

# Theses on Revolutionary Defeatism in Imperialist States

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1. The rapidly accelerating rivalry between the imperialist Great Powers (US, EU, China, Russia and Japan), which is experiencing a qualitative aggravation with the onset of the Global Trade War, makes the program of revolutionary defeatism one of the most important issues for all socialists in imperialist states.

2. The emergence of new imperialist powers (China and Russia) and the subsequent acceleration of such rivalry between all Great Powers are key features of the historic period which opened in 2008, as the RCIT has explained many times. In such a period of historic crisis of capitalism, the ruling classes of all imperialist states strive for:

- i) Intensification of the exploitation of the working class;
- ii) Intensification of the oppression and super-exploitation of the migrants in these countries;
- iii) Intensification of the oppression and super-exploitation of the semi-colonial countries;
- iv) Intensification of military interventions and wars of aggression in the semi-colonial world under the hypocritical phrase of “*War on Terror*” (in particular in the Middle East and in Africa);
- v) Increasing use of sanctions and trade wars against rivals;
- vi) Acceleration of armament and militarist propaganda against rivals (US and Japan vs. China, US and EU vs. Russia, etc.).

3. For these purposes, the ruling classes of the imperialist states (represented by the Administrations of Trump, Putin, Xi, etc) have massively accelerated Great Powers chauvinism and militarism and will inevitable continue to do so. Such jingoism (militarist, aggressive chauvinism) is directed against the rivaling Great Powers and, in particular, against the oppressed nations and minorities (i.e. against people in the semi-colonial countries as well as the migrants and national minorities in the imperialist states).

4. If the working class does not mobilize against the imperialist warmongers and eventually overthrow them, these trade wars and sable-rattling will ultimately result in World War III. While this is not likely in the near future, the RCIT alerts the workers vanguard to fully understand the historic dangers of the Great Power rivalry and to unite as soon as possible on the basis of a revolutionary program of struggle.

5. It is of utmost importance for revolutionaries in imperialist countries to fight unconditionally against such imperialist chauvinism and militarism. The RCIT stands on the classic program of our movement which usually has been summarized by the formula of *Revolutionary Defeatism*. Basically this means nothing else but the application of the Marxist program and the general methods of the class struggle to the terrain of anti-chauvinist and anti-militarist struggle. It is based on the axiom that the working class is by its very nature an *international* class. As such, its interests are in sharpest contrast to those of the imperialist bourgeoisie. Just as the workers of a given enterprise have no

common interests with their boss, so has the working class no common interests with the ruling class of a given capitalist state. Quite the opposite, as the workers want to weaken, defeat and finally expropriate the owners of “their” corporation, so do the workers of a given capitalist country desire to weaken, defeat and finally overthrow the ruling class. (Hence, historically, the category “defeatism” derived from the position of the Bolsheviks to call for the defeat of the ruling class in Russia’s imperialist wars.) For these reasons the workers will utilize every conflict in which their class enemy is involved in order to advance their interests and to strengthen their fighting power.

6. In cases of *conflicts between imperialist states*, the RCIT calls workers and popular organizations around the world to act decisively on the basis of the principles of *international working class solidarity*. This means that they *must not support either camp*. They must refuse to side with their own ruling class as well as with that of the opposing imperialist camp: *Down with all imperialist Great Powers – whether the US, EU, Japan, China or Russia!* Socialists totally reject any chauvinist propaganda of the ruling class. Instead of supporting their “own” ruling class, they propagate irreconcilable class struggle (following the famous phrase of Karl Liebknecht in World War I “*The main enemy is at home*”). This strategy implies in the case of war, as formulated by Lenin and the Bolshevik Party in 1914, that revolutionaries strive for the “*transformation of the imperialist war into civil war*”, i.e. the advance of the proletariat’s struggle for power under the conditions of war. In the same spirit, we advocate the *transformation of the Global Trade War into domestic political class struggle against the ruling elite*. Such a program is the only way to *unite* the international working class on an *internationalist* basis and to *break any “patriotic” unity of workers with “their” imperialist bourgeoisie* as well as their lackeys inside the workers movement. The program of revolutionary defeatism is not a program which starts to be relevant only once a war breaks out (if one begins fighting for it only by then, it will be too late) but one which has to be implemented from now on.

7. More concretely, the RCIT urges socialists to deploy the following tactics in conflicts between imperialist states:

i) Socialists resolutely oppose all forms of imperialist chauvinism which is wiping up hatred of one people against the other. Such jingoism is aimed at poisoning the consciousness of the working people. Hence, they must launch a determined campaign against any form of political or ideological support for any Great Power – be it their own imperialist bourgeoisie or a foreign one.

ii) It is the duty of socialists to oppose all kind of sanctions and measures of trade wars against imperialist rivals.

iii) Likewise, they have to struggle against all forms of militarism, armament and wars between Great Power rivals.

iv) Where working class organizations have representatives in parliamentary bodies, they are obligated to vote against all such chauvinist measures. However, the crucial area of class struggle is not the parliament but workplaces, neighborhoods, schools, universities and barracks. It is here where socialists have to distribute their propaganda and to agitate for class struggle actions (e.g. demonstrations, strikes up to general strikes, uprisings, etc. – according to conditions and relation of forces).

v) It is of utmost importance for revolutionaries to advocate cross-border joint statements and activities of socialists, trade unions as well as other workers and popular mass organizations of the

respective imperialist countries involved in the conflict. Such measures can be a strong signal of concrete internationalist working class solidarity!

8. In cases of *conflicts between the imperialist bourgeoisie and oppressed people*, the RCIT calls workers and popular organizations around the world to act decisively in the spirit of *revolutionary anti-imperialism and working class internationalism*. They must *unconditionally support the oppressed people against the imperialist aggressors* and fight for the defeat of the latter. They must apply the *anti-imperialist united front tactic* – this means siding with the forces representing these oppressed people without giving political support to their respective leaderships (usually petty bourgeois nationalists or Islamists; sometimes even semi-colonial bourgeois states). Socialists in the imperialist countries are obligated to fight merciless against the social-chauvinist supporters of the Great Power privileges as well as against the cowardly centrists who abstain from actively supporting the struggle of the oppressed. Socialists support the *Anti-Imperialist Patriotism* of the oppressed and help them to develop a socialist, internationalist consciousness. *Only on the basis of such a program* will it be possible for socialists to create the conditions for trust and unity of the workers and poor peasants of the oppressed people with the progressive workers in the imperialist countries. Only on such a fundament will it be possible to unite the international working class on an internationalist basis.

9. This means, more concretely, that the RCIT advocates the following tactics:

i) In cases of imperialist non-military aggression against semi-colonial countries (e.g. sanctions against North Korea, Iran, Zimbabwe, Venezuela etc.), socialists must unconditionally oppose it and support measures to undermine, break and, if possible, stop it. While we fight for a world without nuclear weapons, we strongly reject any imperialist aggression against semi-colonial country which possess (or strives to possess) nuclear weapons.

ii) In cases of imperialist wars and occupations of semi-colonial countries (e.g. US in Afghanistan since 2001, in Iraq since 2003, France in Mali since 2013, Russia in Syria since 2015, Israeli settler state occupying Palestine), socialists call for the defeat of the imperialist aggressors and the military victory of the forces representing the oppressed people. The same tactic is required in cases of aggressions by proxy armies for the Great Powers (e.g. AU forces in Somalia, G5 forces in the Sahel countries in West Africa)

iii) Likewise, socialists unconditionally oppose the oppression of national minorities and fully support the right of national self-determination of oppressed people (e.g. the Chechen and other Caucasian people in Russia, the Uyghurs and Tibetans in China, Catalonia in Spain). This means supporting all their national, democratic and cultural rights, including the right to have an independent state if they wish so. Likewise we support local self-government for ethnic minorities like the Roma, the Native Americans in the U.S., etc.

iv) In the same spirit, socialists defend migrants and refugees against national oppression and racist discrimination. Such defense includes the struggle for full equality for migrants (use of native language, citizen rights, equal wages; full solidarity with Muslim migrants against Islamophobic racism, etc.). We also call for a united front in order to physically defend migrants and refugees against racist attacks (self-defense groups, etc.). It also means to fight against racist immigration control in imperialist states and to defend 'Open Borders' for refugees. Actual examples for such issues are Trump's mass deportations of migrants and his "Muslim Ban", the EU's racist Frontex regime in the Mediterranean Sea and on the Balkans, Russia's discrimination against people from the Caucasus and Central Asia, etc.).

v) The strategic goal is to free the working class of the oppressed people from any dominance by bourgeois or petty-bourgeois forces and to advance its independent organization. Only on the basis of such political and organizational independence will the working class be able to lead the other classes and layers of the oppressed people towards liberation from the yoke of imperialism and capitalism.

vi) To advance the struggle for these goals, socialists have to agitate in workplaces, neighborhoods, the schools, universities and in the trenches. They will support all practical actions which help to advance the struggle of the oppressed to defeat the imperialist aggressors. Such activities embrace all forms of class struggle (e.g. demonstrations, strikes up to general strikes, uprisings, participating in wars, etc. – according to conditions and relation of forces). It also includes practical actions which sabotage the aggressions of the imperialist masters (selected strikes against the imperialist war machinery, collective refusal to do work serving the oppression, helping refugees to overcome the barbaric walls of the imperialist fortresses, etc.). Furthermore, socialists should conduct political agitation among the rank and files soldiers of the imperialist armies in order to undermine the reactionary control of the generals, to advance mass desertion as well as fraternization with the “enemy”, etc. We defend the right of oppressed people to get military and other material aid from other states (incl. imperialist states) as long as it does not lead to political subordination to these states. A negative example for this is the petty-bourgeois Kurdish YPG in Syria which became proxies of US imperialism. Workers in such states must support and not block such material aid for the liberation struggle.

vii) There have been rare cases in recent history where the United Nations (or individual states) – under the pressure of progressive mass movements – have formally imposed sanctions on particularly reactionary powers (e.g. sanctions against the South African Apartheid state before 1994). Today many Muslim states have imposed sanctions on the imperialist Israeli state. We critically support such sanctions imposed by semi-colonial countries while pointing out their limitations. In case of imperialist states imposing such sanctions we are aware that these are not the same as reactionary sanctions of imperialist states against rivals or against insubordinate semi-colonies. However, as Marxists we advocate workers and popular sanctions against such reactionary forces like the Zionist state. This means workers actions to stop trade and military aid for Israel, consumer boycott, etc. Hence we critically support the BDS campaign against Israel despite its limitations.

viii) Likewise, revolutionaries advocate cross-border joint statements and activities of socialists, trade unions as well as other workers and popular mass organizations of the respective imperialist and semi-colonial countries.

10. The two fundamental aspects of *Revolutionary Defeatism* – (i) refusal to side with any camp in conflicts between Great Powers and (ii) active support for the struggle of oppressed people in order to defeat the imperialists – are *inextricably linked with each other*. The tensions between the Great Powers are based, to a large degree, on the desire of each ruling class to expand its sphere of influence in the South at the cost of its rivals. The oppression and super-exploitation of the oppressed people is determined by the Great Powers’ drive for global dominance. Opposition against the Great Powers without full support for the liberation struggles of the oppressed people is “*platonic anti-imperialism*” at best or “*hidden social-imperialism*” at worst. Support for this or that liberation struggle without steadfast opposition against *all* Great Powers involves the risk of siding with one imperialist camp against the other and, hence, of transforming a liberation force into a proxy for this or that Great Power.

11. The RCIT point out the fact that recent developments of accelerating contradictions between the Great Powers underline once more the basic truth of Marxism that capitalism in general and imperialism in particular is a *world system* and can only exist as such. Hence, the socialist answer to the global misery is not national isolation – an illusory alternative inevitable resulting in poverty and backwardness given the international nature of the modern productive forces. No, we are neither for imperialist globalization nor for imperialist protectionism – the way forward is international class struggle for the creation of a *socialist world economy* and a *world-wide federation of workers and peasant republics*. Such a program requires a world party, i.e. an *international* organization and not *national-isolated* groups.

12. From this follows the urgency to bring together the numerous movements against this or that neoliberal attack, against this or that war, etc. on an *international* scale. At the moment, all these movements are nationally isolated. In the best case, there exist regional co-ordinations. But in times of Global Trade Wars, of global tensions between the Great Powers, of imperialist aggressions all over the world – in such times it is decisive to unite the workers and popular movements (including the trade unions) on an international level. The global day of action against the Iraq war on 15 February 2003 with 15-20 million people participating, the world social forum movement, the international trade union federations are examples that international unity is possible. But we need international unity which last longer than one day, which is free of bureaucratic manipulators and libertarian muddle heads. *We need a new world mass movement of the workers, youth and oppressed people!*

13. The RCIT denounces the *petty-bourgeois program of pacifism*. It spreads the illusion that it would be possible to overcome imperialist aggression without violence of the oppressed. History has proven otherwise! Furthermore, the pacifists' focus on simply ending a war by any means so that "peace" prevails is not progressive in any way. As long as such a struggle is not combined with the revolutionary overthrow of the imperialist bourgeoisie, such a strategy simply means to advocate the creation of the pre-war conditions of imperialist "peace", i.e. the very conditions which inevitably led to the imperialist war. While revolutionaries fight uncompromisingly against the professional pacifist confusers, they have to deal pedagogically with the wish for peace among the ordinary masses. The slogan for peace can play a progressive role if it is integrated into a revolutionary program of anti-militarist struggle.

14. The RCIT draws attention to important social developments in imperialist countries which have taken place in the past decades and which have crucial consequences for the program of revolutionary defeatism. Such developments are, on one hand, the *massive increase of migration* and, as a result, *the high share of migrants in the imperialist metropolises*. These migrants (including the second and third generation children) are *systematically oppressed and super-exploited as national minorities* and constitute a *significant part of the working class* in the imperialist countries. These migrants are therefore of *strategic importance for building a revolutionary workers party in general and for the revolutionary defeatist strategy in particular*. In fact, the policy on migrants and refugees is the preparation and a litmus test for every progressive organization which will demonstrate if it will be able to withstand the pressures of an imperialist war. While there are some social climber and Quisling-like "super-patriots" among the migrants, the huge majority of them have a *substantially lower identification with their new imperialist "homeland"* as they usually come from poorer, semi-colonial countries. This is symbolically proven at every football match between an imperialist country and the original mother country of migrants living in the given imperialist state. In such cases the migrants will always enthusiastically side with their original mother country and not with the imperialist host country (e.g. Germany or Austria vs. Turkey; France vs. Algeria, U.S. vs. Mexico). In summary, revolutionaries strive for the *transformation*

of the chauvinist hatred against migrants and of the hysteria about the so-called "Refugee Crisis" into the creation of international unity of workers and oppressed from different countries. Such unity can be achieved on the basis of joint struggles for immediate economic and political demands, for democratic rights of migrants and for international solidarity with the liberations struggles of the workers and oppressed in the South.

15. Another important development of recent past is that more than  $\frac{3}{4}$ , i.e. *the huge majority, of the international working class is located no longer in the old imperialist states* (U.S., Western Europe and Japan) but in the semi-colonial countries as well as China. Hence, the struggle of the workers and oppressed in these countries directly effects the global production of capitalist value on which the living standard in the old imperialist countries depends.

16. On the other hand, the imperialists have today a *thick web of capitalist media* at their service (TV, internet, social media, free papers, etc) which enables them a round-the-clock constant stream of chauvinist manipulation of the working class and oppressed. This is utilized with particular effect for provoking a sentiment in the society of being in permanent danger of "terrorist attacks" and "waves of refugees coming". Likewise, the bourgeoisie also often utilizes the monopolized media to support the reduction of social and economic rights of workers or to even to support coups d'état in semi-colonial countries such as Brazil in 2016. However, it is also true that the massive spread of the internet (incl. social media) offers workers and oppressed much better opportunities to exchange information and mobilize on a global scale. It is crucial for socialists to encourage the workers vanguard to utilize these media in order to advance the voices of the oppressed.

17. Economic and social developments of the capitalist societies have created a situation where the ruling classes are *more dependent on political support of the working class and the popular masses at the home front*. This has led to the situation that the imperialists are determined to limit the casualties among their armies as much as possible. This is proven by the fact that the US was forced to withdraw the bulk of its troops from Afghanistan and Iraq despite the fact that their losses were much less than during the Vietnam War or the Korean War 1950-53. Likewise, Israel lost its war against Hezbollah in summer 2006 with only 122 soldiers killed (out of 30,000 soldiers deployed). In short, the decadent, imperialist societies which are robber states can absorb *much less blows* than the oppressed people who fight for a just cause! Revolutionaries in imperialist states can utilize this for aiding the struggle of the oppressed by further undermining the chauvinist "moral" among the people and by advocating internationalist solidarity.

18. The Marxist tradition has always identified the reformist forces as *agents of the bourgeoisie within the labor movement* and the centrists as *opportunistically adapting to these reformists*. Given the massive bourgeoisification of the workers movement in the old imperialist countries, the increasing limitation of the reformist parties to the labor aristocracy and the primarily orientation of most centrist forces to the petty-bourgeois world of reformist and academic circles – all this has resulted in a *further political degeneration* of these forces in general and in relation to their approach to imperialism in particular.

19. The revisionism of many reformists and centrists contains the following characteristics:

i) *Refusal to recognize the Great Power rivalry as a key feature of the present period* and, related to this, *refusal to recognize the imperialist character of China and Russia* (e.g. PSTU/LIT, PTS/FT, UIT, PO/CRFI, FLTI); the *Party of the European Left* de facto openly rejects the whole Marxist conception of imperialism; organizations like the CWI or the IMT occasionally recognize the imperialist character of Russia and China but draw no conclusions from this; most Stalinists and some centrists (e.g.

Altamira's PO/CRFI, the so-called Spartacists) even characterize China as a "socialist" or "deformed workers" state. Consequently, many of the reformist and centrist forces opportunistically adapt either to the Western or the Eastern Great Powers (pro-Western resp. pro-Eastern social-imperialism). Examples for this are, among others, the South African CP's pro-China stance; support of Greece's SYRIZA (which is part of *Party of the European Left*) for EU's sanctions against Russia; the support of Zyuganov's KPRF, Lakeev's UCP or Tyulkin's RKRP for imperialist Russia in the Ukraine since 2014; the Japanese CP's support for Tokyo's territorial claims against China; the CWI's adaption to Western imperialism (disguised support for Britain in the Malvinas War 1982, support for Zionism, refusal to defend Iraq or Afghanistan against the US/UK), etc.. We also see the phenomena of reformist and centrist forces preaching pseudo-defeatism which in fact is *inverted social-chauvinism*, i.e. opportunist adaption to Great Powers which are in conflict with their own imperialist bourgeoisie (historical examples for this are the pro-Allied position of German, Austrian and Italian reformists and centrists in 1933-45; the Stalinists' flirt with Nazi-Germany in 1939-41). Today we see various Stalinists and centrists in the US and Western Europe supporting Russian and Chinese imperialism. (As a side-note we draw attention to the fact that such reactionary "defeatism" is also followed by various ultra-reactionary and fascist groups in Western Europe which subscribe to Dugin's *Eurasianism* and lean towards Russian imperialism.)

ii) *Refusal to support the national and democratic liberation struggles of the oppressed people against the imperialist aggressors and their local lackeys in the South.* Various Stalinists and centrists even support unashamed imperialist wars (e.g. the French PCF's backing, as a government party, of the wars against Yugoslavia in 1999 and Afghanistan in 2001 as well as of the military interventions in Mali in 2013 and in Iraq in 2014; another example is the support of the KPRF, UCP, RKRP and other Stalinists for Russia's war in Syria). These Stalinists and various centrists also side with pro-imperialist dictatorships like Assad in Syria or General Sisi in Egypt (e.g. the WWP, PSL, ANSWER in the US; CPB, Counterfire and the "Stop the War Coalition" in Britain; Alan Woods IMT and the Morenoite LIT praised the military coup in Egypt in July 2013 as a "*Second Revolution*").

iii) *Refusal to consistently support the full equality for migrants and to fight for Open Border for refugees* by nearly all reformists and centrists. Greece's SYRIZA as a governmental party bears full co-responsibility for the EU imperialist assault on refugees (Frontex program, etc.). Various pseudo-socialists support social-chauvinist struggles for the exclusion of migrants from the labor market (e.g. "*British Jobs for British Workers*" strike in 2009, supported by the trade union bureaucracy, the Stalinist CPB, the centrist CWI and IMT, etc.). Other example of social-chauvinism are the PCF's support for the reactionary *Je suis Charlie* campaign for the Islamophobic *Charlie Hebdo* magazine as well as its vote in the parliament for the declaration of the state of emergency by the Hollande government after the terrorist attack (both in 2015).

20. In summary, the RCIT emphasizes the crucial importance of the program of *Revolutionary Defeatism* in order to meet the challenges of the current historic period. Without such a program it is impossible for any socialist organization to find a correct orientation in a period marked by the rapid acceleration of the rivalry between the Great Powers as well as by the incessant aggression of the imperialists and their lackeys against the working class and the oppressed people. The RCIT calls all liberation fighters to join us in the struggle to build a *Revolutionary World Party* – a party that consistently fights for the global overthrow of imperialism and the foundation of a socialist society without oppression and exploitation. Building such a world party requires, among others, intransigent struggle against all social-imperialists adapting to their own Great Power or any other; it requires also systematic pushing back of all those revisionists who refuse to support the struggles of

the oppressed people against the Great Powers and their local regimes in the South. Without a world party it is impossible to fight for a consistent program against imperialism and militarism on an international scale.

21. Naturally, building such a party requires a longer process of building roots among the masses, education of cadres, practical tests, etc. Today the RCIT is a pre-party organization committed to build such a world party. Currently, we are only the nuclei of the future world party. But such a world party will not fall from heaven! It can not be built on a national terrain alone as this will only result in the creation of national-centered organizations with all the inevitable political deformations. No, the process of building a world party can only take place in the trenches of international class struggle on the basis of an internationalist program. The RCIT calls all revolutionaries around the world to join us in this most important task!

*Workers and Oppressed: Fight all Great Powers in East and West!*

*International Unity of Struggle against all Great Powers – U.S., China, EU, Russia and Japan!*

*In Conflicts between Great Powers: The Main Enemy is at Home! Transformation of the Global Trade War into Class Struggle against the Ruling Elite! Transformation of the Imperialist War into Revolutionary Civil War!*

*Support All Liberation Struggles of the Workers and Oppressed against any Great Power and their local Regimes in the South! But No Political Support for the Non-Revolutionary Leaderships of these Struggles!*

*Transformation of the Chauvinist Hatred against Migrants and of the Hysteria about the so-called “Refugee Crisis” into the Creation of International Unity of Workers and Oppressed from different Countries! Fight together for Immediate Economic and Political Demands, for Democratic Rights of Migrants and for International Solidarity with the Liberations Struggles of the Workers and Oppressed in the South!*

*Workers and Oppressed of all Countries, Unite!*

*No Future without Socialism! No Socialism without Revolution! No Revolution without a Revolutionary World Party!*

*Forward in Building the RCIT! For a new World Party of Socialist Revolution!*

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*We refer readers also to the following documents of the RCIT:*

Joint Statement: Global Trade War: No to Great Power Jingoism in West and East! Neither Imperialist Globalization nor Imperialist Protectionism! For International Solidarity and Joint Struggle of the Working Class and Oppressed People! 4 July 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/joint-statement-on-the-looming-global-trade-war/>

Joint Statement: Warmongering in the Middle East: Down with all Imperialist Great Powers and Capitalist Dictatorships! 13 May 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/joint-statement-warmongering-in-the-middle-east/>

Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism, RCIT Books, Vienna 2013, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>.