some in Serbo-Croatian. See e.g. LRCI: The situation in Yugoslavia and the position of proletarian revolutionaries, 30.09.1991, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/situation-yugoslavia-and-position-proletarian-revolutionaries>; LRCI: Bosnia - which side are you on?, 05.03.1993, <http://>

the Syrian Revolution in 2011 also started as a democratic revolution as part of the Arab revolutions against the bourgeois dictatorships. So, contrary to the interpretation of the sectarians, these civil wars started not as a conspiracy of imperialism – they were authentic liberation struggles of the workers and peasants.⁶⁹³

Contrary to these examples, the situations in Iraq 1991 and 2003 or Afghanistan 2001 were different. In Afghanistan 2001 no progressive mass struggle took place – the local civil war of the so-called *Northern Alliance* of Ahmad Shah Massoud against the Taliban didn't bear any progressive potential. The national liberation struggle of the Kurdish people against the Baath regime in Iraq did have a just and progressive character but given its local nature in the north, it did not become the dominant factor in the political situation.

Related to this is another important difference between the two types of wars: The Iraq war 1991, 2003 or the Afghanistan war 2011 *were not an interference of imperialism in ongoing liberation struggles. They were outright imperialist attacks to subjugate this or that nation.*

One has to look concretely at these wars. For example in Bosnia or Kosova the imperialist war goals were not to conquer and subjugate Serbia but rather to contain the spreading of the national liberation struggle and by this to stop the destabilization of the regional order. In the case of Kosova, one should remember that shortly before the war, in spring 1997, there was the armed mass uprising in Albania.⁶⁹⁴ A successful liberation struggle in Kosova would have had massive consequences for starting a similar liberation struggle amongst the oppressed Albanian minorities in Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia itself.

www.fifthinternational.org/content/bosnia-which-side-are-you; LRCI: War and Peace in Bosnia. No imperialist solutions!, 30.05.1993, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/war-and-peace-bosnia-no-imperialist-solutions>; Michael Pröbsting: Are the Bosnian Muslims a nation?, Trotskyist International No. 13/14 (1994) <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/are-bosnian-muslims-nation>; Michael Pröbsting: Arbeitersolidarität mit den Moslems, aber UNO: Raus aus dem Balkan! (1993), <http://www.rkob.net/geschichte/bosnienkrieg-und-linke>; Michael Pröbsting: Für das nationale Selbstbestimmungsrecht der AlbanerInnen im Kosovo! Einem Aufstand entgegen! ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt Nr. 88 (1997), <http://arbeiterinnenstandpunkt.net/alt/ast88kosovo.html>; Michael Pröbsting: Diskussion über die Frage der Balkanföderation und der internationalen ArbeiterInnen-solidarität: Welche Perspektive für den Balkan? ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt Nr. 90 (1998), <http://arbeiterinnenstandpunkt.net/alt/ast90kosovo.html>; Michael Pröbsting: Freiheit für Kosova! Ein revolutionäres Aktionsprogramm (1998); Michael Pröbsting: Marxismus, Imperialismus und der Balkankrieg, ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt Nr. 98 (1999), <http://arbeiterinnenstandpunkt.net/alt/ast98kosovo5.html>; LRCI: Stoppt die NATO-Angriffe! Unabhängigkeit für Kosovo! (1999), <http://arbeiterinnenstandpunkt.net/alt/ast100kosovo.html>. See also Nina Gunić: Bosnia: Never forget Srebrenica - learn the lessons for today! (2012), <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/bosnia-war/>

⁶⁹³ The FLTI who intervened with revolutionary activists both in the Libyan and the Syrian civil wars has published a number of excellent reports and articles these revolutions. See their blog <http://libyarevolutionupdate.blogspot.com.ar> as well as their website <http://www.democraciobrera.org>.

⁶⁹⁴ See e.g. LRCI/PTS: Der albanische Aufstand (1997), <http://arbeiterinnenstandpunkt.net/alt/rm21albanischeraufstand.html>; Michael Pröbsting, Aufstand in Albanien: Das Volk wehrt sich! (1997), <http://arbeiterinnenstandpunkt.net/alt/ast82albanien.html>

Of course imperialist interference *can* change the character of a national liberation struggle. But this is not necessarily always the case. In our book on the Arab Revolution we already referred to examples that showed that the imperialists also interfered in the Chinese national liberation struggle in the 1930s and 40s or in the guerilla mass movements in Eastern Europe against the Nazis during World War II. For example the British sent arms and officer to the Stalinist partisans of Tito and the USA sent even military aircrafts with US pilots to support the bourgeois Chiang Kai-shek forces. Did these lead the revolutionaries of the Fourth International to stop supporting these struggles?! No, and they would have been terrible wrong had they do so.

One has to concretely analyze if a given democratic or national liberation struggle becomes fully subordinated to the imperialist maneuvers and doesn't possess any significant internal dynamic of a workers and peasant liberation struggle. If this is the case, Marxists must change their position and give up their critical support for the national liberation struggle.

However, even here one has to analyze the process and its possible transformation and therefore be prepared for a necessary change in the position. For example when the Shiite workers and peasants in Southern Iraq revolted against Saddam Hussein in March 1991, both we Marxists and the imperialists understood the class meaning of this insurrection. It was a genuine democratic revolution of the workers and peasants. Therefore the Baathist army crushed it, the US troops and the imperialist and petty-bourgeois 'public opinion' cried crocodile tears about the poor Iraqis and the evil Saddam Hussein regime ... but stood by and looked in relief when the uprising was crushed. And we Bolshevik-Communists? We – in our predecessor organization LRCI – defended the Iraqi army against the US troops but we also defended the Shia masses against the Baathist army. Both the imperialists and the LRCI/RCIT changed their position not because they were inconsistent but because the struggle between the classes changed its character. It can also be the other way round that Marxist can first support a democratic revolution and later change this position. Only such a concrete and dialectical approach enables Marxists to elaborate an independent and internationalist working class position. This means a view point which focuses on the advance of the working class struggle, organizations and consciousness and not on the imperialist and petty-bourgeois 'public opinion'.

Let us briefly deal with another historic example. Which positions should Marxists have developed in the 1953, 1956, 1968 or 1980-81 when the workers rebelled against the Stalinist bureaucracy in Eastern Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland?! Of course, the imperialist and petty-bourgeois 'public opinion' in the West was verbally in favor of these workers uprising because they hoped to weaken the Stalinists by tactically exploiting them. But only the Stalinists and living caricatures of Trotskyism like the Spartacists did come to the conclusion that because of the Western 'public opinion', one should defend the bureaucratic dictatorship against the workers. For the Marxists of

course the starting point was not the imperialist and petty-bourgeois 'public opinion' in the West but the independent proletarian class interests. We therefore supported critically but unconditionally the workers uprisings in the East. While we supported these – unfortunately defeated – workers revolutions, we opposed any form of imperialist attack at the same time.

Consequences for the Military Tactic

So we see that in implementing the same independent, internationalist working class line, one has to arrive in different situations to different conclusions because different objective factors and class interests are involved. The same *strategy of permanent revolution* leads in different types of wars to different tactics. Only a mechanistic bonehead can be surprised by this.

Where the working class and the oppressed are not engaged in a direct struggle for power, i.e. outside of a revolutionary situation, the task of the overthrow of a given regime is subordinated to the task of the defense of semi-colonial country (or a degenerated workers state) against an imperialist attack. On the other hand, where we have the mobilization of the working class and the oppressed in a direct struggle for power as it is the case in a revolutionary situation, a civil war etc., Bolshevik-Communists fight for the victorious outcome of this class struggle. Of course we combine this with the fight against the imperialist attacks.

The Second World War is a model for such a contradictory situation. There we could see the application of a combined, dialectical approach of military tactics. The revolutionary Marxists of the Fourth International defended the Soviet Union against German imperialism – despite the former's alliance with Western imperialism. They sided with the colonial people against their imperialist occupiers – despite the Stalinists' support for the British and French occupiers and despite the Allied imperialists' support for the Chinese resistance against Japanese imperialism. The Fourth International also sided with the national liberation partisan armies against German imperialism in Europe and took a defeatist position against both imperialist camps in their conflict with each other.

So we see that in such contradictory cases, where, so to say, several wars take place in one war, it would be disastrous to pursue one and the same tactic for all different wars or "sub-wars". Quite the opposite, Marxists must call for a dual military tactic.

Only when the imperialist forces threaten to conquer a given semi-colonial country (or a degenerated workers state) and when at the same time the working class is not strong enough to take power, only then it becomes necessary to subordinate the struggle against the regime to the defense of the given semi-colonial country (or a degenerated workers state).

This is why – as we already stated above – we supported the national liberation

struggle of the Bosnian people against the Serbian restorationist bureaucracy in 1992-95 while opposing any NATO attacks. This is why we supported the uprising of the Kosova-Albanians in 1997-99 while at the same time opposing NATO's war against Serbia. This is why we said during the Gulf War both in 1991 and 2003 "*Defend Iraq! Defeat Imperialism!*" When the imperialist assault against Afghanistan started on 7th October 2001 we called for the military victory of the Afghan resistance despite the Taliban leadership. Similarly we call today for the military victory of the Islamist rebels in Mali against the French invaders and their allies. And we called for support for the Hezbollah-led resistance in Lebanon 2006 and the Hamas-led resistance in Gaza 2008/09 as well as in 2012 both against the Israeli Apartheid state.

Such complications, amalgamations of different and contradictory interests in a given military conflict are likely to increase in the future. Why? Because of the deepening crisis of capitalist system worldwide and the associated increasing rivalry between imperialist powers. It is because of this rivalry that imperialist powers are more and more motivated to interfere in local conflicts and civil wars and to exploit them to advance their influence and increase their profits. Unfortunately this aspect is completely ignored by many sectarians who fail to recognize that in addition to the old imperialist power – in North America, Western Europe and Japan – there are also new, emerging imperialist powers, particularly Russia and China.

The Marxist Classics on Contradictory Factors in Wars

It is true that imperialist powers at some point tried to utilize these democratic struggles for their purpose and interfered. This must be opposed by the Marxist forces. But, as Lenin said, in the epoch of imperialism the big powers will always try to interfere and utilize national and democratic conflicts. This must not lead Marxists to automatically take a defeatist position in these conflicts. It depends on which factor becomes the dominant aspect – the national, democratic liberation struggle or the imperialist war of conquest. Lenin explained this with the following examples:

"Britain and France fought the Seven Years' War for the possession of colonies. In other words, they waged an imperialist war (which is possible on the basis of slavery and primitive capitalism as well as on the basis of modern highly developed capitalism). France suffered defeat and lost some of her colonies. Several years later there began the national liberation war of the North American States against Britain alone. France and Spain, then in possession of some parts of the present United States, concluded a friendship treaty with the States in rebellion against Britain. This they did out of hostility to Britain, i.e., in their own imperialist interests. French troops fought the British on the side of the American forces. What we have here is a national liberation war in which imperialist rivalry is an auxiliary element, one that has no serious importance. This is the very opposite to what we see in the war of 1914-16 (the national

*element in the Austro-Serbian War is of no serious importance compared with the all-determining element of imperialist rivalry). It would be absurd, therefore, to apply the concept imperialism indiscriminately and conclude that national wars are "impossible". A national liberation war, waged, for example, by an alliance of Persia, India and China against one or more of the imperialist powers, is both possible and probable, for it would follow from the national liberation movements in these countries. The transformation of such a war into an imperialist war between the present-day imperialist powers would depend upon very many concrete factors, the emergence of which it would be ridiculous to guarantee."*⁶⁹⁵

In another article Lenin compared the possibility of imperialist interference in national liberation struggles for their aims with the possible interference of sections of monopoly capital in democratic struggles in imperialist countries. In both cases, Lenin argued, it would be wrong to refuse support for these struggles because of this interference:

*"On the other hand, the socialists of the oppressed nations must, in particular, defend and implement the full and unconditional unity, including organisational unity, of the workers of the oppressed nation and those of the oppressor nation. Without this it is impossible to defend the independent policy of the proletariat and their class solidarity with the proletariat of other countries in face of all manner of intrigues, treachery and trickery on the part of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations persistently utilise the slogans of national liberation to deceive the workers; in their internal policy they use these slogans for reactionary agreements with the bourgeoisie of the dominant nation (for example, the Poles in Austria and Russia who come to terms with reactionaries for the oppression of the Jews and Ukrainians); in their foreign policy they strive to come to terms with one of the rival imperialist powers for the sake of implementing their predatory plans (the policy of the small Balkan states, etc.). The fact that the struggle for national liberation against one imperialist power may, under certain conditions, be utilised by another "great" power for its own, equally imperialist, aims, is just as unlikely to make the Social-Democrats refuse to recognise the right of nations to self-determination as the numerous cases of bourgeois utilisation of republican slogans for the purpose of political deception and financial plunder (as in the Romance countries, for example) are unlikely to make the Social-Democrats reject their republicanism."*⁶⁹⁶

This methodological approach was later defended and developed by the Trotskyists. Rudolf Klement, a secretary of Trotsky and a leading member of the Fourth International who was murdered by the Stalinist GPU, wrote on this question in an excellent article called *"Principles and Tactics in War"*. In this article, which was praised by Trotsky⁶⁹⁷, Klement elaborated the position of the Trotskyists and defended it against their sectarian critics:

⁶⁹⁵ V. I. Lenin: The Junius Pamphlet (1916); in: LCW 22, pp. 310-11

⁶⁹⁶ V. I. Lenin: The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (1916); in: LCW 22, p. 148

⁶⁹⁷ See Leon Trotsky: An Excellent Article on Defeatism (1938); in: Writings of Leon Trotsky 1937-38, pp. 153-154

*“Class struggle and war are international phenomena, which are decided internationally. But since every struggle permits of but two camps (bloc against bloc) and since imperialistic fights intertwine with the class war (world imperialism—world proletariat), there arise manifold and complex cases. The bourgeoisie of the semi-colonial countries or the liberal bourgeoisie menaced by its “own” fascism, appeal for aid to the “friendly” imperialisms; the Soviet Union attempts, for example, to utilise the antagonisms between the imperialisms by concluding alliances with one group against another, etc. The proletariat of all countries, the only internationally solidarity—and not least of all because of that, the only progressive—class, thereby finds itself in the complicated situation in wartime, especially in the new world war, of combining revolutionary defeatism towards his own bourgeoisie with support of progressive wars.”*⁶⁹⁸

Klement defends a dialectical approach, arguing that *“the proletariat, especially in the imperialist countries, requires, in this seemingly contradictory situation, a particularly clear understanding of these combined tasks and of the methods for fulfilling them.”* Later, at the end of his article, he goes on to emphasize: *“Thus we see how different war situations require from the revolutionary proletariat of the various imperialist countries, if it wishes to remain true to itself and to its goal, different fighting forms, which may appear to schematic spirits to be “deviations” from the basic principle of revolutionary defeatism, but which result in reality only from the combination of revolutionary defeatism with the defence of certain progressive camps.”*

It is this concrete, dialectical method which the Marxists classics developed and which we apply today to the different types of wars which take place in a world situation characterized by increasing contradictions and rivalry.

⁶⁹⁸ Rudolf Klement: Principles and Tactics in War (1938); in The New International (Theoretical journal of the Socialist Workers Party, US-American section of the Fourth International), May 1938, Vol. 4, No. 5, pp. 144-145. The RCIT re-published this text in: Revolutionary Communism No. 4 (2012), pp. 44-46.