

# **Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry**

**The Factors behind the Accelerating Rivalry  
between the U.S., China, Russia, EU and Japan**

**A Critique of the Left's Analysis and  
an Outline of the Marxist Perspective**

**By Michael Pröbsting**



**Published by the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency**



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*This book is dedicated to all those who devote their lives to the working class' liberation struggle and to the building of the revolutionary world party without which this liberation struggle can not win.*

Published by the

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# Introduction

One of the biggest issues of our time is the accelerating rivalry between the imperialist Great Powers – the U.S., China, EU, Russia, and Japan. Hence, diplomatic rows, sanctions, trade wars, military tensions and, ultimately, major wars between these Great Powers are prominent features of the historic period ahead. The looming Global Trade War between the U.S. and China, the tensions in the South China Sea, the sanctions between the West and Russia – all that demonstrates the highest actuality of the issue of Great Power rivalry.

These developments are closely related to the increasing aggression of the Great Powers against the oppressed peoples – a phenomenon which has massively accelerated since 2001 under the fig-leaf of “*War on Terror*”.

For these reasons, we have always emphasized the crucial importance of understanding the nature of the imperialist world system. Without such an apprehension of the Marxist theory of the modern epoch it is impossible to recognize the imperialist character of the Great Powers. This is a particularly urgent issue given the emergence of new imperialist powers – China and Russia – which are challenging the long-term masters of the old imperialist world order (the U.S., as the hegemon, and the EU and Japan as its allied powers).

Consequently, a correct theoretical comprehension of the main contradictions of world capitalism is the prerequisite for socialists to take an unambiguous anti-imperialist stand – one of the most important tasks for Marxists today, in particular for those operating in the heart of the imperialist beast.

Such a Marxist program of anti-imperialist struggle inside the imperialist countries themselves has become known as *Defeatism*, or to be more precise, as *Revolutionary Defeatism*. This program means, to summarize it in a simple formula, to reject any kind of support for each and every imperialist Great Power, to support all liberation struggles against any of them and to utilize all difficulties and crises in order to advance the class struggle to defeat the imperialist ruling class in all countries. Our organization, the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT), has recently published a substantial document on this issue (“*Theses on Revolutionary Defeatism in Imperialist States*”). This programmatic document is republished here as an appendix.<sup>1</sup>

The present book is basically structured in four main parts. In the first part, we deal with several features of imperialism which are relevant for our topic with a focus on the rivalry between the Great Powers. Hence, it is not a comprehensive analysis of all aspects of imperialism but focuses on a few of them. We permit ourselves such a procedure also because we have already dealt with numerous issues of present-day imperialism in other books and pamphlets of

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<sup>1</sup> See also on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/theses-on-revolutionary-defeatism-in-imperialist-states/>

the RCIT.<sup>2</sup>

In the second part we discuss the analysis of Great Power rivalry as it has been elaborated by a number of left-wing parties and organizations. In criticizing their position we defend and refine our arguments. In this process we present a number of historical and actual facts. We also compare the arguments of these left-wing organizations with the Marxist theory of imperialism as it has been elaborated by Lenin and Trotsky.

Part three elaborates the essential components of the defeatist program – on the issues of conflicts between Great Powers as well as between imperialist states and semi-colonial countries respectively national minorities and migrants. We explain what the Marxist classics have said on this subject and why it is relevant for today. Furthermore we also analyze which political and social changes have taken place since the times of Lenin and Trotsky and what are their consequences for the program of defeatism.

In the fourth part of the present work we discuss the approach of a number of left-wing organizations on the issue of anti-imperialist struggle. Again, we submit their positions to a criticism from the Marxist point of view and elaborate our arguments with numerous examples. We demonstrate that a number of forces, while claiming to take an anti-imperialist stand, in fact side with one or the other Great Power. In other words, they are not anti-imperialists but rather open or concealed social-imperialists.

We bring the book to a close with a summary of the tasks of Marxists in the struggle against imperialist war and aggression.

Finally, a “warning”: this book is not written from a “neutral” point of view. It is not indifferent to the accelerating rivalry between the Great Powers and the imperialist aggression against oppressed peoples. It takes a stand – a stand against *all* Great Powers and for *supporting* all liberation struggles of the workers and oppressed! It therefore polemicizes against those left-wing organizations which, in our view, fail in taking such an anti-imperialist stand. Hence, this work is not written for the purpose of becoming a commercial success but rather as a guideline for anti-imperialist activists. There are already myriads of bestseller on the market. What is needed is authentic Marxist literature! Lenin liked to say that *„without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.“*<sup>3</sup> This intrinsic truth has not lost its importance.

We are fully aware that the issues discussed in this work are not always easy to understand. This is particularly true as we are discussing phenomena which have come up rather recently (like e.g. the emergence of China and Russia as imperialist Great Powers). Many socialists might prefer sticking with old formula like the idea that only the U.S., Western Europe and Japan are imperialist

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<sup>2</sup> For references to the RCIT literature on these issues see the relevant chapters in this pamphlet.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Lenin: *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), in: LCW Vol. 5, p. 369. Many works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky and other Marxist classics are published at the website of the *Marxist Internet Archive*, [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org), which is a highly valuable source for anyone interested in Marxism.



states. However, we consider such “conservatism” as highly dangerous as it misses the crucial changes in world politics in the past decade. Trotsky’s observation about the importance of keeping the theoretical analysis in step with the objective developments remains fully valid.

*“The vast practical importance of a correct theoretical orientation is most strikingly manifested in a period of acute social conflict of rapid political shifts, of abrupt changes in the situation. In such periods, political conceptions and generalizations are rapidly used up and require either a complete replacement (which is easier) or their concretization, precision or partial rectification (which is harder). It is in just such periods that all sorts of transitional, intermediate situations and combinations arise, as a matter of necessity, which upset the customary patterns and doubly require a sustained theoretical attention. In a word, if in the pacific and “organic” period (before the war) one could still live on the revenue from a few readymade abstractions, in our time each new event forcefully brings home the most important law of the dialectic: The truth is always concrete.”*<sup>4</sup>

We hope that this book will help to clarify the complex theoretical and tactical issues related to the accelerating rivalry between the Great Powers. It will have fulfilled its purpose if it aids activists and all those interested in understanding these issues to get a more comprehensive grasp of one of the most important questions of our time and to draw the necessary conclusions from this.

Finally, this book benefited from collective discussions which the author had with a number of comrades in the RCIT. In particular I want to thank comrade Nina Gunić, with whom I have the privilege to develop jointly ideas and arguments since years and who plays a central role in elaborating the programmatic framework of our theory. Furthermore I want to express my gratitude to comrade Petr Sedov who helped in the elaboration of this book not only with a number of insightful comments but also with providing translations of many quotes from Russian-language sources.

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<sup>4</sup> Leon Trotsky: Bonapartism and Fascism (July 1934), in: Trotsky Writings 1934-35, p. 35



*Part 1:*

*Features of Imperialism  
in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*



# I. The Historic Crisis of Capitalism

As we state in our *“Theses on Revolutionary Defeatism in Imperialist States”*, the global acceleration of the contradictions between states and classes can only be understood when put into a broader historical context – the decay of the capitalist system which is dominating the world. Such decline forces the ruling class of all capitalist countries to accelerate the attacks against the working class and the oppressed people as well as against each other. Hence we see in such a period of historic crisis of capitalism that 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 their 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.).

In the following chapters we will illustrate this analysis with a number of facts and figures. Let us start with a brief overview of the background for the recent acceleration of the rivalry between the Great Powers. The world situation is characterized by a profound acceleration of the contradictions between productive forces and the capitalist relations of production. As a result we have experienced a tendency towards stagnation since the 1970s – a tendency which turned into outright decay since the beginning of the new historic period in 2008.

Such decay of capitalism is reflected in the dramatic climate crisis and the resulting environmental catastrophes, the increasing poverty as well as the decline of the growth rates of world output. As we have dealt with this in detail somewhere else we limit ourselves to present a few figures and tables from official bourgeois institutions.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *The Catastrophic Failure of the Theory of “Catastrophism”*. On the Marxist Theory of Capitalist Breakdown and its Misinterpretation by the Partido Obrero (Argentina) and its “Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International”, RCIT Pamphlet, May 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-catastrophic-failure-of-the-theory-of-catastrophism/>; RCIT: *Advancing Counterrevolution and Acceleration of Class Contradictions Mark the Opening of a New Political Phase. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries* (January 2016), Chapter II and III, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 46, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world->

Figure 1 demonstrates the long-term decline of world output per capita. Table 1 and 2 as well as Figure 2, which we have taken from United Nations sources, demonstrate the same. The annual world output growth rates declined consecutively from +5.84% (1960–70), +4.09% (1970–80), +3.46% (1980–1990), +3.04% (1990–2000) to +2.66% (2000–10). Table 2 shows also that growth rates since 2007 are clearly below the figures before in nearly all world regions. Likewise, Table 3 demonstrates that growth of world output between 2008 and 2017 was substantially lower in every year (except one) than the average growth in the cycle before.

**Table 1. The development of global Gross Domestic Product, 1960–2010 (in absolute numbers as well as average annual growth) <sup>6</sup>**

<i>Global GDP in absolute numbers</i>	<i>Average annual growth rate (5 years)</i>	<i>Average annual growth rate (10 years)</i>
1960: 7279		
1965: 9420	1960–1965: +5.88%	
1970: 12153	1965–1970: +5.80%	1960–1970: +5.84%
1975: 14598	1970–1975: +4.02%	
1980: 17652	1975–1980: +4.18%	1970–1980: +4.09%
1985: 20275	1980–1985: +2.97%	
1990: 24284	1985–1990: +3.95%	1980–1990: +3.46%
1995: 27247	1990–1995: +2.44%	
2000: 32213	1995–2000: +3.64%	1990–2000: +3.04%
2005: 36926	2000–2005: +2.93%	
2010: 41365	2005–2010: +2.40%	2000–2010: +2.66%

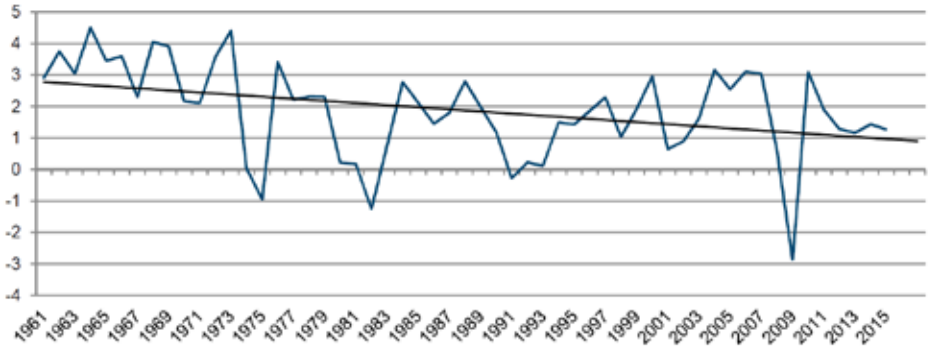
*Legend: GDP figures are in billions of constant 2000 US dollars. The growth figures are the respective averages of the five ten years cycle (our calculations).*

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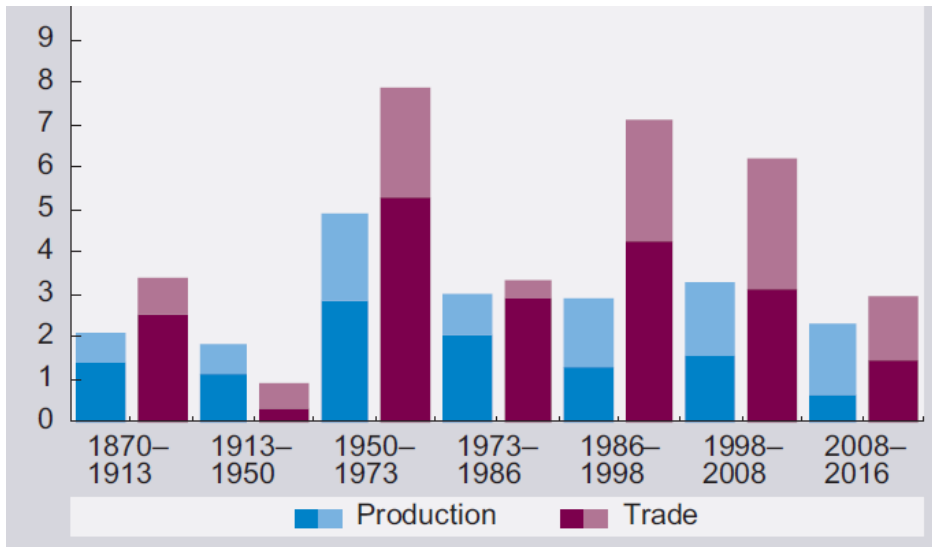
[perspectives-2016/](#); Michael Pröbsting: World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries, RCIT Books, Vienna 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/>; 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/>; Michael Pröbsting: Imperialism, Globalization and the Decline of Capitalism (2008), in: Richard Brenner, Michael Pröbsting, Keith Spencer: The Credit Crunch - A Marxist Analysis, London 2008, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-and-globalization/>.

<sup>6</sup> Deepak Nayyar: The South in the World Economy: Past, Present and Future, UNDP Human Development Report Office, Occasional Paper 2013/01, p. 6

**Figure 1. Growth Rate of Real Per Capita Gross Global Product, 1961-2015** <sup>7</sup>



**Figure 2. Global Output and World Trade, selected country groups and periods, 1870-2016 (Average Annual Growth and Group Contribution, in Percent)** <sup>8</sup>



*Legend: The darker areas represent the contribution of developed countries to the corresponding world aggregates. Data represent real annual compound growth rates, computed using constant 1990 dollars between 1870 and 1973 and constant 2010 dollars between 1973 and 2016.*

<sup>7</sup> Leon Podkaminer: Has Trade Been Driving Global Economic Growth, Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies 2016, Working Paper 131, p. 3

<sup>8</sup> UNCTAD: Trade and Development Report 2018, New York and Geneva, 2018, p. 37

**Table 2. Industrial Growth Rates, Selected Countries and Regions, 1870–2014<sup>9</sup>**  
(Percent)

Groups	1870- 1890	1890- 1913	1913- 1920	1920- 1938	1938- 1950	1950- 1973	1973- 1990	1990- 2007	2007- 2014
	Germany, United Kingdom and United States	3.1	3.4	1.4	1.9	0.9	5.2	1.1	2.1
Germany, Japan and United States	-	-	-	-	-	7.9	2.4	2.2	0.3
European periphery	4.7	5.0	-6.5	4.7	3.6	8.9	3.3	2.8	0.0
Asia	1.5	4.2	5.2	4.2	-1.7	8.5	5.8	4.2	4.1
Latin America and the Caribbean	6.4	4.4	3.4	2.8	5.3	5.7	2.7	2.2	1.0
Middle East and North Africa	1.7	1.7	-5.8	4.9	6.0	6.2	6.1	4.5	3.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	-	-	13.4	4.6	8.6	5.5	3.5	3.9	4.1

<sup>9</sup> UNCTAD: Trade and Development Report 2016, New York and Geneva, 2016, p. 32



**Table 3. World output growth: Annual percentage change 2001-2017 (Gross Domestic Product at constant 2005 dollars)**<sup>10</sup>

2001-08	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
3.2	1.5	-2.1	4.1	2.8	2.2	2.3	2.6	2.6	2.2	2.6

As we have demonstrated in our book *“The Great Robbery of the South”*, the heart of this decline has been the old imperialist states – the North America, Western Europe and Japan – resulting in a massive shift of capitalist value production to China and the semi-colonial world.

This shift is indicated by the dramatic changes in the world industrial production – the sector which creates most of the capitalist value. Historically, the old imperialist countries (usually called “developed countries” by bourgeois economists) have been the center of the capitalist value production. According to a study of the Soviet economist S.L. Wygodski, in 1938 the imperialist countries had a share of 91.7% in world manufacturing and the (semi-)colonial countries produced 8.3%.<sup>11</sup> By 1985, the so-called “developed countries” still accounted for 80.8% of world manufacturing. At that time the “developing countries”, on the other hand, were still the origin of 19.2% the world industrial product. By 2015, the “developed countries” accounted only for 56.3% anymore, while the share of the “developing countries” has increased to 43.7% (i.e. more than doubled). (See Table 4) We remark, as an aside, that the category “developing countries” confuses different types of states, i.e. the semi-colonial countries as well as China and the former USSR.

However, as we have explained in the book mentioned above, these figures still massively underestimate the real shift which has taken place. In reality the real value creation in the South is much bigger than the official figures suggest and, conversely, the real value creation in the North is much smaller. (Basically, a substantial portion of the value created in the South appears in the official figures as created in the North.)

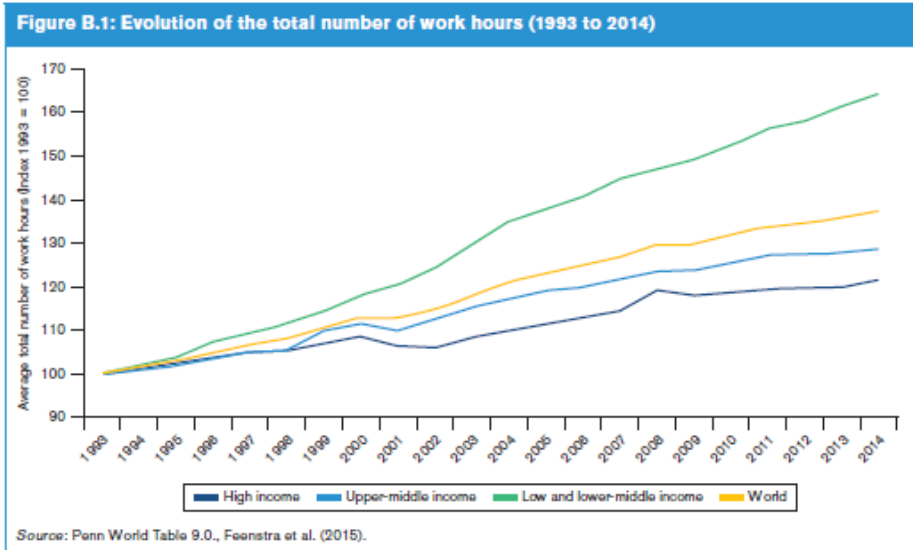
Another indicator for this dramatic shift of capitalist value production away from the old imperialist metropolises is the evolution of the total amount of labor employed across the economy as reflected in the total number of hours worked. As we can see in Figure 3, the total number of hours worked globally between 1993 and 2014 has increased by about 37%. The growth rate of total hours worked has been, however, much higher in so-called “low and lower-middle income” countries (i.e. the poorer, semi-colonial countries). In these countries the number of hours worked increased by 65%. In contrast, total hours worked in the “high-income” countries (i.e. the Western imperialist countries) increased in the same period by only about 20%. In the “upper-middle income” countries it increased by about 27%.

<sup>10</sup> UNCTAD: Trade and Development Report 2017, New York and Geneva, 2017, p. 2

<sup>11</sup> S.L. Wygodski: Der gegenwärtige Kapitalismus (1969), Berlin 1972, p. 387

**Table 4. Manufacturing Share by Region, 1985 and 2015 (in %) <sup>12</sup>**

	1985	2015
World	100%	100%
Developed Countries	80.8%	56.3%
Developing Countries	19.2%	43.7%

**Figure 3. Evolution of the total number of work hours (1993 to 2014) <sup>13</sup>**

<sup>12</sup> The statistics are compiled from two different UNIDO reports: UNIDO: Industrial Development Report 2002/2003. Competing through Innovation and Learning, p. 149 (for the year 1985); UNIDO: Industrial Development Report 2018. Demand for Manufacturing: Driving Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development, p. 200 (for the year 2015)

<sup>13</sup> WTO: World Trade Report 2017. Trade, technology and jobs, p. 22

We note, as a side-mark, that several bourgeois think-tanks warn against the “decline of the West” and the unstoppable rise of the “emerging markets”. *PricewaterhouseCoopers*, for example, a leading Britain-based think tank, predict that by 2050 the ten most important economies are supposed to be, in the following order, China, United States, India, Indonesia, Japan, Brazil, Germany, Mexico, United Kingdom and Russia (GDP measured at market exchange rates)<sup>14</sup> While such prognoses have to be treated with caution, they reflect the decline of the old imperialist powers as well as a thorough crisis of self-confidence of the West.<sup>15</sup>

Another indication of the decay of capitalism, as we discussed in past works, is the stagnation of economic globalization and the rising tendency towards protectionism. This development does not come as a surprise to Marxists. We have predicted in the past the end of Globalization and the creation of regional blocs around individual Great Powers or Great Power alliances.

*“In this book we have outlined the process of globalization and introduced the formula “Globalization = Internationalization + Monopolization”. We have explained that the massive amount of accumulated capital, the development of the productive forces etc. requires a world market. A retreat to relative isolation – as there was such a tendency amongst the US ruling class in the 1920s and 1930 – is impossible today.*

*However, we have also outlined that the same process of globalization which creates improved conditions for profits and extra-profits, also creates enormous contradictions and crisis at the same time. Furthermore, capitalism rests – and will rest as long as it exists – on national states. Without them the capitalist ruling classes can neither organise their domestic basis for exploitation nor possess a strong arm for support on the world market.*

*However, the increasing rivalry between the Great Powers is undermining this globalization. The monopolies need a market as big as possible. But at the same time they*

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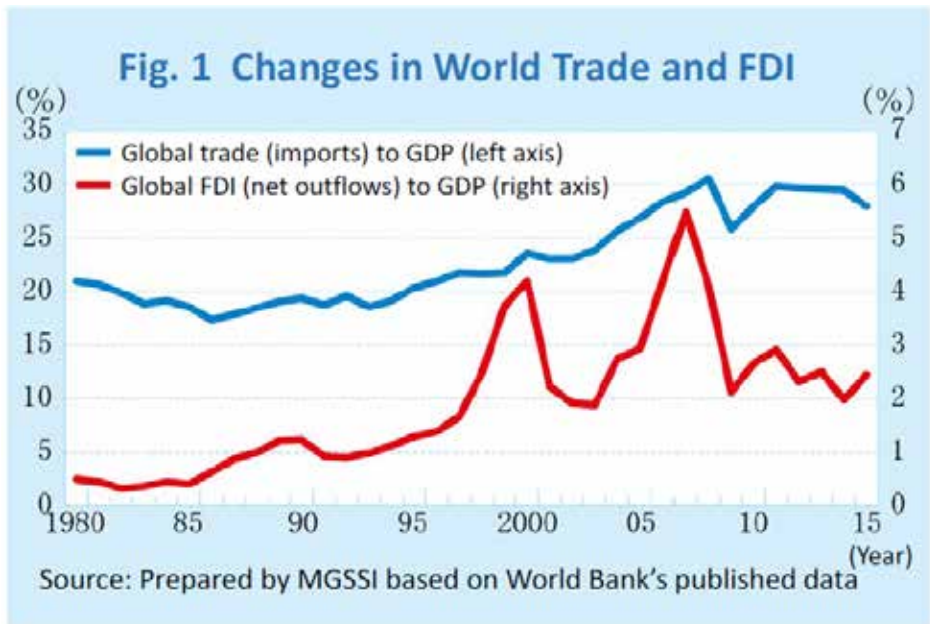
14 PricewaterhouseCoopers: The Long View. How will the global economic order change by 2050? February 2017, p. 68. At this point it might be useful to note the following. The alert reader will observe that in official statistics the figures comparing various aspects of the economic strength of the US, China and other countries differ. They sometimes differ as much that in one statistic, for example, the U.S. is number one and China number two and in another statistic, one the same subject, it is the other way round. The reason for this is often that different standards are used. Sometimes economists give figures for gross domestic product at *purchasing power parity* which adjusts for price level differences across countries and sometimes they give figures for gross domestic product at *market exchange rates*. Both methodologies have their advantages. GDP at PPP is a better indicator of average living standards or volumes of outputs or inputs, because it corrects for price differences across countries at different levels of development. However, GDP at MERs is a better measure of the relative size of the economies in international comparison as it compares all economies by the same standard. Since price levels are significantly lower in less developed countries, looking at GDP at PPPs narrows the income gap with the advanced economies compared to using market exchange rates. In our opinion, it is preferable to compare different countries by using GDP at market exchange rates. Anyway, irrespective if one uses PPP or MER, the dynamic of economic development in the last decades is the same: the old imperialist power decline and China and other countries rise.

15 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South, pp. 382-394

*need absolute dominance, unrestricted access for themselves but maximum possible restriction for their competitors. As a result there will be a tendency towards forms of protectionism and regionalisation. Each Great Power will try to form a regional bloc around it and restrict access for the other Powers. By definition, this must result in numerous conflicts and eventual wars.”*<sup>16</sup>

Such a tendency is not without historic parallels as we could observe in the historic period between the two World Wars 1914-1945. Now we see again the beginning of such a development. This is reflected in the stagnation of world trade in relation to production as well as in the stagnation of cross-border investment. (See Figure 4)

**Figure 4. Changes in World Trade and Foreign Direct Investment, 1980-2015**<sup>17</sup>



<sup>16</sup> Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South*, chapter 14ii), pp. 389-390, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>

<sup>17</sup> Tomohiro Omura: *The Maturity of Emerging Economies and New Developments in the Global Economy*, Mitsui Global Strategic Studies Institute Monthly Report, April 2017, p. 4

Furthermore, there is also a fundamental tendency in Russia and China to increase payments in national currencies. Likewise, there is a substantial increase of gold production in these states. In fact, Russia has become the state with the worldwide fifth largest gold reserves, beating Stalin's historical record of 2.100 metric tons. The state-corporation Gazprom is now discussing a payment system which is related to gold equivalent. Today, the Russian Central Bank accounts for more than 17% of world's gold and foreign exchange reserves.<sup>18</sup> Such policies lead to less dependence on USA banking system.

Finally, we want to draw attention to the fundamental tendency which is the driving force behind the historic crisis of capitalism: the long-term decline of the profit rate. As widely known, Marx elaborated this fundamental law in *Capital Vol. III*. It basically means that, in the long run, the share of surplus value becomes smaller relative to all of the capital invested in production (in machinery, raw materials, etc., as well as wages paid to workers). Therefore, the surplus value which can potentially be used for the reproduction of capital on an extended level becomes less and less. This inevitably leads to disruptions and crises and a historic tendency of decline as it becomes less and less profitable for the capitalists to invest in the expansion of production.<sup>19</sup>

Naturally, over-accumulation of capital, over-production of commodities, and the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is not a linear process, but its tempo and dynamics are influenced by various counter-veiling tendencies – most importantly by the relation of forces between the classes, i.e., the political class struggle.<sup>20</sup> However, while such factors can for some time slow down or temporarily halt the fall of the rate of profit (as happened in the 1990s, for example, as a result of the coalescing neoliberal offensive, advance of imperialist globalization, and the collapse of the Stalinist workers' states), they cannot stop – or even reverse – the decline for in the long run. (See Figure 5)

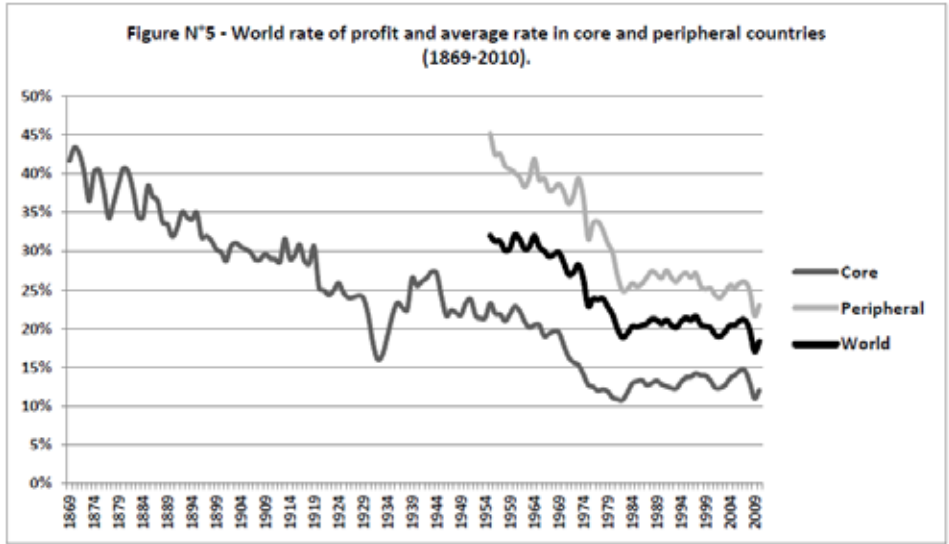
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18 Russia's gold reserves exceed 2,000 tons for the first time, 02 Nov 2018, [http://www.pravdareport.com/news/russia/economics/02-11-2018/141931-russian\\_gold-0/](http://www.pravdareport.com/news/russia/economics/02-11-2018/141931-russian_gold-0/)

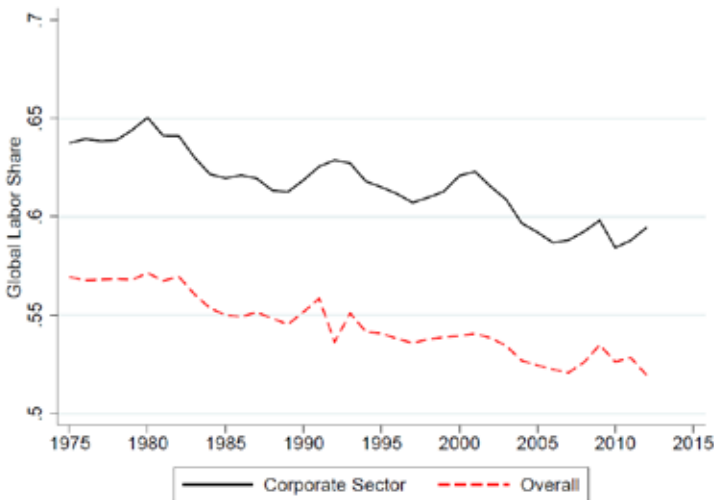
19 Marx considered this to be the most important law of capitalism: „This is in every respect the most important law of modern political economy, and the most essential for understanding the most difficult relations. It is the most important law from the historical standpoint. It is a law which, despite its simplicity, has never before been grasped and, even less, consciously articulated.“ (Karl Marx: Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie; in: MECW Vol. 29, p. 133)

20 See on this e.g., Richard Brenner, Michael Pröbsting, Keith Spencer: The Credit Crunch - A Marxist Analysis, London 2008

**Figure 5. World Rate of Profit and Average Rate in Core and Peripheral Countries (1869-2010)** <sup>21</sup>



**Figure 6. Declining Global Labor Share** <sup>22</sup>



<sup>21</sup> Esteban Ezequiel Maito: The historical transience of capital. The downward trend in the rate of profit since XIX century, 2014, p. 13

<sup>22</sup> Loukas Karabarbounis and Brent Neiman: The Global Decline Of The Labor Share, NBER Working Paper 19136, June 2013, p. 35

## II. Global Offensive of the Capitalists against the Working Class

In order to halt this tendency of the profit rate to fall, the capitalists are accelerating their attacks on the working class. This is true for the old imperialist countries, for the new Great Powers China and Russia, as well as for semi-colonial countries. This is reflected, among others, in the decline of the labor share of income in most countries – in the North as well as in the South.<sup>23</sup>

Loukas Karabarbounis and Brent Neiman, two economists who have published well-researched studies on this subject, have arrived to the conclusion that the global labor share has declined from roughly 64% in 1975 to about 59% in 2012. (See Figure 6)

We see the same picture in another figure which gives the labor shares for all Great Powers as well as other G20 countries. (See Figure 7) According to this statistic, the adjusted labor shares declined between 1991-2011 from about 63% to 58%.

Even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – not known as a labor-friendly institution – has to admit this fact. In a major study, the IMF found out:

*“In a sample of 35 advanced economies, between 1991 and 2014, the labor share declined in 19, which accounted for 78 percent of 2014 advanced economy GDP, and rose or remained relatively stable in the remainder. The overall cross-country dispersion of labor shares is considerably larger in emerging market and developing economies than in advanced economies. In a sample of 54 emerging market and developing economies (for which, on average, the decline in the labor share over the sample period is concentrated in the early 1990s), the labor share declined in 32 economies, which accounted for about 70 percent of 2014 emerging market GDP”<sup>24</sup>*

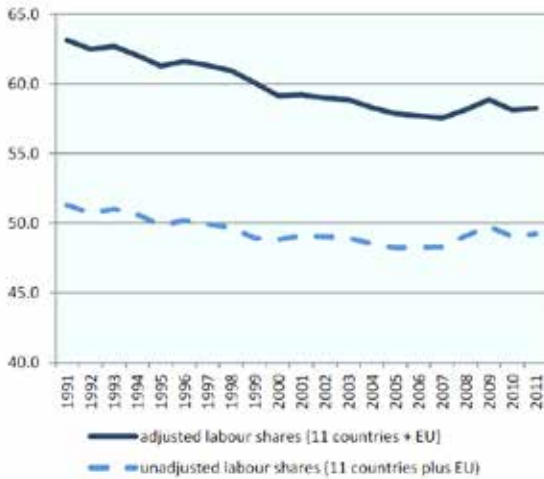
In Figure 8 we see the IMF figures for the development of the adjusted labor share in the years 1980-2014 for the old imperialist countries (“Advanced Economies”) as well as for the other countries.

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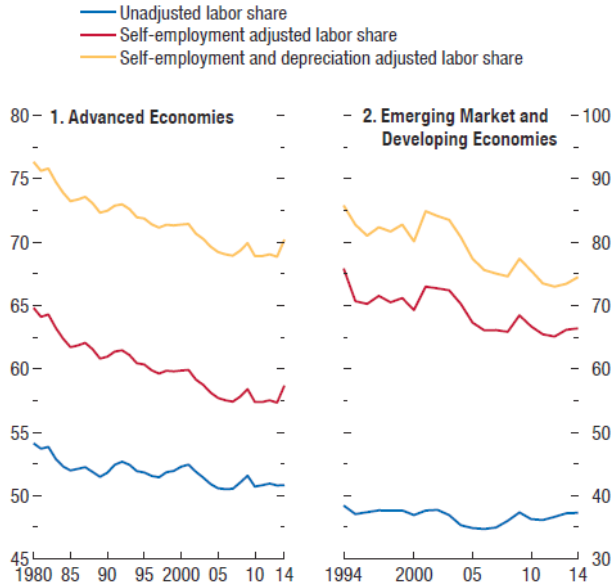
23 For our general assessment of the composition of the world working class and the changes in the past decades we refer, among others, Michael Pröbsting: *Marxism and the United Front Tactic Today. The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony in the Liberation Movement in Semi-Colonial and Imperialist Countries in the present Period*, RCIT Books, Vienna 2016, Chapter III, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/book-united-front/>

24 IMF: *World Economic Outlook: Gaining Momentum?* Washington, April 2017, p. 126

**Figure 7. The Adjusted and Unadjusted Labor Shares in selected G20 Countries, 1991-2011** <sup>25</sup>



**Figure 8. Evolution of the Adjusted Labor Share of Income (Percent)** <sup>26</sup>

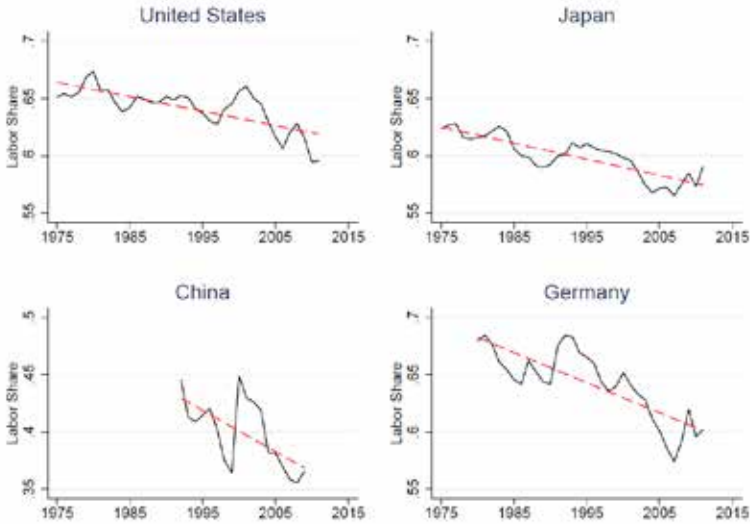


25 The Labour Share in G20 Economies, Report from the International Labour Organization and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development with contributions from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group, Report prepared for the G20 Employment Working Group, Antalya, Turkey, 26-27 February 2015, p. 5

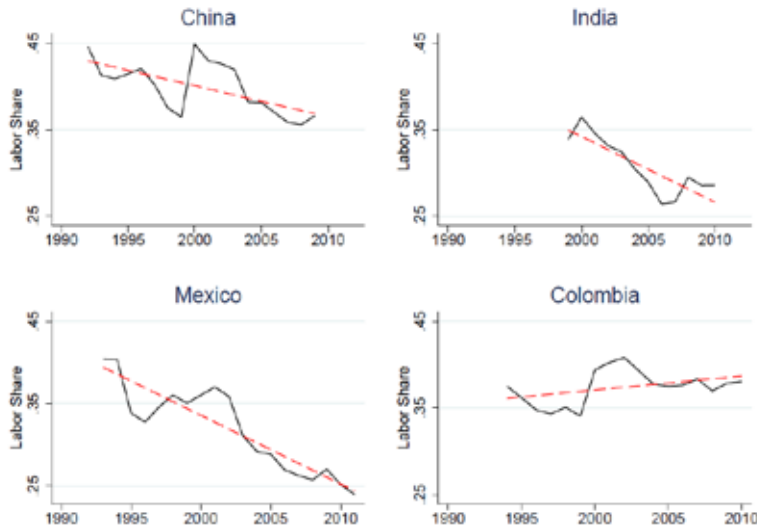
26 IMF: World Economic Outlook: Gaining Momentum? Washington, April 2017, p. 133



**Figure 9. Declining Labor Shares in Largest Economies**<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 10. Declining Labor Share for Developing Economies**<sup>28</sup>



27 Loukas Karabarbounis and Brent Neiman: The Global Decline of the Labor Share (And Follow-up Thoughts), University of Chicago, March 2014, p. 11

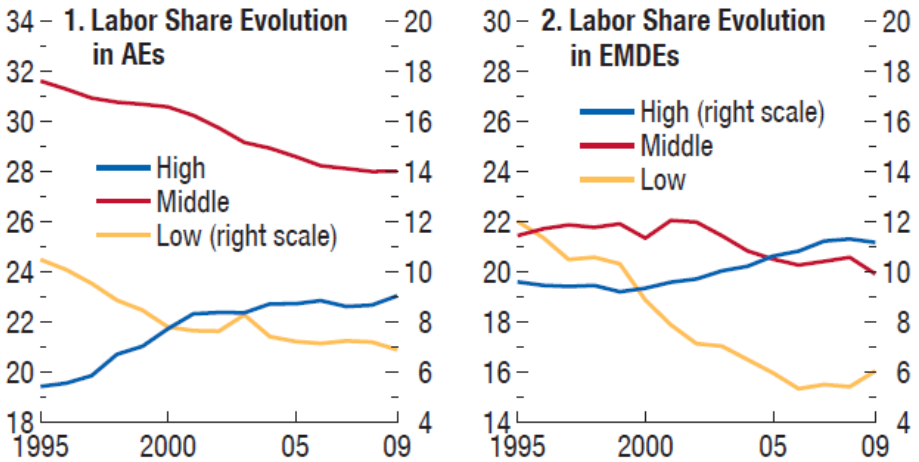
28 Loukas Karabarbounis and Brent Neiman: The Global Decline of the Labor Share, Quarterly Journal of Economics (2014), Presented by Sergio Feijoo, March 29, 2017, p. 6

In the figures 9 and 10 we see a breakdown of the development of the labor share for a number of important countries – the U.S., Japan, Germany, China, India, Mexico and Columbia. Again, with the exception of the last country, the dynamic is the same declining one.<sup>29</sup>

The brunt of these capitalist attacks has been borne, as the authors of the IMF study elaborate in another research paper, by the mass of the working class – the low- and middle-skilled labor. Only the upper stratum, often part of the privileged labor aristocracy, has been able to increase their share of income. (See Figure 11)

*“The decline in the global labor share has been borne by low- and middle-skilled labor. During 1995-2009 their combined labor income share was reduced by more than 7 percentage points, while the global high-skilled labor share increased by more than 5 percentage points.”<sup>30</sup>*

**Figure 11. Labor Share Evolutions and Labor Force Composition by Skill Level (Percent)**<sup>31</sup>

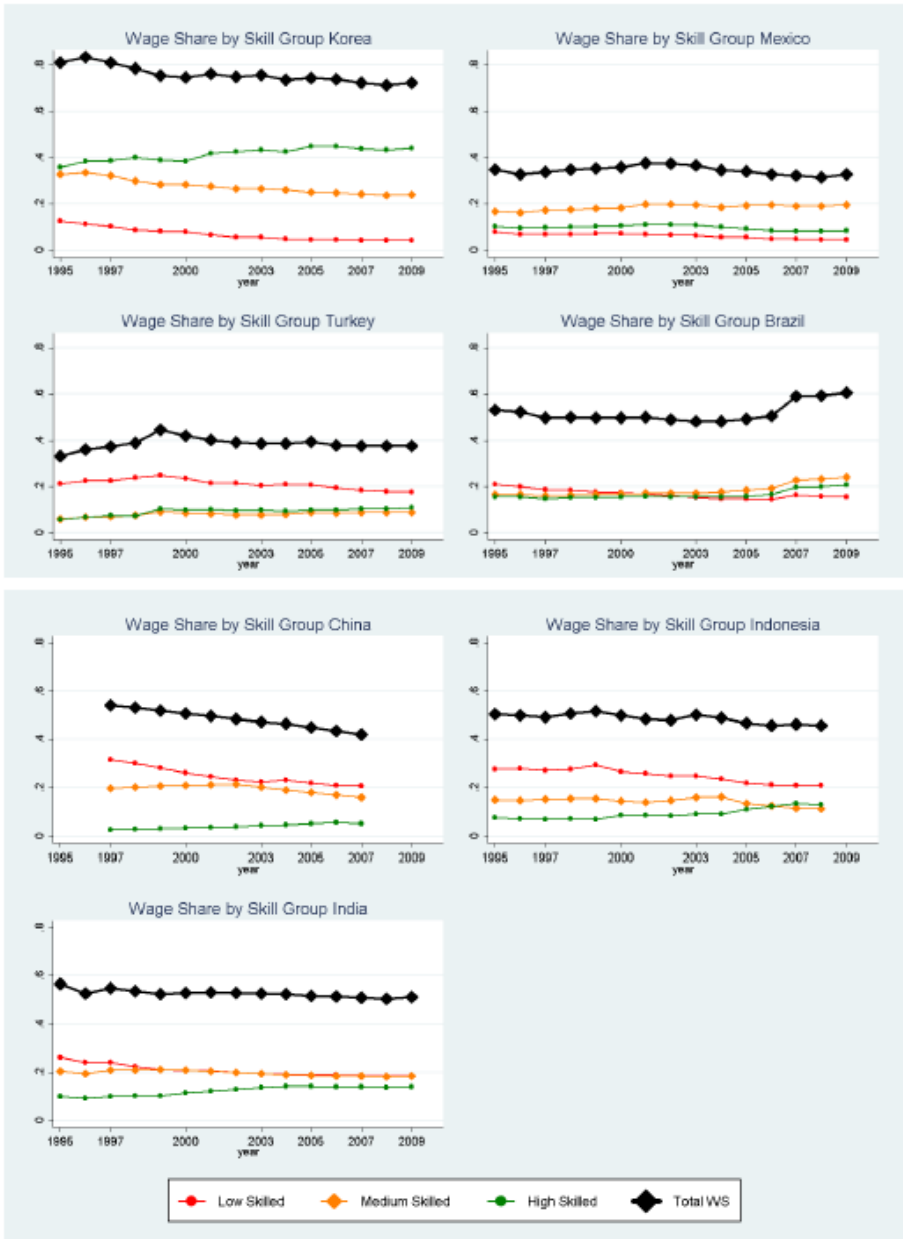


<sup>29</sup> As a side-note, we draw attention to the massive decline of the wage share in China. It is a severe blow to the myth spread by the Stalinist and semi-Stalinist eulogists of China’s “communist” capitalism. While they advocate China’s model as “socialism” or at least a “deformed workers state”, the reality is that a growing share of income enters the pockets of the capitalists while the worker’s share declines. (See on this also the Figure 9, 10, 12 and 23.)

<sup>30</sup> Mai Chi Dao, Mitali Das, Zsoka Koczan, Weicheng Lian: Why is Labor Receiving a Smaller Share of Global Income? Theory and Empirical Evidence. IMF Working Paper, July 2017, pp. 14-15

<sup>31</sup> IMF: World Economic Outlook: Gaining Momentum? Washington, April 2017, p. 128

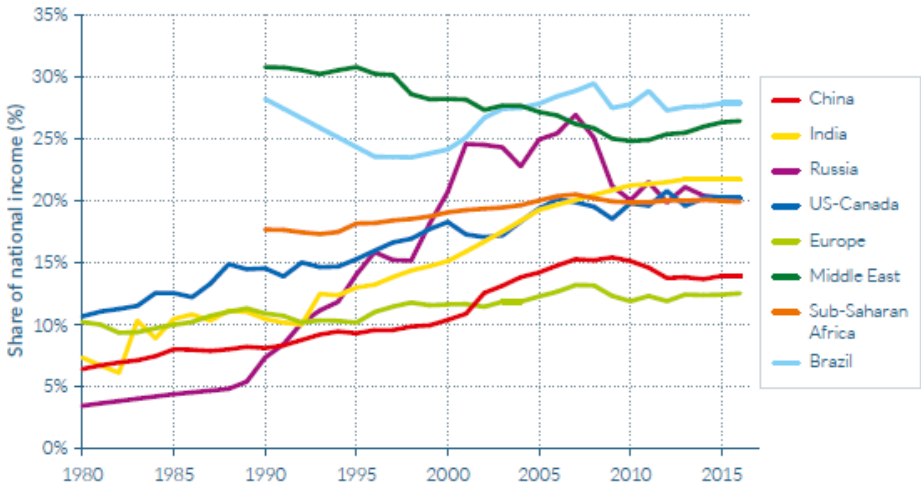
Figure 12. Wage Share by Skill group as defined by Workers' Education, 1995- 2009 (Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Korea, Turkey) <sup>32</sup>



32 Alexander Guschanski and Özlem Onaran: Why is the wage share falling in emerging economies? Industry level evidence, University of Greenwich, 2017, p. 18

**Figure 13. Top 1% Income Shares across the World, 1980–2016** <sup>33</sup>

Top 1% income shares across the world, 1980–2016



Source: WID.world (2017). See [wir2018.wid.world](http://wir2018.wid.world) for data series and notes.

In 2016, 14% of national income was received by the Top 1% in China.

Figure 12 shows the development of the wage share on income in the years 1995–2009 in China as well as seven other important advanced semi-colonial countries. As we can see, in all countries, except Brazil, did the labor share decline. In these countries, the income share of the lower and middle strata of the working class is declining while the share of the upper strata increases.

The reverse development of such decline of workers' wages has been the massive increase of the capitalists' profits. We content ourselves with reproducing one figure from the recently published and highly informative *World Inequality Report 2018* which demonstrates the evolution of the Top 1% income shares in the world's regions between 1980 and 2016. (See Figure 13)

We have elaborated in more detail about the global character of the attacks on the working class for several reasons. First, we want to demonstrate the validity of the Marxist law that the capitalist class, faced with the decline of its mode of production, attempts to increase the surplus value by systematically reducing the wage share.

Secondly, the profound character of the deterioration of the working people's living standard increases the desire of the imperialist bourgeoisie to confuse and manipulate the working class via chauvinism and jingoist warmongering

<sup>33</sup> Facundo Alvaredo, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, Gabriel Zucman: *World Inequality Report 2018*, p. 44

in order to divert their hatred away from the true culprit and against their class brothers and sisters.

Thirdly, it is important to take note of the severe attacks on the mass of the proletariat (the low and middle-skilled majority) in the imperialist countries as it objectively undermines the material basis of loyalty of this working class to the imperialist state and, hence, to “their” bourgeoisie. This, in turn, creates the preconditions for a fertile ground for revolutionary defeatism, i.e. the class struggle against the imperialist masters.

Finally, it is crucial to recognize the diverging trends in labor income between the upper strata of the proletariat and the lower and middle strata. The relative positive development of the formers income share constitutes an objective, material basis for aristocratic and pro-imperialist, i.e. social-imperialist tendencies among this privileged sector of the working class.

### III. Capitalism and the Increasing Relevance of Migration

A crucial sector of the working class, which becomes increasingly important in the imperialist countries, are migrants. As we have elaborated extensively in other publications, this layer of the working class is nationally oppressed and economically super-exploited. , i.e. the capitalists reap extra profits from the migrants' labor.<sup>34</sup>

Migration from the South to the imperialist North has accelerated in the past decades given the increasing impoverishment and the growing number of wars as well as of environmental catastrophes in the semi-colonial countries. In addition, the capitalists have increasingly encouraged a process of importing migrants from poorer countries to the imperialist metropolises in order to exploit them as cheap labor. The background for this is, on one hand, the desire of the capitalists to lower the wage costs (as well as the costs for education). On the other hand, the imperialist states face a constant reduction of young labor force.

<sup>35</sup>

A Dutch business executive stated, in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, that *"the European Union will be 32 million people short by 2050. This could go up to as much as 50 million, because a substantial part of the population still hasn't got a good-quality education. You can do whatever you want, but an increase in productivity won't help, increasing the retirement age won't help, you will have to work on immigration. There's no choice."*<sup>36</sup>

The situation in the U.S. is not much better. According to the *United States Census Bureau* data for every 100 working-age Americans there are currently 21 at the age of 65 or older. However, this ratio will increase to 35 by the year

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34 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Migration and Super-exploitation: Marxist Theory and the Role of Migration in the present Period of Capitalist Decay, in: Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory (Volume 43, Issue 3-4, 2015), pp. 329-346; Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South, Chapter 9, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>; Michael Pröbsting: Marxismus, Migration und revolutionäre Integration (2010); in: Der Weg des Revolutionären Kommunismus, Nr. 7, <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/werk-7>. A summary of this study in English-language: Michael Pröbsting: Marxism, Migration and revolutionary Integration, in: Revolutionary Communism, No. 1 (English-language Journal of the RCIT), <http://www.thecommunists.net/oppressed/revolutionary-integration/>

35 See on this e.g. McKinsey Global Institute: Global growth: Can productivity save the day in an aging world? January 2015, p. 34; Lukasz Rachel and Thomas D Smith: Secular drivers of the global real interest rate, Bank of England, Staff Working Paper No. 571, December 2015

36 Andre Sterk and Robin van Daalen: Immigration Holds Key to Labor Shortage, *Wall Street Journal*, June 28, 2011, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304314404576411362925170744>

2030.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, the *Boston Consulting Group* estimates that China's surplus in the year 2020 (about 55.2 million to 75.3 million workers) could reverse sharply, turning into a shortage of up to 24.5 million people by 2030.<sup>38</sup> According to the latest issue of the UN's *World Population Prospects*, China's population is supposed to decline from 1.409 million (2017) to 1.020 million (2100).<sup>39</sup>

Russia, too, faces perspectives of labor shortage. Putin's finance ministry predicts a 4% decline in the working population by 2035. The UN predicts a decline of the country's population from 144 million (2017) to 140.5 million (2030), 132.7 million (2050) and 124 million (2100).<sup>40</sup> The *Institute for Social Analysis and Forecasting at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration* (RANEPA) sees the work force shrinking by about 0.8-0.9 million people a year until 2025. Russia's labor force, which has risen since 1999, stood at 76.3 million people in July 2017, down by 1 million a year earlier.<sup>41</sup>

As a result of these developments, in the last few decades, millions of people from the South have succeeded in reaching the relatively wealthy regions of North America, Western Europe and Oceania. (See also Figure 14) In the US, the share of migrants among the general population rose from 5.2% (1960) to 12.3% (2000) to more than 14% (2010) and 16% (2017). In Western Europe, the migrants' share of the population grew from about 4.6% (1960) to nearly 10% (2010) and 14.4% (2017).<sup>42</sup>

The United Nations estimates in its latest migration report: "*Between 2000 and 2015, positive net migration contributed 42 per cent of the population growth in Northern America and 31 per cent in Oceania. In Europe, the size of the population would have declined during the period 2000-2015 in the absence of positive net migration.*"<sup>43</sup>

Russia, an emerging imperialist power, experiences also a massive process

37 Arthur S. Guarino: The Economic Implications of an Aging Global Population, 02.08.2018, <https://www.focus-economics.com/blog/economic-implications-of-an-aging-global-population>

38 Boston Consulting Group: The Global Workforce Crisis: \$10 Trillion at Risk, BCG Report, June 2014, p. 4

39 World Population Prospects, The 2017 Revision. Key Findings and Advance Tables, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, New York, 2017, p. 24

40 World Population Prospects, The 2017 Revision, p. 26

41 Denis Pinchuk, Maria Kiselyova: 'No miracles': labor shortage set to hit Russia's GDP, Reuters, October 3, 2017 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-labour-demography/no-miracles-labor-shortage-set-to-hit-russias-gdp-idUSKCN1C80CY>

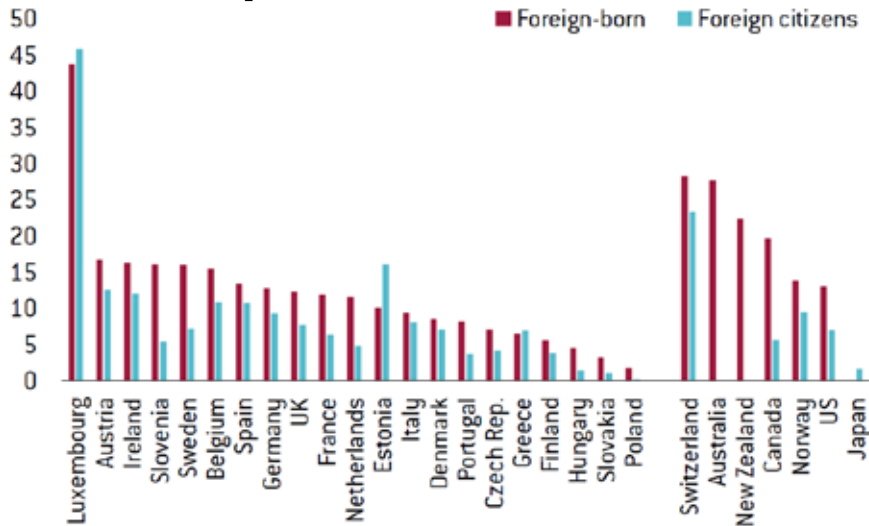
42 See Rainer Münz/Heinz Fassmann: Migrants in Europe and their Economic Position: Evidence from the European Labour Force Survey and from Other Sources (2004), pp. 5-6; Carlos Vargas-Silva: Global International Migrant Stock: The UK in International Comparison (2011), [www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk), p. 5; United Nations: International Migration Report 2017, Highlights, New York, 2017, pp. 29-30. The third region where migrants play an important role is the oil-producing states in the Middle East. We have dealt with this specific case elsewhere. See e.g., Michael Pröbsting: Die halbe Revolution. Lehren und Perspektiven des arabischen Aufstandes, in: Der Weg des Revolutionären Kommunismus, Nr. 8 (2011), p. 14, <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/werk-8>

43 International Migration Report 2017 (Highlights), Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, New York 2017, p. 18

of migration, in particular from Central Asian republics. According to official statistics approximately 11.6 million legal migrants currently reside inside Russia. In addition, another 5-8 million migrants have illegally entered the country in order to work there. The official figure for the migrants' share of Russia's population is 8.1%. However, there exist estimations which calculate a larger share of migrants in Russia.<sup>44</sup>

The role of migrants is even more significant than these figures indicate as they are concentrated in the metropolitan areas of the imperialist countries. Already, in the early years of the 2000s, half of all resident workers in New York were black, Latinos or belonged to another national minority. In inner and outer London, respectively 29% and 22%, of the residents were from ethnic minorities in 2000.<sup>45</sup> In Austria migrants officially constitute 19.4% of the total population, and in Vienna, the capital city, this share is higher with 38.5%. (If one includes the second and third generation of migrants, this share is even higher.) About 2/3 of these migrants either come from the Balkans, Eastern Europe or Turkey.

**Figure 14. Foreign-Born and Foreign Citizen Population in 2013 (Percent of Total Population)**<sup>46</sup>



<sup>44</sup> United Nations: International Migration Report 2017, Highlights, New York, 2017, p. 29; Irina Sinitsina: Economic Cooperation Between Russia and Central Asian Countries: Trends and Outlook, 2012, pp. 38-39

<sup>45</sup> See Peter Dicken: Global Shift. Mapping The Changing Contours Of The World Economy (Sixth Edition), The Guilford Press, New York 2011, p. 496

<sup>46</sup> Uuriintuya Batsaikhan, Zsolt Darvas and Inês Gonçalves Raposo: People on the move: migration and mobility in the European Union, Bruegel Blueprint Series Volume XXVIII, Bruegel, Brussels 2018, p.86



Contrary to the myth spread by right-wing populists, migration is *not* the cause of poverty and unemployment. In fact, as we demonstrated in other works, migrants are super-exploited and contribute *more* to the national wealth of their new country than what they receive. To give only a few examples: in Austria migrants paid €1.6 billion for social service in 2007, but received only €0.4 billion social benefits. Thus, the Austrian state appropriated €1.2 billion in that year alone and used it for other purposes.<sup>47</sup> This example from the year 2007 is not exception but rather the rule, as other studies have shown.<sup>48</sup>

Another example of how the capitalists profit from migrants' labor can be seen in Britain. According to the then minister for migration, Liam Byrne, the "British economy" gained about £6 billion in the year 2006. According to the then finance minister of UK, migrants' labor was responsible for 15%-20% of economic growth in Britain in the years 2001-2006.<sup>49</sup> In our studies on migration cited above, we have given many more examples of this form of capitalist super-exploitation.<sup>50</sup>

A recently published study arrived at the same conclusions. According to the *Resolution Foundation*, the ethnicity pay gap represented "a huge blow to the living standards of those affected". Black and ethnic minority employees are losing out on £3.2bn a year in wages compared to white colleagues doing the same work. After taking account of differences in average qualifications and job types, the analysis by the Resolution Foundation found the gap rose to as much as 17%, or £3.90 an hour, for black male graduates' pay. It found Pakistani and Bangladeshi male graduates earned an average £2.67 an hour (12%) less, while among female graduates, black women faced the biggest pay penalty, of £1.62 an hour (9%).<sup>51</sup>

The same phenomenon can be observed in Russia. For example, migrants are forced to pay fees of several thousand rubles to get a license to work. In Moscow such payments are bringing even more revenues for the budget than the taxes from oil-corporations!<sup>52</sup>

In summary, given the increasing number of migrants in the imperialist states, the intensifying racism and national oppression against migrants in these countries and the ongoing super-exploitation of them as cheap labor forces, we can

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47 See Hans Gmünder: Straches Handlangerdienste, KPÖ, 10.11.07, [http://www.kpoe.at/index.php?id=23&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=105&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=2&cHash=7fe484e968](http://www.kpoe.at/index.php?id=23&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=105&tx_ttnews[backPid]=2&cHash=7fe484e968)

48 See Gudrun Biffl: Die Zuwanderung von Ausländern nach Österreich. Kosten-Nutzen-Überlegungen und Fragen der Sozialtransfers (1997), WIFO, p. 8

49 House of Lords (Britain): Report - Economic Impact of Migration in UK (2008), p. 22

50 See also e.g. Martin Kahanec and Martin Guzi: How Immigrants Helped EU Labor Markets to Adjust during the Great Recession, IZA – Institute of Labor Economics, Discussion Paper No. 10443, December 2016

51 Kathleen Henahan: The £3.2bn pay penalty facing black and ethnic minority workers, 27 December 2018, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/media/blog/the-3-2bn-pay-penalty-facing-black-and-ethnic-minority-workers/>

52 Доходы Москвы от мигрантов превысили налоги с нефтяных компаний, 6.8.206, [https://lenta.ru/news/2016/08/06/migrants\\_pay/](https://lenta.ru/news/2016/08/06/migrants_pay/)

state beyond doubt the increasing relevance of migration both for capitalism as well as for the liberation struggle of the international working class.

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We can compare, to a certain degree, the role of migrants in the imperialist countries with the role of oppressed nations in imperialist states before 1918. Russia and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire had a population with a majority belonging to oppressed nations. Large sectors of the U.S. population were either black or migrants. As everyone knows, the national question played a key role in the collapse of the Russian and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. (The U.S. could better manage this issue as it was still a rising imperialist power.)

Obviously there are important differences between migrants today and national minorities in the states at that time. Migrants do not constitute a majority of the population in Western imperialist countries. But they are certainly more significant than migrants and national minorities were in most Western countries before 1918. Furthermore, most national minorities were more “backward” in their capitalist development than the dominant nation was.<sup>53</sup> Hence, the share of the proletariat of these oppressed nations was less than the state-wide average while the share of peasantry and urban petty-bourgeoisie was above average. This is completely different with migrants today as most of them are part of the working class actively employed in the labor process. So in effect, the migrants in the old imperialist countries are even more proletarian in their composition than the native population.

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In a book published 50 years ago, Ernest Mandel discussed the objective difficulties for the European working class to develop an internationalist consciousness. He pointed out the material and cultural difficulties for European workers to come into contact with workers of other countries since, at that time, workers hardly had sufficient money to make holidays abroad or to learn foreign languages. He also attacked the reformist bureaucracy of the workers movement for hindering or even outright fighting against any internationalist orientation.

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53 There were, of course, some exceptions like the Poles living in Tsarist Russia or the Czech people living in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. These people were capitalistically more developed than the dominant nation and, hence, had a significant (and militant) proletariat. See on this e.g. Georg W. Strobel: *Die Partei Rosa Luxemburgs, Lenin und die SPD. Der polnische ‚europäische‘ Internationalismus in der russischen Sozialdemokratie*; Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden 1974; Georg W. Strobel: *Quellen zur Geschichte des Kommunismus in Polen 1878-1918*, Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik., Köln 1968; Raimund Löw: *Der Zerfall der Kleinen Internationale: Nationalitätenkonflikte in der Arbeiterbewegung des alten Österreich (1889-1914)*, Europaverlag, Wien 1984

54 Ernest Mandel: *Die EWG und die Konkurrenz Europa – USA*, Europäische Verlagsanstalt,

However, there have been important changes since then. Transport costs have been reduced, making traveling abroad much easier for European workers. The cultural level also has improved as learning English in school has become obligatory. Furthermore, the working class in Europe has become much more multinational in its composition. A growing part of the workers – the migrants – has a consciousness which exceeds the national boundaries not because they are inherently more progressive or internationalist than the native workers but simply because they continue to have numerous bonds with their home country. Hence, they are naturally more interested in (some) international issues. The strong interest and identification of Arab migrants in Europe with the Arab Revolution since 2011 or the strong solidarity of Muslim migrants with the liberation struggle in Palestine are vivid examples of this fact.<sup>55</sup>

Another example for spontaneous internationalist consciousness among migrants is the famous slogans of the Central American migrant caravans who march to the U.S.: “*¡No somos criminales! ¡Somos trabajadores internacionales!*” (“*We are not criminals! We are international workers!*”)

Since migrants are not part of the native, dominant nation but rather nationally oppressed minorities, the huge majority of them have a substantially lower identification with their new imperialist “homeland” than the native, nationally dominant population has. 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 (see e.g. football matches between Germany or Austria against Turkey or an ex-Yugoslavian country; France against Algeria; the U.S. against Mexico). In many cases, migrant fans of the “guest team” even outnumber fans of the “home team”. True, there exist some social climber and Quisling-like “super-patriots” among the migrants, but the huge majority of migrants continue to identify more with their original, semi-colonial, mother country than with the new imperialist host country.

This has important consequences for the political climate and social stability of the old imperialist countries as the ruling class can count less on the uncon-

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Frankfurt a.M. 1968, pp. 90-91. This book, to our knowledge, has never been published in English language. For our political assessment of Mandel, a central leader of the post-war Fourth International both in its early revolutionary phase as well as in its period of centrist degeneration, we refer readers to our pamphlet Michael Pröbsting: The Catastrophic Failure of the Theory of “Catastrophism”, in: Revolutionary Communism, New Series No.7, June 2018, p.29, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-catastrophic-failure-of-the-theory-of-catastrophism/>

<sup>55</sup> Activists of the RCIT Sections in Europe could gain a lot of practical experience of these developments through many years of close collaboration with these migrants both in solidarity work with the liberation struggles in the Arab world as well in activities against racism and Islamophobia. See on this Michael Pröbsting: Marxism and the United Front Tactic Today. The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony in the Liberation Movement in Semi-Colonial and Imperialist Countries in the present Period, RCIT Books, Vienna 2016, pp. 116-119, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/book-united-front/>; See also numerous report on our website.

ditional loyalty of their population with their nation state than they could in the past. Such a development has important consequences for situations when the ruling class will call their population to rally to the chauvinist banner of “national defense” against a “foreign threat”. Trotsky’s observation in the 1930s about the potentially important role of the black minority in the U.S. in the struggle against imperialist war, given their limited patriotism in a country which brutally suppresses them, gains actual relevance in the case of migrants today.<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, migrants can play an important role as they are coming from the South and live now in North America, Western Europe or Russia. They can constitute a kind of transmission belt between the two parts of the world: they can bring the militant fighting spirit from their home countries to the North and transmit various skills and experiences from the North to the South.

Such multi-nationalization has also deep effects for the consciousness of the native Western European workers. True some sectors become more chauvinistic. This is often caused by a disorientation and regress in their political consciousness as a result of decades of betrayal by the labor bureaucracy and the consequential rise of right-wing populist parties. Such a development is also facilitated by a certain “aristocratic instinct” of Western European workers towards “foreigners” from poorer countries – a result from the fact that they are living in countries which dominated the world for centuries and from the failure of reformism to help workers to overcome such an “aristocratic consciousness”.

In addition, the working class is not (and can not be) immune towards the influence of the petty-bourgeoisie and the middle layer. Furthermore, one has to take into account certain differences in the development of the consciousness of workers in metropolitan areas (which often have a more multinational composition) and those in the countryside (which usually have a lower share of migrants).

On the other hand there exists also a significant sector of the native European working class which stands in solidarity with refugees, which helped them in 2015 when many arrived, which reject Islamophobia and which support refugees rights to enter their countries. True, sometimes this sector is larger and dominates the “public opinion” (e.g. in autumn 2015 and spring 2016) and on other times it is the reactionary racists which dominate. But this does not mean that they do not exist. They are just less visible for the bourgeois “public opinion”. In any case, this sector, together with the migrants, will play a primary role in build working class resistance and revolutionary parties in Europe.

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<sup>56</sup> „The Negro question takes on a new importance. The Negroes will hardly be patriotic in the coming war.“ (Leon Trotsky: For A Courageous Reorientation (1939), in: Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1938-39, p. 349)

## IV. The Marxist Criteria for an Imperialist Great Power

In the following chapter we will summarize our theoretical understanding of the consequences of the Marxist theory of imperialism, as it was developed by Lenin, for the respective definition of imperialist and semi-colonial states.<sup>57</sup>

### Main Characteristics of an Imperialist respectively a Semi-Colonial State

Lenin described the essential characteristic of imperialism as the formation of monopolies which dominate the economy. Related to this, he pointed out the fusion of banking and industrial capital into financial capital, the increase in capital export alongside the export of commodities, and the struggle for spheres of influence, specifically colonies.

In *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism* – his most comprehensive theoretical essay on imperialism – Lenin gave the following definition of imperialism:

*„We have to begin with as precise and full a definition of imperialism as possible. Imperialism is a specific historical stage of capitalism. Its specific character is threefold: imperialism is monopoly capitalism; parasitic, or decaying capitalism; moribund capitalism. The supplanting of free competition by monopoly is the fundamental economic feature, the quintessence of imperialism. Monopoly manifests itself in five principal forms: (1) cartels, syndicates and trusts – the concentration of production has reached a degree which gives rise to these monopolistic associations of capitalists; (2) the monopolistic position of the big banks – three, four or five giant banks manipulate the whole economic life of America, France, Germany; (3) seizure of the sources of raw material by the trusts and the financial oligarchy (finance capital is monopoly industrial capital merged with bank capital); (4) the (economic) partition of the world by the international cartels has begun. There are already over one hundred such international cartels, which command the entire world market and divide it “amicably” among themselves – until war redivides it. The export of capital, as distinct from the export of commodities under non-monopoly capitalism, is a highly characteristic phenomenon and is closely linked*

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<sup>57</sup> We have dealt with Lenin’s theory of imperialism extensively in other publications. See, for example: Michael Pröbsting: Lenin’s Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power. On the Understanding and Misunderstanding of Today’s Inter-Imperialist Rivalry in the Light of Lenin’s Theory of Imperialism. Another Reply to Our Critics Who Deny Russia’s Imperialist Character, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 25, August 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-theory-and-russia/>; 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, 2013, <http://www.great-robbery-of-the-south.net/>; Michael Pröbsting: Imperialism and the Decline of Capitalism (2008), in: Richard Brenner, Michael Pröbsting, Keith Spencer: *The Credit Crunch – A Marxist Analysis* (2008), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-and-globalization/>

with the economic and territorial-political partition of the world; (5) the territorial partition of the world (colonies) is completed.”<sup>58</sup>

A widespread flaw in defining the class character of states is to attempt analyzing them *in isolation*. One takes this or that figure of wealth, this or that number of corporations and derives from them the supposed class character of a given state. However, such an approach is not appropriate for Marxists as it is in fundamental contradiction to the method on which our philosophical *Weltanschauung* is based. It is impossible to arrive to a correct understanding without approaching this issue from the viewpoint of materialist dialectic. This method, which is the methodological basis of Marxism, obligates us to analyze each thing, each phenomenon not in isolation but *in relation to others*.

Abram Deborin, the leading Marxist philosopher in the USSR in the 1920s before the Stalinist clampdown, formulated this issue very well. “*Nothing in the world exists in and of itself but everything exists in relation to the rest of the totality.*”<sup>59</sup>

Such a view is based on the dialectical view of things and their development which Lenin formulated so concisely in 1915 on his philosophical article *On the Question of Dialectics*. In this article Lenin emphasized that it is fundamental to understand that development (or evolution) in general is based on *unity of opposites*, a unity which is characterized by struggle and interaction or, in other words, *relationships of contradictions in permanent motion*.

„The two basic (...) conceptions of development (evolution) are: development as decrease and increase, as repetition, and development as a unity of opposites (the division of a unity into mutually exclusive opposites and their reciprocal relation). In the first conception of motion, self-movement, its driving force, its source, its motive, remains in the shade (or this source is made external—God, subject, etc.). In the second conception the chief attention is directed precisely to knowledge of the source of “self”-movement. The first conception is lifeless, pale and dry. The second is living. The second alone furnishes the key to the “self-movement” of everything existing; it alone furnishes the key to the “leaps,” to the “break in continuity,” to the “transformation into the opposite,” to the destruction of the old and the emergence of the new. The unity (coincidence, identity, equal action) of opposites is conditional, temporary, transitory, relative. The struggle of mutually exclusive opposites is absolute, just as development and motion are absolute.”<sup>60</sup>

Approaching things, including states, by analyzing them in relation to others is the fundamental basis to arrive to a correct understanding. Thus, a given state must be viewed not only as a separate unit, but first and foremost *in its relation to other states and nations*. Similarly, by the way, classes can only be understood in relation to one other. This is self-evident since states, by definition, could

58 V. I. Lenin: Imperialism and the Split in Socialism (1916); in: CW Vol. 23, pp. 105-106 [Emphases in the original]

59 Abram Deborin: Lenin als revolutionärer Dialektiker (1925); in: Nikolai Bucharin/Abram Deborin: Kontroversen über dialektischen und mechanistischen Materialismus, Frankfurt a.M. 1974, p. 136 [our translation]

60 V.I. Lenin: On the Question of Dialectics (1915); in: LCW 38, p.358 [Emphases in the original]

not exist in isolation but only because other states exist too. The same, again, in the case of classes: There is no bourgeoisie without a working class. There are no big landowners without rural workers and peasants. Likewise, there are no imperialist states without colonies and semi-colonies. There is no single Great Power but several Great Powers which are in rivalry to each other.<sup>61</sup>

We note, as an aside, that the German centrist theoretician Karl Kautsky developed in 1914 a theory, according to which the economic laws of capitalism would push the bourgeoisie to overcome the stage of imperialism and to enter a stage called "*ultra-imperialism*." This epoch would be characterized by an increasing exploitation of the working class as well as of the colonial and semi-colonial countries. At the same time, the imperialist powers would increasingly overcome their rivalry and unite in a single imperialist trust or alliance. However, this theory of ultra-imperialism has been totally refuted by the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, there are a number of revisionist theoreticians today who advocate a remake of this theory by suggesting that modern imperialism would be characterized not by rivalry between Great Powers but rather by the existence of a global "Empire" (e.g. Negri, Panitch, Gindin, etc.). In fact, those Marxists who deny the imperialist character of China and Russia and who claim that there exists only a more or less united imperialist bloc, led by the U.S., come very close to Kautsky's theory of ultra-imperialism!<sup>62</sup>

The comparability of states and classes in this context is particularly valid given the fact that states, in the Marxist understanding, are "*special bodies of armed men which serve the ruling class*," as Lenin put it in 1917 in his famous book *State and Revolution*.<sup>63</sup>

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61 This, by the way, is also true for workers states (including deformed ones). Such countries represent, casted in the form of a state, the state of the international equilibrium between the antagonistic classes. This was also true in the case of the Stalinist states, albeit this relationship was complicated by the bureaucratic machinery of the ruling caste. See on this our analysis of Stalinist states: Michael Pröbsting: *Cuba's Revolution Sold Out? The Road from Revolution to the Restoration of Capitalism* (Chapter II), August 2013, RCIT Books, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/cuba-s-revolution-sold-out/>

62 We have dealt with these arguments in Michael Pröbsting: *Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power. On the Understanding and Misunderstanding of Today's Inter-Imperialist Rivalry in the Light of Lenin's Theory of Imperialism. Another Reply to Our Critics Who Deny Russia's Imperialist Character*, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 25, August 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-theory-and-russia/>

63 "*A state arises, a special power is created, special bodies of armed men, and every revolution, by destroying the state apparatus, shows us the naked class struggle, clearly shows us how the ruling class strives to restore the special bodies of armed men which serve it, and how the oppressed class strives to create a new organisation of this kind, capable of serving the exploited instead of the exploiters.*" (V. I. Lenin: *The State and Revolution. The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution* (1917), in: LCW Vol. 25, p. 395). Such an understanding was based on the state theory of Marx and Engels. See for example, the latter's' book *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* in which he analyzed the historical origin of the state: "*This public force exists in every state; it consists not merely of armed men, but also of material appendages, prisons and coercive institutions of all kinds...*" (Friedrich Engels: *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. In the Light of the Researches by Lewis H. Morgan* (1884), in: MECW Vol. 26, p. 270)

The formation of monopolies and Great Powers increasingly led to the division of the entire world into different spheres of influence among the rival imperialist states and the subjugation of most countries under these few great powers. From this follows an essential feature of Lenin's (and Trotsky's) analysis of imperialism: the characterization of the connection between the imperialist nations and the huge majority of people living in the capitalistically less developed countries as a *relationship of oppression*. In fact Lenin, and following him, Trotsky too, came to the conclusion that this division of the world's nations into oppressor and oppressed nations is one of the most important characteristics of the imperialist epoch:

*„Imperialism means the progressively mounting oppression of the nations of the world by a handful of Great Powers (...) That is why the focal point in the Social-Democratic programme must be that division of nations into oppressor and oppressed which forms the essence of imperialism, and is deceitfully evaded by the social-chauvinists and Kautsky. This division is not significant from the angle of bourgeois pacifism or the philistine Utopia of peaceful competition among independent nations under capitalism, but it is most significant from the angle of the revolutionary struggle against imperialism.“*<sup>64</sup>

From this, Lenin concluded that the division between oppressed and oppressor nations must constitute a central feature of the Marxist program:

*“The programme of Social-Democracy (this is how the Marxists called themselves at that time, Ed.), as a counter-balance to this petty-bourgeois, opportunist utopia, must postulate the division of nations into oppressor and oppressed as basic, significant and inevitable under imperialism.“*<sup>65</sup>

The economic basis of the relationship between imperialist and semi-colonial states is what Lenin called the *super-exploitation* of these oppressed nations by the imperialist monopolies. Because of this super-exploitation, monopoly capital can acquire – in addition to the average profit rate – an extra profit. These extra-profits are important additions to the profits which monopoly capital already extracts from the workers in the rich countries. They are, by the way, an essential source to bribe the upper, aristocratic sectors of the working class and in particular the labor bureaucracy in the imperialist countries – features which help to strengthen the rule of monopoly capital.

In our book, *The Great Robbery of the South*, we have elaborated basically four different forms of super-exploitation by which monopoly capital obtains extra profits from colonial and semi-colonial countries:<sup>66</sup>

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

65 V. I. Lenin: *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (1916); in: LCW 22, p. 147

66 Beside the extensive analysis in our book *The Great Robbery of the South* (see above) we refer readers also to our booklet on the super-exploitation of migrants (in German language): Michael Pröbsting: *Marxismus, Migration und revolutionäre Integration* (2010); in: *Revolutionärer Kommunismus*, Nr. 7, <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/werk-7>. A summary of this study in English-



- i) Capital export as productive investment
- ii) Capital export as money capital (loans, currency reserves, speculation, etc.)
- iii) Value transfer via unequal exchange
- iv) Value transfer via migration (based on the super-exploitation of migrants, a nationally oppressed layer of the working class)

The relationship between states has to be seen always in the totality of its economic, political, and military features – “*the entire totality of the manifold relations of this thing to others*” (Lenin).<sup>67</sup> An imperialist state usually enters a relationship with other states and nations whom it oppresses, in one way or another, and super-exploits – i.e., appropriates a share of its produced capitalist value. However, this has to be viewed in its totality, i.e., if a state gains certain profits from foreign investment but has to pay much more (debt service, profit repatriation, etc.) to other countries’ foreign investment, loans etc., this state can usually not be considered as imperialist. Likewise, the different forms of oppression and super-exploitation can occur in various combinations or only in one but not another form. Smaller imperialist states usually do not attack or threaten semi-colonies by armed forces. This can be even true for a Great Power like Japan. The latter, however, super-exploits many oppressed people via capital export but only to a very small degree via migration. Such super-exploitation of migrants figures prominently in Russia, which, on the other hand, exports much less capital than Japan.

Naturally, it is not sufficient to divide countries into categories of imperialist or semi-colonial states. There are of course many different shades. This already begins with differences among Great Powers. There are Great Powers like the strongest one, the US, but also others which were economically strong but militarily much weaker in recent decades (like Japan or Germany). As said above, one needs to consider the totality of a state’s economic, political, and military position in the global hierarchy of states. Thus, we can consider a given state as imperialist even it is economically weaker, but still possesses a relatively strong political and military position (like Russia before 1917 and, again, since the early 2000s). Such a strong political and military position can be used to oppress other countries and nations and to appropriate capitalist value from them.

We have elaborated in much detail in past works that such unevenness between the Great Powers themselves has always been a prominent feature throughout the whole history of modern capitalism.<sup>68</sup> In Chapter VII below we will give a few examples to demonstrate such unevenness. At this point we limit ourselves to refer to the vast differences in industrial development, economic productivity, capital export, loans, etc. between different imperialist states at

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language: Michael Pröbsting: Marxism, Migration and revolutionary Integration, in: Revolutionary Communism, No. 1 (English-language Journal of the RCIT), <http://www.thecommunists.net/oppressed/revolutionary-integration/>

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

68 We have elaborated such a historical examination on various occasions, most importantly in Michael Pröbsting: *Lenin’s Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power*.

a time when Lenin and Trotsky elaborated the Marxist theory of imperialism.

We can state in general that the unevenness in historical developments resulted in the situation that old, “mature” imperialist powers (like Britain or France) existed (and rivaled) with newer, rising powers (like the U.S. or Germany) as well as with more backward powers (like Russia, Austrian-Hungary Empire, Italy or Japan).

Lenin himself drew attention to such unevenness repeatedly. In his *Notebooks on Imperialism*, for example, he suggested a “hierarchization” among the Great Powers. In one of his notes, he differentiated between three categories of imperialist states:

- I. Three chief (fully independent) countries: Great Britain, Germany, United States
- II. Secondary (first class, but not fully independent): France, Russia, Japan
- III. Italy, Austria-Hungary”<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, we have to differentiate between Great Powers and smaller imperialist states (like Australia, Belgium, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Austria, the Scandinavian countries, etc.). Obviously they are not the equals of the Great Powers, but rather are subordinated to them. These smaller imperialist states are politically and militarily dependent on one or several Great Powers in order to participate in the global imperialist order. Hence, they ensure their privileged position by entering economic, political, and military alliances with the Great Powers like the EU, OECD, IMF, World Bank, WTO, NATO, and various “partnerships.” However, these smaller imperialist states are not super-exploited by the Great Powers but rather participate in the super-exploitation of the semi-colonial world by appropriating a significant amount of value from semi-colonies.

The Marxist classics have always recognized that there can be important differences in power, political regime, etc. between the different imperialist powers. In their famous pamphlet *Socialism and War*, Lenin and Zinoviev explained that during the imperialist epoch, it is typical to see stronger and weaker, more advanced and more backward imperialist powers. However, these disparities did not lead the two leaders of the Bolshevik party to abandon their conclusion that *all* of these great powers were imperialist.

*“The principal spheres of investment of British capital are the British colonies, which are very large also in America (for example, Canada), not to mention Asia, etc. In this case, enormous exports of capital are bound up most closely with vast colonies, of the importance of which for imperialism I shall speak later. In the case of France the situation is different. French capital exports are invested mainly in Europe, primarily in Russia (at least ten thousand million francs). This is mainly loan capital, government loans, and not capital invested in industrial undertakings. Unlike British colonial imperialism, French imperialism might be termed usury imperialism. In the case of Germany, we have a third type; colonies are inconsiderable, and German capital invested*

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69 V.I.Lenin: On the Question of Imperialism, in: LCW 39, p. 202

abroad is divided most evenly between Europe and America.”<sup>70</sup>

To summarize, it is impossible to understand imperialism without recognizing the unevenness of world capitalism which includes also understanding the uneven development among the Great Powers themselves. It is not for nothing that Trotsky considered unevenness as “*the most general law of the historic process.*”<sup>71</sup>

It is also essential to see finance capital as fusion between industrial and banking capital. It is a widespread eclectic mistake among various centrists to understand finance capital, in a bourgeois sense, as solely “banking capital”.<sup>72</sup> As a result of such mistake such people characterize only those states as imperialist which have the most powerful banking or financial system (like the U.S.). Furthermore, finance capital in Marxist sense is characterized by a high degree of monopolization. As a result we can observe important changes compared to the period of ascending capitalism. Hilferding, Lenin and Bukharin noted that policies like protectionism and even simple trade have changed their character in the monopolistic stage of capitalism. Here the state plays an increasingly crucial role. One of its tools is protectionism which helps in securing position of monopolies via permanent tariffs, subsidies, credit policies of imperialist states, etc. Other examples are state financial diplomacy via credit support, the creation of customs unions or free trade agreements, etc.

In conclusion, how shall Marxists define an imperialist state? The formula, which we have developed in past works and which seems to us as still the most precise, is the following: *An imperialist state is a capitalist state whose monopolies and state apparatus have a position in the world order where they first and foremost dominate other states and nations. As a result they gain extra-profits and other economic, political and/or military advantages from such a relationship based on super-exploitation and oppression.*<sup>73</sup>

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70 V. I. Lenin: Imperialism. The Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916), in: LCW Vol. 22, p. 243. In the same book, Lenin also explained that he judged imperialist states not only in terms of their present condition, but also in terms of their *direction of development*. In other words, he recognized – in contrast to the pro-Eastern social-imperialists, who refuse to recognize China and Russia as imperialist powers – the character and dynamic of emerging great powers like Russia or Japan during his time: “*This is because the only conceivable basis under capitalism for the division of spheres of influence, interests, colonies, etc., is a calculation of the strength of those participating, their general economic, financial, military strength, etc. And the strength of these participants in the division does not change to an equal degree, for the even development of different undertakings, trusts, branches of industry, or countries is impossible under capitalism. Half a century ago Germany was a miserable, insignificant country, if her capitalist strength is compared with that of the Britain of that time; Japan compared with Russia in the same way. Is it “conceivable” that in ten or twenty years’ time the relative strength of the imperialist powers will have remained unchanged? It is out of the question.*” (V. I. Lenin: Imperialism. The Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916) ; in: LCW Vol. 22, p. 295)

71 Leon Trotsky: History of the Russian Revolution (1930), Haymarket Books, Chicago 2008, p. 5

72 We have dealt with this issue in more detail in Michael Pröbsting: Lenin’s Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power.

73 We think such a definition of an imperialist state is in accordance with the brief definition which Lenin gave in one of his writings on imperialism in 1916: “... *imperialist Great Powers (i.e., powers that oppress a whole number of nations and enmesh them in dependence on finance capital, etc.)...*” (V. I. Lenin:

Likewise, one also has to differentiate between different types of semi-colonies. Obviously there are huge differences today between Peru and Argentina or Brazil, Congo and Egypt, Pakistan and Turkey, Nepal and Thailand, Kazakhstan and Poland. Some countries are more industrialized than others, some have achieved a certain political latitude and others not. Hence, we can differentiate between *advanced or industrialized semi-colonies* like for example Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Iran, Poland or Thailand on the one hand and *poorer or semi-industrialized semi-colonies* like Bolivia, Peru, the Sub-Saharan African countries (except South Africa), Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indonesia etc.

Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that these different types of semi-colonies have much more in common than what differentiates between them, as Trotsky has already pointed out:

*“Colonial and semi-colonial – and therefore backward – countries, which embrace by far the greater part of mankind, differ extraordinarily from one another in their degree of backwardness, representing an historical ladder reaching from nomadry, and even cannibalism, up to the most modern industrial culture. The combination of extremes in one degree or another characterizes all of the backward countries. However, the hierarchy of backwardness, if one may employ such an expression, is determined by the specific weight of the elements of barbarism and culture in the life of each colonial country. Equatorial Africa lags far behind Algeria, Paraguay behind Mexico, Abyssinia behind India or China. With their common economic dependence upon the imperialist metropolis, their political dependence bears in some instances the character of open colonial slavery (India, Equatorial Africa), while in others it is concealed by the fiction of State independence (China, Latin America).”*<sup>74</sup>

To summarize our definition of semi-colonies we propose the following formula: *A semi-colonial country is a capitalist state whose economy and state apparatus have a position in the world order where they first and foremost are dominated by other states and nations. As a result they create extra-profits and give other economic, political and/or military advantages to the imperialist monopolies and states through their relationship based on super-exploitation and oppression.*

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A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism (1916); in: LCW Vol. 23, p. 34)

74 Leon Trotsky: The Chinese Revolution (Introduction to Harold R. Isaacs, The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution, London 1938); <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/xx/china.htm>

## Is a Transition from Being One Type of State to Another Possible?

The analysis and division of countries into different types must not be understood in a dogmatic, mechanistic way, but rather in a Marxist, i.e. dialectical, way. Lenin already pointed out that definitions are not abstract dogmas but have to be understood as elastic categories: „...without forgetting the conditional and relative value of all definitions in general, which can never embrace all the concatenations of a phenomenon in its full development...“.<sup>75</sup>

Hence, it would be wrong to imagine a Chinese Wall separating the two categories, imperialist and semi-colonial states. As we have argued on other occasions there have been several examples where, under exceptional circumstances, a dependent state was able to become an imperialist country as well as the other way round. The central reason for this is the law of uneven and combined development which explains the different tempos of development of productive forces in different nations and their interaction which again results in instability, clashes, wars and transformations of existing political and social relations. It is therefore only logical that such developments can bring about the emergence and growth of new capitalist powers as well as the decline of old powers.<sup>76</sup>

Lenin himself has explicitly pointed out the possibility that backward, semi-colonial countries could transform their class character:

*“Capitalism is growing with the greatest rapidity in the colonies and in overseas countries. Among the latter, new imperialist powers are emerging (e.g., Japan).”*<sup>77</sup>

Indeed, as we have pointed out elsewhere, there have been various historical examples of such transformations. There is the example of Czechoslovakia which was a colony in the Habsburg Empire but became – after the implosion of the latter in 1918 – a minor imperialist power. Likewise, South Korea and Israel became imperialist states in the 1990s as did Russia and China in the early and late part of the first decade of the 2000s respectively.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand,

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75 V. I. Lenin: Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism; in: LCW 22, p. 266

76 We have dealt with the issue of the emergence of new imperialist powers extensively. On China as an emerging imperialist power see the RCIT's literature mentioned above. On Russia as an emerging imperialist power see: Michael Pröbsting: Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power. On the Understanding and Misunderstanding of Today's Inter-Imperialist Rivalry in the Light of Lenin's Theory of Imperialism. Another Reply to Our Critics Who Deny Russia's Imperialist Character, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 25, August 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-theory-and-russia/>; Michael Pröbsting: Russia as a Great Imperialist Power. The formation of Russian Monopoly Capital and its Empire – A Reply to our Critics, 18 March 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 21, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-russia/>

77 V. I. Lenin: Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916) ; in: LCW Vol. 22, p. 274

78 We have analyzed South Korea's transformation into a minor imperialist power in Michael Pröbsting: Der kapitalistische Aufholprozeß in Südkorea und Taiwan; in: *Revolutionärer Marxismus* Nr. 20 (1996). A shortened version of this article appeared as *“Capitalist Development*

Portugal lost its imperialist status during the last four decades following the loss of its colonies in 1974.

## “Sub-Imperialism” – A Useful Category?

A number of progressive theoreticians support the conception of a “transitional” or “sub-imperialist” state as a third, additional category of countries in addition to colonial and semi-colonial countries.<sup>79</sup> We have elaborated our criticism of the theory of sub-imperialism in *The Great Robbery of the South* and we will only summarize here briefly some conclusions.<sup>80</sup>

Naturally if states undergo a process of transformation from an imperialist to a semi-colonial country or the other way around, they are “in transition” and in this sense it can be useful to describe a temporary process of transformation. However, the supporters of the theory of sub-imperialism don’t understand this as a category to describe the transition process but rather see it as a separate, independent category. And here lies the fundamental problem.

Capitalism unites all nations in the world via economic and political expansion and the formation of a world market. This process has taken place from the beginning of the capitalist mode of production and has tremendously accelerated in the epoch of imperialism. Under these conditions, no nation escapes the formation of ever closer economic and political ties with the dominant imperialist powers. Such close relations automatically create, modify, and reproduce mechanisms of exploitation and super-exploitation. In other words, under capitalism – and even more under imperialism – all nations are sucked into the process of super-exploitation. Either they are strong enough and become part of the oppressing nations, or they are pushed into the camp of the majority of humanity – the oppressed nations. There is no “third camp” in between.

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on *South Korea and Taiwan*” in: Trotskyist International No. 21 (1997), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/capitalism-in-south-korea-taiwan/>. On Israel as a minor imperialist power see Michael Pröbsting: *On some Questions of the Zionist Oppression and the Permanent Revolution in Palestine*”, in: *Revolutionary Communism* Nr. 10 (June 2013), p. 29, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/permanent-revolution-in-palestine>

79 See e.g. Ruy Mauro Marini: *Brazilian Subimperialism*, in: *Monthly Review* Vol. 23, No. 9 (February 1972), pp. 14-24; Mário Costa de Paiva Guimarães Júnior, Tiago Camarinha Lopes: *Trotsky’s Law of Uneven and Combined Development in Marini’s Dialectics of Dependency*, Fourth Annual Conference in Political Economy, July 9-11, 2013, The Hague, The Netherlands; Tiago Camarinha Lopes: *Marx and Marini on Absolute and Relative Surplus Value*, in: *International Critical Thought*, Vol. 3, Issue 2 (2013); currently, Patrick Bond and Ana Garcia are among the most prominent supporters of the theory of sub-imperialism. See e.g. Patrick Bond and Ana Garcia (Eds.): *BRICS – An Anti-Capitalist Critique*, Pluto Press, London 2015; Patrick Bond: *Towards a Broader Theory of Imperialism*, 2018-04-19, <http://roape.net/2018/04/18/towards-a-broader-theory-of-imperialism/>; Patrick Bond: *BRICS and the tendency to sub-imperialism*, 2014-04-10, *Pambazuka*, Issue 673, <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/91303>

80 See Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South*, pp. 220-228. See <http://www.great-robbery-of-the-south.net/great-robbery-of-south-online/download-chapters-1/chapter9/>

Of course, there are significant differences in the development of the productive forces among the imperialist states as well as among the semi-colonial countries. This is only logical given the unequal dynamic of development between nations. Hence, it is indeed true that there are bigger and smaller imperialist countries which are unequal. However, the point is that the smaller are not exploited by bigger imperialist powers. For example the USA and Canada are certainly not equal but also don't systematically exploit each other. The same is true for Germany and Austria or France and Belgium, Luxemburg or Switzerland. However they are all imperialist nations. Why? Because they have developed significant monopoly capital which systematically exploits and transfers value from the South, and they are part of an international imperialist order from which they profit and defend by various means. Likewise there are advanced semi-colonies which have a certain regional influence (e.g., Brazil, India, Greece) and others which have none; some are stronger and others are weaker. But as Marxist we must focus on the law of value and the transfer of value between countries and the political order associated with this. And here it is obvious that the industrialized semi-colonies are also dominated and super-exploited by the imperialist monopolies. For these reasons we reject the usefulness of the category of "*Sub-Imperialism*" as part of the Marxist analytical apparatus.

Finally, as an aside, we draw attention to the fact that objectively the theory of sub-imperialism is a rehash of similar attempts in the 1920s. As we pointed out somewhere else, the Japanese ex-Marxist Takahashi Kamekichi developed at that time his notorious theory of Japan as a "*petty imperialism*". Takahashi noted that, given Japan's backwardness in the areas of financial capital and capital export, Japanese capitalism "*had not yet attained the stage of imperialism,*" to use Lenin's terms. From this he concluded that Japanese socialists should not see the main enemy as being the domestic bourgeoisie, but rather the Western powers.

*"If you look at Japanese capitalism internationally, [he argued,] it may indeed be imperialistic. However, at the most, it is an imperialistic country as the petit bourgeois is to the grand bourgeois. If we take the term petit bourgeois and establish the category of petty imperialism, Japan is but a petty imperialist country. Thus, just as the interests of the petty bourgeoisie coincide with those of the proletariat and are not one with the interests of the grande bourgeoisie, the interests of petty imperialist countries coincide more with those of countries subject to imperialism than with those of large imperialist countries."*

Takahashi went on to assert that there was considerable evidence that Japan too "*is in the position of a country subject to imperialism. (...) Consequently, [Japan's] international class role, rather than coinciding with that of imperialist countries like Britain and the United States, coincides far more with that of China, India, and other countries subject to imperialism.*"<sup>81</sup>

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81 All quotes are taken from Germaine A. Hoston: *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1986, pp. 80-81

In short, Takahashi objectively provided a social-imperialist theory which justified the expansionist aspirations of the Japanese ruling class and Japanese communists correctly attacked him for this bankrupt theory.

Unfortunately, a number of modern successors are, most likely without being aware, following the path of Takahashi's theory in order to "belittle", i.e. to justify, Russian and Chinese imperialism and, among other things, to propagate an alliance of oppressed peoples with the great Eastern powers.



## V. The Emergence of China and Russia as New Great Powers

This historic decline of the old capitalist powers and the resulting massive economic shift led to the creation of new imperialist powers (China and Russia) and, inextricably associated, to the acceleration of the rivalry between the Great Powers.

### Production and Trade

As we have demonstrated in a number of studies, China has become the most important challenger of the U.S. as the hegemonic imperialist power.<sup>82</sup> When we look at the basis of capitalist value production – global industrial production – we see that the US's share decreased from 25.1% (2000) to 17.7% (2015), Western Europe's share also declined from 12.1% to 9.2%, while China's share grew from 6.5% (2000) to 23.6% (2015). (See Figure 15) Likewise, while the U.S.'s share in world trade declined from 15.1% (2001) to 11.4% (2016), China's share rose in this period from 4.0% to 11.5%. (See Figure 16)

According to the latest statistics published by the World Trade Organization, China's share in merchandise trade in 2017 was 11.5% while the US was 11.1%.<sup>83</sup>

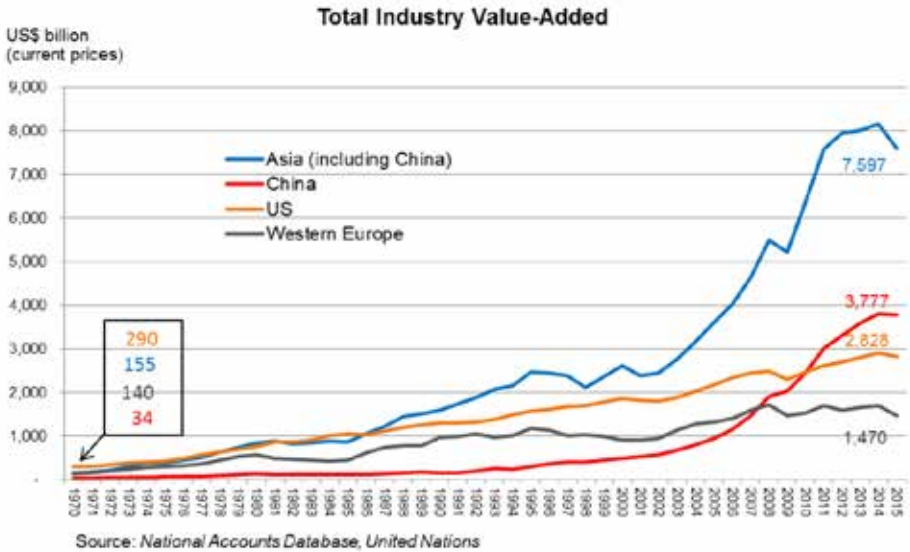
In Table 5 and 6 we show figures which demonstrate the long-term development of world merchandise exports and imports since the end of World War II. They reflect, among others, the decline of the old imperialist powers and the rise of China – particularly since the beginning of the century. Since the restoration of capitalism in the former Stalinist states (the figures provided are for 1993), the share of the U.S. in world merchandise exports declined from 12.6%

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<sup>82</sup> On the RCIT's analysis of China as an emerging imperialist power see the literature mentioned in the special sub-section on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-russia-as-imperialist-powers/>. In particular we refer readers to Michael Pröbsting: The China-India Conflict: Its Causes and Consequences. What are the background and the nature of the tensions between China and India in the Sikkim border region? What should be the tactical conclusions for Socialists and Activists of the Liberation Movements? 18 August 2017, Revolutionary Communism No. 71, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-india-rivalry/>; Michael Pröbsting: The China Question and the Marxist Theory of Imperialism, December 2014, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/reply-to-csr-pco-on-china/>; Michael Pröbsting: China's transformation into an imperialist power. A study of the economic, political and military aspects of China as a Great Power, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 4, <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/revcom-number-4>.

<sup>83</sup> WTO: World Trade Statistical Review 2018, p. 23

**Figure 15. Global Industrial Production, US, Western Europe and China 1970-2015 (in Current Prices)** <sup>84</sup>



**Figure 16. Share of the US and China in World Trade, 2001-2016** <sup>85</sup>



<sup>84</sup> Hong Kong Trade Development Council: Changing Global Production Landscape and Asia's Flourishing Supply Chain, 3 October 2017, p.1

<sup>85</sup> Hong Kong Trade Development Council: Changing Global Production Landscape and Asia's Flourishing Supply Chain, 3 October 2017, p.4

to 9.0% in 2017. There has been the same tendency in other Western countries (Japan: from 9.8% to 4.1%, Germany: from 10.3% to 8.4%, France: from 6.0% to 3.1%, UK: from 4.9% to 2.6%). In the same period China's share rose from 2.5% to 13.2% and Russia's from 1.7% to 3.0%. The same development has taken place in world merchandise imports.

**Table 5. Share of World Merchandise Exports by Region and Selected Economy, 1953-2017 (Percentage)** <sup>86</sup>

<i>Country</i>	1953	1963	1973	1983	1993	2003	2017
USA	14.6	14.3	12.2	11.2	12.6	9.8	9.0
Germany	5.3	9.3	11.7	9.2	10.3	10.2	8.4
France	4.8	5.2	6.3	5.2	6.0	5.3	3.1
United Kingdom	9.0	7.8	5.1	5.0	4.9	4.1	2.6
China	1.2	1.3	1.0	1.2	2.5	5.9	13.2
Japan	1.5	3.5	6.4	8.0	9.8	6.4	4.1
India	1.3	1.0	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.8	1.7
CIS (Russia & ex-USSR)	-	-	-	-	1.7	2.6	3.0
South Africa	1.6	1.5	1.0	1.0	0.7	0.5	0.5

**Table 6. Share of World Merchandise Imports by Region and Selected Economy, 1953-2017 (Percentage)** <sup>87</sup>

<i>Country</i>	1953	1963	1973	1983	1993	2003	2017
USA	13.9	11.4	12.4	14.3	15.9	16.9	13.7
Germany	4.5	8.0	9.2	8.1	9.0	7.9	6.6
United Kingdom	11.0	8.5	6.5	5.3	5.5	5.2	3.7
France	4.9	5.3	6.4	5.6	5.7	5.2	3.6
China	1.6	0.9	0.9	1.1	2.7	5.4	10.5
Japan	2.8	4.1	6.5	6.7	6.4	5.0	3.8
India	1.4	1.5	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.9	2.5
CIS (Russia & ex-USSR)	-	-	-	-	1.5	1.7	2.3
South Africa	1.5	1.1	0.9	0.8	0.5	0.5	0.6

<sup>86</sup> WTO: World Trade Statistical Review 2018, p. 122. We would also like to draw attention to the fact that the U.S. and Britain import substantially more commodities than they export, i.e. the live above their means. They are definitely the most rotten, parasitic old imperialist powers. No wonder that the U.S. has become the world's biggest debtor.

<sup>87</sup> WTO: World Trade Statistical Review 2018, p. 123

## Monopolies and Billionaires

Such a decline of the old Western imperialist powers and the emergence of China as a new challenger can be observed not only within the scope of capitalist value production and trade. We see the same development when we analyze the national composition of the leading capitalist monopolies. Comparing the *Forbes Global 2000* list – a list the world’s 2000 largest corporations – of the year 2003 with the year 2017, we see that while the US remains the strongest power, its share has declined substantially from 776 corporations (38.8%) to 565 (28.2%). At the same time, China’s share grew dramatically and it has now become the number two among the Great Powers. (See Table 7)

**Table 7. National Composition of the World’s 2000 Largest Corporations, 2003 and 2017 (*Forbes Global 2000* List)<sup>88</sup>**

	2003		2017	
	Number	Share	Number	Share
USA	776	38.8%	565	28.2%
China	13	0.6%	263	13.1%
Japan	331	16.5%	229	11.4%
United Kingdom	132	6.6%	91	4.5%
France	67	3.3%	59	2.9%
Canada	50	2.5%	58	2.9%
Germany	64	3.2%	51	2.5%

We see the same picture when we compare the regional composition of the world’s Top 5000 companies (by market capitalization) for the years 2000 and 2016. (See Table 8) Given the larger number of monopolies, this statistic is even more representative for the dramatic change which has taken place in the relation of forces between the imperialist rivals. In this table China’s rise as an imperialist power is confirmed again. In 2000, it’s share among this list of leading corporations was 402 (8%). In 2016, this share has already grown to 1,085 (21.7%). At the same time did North America’s share decline from 1,958 (39.2%) to 1519 (30.4), Europe’s share from 1346 (26.9%) to 876 (17.5%) and Japan’s share from 659 (13.2%) to 437 (8.7%).

<sup>88</sup> Forbes Global 2000 List (2017), <https://www.forbes.com/global2000/list/45/#tab:overall>

**Table 8. Regional Composition of World's Top 5000 Companies 2000 and 2016**<sup>89</sup>

	<i>North America</i>	<i>Europe</i>	<i>Japan</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Others</i>
2000	1956	1346	659	402	635
2016	1519	876	437	1085	1083

Another study, published by UNCTAD, also confirms China's rise amongst the biggest global monopolies. It reports that China's share among the largest 2,000 Transnational Corporations (TNC) has grown so massively in the past two decades so that by 2015 they took 17% of all profits of these top monopolies. The UNCTAD report adds: *"Interestingly however, the share of Chinese financial TNCs in top TNCs profit expanded rapidly to more than 10 per cent to total top TNCs profits, exceeding those of United States financial top TNCs in 2015."*<sup>90</sup>

These figures prove beyond doubt that China's rise (and the West's decline) is not limited to production and trade. As we will see later, various revisionist deniers of China's imperialist character claim that the Middle Kingdom would still be the global workbench. But as we have argued in various works and as the figures above confirm, this is no longer true – at least not since one decade! China does not only produce and trade a significant share of the global capitalist value product but it also *owns* a large share of it. This is reflected in the substantial share of Chinese corporations among the world's top monopolies as well as their profits (both in the industrial and the financial sector). In other words, the Chinese corporations (even if they are formally state-owned) are not a kind of "socialist" mega-enterprises but undoubtedly capitalist monopolies.

Another example, telling a lot about China's "socialism", is the rise of the billionaires. As we have shown in other studies, China has become home to the largest number of billionaires, or the second largest – depending on which list one takes – in the world. According to the 2017 issue of the *Hurun Global Rich List*, 609 billionaires are Chinese and 552 are US citizens. Together they account for half of the billionaires worldwide.<sup>91</sup> The *Forbes Billionaire List*, which is US-based while *Hurun* is China-based, sees the U.S. still ahead. According to *Forbes*: *"The U.S. continues to have more billionaires than any other nation, with a record 565, up from 540 a year ago. China is catching up with 319. (Hong Kong has another 67, and Macau 1.) Germany has the third most with 114 and India, with 101,*

<sup>89</sup> Tomohiro Omura: The Maturity of Emerging Economies and New Developments in the Global Economy, Mitsui Global Strategic Studies Institute Monthly Report, April 2017, p. 4

<sup>90</sup> UNCTAD: Trade and Development Report 2018, New York and Geneva, 2018, p. 58

<sup>91</sup> Hurun Global Rich List 2017, <http://www.hurun.net/EN/HuList/Index?num=8407ACFCBC85>; see also Zhu Wenqian: Beijing listed as billionaire capital of world once again, China Daily, 2017-03-08, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2017-03/08/content\\_28470987.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2017-03/08/content_28470987.htm); Michael Pröbsting: China's "Socialist" Billionaires, 16.11.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/china-s-billionaires>

*the first time it has had more than 100, is fourth.*"<sup>92</sup> While the detailed figures vary in the different reports, the trend in all available studies is the same: the weight of China's monopoly capitalists is increasing.

A very similar result emerges from the latest edition of the annual *Billionaires Insights* report published in October 2018 by the Swiss Bank UBS, jointly with Britain's PwC.<sup>93</sup> According to this report there are 2,158 billionaires in the world, of these have 373 their home in China. This figure rises to 475 if we add the billionaires living in Hong Kong, Macao (both of them are part of the Chinese state) as well as Taiwan. This means that about one fifth of the global super-rich – i.e. the monopoly capitalists – are living in China! This figure is not much below the number of billionaires living in the U.S. (585) and above the figures for Japan as well as the combined figure for all imperialist powers in Western Europe (414). Furthermore, of all countries it was the Chinese billionaires which experienced the fastest growth of their wealth in 2017 (+39%). Billionaires in other countries had much lower growth rates (the global average growth was 12%). China is also the country with the highest number of new billionaires. 106 people became billionaires in 2017 (although a number dropped off the list from 2016). That comes out to roughly one new billionaire every three days.<sup>94</sup>

It is evident, that the Chinese capitalist class experienced the fastest growth in the world in the past decade. The UBS/PwC report comments: *"Twelve years ago, the world's most populous country was home to only 16 billionaires. Today, as the 'Chinese Century' progresses, they number 373, nearly one in five of the global total."*

It is important to recognize that China's capitalism is based not only on a tiny minority of super-rich (in contrast to countries like India or Saudi Arabia) but rather on a broader stratum of small and middle capitalists. As we show in Table 9, China is number two in all categories of millionaires – only behind the U.S. and ahead of all other imperialist Great Powers like Japan, Germany, France and Britain.

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92 Luisa Kroll and Kerry A. Dolan: Forbes 2017 Billionaires List: Meet The Richest People On The Planet, 20.3.2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kerryadolan/2017/03/20/forbes-2017-billionaireslist-meet-the-richest-people-on-theplanet/#2084cc6362ff>; see also <https://www.forbes.com/billionaires/list/#version:static>

93 UBS/PwC: New visionaries and the Chinese Century. Billionaires insights 2018; A media release of the publishers which summarizes the results, can be viewed here: UBS/PwC Billionaires Report 2018: Total billionaire wealth grows 19 percent to a record USD 8.9 trillion, 26 October 2018, <https://www.ubs.com/global/en/ubs-news/r-news-display-ndp/en-20181026-billionaires-report-2018.html>

94 See also our article on this report: Michael Pröbsting China: A Paradise for Billionaires. The latest UBS/PwC Report about the Global Super-Rich Delivers another Crushing Blow to the Stalinist Myth of China's "Socialism", 27.10.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/china-is-a-paradise-for-billionaires/>; see also Michael Pröbsting: The Global Super-Rich Get Even Richer. UBS/PwC Publish their latest Report about the World's Billionaires, 27.10.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/the-global-super-rich-get-even-richer/>

Table 9. The Rich and the Super-Rich by Country, 2018 <sup>95</sup>

Country	Wealth Range (in Million US-Dollar)					
	1-5m	5-10m	10-50m	50-100m	100-500m	500+m
United States	14,520,885	1,855,679	902,736	50,144	19,253	1,144
China	3,094,768	235,858	132,701	10,113	5,690	708
Japan	2,627,845	125,377	51,947	2,478	1,027	71
United Kingdom	2,247,529	124,244	56,535	3,125	1,422	117
Germany	1,985,627	127,157	63,678	4,078	2,042	203
France	2,002,967	99,252	42,117	2,087	886	64

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<sup>95</sup> Credit Suisse Research Institute: Global Wealth Databook 2018, October 2018, p. 125

Another indicator to measure China's rise is, what Chinese economists call *net social wealth*. This is the total of non-financial assets and net foreign assets. A recently published report, which was released by the China-based *National Institution for Finance & Development*, calculates that China's net social wealth reached 437 trillion yuan (\$63.66 trillion) at the end of 2016, equal to about 70% of the US total and ahead of all other Great Powers.<sup>96</sup>

## Capital Export and Military Spending

The next two tables demonstrate that China and Russia (to a lesser degree) are increasingly becoming major foreign investors. In Table 10 we reproduce the latest figure for the capital export of the Great Powers. As we can see China had already become number three in Foreign Direct Investment Outflows in 2017 – ahead of all European powers. Russia's figure is lower, slightly less than half of Germany's FDI.

**Table 10. Foreign Direct Investment Outflows by Country in 2017 (in Millions of \$US and as Share of Global FDI Outflows)**<sup>97</sup>

<i>Country</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>Share of the Global FDI Outflows</i>
<i>Total</i>	1,429,972	100%
<i>USA</i>	342,269	23.9%
<i>Japan</i>	160,449	11.2%
<i>Britain</i>	99,614	7%
<i>Germany</i>	82,336	5.6%
<i>France</i>	58,116	4.1%
<i>China</i>	124,630	8.7%
<i>Russia</i>	36,032	2.5%

When we look at the accumulated stock of FDI's outflows (by 2017) it is interesting to see the rapid catch-up process particularly of China. Despite the fact that China only became an imperialist power about a decade ago, its FDI Outward stock already equals the figures of all other Great Powers (except the U.S. (see Table 11).

<sup>96</sup> Xie Jun: China's social net wealth second highest, while imbalances need attention, Global Times, 2018/12/27 <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1133892.shtml>

<sup>97</sup> UNCTAD: World Investment Report 2018, pp. 184-187



**Table 11. Foreign Direct Investment Outward Stock by Country in 2017 (in Millions of \$US and as Share of Global FDI Outward Stock)<sup>98</sup>**

<i>Country</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>Share of the Global FDI Outflows</i>
<i>Total</i>	30,837,927	100%
<i>USA</i>	7,799,045	25.3%
<i>Japan</i>	1,519,983	4.9%
<i>Britain</i>	1,531,683	5%
<i>Germany</i>	1,607,380	5.2%
<i>France</i>	1,451,663	4.7%
<i>China</i>	1,482,020	4.8%
<i>Russia</i>	382,278	1.2%

We can observe a similar development in the field of investment in modern technologies. As Figure 17 shows, the U.S. remains the world's leading country in terms of spending for Research & Development. However, China is catching up rapidly. Beijing's current five year plan calls for increasing research and design spending to 2.5% of GDP, up from 2.1% in 2011-2015. As a result, it has become the second-placed country in the past decade.

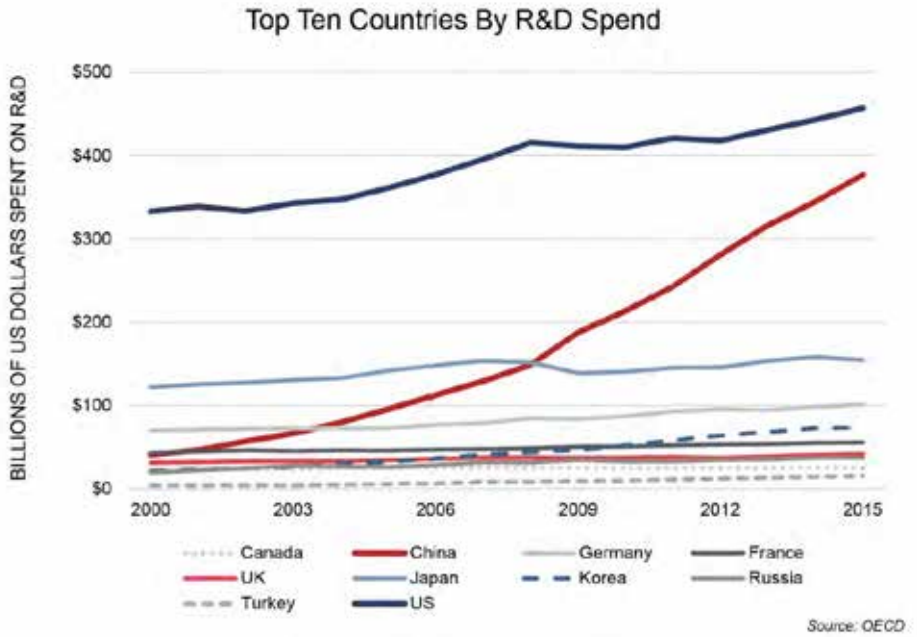
While Russia is weaker on an economic level, it still plays an important role given its military and political weight. In addition to important monopolies like Gazprom or Rosneft, Russia has a huge military-industrial complex making it the second largest military power behind the U.S. and ahead of all other imperialist states. (See Table 12 and 13)<sup>99</sup>

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98 UNCTAD: World Investment Report 2018, pp. 188-191

99 On the RCIT's analysis of Russia as an imperialist power see the literature mentioned in the special sub-section on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-russia-as-imperialist-powers/>. In particular we refer readers to Michael Pröbsting: Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power. On the Understanding and Misunderstanding of Today's Inter-Imperialist Rivalry in the Light of Lenin's Theory of Imperialism, August 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-theory-and-russia/>; Michael Pröbsting: Russia as a Great Imperialist Power. The formation of Russian Monopoly Capital and its Empire – A Reply to our Critics, 18 March 2014, Special Issue of Revolutionary Communism No. 21 (March 2014), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-russia/>.

**Figure 17. Top Ten Countries by Spending for Research & Development, 2000-2015** <sup>100</sup>



**Table 12. World Nuclear Forces, 2018** <sup>101</sup>

<i>Country</i>	<i>Deployed Warheads</i>	<i>Other Warheads</i>	<i>Total Inventory</i>
USA	1,750	4,700	6,450
Russia	1,600	5,250	6,850
France	280	20	300
China	–	280	280
UK	120	95	215

100 Pentagon: Assessing and Strengthening the Manufacturing and Defense Industrial Base and Supply Chain Resiliency of the United States, Report to President Donald J. Trump by the Interagency Task Force in Fulfillment of Executive Order 13806, September 2018, p. 39

101 SIPRI Yearbook 2018, Armaments, Disarmament and International Security, p. 236

**Table 13. The World's 10 Top Exporters of Weapons, 2016** <sup>102</sup>

<i>Exporter</i>	<i>Global Share (%)</i>
1 USA	33
2 Russia	23
3 China	6.2
4 France	6.0
5 Germany	5.6
6 UK	4.6
7 Spain	2.8
8 Italy	2.7
9 Ukraine	2.6
10 Israel	2.3

Furthermore, it is essential to point out that the Russian state has only a relatively small amount of foreign debt. <sup>103</sup> At the same time, the Russia's corporate debt is much higher and its total external debt at current point is around 30% of GDP. However, accelerating rivalry between imperialist states is pushing Russian corporation to sell its debt, which resulted in record payment of around 130 billion US Dollars in 2018. <sup>104</sup> Such high currency debt is connected with Russia's orientation to export commodities in order to gain foreign currency. Nevertheless, high debt payments do not automatically mean that Russia would be a "semi-colonial" state. There was a similar pattern in Tsarist Russia when French and German banks played a major role in the economy. Nevertheless, its military apparatus and its colonial expansion, combined with increasing foreign investments in Asian nations, gave Russia its imperialist character.

Today, modern Russia's imperialist ambitions are more far-reaching than those of the old Empire. For example, Russia is becoming a dominating force in Latin America states like Venezuela <sup>105</sup> and Cuba <sup>106</sup>. It is also expanding its presence in the Middle East in Syria, Libya, Iran and Egypt. In Africa Russia already deploys more UN "peacekeeping" troops than other nations. <sup>107</sup> There

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102 SIPRI Yearbook 2017 (Summary), p. 15

103 See e.g. Russia Total External Debt, <https://tradingeconomics.com/russia/external-debt>

104 See e.g. ING: Russia intensifies net foreign debt redemption in 3Q, 11.10.2018, <https://think.ing.com/snaps/russia-intensifies-foreign-debt-redemption-in-3q/>

105 See e.g. Anthony Faiola and Karen DeYoung: In Venezuela, Russia pockets key energy assets in exchange for cash bailouts, Washington Post, December 24, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/in-venezuela-russia-pockets-key-energy-assets-in-exchange-for-cash-bailouts/2018/12/20/da458db6-f403-11e8-80d0-f7e1948d55f4\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.4c57edeb1009](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/in-venezuela-russia-pockets-key-energy-assets-in-exchange-for-cash-bailouts/2018/12/20/da458db6-f403-11e8-80d0-f7e1948d55f4_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4c57edeb1009)

106 See e.g. Russia to develop production facilities in Cuba, 21 Jun, 2016, Russia Today, <https://www.rt.com/business/347586-russia-cuba-facilities-development/>

107 See e.g. South China Morning Post: How Russia is boosting its role in Africa with weapons,

is also some presence of Russian financial capital in Nigeria.<sup>108</sup> The Russian government uses different means to achieve its foreign political goals: military aid, loans, foreign investments, etc.

Understanding the imperialist character of Russia requires viewing the state not only from an economic but from a political-economic point of view. Usually economic-minded pseudo-Marxists tend to have a linear interpretation of the relationship between basis and superstructure and view politics as always directly following the economy. Engels repeatedly emphasized the “*relative independence of the super-structure*” and that the economy is the decisive determinant only in “*final analysis*”.<sup>109</sup> Thus, political actions of the bourgeoisie sometimes can take place prior to changes and achievements in economy. In fact, this is the case with Russia. If we look at the political actions of Russian state and later its foreign policy in the Middle East, we can observe how its successful intervention in Syria created a very prestigious position for Russian monopolies in the region. For instance, *Rosatomb* achieved a number of deals with Egypt and Turkey, the military-industrial complex acquired new contracts with several states and some forms of new partnerships with traditional US-allies like Saudi Arabia and Israel are on the horizon.

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investment and ‘instructors’, 14 August, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/africa/article/2159622/how-russia-boosting-its-role-africa-weapons-investment-and>

108 See e.g. Financial Times: Fortunes of Nigeria’s banks tied to the oil price, 20.11.2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/370057c8-c71f-11e8-86e6-19f5b7134d1c>

109 See e.g.: „According to the materialistic conception of history, the production and reproduction of real life constitutes in the last instance the determining factor of history. Neither Marx nor I ever maintained more. Now when someone comes along and distorts this to mean that the economic factor is the sole determining factor, he is converting the former proposition into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis but the various factors of the superstructure – the political forms of the class struggles and its results – constitutions, etc., established by victorious classes after hard-won battles – legal forms, and even the reflexes of all these real struggles in the brain of the participants, political, jural, philosophical theories, religious conceptions and their further development into systematic dogmas – all these exercise an influence upon the course of historical struggles, and in many cases determine for the most part their form. There is a reciprocity between all these factors in which, finally, through the endless array of contingencies (i.e., of things and events whose inner connection with one another is so remote, or so incapable of proof, that we may neglect it, regarding it as nonexistent) the economic movement asserts itself as necessary. Were this not the case, the application of the history to any given historical period would be easier than the solution of a simple equation of the first degree. We ourselves make our own history, but, first of all, under very definite presuppositions and conditions. Among these are the economic, which are finally decisive. But there are also the political, etc.” (Friedrich Engels: Letter to Joseph Bloch (1890); in: MECW 49, pp. 34-35)

## VI. The Acceleration of Inter-Imperialist Rivalry and the Global Trade War

Given the historic crisis of capitalism and the massive shift in the relation of forces between the Great Powers, it is hardly surprising that the tensions between the imperialist states are accelerating. Trotsky always emphasized how crucial it is for a revolutionary organization to carefully analyze the political process, the contradictions and the changes in the relations between the states and classes in order to prepare politically for coming imperialist wars.

*“The first prerequisite for success is the training of party cadres in the correct understanding of all the conditions of imperialist war and of all the political processes that accompany it. Woe to that party that confines itself in this burning question to general phrases and abstract slogans! The bloody events will crash over its head and smash it.”*<sup>110</sup>

Taking this advice into account is particularly important in the coming period of increasing tensions between the Great Powers. One has to understand the lawfulness of the processes taking place in the imperialist world system. The emergence of the extraordinary chauvinistic (and bizarre) Trump Administration is therefore not a bad joke of history (albeit it often looks like this) but an expression of historical necessity. *“Make America Great Again”* reflects objectively the desperate attempt of US imperialism to stop and to reverse the historic decline of its hegemonic position.<sup>111</sup> Likewise, the grotesque person of Trump symbolizes the failure of the U.S. to achieve such a goal.<sup>112</sup>

This massive acceleration of Great Power rivalry has been reflected in the looming Global Trade War, in the cancellation of the INF Treaty by the U.S. Administration<sup>113</sup>, the tensions in the South China Sea<sup>114</sup>, the U.S. aggression

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110 Leon Trotsky: War and the Fourth International (1934), in: Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1933-34, p. 324

111 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting and Almedina Gunić: How the Pentagon Views the World Situation. A New Study by the US Military Confirms Marxists' Analysis of the Current Historic Period, 25 July 2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/pentagon-study/>

112 There exists already a myriad of literature about the Trump Administration. While we do not agree with all aspects of his analyses, the American socialist John Reimann has published a number of insightful articles on the website <https://oaklandsocialist.com/>.

113 See on this e.g. RCIT: Trump threatens to withdraw from INF Treaty: No to a New Imperialist Arms Race! The Acceleration of Rivalry between the Great Powers Increases the Risks of World War III, 25 October 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/trump-threatens-to-withdraw-from-inf-treaty/>

114 See on this e.g. Michael Klare, Is a War With China on the Horizon? June 19, 2018, [http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/176438/tomgram%3A\\_michael\\_klare%2C\\_is\\_a\\_war\\_with\\_china\\_on\\_the\\_horizon/#more](http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/176438/tomgram%3A_michael_klare%2C_is_a_war_with_china_on_the_horizon/#more); Jane Perlez: Xi Jinping Extends Power, and China Braces for a New Cold War, 27 February 2018 NYT, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/27/world/asia/xi-jinping-china-new-cold-war.html>; James Reinl: Is a US-China war in Asia inevitable? 2018-10-30 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/china-war-asia-inevitable-181029195111603.html> These tensions are rising not only

against Iran<sup>115</sup> as well as various sable-rattling statements by leading politicians and military of both sides.

## At the Onset of a New Cold War

Let us give a few examples from the recent past. Retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, former commander of the U.S. Army in Europe, warned at the Warsaw Security Forum that “*in 15 years (...) it is a very strong likelihood that we will be at war with China*”.<sup>116</sup> Britain’s Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt warned while visiting Iran that a single small event could spark off a First World War-style catastrophe in the Middle East.<sup>117</sup> The former US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson recently warned of the risks of an “*Iron Curtain*” descending between the world’s two largest economies.<sup>118</sup> According to Chinese media, President Xi Jinping has told his military commanders to “*concentrate preparations for fighting a war*” as tensions continue to grow over the future of the South China Sea and Taiwan.<sup>119</sup> U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton stated that the U.S. is determined to push back China’s and Russia’s growing influence in Africa.<sup>120</sup>

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because of the conflict between the U.S. and China but also because of the increasing assertiveness of Japanese imperialism. See e.g. Justin McCurry: Japan to get first aircraft carrier since second world war amid China concerns, 29 Nov 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/29/japan-to-get-first-aircraft-carrier-since-second-world-war-amid-china-concerns>; U.S. to blame if any South China Sea clash: Chinese researcher, January 9, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-usa-military/u-s-to-blame-if-any-south-china-sea-clash-chinese-researcher-idUSKCN1P31CK>

115 See on this e.g. Peter Osborne: How US sanctions on Iran could herald a profound global power shift, 2 November 2018 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/how-us-sanctions-iran-could-herald-profound-global-power-shift-538116542>; for the RCIT’s position see e.g. Warmongering in the Middle East: Down with all Imperialist Great Powers and Capitalist Dictatorships! Joint Statement of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), Alkebulan School of Black Studies (Kenya), Pacesetters Movement (Nigeria), Pan-Afrikan Consciousness Renaissance (Nigeria), Marxist Group ‘Class Politics’ (Russia), and Sınıf Savaşı (Turkey), 13 May 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/joint-statement-warmongering-in-the-middle-east/>; Yossi Schwartz: Israel’s Attack on Iranian Forces in Syria, 14.5.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/israel-s-attack-on-iranian-forces-in-syria/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Mad Man plays with fire, again. A Commentary on Trump’s Decision to Pull the U.S. out of the Iran Nuclear Deal, 9 May 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/trump-pulls-u-s-out-of-iran-nuclear-deal/>

116 The Associated Press: Retired US General Says War With China Likely in 15 Years, Oct. 24, 2018 <https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2018/10/24/world/europe/ap-eu-poland-us-china.html>

117 UK foreign secretary warns of ‘First World War risk’ in Middle East, 20 November 2018 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/britains-hunt-warns-another-first-world-war-middle-east-2121358881>

118 Gordon Watts: Hope springs eternal for a China-US trade deal, November 9, 2018 <http://www.atimes.com/article/hope-springs-eternal-for-a-china-us-trade-deal/>

119 Xi inspects PLA Southern Theater Command, stresses advancing commanding ability, Xinhua, 2018-10-26 [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-10/26/c\\_137561097.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-10/26/c_137561097.htm); Jamie Seidel: President Xi tells military to ‘concentrate preparation for fighting a war’, October 29, 2018, <https://www.news.com.au/technology/innovation/military/president-xi-tells-military-to-concentrate-preparation-for-fighting-a-war/news-story/e3929306705b623290b925cbb1fda9b>

120 See e.g. Steve Holland, Lesley Wroughton: U.S. to counter China, Russia influence in Africa:

Another example of the increasing influence of aggressive imperialists is the rise of Peter Navarro in the U.S. Administration. He is the current White House adviser on trade and he has been the author of several publications in the last years which identify China as the main rival of the U.S. One of them has the self-explanatory title *“The Coming China Wars”*. Unsurprisingly, he is a strong advocate of high tariffs against the Middle Kingdom.<sup>121</sup>

Graham Allison, a former U.S. assistant secretary of defence, advocates a similar foreign policy. Allison has introduced the phrase of the *“Thucydides Trap”*. He argues that in most cases in history the confrontation between a rising power and a ruling power has resulted in bloodshed. Consequently, he is convinced of the likelihood of a major confrontation between the U.S. and China.<sup>122</sup>

Official Chinese media have similar sober expectations about the future relations between the Great Powers. *Global Times*, a kind of international English-language central organ of the ruling CCP, published an article which stated that even if China and the U.S. can avert a trade war in the short term, there is no reason for optimism:

*“In the short term, due to the win-win nature of trade, there is still room for negotiation in the trade disputes. Nevertheless, in the medium term, the US has become aggressive toward the rise of China’s manufacturing sector and the narrowing of the gap in high-tech areas. In the long run, amid the concerns over the Thucydides’ Trap, an overall US containment of China is not entirely impossible. In this sense, China will likely face more conflicts with the US at different levels, and it is essential to be prepared for a protracted war.”*<sup>123</sup>

In the past years a whole series of books and studies have been published which focus on the increasing tensions between the Great Powers and warn of major confrontations in the foreseeable future. The Eurasia Group wrote for example: *“We aren’t on the brink of World War III. But absent a global security un-*

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Bolton, December 13, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-africa/u-s-to-counter-china-russia-influence-in-africa-bolton-idUSKBN1OC1XV>; Michael Cohen, Samer Al-Atrush, Henry Meyer, and Margaret Talev: *America’s Moment of Truth in Africa: It’s Losing Out to China*, 14. Dezember 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-12-14/1-billion-a-month-the-cost-of-trump-s-tariffs-on-technology>

121 See e.g. *How China’s Economic Aggression Threatens the Technologies and Intellectual Property of the United States and the World*, White House Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy, June 2018; Peter Navarro: *Crouching Tiger: What China’s Militarism Means for the World*, Prometheus Books, New York 2015; Peter Navarro and Greg Autry: *Death by China: Confronting the Dragon – A Global Call to Action for the Western World*, Pearson Education, New Jersey 2011; Peter Navarro: *The Coming China Wars – Where They Will Be Fought and How They Can Be Won*, Financial Times Press, New Jersey 2006

122 See e.g. Graham T. Allison: *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’ Trap?* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, New York 2017; Graham Allison: *China and Russia: A Strategic Alliance in the Making*, December 14, 2018 <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/china-and-russia-strategic-alliance-making-38727>; Graham Allison: *The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?* Sep 24, 2015 *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/united-states-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/>

123 Shen Jianguang: *China needs to prepare for long-term rivalry with the US even if trade deal is reached*, *Global Times*, 2019/1/9 <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1135170.shtml>

*derwriter, and with a proliferation of subnational and non-state actors capable of destabilizing action, the world is a more dangerous place. The likelihood of geopolitical accidents has risen significantly, a trend that will continue. At some point, we're likely to have a mistake that leads to a confrontation."*<sup>124</sup>

Minxin Pei, a Chinese expert living in the U.S., warned: *"The escalating trade feud between the US and China is increasingly viewed as the opening campaign of a new cold war. This clash of titans, should it continue to escalate, will cost both parties dearly, to the point that even the winner (more likely the US) would probably find its victory Pyrrhic."*<sup>125</sup>

It is important to recognize that it is not only China which is challenging the hegemony of the Western Great Powers. Russia too is globally expanding its political, military and economic influence.<sup>126</sup> The military interventions in the Ukraine<sup>127</sup> and in Syria<sup>128</sup>, the increasing role of Moscow in the whole Middle East<sup>129</sup>, in Africa<sup>130</sup>, etc. – all this alarms the old imperialist powers. This is even true for Latin America – the traditional hinterland of U.S. imperialism – which *"Russia is discovering a new 'El Dorado'"*. Moscow has expanded its relations not only with the ALBA states like Venezuela and Cuba but also with countries like

124 Eurasia Group: Top Risks 2018, p. 6

125 Minxin Pei: The Sino-American cold war's collateral damage. October 19, 2018 <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1390641>; see also Minxin Pei: China's Crony Capitalism. The Dynamics of Regime Decay, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2016

126 See on this e.g. PONARS Eurasia: Russian Foreign Policy after Crimea – How To Understand And Address It, Policy Perspectives, September 2017; Bobo Lo: Russia and the new world order, Chatham House, London 2015; Rob de Wijk: Power Politics. How China and Russia Reshape the World, Amsterdam University Press B.V., Amsterdam 2015; Robert Ross: Naval superpower race: China 'to overtake US in 15 years'. November 28, 2018 <http://www.atimes.com/article/naval-superpower-race-china-to-overtake-us-in-15-years/>; Robert Ross: The End of U.S. Naval Dominance in Asia, November 18, 2018, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/end-us-naval-dominance-asia>

127 On Russia's intervention in the Ukraine see various RCIT statements which we published on our sub-page <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/>. In particular we draw attention to Michael Pröbsting: The Uprising in East Ukraine and Russian Imperialism. An Analysis of Recent Developments in the Ukrainian Civil War and their Consequences for Revolutionary Tactics, 22.October 2014, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/ukraine-and-russian-imperialism/>

128 For our assessment of Russia's role in Syria see numerous statements and articles which can be read on a special sub-section on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/collection-of-articles-on-the-syrian-revolution/>

129 See on this e.g. Yury Barmin: Russia and Israel: The Middle East vector of relations, Russian International Affairs Council, Afro-Middle East Centre (AMEC) Briefing No. 13/2018 10 November 2018; Alexey Khlebnikov: 2018: A year of many challenges for Putin in the Middle East. If Russia fails to meet regional actors' expectations over Syria, Libya or Israel/Palestine, it will ruin its image as a credible partner, Middle East Eye, January 15, 2018, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/russia-middle-east-2018-533160191>; Maxim A. Suchkov: Can Russia, China cooperate on the Middle East? December 12, 2018 <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/12/russia-china-cooperation-syria-middle-east.html>

130 Nathan Ghelli: Russian Investment in Africa Contributes to Its Development, June 18, 2018 <https://www.borgenmagazine.com/russian-investment-in-africa/>; On Russia's role in Africa see e.g. How Russia is boosting its role in Africa with weapons, investment and 'instructors', 14 August, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/africa/article/2159622/how-russia-boosting-its-role-africa-weapons-investment-and>



Argentina, even under the right-wing President Mauricio Macri.<sup>131</sup> The latest tensions between the Great Powers after the clash between the Russian and the Ukrainian Navy in the Kerch Strait only confirm this trend.<sup>132</sup>

## Tianxia – China’s Ideological Challenge

Naturally, China’s and Russia’s rise as Great Powers goes hand in hand with a rising ideological self-confidence. Beijing views itself increasingly as a power which should play a central role in world politics. President Xi emphasized China’s global leading role in a speech in autumn 2017 when he said: “*It is time for us to take centre stage in the world and to make a greater contribution to humankind.*”<sup>133</sup> The CCP’s flagship newspaper, *People’s Daily*, stated in a substantive editorial that China faces a “*historic opportunity*” to “*restore itself to greatness and return to its rightful position in the world.*” It emphasizes: “*“The world has never focused on China so much and needed China so much as it does now”*”. It states: “*The historic opportunity is an all-round one, which refers to not only economic development but also the speeding up of science, technology and industrial revolution, the growing influence of Chinese culture and the increasing acknowledgement to the Chinese wisdom and Chinese approach (...)* We are more confident, and more competent, than any time in history to grasp this opportunity.” Furthermore, the editorial points out that “*the global governance system is undergoing profound changes; and a new international order is taking shape.*” Reflecting the imperialist drive, *South China Morning Post*, Hong Kong’s biggest daily newspaper owned by Jack Ma’s *Alibaba*, titled a report about this manifesto “*Make China great again!*”<sup>134</sup>

Elisabeth C. Economy, a bourgeois Asia expert at the U.S. *Council on Foreign Relations*, is certainly not wrong in observing that China’s President Xi is globally advocating the “*Chinese model*”: “*Xi seeks his own model of politics and foreign*

131 See on this e.g. Roberto Mansilla Blanco: Russia in Latin America: Geopolitics and pragmatism, November 28, 2018 <https://theglobalamericans.org/2018/11/russia-in-latin-america-geopolitics-and-pragmatism/>; Russian companies get green light to mine gold in Venezuela, 26 Dec, 2018 <https://www.rt.com/business/447438-venezuela-russia-gold-exploration/>

132 See on this e.g. Military Escalation between Russia and Ukraine at the Kerch Strait. Down with the Reactionary Warmongering on Both Sides! Emergency Statement of the RCIT and the Marxist Group “Class Politics” (Russia), 28 November 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/military-escalation-between-russia-and-ukraine-at-the-kerch-strait/>

133 BBC: Xi Jinping: ‘Time for China to take centre stage’, 18 October 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-41647872>

134 All quotes are taken from Bill Bishop: China wants to reshape the global order, in: *Axios China*, Jan 19, 2018, [https://www.axios.com/chinas-growing-global-aspirations-in-the-xi-jinping-era-1516305566-aa5be206-c156-4313-8229-cfa88af9b75a.html?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=&stream=top-stories](https://www.axios.com/chinas-growing-global-aspirations-in-the-xi-jinping-era-1516305566-aa5be206-c156-4313-8229-cfa88af9b75a.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=&stream=top-stories); Nectar Gan: Make China great again: Communist Party seeks to seize ‘historic’ moment to reshape world order. High-profile comment piece urges country to rally around Xi and realise nation’s global aspirations, 18 January, 2018, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2128711/make-china-great-again-communist-party-seeks-seize>; Xinhua: CPC newspaper says China should “grasp historic opportunity”, 15.01.2018, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/15/c\\_136897189.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/15/c_136897189.htm)

*policy: a uniquely Chinese model that he believes will deliver his Chinese Dream and perhaps become a standard bearer for other countries disenchanted with the American and European models of liberal democracy.”*<sup>135</sup>

The increasing ideological self-confidence of China’s ruling class is also reflected in the revival of old concept of *Tianxia* (which literally means “all under heaven”), an ancient Chinese concept. This concept was historically based on an understanding of the world in five concentric zones with the Emperor (“*Son of Heaven*”) resp. the royal domain in the centre, the domains of the princes, the pacification zone, the zone of allied barbarians, and the zone of savagery.<sup>136</sup> An alternative interpretation is to divide the world into three areas with diminishing Chinese influence: inner vassal area, outer vassal area, and temporary non-vassal area.<sup>137</sup> Despite modifications throughout history, the concept of *Tianxia* has always been a classic Confucian concept legitimizing the empire of the ruling class of Han-Chinese Empire.

Today, various Chinese and non-Chinese pro-Beijing ideologists present *Tianxia* as a peaceful alternative model to the Western-dominated imperialist world order.<sup>138</sup> Pepe Escobar, for example, a key ideologist who combines propaganda for Moscow and Beijing with a left-liberal color<sup>139</sup>, argues for the

135 Elizabeth Economy: *The Third Revolution. Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State*, Council on Foreign Relations, Oxford University Press, New York 2018, p. 12

136 See on this e.g. Wang Mingming: *All under heaven (tianxia). Cosmological perspectives and political ontologies in pre-modern China*, in: HAU: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2 (1), pp. 337–383; Bart Dessein: *Faith and Politics: (New) Confucianism as Civil Religion*, in: *Asian Studies II (XVIII)*, 1 (2014), pp. 39–64; Huang, Yang: *Perceptions of the Barbarian in Early Greece and China*, in: *CHS Research Bulletin* 2, No. 1 (2013). [http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hlncc.essay:HuangY.Perceptions\\_of\\_the\\_Barbarian\\_in\\_Early\\_Greece\\_and\\_China.2013](http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hlncc.essay:HuangY.Perceptions_of_the_Barbarian_in_Early_Greece_and_China.2013)

137 See e.g. Zhang Feng: *Rethinking the “tribute system”. Broadening the conceptual horizon of historical East Asian politics*, in: Zheng Yongnian (Ed.): *China and International Relations. The Chinese view and the contribution of Wang Gungwu*, Routledge, New York 2010

138 See e.g. Ban Wang (Ed.): *Chinese Visions of World Order. Tianxia, Culture, and World Politics*, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2017; *Chinese Beginnings of Cosmopolitanism: A Genealogical Critique of Tianxia Guan*; Zheng Yongnian (Ed.): *China and International Relations. The Chinese view and the contribution of Wang Gungwu*, Routledge, New York 2010; Wang Gungwu and Zheng Yongnian: *China and the New International Order*, Routledge, New York 2008; see also: Salvatore Babones: *American Tianxia, Chinese money, American power, and the end of history*, Policy Press, Bristol 2017

139 See e.g. Pepe Escobar: *How the New Silk Roads are merging into Greater Eurasia*, December 13, 2018 <http://www.atimes.com/article/how-the-new-silk-roads-are-merging-into-greater-eurasia/>; Pepe Escobar: *Welcome to the G-20 from Hell*, October 14, 2018 <http://www.atimes.com/article/welcome-to-the-g-20-from-hell/>; Pepe Escobar: *Eagle-meets-Bear and the Syria tug-of-war*, July 5, 2018 <http://www.atimes.com/article/eagle-meets-bear-and-the-syria-tug-of-war/>; Pepe Escobar: *Here comes the 30-year trade war*, September 23, 2018 <http://www.atimes.com/article/here-comes-the-30-year-trade-war/>; Pepe Escobar: *Economic war on Iran is war on Eurasia integration*, August 14, 2018 <http://www.atimes.com/article/economic-war-on-iran-is-war-on-eurasia-integration/>; Pepe Escobar: *How BRICS Plus clashes with the US economic war on Iran*, July 28, 2018 <http://www.atimes.com/article/how-brics-plus-clashes-with-the-us-economic-war-on-iran/>; Pepe Escobar: *Here’s the real reason the US must talk to Russia*, July 21, 2018 <http://www.atimes.com/article/heres-the-real-reason-the-us-must-talk-to-russia/>; Pepe Escobar: *Trump, NATO and ‘Russian aggression’*, July 13, 2018 <http://www.atimes.com/article/trump-nato-and-russian-aggression/> ;

superiority of Chinese *Tianxia* world view by referring to the writings of Zhao Tingyang, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He characterizes *Tianxia* as a world view “to tackle universal problems in a process of dynamic formation that refers to globalization. (...) Tingyang shows that the *Tianxia* concept refers to a world system where the true political subject is the world. Under the Western imperialist vision, the world was always an object of conquest, domination and exploitation, and never a political subject per se. So we need a higher and more comprehensive unifying vision than that of the nation-state – under a Lao Tzu framework: “To see the world from the point of view of the world”. Plunging into the deepest roots of Chinese culture, Tingyang shows the idea that there’s nothing beyond *Tianxia* is, in fact, a metaphysical principle, because *Tian* (heaven) exists globally. So, *Tianxia* (all under Heaven), as Confucius said, must be the same, in order to be in accordance with heaven. Thus the *Tianxia* system is inclusive and not exclusive; it suppresses the idea of enemy and foreigner; no country or culture would be designated as an enemy, and be non-incorporable to the system.”<sup>140</sup>

However, this is obviously bourgeois ideological nonsense since the whole history of the Chinese Kingdom is characterized by expansionism and subjugation of non-Han people as many neighboring people in East Turkestan, Vietnam, Korea, etc. had to experience. Naturally, this makes China no different to Western Empires as the latter were also always trying to expand and subjugate other peoples. However, Marxists have to oppose any historical ideological myths – be they pro-Chinese or pro-Western. Neither China’s Empire, not any other Empire in history, was inclusive or peaceful. They were brutal state machineries for the purpose of serving the class interests of the ruling elite via exploiting the working people as well as via subjugating other peoples. The same is true today. Whether it is called “*global values of civilization*”, “*human rights and democracy*” or *Tianxian*, these are all bourgeois ideological concepts serving as

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Pepe Escobar: Tariffs ‘kick off 50-year trade war’ with China; July 6, 2018 <http://www.atimes.com/article/tariffs-kick-off-50-year-trade-war-with-china/>; Pepe Escobar: The Pivot to Eurasia, July 23, 2015, [http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/176026/tomgram%3A\\_pepe\\_escobar%2C\\_the\\_pivot\\_to\\_eurasia/](http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/176026/tomgram%3A_pepe_escobar%2C_the_pivot_to_eurasia/); Pepe Escobar: The Eurasian Big Bang. How China and Russia Are Running Rings Around Washington, 23.7.2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/pepe-escobar/the-eurasian-big-bang\\_b\\_7856614.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/pepe-escobar/the-eurasian-big-bang_b_7856614.html); Pepe Escobar: What the BRICS plus Germany are really up to? February 27, 2015 <http://rt.com/op-edge/236219-russia-china-germany-trade-axis/>; Pepe Escobar: The Geopolitical Earthquakes Reshaping Eurasia’s Economy, May 19, 2014, <http://www.thenation.com/article/179916/geopolitical-earthquakes-reshaping-eurasias-economy/>; Pepe Escobar: ; Pepe Escobar: Liquid War Across Eurasia and the Asia-Pacific: Postcard from Pipelineistan, in: The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol 21-2-09, May 23, 2009, <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Pepe-Escobar/3149/article.html>; Pepe Escobar: Empire of Chaos. The Roving Eye Collection, Vol.1, Nimble Books 2014.

140 Pepe Escobar: All under Heaven, China’s challenge to the Westphalian system. Beijing is tweaking the rules of the Western order to reflect its revitalized geopolitical and economic power, but some Americans see this as a threat to their way of life, January 10, 2019 <http://www.atimes.com/article/all-under-heaven-chinas-challenge-to-the-westphalian-system/>; see also Pepe Escobar: Chinese scholar offers insight into Beijing’s strategic mindset. Essay by security expert Professor Zhang Wenmu gives a glimpse of China’s geostrategic outlook, from the ‘Western Pacific Chinese Sea’ to the far side of the moon, January 5, 2019 <http://www.atimes.com/article/chinese-scholar-offers-insight-into-beijings-strategic-mindset/>

justifications for the imperialist policy of Great Powers.

There are a number of ideologists advocating the view point of Russia and China. Naturally, in contrast to the pro-Western ideologists, they observe rather cheerfully that “*the transfer of the geopolitical center of gravity to Eurasia is something the West will have to get used to*”.<sup>141</sup> Such ideologists, in addition to various Stalinists, range from writers like the already mentioned Pepe Escobar to William Engdahl, who is close to the semi-fascist *LaRouche movement* and the Russian fascist Aleksandr Dugin.<sup>142</sup> The later is a leading figure of the *Eurasian movement*, a current which is extremely reactionary in nature, lauds great power chauvinism and authoritarian forms of bourgeois regimes, and also includes a number of positions akin to fascism. It calls for the formation of a totalitarian empire with Russia as its center which will form an alliance with Europe against the US. Dugin proclaimed already two decades ago: “*Russia is the incarnation of the quest for an historical alternative to Atlanticism. Therein lies her global mission.*”<sup>143</sup>

## Protectionism and Militarism

All these tensions reflect the fundamental shift which is taking place in world politics. We have entered a new era. Making a historical review we can say that there was the era of Cold War between the imperialist states (led by the U.S.) and the Stalinist workers states (led by the USSR) in the years 1948-1989/91. After this we experienced an *Inter-Cold War Era* characterized by the absolute domination of U.S. imperialism. And currently, we are entering a *new Era of Cold War* between the imperialist Great Powers – first and foremost between the U.S. and China.<sup>144</sup>

The Global Trade War, which began in 2018, is a good example for the rapid deterioration in the relations between the Great Powers. As we have discussed in recently published documents, the political and economic tensions between the Great Powers have massively accelerated in the last few months with US

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141 William Engdahl: *The Eurasian Century Is NOW Unstoppable* October 7, 2016, <http://www.4thmedia.org/2016/10/the-eurasian-century-is-now-unstoppable/>; see also F. William Engdahl: *The Lost Hegemon. Who the Gods Would Destroy*, mineBooks, Wiesbaden 2016; F. William Engdahl: *Target: China. How Washington and Wall Street Plan to Cage the Asian Dragon*, Progressive Press, 2014; F. William Engdahl: *Transformational Projects in Eurasia Land Space*, 2016-09-10, <http://journal-neo.org/2016/09/10/transformational-projects-in-eurasia-land-space-3/>

142 Aleksandr Dugin: *Last War of the World-Island – The Geopolitics of Contemporary Russia*, Arktos, London 2015; Aleksandr Dugin: *Eurasian Mission: An Introduction to Neo-Eurasianism*, Arktos, London 2014; Aleksandr Dugin: *Putin vs Putin – Vladimir Putin Viewed from the Right*, Arktos, London 2014; Aleksandr Dugin: *The Fourth Political Theory*, Arktos, Eurasian Movement, London 2012.

143 Aleksandr Dugin in 1998; Quoted in Marlene Laruelle: *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008, p. 119

144 The Russia expert Stephen F. Cohen already spoke in 2009 about a new Cold War Era between the U.S and Russia. (See Stephen F. Cohen: *Soviet fates and lost alternatives: from Stalinism to the new Cold War*; Columbia University Press 2009).

President Trump triggering an open trade war.<sup>145</sup> However, this clash is not a sudden, unexpected development or a result of Trump's madness. It is rather the result of the rising number of protectionist measures by the US as well as other Great Powers in the last years. (See Figure 18)

This is why the brighter minds among the political and business leaders on both sides already prepare for a long Cold War. Chen Hongtian, a leading Chinese billionaire who is member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee and chairman of the Harmony Club, a group of about 150 Chinese tycoons, expects a long period of Cold War between the two Great Powers. In a speech to fellow monopoly capitalists he warned that the coming "political winter" will be "colder and longer than expected" and "all that I can say is that difficulties [for private enterprises] are much bigger than people expected."<sup>146</sup>

As we demonstrate in Figure 19 there has been a stagnation of world trade since the Great Recession in 2008 after decades of massive growth ("Globalization"). In short, the period of Globalization has ended in the last years as a result of the decay of capitalism.

The Global Trade War, the warmongering in the Middle East, the US aggression against Iran, the tensions in the South Chinese Sea, the conflict about North Korea's nuclear weapons, the conflict in the Ukraine, all these are logical consequences of the acceleration of the rivalry between the Great Powers.

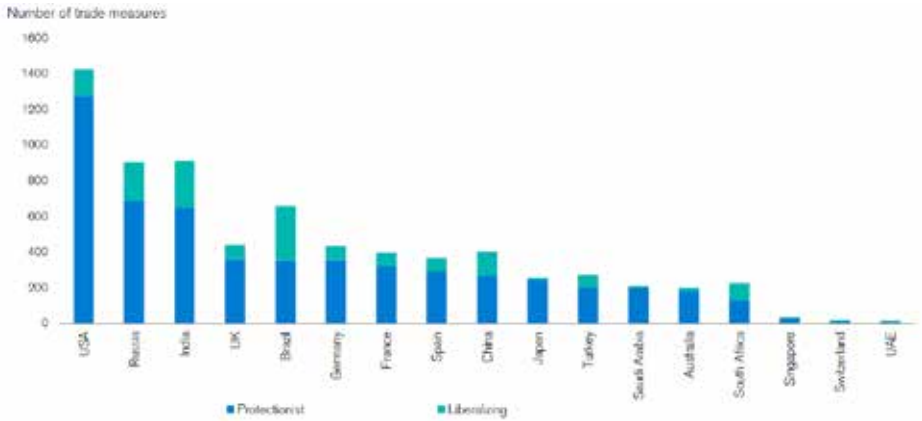
As a result, it is only logical that global armament is increasing again. While it has not reached the level of the highpoint of the Cold War in the 1980s, the process of increasing arms production and sales since the early 2000s is evident. (See Figure 20 and 21)

According to the SIPRI institute, global military expenditure was \$1,739 billion in 2017, an increase of 1.1% in real terms on 2016. Total military spending accounted for 2.2% of global Gross Domestic Product in 2017.

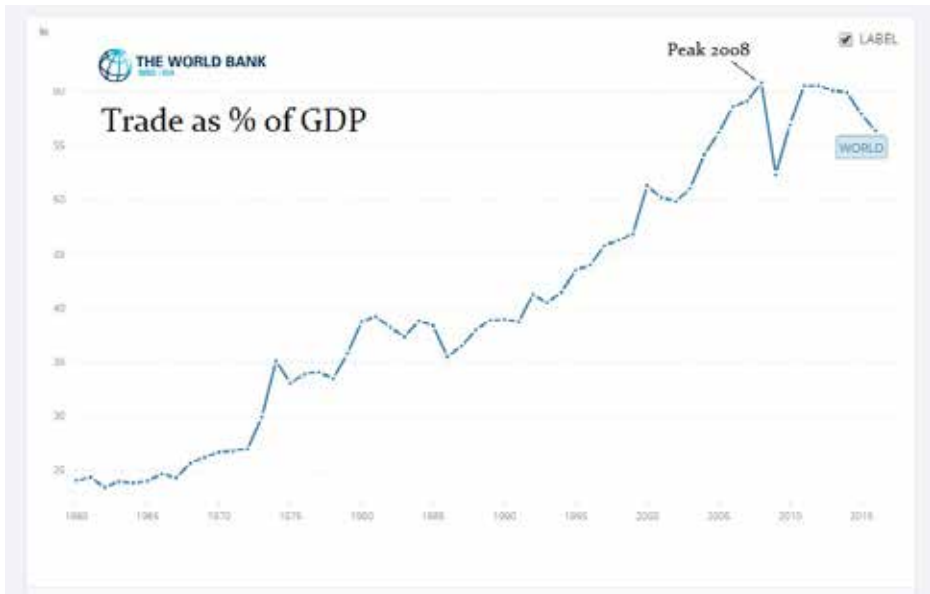
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145 See on this e.g. our recently published documents: Joint Statement: Global Trade War: No to Great Power Jingoism in West and East! Neither Imperialist Globalization nor Imperialist Protectionism! For International Solidarity and Joint Struggle of the Working Class and Oppressed People! 4 July 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/joint-statement-on-the-looming-global-trade-war/>; Yossi Schwartz: Capitalist Trade and the Looming 3rd World War, 15 July 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/capitalist-trade-and-looming-3rd-world-war/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Global Trade War has Begun. What is its Meaning and what should be the Response of Socialists?, 13 July 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-global-trade-war-has-begun/>; Michael Pröbsting: Where Do Socialists Stand in Face of the Looming Global Trade War? A Showcase of the Practical Consequences of the Assessment of the Class Character of the Chinese State, 17 June 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/where-do-socialists-stand-in-face-of-the-looming-global-trade-war/>; Michael Pröbsting: World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries, RCIT Books, Vienna 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/>

146 South China Morning Post: China's private economy set for winter 'colder and longer than expected', warns billionaire tycoon, 28 December, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/2179762/chinas-private-economy-set-winter-colder-and-longer-expected>

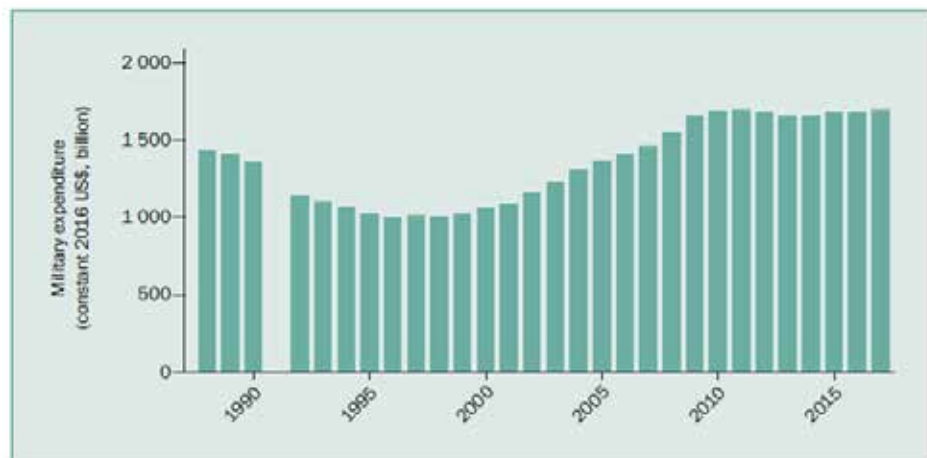
**Figure 18. Protectionist Measures dominate and distort Global Trade**<sup>147</sup>

Source: Global Trade Alert, Credit Suisse

**Figure 19. World Trade as Percentage of World GDP, 1960-2016**<sup>148</sup>

<sup>147</sup> Credit Suisse: Getting over Globalization, 2017, p. 28

<sup>148</sup> Martin Armstrong: World Trade – Who is Really Hurt in the Trade War, April 7, 2018; see on this also Eastsping Investments: Trade and Tariffs, Lessons from History, 2018, p. 2

**Figure 20. The Trend in Transfers of Major Weapons, 1950–2017** <sup>149</sup>**Figure 21. World military expenditure, 1988–2017** <sup>150</sup>

<sup>149</sup> SIPRI Yearbook 2018 (Summary) p. 9

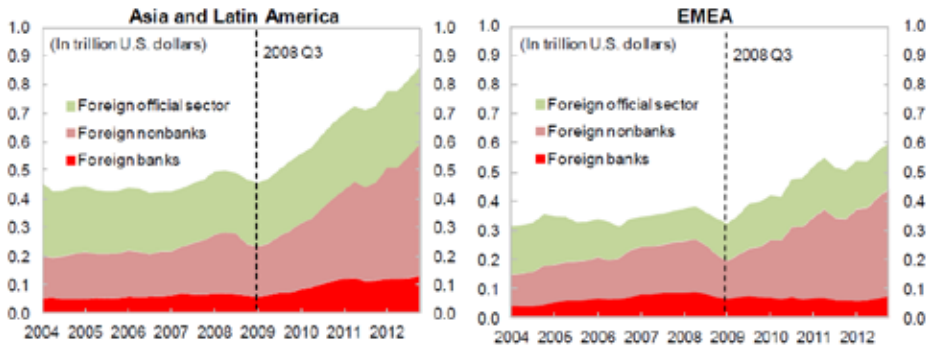
<sup>150</sup> SIPRI Fact Sheet, Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2017, May 2018, p. 1

## The Imperialist Drive for Control of the South

The same fundamental factor which accelerates the rivalry between the Great Powers – the desperate drive of the imperialist ruling classes to increase their share of the cake (i.e. the global capitalist value product) – is also behind their desire to increase the super-exploitation of the oppressed peoples and the semi-colonial world. The relevance of this process – an essential feature of the whole epoch of imperialism – has substantially increased in the past decades. We refer readers to our book *“The Great Robbery of the South”* and other publications for a detailed account of the imperialist super-exploitation of the South.

At his point we limit ourselves to a study of the IMF which analyzed the role of “foreign investors” (i.e. mostly imperialist capital) in the so-called *Emerging Markets* (i.e. the semi-colonial countries plus China and Russia). The report concludes that the role of “foreign investors” has considerably increased – particularly since the Great Recession in 2008: *“We estimate that total foreign investors held about US\$1 trillion of Emerging Markets government debt (excluding foreign official loans) at end-2012.”*<sup>151</sup> (See also Figure 22)

**Figure 22. Emerging Markets: Foreign Investors as an Investor Class, 2004-12**<sup>152</sup>



151 Serkan Arslanalp and Takahiro Tsuda: Tracking Global Demand for Emerging Market Sovereign Debt, International Monetary Fund, Working Paper, March 2014, p. 19

152 Serkan Arslanalp and Takahiro Tsuda: Tracking Global Demand for Emerging Market Sovereign Debt, International Monetary Fund, Working Paper, March 2014, p. 19



These figures demonstrate the process of strengthening position of imperialist capital in the countries of the South since the beginning of the new historic period in 2008.

As we have emphasized many times, the increasing drive of the imperialist monopolies to extract such extra-profits from the semi-colonial countries and to control their cheap labor and their raw materials is the main factor for the rising number of direct or indirect imperialist wars and interventions in the South. Examples for this development are the U.S. occupation wars in Afghanistan since 2001 and Iraq since 2003, Russia's war against the Chechen people, or Israel's occupation of the Palestinian people including its recent three wars against Gaza (2009, 2012, and 2014). Other examples are the military intervention of the US in Somalia as well as in Northern and Western Africa or of European powers in Mali and other central African states. In the same category falls the US aggression against semi-colonial states like North Korea and Iran.

In addition, we have seen in recent years an increasing number of cases where imperialist powers collaborate with allied regimes of semi-colonial states and equip and finance military forces composed mainly of soldiers from these countries. Examples for this are the Ethiopia-led AMISOM which acts, in close collaboration with US and EU imperialism, as an occupation force in Somalia fighting against *Al-Shabaab*; the recently constituted *G5 force* in Western Africa which shall fight against Islamist "terrorists" under French command; or various Iraqi special units which have been trained and equipped by the U.S. While the troops might come from semi-colonial countries, they act as imperialist proxies and their wars have to be characterized as imperialist wars.

Such forces basically resemble the colonial troops of the British, French as well other Empires. The British Empire, for example, built the so-called "*Indian Army*". This army commanded several hundred of thousands Indian soldiers (during World War II even 2.5 million) which were deployed under British command and for British interests not only in colonial India itself but all over the world.<sup>153</sup>

In summary, we see that the historic crisis of capitalism accelerates both the tensions between the Great Powers as well as the imperialist aggressiveness against the oppressed peoples in the semi-colonial world.

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153 On the British Indian Army see e.g. Kaushik Roy (Ed): *The Indian Army in the Two World Wars, History of Warfare 70*, Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden 2012; Alan Jeffreys, Patrick Rose (Eds): *The Indian Army, 1939-47: Experience and Development*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Farnham 2012; David Omissi: *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940*, Studies in Military and Strategic History, Palgrave Macmillan UK, London 1994.

## Rivalry between U.S. and China as the Main Axis of Inner-Imperialist Contradictions

Let us conclude this overview of the fundamental changes in world politics in the past decades with the following observations. As we have said, there are basically five Great Powers: the U.S., China, the European Union, Russia and Japan. (In addition there are several smaller imperialist states like South Korea, Australia, or the Switzerland.)

Of course we can not make a prediction about the exact lineup of the future rivaling alignment of the Great Powers and their alliances. However, there is good reason to assume that the a major faultline will be between the “sated” and the “hungry”, i.e. the old imperialist powers U.S., EU and Japan which divided up the world among themselves in the past decades and the newcomers China and Russia which are rising but have to push back the established incumbents in order to find space for their foreign investment, their market shares and military bases.<sup>154</sup>

It seems most likely to us that the main poles of any imperialist camps will be the U.S. on one side and China on the other. This is because these two Great Powers are the respective strongest forces among the “sated” and the “hungry”. Furthermore it is possible and necessary to arrive at a certain “hierarchization” among these Great Powers. As we noted above, Lenin also undertook such a “hierarchization” among the Great Powers.

In our view the two strongest, most important, the development of world politics and world economy most determining imperialist powers are the U.S. and China. As we have shown above, these two states are without doubt the two strongest economic powers. While Russia is militarily superior to China (and all other imperialist powers except the U.S.), it is economically so much weaker that we can not treat Moscow as equal with Beijing.

Other imperialist powers might come close to the U.S. respectively China in this or that area. But in their totality they do not match these two dominant Great Powers. Japan, for example, is economically strong. But for various reasons, one of them the consequences of its defeat in World War II, it is politically and military subordinated to the U.S. and does not play an independent role. Germany, the economically strongest European power, faces also the consequences of its defeat in World War II and, as a result, still can not play an independent military role in global affairs.

Furthermore, one has to make a certain reservation about the EU as a Global Power. Basically it is not a unified state but rather a federation in making with

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154 We draw inspiration from a formulation Trotsky used when comparing the “sated” Entente imperialists like France and the “hungry” imperialists like Germany which lost WWI and which was looking for revenge. *“The contradiction between Germany and France is by no means that of democracy vs. fascism, but rather that between a hungry and a sated imperialism.”* (Leon Trotsky: Who Defends Russia? Who Helps Hitler? (1935); in: Trotsky Writings 1935-36, p. 61)

various inner contradictions. This substantially limits its ability to intervene politically and military in global affairs. As a matter of fact, the EU stands at a crossroad: either it succeeds, realistically under the leadership of Germany and France, to make a great leap forward and to create a Pan-European proto-state which could take an independent stand as a Great Power defending its imperialist interests against the rivals in East and West. Or it becomes an object of desire for the other Great Powers and will inevitable weaken and collapse. However, we will not focus on this issue here since we have dealt with it elsewhere and, furthermore, it does not alter the fundamental argument in this place.<sup>155</sup>

Of course, each of these Great Powers is an independent power following their own interests. But they can only act in the world arena (and actually do so) if they operate in an alliance with one of the two dominating Great Powers U.S. resp. China. They can hardly play any significant role without the support of one of the two. And in any alliance with one of them, it is the U.S. resp. China which will play the dominant role but neither can the EU, Russia nor Japan.

Furthermore, when analyzing the Great Powers it is crucial to take into account *the dynamic of the development*. The U.S., the EU and Japan are old, declining, imperialist powers while China and Russia are new, rising powers. To illustrate this dynamic once again we compare the economic development of the U.S. and China since 1985. In Table 14 we show the dramatic changes in the U.S. resp. China's share in world manufacturing production as well as among the global Top 500 corporations.

Table 15 also demonstrates the dramatic shift and the increase of China's global weight since the beginning of the century. This overall picture confirms once again, that China has become an imperialist Great Power.

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155 For an overview of the RCIT's writings on the European Union see Michael Pröbsting: Marxism, the European Union and Brexit. The L5I and the European Union: A Right Turn away from Marxism. The recent change in the L5I's position towards the support for EU membership represents a shift away from its own tradition, of the Marxist method, and of the facts; August 2016, in: Revolutionary Communist No. 55, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/eu-and-brexit/>; Michael Pröbsting: Does the EU Represent "Bourgeois Democratic Progress"? Once again, on the EU and the Tactics of the Working Class – An Addendum to our Criticism of the L5I's Turn to the Right and Its Support for EU Membership, 16.09.2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/eu-brexit-article/>; Manfred Meier: Nachbeben des Brexit - Zur Rechtswende von L5I: das „JA“ zum Verbleib in der EU, August 2016, <http://www.thecommunists.net/home/deutsch/gam-brexit/>; Michael Pröbsting: The British Left and the EU-Referendum: The Many Faces of pro-UK or pro-EU Social-Imperialism. An analysis of the left's failure to fight for an independent, internationalist and socialist stance both against British as well as European imperialism, Revolutionary Communism Nr. 40, August 2015 <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/british-left-and-eu-referendum/>; see also (in German language only) Michael Pröbsting: Die Frage der Vereinigung Europas im Lichte der marxistischen Theorie. Zur Frage eines supranationalen Staatsapparates des EU-Imperialismus und der marxistischen Staatstheorie. Die Diskussion zur Lösung der Vereinigten Sozialistischen Staaten von Europa bei Lenin und Trotzki und ihre Anwendung unter den heutigen Bedingungen des Klassenkampfes, in: Unter der Fahne der Revolution Nr. 2/3 (2008), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/marxismus-und-eu/>

**Table 14. Economy: US Decline and China's Rise between 1985 and 2018** <sup>156</sup>  
*Global Share (in %)*

	1985		1998/2001		2011		2016/18	
	US	CHN	US	CHN	US	CHN	US	CHN
<i>Manufacturing Production</i>	32.4%	4.3%	25.4%	6.3%	20.5%	16.4%	16.3%	23.5%
<i>Top 500 Corporations</i>	-	-	43.0%	2.0%	26.0%	14.6%	25.2%	24.0%

**Table 15. China's Increasing Global Weight, 2000 vs. 2015** <sup>157</sup>

	2000	2015
<i>Population</i>	20.7%	18.7%
<i>GDP</i>	3.7%	15.1%
<i>Exports</i>	3.9%	13.8%
<i>Imports</i>	3.4%	10.1%
<i>Reserves</i>	6.6%	30.1%
<i>Inward FDI</i>	3.0%	7.7%
<i>Outward FDI</i>	0.1%	8.7%
<i>Inward Portfolio Investment</i>	0.5%	1.5%
<i>Outward Portfolio Investment</i>	0.8%	0.6%

<sup>156</sup> For the figures on manufacturing see UNIDO Industrial Development Report 2002/2003, p. 152 (for the years 1985 and 1998), UNIDO Industrial Development Report 2013, p. 196 resp. 202 (for the year 2011) and UNIDO Industrial Development Report 2018, p. 205 resp. 209 (for the year 2016). Note that manufacturing is not identical with industrial production since the later also includes mining and the construction sector.

For the figures on the top 500 corporations see Wikipedia: Fortune Global 500, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortune\\_Global\\_500](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortune_Global_500) (for 2001), Agence France-Presse: Chinese companies push out Japan on Fortune Global 500 list, July 9, 2012, <http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2012/07/09/chinese-companies-push-out-japan-on-fortune-global-500-list/> (for 2011) and Fortune: Fortune Global 500 List 2018: See Who Made It, <http://fortune.com/global500/list/> (for 2018).

<sup>157</sup> See on this e.g. Logan Wright, Daniel Rosen: Credit and Credibility – Risks to China's Economic Resilience, Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 2018, p. 12

In the field of world politics, it is the relationship between the U.S. and China which is the single most important factors in global inter-states relations. It is the relationship between these two Great Powers which will cause major economic and political crisis, which will result in military tensions, and which will provoke a polarization of states, of parties as well as of the labor movement in opposing camps.

In his polemic against the Stalinist program adopted at the Comintern congress on 1928, Trotsky criticized, among others, that this program failed to emphasize the crucial role of the relationship between Europe and America for world politics: *“If in the past decade the main source of revolutionary situations lay in the direct consequences of the imperialist war, in the second post-war decade the most important source of revolutionary upheavals will be the interrelations of Europe and America.”*<sup>158</sup>

Nearly a century later, we can say that it is the relationship between the U.S. and China which will play a similar role in the next years and decades. It is impossible to find a correct orientation in world politics without understanding this issue!

Naturally, this dynamic is a highly important factor for the political self-confidence and the appeal of China resp. Russia. China’s President Xi statement in a recent prominent speech – *“No one is in a position to dictate to the Chinese people what should or should not be done”* – reflects such increasing self-confidence.<sup>159</sup>

At the same time, the U.S. President announces officially a historic shift of its foreign policy. Defending his decision to withdraw all U.S. troops from Syria and half of those in Afghanistan, Trump declared that the U.S. cannot continue to be *“the policeman of the world”*. He added: *“We are spread out all over the world. We are in countries most people haven’t even heard about. Frankly, it’s ridiculous.”*<sup>160</sup>

Such a dynamic of decline has also profound consequences for the domestic stability and cohesiveness. Just look at the U.S. or the European Union. The ruling class of the strongest imperialist power is deadlocked in a political civil war with Trump as a dysfunctional President who is detested by the majority of the monopoly bourgeoisie as well as of the population. An increasing number of commentators compare the decline of the U.S. with the final period of the Roman Empire and Dumbass Trump with the notorious Emperor Nero.<sup>161</sup>

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158 Leon Trotsky: *The Third International After Lenin* (1928), Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, p.10

159 Sebastien Falletti: *US trade war raises the specter of new Cold War*, December 25, 2018 <http://www.atimes.com/article/us-trade-war-raises-the-specter-of-new-cold-war/>

160 David Smith: *Trump hails foreign policy shift on surprise visit to US troops in Iraq*, 27 December 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/dec/26/trump-iraq-visit-us-troops-shutdown>

161 See e.g. Jeet Heer: *Are We Witnessing the Fall of the American Empire?* Trump’s presidency is often compared to the decline of Rome, but the reality is much more complicated, March 7, 2018 <https://newrepublic.com/article/147319/witnessing-fall-american-empire>; David Remnick: *The Increasing Unfitness of Donald Trump*. The West Wing has come to resemble the dankest realms of Twitter, in which everyone is racked with paranoia and everyone despises everyone else, January 15, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/15/the-increasing-unfitness-of-donald-trump>

And the imperialist governments of the European Union are self-absorbed with their conflicts between each other, with the issue how to deal with Brexit, with migration, the U.S. aggression against Iran, the global trade war, etc.

Related with this decline of the old imperialist powers is the undermining of the social fabric in the U.S., Western Europe and Japan. Historically, these richest imperialist powers were able to afford for many decades a relatively stable bourgeois democracy because their wealth allowed them to build a social alliance of the ruling class with the middle class and the labor aristocracy. Politically, this “*historic bloc*” (to lend a category of Antonio Gramsci) has been expressed in relatively stable governments (sometimes as coalition governments) – of the Republican resp. the Democratic Party in the U.S., of the leading conservative resp. reformist party in Europe, etc.

All this is changing now as we see with Trump, Macron, the M5-Lega government in Italy, etc. In short, the decline of the old imperialist powers has provoked a lasting disintegration of this “*historic bloc*” and resulted in the break-away of sectors of the middle class (expressed in the emergence of radical right-wing racist movements or radical liberal-democratic movements). Likewise, we see crises or even splits in reformist parties like Corbyn’s Labour Party in Britain, the collapse of the French Socialist Party and the rise of Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s *La France Insoumise*, the rise of Podemos in Spain, etc.

In short, the decline of the old imperialist powers has provoked a fundamental social and political destabilization. This domestic political crisis weakens these Great Powers in addition to their economic decline.

One of the consequences of this rupture of the social fabric in the old imperialist states is a crisis of the political and ideological identification of the people with their state. Of course, this must not be confused with a political conscious anti-imperialist or defeatist attitude. It is rather a “subliminal social mood” where people rather focus on their immediate needs, on consumerism, etc. But there exists hardly a mood among the population in North America, in Western Europe or Japan to willingly make sacrifices so that “the nation” can get stronger; there is little enthusiasm for military adventures abroad and every government is anxious to minimize casualties in wars abroad. Trump is a reactionary chauvinist par excellence but he gains points amongst his supporters by reducing of number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan and the Middle East. The highpoint of his chauvinist glory is ... to build a wall at the border with Mexico! Not a chauvinist aggressiveness of a *Great Power* but rather a defensive chauvinism of a decaying former super-power! It is no exaggeration to say that there is a touch of defeatism (understood in the literal sense, not the Leninist meaning of the category) in the social atmosphere in Western countries as it was the case in France in 1939/40 before the state machinery unceremonial quickly collapsed when faced with the German offensive in May/June 1940.

Finally, a note about those bourgeois ideologists, who are so “fascinated” with the decline of the West and the rise of China that they already talk about

the replacement of the U.S. by China as the world's hegemon. We consider the idea of an orderly replacement of the U.S.-dominated world order by a China-dominated world order as one-sided and impressionist nonsense. Yes, the U.S. and the West in general are declining and, yes, China is rising as we have argued since a number of years. However, it is sheer nonsense, a kind of bourgeois pacifism, to imagine that such a replacement would be possible *without* a major world war (or, theoretically, a successful socialist revolution in one of the major imperialist powers). The decline of the West and the rise of the East mean, in the first place, an *acceleration of the contradictions* between the Great Powers. It means more trade wars, more proxy wars and, eventually, major wars between the rivals. The West will not go down without a desperate struggle for hegemony. And it would be foolish to exclude the possibility that the West could win such a confrontation. If the working class does not succeed in overthrowing the capitalists bandits in time, it is, however, also possible that the result of such a world war will be rather annihilation of all participants.

## VII. Imperialist Great Powers: Some Historical Comparisons

Capitalism has seen various changes and modifications in the past hundred years albeit its essence has remained the same. The productive forces have grown and, as a result, the internationalization of the economy, the prevalent role of the world economy, has increased (“globalization” of trade, investment, migration, etc.). Related to this is the shift of capitalist value production from the old imperialist countries to new imperialist powers (in particular China) and the semi-colonial South and, as a result, a shift of the center of gravity of the world proletariat in the same direction. From this follows an increasing super-exploitation of the oppressed people by the imperialists as well as a tendency to a further bourgeoisification of the labor movement in the old imperialist countries.<sup>162</sup>

There have been also important changes in the relations between the imperialist Great Powers. Until 1917, the world was shaped by the bloody rivalry between the imperialist Great Powers. This rivalry continued after WWI for two decades (albeit without major wars in the heartlands of imperialism), before it resulted in another, even more destructive, world war. However, the situation was complicated since 1917 by two crucial factors: first the emergence of the USSR as the first workers state of the world and, secondly, with the upswing of anti-colonial liberation struggles of the oppressed peoples. While the USSR degenerated under the rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy, it remained an important anti-capitalist factor.

World War II ended with a victory of the USSR based on the heroic resistance of the people in the Soviet Union as well as in China, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Italy, France, etc.<sup>163</sup> Since the Stalinist bureaucracy, as well as fascism, had annihilated many revolutionary cadre, it could also succeed in pacifying the working class uprisings and channel them for the purpose of expanding its sphere of influence. Nevertheless, the result of this development was that by the end of the 1940s not only the USSR but also China, the North of Korea, Eastern Europe and most of the Balkans were no longer capitalist.

The outcome of World War II did also result in a profound regroupement within the imperialist camp. The defeat of German and Japanese imperialism, the shattered status of Britain and France and the enormous strength of the U.S.

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162 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South* (Chapter 8 and 14); Michael Pröbsting: *Marxism and the United Front Tactic Today. The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony in the Liberation Movement in Semi-Colonial and Imperialist Countries in the present Period*, RCIT Books, Vienna 2016, pp. 43-51, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/book-united-front/>

163 Despite some limitations, Ernest Mandel’s book on World War II remains an excellent overview of this issue: Ernest Mandel: *The Meaning of the Second World War*, Verso, London 1986



resulted in the absolute domination of the latter within the imperialist camp. This tendency was reinforced with the beginning of the Cold War in the later 1940s which consolidated the alliance of the imperialist Great Powers under the leadership of Washington.

While this development did not eliminate the rivalry between the Great Powers, it certainly *subordinated* these tendencies to the overriding priority of the imperialists to stand together against the post-capitalist bureaucratic workers states and the anti-imperialist uprisings of the oppressed peoples which took place on all continents.

The collapse of the Stalinist camp in 1989-91 and the restoration of capitalism at first expanded the hegemony of the U.S. as it has been the dominant imperialist force for half a century. The imperialist propagandists cheered and were optimistic about the future. Who could forget the silly proclamation of Francis Fukuyama about "*the End of History*"?!<sup>164</sup> That period reminded one to the characterization of the American economic historian David Landes about the period at the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*"In the last years of the century, prices began to rise and profits with them. As business improved, confidence returned-not the spotty, evanescent confidence of the brief booms that had punctuated the gloom of the preceding decades, but a general euphoria such as had not prevailed since the Gründerjahre of the early 1870's. Everything seemed right again-in spite of rattlings of arms and monitory Marxist references to the 'last stage' of capitalism. In all of Western Europe, these years live on in memory as the good old days-the Edwardian era, la belle époque."*<sup>165</sup>

However, the slow economic decline of U.S. imperialism, which began already long before, accelerated gradually. In 2001, Washington launched its reactionary "*War on Terror*" – a huge reactionary offensive which used the 9/11 attack as a pretext. This militarist offensive of U.S. imperialism has been essentially an attempt to impede its decline – and has caused the death of about half a million people until now!<sup>166</sup> However, this attempt basically failed as the U.S. a) could not achieve lasting victories in its colonial aggression and b) could not halt the rise of new imperialist Great Powers like China and Russia.

The lunatic Trump Administration is both a symbol for the decay of Washington as well as an attempt to regain absolute hegemony by combination of aggressive foreign policy against all rivals. This attempt is obviously doomed to collapse.

This brief historic overview should help us to identify the main features of the relations between the Great Powers and their inner contradictions. Looking for historical analogies, it seems to us that the world situation most similar to the

164 Francis Fukuyama: *The End of History and the Last Man*, Free Press, New York 1992

165 David S. Landes: *The Unbound Prometheus. Technological change and industrial development in Western Europe from 1750 to the present*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1969, p. 231

166 See Neta C. Crawford: *Human Cost of the Post-9/11 Wars: Lethality and the Need for Transparency*, November 2018, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at the Brown University

present one is the historic period before World War I. However, we have to note that there are two important factors which differentiate the present world situation from the one before 1914. First, the massive gain in importance of countries and powers outside of the old Western Great Powers and, hence, of the class struggles in these parts of the world. And, secondly, the menacing danger of the climate catastrophe caused by the reckless capitalist corporations.

Taking these modifications into account, we have to stress that the essence of the world capitalist system has not substantially changed. The capitalist hunt for profits, the rivalry between the monopolies and the Great Powers, the exploitation of the working class and the super-exploitation of the South, the historic decline of the capitalist system (tendency of the profit rate to fall, etc.) – all these essential features of modern capitalism still dominate the fate of humanity.

Hence, it is clear to us that the program of class struggle against imperialism and wars, as it was developed by the Marxist classics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, remains fully valid in its essential features. However, the challenge for Marxists is not only to uphold their fundamental principles but also to apply them to concrete situations of conflicts and struggles in a concrete way.

## Excuse: The Law of Uneven and Combined Development

Our overview of the development of the rivaling Great Powers already indicated to the uneven nature of this process and the interdependence between the different poles in this relationship. This demonstrates the fact that an understanding of the historical development of capitalism in general and of the relationships between the Great Powers in particular is impossible without recognizing the central importance of the *law of uneven and combined development* as it was elaborated by Lenin and Trotsky. Hence we will briefly summarize the essence of this law.<sup>167</sup>

This law explains – if we formulate it in a very general way – how different stages of development as well as different tempos of development in a given society interact with one another and thereby result in different forms or types of development. Naturally, this same process also takes place between different societies. Trotsky, first developed such a conception – together with his strategy of permanent revolution – in 1905/06 when he tried to explain the possible roads of Russia's social development. He showed that Russia – despite its massive social and economic backwardness compared to Western Europe and hence the related small size of its proletariat – could witness a working class-led revolution without having experienced first a long period of capitalist develop-

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167 For a more substantive elaboration of our view on this issue see Michael Pröbsting: Capitalism Today and the Law of Uneven Development: The Marxist Tradition and its Application in the Present Historic Period, in: Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory, Volume 44, Issue 4, (2016), <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03017605.2016.1236483>

ment as that which took place in Western Europe.

*„The laws of history have nothing in common with a pedantic schematism. Unevenness, the most general law of the historic process, reveals itself most sharply and complexly in the destiny of the backward countries. Under the whip of external necessity, their backward culture is compelled to make leaps. From the universal law of unevenness thus derives another law which, for the lack of a better name, we may call the law of combined development—by which we mean a drawing together of the different stages of the journey, a combining of the separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms. Without this law, to be taken of course in its whole material content, it is impossible to understand the history of Russia, and indeed of any country of the second, third, or tenth cultural class.“*<sup>168</sup>

Later, and in particular after the experience of the Chinese Revolution of 1925–27, Trotsky generalized this conception and deduced from it the strategy of permanent revolution. He would also generalize the meaning of his law of uneven and combined development and see in it a central concept relevant for the whole of human history. Trotsky absolutely rejected the Stalinist idea that human society inevitably develops through an irrevocable succession of necessary stages. Rather history develops in leaps and in different patterns in different countries. Replying to Stalin’s assertion that this law is only relevant for the capitalist epoch, Trotsky emphasized *“that the entire history of mankind is governed by the law of uneven development.“*<sup>169</sup>

In his critique of the Stalinist draft program for the Communist International, Trotsky explained the relevance of this law to understand the process of relations between nations, including their abrupt changes, in modern capitalism.

*„Capitalism finds various sections of mankind at different stages of development, each with its profound internal contradictions. The extreme diversity in the levels attained, and the extraordinary unevenness in the rate of development of the different sections of mankind during the various epochs, serve as the starting point of capitalism. Capitalism gains mastery only gradually over the inherited unevenness, breaking and altering it, employing therein its own means and methods. In contrast to the economic systems which preceded it, capitalism inherently and constantly aims at economic expansion, at the penetration of new territories, the surmounting of economic differences, the conversion of self-sufficient provincial and national economies into a system of financial interrelationships. Thereby it brings about their rapprochement and equalizes the economic and cultural levels of the most progressive and the most backward countries. Without this main process, it would be impossible to conceive of the relative leveling out, first, of Europe with Great Britain, and then, of America with Europe; the industrialization of the colonies, the diminishing gap between India and Great Britain, and all the*

<sup>168</sup> Leon Trotsky: *History of the Russian Revolution* (1930), Haymarket Books, Chicago 2008, p. 5

<sup>169</sup> Leon Trotsky: *The Third International After Lenin* (1928), Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, p.19. Later, by the way, Trotsky explained that the law of uneven development is also relevant to understanding the contradictory developments in nature, human consciousness, etc. (See on this Philip Pomper (Editor): *Trotsky’s Notebooks, 1933-1935: Writings on Lenin, Dialectics and Evolutionism*, Columbia University Press, New York 1986)

consequences arising from the enumerated processes upon which is based not only the program of the Communist International but also its very existence.

By drawing the countries economically closer to one another and leveling out their stages of development, capitalism, however, operates by methods of its own, that is to say, by anarchistic methods which constantly undermine its own work, set one country against another, and one branch of industry against another, developing some parts of world economy while hampering and throwing back the development of others. Only the correlation of these two fundamental tendencies - both of which arise from the nature of capitalism - explains to us the living texture of the historical process.

Imperialism, thanks to the universality, penetrability, and mobility and the break-neck speed of the formation of finance capital as the driving force of imperialism, lends vigor to both these tendencies. Imperialism links up incomparably more rapidly and more deeply the individual national and continental units into a single entity, bringing them into the closest and most vital dependence upon each other and rendering their economic methods, social forms, and levels of development more identical. At the same time, it attains this "goal" by such antagonistic methods, such tiger-leaps, and such raids upon backward countries and areas that the unification and leveling of world economy which it has effected, is upset by it even more violently and convulsively than in the preceding epochs."<sup>170</sup>

Here is not the place to discuss the law of uneven and combined development in general. Instead we will limit ourselves to discuss its relevance to the focus of this work – the rivalry between the Great Powers. As we can see, Lenin and Trotsky considered this law as relevant not only for the so-called backward (semi-)colonial countries or the relationship between the imperialist and the (semi-)colonial states but also for the relationship between the Great Powers themselves. The following two quotes of Trotsky and Lenin demonstrate this very clearly.

"... the privilege of historical backwardness – and such a privilege exists – permits, or rather compels, the adoption of whatever is ready in advance of any specified date, skipping a whole series of intermediate stages. Savages throw away their bows and arrows for rifles all at once, without travelling the road which lay between those two weapons in the past. The European colonists in America did not begin history all over again from the beginning. The fact that Germany and the United States have now economically outstripped England was made possible by the very backwardness of their capitalist development... The development of historically backward nations leads necessarily to a peculiar combination of different stages in the historical process."<sup>171</sup>

„Defending the slogan of the Soviet United States of Europe, we pointed out in 1915, that the law of uneven development is in itself no argument against this slogan, because the unevenness of historical development of different countries and continents is in itself uneven. European countries develop unevenly in relation to one another. Never-

170 Leon Trotsky: *The Third International After Lenin* (1928), Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, pp.19-20

171 Leon Trotsky: *History of the Russian Revolution* (1930), Haymarket Books, Chicago 2008, p. 4

theless it can be maintained with absolute historical certainty that not a single one of these countries is fated, at least in the historical epoch under review, to run so far ahead in relation to other countries as America has run ahead of Europe. For America there is one scale of unevenness, for Europe there is another. Geographically and historically, conditions have predetermined such a close organic bond between the countries of Europe that there is no way for them to tear themselves out of it. The modern bourgeois governments of Europe are like murderers chained to a single cart. " 172

Likewise, Lenin observed uneven development not only in Russia itself but also on a global scale. In Russia, modern capitalist enterprises existed alongside backward semi-feudal agrarian forms of exploitation. On a global scale, Lenin could see the most developed capitalist country, England, stagnating while other countries with a belated capitalist development rose dramatically (e.g., America and Japan). Likewise, capital export from the European imperialist countries to economically backward colonies created amalgamations of different modes of production and thus led to accelerated economic growth in the latter countries. Lenin concluded that „uneven economic and political development is an absolute law of capitalism.“ 173

Lenin emphasized the importance of the law of uneven development in the relations between the Great Powers. He explained that it is exactly this law which helps to understand why a stable relationship between the Great Powers is impossible and why there have to be ruptures and, eventually, wars between them.

„The question has only to be presented clearly for any other than a negative answer to be impossible. This is because the only conceivable basis under capitalism for the division of spheres of influence, interests, colonies, etc., is a calculation of the strength of those participating, their general economic, financial, military strength, etc. And the strength of these participants in the division does not change to an equal degree, for the even development of different undertakings, trusts, branches of industry, or countries is impossible under capitalism. Half a century ago Germany was a miserable, insignificant country, if her capitalist strength is compared with that of the Britain of that time; Japan compared with Russia in the same way. Is it “conceivable” that in ten or twenty years’ time the relative strength of the imperialist powers will have remained unchanged? It is out of the question.“ 174

And indeed, if we look to the development of capitalism in earlier periods of the imperialist epoch, we will see a full confirmation of such an uneven development between the Great Powers as we will demonstrate below.

Such unevenness between the Great Powers at the time of Lenin and Trotsky is important to recognize particularly since various deniers of the imperialist nature of China and Russia today claim that the Marxist classics considered

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172 Leon Trotsky: *The Third International After Lenin* (1928), Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, pp.14-15

173 V.I. Lenin: *On the Slogan for a United States of Europe* (1915), in: LCW 21, p. 342

174 V.I. Lenin: *Imperialism, The Highest Stage Of Capitalism* (1916), in: LCW 22, p. 295

only the strongest and most advanced capitalist nations as “imperialist”. We have already refuted this claim above in chapter IV. But let us demonstrate the uneven character of the imperialist Great Powers in earlier periods of imperialism more in detail below.

### **Some Historical Examples about the Unevenness of the Great Powers before 1939**

As we have noted above, one could differentiate the imperialist Great Powers in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, broadly speaking, in old, “mature” imperialist powers (like Britain or France), newer, rising powers (like the U.S. or Germany) as well as more backward powers (like Russia, Austrian-Hungary Empire, Italy or Japan). As we have elaborated in several works, unevenness existed between these Great Powers in several aspects like industrial development, economic productivity, capital export, loans, etc. – not dissimilar to differences between the present imperialist powers.<sup>175</sup>

Most obvious was the massive difference between advanced imperialist powers and the more backward. At this point it should be sufficient to give just two examples. In Table 16 we see the huge differences in labor productivity between countries like Britain or the U.S. on one side and of backward imperialist powers like Russia, Japan or Spain on the other side.

**Table 16. Population and Gross Domestic Product in 1913**<sup>176</sup>

	<b>Population (in Million)</b>	<b>GDP in \$ Billions</b>	<b>GDP Per Capita in \$</b>
United States	97.6	517.4	5,301
United Kingdom	45.6	224.6	4,921
Spain	20.3	45.7	2,255
Russia	156.2	232.3	1,488
Japan	51.7	71.6	1,387
China	437.1	241.3	552

<sup>175</sup> See for this various works listed in the special sub-section on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-russia-as-imperialist-powers/>; In particular we refer readers to our pamphlet *Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power*.

<sup>176</sup> Angus Maddison: *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective*, Vol. 1, 2001, pp. 183-185 and 213-215. The figures are calculated in 1990 international U.S. Dollars.

In Table 17 we see figures of GDP per capita and relative levels of industrialization for several imperialist powers on the eve of WWI. Similar to what we see today, in 1913 there were huge differences in productivity between the Western imperialist powers and their Eastern rivals. Britain's industrial production per capita (serving as the base of comparison with a value of 100) was, for example, more than three times as large as Austria's, four times bigger than Italy's, and six times the size of Russia's.

**Table 17. Relative GDP per capita (column A) and relative levels of industrialization (column B) in 1913** <sup>177</sup>

<i>Country</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>
Britain	100	100
France	81	51
Germany	77	74
Austria	62	29
Italy	52	23
Spain	48	19
Russia	29	17

Such unevenness in the economic development, as we demonstrated, did not stop Lenin to characterize "backward" Great Powers like Russia, Austria-Hungary, Italy or Japan as imperialist. See for example his reference to the imperialist character of country like Japan, despite its much weaker economic development stage.

*"Capitalism is growing with the greatest rapidity in the colonies and in overseas countries. Among the latter, new imperialist powers are emerging (e.g., Japan)."* <sup>178</sup>

However, a closer look to the historical data will demonstrate that unevenness did not only exist between the developed and the backward Great Powers but also between the Western imperialist states themselves. This was, first, obviously the case in terms of colonial possessions. While Britain and France had vast global Empires under their control, Germany and the U.S. had hardly any colonies.

We see similar unevenness among the Western Great Powers when we look to the role of capital export. As Table 18 demonstrates, capital export played a much more important role for Britain than commodity production and trade. This is not surprising as Britain was the dominant imperialist power at that time

<sup>177</sup> François Crouzet: *A History of the European Economy, 1000–2000*, University Press of Virginia, 2001, p. 148

<sup>178</sup> V. I. Lenin: *Imperialism. The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) ; in: *LCW Vol. 22*, p. 274

(historically it played a similar role to the US in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). London alone controlled nearly half of the world's foreign investment. Its share in capital export was nearly 2,5 times as large than its share in the world's industrial production and trade. The situation was not much different in France. However, in the case of Germany we see an imperialist power which capital export did not play a larger role than its commodity trade. And in the case of the United States we see a picture where commodity production and trade played a significantly larger role than its capital export.

**Table 18. Great Powers' Share in Industrial Production, Trade and Capital Export, 1913** <sup>179</sup>

	<b>Industrial Production</b>	<b>World Trade</b>	<b>Overseas Investment</b>
<i>Great Britain</i>	14%	15%	41%
<i>United States</i>	36%	11%	8%
<i>Germany</i>	16%	13%	13%
<i>France</i>	6%	8%	20%

To a certain degree the U.S. was at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in a similar position like China has been in the past decade. It was a newcomer and its capital export lagged behind the established imperialist powers.

This is also evident from another indicator. As Table 18 demonstrated, the U.S. was not a major contributor for capital export – its share in the global stocks was not even 1/5 of Britain's. At the same time, the United States were by far the largest recipient of foreign investments by 1913/14 when it imported \$7.1 Billion – the equivalent of 15.8% of the global foreign investment. <sup>180</sup> In Table 19 we see that by 1914, US imperialism received more than double as much investment from foreign sources than U.S. nationals invested abroad.

<sup>179</sup> The column with the figures for industrial production and world trade are taken from Jürgen Kuczynski: *Studien zur Geschichte der Weltwirtschaft*, Berlin 1952, p. 35 and p. 43. The column with the figures for overseas investment trade is taken from Paul Bairoch and Richard Kozul-Wright: *Globalization Myths: Some Historical Reflections on Integration, Industrialization and Growth in the World Economy*, UNCTAD Discussion Papers No. 113, 1996, p. 12. (For non-German readers we add that the late Jürgen Kuczynski was a famous German economy historian in the Stalinist tradition, who wrote numerous books about the history of capitalism and the working class. He was a kind of German version of Eric Hobsbawn.)

<sup>180</sup> Dirk Willem te Velde: *Foreign Direct Investment and Development. A historical perspective*, 30 January 2006, Background paper for 'World Economic and Social Survey for 2006', Overseas Development Institute, p. 6.



**Table 19. Foreign Investment Position of the United States, 1914 (in billions of U.S. dollars)**<sup>181</sup>

<i>U.S. investments abroad</i>		<i>Foreign investments in U.S.</i>	
<i>Total Government lending</i>	<i>Private accounts (Portfolio investments and Direct investments)</i>	<i>Total Government borrowings</i>	<i>Private obligations (Portfolio investments and Direct investments)</i>
3.5	0	7.1	0.1
	3.5		7.0

**Table 20. Germany and United Kingdom: Foreign Investment as Percentage of Total Net Capital Formation (at current prices)**<sup>182</sup>

	<i>Germany</i>	<i>United Kingdom</i>
1851/5-1861/5	2.2%	1855-64
1861/5-1871/5	12.9%	1865-74
1871/5-1881/5	14.1%	1875-84
1881/5-1891/5	19.9%	1885-94
1891/5-1901/5	9.7%	1895-1904
1901/5-1911/13	5.7%	1905-14
		51.9%

**Table 21. Net Foreign Assets in 1914 (% of GDP)**<sup>183</sup>

United Kingdom	153%
Germany	36%
USA	-9%

<sup>181</sup> Mira Wilkins: *The History of Foreign Investment in the United States, 1914-1945*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2004, p. 64<sup>182</sup> David S. Landes: *The Unbound Prometheus. Technological change and industrial development in Western Europe from 1750 to the present*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1969, p. 331<sup>183</sup> Moritz Schularick: *A Tale of two 'Globalizations': Capital Flows from Rich to Poor in Two Eras of Global Finance*, in: *International Journal of Finance and Economics* 11 (2006), p. 350

Giovanni Arrighi and Beverly J. Silver report that between 1870 and 1913 Britain's foreign investment and long-term lending to the U.S. amounted to \$3 billion. "But during the same period the U.S. made net payments of interests and dividends, mostly to Britain, amounting to \$5.8 billion. The consequence was an increase of U.S. foreign debt from \$200 million in 1843 to \$3,700 million in 1914. Britain, in contrast, at the beginning of the First World War had nearly one-half of its assets overseas and received about 10 percent of its national income in the form of interest on foreign investment."<sup>184</sup>

In other words, the United States was at the eve of World War One a net capital *importer*, not a net capital *exporter*. It paid net dividends and interests to Britain. In terms of capital export, the contrast between the U.S. and Britain could hardly be bigger. However, both – the U.S. as well as Britain – were imperialist Great Powers. This is an example for the uneven development *between* the imperialist powers. Nevertheless, Lenin characterized not only Britain but also Germany and the U.S. as imperialists.

Another telling statistic has been provided by David Landes in his famous study on capitalism *The Unbound Prometheus*. The following Table 20 demonstrates the different relevance of capital export for such leading imperialist powers like Britain and Germany. While Britain's foreign investment represented nearly 52% of its total net capital formation, it was only less than 6% in the case of Germany. In other words, German capital not only played a much smaller role than Britain on the world market, capital export was also much less important for Germany.

Another example for the uneven development among different imperialist Great Powers can be seen in Table 21. Comparing the net foreign assets in 1914 of Britain, Germany and the U.S. in relation to their economic output, we see massive differences in the role of capital export for these Great Powers. In the case of Britain, foreign investment clearly played a most prominent role. However, in Germany's case, capital export, as a share to its output, was only ¼ of Britain's. And if we take the U.S. the gap is even larger. Here we see, as other tables above already indicated, that the U.S. actually was not even a net capital export at all but rather a net capital importer.

Again, we repeat, that such unevenness did not stop Lenin from characterizing all these Great Powers as imperialist.

Unevenness remained a central feature among the imperialist powers in the period between the two World Wars. Germany, having lost World War One, possessed no longer any colonies. Likewise, we see massive differences when looking at the role of capital export in the economy of various imperialist powers on the eve of World War II. As Table 22 shows Britain was still dominant with a share of 39.4% of the global foreign investment. In contrast, France's share was only 8.8%. And Germany's capital export volume was less than 4%

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<sup>184</sup> Giovanni Arrighi and Beverly J. Silver: *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1999, pp. 132-133

of that of Britain in 1938. Similarly, Japan's foreign investment was only 7.1% of that of the US. To conclude, we see large disparity in capital export between the imperialist powers in the 1930s. However, this huge gap did not cause Marxists to deny the imperialist nature of *all* these powers!

## Globalization and Great Power Rivalry in the Period before World War One

We have noted above that the historic period most similar to the present one is the era before World War One. Obviously, it would go beyond the scope of this work to analyze the period before World War I.<sup>185</sup> However, it is useful to draw attention to several similarities.

Similar to the U.S. in recent decades, Britain was before World War I by far the most mature capitalist country as reflected in its dominant role in the world's stock of foreign investment. The late Eric Hobsbawm, one of the finest Marxist historian in the Post-World War period, concurrently pointed out: *"In 1914 France, Germany, the USA, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the rest between them had 56 per cent of the world's overseas investments; Britain alone had 44 per cent. In 1914 the British steamer fleet alone was 12 per cent larger than all the merchant fleets of all the other European states put together."*<sup>186</sup>

However, Britain's power was already in decline as new rivals were emerging – first and foremost Germany and the U.S. Nevertheless, the gap between these powers in terms of capital export was still huge. Today China plays a similar role as a challenger.

One could argue that the close economic relations – called globalization today (or *"hyperglobalization"* to borrow a phrase from UNCTAD<sup>187</sup>) – would be an obstacle for an outburst of open rivalry between the Great Powers. However, as we have pointed out in the past, history proves otherwise. In fact Britain and Germany, two major rivals in World War I, had close economic relations before 1914.<sup>188</sup> In Table 23 we see that Britain was Germany's most important trade partner before 1914 while Germany was nearly as important as France for Britain's trade.

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185 There exists a myriad of literature about World War One. See e.g. James Joll: *The Origins of the First World War*, Longman, New York 1984; Gerd Hardach: *First World War, 1914-1918*, Penguin Books, New York 1987; John Godfrey: *Capitalism at War: Industrial Policy and Bureaucracy in France, 1914-1918*, Berg Publishers, Leamington Spa 1987; Fritz Klein (Ed.): *Deutschland im ersten Weltkrieg*, Vol. 1-3, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 1968.

186 E. J. Hobsbawm: *The Age of Empire*, Vintage Books, New York 1989, p.51

187 See UNCTAD: *World Investment Report 2018*

188 See on this e.g. Helga Nussbaum: *Der europäische Wirtschaftsraum. Verflechtung, Angleichung, Diskrepanz*, in: Fritz Klein / Karl Otmar von Aretin (Eds): *Europa um 1900*, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 1989, p. 49

**Table 22. Gross Nominal Value of Capital Invested Abroad in 1938 (in millions of \$US at current exchange rates)** <sup>189</sup>

	<i>Europe</i>	<i>Western Offshoots</i>	<i>Latin America</i>	<i>Asia</i>	<i>Africa</i>	<i>Total</i>
United Kingdom	1.139	6.562	3.888	3.169	1.848	17.335
France	1.035	582	292	906	1.044	3.859
Germany	274	130	132	140	—	676
Netherlands	1.643	1.016	145	1.998	16	4.818
Other*	1.803	1.143	820	101	646	4.579
United States	2.386	4.454	3.496	997	158	11.491
Japan	53	48	1	1.128	—	1.230
Total	8.331	13.935	8.774	8.439	3.712	43.988

\* Other include 19 European countries

**Table 23. Main Trade Partners of Britain and Germany, 1890-1913 (Average % Share)** <sup>190</sup>

<b>Britain</b>	<b>Germany</b>
1. U.S.: 19.47%	1. Britain: 13.85%
2. France: 8.99%	2. U.S.: 11.03%
3. Germany: 8.90%	3. Austria-Hungary: 10.15%

**Table 24. Average level of tariff in Europe 1914 (in %)** <sup>191</sup>

United Kingdom	0	Austria-Hungary, Italy	18
Netherlands	4	France, Sweden	20
Switzerland, Belgium	9	Russia	38
Germany	13	Spain	41
Denmark	14	USA (1913)	30

<sup>189</sup> Angus Maddison: *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective*, Vol. 1, 2001, p. 101

<sup>190</sup> Stefano Battilossi: *The Determinants of Multinational Banking during the First Globalization, 1870-1914*, Working Papers 114, Oesterreichische Nationalbank (Austrian Central Bank), 2006, p. 40

<sup>191</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm: *The Age of Empire*, Vintage Books, New York 1989, p. 39

However, as Marxists have pointed out repeatedly, such close economic relations not only create closer bonds between the monopoly capitalists, they *also* accelerate the rivalry between them. This was demonstrated powerful with the long-standing rivalry between Britain and Germany which resulted in the outbreak of hostilities between them in 1914.

Another parallel is the increase of protectionism in the years before the First World War. With the exception of the strongest imperialist power Britain, all other imperialist states did impose tariffs on commodity imports – again a similar development to the beginning Global Trade War which we are currently experiencing. (See Table 24)

Let us conclude by remarking that such unevenness between the imperialist powers continued to exist after World War II. While the U.S: become the absolute hegemonic power, Britain's and France's status was in rapid decline as reflected in the loss of their colonial Empires or the botched attempt to stop Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956. Germany and Japan, as defeated imperialist powers, were able to rebuild their economy but remained military subordinated to Washington.

## The "Fat" and the "Lean" Cows

There is also another aspect where it is worth drawing parallels with earlier developments in history. The Second World War where essentially a confrontation between old, long-standing Great Powers which dominated the world order and new, emerging Great Powers which challenged this order and which were determined to get their imperialist share of the cake. The old imperialist powers – Britain and France – were richer and could afford some kind of bourgeois democratic system. The new imperialist powers – Germany, Italy and Japan – were not so rich. They had to centralize their economic resources and fully suppress political freedom.

Trotsky wrote on this issue several times in his works in the 1930s. *"The above-mentioned classification of states has its historical meaning, but not at all that which is indicated in cheap pacifist scribblings. The first to arrive at fascism or other forms of dictatorship were those countries whose internal contradictions had reached the greatest sharpness: countries without their own raw materials, without sufficient access to the world market (Germany, Italy, Japan); countries which suffered defeat in the last war (Germany, Hungary, Austria); finally, countries in which the crisis of the capitalist system is complicated by precapitalist survivals (Japan, Poland, Rumania, Hungary). All these historically backward or unfavored nations are naturally the least satisfied with the political map of our planet. Their foreign policies have, therefore, a more aggressive character than those of the privileged countries, which are concerned above all with the preservation of the loot they have already acquired. Hence arises the very conditional division of states into partisans and adversaries of the status quo, the fascist and semi-fascist countries being, for the most part, in the latter alignment. But that does not at all*

*mean that precisely these two camps will fight each other.”*<sup>192</sup>

Trotsky once called the old power “*fat cows*” and the emerging powers “*lean cows*” which, consequently, had different relationships with the social-imperialist parties. “*Just as the capitalist world is divided into the fat cows of imperialist democracies and the lean and greedy cows of the fascist dictatorships, so the Second International has broken up into a “satiated” group who still remain shareholders in their national imperialist enterprises and a group of lean cows driven from the national pastures by fascism.*”<sup>193</sup>

There exists a certain similarity to the situation today. The old Great Powers – the U.S., the EU and Japan – are defenders of the existing world order. These “*fat cows*” can afford a certain degree of bourgeois democratic rights in their countries. The emerging Great Powers – China and Russia – are not so rich. They have substantial lower labor productivity than the old imperialist rivals. These “*lean cows*” aggressively challenge the existing order as this is the only way to become “*fat*”. In order to achieve this, the bourgeoisie of these states is ruling via authoritarian regimes with little (Russia) or no (China) democratic rights at home.

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192 Leon Trotsky: *On the Threshold of a New World War* (1937); in: *Trotsky Writings 1936-37*, p. 384

193 Leon Trotsky: *Progressive Paralysis. The Second International on the Eve of the New War* (1939), in: *Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1939-40*, p. 36

*Part 2:*

*Modern Revisionist Theories  
of Great Power Rivalry  
in Today's World*





## VIII. Revisionist Whitewashing: Stalinist and Bolivarian Admirers of Beijing's "Socialism"

Marxists have always insisted that it is a grave mistake to judge parties and people by their general ideological creeds. Such political belief taken by itself are worth nothing. As Trotsky put it aptly: "*Neither classes nor parties can be judged by what they say about themselves or by the slogans they raise at a given moment. This fully applies to groupings within a political party as well.*"<sup>194</sup>

One can judge their value only by comparing them with the concrete political conclusions and the concrete stance in the international class struggle. Only then can Marxists arrive to an adequate judgment of the given party or person.

History has proven this fundamental truth countless times. As we have pointed out somewhere else, antagonistic class forces have fought repeatedly against each other under the banner of one and the same religion: the official Christian church serving the Roman Emperor against the *Donatists* and the *Agonistici* who were rooted among the poorer classes (particularly in North Africa); the corrupt *Abbasid* Caliphate against 'Ali ibn Muhammad and the social revolutionary *Zanj Rebellion* of the slaves and poor; or take *Thomas Münzer* leading the revolutionary uprising of the poor peasants against the ruling feudal class in Germany and *Martin Luther*, compromising with the same class, under the same banner of Christianity and the struggle against the corrupt Catholic Church.<sup>195</sup>

We see the same in the history of the modern workers movement. In the name of Marxism we had, on one hand, revolutionary forces led by Lenin, Luxemburg and Liebknecht fighting against the imperialist war and, on the other hand, opportunist forces like Kautsky and Plekhanov supporting it. In the name of Leninism we had Trotsky and the Fourth International fighting against the totalitarian and pro-imperialist Stalinist bureaucracy which misused the same banner.

Things are not different today. There are forces which raise the banner of Marxism and at the same time support the reactionary Assad dictatorship against the popular uprising of the Syrian people. Others stand aside and take a neutral position. And another camp supports the Syrian Revolution against Assad.<sup>196</sup> The military coup d'état of General Sisi in Egypt in July 2013 is an-

194 Leon Trotsky: An Analysis of the Slogans and Differences, in: Leon Trotsky: The Challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25, New York 1975, p. 390

195 See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: World Perspectives 2018, pp. 107-108, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/>

196 For the RCIT's analysis of the Syrian Revolution see a number of booklets, statements and articles on the Syrian Revolution which can be read on a special sub-section on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/collection-of-articles-on-the-syrian-revolution/>. In particular we refer to Michael Pröbsting: Is the Syrian Revolution at its End? Is

other example: organizations formally adhering to the ideology of Marxism supported the coup and others supported the mass protests against the army.<sup>197</sup> We could go on with many more examples.

This is hardly surprising: similarly to the past, numerous opportunist forces serve the ruling class, directly or indirectly, by misusing the banner of Marxism, Leninism or Trotskyism and creating confusion in the ranks of the workers vanguard and revolutionary activists in general. This is why it is crucial for revolutionaries to demarcate authentic Marxism from the revisionists who distort our banner. This is why the RCIT has always emphasized that revolutionaries must oppose any unity with socialists on the basis of “general principles” only but without agreement on a concrete program for the international class struggle. Quite the opposite, revolutionaries must wage an intransigent struggle against those who serve the ruling class and who create confusion among the political vanguard by misusing the name of Marxism, Leninism or Trotskyism.

We see the same phenomena when it comes to the emergence of China and Russia as imperialist powers and the Great Power rivalry. We have demonstrated in previous chapters the imperialist character of Russia and China. However, as a matter of truth, there are numerous parties calling themselves as “Marxist-Leninist” which characterize China as a “socialist state” or which at least characterize Xi’s China and Putin’s Russia as “objectively anti-imperialist” powers. Let us discuss this with a few examples in this and the following three chapters.

A substantial number of Stalinist and Bolivarian parties praise China as a “socialist” and “progressive” force. The South African Communist Party (SACP), part of coalition government which has loyally administered the country in the service of the monopoly capitalists since 1994, entertains close connections with the Chinese brother party since long. Here is what Benedict Anthony Duke Martins, a leader of the SACP, recently said about “*the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*” (a favorite phrase of the official Chinese ideologists):

*“As a member of the Political Bureau and Central Committee of the South African*

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Third Camp Abstentionism Justified? An essay on the organs of popular power in the liberated area of Syria, on the character of the different sectors of the Syrian rebels, and on the failure of those leftists who deserted the Syrian Revolution, 5 April 2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/syrian-revolution-not-dead/> and chapter V of Michael Pröbsting: World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings, February 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/worldperspectives-2018/chapter-v/>. Albeit we do not agree with all aspects of his analyses, the Australian socialist Michael Karadjis has also published a number of insightful articles on the Syrian Revolution on the website <https://mkaradjis.wordpress.com/>.

<sup>197</sup> See on the Egypt coup numerous statements and articles of the RCIT published in the following sub-section of our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/>. In particular we refer to a comprehensive pamphlet on this issue by Michael Pröbsting: The Coup d’État in Egypt and the Bankruptcy of the Left’s “Army Socialism”, August 2013, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/egypt-and-left-army-socialism/>. See also Yossi Schwartz: Egypt: The U.S. Support for the Military Coup and the Left’s ignorance, 11.7.2013, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-us-support-for-military-coup/>

Communist Party (SACP), Benedict Anthony Duke Martins spoke highly of the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and its modeling effect on communist parties in other countries including his own. “Mutual benefits exist between South Africa and China,” Martins said. “Cooperation between the two communist parties will move up to a higher level.” Learning from the unique leadership style of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Martins said socialism with “South African” characteristics has developed and will continuously improve the national condition of wealth distribution, gender equality, financing of infrastructure and other social concerns. “During the post-colonial period, South Africa was able to achieve profound national growth that partially benefited from financial support from its Chinese communist partner,” he said.<sup>198</sup>

Various Stalinist-Maoist parties in Nepal are taking the same line. In a message congratulating the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the chairman of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), Puspa Kamal Dahal Prachanda, said that “‘we feel pride to see our immediate neighbor to have achieved a remarkable economic progress accompanied by political stability under the leadership of the CPC.’ The world is closely scrutinizing the CPC congress as developments that unfold in China will have direct repercussions in the world, the message said, adding they believed the outcome of the congress will have a far-reaching impact both in China as well as in the world. The Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) expressed solidarity with efforts made by the CPC for peace, stability and development both at home and abroad, the message said. The chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) -- Jhala Nath Khanal -- said in a message that under the leadership of the CPC, China has registered great progress and become the second largest economy of the world. The message said China has successfully built socialism with Chinese characteristics as per basic guidelines laid down by Comrade Deng Xiaoping.”<sup>199</sup>

Cuba’s ruling Communist Party, which implemented the restoration of capitalism on the island in the past years<sup>200</sup>, joins the chorus of praise for the “wise leadership” in Beijing. “Cuba has congratulated China as it holds the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, CPC, in Beijing. ‘We believe it will be a major success,’ Ulises Guilarte, a senior member of the Communist Part of Cuba told Chinese media. ‘China is a country that offers confidence, security and, above all, much hope in how to build a better world in the midst of an international economic order characterized by inequality, exclusion and interference by imperial powers,’ Guilarte added.”<sup>201</sup>

198 Mutual interests strengthen South Africa-China relations, 2018-May-29, [http://www.szdaily.com/content/2018-05/29/content\\_21019455.htm](http://www.szdaily.com/content/2018-05/29/content_21019455.htm)

199 World party leaders congratulate China on CPC congress, 2012/11/08, <http://dm.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/sbd/t987943.htm>

200 On the capitalist restoration in Cuba see e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Cuba’s Revolution Sold Out? The Road from Revolution to the Restoration of Capitalism, August 2013, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/cuba-s-revolution-sold-out/>

201 Cuba Congratulates China on Communist Party Congress, 18 October 2017 <https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Cuba-Congratulates-China-on-Communist-Party-Congress-20171018-0029.html>

Similar praise for China's rulers can be heard from the Bolivarian PSUV, the governing party of Venezuela: *"The Communist Party of China (CPC) has demonstrated remarkable leadership which has successfully led the country through various profound transformations, Venezuelan analysts say. In a recent interview with Xinhua, international relations expert Jose Antonio Egado said the CPC's success, and by extension China's success, lies in the party's capacity to plan ahead and adapt its policies without losing sight of its fundamental socialist principles. "China has seen enormous achievements in development, such as having lifted more than 700 million people out of poverty," Egado said.*

*Earle Herrera, a deputy of the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) in Venezuela's National Assembly, believes the CPC's ability to quickly respond to domestic and global changes stems from its capacity for self-criticism. To get the Asian giant to where it is today, the CPC leadership deftly adapted policies and management to new circumstances. The CPC has been able to create high-level administrative teams capable of inventing new policies, said Egado, adding that the party also knows when and where to take a more hands-on approach. Thanks to "the party's self-criticism, the CPC has known how to renew itself when political and economic circumstances call for it," Herrera said."*<sup>202</sup>

The Communist Party of the USA might be a far less significant force than those quoted above but is certainly not less enthusiastic in its support for the imperialist rulers in "communist" clothes. John Bachtell, the party's Chairman, writes a most shameless eulogy: *"The CPC is a deeply revolutionary party, creatively applying Marxism to the Chinese reality. Their approach is pragmatic, fact based, self-critical, and self-reforming. Far from building a capitalist economy, the CPC is charting a path in the context of China's realities, guiding the country to achieve a modern socialist society under extraordinary difficult conditions and not without many problems, mistakes and shortcomings, one with 'Chinese characteristics.'"*<sup>203</sup>

Even progressive academic journals like *Monthly Review*, a U.S.-based journal which often publishes thoughtful analysis of the political and economic contradictions of imperialism, gives a platform for sycophants of Chinese imperialism. Such it publishes an article of Ajit Singh, an Indian lawyer and self-proclaimed anti-imperialist and Marxist:

*"Under the leadership of the Communist Party, China has always identified itself as part of the Third World or global South and the collective struggle of formerly colonized and oppressed nations against the global inequality wrought by imperialism. (...) While China is not a perfect society and continues to face many challenges, the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics has been able to respond to a number of pressing issues facing the world today, better than the U.S. capitalist system."*<sup>204</sup>

202 Xinhua: Roundup: Venezuelan analysts say Communist Party of China's leadership remarkable, 2016-07-11, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-07/11/c\\_135504402.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-07/11/c_135504402.htm)

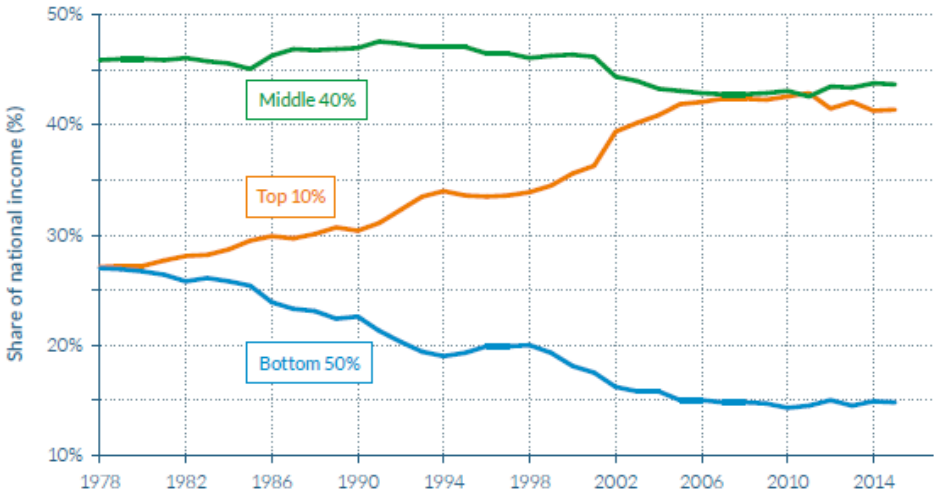
203 John Bachtell: A new era for building socialism with 'Chinese characteristics', June 14, 2018, <http://www.cpusa.org/article/a-new-era-for-building-socialism-with-chinese-characteristics/>

204 Ajit Singh: China's rise threatens U.S. imperialism, not American people, *Monthly Review Online*, Apr 09, 2018, <https://mronline.org/2018/04/09/chinas-rise-threatens-u-s-imperialism-not>

Naturally, all these eulogies don't relate to the reality of China's capitalism but rather a fantasy world. As we have shown in this book (and numerous other studies) China's social and economic development in the past three decades has been characterized by very similar features like other capitalist countries in the world. Contrary to the official socialist ideology, the share of wages has declined while profits for the capitalists have gone up. As a result, the income share of the richest Top 1% of the population has doubled between 1980 and 2016 from 7% to 14%. If we take the share of the richest 10%, equivalent to the bourgeoisie and the upper middle class, we see the same dynamic. (See Figure 23)

**Figure 23. Income Share in China, 1978-2015** <sup>205</sup>

**Income shares in China, 1978-2015**



[american-people/](http://www.american-people/); see also, by the same author: A New Era for Socialist China, 24 October 2017, <https://www.telesurtv.net/english/opinion/A-New-Era-for-Socialist-China-20171024-0008.html>; India and China: Rivals or Potential Partners in Liberation? November 2nd, 2017, <http://www.hamptoninstitution.org/india-and-china.html>

<sup>205</sup> World Inequality Report 2018, p. 108

The *World Inequality Report 2018* analyzed and compared these developments. It concluded that “the share of total national income accounted for by just that nation’s top 10% earners (top 10% income share) was 37% in Europe, 41% in China, 46% in Russia, 47% in US-Canada, and around 55% in sub-Saharan Africa, Brazil, and India. In the Middle East, the world’s most unequal region according to our estimates, the top 10% capture 61% of national income.”<sup>206</sup> This is an astonishing development, particularly if we bear in mind that less than three decades ago, capitalism even did not exist in China and Russia! Today, inequality in these two countries is basically higher than in the old capitalist states of Europe and nearly as much as in North America.

As we have stated repeatedly the creation of such a class of capitalists, including monopoly capitalists, is not an “accidentally” process, i.e. contrary to the intention of the CPC regime. Quite the opposite, the Chinese regime has deliberately nurtured this process for decades. The UBS/PwC report mentioned above, from which we reproduced figures about the massive growth in number of billionaires in China, confirms this truth once more. It quotes leading Western bankers who emphasize the importance of the government support for the process of capitalist accumulation. Josef Stadler, Head of Ultra High Net Worth at UBS Global Wealth Management, commented on the latest report: “Over the last decade, Chinese billionaires have created some of the world’s largest and most successful companies, raised living standards. But this is just the beginning. China’s vast population, technology innovation and productivity growth combined with government support, are providing unprecedented opportunities for individuals not only to build businesses but also to change people’s lives for the better.” Another researcher, Dr. Marcel Widrig, Partner and Private Wealth Leader, PwC, remarked: “Our report reveals how China is currently the leading country for entrepreneurs to create wealth. Nowhere else has the same combination of a huge population, technology innovation and government support.”

Unsurprisingly, China’s monopoly capitalists share this view. One Chinese billionaire told the researchers of the UBS/PwC report: “Nowhere else in the world can you find better conditions for growth than in China. The continued progress of wealth creation is supported by government policies liberating the economy, while urbanisation and business model disruption has crafted powerful new entrepreneurs.”<sup>207</sup>

Another evidence of the fusion of the state party and China’s monopoly capitalists is the fact that millionaires are officially allowed to become members of the ruling “Communist” Party. For instance, the country’s biggest capitalist, Jack Ma, chairman of the Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba Group Holdings

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206 Facundo Alvaredo, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, Gabriel Zucman: *World Inequality Report 2018*, p. 9

207 Quoted in South China Morning Post: China making two billionaires every week as world’s super-rich become wealthier than ever before, report reveals, 26 October, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/united-states-canada/article/2170348/china-making-two-billionaires-every-week-worlds>

Ltd., has become member of CCP.<sup>208</sup>

It is also characteristic that the Communist Youth League – the ruling party’s youth organization – is advertising the slogan “*Follow our party, start your business.*”<sup>209</sup>

Even China’s constitution reveals that the Stalinist propagandists of a “socialist” or “deformed workers state” are clearly living in an absurd virtual reality:

*“Article 11: The non-public sectors of the economy such as the individual and private sectors of the economy, operating within the limits prescribed by law, constitute an important component of the socialist market economy. The State protects the lawful rights and interests of the non-public sectors of the economy such as the individual and private sectors of the economy. The State encourages, supports and guides the development of the non-public sectors of the economy and, in accordance with law, exercises supervision and control over the non-public sectors of the economy. (...)*

*Article 13: Citizens’ lawful private property is inviolable. The State, in accordance with law, protects the rights of citizens to private property and to its inheritance. The State may, in the public interest and in accordance with law, expropriate or requisition private property for its use and make compensation for the private property expropriated or requisitioned.”*<sup>210</sup>

The whole notion of a *socialist market system* is bizarre, because socialism is globally planned economy. Remaining smaller private property in the economy, which will exist in early stages of the workers state, is subordinated to the socialist plan. It will wither away until reaching full-time communism. It is true that Article 13 of China’s constitution mentions the possibility of the requisition of private property in “public interests”. However, such policies were common for capitalist economies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in times of serious economic crisis.

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208 Why Communist China Is Home to So Many Billionaires, November 29, 2018, <http://fortune.com/2018/11/29/communist-china-billionaires-jack-ma/>

209 Josh Horwitz: China’s Communist Party is all in on the power of technology, October 25, 2017, <https://qz.com/1102948/chinas-communist-party-is-all-in-on-the-power-of-technology-and-thats-tricky-for-its-tech-giants/?fbclid=IwAR3F7pagTdowLCempaER6LSBBUE4wN1P66YArkLh7SXXIA0gWy4GMUv3x4>

210 Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, [http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Constitution/2007-11/15/content\\_1372963.htm](http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Constitution/2007-11/15/content_1372963.htm)

## Is China a Unique Case of Capitalist Miracle?

As we have seen above, the Stalinists like to justify their praise for China's ruling class by referring to the country's rapid economic growth in the past decades.<sup>211</sup> However, what they hide is the fact that this growth was based on *primitive capitalist accumulation* and the *emergence of a class of capitalists including monopoly capitalists*. This is proven not only by the figures demonstrating the rise of the rich elite mentioned above. It is also obvious when one recognizes the fact that the spectacular growth of China's economy has gone hand in hand with a spectacular growth of its private capitalist sector. According to a study published by *World Bank* and the *Chinese Development Research Center of the State Council* in 2013, about 70% of the country's GDP as well as of its employment are located in the non-state sectors. The state sector's share in the total number of industrial enterprises (with annual sales over 5mn RMB) fell precipitously from 39.2% in 1998 to 4.5% in 2010. During the same period, the share of State Owned Enterprises in total industrial assets dropped from 68.8% to 42.4%, while their share in employment declined from 60.5% to 19.4%.<sup>212</sup> Since then, this process has gone much further.

According to Arthur Kroeber's book on China's economy, the share of the state sector has continued to decline in recent years. He estimates that "*the SOE share of urban employment continues to fall, and in 2013 stood at an all-time low of 17 percent*". He also calculates that "*the state share of industrial production (on a value-added basis) is about 25 percent.*"<sup>213</sup> Kroeber concludes: "*China's economy is largely a private-sector success story, and its ability to keep up fast growth in the future will depend mainly on private companies.*"<sup>214</sup>

Liu He, top economic adviser of China's President Xi, estimates that the country's "*private sector generates 60 percent of the nation's output, 70 percent of technological innovation and 90 percent of new jobs.*"<sup>215</sup>

Furthermore, these pro-Chinese whitewashers "forget" (or want others to forget) that periods of rapid economic growth do not indicate in itself the socialist character of a given country. It is true that China has experienced a period of rapid economic growth since the 1980s. According to one study, China's annual

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211 See e.g. John Ross: Why Are China and India Growing So Fast? State Investment, August 29, 2016, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john\\_ross-/china-india-growth\\_b\\_11655472.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john_ross-/china-india-growth_b_11655472.html); John Ross: The Asian and Chinese economic growth models - implications of modern findings on economic growth, 2009-09-08, <http://socialisteconomicbulletin.blogspot.com/>

212 The World Bank, Development Research Center of the State Council, the People's Republic of China: China 2030. Building a Modern, Harmonious, and Creative High-Income Society, Washington 2013, p. 104

213 Arthur R. Kroeber: China's Economy. What Everyone Needs To Know, Oxford University Press, New York 2016, p. 100 and 101

214 Ibid, p. 105

215 Bloomberg: China Built a Global Economy in 40 Years. Now It Has a New Plan, 16 December 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2018-12-15/president-xi-jinping-s-next-moves-dictate-china-s-economic-future?srnd=premium-europe>



per capita GDP rose from \$1,300 in 1980 to \$7,700 in 2010, an increase of almost 500%.<sup>216</sup>

This is certainly an impressive figure. But other, capitalist states, usually countries with reactionary, authoritarian regimes, have made very similar experiences. We have in mind the so-called *Asian Dragons*, i.e. countries like South Korea and Taiwan. These countries saw growth rates for decades similar to those of China. (See Figure 24 and 25)<sup>217</sup>

And if we look again to South Korea in detail, we see that in 1950, its GDP per capita was about \$850.<sup>218</sup> In 1960 it had already increased to 1,537 US-Dollar. By the year 1990, South Korea's GDP per capita was already at 11,985 – in other words, it had increased nearly by eight-times in the preceding three decades. (See Figure 26) Other sources even claim a higher growth rate.<sup>219</sup>

So, when the Stalinist flag-bearer of Beijing's ruling class justify their support for China's "socialism" by referring to its impressive economic growth, they would, consequently, have to praise also the capitalist military dictatorships in Taiwan and South Korea or the imperialist ruling class in Japan!

In summary, the Stalinist whitewashing of China's capitalism as a kind of socialist paradise is one of the most bizarre falsifications of modern history. It is nothing but a weapon of disinformation in the service of Chinese (and Russian) imperialism.

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216 Jingyi Jiang and Kei-Mu Yi: How Rich Will China Become? A simple calculation based on South Korea and Japan's experience, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, in: *The Region*, June 2015, p. 8. See also Brian Wang: China development compared to Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, March 31, 2014 <https://www.nextbigfuture.com/2014/03/china-development-compared-to-japan.html>

217 We have analyzed the specific feature of the capitalist modernization process of South-Korea and Taiwan in a special study: Michael Pröbsting: Der kapitalistische Aufholprozess in Südkorea und Taiwan; in: *Revolutionärer Marxismus* Nr. 20 (1996), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/kapitalismus-in-suedkorea-taiwan/>. A shortened version of this article appeared as "*Capitalist Development on South Korea and Taiwan*" in: *Trotskyist International* No. 21 (1997), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/capitalism-in-south-korea-taiwan/>

218 Paulina Restrepo-Echavarría and María A. Arias: Tigers, Tiger Cubs and Economic Growth, May 25, 2017 <https://www.stlouisfed.org/on-the-economy/2017/may/tigers-tiger-cubs-economic-growth>

219 Professor Kwan S. Kim estimates that South Korea's real GNP grew at the average annual rates in the period of 1962-1979. In terms of real per capita, growth was at an 18-fold increase to \$1,481 in 1980 from \$87 in 1962. (Professor Kwan S. Kim: *The Korean Miracle (1962-1980) Revisited: Myths and Realities in Strategy and Development*, Kellogg Institute at the University of Notre Dame, Working Paper #166, November 1991, p. 5)

Figure 24. GDP per capita in China and East Asian neighbours 1960-2011 <sup>220</sup>

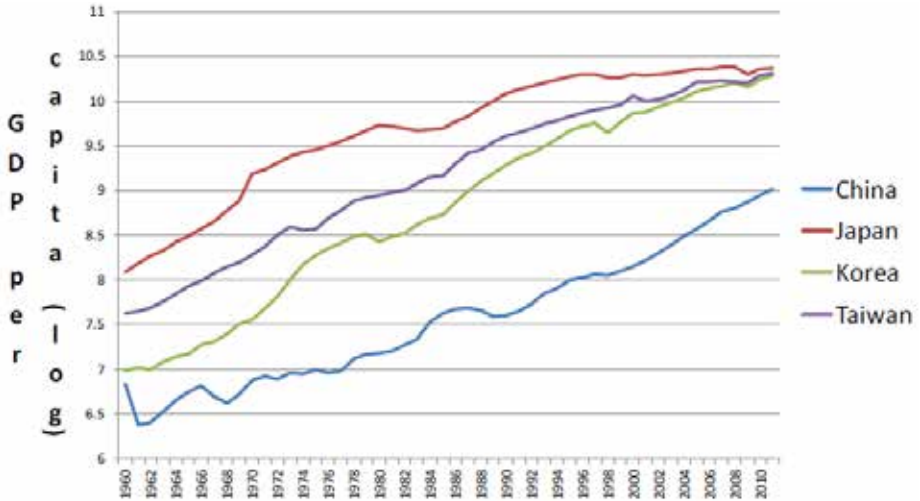
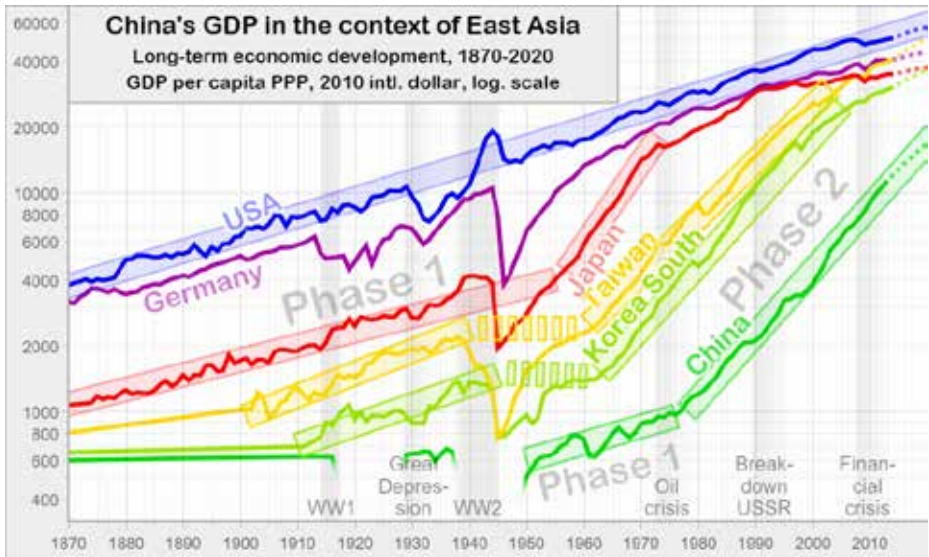


Figure 25. Long-Term Economic Growth of China and East Asia, 1870-2020 <sup>221</sup>



220 David Dollar: China's Rebalancing: Lessons from East Asian Economic History, The Brookings Institution, Working Paper Series, October 2013, p. 5

221 Otto Kolbl: Chinese development, <http://www.rainbowbuilders.org/china-entwicklung/>

**Figure 26. Real GDP per Capita in South Korea, 1960-2011** <sup>222</sup>

## Russian Stalinists: Failure to Understand Imperialism in their own Country

Let us briefly note the position of some Stalinist parties in Russia about the class character of “their” Great Power. The largest Stalinist party is the *Communist Party of the Russian Federation* (KPRF), led by Gennady Zyuganov. It is bourgeois-populist party which always considered Russia as its “fatherland” and which it views as being under threat by foreign imperialists. Clearly, they would never ever consider Russia as an imperialist Great Power. Quite the opposite, it’s openly pronounced goal is to recreate the USSR and to unite all Russian minorities living abroad in a single Great Russian Empire (more on this below).

The *Russian Communist Workers’ Party – Revolutionary Party of Communists* (RKRP-RPK), led by Viktor Tyulkin, has a more differentiated position. This party recognizes the imperialist character of Russia, in fact, it has elaborated some detailed and well informed analysis of Russia monopoly capitalism (which stands far above the analysis of many Western pseudo-Trotskyists!). It even refers sometimes to China as an imperialist state. Viktor Tyulkin states in

<sup>222</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Real GDP per Capita in the Republic of Korea (South Korea), retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/KORRGDPC>, September 17, 2018. The calculation is based on 2011 U.S. Dollars, Not Seasonally Adjusted.

a document: *“The foreign policy of Putin is connected with the interests of the Russian capital. Russian imperialism is still young. Nevertheless, it is well established and has a good appetite. It faces competition in the world arena from much larger and experienced opponents like the USA and the EU. (...) Russia and China as imperialist countries form some kind of union (including the BRICS) ...”*<sup>223</sup>

The problem, as we will see below, with the RKRK is that, as good old Stalinists, they only draw the conclusions from this that one has to side with the “lesser evil” – Russian and Chinese imperialism – against the “bigger evil”, the Western Great Powers! They are repeating more or less the schema of the Stalinists in the 1930s: At that time, Moscow and its international lackeys were prepared, albeit rarely, to call Britain, France and the US as imperialist. However, Stalinism considered them as “good” imperialists (“democratic”, “anti-fascist”, etc.) who were potential allies in the struggle against the “really bad” imperialists (Nazi-Germany and its allies).

Needless to say that this ideological garbage was stolen from the arsenal of international revisionism which was used to justify why the British, French and U.S. social democrats were “obligated” to side with their bourgeoisie against the “reactionary monarchies” of Germany, Austria and Turkey. And, using the same national-reformist logic, the German social democrats argued that they had to defend “their cultural superior fatherland” against the “Tatarian Russians”.

It is worth pointing out that when Moscow’s foreign policy interests changed, the whole hypocritical ideology was turned on its head. Between 1939 and 1941, during the period of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, the Stalinist fire was focused on “plutocratic” Western imperialism, while “peace-loving” Nazi-Germany was treated much more cautiously. In fact, Moscow handed over a number of German and Austrian communists to the Gestapo (among them the founder of the Austrian Communist Party Franz Koritschoner or the German communist Margarete Buber-Neumann<sup>224</sup>). Likewise did various Stalinist parties in France, Denmark, etc approach the German occupants and looked for possibilities of collaboration.<sup>225</sup> In that period, Stalinism denounced Britain and France

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223 Viktor Tyulkin: Some words on the Russian imperialism, 09.10.2017, <https://rkrp-rpk.ru/2017/10/09/%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BA%D0%BE-%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B2-%D0%BE-%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%B9%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BC-%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B0%D0%BB/> (our translation)

224 See e.g. Margarete Buber-Neumann: *Als Gefangene bei Stalin und Hitler*, Seewald Verlag, Stuttgart 1985

225 A number of books have been published about the Stalinist policy in the period of the Hitler-Stalin Pact. A number of documents have been published in Raymond James Sontag and James Stuart Beddie (Ed.): *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941. Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Office, Department of State, 1948*. Many documents of the Stalinist parties in this period have become public only after 1989. Many of them have been collected in the German-language book: Bernhard H. Bayerlein. *Der Verräter, Stalin, bist Du! Vom Ende der linken Solidarität 1939-1941. Komintern und kommunistische Parteien im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Aufbau Verlag, Berlin 2009; another documentation is: J.W.Brügel: *Stalin und Hitler*. Europaverlag, Wien 1973. See also:

as “brutal colonial masters” oppressing the peoples in Asia and Africa.

Of course, when the Nazis invaded the USSR in June 1941 – to the complete surprise of Stalin and Molotov – everything changed again.<sup>226</sup> Britain and France were no longer considered oppressive imperialists but rather democratic antifascist allies. Political hypocrisy, ideological confusion and unprincipled maneuver were certainly the chief business of Stalinism!

Naturally, such siding with one camp of imperialists against the other is in complete contrast to the principles of Marxism! There can be no justification for camouflaging one camp as “less aggressive” or “more progressive” than the other (and even less justification for swapping such attributes every few years)! Trotsky, following Lenin’s approach, insisted that it is the *class character* of a given state and its goals which are decisive for the approach of Marxists.

*“Imperialism camouflages its own peculiar aims – seizure of colonies, markets, sources of raw material, spheres of influence – with such ideas as “safeguarding peace against the aggressors,” “defense of the fatherland,” “defense of democracy,” etc. These ideas are false through and through. It is the duty of every socialist not to support them but, on the contrary, to unmask them before the people. “The question of which group delivered the first military blow or first declare war,” wrote Lenin in March 1915, “has no importance whatever in determining the tactics of socialists. Phrases about the defense of the fatherland, repelling invasion by the enemy, conducting a defensive war, etc., are on both sides a complete deception of the people.” “For decades,” explained Lenin, “three bandits (the bourgeoisie and governments of England, Russia, and France) armed themselves to despoil Germany. Is it surprising that the two bandits (Germany and Austria-Hungary) launched an attack before the three bandits succeeded in obtaining the new knives they had ordered?” The objective historical meaning of the war is of decisive importance for the proletariat: What class is conducting it? and for the sake of what? This is decisive, and not the subterfuges of diplomacy by means of which the enemy can always be successfully portrayed to the people as an aggressor.”*<sup>227</sup>

Another Stalinist party is the *United Communist Party (OKP)* which was founded in 2014 and which is led by Vladimir Lakeev and Darya Mitina. This party refuses to characterize Russia as an imperialist state. Without socialism, the OKP leaders tell us, Russia is doomed to be a “peripheral” and “colonial” country. Hence, the OKP elaborates in a document about “*peripheral Russian capitalism, weakened by international sanctions (...)* A Marxist analysis of contemporary international relations shows: Russia may once again be the “weak link” in the

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Bisovsky, Gerhard, Hans Schafranek und Robert Streibel (Ed.): *Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt*, Verlag: Picus Verlag, 1990.

226 The reaction of Molotov, the USSR’s foreign minister at that time, to the German ambassador, when the latter formally informed Moscow on 22 June 1941 that Berlin had declared war, is characteristic. He was deeply hurt and responded enraged: “*We have not deserved this!*” (Source: Bernhard H. Bayerlein. *Der Verräter, Stalin, bist Du!* p. 365) Yes, indeed, how could the Stalinists have expected the Nazis to deal their Moscow allies so ungrateful!?

227 Leon Trotsky: *Lenin on Imperialism* (1939), in: *Writings of Leon Trotsky*, Vol. 1938-39, Pathfinder Press, New York 1974, pp. 165-166

*chain of imperialism. (...) The choice that history leaves us is simple: either socialism or a further fall into the abyss of de-industrialization, disintegration and colonization.*"<sup>228</sup>

Albeit not a Stalinist, it is worth mentioning Boris Kagarlitsky who is a prominent left-wing intellectual in Russia and internationally. He is coordinator of the *Transnational Institute Global Crisis* project and Director of the *Institute of Globalization and Social Movements* (IGSO) in Moscow. Furthermore he is also the editor of the online magazine *Rabkor* (Workers Correspondence). Kagarlitsky has also long-standing close relations with the *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung*, the official think tank of the German LINKE.

While Kagarlitsky does not represent a party, his theoretical views are quite influential among the Russian left and also respected among a number of Western leftists. Basically Kagarlitsky and forces close to him share the analysis of the so-called "*World-System Theory*" analysis which views the world as centered around the Western Great Powers. Such a theory comfortably fits for the purpose to whitewash Russian imperialism. Hence, Kagarlitsky does not recognize Russia as an imperialist state but rather as a "*peripheral capitalist state*" comparable to other larger semi-colonial countries like Mexico or India. Such he wrote in his book *Empire of the Periphery*:

*"Russian society on the threshold of the twenty-first century, for all its post-Soviet peculiarities, had taken on all the characteristic traits of peripheral capitalism, and was obeying the logic of this system."*<sup>229</sup>

*"... the development of Russian capitalism had an obvious peripheral character."*<sup>230</sup>

*"The peripheral position of the Russian state created a need for national self-assertion, just as in other countries of the periphery, from Mexico to India."*<sup>231</sup>

We note in passing, that Kagarlitsky in this book, which covers the history of Russia, refuses to characterize Russia even before 1917 as an imperialist state. In short we have another showcase of historical revisionism and present-day whitewashing of Russia's imperialist class character.

The same position is shared by other eclectic world-system thinkers like Alexander Buzgalin and Ruslan Dzarasov.<sup>232</sup> Dzarasov explicitly denies, in his book *The Conundrum of Russian Capitalism*, the imperialist character of Russia.

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228 Заявление Президиума ЦК ОКП: Мы отвергаем территориальные уступки, осуществленные против воли трудящихся, 21 Дек. 2016 [http://ucp.su/category/news/683-my-otvergaem-territorialnye-ustupki-osushestvlennoy/](http://ucp.su/category/news/683-my-otvergaem-territorialnye-ustupki-osushestvlennoy) (Statement of the Presidium of the CC OKP: We reject territorial concessions made against the will of the working people, 21 December 2016) (our translation)

229 Boris Kagarlitsky: *Empire of the Periphery. Russia and the World System*, Pluto Press, London 2008, p. 305

230 *ibid*, p. 307

231 *ibid*, p. 319

232 Unsurprisingly, Western pro-Russian social-imperialists like the Canadian ex-Trotskyist Roger Annis are favorable referring to thinkers like Ruslan Dzarasov. See e.g. Renfrey Clarke and Roger Annis: The myth of 'Russian imperialism': In defense of Lenin's analyses, *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, February 29, 2016, <http://links.org.au/node/4629>. We have dealt with the arguments of Roger Annis in Michael Pröbsting: *Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power*.

Contrary, he states: *“Russian capitalism belongs to the periphery (more precisely to the semi-periphery) of world capitalism.”*<sup>233</sup> It is not surprising that Dzarasov, like other revisionists (e.g. Roger Annis, PO/CRFI), also denies the imperialist character of Tsarist Russia before 1917: *“Tsarist Russia exhibited the typical features of a periphery society, which viewed western capital as a major driving force for its own industrialisation.”*<sup>234</sup>

## **The Ultra-Stalinist CPGB-ML: “Anti -Imperialist” Russia and China?**

Another, particularly crude example of modern Stalinism is the so-called *Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist)*. This group combines worshipping of Stalin and Mao with uncritical appraisal of Gaddafi, Assad and the North Korean regime.

It is therefore hardly surprising that the CPGB(ML) also esteems Russia’s and China’s role as *“progressive and anti-imperialist”*. It claims that Russia is ruled by a national, patriotic bourgeoisie which has stopped the interference of imperialism: *“The Russian national bourgeoisie has taken back the control of the most important levers of the country’s economy and is determined to retain control in its national interest. It quite clearly does not wish to become merely a facilitator for imperialist plunder and superexploitation.”*<sup>235</sup>

Albeit even the CPGB-ML can not deny the advance of capitalism in China, it claims that the Middle Kingdom is still ruled by a (socialist) *“people’s government”*: *“Although several decades of market socialism have weakened the state sector and reintroduced the anarchy of commodity production into China’s economy, the country is still run by a people’s government that is able to exercise control over the levers of what remains of the state sector in the interests of the Chinese people, enabling it to carry out considerably longer-term planning than any of the crisis-ridden imperialist states can manage.”*<sup>236</sup>

Hence, these ultra-Stalinists consider the global role of the Putin and Xi regime as highly progressive. In a resolution adopted at its latest congress, the CPGB-ML praises the new Eastern imperialist powers:

*“Congress further notes that the role played by both Russia and China in the world today is a progressive, anti-imperialist one – as shown by China’s technological transfer and infrastructure building in developing countries, for example, by Russia’s military assistance to the Syrian people in their fight against an imperialist-backed jihadi invasion, or by both countries’ roles in forming trade blocs (such as Brics or the SCC)*

233 Ruslan Dzarasov: *The Conundrum of Russian Capitalism. The Post-Soviet Economy in the World System*, Pluto Press, London 2014, p. 150. This statement is repeated several times in his book (e.g. p. 13, 14, and 156).

234 Ibid, p. 42, see also p. 45

235 Joti Brar: *The Drive to War Against Russia and China*, CPGB(ML), Shakun Printers, Shahdara 2017, p. 9

236 Ibid, p. 13

*that bypass imperialist mechanisms of control. This congress believes that, even without such overtly anti-imperialist actions as those noted above, Russia and China have earned the enmity of imperialism simply by maintaining their own national independence and refusing to submit their peoples, markets and natural resources to imperialist control. Congress further believes that neither Russia nor China have aggressive or expansionist intentions, and that all their military development is aimed at helping them to prevent an imperialist onslaught or preparing them to defend themselves in the event of one being launched.”*<sup>237</sup>

No doubt, this is a perfect example for the unashamed “anti-imperialist” coloring of imperialist powers!

Finally, let us mention, in passing, that there are also some pseudo-Marxist groups who arrive to similar conclusions like the Stalinists. Examples for this are the WWP and the PSL in the U.S. as well as some “Trotskyists” (or let us better say caricatures of Trotskyism). Such Stalinophile sects like the Spartacist ICL, the IBT or Jan Norden’s IG/LFI claim that China is still – more than a quarter of century after capitalist restoration! – a “deformed workers state”! They also suggest that Russia is not an imperialist state. The *World Socialist Website* (WSWS) even published a polemic against the RCIT dedicated to a slanderous attack on our characterization of China and Russia as imperialist powers.<sup>238</sup> Like the Bourbons of France these people have learned nothing and forgotten nothing!

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<sup>237</sup> CPGB(ML): Beware the drive to WW3 with Russia and China, Party statement of the CPGB(ML) 8<sup>th</sup> Congress, 21 November 2018 <https://www.cpgb-ml.org/2018/11/21/news/beware-the-drive-to-ww3-with-russia-and-china/>

<sup>238</sup> See Johannes Stern: Behind the designation of Russia and China as “imperialist”: A case study in theoretical charlatany, WSWS, 14 April 2016, <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2016/04/14/prob-a14.html> (The WSWS published this attack on us into several languages; see e.g. <https://www.wsws.org/de/articles/2016/04/15/proe-a15.html>; <http://www.wsws.org/fr/articles/2016/avr2016/ruch-a30.shtml>) The RCIT has published two replies: Michael Pröbsting: The Involuntary Self-Exposure of the WSWS. A Brief Reply to a Lengthy Attack by David North’s WSWS against the RCIT, 18.4.2016, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/reply-to-wsws-short/>; Johannes Wiener: In Response to the Self-Proclaimed “Leadership” of the World Socialist Movement. A Reply to the Recent Polemic of the ICFI/WSWS against the RCIT, 30 April 2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/reply-to-wsws-long/>.



## IX. Revisionist Whitewashing: Russia and China are neither Capitalist nor Great Powers (PO/CRFI)

A peculiar example of “Trotskyist” whitewashing of Russian and Chinese imperialism originates from the so-called *Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International* (CRFI) of which the Argentine *Partido Obrero* (PO, Workers Party) is the dominant component. It is useful to deal with the positions of this current because they are more consistent than most other pseudo-Trotskyists in drawing conclusion from their theory that Russia and China are not imperialist.

### Capitalism is still not restored in Russia and China?

PO/CRFI claims that capitalism has not been restored in Russia and China until today. In the founding document of the CRFI, i.e. in the year 2004, the authors stated that “*the restoration of capitalism (...) is in its initial stages*” in the ex-Stalinist states in Eastern Europe and Asia.<sup>239</sup> So, 15 years after the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the Stalinist bureaucratic rule in 1989, the restoration of capitalism and the creation of a capitalist class was still “*is in its initial stages*”?! What an absurd and bizarre nonsense! Were Eastern Europe, Russia, China etc. not dominated since 1989-92 by governments which advanced the restoration of capitalism?! Were these economies not soon to be governed by the capitalist law of value?! Were these economies not already long before 2004 dominated by a private capitalist sector?! It seems that the PO/CRFI leaders were living in another world!<sup>240</sup>

Worse, PO/CRFI upholds such sterile dogmatism until today! In a recently published article on China the PO leadership effectively still denies – in the year 2017! – that China has become a capitalist state.<sup>241</sup> Pablo Heller, a leading PO theoretician, still speaks about “the process of transition towards capitalism”. (“*The transition to capitalism in China enters a more violent period.*”) As if this transition would have not already taken place many years ago!

239 Draft of programmatic thesis for the Congress for the Refoundation of the IV International, 2004, <http://www.progettocomunista.it/04BairesTesiProgrammaticheing.htm>

240 We have analyzed the restoration of capitalism in various places. See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *Cuba’s Revolution Sold Out? The Road from Revolution to the Restoration of Capitalism*, August 2013, RCIT Books, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/cuba-s-revolution-sold-out/>; see also chapter VI (dealing with capitalist restoration in North Korea) in the above mention book Michael Pröbsting: *World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings*; concerning capitalist restoration in China we refer to Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South* (Chapter X).

241 Pablo Heller: *China: El otro bonapartismo*, March 9, 2017, Prensa Obrera # 1449 <http://www.prensaobrera.com/prensaObrera/1449/internacionales/china-el-otro-bonapartismo>

Unbelievable, in its latest extensive international statement, the PO leadership even claims that capitalism could not be established in the future in Russia and China “on a peaceful road”: “A “peaceful” transition to capitalism, on behalf of regimes that expropriated capital through social revolutions, is unviable.”<sup>242</sup> We have seen those pseudo-orthodox Trotskyists who predicted in 1989 that it would be impossible to restore capitalism in the former workers states without civil wars. Already at that time, we criticized such doctrinarism. However, PO easily beats all those doctrinaires at that time as it still upholds such nonsense three decades after the collapse of Stalinism and the restoration of capitalism!

“Armed” with the same doctrinaire logic, PO and their international affiliates also claim that Russia and China are still not integrated into the capitalist world economy: “The integration of the former nationalized economies into the world capitalist economy cannot proceed by ‘peaceful’ means.”<sup>243</sup> The same assessment is repeated in an essay published in autumn 2018: “What determines the character of war in the 21st century is the encirclement of Russia and China by US imperialism, in alliance with its subordinate allies of European and Japanese imperialism, in order to integrate the former countries into the imperialist world system in unrestrained fashion by bringing the process of capitalist restoration in these countries to its completion.”<sup>244</sup>

Can one seriously claim that Russia and China are still not “integrated into the imperialist world system”? True, they are not subjugated to Washington. But since imperialism is not reduced to one Great Power but is a system built on rivalry between Great Powers (in line with Lenin and Trotsky we reject Kautsky’s theory of Ultra-Imperialism which assumed that the Great Powers would overcome their rivalry), it would be strange if Great Powers would not exist outside the orbit of Washington.

But China and Russia are certainly integrated into the imperialist world system! As we have shown above, Beijing has become the world’s largest trading power. It is one of the leading foreign investors as well as creditors. How can a country be more integrated into the imperialist world economy?! And can it be the case that the PO leaders have never heard about China’s “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) – an international investment program effecting 65 other countries and designed to expand Beijing’s global economic and political influence?!<sup>245</sup>

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242 Partido Obrero’s contribution to the international conference debate (adopted by the National Committee of Partido Obrero), 21.3.2018, <http://www.prensaobrera.com/prensaObrera/online/en/partido-obrero-s-contribution-to-the-international-conference-debate>

243 Partido Obrero, PT (Uruguay), DIP (Turkey), EEK (Greece): Declaration of the International Conference, 13.4.2018, <http://www.prensaobrera.com/prensaObrera/online/internacionales/declaration-of-the-international-conference>

244 Levent Dölek: The Character of War in 21st Century: Are China and Russia a target or a side of the war? In: World Revolution / Revolución Mundial Issue 1 (Autumn 2018), p. 58

245 The RCIT has dealt with China’s BRI initiative in various documents. See e.g. our statement: The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor is a Project of Chinese Imperialism for the Colonialization of Pakistan! Joint Statement of the International Secretariat of the RCIT and the Revolutionary Workers Organization (Pakistani Section of the RCIT), 22.1.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/pakistan-cpec/>; see also our pamphlet Michael Pröbsting: The China-India

The BRI initiative is the Chinese version of the so-called *Marshal Plan* which was crucial for US imperialism to consolidate its imperialist domination in Western Europe after WWII.<sup>246</sup> What examples do the PO/CRFI comrades need more to recognize that that China is fully integrated in the capitalist world system?!

The PO leaders basically maintain the same position for Russia. This becomes evident from another article which it published some months ago. In it, the PO leadership claims: “Neither in Russia nor China has a bourgeoisie emerged as a class, since in both cases it is mediated by the State, which continues to hold on to large part of its “pre-capitalist” bureaucratic structure.”<sup>247</sup>

So, again, we are faced with a monstrous absurdity which even most Stalinists don’t dare to uphold! The state machinery in Russia is supposed to be a “pre-capitalist’ bureaucratic structure” when, in fact, it is acting as a capitalist servant for the oligarchs – both domestically and abroad – since nearly three decades!<sup>248</sup>

As we have demonstrated in our studies on Russian imperialism, its economy is dominated by powerful monopolies. The thirty-two largest of these monopolies – also called “financial-industrial groups” (FIG) in Russia – control almost 51% in Russia’s GDP. (See Figure 27)

According to a 2013 report of *Credit Suisse*, a small group of 110 billionaires owns 35% of all the wealth in Russia.<sup>249</sup> If we look again to the *World Inequality Report 2018*, we can observe a similar trend like in China, albeit even more drastically. In Figure 28 we see that the income share of the top 10% was relatively low when Russia was still post-capitalist. However, this radically changed from 1989 onwards. The share of income of the top 10% grew from 22% to 41% (2015)! During the same period did the share of the bottom half of the population collapse from about 30% of national income to only 17%!

Conflict: Its Causes and Consequences. What are the background and the nature of the tensions between China and India in the Sikkim border region? What should be the tactical conclusions for Socialists and Activists of the Liberation Movements? 18 August 2017, Revolutionary Communism No. 71, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-india-rivalry/>

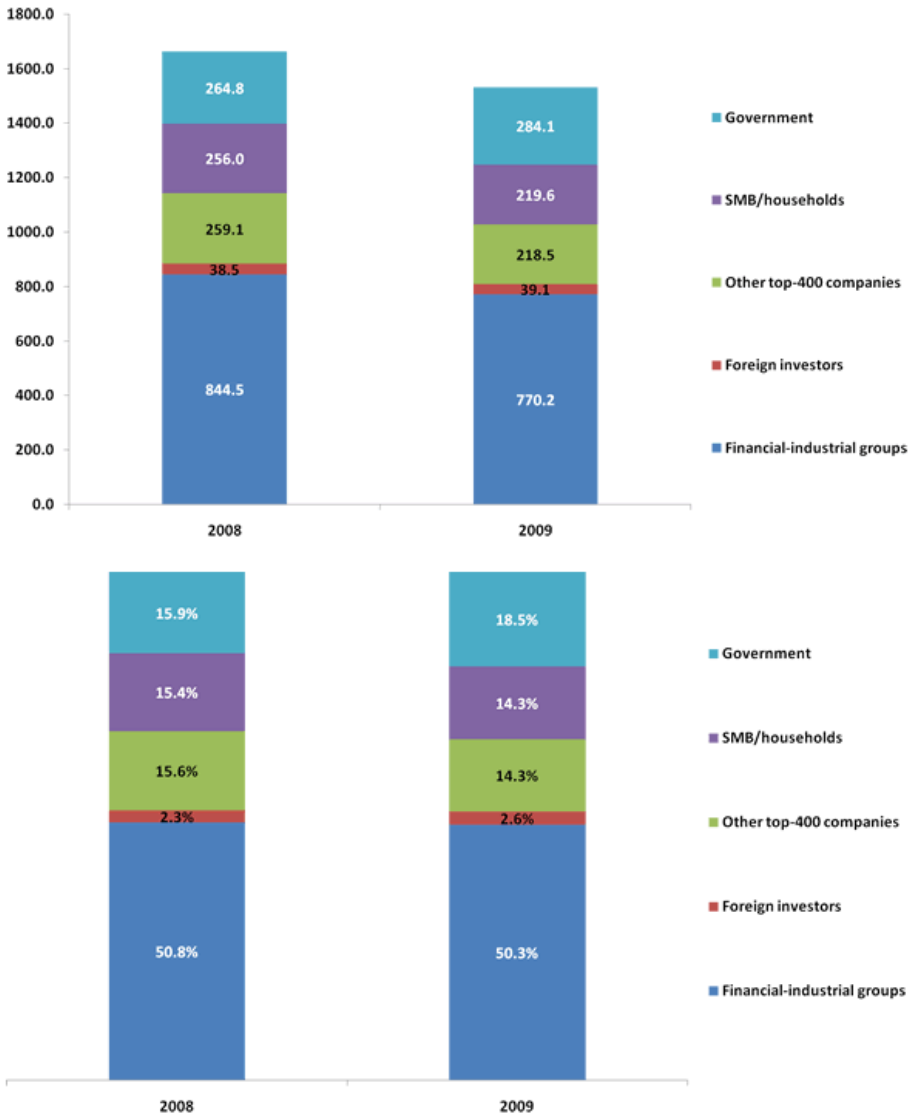
246 A similar example was the US initiative called *Alliance for Progress* in the 1960s which served to expand its domination in Latin America.

247 Partido Obrero’s contribution to the international conference debate (adopted by the National Committee of Partido Obrero), 21.3.2018, <http://www.prensaobrera.com/prensaObrera/online/en/partido-obrero-s-contribution-to-the-international-conference-debate>; see also Pablo Heller: A dónde va China. Entre la guerra comercial y la restauración capitalista, 26 de abril de 2018, <http://www.prensaobrera.com/prensaObrera/1499/internacionales/a-donde-va-china>

248 On the RCIT’s analysis of Russia as an imperialist power see the literature mentioned in the special sub-section on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-russia-as-imperialist-powers/>. In particular we refer readers to Michael Pröbsting: Lenin’s Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power. On the Understanding and Misunderstanding of Today’s Inter-Imperialist Rivalry in the Light of Lenin’s Theory of Imperialism, August 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-theory-and-russia/>; Michael Pröbsting: Russia as a Great Imperialist Power. The formation of Russian Monopoly Capital and its Empire – A Reply to our Critics, 18 March 2014, Special Issue of Revolutionary Communism No. 21 (March 2014), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-russia/>.

249 Credit Suisse: Global Wealth Report 2013, p. 53

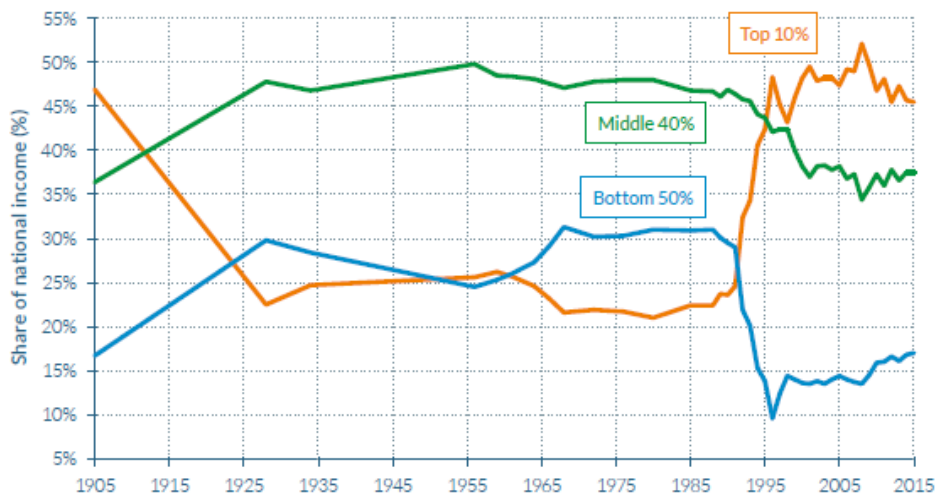
Figure 27. Russia's GDP by Contributor (in US\$ Billions and as a Share) <sup>250</sup>



250 Who Owns Russia: 32 Largest Business Groups Make 51% of GDP, Emerging Markets Venue, July 12, 2010, [http://www.emergingmarketsvenue.com/2010/07/12/russian\\_business\\_groups/](http://www.emergingmarketsvenue.com/2010/07/12/russian_business_groups/)

**Figure 28. Income Share in Russia, 1905-2015**<sup>251</sup>

Income shares in Russia, 1905-2015



Only the most ignorant observer could deny that this process of radical distribution of national income from the popular masses to the elite in a period of capitalist restoration reflects the creation of a powerful bourgeois class.

So, we ask the PO comrades: who are these top 10% in Russia who have the same share of national income like the top 10% in North America?! Are these not the capitalists and the upper middle class?! Does PO honestly believe that this is some kind of bureaucracy?! No, as a matter of fact, the process of capitalist restoration has resulted in the creation of a capitalist class. Today, it is the bourgeoisie which dominates *all* these countries – the U.S., Europe as well as China and Russia. PO's claim that no capitalist class exists in Russia and China is a total absurdity which reflects its political aloofness from the reality of global capitalism!

Unsurprisingly, the PO/CRFI's arguments why Russia and China are supposedly no imperialist powers are not much better. In reply to our pamphlet directed against their theoretical foundation, PO/CRFI recently published an article in which it polemicised against the Marxist analysis of the emerging Great Powers in the East.<sup>252</sup> While this article constitutes a serious effort to defend

<sup>251</sup> World Inequality Report 2018, p. 120

<sup>252</sup> We have dealt with one of the key theories of CRFI – the so-called Theory of “Catastrophism” – in a recently published pamphlet. See Michael Pröbsting: The Catastrophic Failure of the Theory of “Catastrophism”. On the Marxist Theory of Capitalist Breakdown and its Misinterpretation by the Partido Obrero (Argentina) and its “Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International”, 27 May 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-catastrophic-failure-of-the-theory-of-catastrophism/>

their position, it suffers from three fundamental problems: a) its arguments are in contradiction to the Marxist theory, b) they are also in contradiction to the objective facts and c) they lack inner coherence.

A key thesis of PO/CRFI is that Russia and China can not possess an imperialist class character because of their (alleged) backwardness in terms of capital export. Since the PO/CRFI formally adheres to Lenin's theory of imperialism, they face the problem – like all supporters of the “Russia and China are not imperialist”-Thesis – to explain why the leader of the Bolsheviks counted at his time countries like Russia, Japan, Italy or Austria-Hungary among the imperialist states. As we have demonstrated above, these states exported much less capital than Britain, France or Germany and they often imported more capital than they exported.

As we have shown above, the imperialist powers at the time of Lenin and Trotsky differed both in their political superstructure as well as in the specific configuration of their economic basis.<sup>253</sup> However, what united them was that they oppressed and exploited, directly or indirectly, other nations. Lenin summarized his definition of an imperialist state in one of his writings on imperialism in 1916 in the following way: „... *imperialist Great Powers (i.e., powers that oppress a whole number of nations and enmesh them in dependence on finance capital, etc.)...*“<sup>254</sup>

## Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and its Stalinophile Falsification

Hence, the revisionist deniers of Russia's and China's imperialist character today have to “re-interpret”, i.e. falsify, Lenin's theory of imperialism. They have to claim that supposedly Lenin did not consider states like Russia as imperialist. The PO/CRFI is not the first and probably not the last to revise the Marxist theory of imperialism. Let's see how they are arguing their case:

*“In the age of imperialism, great powers define the act of war and carry out the territorial division of the world. However, the analysis of imperialism requires making distinctions between these great powers. According to Lenin, among the six great powers that divided the world, the United States, Germany, and Japan were young and emerging capitalist (imperialist) states and England and France were the old capitalist (imperialist) states. With a socio-economic structure dominated by pre capitalist relations and surrounded by modern capitalist imperialist forces, Russia was quite different from others. While defining Russia's position in the World War I as imperialist, Lenin stressed this crucial difference: “In Russia, capitalist imperialism of the latest type has fully revealed itself in the policy of tsarism towards Persia, Manchuria and Mongolia; but, in general, military and feudal imperialism predominates in Russia.”*

*The elements of militarism and feudalism that dominated Russian imperialism were*

<sup>253</sup> We have dealt with this argument in detail in our pamphlet *Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power* (Chapter II, pp. 6-32)

<sup>254</sup> V. I. Lenin: *A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism* (1916); in: LCW Vol. 23, p. 34

also present in Ottoman imperialism. However, the Ottoman Empire was a semi-colony and did not possess the distinct characteristics of imperialism defined as the highest stage of capitalism. Therefore, neither Russia nor the Ottoman Empire cannot be seen as imperialist powers that defined the (imperialist) character of the World War I. They were dependent on great imperialist powers and therefore occupied a secondary position (at best) in the inter-imperialist rivalry. Hence, the imperialism of Russia and the Ottomans resembled the imperialism of the Greater Rome rather than capitalist imperialism.

The emphases on monopoly capitalism, finance-capital, and capital export in Lenin's theory of imperialism displays the main foundations of the great powers struggling for the division and re-division of the world. Large armies, expansive territories, and relatively high populations were the sources of power of the pre-capitalist empires. In the age of imperialism, the export of capital took the place of military campaigns and finance-capital invading the markets took the place of invading armies. On the international plane, imperialist armies (that are financed by super profits derived from the plunder of raw materials and exploitation of cheap labor power and using the technical and technological capabilities supplied by capitalist industry) became dominant in every field. The armies of the pre-capitalist empires proud of their almighty past were either defeated by the imperialist invaders (as seen in the case of China) or became auxiliary powers in the service of imperialism (as seen in the cases of Russia, the Ottomans, and Austria-Hungary)."<sup>255</sup>

So we see how the PO/CRFI turns the Marxist theory of imperialist states on its head in only three paragraphs. While Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks always consistently argued that Russia (or the Austria-Hungarian Empire) were imperialist powers, the PO/CRFI comrades now claim that these were semi-colonies (like the Ottoman Empire)!

The Bolsheviks' characterization of Russia as "imperialist" is presented as an a-historical category suggesting that they considered Russia only as "imperialist" like the Roman Empire 2000 years ago, i.e. not as imperialist in the sense of a capitalist power! This is a bizarre distortion of truth!

We have already shown above that Lenin viewed Russia as an imperialist power (in the same category as France). One can find dozens of other quotes which make clear beyond any doubt that the Bolsheviks never ever characterized Russia as a semi-colony (like the Ottoman Empire) but as an imperialist Great Power. They were certainly aware of the differences between various Great Powers (more and less independent powers, economically advanced and backward, etc). But they saw Russia in the same broad category as other imperialist Great Powers! In place of many more we reproduce a short selection of these quotes:

*"Only idiots or shrewd persons can deny that the war from Russia's part has an extraordinary imperialist character. The whole political order of 3<sup>rd</sup> June has been an attempt to bring together the capitalist bourgeoisie with the bureaucratic machinery and the nobility – under the condition that the monarchy succeeds satisfying the inter-*

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255 Levent Dölek: The Character of War in 21st Century, pp. 52-53

*national ambitions of Russian capital. (...) Russian imperialism, whose extraordinary counter-revolutionary character has been beyond doubt for all Russian social democrats, has played a huge role in the preparation of the present war.”*<sup>256</sup>

*„Its meaning is that Russia was the most backward and economically weakest of all the imperialist states. That is precisely why her ruling classes were the first to collapse as they had loaded an unbearable burden on the insufficient productive forces of the country. Uneven, sporadic development thus compelled the proletariat of the most backward imperialist country to be the first to seize power.”*<sup>257</sup>

*“The Russian bourgeoisie was the bourgeoisie of an imperialist oppressor state; the Chinese bourgeoisie, a bourgeoisie of an oppressed colonial country.”*<sup>258</sup>

*„But the Russian bourgeoisie enjoyed the benefits of an immeasurably greater independence from foreign imperialism than the Chinese bourgeoisie. Russia itself was an imperialist country.”*<sup>259</sup>

*“In Russia, capitalist imperialism of the latest type has fully revealed itself in the policy of tsarism towards Persia, Manchuria and Mongolia, but, in general, military and feudal imperialism is predominant in Russia. In no country in the world are the majority of the population oppressed so much as in Russia.”*<sup>260</sup>

*“The Russian imperialism differs from Western European imperialism in many aspects. It is not an imperialism of the latest stage of capitalist development. Russia is a country which imports capital, which is an object of capital exporting countries. The Russian imperialism is a feudal, militaristic imperialism. (...) There is no imperialism which is cruder, more barbaric, and bloodier than Russian imperialism.”*<sup>261</sup>

*“The last third of the nineteenth century saw the transition to the new, imperialist era. Finance capital not of one, but of several, though very few, Great Powers enjoys a monopoly. (In Japan and Russia the monopoly of military power, vast territories, or special facilities for robbing minority nationalities, China, etc., partly supplements, partly takes the place of, the monopoly of modern, up-to-date finance capital.)”*<sup>262</sup>

*“Such was the situation formerly, such it was prior to the war, when imperialist England still had rivals in the rapacious German, French, and Russian imperialists, when she did not yet dare to clamp her paws on all the countries of the East, fearing that she might receive a blow on her extended paws from some rapacious rival.”*<sup>263</sup>

256 Leon Trotsky: *Über den russischen Imperialismus* (1916), in: Leo Trotzki: *Europa im Krieg*, Arbeiterpresse Verlag, Essen 1998, pp. 203-204 (our translation). To our knowledge, this text has never been translated into English language.

257 Leon Trotsky: *The Third International After Lenin*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, p. 56

258 Leon Trotsky: *The Third International After Lenin*, p. 174

259 Leon Trotsky: *The Chinese Revolution* (1938), in: *Fourth International* [New York], Vol.6 No.10 (Whole No.59), October 1945, p. 316, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/xx/china.htm>

260 V.I. Lenin: *Socialism and War. The Attitude of the R.S.D.L.P. toward the War* (1915), in: *LCW* 21, p. 306

261 Grigori Sinowjew: *Die russische Sozialdemokratie und der russische Sozialchauvinismus* (1915); in: W. I. Lenin/G. Sinowjew: *Gegen den Strom. Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1914-1916*, Hamburg 1921, pp. 174-175 (our translation)

262 V. I. Lenin: *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism* (1916); in: *LCW* Vol. 23, p. 116

263 Communist International: *A Manifesto to the Peoples of the East*, issued by the Congress of the Peoples of the East, Baku 1920, in: *Baku: Congress of the Peoples of the East*, New Park Publication



„... even in peace time Russia set a world record for the oppression of nations with an imperialism that is much more crude, medieval, economically backward and militarily bureaucratic.“<sup>264</sup>

„The character of this war between the bourgeois and imperialist Great Powers would not change a jot were the military-autocratic and feudal imperialism to be swept away in one of these countries. That is because, in such conditions, a purely bourgeois imperialism would not vanish, but would only gain strength.“<sup>265</sup>

“Capitalism is private ownership of the means of production, and anarchy in production. To advocate a “just” division of income on such a basis is sheer Proudhonism, stupid philistinism. No division can be effected otherwise than in “proportion to strength”, and strength changes with the course of economic development. Following 1871, the rate of Germany’s accession of strength was three or four times as rapid as that of Britain and France, and of Japan about ten times as rapid as Russia’s. There is and there can be no other way of testing the real might of a capitalist state than by war. War does not contradict the fundamentals of private property—on the contrary, it is a direct and inevitable outcome of those fundamentals. Under capitalism the smooth economic growth of individual enterprises or individual states is impossible. Under capitalism, there are no other means of restoring the periodically disturbed equilibrium than crises in industry and wars in politics.“<sup>266</sup>

We could provide many more quotes which all demonstrate the same: While Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks were fully aware of the important role of the absolutist Tsar regime and the consequences for the specific, combined character of the Russian state (fusing semi-feudal and capitalist elements), they unambiguously insisted on Russia’s character as an *imperialist* Great Power (and not a *semi-colony*)!

Let us give another example: A few weeks after the February Revolution in Russia in 1917, when the autocratic Tsar regime was overthrown and replaced by the bourgeois-liberal popular front government, Trotsky characterized the latter as a “*liberal imperialistic government*”. He described the continuity, changes and transition of Russian imperialism from the years 1905-07 (when the *régime of June 3<sup>rd</sup>* came to power) to 1917 in the following way:

“The capitalist classes, reconciled with the *régime of June 3<sup>rd</sup>*, turned their attention to the usurpation of foreign markets. A new era of Russian imperialism ensues, an imperialism accompanied by a disorderly financial and military system and by insatiable appetites. Gutchkov, the present War Minister, was formerly a member of the Committee on National Defense, helping to make the army and the navy complete. Milukov, the present Minister of Foreign Affairs, worked out a program of world conquests which he advocated on his trips to Europe. Russian imperialism and his Octobrist and Cadet representatives bear a great part of the responsibility for the present war. By the grace

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1977, p. 169, online: [http://www.marxists.org/subject/arab-world/documents/ppls\\_of\\_east.htm](http://www.marxists.org/subject/arab-world/documents/ppls_of_east.htm)

264 V. I. Lenin: The Discussion On Self-Determination Summed Up (1916); in: CW Vol. 22, p. 359

265 V. I. Lenin: Social-Chauvinist Policy Behind A Cover Of Internationalist Phrases (1915); in: CW Vol. 21, p. 435

266 V.I. Lenin: On the Slogan for a United States of Europe (1915), in: LCW 21, pp. 341-342

*of the Revolution which they had not wanted and which they had fought, Gutchkov and Milukov are now in power. (...) This transition from an imperialism of the dynasty and the nobility to an imperialism of a purely bourgeois character, can never reconcile the Russian proletariat to the war.”*<sup>267</sup>

267 Here is the major section of Trotsky's article which we reprint in full as it provides a good insight into the Marxist analysis of Russia as a capitalist power and the changes the February Revolution brought to it: “In 1905, Milukov, the present militant Minister of Foreign Affairs, called the Russo-Japanese war an adventure and demanded its immediate cessation. This was also the spirit of the liberal and radical press. The strongest industrial organizations favored immediate peace in spite of unequalled disasters. Why was it so? Because they expected internal reforms. The establishment of a Constitutional system, a parliamentary control over the budget and the state finances, a better school system and, especially, an increase in the land possessions of the peasants, would, they hoped, increase the prosperity of the population and create a vast internal market for Russian industry. It is true that even then, twelve years ago, the Russian bourgeoisie was ready to usurp land belonging to others. It hoped, however, that abolition of feudal relations in the village would create a more powerful market than the annexation of Manchuria or Korea.

The democratization of the country and liberation of the peasants, however, turned out to be a slow process. Neither the Tzar, nor the nobility, nor the bureaucracy were willing to yield any of their prerogatives. Liberal exhortations were not enough to make them give up the machinery of the state and their land possessions. A revolutionary onslaught of the masses was required. This the bourgeoisie did not want. The agrarian revolts of the peasants, the ever growing struggle of the proletariat and the spread of insurrections in the army caused the liberal bourgeoisie to fall back into the camp of the Tzarist bureaucracy and reactionary nobility. Their alliance was sealed by the coup d' état of June 3rd, 1907. Out of this coup d' état emerged the Third and the Fourth Dumas.

The peasants received no land. The administrative system changed only in name, not in substance. The development of an internal market consisting of prosperous farmers, after the American fashion, did not take place. The capitalist classes, reconciled with the régime of June 3rd, turned their attention to the usurpation of foreign markets. A new era of Russian imperialism ensues, an imperialism accompanied by a disorderly financial and military system and by insatiable appetites. Gutchkov, the present War Minister, was formerly a member of the Committee on National Defense, helping to make the army and the navy complete. Milukov, the present Minister of Foreign Affairs, worked out a program of world conquests which he advocated on his trips to Europe. Russian imperialism and his Octobrist and Cadet representatives bear a great part of the responsibility for the present war.

By the grace of the Revolution which they had not wanted and which they had fought, Gutchkov and Milukov are now in power. For the continuation of the war, for victory? Of course! They are the same persons who had dragged the country into the war for the sake of the interests of capital. All their opposition to Tzarism had its source in their unsatisfied imperialistic appetites. So long as the clique of Nicholas II was in power, the interests of the dynasty and of the reactionary nobility were prevailing in Russian foreign affairs. This is why Berlin and Vienna had hoped to conclude a separate peace with Russia. Now, purely imperialistic interests have superseded the Tzarism interests; pure imperialism is written on the banner of the Provisional Government. “The government of the Tzar is gone,” the Milukovs and Gutchkovs say to the people, “now you must shed your blood for the common interests of the entire nation.” Those interests the imperialists understand as the reincorporation of Poland, the conquest of Galicia, Constantinople, Armenia, Persia.

This transition from an imperialism of the dynasty and the nobility to an imperialism of a purely bourgeois character, can never reconcile the Russian proletariat to the war. An international struggle against the world slaughter and imperialism are now our task more than ever. The last despatches which tell of an anti-militaristic propaganda in the streets of Petrograd show that our comrades are bravely doing their duty. The imperialistic boasts of Milukov to crush Germany, Austria and Turkey are the most effective and most timely aid for the Hohenzollerns and Habsburgs ... Milukov will now serve as a scare-crow in their hands. The liberal imperialistic government of Russia has not yet started reform in its own army, yet it is already helping the Hohenzollerns to raise the patriotic spirit and to mend the shattered ‘national unity’ of the German people.” (Leon Trotsky: War or Peace? published in New York, March 30, 1917, in: Leon Trotsky: Our Revolution. Essays on Working-Class and International Revolution, 1904-1917, Henry Holt and

As we see, Trotsky does not speak about a semi-colonial Russia but about an imperialist Russia. He characterized the liberal Provisional Government in March 1917 as representing “*an imperialism of purely bourgeois character*”.

How do the PO/CRFI comrades reconcile this with their view that Russia was a semi-colony? Do they want to suggest that Russia was a semi-colony as long as the Tsar ruled and then, between February and October 1917, it suddenly would have become an imperialist state? Leaving aside that this would be a) absurd and b) in contradiction to what the Bolsheviks said, it would also contradict the method of the PO/CRFI itself. The comrades insist, as we have shown above, that Russia did not meet the criteria of Lenin’s theory of imperialism (“*emphases on monopoly capitalism, finance-capital, and capital export*”). This had not, and could hardly have, changed in February/March 1917!

So how does PO/CRFI explain Trotsky assessment of Russia as a “*purely bourgeois imperialism*” in March 1917? Is it not much more logical, as we always have argued, that Russia was in essence an imperialist Great Power already before 1917 (similarly like Austria-Hungary, Japan, Italy, etc.) and that the February Revolution, resulting in the overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy, led to an important change in the political superstructure of Russian capitalism but not in its economic basis?!<sup>268</sup>

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Company, New York 1918 (Edited by Moissaye J. Olgin), pp. 207-211, online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1918/ourevo/ch11.htm>)

268 For an overview on Russian imperialism before 1917 we refer reader to: D. C. B. Lieven: *Russia and the Origins of the First World War*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 1983; Ian D. Thatcher: *Late Imperial Russia*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2005; Alexander Semyonov: *Russian Liberalism and the Problem of Imperial Diversity*, in: Matthew Fitzpatrick (Ed): *Liberal Imperialism in Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2012, pp. 67-89; Bertram Wolfe: *War Comes to Russia*, in: *The Russian Review* Vol. 22 (1963), No. 2, pp. 123-138; Joshua A. Sanborn: *Russian Imperialism, 1914–2014: Annexationist, Adventurist, or Anxious?*, in: *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 27 (2014), No. 2, pp.92-108; Stephan Velychenko: *The Size of the Imperial Russian Bureaucracy and Army in Comparative Perspective*, in: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Vol. 49 (2001), No. 3, pp. 346–362; Karin-Irene Eiermann: *The Russian Concession in Wuhan (1896-1925) - Imperialism and Great Power Rivalry*, in: *COMPARATIV* Vol. 15 (2005), No. 5/6, pp. 39-49; German-language literature: Dietrich Geyer: *Der russische Imperialismus. Studien über den Zusammenhang von innerer und auswärtiger Politik 1860–1914*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1977; Dietrich Geyer (Ed.): *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im vorrevolutionären Rußland*, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, Köln 1975; Fritz Klein (Ed.): *Neue Studien zum Imperialismus vor 1914*, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 1980; Jan Kusber: *Krieg und Revolution in Russland 1904-1906. Das Militär im Verhältnis zu Wirtschaft, Autokratie und Gesellschaft*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 1997; Andreas Kappeler: *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall*, Beck, München 1992; Horst Gunther Linke: *Das zarische Russland und der Erste Weltkrieg. Diplomatie und Kriegsziele 1914-1917*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München 1982; Georg von Rauch: *Rußland im Zeitalter des Nationalismus und Imperialismus (1856-1917)*, Kopernikus Verlag, München 1961; G.W.F. Hallgarten: *Das Schicksal des Imperialismus im 20. Jahrhundert. Drei Abhandlungen über Kriegsursachen in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, Frankfurt a.M. 1969; Gustav Schmidt: *Der europäische Imperialismus*, R. Oldenburg Verlag, München 1985; Ju.A. Petrov: *Die Bourgeoisie Rußlands zu Beginn des 20.Jahrhunderts: Versuche einer politischen Konsolidierung*, in: *Berliner Jahrbuch für osteuropäische Geschichte*, 1997, pp. 49-67; Mark Bassin: *Imperial Raum / Nationaler Raum*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* Vol. 28 (2002), pp. 378-402; Ulrich Hofmeister: *Zwischen Kontinentalimperium und Kontinentalmacht. Repräsentationen*

In fact, the PO/CRFI is not the inventor of the idea that Russia before 1917 was not an imperialist power but rather a “semi-colony”. While this thesis was roundly rejected by Russian Marxists in the time of Lenin and Trotsky, it originated among the Stalinists in the 1930s.

As we have already noted in the past, it was the notorious “theory” of Stalin in the 1930s which declared that Russia before 1917 was not an imperialist power but rather a “semi-colony”. Such he instructed the Russian historians to rewrite the Marxist analysis of Russia’s class character.<sup>269</sup>

*“That Russia entered the imperialist war on the side of the Entente, on the side of France and Great Britain, was not accidental. It should be borne in mind that before 1914 the most important branches of Russian industry were in the hands of foreign capitalists, chiefly those of France, Great Britain and Belgium, that is, the Entente countries. The most important of Russia’s metal works were in the hands of French capitalists. In all, about three-quarters (72 per cent) of the metal industry depended on foreign capital. The same was true of the coal industry of the Donetz Basin. Oil-fields owned by British and French capital accounted for about half the oil output of the country. A considerable part of the profits of Russian industry flowed into foreign banks, chiefly British and French. All these circumstances, in addition to the thousands of millions borrowed by the tsar from France and Britain in loans, chained tsardom to British and French imperialism and converted Russia into a tributary, a semi-colony of these countries.”*<sup>270</sup>

Naturally, this Stalinist view was in contradiction to the positions of de facto all Marxist historians who participated in the lively discussion about the char-

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der russischen Herrschaft in Turkestan, 1865–1917, in: Martin Aust and Julia Obertreis (Eds.): Osteuropäische Geschichte und Globalgeschichte, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2014; Dittmar Dahlmann: Zwischen Europa und Asien. Russischer Imperialismus im 19. Jahrhundert, in: Wolfgang Reinhard (Ed): Imperialistische Kontinuität und nationale Ungeduld im 19. Jahrhundert, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt a.M. 1991, pp. 50-66; Manfred Hagen: Der Russische “Bonapartismus” nach 1906, in: Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Vol. 24 (1976), No. 3, pp. 369-393; Gottfried Schramm: Das Zarenreich: ein Beispiel für Imperialismus, in: Geschichte und Gesellschaft Vol. 7 (1981), No. 2, pp. 297-310; Heiko Haumann: Staatsintervention und Monopole im Zarenreich - ein Beispiel für Organisierten Kapitalismus? in: Geschichte und Gesellschaft Vol. 5 (1979), No. 2, pp. 336-355; Paul Luft: Strategische Interessen und Anleihenpolitik Rußlands im Iran, in: Geschichte und Gesellschaft Vol. 1 (1975), No. 3, pp. 506-538; Bernd Bonwetsch: Das ausländische Kapital in Rußland, in: Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Vol. 22 (1974), pp. 412-425

269 For an overview of the development of the Soviet historiography under Stalin’s rule on the issue of the class character of Tsarist Russia see e.g. George M. Enteen, Tatiana Gorn, and Cheryl Kern: Soviet Historians and the Study of Russian Imperialism, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979, pp. 23-28; George M. Enteen: The Soviet Scholar-Bureaucrat: M. N. Pokrovskii and the Society of Marxist Historians, Pennsylvania State University 1978, pp. 95-95 and pp. 176-178; James W. Roberts: Lenin’s Theory of Imperialism in Soviet Usage, in: Soviet Studies Vol. 29, Nr. 3 (July 1977), pp. 353-372.

270 History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course, Edited by a Commission of the C.C. of the C.P.S.U.(B.), International Publishers, New York 1939, p. 162. Another edition of the same book, published by the *Foreign Languages Publishing House* in Moscow in 1945, contains the same formulation on the same page.

acter of Tsarist Russia which took place in the Soviet Union in the 1920s.<sup>271</sup> It should be noted that M.N. Pokrovsky, an outstanding Russian Marxist historian and the leading figure of Soviet historiography in the 1920s, enabled a fruitful discussion among various historians and made himself important contributions for the understanding of Russia's history (irrespective of his methodological weakness which Trotsky pointed out).<sup>272</sup>

The PO/CRFI comrades fail to understand that the law of uneven and combined development resulted in a contradictory development and nature of Russia as a backward, imperialist power. It was this law which allowed the Bolsheviks to explain why Russian imperialism combined both modern as well as backward-absolutist (tsarist autocracy) features of imperialism.

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271 For an overview of the discussion of Marxist historians in the Soviet Union in the 1920s about the class character of Tsarist Russia we refer to the following publications (in addition to the works of Enteen, Gorn, Kern and Roberts mentioned above): John Barber: *Soviet Historians in Crisis, 1928-32*, Macmillan Press, London 1981; George M. Enteen: *Marxists versus Non-Marxists: Soviet Historiography in the 1920s*, in: *Slavic Review*, Vol. 35 (1976), No. 1, pp. 91-110; Robert F. Byrnes: *Creating the Soviet Historical Profession, 1917-1934*, in: *Slavic Review*, Vol. 50 (1991), No. 2, pp. 297-308; George M. Enteen: *Soviet Historians review their own Past: The Rehabilitation of Pokrovsky*, in: *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 20 (1969), No. 3, pp. 306-320; Samuel H. Baron: *Plekhanov, Trotsky and the Development of Soviet Historiography*, in: *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 26 (1974), No. 3, pp. 380-395.

There exists also a number of German-language works on this issue: W. Astrow/ A. Slepko/ J. Thomas (Eds): *Illustrierte Geschichte der Russischen Revolution 1917* (published in 1928, reprinted by Verlag Neue Kritik, Frankfurt am Main 1970), pp. 70-72; Karl-Heinz Schlarp: *Ursachen und Entstehung des Ersten Weltkrieges im Lichte der sowjetischen Geschichtsschreibung*, Alfred Metzner Verlag, Hamburg 1971; K.N. Tarnovskij: *Probleme des russischen Imperialismus in der sowjetischen Geschichtsschreibung*, in: *Jahrbuch für Geschichte der sozialistischen Länder Europas*, Jg. 27, Berlin 1983, pp. 77-95; Vladimir Laveryce: *Der staatsmonopolistische Kapitalismus in Rußland. Ergebnisse und Aufgaben der weiteren Forschung*, in: *Jahrbuch für Geschichte der sozialistischen Länder Europas*, Jg. 29, Berlin 1985, pp. 233-243; Erich Donnert: *Pokrovskijs Stellung in der sowjetischen Geschichtswissenschaft*, in: *Jahrbuch für Geschichte der sozialistischen Länder Europas*, Jg. 7, Berlin 1963, pp. 35-60; Lutz-Dieter Behrendt: *M.N. Pokrovskij als Historiker der Großen Sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution*, in: *Jahrbuch für Geschichte der sozialistischen Länder Europas*, Jg. 22, Berlin 1978, pp. 97-115; Boris Kolonickij: *100 Jahre und kein Ende. Sowjetische Historiker und der Erste Weltkrieg*, in: *Osteuropa* Jg. 64 (2014), Bd. 2-4, pp. 369-388

272 A number of his works have been translated into English and German language: M. N. Pokrovskii: *Russia in World History; Selected Essays*, Edited by Roman Szporluk, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1970; M. Pokrowski: *Geschichte Russlands von seiner Entstehung bis zur neuesten Zeit*, C.L.Hirschfeld Verlag, Leipzig 1929; M. Pokrowski: *Russische Geschichte*, Berlin 1930; M. N. Pokrowski: *Historische Aufsätze. Ein Sammelband*, Verlag für Literatur und Politik, Wien and Berlin 1928; M.N. Pokrovskij: *Aus den Geheim-Archiven des Zaren. Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach den Urhebern des Weltkrieges*, August Scherl, Berlin 1919; M.N. Pokrowski: *Vorwort des russischen Herausgebers*, in: Otto Hoetzsch (Ed.): *Internationale Beziehungen im Zeitalter des Imperialismus*, Reihe 1, 1. Band, Verlag von Reimar Hobbing, Berlin 1931.

Trotsky noted on Pokrovsky in his *History of the Russian Revolution*: "*News of the death of M. N. Pokrovsky, with whom we have had to do battle more than once in the course of these two volumes, arrived after our work was finished. Having come over to Marxism from the liberal camp when already a finished scholar, Pokrovsky enriched the most recent historic literature with precious works and beginnings. But nonetheless he never fully mastered the method of dialectic materialism. It is a matter of simple justice to add that Pokrovsky was a man not only of high gifts and exceptional erudition, but also of deep loyalty to the cause which he served.*" (Leon Trotsky: *History of the Russian Revolution*, Haymarket Books, Chicago 2008, p. 353)

This whole question is not limited to Tsarist Russia. As we said above, there existed also other backward imperialist powers at that time like Japan, Italy or Austria-Hungary. Lenin and Trotsky considered these powers, despite their economic backwardness, as imperialist. They were fully aware of the uneven character of their economic and political development.

We demonstrated already above Lenin's assessment of Japan as an imperialist Great Power. Here is another quote of Trotsky:

*"Japan is today the weakest link in the imperialist chain. Her financial and military superstructure rests on a foundation of semi-feudal agrarian barbarism. Periodical explosions within the Japanese army are only a reflection of the intolerable tension of social contradictions in the country. The regime as a whole maintains itself only through the dynamics of military seizures. (...) But Japanese aggression is interlaced with traditionalism. While creating a gigantic fleet of the most modern type, the Japanese imperialists prefer to base their activities on ancient national traditions. Just as priests put their pronouncements and desires into the mouths of deities, so the Japanese imperialists palm off their very modern plans and combinations as the will of the august progenitors of the reigning Emperor. Similarly Tanaka covered up the imperialist aspirations of the ruling cliques by reference to a non-existing testament of an Emperor."*<sup>273</sup>

Lenin dedicated a whole article on Italian imperialism in 1915. Fully aware of its backward character (there was hardly any Italian capital export and no migrants coming to Italy but rather the other way round), he nevertheless insisted on the imperialist character of the Italian state.

*"Italian imperialism has been called "poor people's imperialism" (l'imperialismo della povera gente), because of the country's poverty and the utter destitution of the masses of Italian emigrants."*

Hence, he emphasized that *"internationalist socialists of Italy"* have to *"oppose a war which in fact is being waged for the imperialist interests of the Italian bourgeoisie."*

<sup>274</sup>

How do the PO/CRFI comrades explain all this? They can't since it is obvious the case that Lenin and Trotsky viewed not only those powers as imperialist (and not as semi-colonial) which were strong in terms of capital export and finance capital but also other, more backward states. In contrast to the PO/CRFI, the Bolsheviks approached this issue in a dialectical way, taking into account the totality of political, economic and military factors which characterized the relations of such Great Powers and oppressed nations.

In summary, we have demonstrated that PO/CRFI changes the view of Lenin and Trotsky on Russian imperialism in its opposite and totally distort their dialectical method. It is hardly surprising that PO/CRFI is equally incapable to understand the imperialist character of Russia and China today.

<sup>273</sup> Leon Trotsky: The "Tanaka Memorial" (1940), in: Trotsky Writings 1939/40, p. 170, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1940/01/tanaka.htm>

<sup>274</sup> V.I. Lenin: Imperialism and Socialism in Italy (1915), in: LCW Vol. 21, p. 358 resp. 365

## Russia's and China's Capital Export: Myth and Reality

The PO/CRFI author writes under the chapter heading *“What defines the character of the Russian and Chinese economies: Export of commodities or export of capital?”*: *“Imperialism is a stage of capitalism in which the export of capital, rather than that of commodities, becomes determinant.”* As we will see, this is a key statement in the argument of the PO/CRFI which the comrades distort from a feature of the world imperialist system into a caricatural criterion to characterize individual countries. But let us first continue with the quote:

*“In the 21st century, the export of capital has become easier both technically and technologically. The neoliberal attacks of imperialism have, over time, considerably dismantled the barriers in front of the circulation of capital. The export of capital under these circumstances is not limited to a handful of imperialist powers but has rather become more widespread. Moreover, the deepening integration of the imperialist world has led to an increase in the export of capital among imperialist economies and the US and Britain now receive a high level of direct foreign investment, as well as being leaders in the export of capital as major imperialist powers. That the levels of investment the US and Britain export and receive, each, are approximately the same does not change the imperialist characteristic of the finance-capital of these countries. On the contrary, they are at the center of an increasingly integrating world capitalist system.*

Imperialist countries such as Germany, France and the Netherlands, plus the European Union as a whole and Japan are net capital exporters in terms of the foreign direct investment stock. On the other hand, Russia and China are net capital importers in terms of the foreign direct investment stock. Whereas the stock of the foreign direct investment of China is equal to 24 per cent of its GDP, its export of capital reaches only 12 per cent of its GDP. This percentage, for Russia, is respectively 30 per cent and 26 per cent, and this despite it being the unrivalled number one exporter of capital to the former Soviet republics, which demonstrates that it is also a net capital importer.

A close scrutiny of both China and Russia shows that the character of their economies is defined not by the export of capital but by the export of commodities. The situation of Russia is quite obvious. 40 percent of Russia's budget income stems from oil, gas and their derivatives. Its economic performance is highly dependent on the fluctuation of oil prices. On a global scale, however, Russia with its total export income of 353 billion dollars is at the bottom of the league of exporting countries, competing with the United Arab Emirates. For this reason, we shall not discuss further the situation of Russia due to the clarity of its position, whereas China's situation seems to be more controversial and deserves to be evaluated in more detail.

With an income to the amount of 2.3 trillion dollars from its export of commodities, China is at the top of the league of exporters. If we add the 550 million dollars of Hong Kong's exports to this figure, China's export income stands at twice the export income of countries such as the US (1.5 trillion) or Germany (1.4 trillion). Our point is that the export of capital from China is complimentary to the country's gigantic commodity-exporting economic structure. In other words, the Chinese economy exports both goods

*and capital but what is determinant in the Chinese case is the export of commodities, not imperialism's distinctive feature of the export of capital."* <sup>275</sup>

*"Unlike their American, German, French and Japanese counterparts, neither Russia with its oil and gas monopolies, its state banks as well as its ever-growing oligarchs due to the plundering of the workers' state, nor China with its giant but premature finance-capital can form the basis for an imperialist power. However, such a conclusion does not imply that the current situation will remain the same forever. Even though Russian finance-capital is far from having an imperialist character, the development of Chinese finance-capital requires close scrutiny. Nonetheless, we cannot talk about imperialism unless China elevates its economy to a new level in which the export of capital, not the export of commodities, becomes dominant."* <sup>276</sup>

Every single paragraph represents violation either of the Marxist method, of simple logic or of bare figures. Let us deal with the main mistakes point by point. As he have already stated, the PO/CRFI's method suffers from its complete lack of dialectic which characterizes the law of uneven and combined development. From the general truth – that in the epoch of imperialism capital export becomes more important than commodity export – the comrades wrongly conclude that powers can be qualified as imperialist *only* if their capital export is substantially larger than their commodity export. However, this was never the method of Lenin and Trotsky and for good reason.

A larger role of capital export, compared with commodity export, is often the case for advanced, long-time imperialist powers but not necessarily for backward powers or for newcomers. Japan, which for example was such a backward Great Power with significant semi-feudal characteristics, had a share of only 0.1% of the global stock of outward foreign direct investment in 1914. <sup>277</sup> Nevertheless, Lenin and Trotsky considered it at that time as an imperialist state.

Likewise, as we have shown above there always existed an uneven development among the Great Powers in general and even the Western imperialist states. Britain was the dominant capital exporter by 1914 with 41% of all global foreign direct investment! In Germany, certainly also an imperialist power at that time, capital export did not play a larger role than its commodity trade. And in the case of the United States we see a picture where commodity production and trade played a significantly larger role than its capital export.

As we said above, to a certain degree the U.S. was at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in a similar position like China has been in the past decade. It was a newcomer and its capital export lagged behind the established imperialist powers. Until 1914, US imperialism received more than double as much investment from foreign sources as U.S. nationals invested abroad. In the logic of the PO/CRFI, the U.S. in 1914 would not have qualified as an imperialist power.

In fact, both – the U.S. as well as Britain – were imperialist Great Powers.

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275 Levent Dölek: *The Character of War in 21st Century*, pp. 55-56

276 Levent Dölek: *The Character of War in 21st Century*, p. 57

277 UNCTAD: *World Investment Report 1994*, p. 131



This is an example for the uneven development *between* the imperialist powers. However, if Lenin would have adopted the sterile and one-sided method of the PO/CRFI, he could have never characterized the U.S. as imperialists. We do not assume that the PO/CRFI holds such a position but this is the inevitable consequence of their distorted interpretation of Lenin's theory of imperialism.

Furthermore, the PO/CRFI's approach ignores the fundamental fact that a significant role of a country in the world's commodity trade can simply reflect the fact that it is an important homeland of capitalist value production. This, in turn, usually is an indicator of capitalist economic power.

Let us move further. In several cases, the PO/CRFI author uses inaccurate figures. For example, it is not true that China exports significantly less capital than it imports. While this was indeed the case in the early period of capitalist restoration, it is no longer the case. The figures from the annual UNCTAD *World Investment Report*, the most authoritative source in this field, demonstrate very clearly the rapid catch-up process of China in terms of capital export. In Table 25 we can see that China's foreign investment has increased so much in the last decade that its outward FDI stock already equals its inward FDI stock today.

Germany is another example demonstrating the absurd character of the PO/CRFI argument that a country could not be imperialist if its capital export is not more important than its commodity export. As we have shown above Germany's share in world merchandise exports is 8.4% (2017) while its share in global FDI outflows as well as stocks is significantly less (5.6% respectively 5.2% in the same year). Following the undialectical PO/CRFI method, we could not characterize Germany as an imperialist Great Power.

It is worth noting that even the oldest imperialist Great Powers contradict the criteria of PO/CRFI. Britain, the world's oldest imperialist state, not only has a FDI stock of the same size like China. It also imports slightly more capital than it exports! According to the latest UNCTAD figures, Britain's Inward FDI stock is \$1,563,867 Mil. and its Outward FDI stock is \$1,531,683. The same proportion between Inward and Outward FDI stock exists for the United States: \$7,807,032 respectively \$7,799,045. As we see, the whole PO/CRFI theory is based on non-sensical arguments, distortion of the Marxist theory and false figures!

**Table 25. China's Foreign Direct Investment  
(in Million US-Dollars), 2000-2017** <sup>278</sup>

<i>FDI inward stock</i>			<i>FDI outward stock</i>		
2000	2010	2017	2000	2010	2017
193,348	587,817	1,490,933	27,768	317,211	1,482,020

<sup>278</sup> UNCTAD: World Investment Report 2018, p. 189

## On the Character of China's Foreign Investments

Let us move to the next attempt of the PO/CRFI author to save their failing theory. *"While 40% of Chinese direct capital export concentrates on the mining, oil and energy sectors, only 4% of it goes to manufacturing industry. China is one of the major customers of raw materials and energy and this demand emerges out of export-oriented production within the borders of China, that is, out of the impetus for the export of commodities. The determinant variable in China's direct investments abroad is the national income of the country into which the Chinese capital is exported. Foreign investments of China target not cheap labor but large markets. Large markets mean more demand for Chinese goods, which demonstrates that the export of Chinese capital is an extension of its export of commodities and that this characteristic of the Chinese economy cannot be defined as an indicator of imperialism."*<sup>279</sup>

Again, one confusion follows the other. The author notes that China's capital export has a focus on the mining, oil and energy sectors and suggests that this would be an indicator for China's non-imperialist character. (By the way, he makes a similar remark concerning Russia in the quote we reproduced above.) It is difficult to follow this logic – to put it diplomatically. Can it be the case the PO/CRFI author is not aware that oil, gas and the whole energy sector is a crucial part of the capitalist world economy?

This is true not only for semi-colonial but also for imperialist countries. According to a recently published study, energy (and hence any price fluctuations of it) affects over 60% of the total production costs in France.<sup>280</sup> Among the top 10 companies on the Fortune Global 500 list of year 2018 six were operating in the energy sector (and two others in the automobile sector which is strongly affected by energy prices). The whole history of world capitalism is marked by the important role of the energy sector (one just has to remember the role of the oil barons in the U.S. history)!

The author mentions that Russia's budget is influenced by changes of oil and gas prices on the world market. True. He only fails to mention that not only Russia's but the whole world economy is influenced by the fluctuations of for oil and gas prices because of the central role of this sector for the world economy. There have been global recessions in the past decades which have been triggered (or at least fastened) because of rises of the oil price.

Furthermore, have the PO/CRFI comrades forgotten that Lenin himself named the search for raw materials one of the five key characteristics of imperialism?! As we quoted above, he wrote in his key essay on imperialism: *"We have to begin with as precise and full a definition of imperialism as possible. Imperialism is a specific historical stage of capitalism. Its specific character is threefold: imperialism is monopoly capitalism; parasitic, or decaying capitalism; moribund capitalism. The supplanting of*

<sup>279</sup> Levent Dölek: *The Character of War in 21st Century*, p. 56

<sup>280</sup> Henri Sefa: *The Impact of Energy on Global Economy*, in: *International Journal of Energy Economics and Policy*, Vol. 7(2017), No. 2, p. 294.

*free competition by monopoly is the fundamental economic feature, the quintessence of imperialism. Monopoly manifests itself in five principal forms: (...) (3) seizure of the sources of raw material by the trusts and the financial oligarchy...*"<sup>281</sup>

In short, we can not understand why the PO/CRFI author interprets China's strong capital export in the energy sector as an indicator to *disprove* its imperialist character!

Let's move ahead. The author claims. "*Foreign investments of China target not cheap labor but large markets.*" Really?! We have shown in past studies that China has become a leading investor in many semi-colonial countries. In 2010 China became the third-largest investor in Latin America behind the US and the Netherlands.<sup>282</sup> According to a study from McKinsey Chinese corporations already play a dominant role in Africa. About 10,000 Chinese corporations (90% of which are private capitalist firms) operate in Africa. They control about 12% of the continent's total industrial production and about half of Africa's internationally contracted construction market. In Africa, China is also a leader in "green field investment" (i.e., when a parent company begins a new venture by constructing new facilities outside of its home country); in 2015-16, China invested USD 38.4 billion (24% of total green field investment in Africa).<sup>283</sup> Furthermore, China is a leading foreign investor in many Asian countries.

Certainly, we do not deny that China's corporations are interested in access to "*large markets.*" This seems to us a pretty common desire for capitalists – despite the fact that the PO/CRFI leaders want to convince us that capitalism still has not been restored in China! As far as we know, there are also many Western imperialist corporations which are interested in access to "*large markets.*"

In fact, searching for raw materials, for new markets, etc. has always been a feature of imperialist monopolies. Lenin already wrote about this in his book on imperialism: "*We have seen that in its economic essence imperialism is monopoly capitalism. (...) We must take special note of the four principal types of monopoly, or principal manifestations of monopoly capitalism, which are characteristic of the epoch we are examining. (...) Fourthly, monopoly has grown out of colonial policy. To the numerous "old" motives of colonial policy, finance capital has added the struggle for the sources of raw materials, for the export of capital, for spheres of influence, i.e., for spheres for profitable deals, concessions, monopoly profits and so on, economic territory in general.*"<sup>284</sup>

Anyway, does the PO/CRFI author seriously want to suggest that Chinese

281 V. I. Lenin: *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism* (1916); in: CW Vol. 23, pp. 105-106 [Emphases in the original]

282 Miguel Perez Ludeña: *Adapting to the Latin American experience*; in: EAST ASIA FORUM QUARTERLY, Vol.4 No.2 April–June 2012, p. 13

283 Irene Yuan Sun, Kartik Jayaram, Omid Kassiri: *Dance of the lions and dragons. How are Africa and China engaging, and how will the partnership evolve?* McKinsey & Company, June 2017, p. 10 and pp. 29-30

284 V. I. Lenin: *Imperialism. The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) ; in: LCW Vol. 22, pp. 298-299

capitalists are not exploiting cheap labor force in these countries?! Who is working in all those enterprises? True, some Chinese corporations bring their own labor force but this is hardly the case for the majority of their foreign investments!

Another attempt of the PO/CRFI author to relativize the role of China's capital export is his reference to the so-called "round tripping" – i.e. the transfer of money from mainland China to Hong Kong and then back to mainland China so that it will be classified as "foreign investment" (i.e. gaining from tax privileges etc.).

*"There is also a serious source of misunderstanding regarding the data on the Chinese export of capital. When Hong Kong, a former British colony, was turned over to China in 1997, China and Britain made an agreement known as 'one country, two systems', according to which the free market and the liberal structure of Hong Kong earned immunity. For this reason, investments of China in Hong Kong are calculated as part of China's capital export. Additionally, foreign investments of Hong Kong in China are in the status of foreign capital. China offers many incentives so as to attract foreign investment. For this reason, the Chinese capital that starts a business in Hong Kong returns to China ("round tripping") and takes advantage of the incentives provided for foreign investment. The share of Hong Kong in the export of Chinese capital reaches 70 per cent and the capital that is re-invested in China as a result of round tripping is estimated to reach 40 per cent of the export of Chinese capital."*<sup>285</sup>

We have already dealt with this phenomenon in past works (and also pointed to a similar situation in Russia). Here, again, the author has not thought through the issue. First, one consequence of the "overstated" figures for China's capital export (since they in fact are re-invested in China via Hong Kong) is that it is not only the figures for *capital export* which are overstated but, consequently, China's figures for *capital import* are overstated too. This means that the role of foreign imperialist capital in China is not as big as various revisionists (including those of PO/CRFI) often claim.

But irrespective of this, there is a more fundamental issue involved. It is a widespread myth, usually claimed by Western media, that sending money abroad to tax havens and re-investing it as "foreign capital" would be peculiarity of China (and Russia). As a matter of fact, this is not true. Such is a standard practice in nearly all capitalist countries – including the Western imperialist ones.

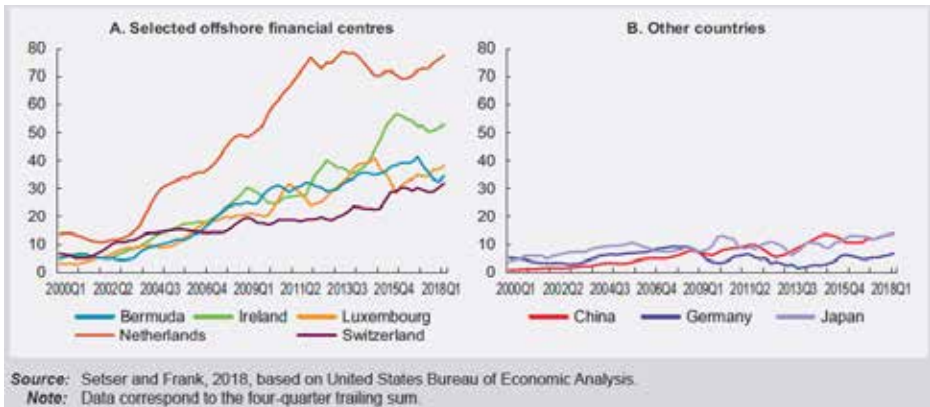
As we pointed out in past studies, transferring money to offshore countries also constitutes a significant share of the ostensible FDI of Western imperialists. According to a study, "at least 30% of global FDI stock is intermediated through tax havens."<sup>286</sup> Gabriel Zucman, a disciple of Thomas Piketty (*Capital in the Twenty-*

285 Levent Dölek: *The Character of War in 21st Century*, p. 56

286 Daniel Haberly and Dariusz Wójcik: *Tax havens and the production of offshore FDI: An empirical analysis* (2013), p. 1. *The Economist* reported the same. (*The Economist: Storm survivors, Special Report on Off Shore Finance*, February 16th 2013, p. 2)

*First Century*”) published a study calculating that, as of 2008, about \$5.9 trillion in financial wealth (i.e., excluding works of art and real estate) were kept in tax havens by the global rich.<sup>287</sup> The *Tax Justice Network* puts the figure higher at \$21 to \$32 trillion as of 2010.<sup>288</sup> In Figure 29 we see the massively increasing volume of profits which U.S. corporations formally get from foreign direct investment in offshore financial centers. So we see, again, that the arguments of PO/CRFI against China being an imperialist power are built on sand.

**Figure 29. Income of the United States on direct investment abroad, selected countries, first quarter 2000 to first quarter 2018 (Billions of dollars)**<sup>289</sup>



287 Zucman, Gabriel: The Missing Wealth of Nations: Are Europe and the U.S. Net Debtors or Net Creditors? in: *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* (2013), p. 1344

288 James S. Henry: *The Price of Offshore Revisited*. Tax Justice Network 2012, p. 5

289 UNCTAD: *Trade and Development Report 2018*, New York and Geneva, 2018, p. 39

## State-Owned Corporations in China and Russia: Not Capitalist?

Let's deal with the next argument of PO/CRFI. The comrades are forced to admit "*that finance-capital, characteristic of the age of imperialism, exists in Russia and China.*" But they make an important relativization which supposedly undermines the thesis that China and Russia are imperialist states: "*However, almost all of those companies are either state-owned corporations or joint-stock companies in which the state is the main share-holder.*"

*"Three petroleum and natural gas giants, Gazprom, Lukoil and Rosneft, and two publicly traded national banks, Sberbank and VTB Bank, are the Russian companies which are amongst the world's biggest 500 companies list. China, on the other hand, enters the list as one of the leading countries, with approximately 20 companies in the top 500 list. Thus, if we add the increasing stock market activity in both China and Russia to the increasing importance of the banks' capital, we can easily say that finance-capital, characteristic of the age of imperialism, exists in Russia and China. However, almost all of those companies are either state-owned corporations or joint-stock companies in which the state is the main share-holder. The only private Chinese company which made it to the list is the Hong-Kong based Noble Group, which is in fact a British company founded by a big coal trader named Richard Elman. The reason why those companies are among the top 500 in the world is not the developed capitalism of China and Russia, but Russian leadership in natural resources and China's huge market due to the fact that it has the biggest population in the world"* <sup>290</sup>

We note in passing that, unfortunately, the comrades don't recognize the irony implied in this statement: despite admitting the existence of finance capital, the PO/CRFI insists that capitalism still has not been restored in these countries! But unintended self-mockery is certainly not the biggest misfortune of the comrades! In fact, the PO/CRFI's assertion reveals that it is unaware of Lenin's thesis of "*state monopoly capitalism*". In his theory of imperialism, Lenin stated that advanced capitalism, in the age of its decline, is increasingly characterized by a central role of the state. This results in the increasing role of state (or partly state) corporations, indirect state intervention in the economy, etc.

*„The question of the state is now acquiring particular importance both in theory and in practical politics. The imperialist war has immensely accelerated and intensified the process of transformation of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism.“* <sup>291</sup>

*"That capitalism in Russia has also become monopoly capitalism is sufficiently attested by the examples of the Prodigol, the Prodamet, the Sugar Syndicate, etc. This Sugar Syndicate is an object-lesson in the way monopoly capitalism develops into state-monopoly capitalism. And what is the state? It is an organisation of the ruling class..."*

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290 Levent Dölek: *The Character of War in 21st Century*, p. 57

291 V. I. Lenin: *The State and Revolution. The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution* (1917); in: *LCW Vol. 25*, p.387

292 V. I. Lenin: *The Impending Catastrophe and how to Combat it* (1917); in: *LCW Vol. 25*, p.361

It is a widespread myth of neo-liberalism to claim that state-owned corporations could not operate profitably. As we have demonstrated in past studies, China's state-owned enterprises underwent massive restructuring, mass layoffs, abolishing of social benefits so that, as a result, the majority of them make profit since years. According to China's official statistics, the state-owned enterprises "posted their best profitability performance in 2018, even as the country's GDP growth has slowed, as initial reforms yielded results and provided solid support to the world's second-largest economy. In 2018, aggregate revenues of the country's nearly 100 centrally administered SOEs increased 10.1 percent year-on-year to 29.1 trillion yuan (\$4.29 trillion). (...) Profit growth was even better, reaching 1.7 trillion yuan with an increase of 16.7 percent, the best results since these figures were first collected, according to SASAC spokesperson Peng Huagang."<sup>293</sup>

And the Western capitalists themselves have to admit this implicitly when they include numerous state or semi-state owned corporations in the annual *Global Fortune 500* list. We remind our readers to the UNCTAD study quoted above which reports that the Chinese corporations (many of the state-owned) among the largest 2,000 Transnational Corporations take 17% of all profits of these top monopolies! So, obviously, the Chinese state-owned corporations operate pretty profitably!

## The Role of Migration

Let us now deal with the last argument of PO/CRFI why Russia and China supposedly are not imperialist powers. The author claims that China is not an imperialist country because there is no migration to China where such migrant workers would be super-exploited as cheap labor.

*"Additionally, it is impossible for China to rise up to the league of imperialist countries as long as it does not seek cheap labor beyond its borders, but continues to offer wages among the lowest in the world and remains a country into which capital flows and out of which its own population moves. In connection with this, we must mention that Lenin also added the phenomenon of migration to the indicators of imperialism: "One of the special features of imperialism connected with the facts I am describing, is the decline in emigration from imperialist countries and the increase in immigration into these countries from the more backward countries where lower wages are paid." In today's world if there is no such thing as American, German, Danish, Dutch, Canadian, British or French migrant workers, the reason is that these countries are imperialist powers. And the converse relation must also be taken to be true."*<sup>294</sup>

The first sentence is simply nonsense as we have shown. Yes, capital flows

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293 Chu Daye and Zhang Dan: Results underpin economy amid downward pressure, *Global Times* 2019/1/17 <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1136176.shtml>; see also SCMP: China's state-owned companies enjoy record profits, even as private sector flounders, 18 January, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/2182552/chinas-state-owned-companies-enjoy-record-profits-even-private>

294 Levent Dölek: *The Character of War in 21st Century*, pp. 57-58

into China (as it is also flowing into many North American and European imperialist countries). But a lot of capital also flows out of China as foreign investment of Chinese corporations. This is why they are among the leading foreign investors in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Contrary to the PO/CRFI myth, these corporations are exploiting the local, cheap labor forces. The author seems to suggest that there is a significant emigration of Chinese people from China to other countries. This might be a mistake in the translation of the text (which was probably written in Turkish). If it is not a translation mistake, it is simple nonsense. There is no significant migration from China to other countries.

The only thing which is true is that there is indeed little migration to China. But before dealing with this issue, we want to draw attention to the fact that the author furtively left out the case of Russia. This is most likely the case because PO/CRFI also denies the imperialist character of Russia. Nevertheless, as we have shown in past studies, Russian imperialism enormously gains from super-exploitation of migrants. According to official statistics approximately 11.6 million legal migrants currently reside inside Russia. In addition, another 5-8 million migrants have illegally entered the country in order to work there. The official figure for the migrants' share of Russia's population is 8.1%, which is close to levels in various European countries. However, this appears to be an underestimation. Most of these migrants come from Central Asia and Caucasus. In addition, this figure does *not* include the migrants from oppressed nations within Russia.<sup>295</sup>

In general, the author is right to say that migration plays an important role in imperialist countries. In fact, this is a central feature of imperialism particularly in the current historic period of its decay.<sup>296</sup> However, it is useful to bear in

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295 For more information on migration in Russia see Michael Pröbsting: Russia as a Great Imperialist Power. The formation of Russian Monopoly Capital and its Empire – A Reply to our Critics, 18 March 2014, Special Issue of Revolutionary Communism No. 21 (March 2014), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-russia/> (See Chapter "Migration and Super-Exploitation")

296 For the RCIT's analysis of migration see e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Patriotic "Anti-Capitalism" for Fools. Yet Again on the CWG/LCC's Support for "Workers" Immigration Control and Protectionism in the US, 30.5.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/cwg-lcc-us-protectionism/>; Michael Pröbsting and Andrew Walton: The Slogan of "Workers" Immigration Control: A Concession to Social-Chauvinism, 27.3.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/workers-immigration-control/>; Michael Pröbsting and Andrew Walton: A Social-Chauvinist Defence of the Indefensible. Another Reply to the CWG/LCC's Support for "Workers" Immigration Control, 14.5.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/cwg-immigration-control/>; RCIT: Marxism, Migration and Revolutionary Integration, <https://www.thecommunists.net/oppressed/revolutionary-integration/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South, chapter 8.iv) and 14ii), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>; Michael Pröbsting: The British Left and the EU-Referendum: The Many Faces of pro-UK or pro-EU Social-Imperialism, August 2015, Chapter II.2, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/british-left-and-eu-referendum/part-5-1/>, RCIT-Program, chapter V: <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/fight-against-oppression-of-migrants/>, RCIT-Manifesto chapter IV: <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-program-2016/chapter-iv/>; and various actual statements and articles here: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/articles-on-refugees/>. See also Michael Pröbsting: Migration and Super-exploitation: Marxist Theory and the Role of Migration in the present Period of Capitalist Decay, in: Critique: Journal of



mind that there are exceptions and not every imperialist country experiences substantial migration. This is, for example, the case with Japan, one of the strongest imperialist powers in the world. Japan has only a small share of migrants among its population (1.7% in 2007).<sup>297</sup>

The case of China has its peculiarities as we have pointed out in past studies. The Stalinist-capitalist ruling class utilizes effectively the sheer size of the country's population – China's 1.4 billion people are the equivalent to 18.5% of the total world population! Furthermore, it utilizes the old household registration system which was set up by the Stalinist bureaucracy in 1958. According to this system (called *hukou* in China) "*residents were not allowed to work or live outside the administrative boundaries of their household registration without approval of the authorities. Once they left their place of registration, they would also leave behind all of their rights and benefits. For the purpose of surveillance, everyone, including temporary residents in transit, was required to register with the police of their place of residence and their temporary residence. By the 1970s, the system became so rigid that 'peasants could be arrested just for entering cities'.*"<sup>298</sup>

Given rural poverty and opportunities for jobs in the cities, millions and millions of rural, mostly young, peasants moved to the cities to find employment. These former peasants or peasant youth who moved to the cities are called *migrants* in China. This category is misleading since it is usually used for people who move to another country. In fact they are rural-to-urban migrant workers. However it is no accident that these people are called migrants, because there is an important similarity between them and those who internationally are called migrants: they move to areas where they live often illegal and without rights and claim to social security. So these former rural people move to the cities where they are often illegal and – because of the *hukou*-system – have no access to housing, employment, education, medical services and social security.

Living in very poor conditions, these migrants soon became a major driving force for the capitalist process of primitive accumulation via of super-exploitation. The number of migrant workers in China rose from about 30 million (1989), to 62 million (1993), 131.8 million (2006) and by the end of 2010, their number rose to an estimated 242 million. In the capital city, Beijing, about 40% of the total population are migrant workers, while in Shenzhen nearly 12 million of the total 14 million population are migrants. These migrant workers are usually pushed into hard-labor, low-wage jobs. According to the *China Labour Bulletin*, migrants made up 58% of all workers in the industry and 52% in the

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Socialist Theory (Volume 43, Issue 3-4, 2015), pp. 329-346. We have also published a detailed study on migration and the Marxist program in German language. See Michael Pröbsting: *Marxismus, Migration und revolutionäre Integration* (2010); in: *Der Weg des Revolutionären Kommunismus*, Nr. 7, pp. 38-41, <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/werk-7>

297 Gabriele Vogt: *Bevölkerungsentwicklung in Japan: Fokus Migration*, Berlin-Instituts für Bevölkerung und Entwicklung, 2008, p. 3

298 China Labour Bulletin: *Migrant workers in China*, 6 June, 2008, <http://www.clb.org.hk/en/node/100259>

service sector in 2008. The proportion of migrant workers in manufacturing industries and in construction reached as high as 68% and 80% respectively.<sup>299</sup>

According to another study rural-to-urban migrant workers have also become the largest proportion of the workforce, making up some two-thirds of all non-agricultural workers. They have become dominant in a number of major sectors: 90% in construction, 80% in mining and extraction, 60% in textiles and 50% in urban service trades.

In short, Chinese imperialism does not need to import important migrants because it is already in a position to super-exploit vast human resources of cheap labor. In fact, this system of super-exploiting internal migrants is one of the sources for the rapid process of capital accumulation which resulted in the rise of Chinese capitalism. The PO/CRFI comrades are therefore completely wrong to conclude from China's lack of migration that this would reflect China's non-imperialism.

In summary, the analysis of PO/CRFI fails to grasp the nature of capitalism in China and Russia and, consequently, fails to understand its character as emerging imperialist powers. From this follows the failure of this organization to understand the nature of the Great Power rivalry in the present historic period.<sup>300</sup>

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299 China Labour Bulletin: Migrant workers in China, 6 June, 2008, <http://www.clb.org.hk/en/node/100259>

300 We draw attention to the fact that one organization which was part of the CRFI from its beginning, the Italian *Partito Comunista dei Lavoratori* (Communist Workers Party), arrives at very different conclusions on the issue of China and Russia. After being bureaucratically expelled from the PO/CRFI in 2018, Marco Ferrando, one of the historic leaders of the PCL, has recently published an article which criticizes the positions of their former comrades. In this article the PCL characterizes Russia and China as imperialist powers and supports this position with very similar arguments which the RCIT has elaborated in the last seven years. (See Marco Ferrando: Un confronto sulla questione cinese, 9 December 2018, <http://www.pclavoratori.it/files/index.php?obj=NEWS&oid=6082>)

## X. Revisionist Whitewashing: China and Russia are Semi-Colonies rather than Great Powers (LIT/UIT/FT)

A number of organizations adhering to the ideology of Trotskyism refuse the reactionary nonsense that capitalist restoration in Russia and China has not been completed. They rightly reject such Stalinist whitewashing of the ruling classes in China and Russia. Nevertheless, they don't share our characterization of China and Russia as imperialist powers. This, in our opinion, contains the danger of objectively opening the door to lending support to these states in the Great Power rivalry.

Let us take for example two, larger, Trotskyite organizations standing in the centrist tradition of Nahuel Moreno which are both based mainly in Latin America: the *"International Workers League - Fourth International"* (LIT-CI) and the *"International Workers Unity - Fourth International"* (UIT-CI).<sup>301</sup>

As we observed in our recently published pamphlet on the Syrian Revolution and the Great Power rivalry, they correctly oppose both the military interventions of Russia as well as the U.S. in Syria. However, in their statements on this issue, they characterized only the Western powers as "imperialist" but refrained from doing so for Russia.<sup>302</sup>

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301 For the RCIT's characterization of Morenoism see e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Summary of our main differences with the UIT-CI, October 2015, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/critique-of-uit-ci/>; LRCI: Barbaric Trotskyism: a History of Morenoism (1992), Part 1 and 2, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/morenoism-part-1/> and <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/morenoism-part-2/>

302 See e.g. *"The leader (Trump, Ed.) of a coalition that, since 2014, killed thousands of civilians, is suddenly horrified because of the "barbarianism" of his Syrian counterpart. "What happened is barbaric and inadmissible. We are studying the response. Nothing is discarded so far," he said. Then, he announced "important decisions" in the next "24 to 48 hours." There is a concrete threat of a military attack on a bigger scale than the current one – characterized by some analysts like "imminent." From the IWL-FI, we repudiate any type of military intervention by imperialism against Syria. That is not the solution to oppression and to the atrocities of al-Assad's regime. In the Syrian case, [an intervention] will always pursue to defeat the revolutionary process, not the dictator. Washington uses its missiles serving a policy: better conditions to control the country in a future political "transition". He does not care about the lives or aspirations of the Syrian people. (...) The Syrian people have lost too much blood already, confronting Assad's dictatorship. A victorious imperialist military intervention, even under the hypothesis of overthrowing Assad's regime, will be nothing but a new dictatorship, for the people. It would be the dictatorship of imperialism, the greater genocide of human history."* (Daniel Sugasti: We repudiate Trump's threats on more attacks to Syria! LIT-CI, April 10, 2018 <https://litci.org/en/we-repudiate-trumps-threats-on-more-attacks-to-syria/>) *"Ordered by the ultra-reactionary Donald Trump, the US, UK and France launched a criminal attack with missiles over places near the capital Damascus and Homs, in Syria. (...) Our socialist current, the IWU-FI, has spent years repudiating Bashar al Assad dictatorship and his genocidal actions against Syrian people, military supported by reactionary Putin and the Ayatollahs regime of Iran. (...) IWU-FI has been reporting on the permanent imperialist intervention of the US, together with the NATO and their allies, the petrol Arab monarchies and the Zionist State of Israel. (...) Now we repudiate the bombing ordered by Trump. We do not acknowledge imperialism any right to pretend "justice" is served in this way. Yank imperialism is the largest*

These were not accidental oversights but a logical result of their theoretical analysis. The leaderships both of the LIT as well as of the UIT have repeatedly stated in theoretical articles that they consider China and Russia not as imperialist powers but rather as large semi-colonial countries like Brazil, Mexico, and India.

## LIT: Is China Comparable with Brazil, India or Mexico?

Let us first look to the arguments of the LIT comrades.

*“This example goes to prove that Chinese economy is being used by the multinationals to super-exploit the world, while turning China into a semi-colony of world imperialism, a condition of submission which leads to immense contradictions that will explode in the forthcoming years. (...) And then a myth cropped up: China is to be the new global superpower, followed by new regional powers: Brazil, Russia, India, Mexico, South Africa, etc. It is true that these countries have a privileged relation with imperialism; however, this relation presupposes their subordination to the transnationals: they are part of the process of recolonisation.”*<sup>303</sup>

They view China as a kind of subsidiary of U.S. imperialism as the following quotes demonstrate.

*“So, an unprecedented historical combination occurs: the Stalinist apparatus, that had led the revolution and built the Bureaucratized Workers’ State, restored capitalism and remained in power after doing so. But now they no longer defend the economic and social basis of a Workers’ State, they are in the service of imperialist capitalism. (...) We have referred to the “tandem mechanism” of the Chinese and U.S. economies. But they are not equal and equivalent “locomotives”. One was the main and dominant (U.S.), the other was subsidiary and dominated (China). China turned into the “factory of the world” not as a dominant potency, but as a subordinated country in an accumulation*

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*killer in history, with invasions and aggressions everywhere in the world. (...) Their actions are a smokescreen to show they are the world police and to hide that, in fact, they support al Assad, together with Russia and Iran. They have been years negotiating and agreeing military actions with Russia with the argument of “defeating terrorism” in order to support the dictator Bashar al Assad who, since March 2011, saw his power at risk as hundred of thousand of Syrian people took to the streets. We call the people of the world and the political, union, students and left organisations from around the world to express their disapproval to the imperialist bombing. We also call to repudiate Assad regime and Putin and to express solidarity with the Syrian people.”* (IWU-FI: We repudiate the imperialist shelling on Syria! No to Trump’s killer missiles! April 14, 2018, <http://uit-ci.org/index.php/news-a-documents/1985-we-repudiate-the-imperialist-shelling-on-syria-no-to-trumps-killer-missiles>)

303 Nazareno Godeiro: The validity of Lenin’s imperialism theory, LIT-CI, International Courier, 09 October 2014, [http://www.litci.org/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2568:the-validity-of-lenins-imperialism-theory&catid=729:international-courier&Itemid=39](http://www.litci.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2568:the-validity-of-lenins-imperialism-theory&catid=729:international-courier&Itemid=39). In another, more recent article, the LIT leaders repeat their schema that China’s ruling class is a servant of the (Western) imperialist powers: *“So, an unprecedented historical combination occurs: the Stalinist apparatus, that had led the revolution and built the Bureaucratized Workers’ State, restored capitalism and remained in power after doing so. But now they no longer defend the economic and social basis of a Workers’ State, they are in the service of imperialist capitalism.”* (Alejandro Iturbe: Capitalist Restoration in China, September 7, 2017 <https://litci.org/en/capitalist-restoration-in-china-special/>)

*model dominated by imperialist capital. From this point of view, the model's global mechanism is similar to strong semi-colonial countries, like Brazil. (...) It is capitalist because of the accumulation model dynamic that we have analyzed. It is also a dependent capitalism because imperialist capital controls both ends of the process (investments and exports)."*<sup>304</sup>

*"Is China an Imperialist Country?*

*The reality we have described leads many analysts to consider China as the "emerging power of the XXI Century". From the perspective of many Marxists it is a new imperialist or sub-imperialist country (imperialist but dependent on a stronger imperialism). This latter characterization is based on the following reasoning: given that Lenin (on his famous book on the subject) has defined the main characteristic of imperialism as the export of financial capital, countries that have companies that do so (and therefore extract surplus value from others) acquire an imperialist character. This logic is applied not only to China, but also to other countries like Brazil.*

*We believe this characterization is mistaken because it focuses on only one element (the existence of capital exporting companies) to mechanically define the whole character of the country and its location in "international hierarchy". But if we observe it more deeply, we will find that at the current stage of capitalist development, there are companies like that in countries nobody can characterize as imperialist. (In what follows, the LIT comrades refer to examples of companies in Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil; Ed.) These companies act as multinationals (similar to imperialist companies). They extract surplus value from their investments abroad. In many cases, they plunder natural resources and send most of their profit to their head offices. But this reality must be understood in the whole context of the country of origin. We must analyze whether this surplus value obtained abroad is the main axis of the country's economy, or on the contrary, it only represents a contradictory (and privileged) element in a more general process. A process in which a country turns in most of the surplus value to the main countries (through imperialist companies' profits repatriation, foreign debt payment, plundering of natural resources, etc.). For us this is clearly the situation of Peru, Chile, Argentina and also Brazil.*

*China's case is more complex, because the State and bourgeoisie have a significant volume of capital and make large investments abroad, which allows them to have a relative autonomy, which we have already referred to. However, the Chinese economic model does not work around the surplus value obtained abroad. On the contrary, they turn in most of the surplus value obtained in the country to imperialist financial capital. If we analyze Chinese investments, we will see that most of them are used to support their monetary reserves, or guarantee the supply and transportation of the commodities and food they import. Secondly, they seek relief for the overproduction of steel, construction and mechanical products in the country. They are subsidiaries, subordinated to the accumulation model as a whole, and at its service. In other words, they ultimately*

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304 Alejandro Iturbe (LIT-CI): Certainties and questions raised by China's economic crisis – Part 1, March 30, 2016 <https://litci.org/en/certainties-and-questions-raised-by-chinas-economic-crisis-part-1/>

*ensure imperialism's surplus value."*<sup>305</sup>

The LIT maintains this position even now when the Global Trade War between the U.S. and China has begun.

*"We talked about the "tandem mode" of the US-China economies. But both roles are not equal or equivalent. One is the main and controlling one (the US) and the other is a subsidiary, the dominated one (China). China became the "world factory" but not as a dominating power but as a subordinated country, in a model of accumulation controlled by imperialist capitals. From this point of view, the global economic model of China is similar to those of the strongest semi-colonial countries, like Brazil."*<sup>306</sup>

So, in summary, the LIT imagines that China is a semi-colonial country which is super-exploited by U.S. (and other) imperialist powers.

## **UIT: China is Super-Exploited by Imperialism?**

The comrades of the other major Morenoite tendency, the UIT-CI, basically share the same methodological approach. The UIT, as the quote below demonstrates, also characterizes both China and Russia not as an imperialist power but as a semi-colony.

*"The definition of China as a capitalist country has its peculiarities, on the basis that it is a country where capitalism was restored and is still governed by the CPC, a Stalinist party. It is not an imperialist country because it is a country that has been semi-colonized by the large multinationals of imperialist world (U.S. and European), which dominate it, and its total dependence on exports to those countries. China is a large semi-colony with respect to imperialism, such as, for example, Brazil, India and Russia, minding the differences"*<sup>307</sup>

And, like their comrades from the LIT, the UIT also maintains this position even now, when the Global Trade War demonstrates that China is indeed able to challenge the biggest imperialist power on earth!

*"China and its insertion in the global market*

*(...). Forty years later, the Chinese economy went from representing 1.8% of the world market to 18.2%, but the cost of associating with large multinationals and subordinating themselves to imperialist plans was paid for the loss of those historic gains and the a return to a brutal social inequality, megacorruption and superexploitation, with strenuous workdays and miserable salaries under a regime of a single-party capitalist dictatorship. Successive worker strikes in recent years, such as the one in Dongguan in 2014, the largest in the history of the People's Republic of China, call into question*

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305 Alejandro Iturbe (LIT-CI): Certainties and questions raised by China's economic crisis – Part 2, March 22, 2016 <https://litci.org/en/certainties-and-questions-raised-by-chinas-economic-crisis-part-2/>

306 Alejandro Iturbe: Trump's trade sanctions against China, March 29, 2018 <https://litci.org/en/trumps-trade-sanctions-against-china/>

307 Global Policy Theses, discussed and voted at the Fourth Congress of the IWU-FI, Chapter "VI. China: Towards a new hegemonic power?", <http://uit-ci.org/index.php/mundo/2018-04-05-19-24-25/1912-vi-china-towards-a-new-hegemonic-power>

*the exploitation model of the Chinese dictatorship and its false "socialism with Chinese characteristics".*"<sup>308</sup>

As we have shown above (as well as in many other studies), the Morenoite assessment of China and Russia as subordinated and super-exploited countries under the mercy of U.S. imperialism is a caricature of reality. China has become the most important challenger of the US as the world's hegemonic power. It has already overtaken all other imperialist powers (like Japan or the Western European states). While foreign capital did play an important role in the past, this has been strongly reduced. While the share of foreign direct investment in China's fixed capital formation was about 17% in 1994, it has been only about 2.5% by 2014.<sup>309</sup>

Russia, while economically weaker than China, has also proven capable of challenging the Western domination in the Middle East. So, we ask the leading comrades of LIT and UIT: how do you explain that Russia and China, these supposed semi-colonies of U.S. imperialism, manage to challenge the supremacy of Washington?! How do they explain that Putin has succeeded to bring Syria under his control and expand Moscow's influence at the expense of the U.S.?! How do they explain that China is becoming one of the, if not the, largest foreign investor in Africa, Asia and Latin America and that its political weight is constantly rising to the strong irritation of the U.S. Administration?!

Unfortunately, all these fundamental changes in world capitalism in the past one, two decades seem to have gone completely unnoticed by the LIT and UIT leaders! Trotsky once remarked: „*What characterizes a genuine revolutionary organization is above all the seriousness with which it works out and tests its political line at each new turn of events.*“<sup>310</sup> It would be very helpful for the comrades of LIT and UIT to take this advice into account!

Any equation of semi-colonies like Brazil or India with Russia or China is completely absurd. As we have shown in other works Russia's economy is dominated by domestic monopolies.<sup>311</sup> Key sectors like oil, gas, banking, and metal are controlled by a few large corporations which are usually closely linked with the state. According to a calculation from 2004, the 22 largest Rus-

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308 Mariana Morena: Sanciones cruzadas entre Estados Unidos y China: ¿Hacia una "guerra comercial global"? <http://www.uit-ci.org/index.php/noticias-y-documentos/crisis-capitalista-mundial/2071-2018-07-13-01-07-42>

309 Arthur R. Kroeber: China's Economy. What Everyone Needs To Know, Oxford University Press, New York 2016, p. 53

310 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. The Formative Years (1933-40), New York 1973, p. 343

311 See Michael Pröbsting: Russia as a Great Imperialist Power. The formation of Russian Monopoly Capital and its Empire – A Reply to our Critics, 18 March 2014, Special Issue of Revolutionary Communism No. 21 (March 2014), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-russia/>; Michael Pröbsting: Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power. On the Understanding and Misunderstanding of Today's Inter-Imperialist Rivalry in the Light of Lenin's Theory of Imperialism, August 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-theory-and-russia/>

sian monopolies employ 42% of the labor force and account for 39% of sales, while the capitalist state (both regional and federal combined) employ another 21% of the labor force and account for an additional 36% of sales. On the other hand, *foreign* corporations employ only 3% of Russian workers and sell only 8% of the goods and services produced in the country.<sup>312</sup>

China, as we have demonstrated in detail, is home of the second-largest number of multinational corporations in the world (only behind the U.S.). At the same time, the share of foreign capital in the Chinese stock market is only around 5% and around 2% in the Chinese bond market.<sup>313</sup> Arthur Kroeber, author of a major study of China's economy, concludes "*that [state-owned enterprises] account for about 35 percent of GDP (...), domestic private firms account for about 60 percent of GDP, and firms controlled by foreign investors account for the remaining 5 percent or so.*"<sup>314</sup> In short, China is not dominated by foreign capital but rather dominates other countries.

In contrast to Russia and China, Brazil has always been dominated not by domestic but by foreign monopolies. We have described this in more detail in our book *The Great Robbery of the South*. A study of Brazil in the 1960s demonstrates that 31 of the 50 largest private enterprises were controlled by imperialist capital. Out of 276 large companies, more than half were controlled by foreign owners.<sup>315</sup>

Since the time of these studies, the picture has not changed. Today, imperialist corporations control nearly half of Brazil's foreign trade and more than half of the largest 500 private Brazilian companies: "*The high FDI inflows have meant an increase in the foreign share in the Brazilian economy. (...) Foreign corporations also increased their share of the country's foreign trade, reaching 41.3% of exports and 49.3% of imports. The role of the foreign capital is even stronger when we consider only large companies. Among the largest 500 private Brazilian companies, those under foreign control accounted for 41.2% of sales in 1989. This share increased to 49.9% in 1997 and, by 2003, reached 51.7%.*"<sup>316</sup>

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312 Sergei Guriev and Andrei Rachinsky: Oligarchs: the past or the future of Russian capitalism? July 2004, p. 11

313 Wang Yanfei: China should reduce restrictions on foreign capital, senior economists say, China Daily, 2017-09-25, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2017-09/25/content\\_32448925.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2017-09/25/content_32448925.htm)

314 Arthur R. Kroeber: China's Economy. What Everyone Needs To Know, Oxford University Press, New York 2016, p. 101

315 See Celso Furtado: Economic Development of Latin America. Historical Background and Contemporary Problems, New York 1984, pp. 204-206

316 Celio Hiratuka: Foreign Direct Investment and Transnational Corporations in Brazil: Recent Trends and Impacts on Economic Development, April 2008, pp. 5-6



## FT: Russia and China can not become Imperialist without a Major War?

The Trotskyist Fraction – Fourth International (FT) whose main force is the Socialist Workers' Party (PTS) in Argentina, also rejects the characterization of Russia and China as imperialist. Like the statements of other centrists, the FT declaration on the recent events in Syria uses the term “imperialist” only when it comes to the actions of the US and Western powers but not when they mention Putin’s war of aggression.<sup>317</sup> Again, this is no accident as one can see from more elaborated documents of the FT.

This becomes evident from a statement of Philippe Alcoy, a leader of the FT in France. This comrade wrote in April 2018:

*“With the international economic crisis of 2007-2008, this situation started to change. The failure of the US-led invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan marked a relative but real decline in the world hegemony of the north-American imperialist, even if today there is no new imperialist power to challenge the USA.*

*It is in this context that we must understand this new offensive of Western powers against Russia. Not that Russia is challenging USA hegemony (it is really far from that). We are not in a “new Cold War”. In the end, the conflict is not even between Russia and “the West”. It is a move from the USA to prevent any international power, or international alliance from challenging its hegemony as the main imperialist power. (...)*

*Russia is not really an imperialist power but a regional power able to influence some international affairs. Its military power and its positions in international organisations (inherited mainly from the Soviet period) create the “illusion of world super power”. But since the end of the Cold War, the Russian economy has become almost completely dependent on production and export of gas and oil (which technology is largely imported from imperialist countries); its main area of influence is the former Soviet space; the central role it plays in Syria today is mostly the result of the huge blow it received in Ukraine in 2014. Moreover, with the Western offensive Russia is becoming a “pariah state”.”<sup>318</sup>*

This statement is completely nonsensical and reflects the FT’s failure to understand the fundamental dynamics of the current historic period. While in fact the accelerating rivalry between the imperialist Great Powers and, in particular, the challenge of the U.S. hegemony by Russia and China are key features of the world situation, the FT simply denies this reality. It states: “today there is no new imperialist power to challenge the USA”

Well, if there is supposedly no challenge to the U.S., we ask the comrades, how do they explain that there is a looming Global Trade War between the U.S.

317 Stop Bombing Syria! Nothing good can come of this bombing or any other imperialist military intervention, April 14, 2018 <http://www.leftvoice.org/Stop-Bombing-Syria>

318 Philippe Alcoy (FT in France), in: Rossen Djagalov: We Asked: Geopolitics and the Left (Part I: Russia & the West), LeftEast April 19 2018, <http://www.criticatac.ro/lefteast/we-asked-rusia-and-the-west/>

and China?! If this is not a challenge, what than is a challenge?! And do the FT comrades want to deny the fact that Russia has effectively outmaneuvered the U.S. from the negotiations in Syria – a key area of the political dynamic in the Middle East. (The FT's explanation of Russia's role in Syria that this "*is mostly the result of the huge blow it received in Ukraine in 2014*" lacks any logic. If Russia was weakened by the events in the Ukraine why should it, as a result of that, be able to dominate Syria?!) Likewise, it plays an influential role in other key powers in the Middle East like Iran and Turkey. And in Eastern Europe and Central Asia Russia is also able to challenge the U.S.

Similarly with China. While the FT concede that China has certain "*imperialist features*" it claims that neither Russia nor China have created an "*independent capitalist class*".<sup>319</sup> Hence it talks, in the case of China, not about the "*ruling*

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319 The FT comrades have also published an interview with Au Loong Yu, a socialist Chinese academic living in Hong Kong. As they published the interview without any comment one can assume that they view his positions as in broad agreement with their analysis of China's capitalism. And indeed, Au Loong Yu shares the FT position that China is not an imperialist state. We note as an aside that the Mandelists published exactly the same interview with a title which rather suggests that the text would rather confirm the characterization of China as an imperialist Great Power! (See <http://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article5758>) Anyway, here is the relevant excerpt of the interview published by the FT comrades:

*“Question: In your book China's Rise: Strength and Fragility, you give an account of the impressive growth of Chinese transnational corporations up to 2007. In the 10 years since, the pace of Chinese foreign investment in Latin America, in Africa and elsewhere has increased even more. Can we speak of China as a new imperialism? If so, does it have specific characteristics? How does the One Belt One Road initiative fit into this project?”*

*Answer: (...) China's bureaucratic capitalism necessarily carries with it a global expansionist logic, first in economic terms and then increasingly also in political and military terms. If one measures the degree of monopoly and the fusion between financial and industrial capital—made possible through bureaucratic capitalism, and also the degree of outward investment—then surely China already carries strong elements of modern imperialism, that is, a kind of imperialism that, with the backing of military power and surplus capital, seeks to dominate weaker countries but does not necessarily seek direct political domination over them as it did before.*

*This also explains the change of foreign policy from Deng Xiaoping's tao guang yang hui (meaning “not to show off one's capability but to keep a low profile”) to Xi Jinping's more assertive stand in relation to the United States and Japan, known as fen fa you wei (meaning “striving for achievement”).*

*But it is important to identify the actual stage China is now passing through. If we are simply satisfied with putting name tags on a complicated and crazily rapid-changing country with such a long history and then putting it on par with all the other imperialist countries, then one may make a big mistake. There are two factors we must consider. First, it is the colonial legacy that still weighs heavily on the party state.*

*If we say China is imperialist, then it is the first imperialist country that is formerly semicolonial, and one that has been repeatedly invaded by multiple great powers many times throughout a century. This necessarily makes Chinese people particularly sensitive to national self-defense. One must differentiate this legitimate concern from the party's aggressive expansionism.*

*Another facet of this colonial legacy is the Taiwan and Hong Kong issue. The United States sees Taiwan as its protectorate. I do not support the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) stance on Taiwan, since we believe in the latter's right to self-determination, which the CCP denies. (...)*

*In comparison, all other imperialist countries are free of a colonial legacy but rather benefit from their imperialist past (contributing to both their sharp and soft power). China's rise is still burdened by its colonial legacy, which acts against its interest. This asymmetry defines our choices of different tactics when dealing with the U.S.-China rivalry.*

class” but about the “ruling bureaucracy”. The following quote, taken from the central political document adopted at their recently held international conference, demonstrates that the FT claims Russia and China are much too weak and backward to challenge the U.S. They explicitly deny that China can become an imperialist power “on a peaceful road”, i.e. without a prior major and victorious war against U.S. imperialism.

*“In the past years, the imperialist features of China have deepened. (...) Briefly, China can not challenge today the global supremacy of the U.S. which will remain the most important imperialist power in the next years. The GDP per capita of China is much too low (...), the differences in the military field are still huge, and the same holds true in the technological sector. Furthermore, neither in China nor in Russia could an independent capitalist class consolidate itself given the peculiarities of capitalist restoration. Hence, the role of the state is still dominant. (...) There exists a double challenge: China wants to get out of the limitations which the imperialist world economy imposes on it and at the same time the U.S. tries to break China. (...) This demonstrates that there is no possibility of a “peaceful road” towards an imperialist development of China.”*<sup>320</sup>

Surely, China and Russia are “backward”, compared with the U.S. and other Western powers, when we look at their GDP per capita. But, as we have demonstrated in several studies as well as in this book, such discrepancies between imperialist states have often been the case and do not contradict the imperialist nature of such “backward” Great Powers. We remind the FT comrades that such unevenness between the Great Powers always existed in the epoch of imperialism.

It is true that U.S. imperialism is, in principle, still superior to its rivals including Russia and China. But the truth is always concrete as Lenin liked to say. Yes, the U.S. is the biggest economic and military power. However, at the same time it is overburdened by the global responsibilities as the former absolute hegemon of the world. Contrary to Russia and China, the ruling class of the U.S. is bitterly divided.

To make a comparison: the U.S. is like a big beast which is wounded. Russia and China are like smaller tigers which are, contrary to their rival, fit and fast.

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*China’s expansion is increasingly imperialistic, but we also need to take into account the fact that China is deeply contradictory, possessing a logic of expansion but itself being checked by its dependent accumulation—both dependent on the West’s market but also its technology, hence it must accept a low-value-added status in the global value chain. Surely, China is an accomplice with imperialist countries over the management of the global value chain, but it is still a minor player in comparison. This asymmetry needs to be considered as well if we want to develop a wise enough tactic for dealing with Taiwan issue.”* (Strength and Contradictions of the Chinese Economy: An Interview With Au Loong Yu, September 13, 2018, <http://www.leftvoice.org/Strength-and-Contradictions-of-the-Chinese-Economy-An-Interview-With-Au-Loong-Yu>)

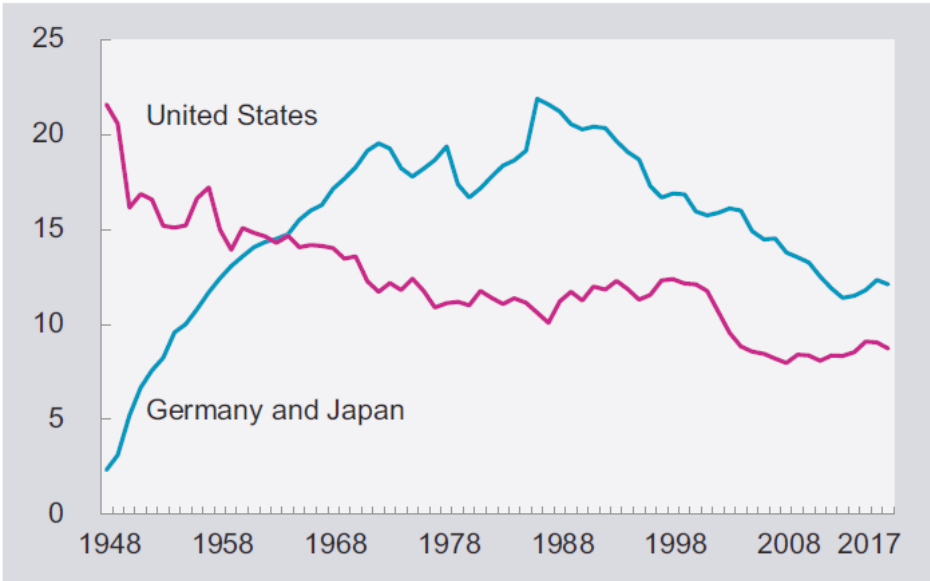
320 As we could not find an English-language translation of this document, we have translated this quotes ourselves from the Spanish-language version respectively the German-language version. (XI Conferencia De La FT: Tensiones económicas e inestabilidad política. Documento sobre situación internacional discutido en la XI Conferencia de la FT, 22.3.2018, 2018, <http://www.laizquierdadiario.com/Tensiones-economicas-e-inestabilidad-politica>; FT: Die Welt im Jahr 2018 (Teil 1): Wirtschaftliche Spannungen und politische Instabilität, <https://www.klassegegenklasse.org/die-welt-im-jahr-2018-teil-1-wirtschaftliche-spannungen-und-politische-instabilitaet/>)

Under such conditions, the superiority of the U.S. becomes more relative and limited.

The thesis that China (or Russia) can not become imperialist powers “*on a peaceful road*” is not new. It has already been raised against the RCIT by another Latin American group. As we did reply already to these comrades, we consider such a position as fundamentally wrong. Of course, there has never been and there can never be a peaceful coexistence between imperialist powers in the long run. This is a pillar of Marxist theory as we have always pointed out.

But why do the FT comrades insist that there must be a war *before* a state can become an imperialist power? Where did Lenin or Trotsky say such a thing? The US, Japan, and the EU have declined in the past decades without a world war. (See e.g. Figure 30 which demonstrates the decline of the Western Great Powers U.S., Germany and Japan in the past decades.) In the same period, new great powers can and have emerged.

**Figure 30. Share in Global Merchandise Exports, 1948–2017 (in Percent)** <sup>321</sup>



321 UNCTAD: Trade and Development Report 2018, New York and Geneva, 2018, p. 37

Furthermore, we would like to remind the comrades that Lenin himself explicitly pointed out the possibility of the emergence of new imperialist powers: “Capitalism is growing with the greatest rapidity in the colonies and in overseas countries. Among the latter, new imperialist powers are emerging (e.g., Japan).”<sup>322</sup>

The failure of the FT comrades to understand the rivalry between the US and China as the rivalry between two imperialist Great Powers becomes also apparent in another recently published article. This article, titled “21st Century Economic Nationalism”, deals with the rising tensions between the two powers on the issues of trade. However, despite the length of the article the author fails to mention a single time the word “imperialist” or “imperialism”!<sup>323</sup>

We see the same failure in the FT’s analysis of the Global Trade War. In a recently published article they fail to understand the tensions as an inter-imperialist conflict between Great Powers. Consequently, while they name the US, as well as the European Union, “imperialist”, they refrain from such a characterization of China.<sup>324</sup>

It is clear that the development of reality is far more advanced than the empty, wooden schemas of centrism. While they deny the imperialist nature of Russia and China, the reality is marked by the challenge of Western imperialism by the new Great Powers of the East. The centrists are, to paraphrase Lenin, prisoners of old formulas.<sup>325</sup>

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322 V. I. Lenin: Imperialism. The Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916) ; in: LCW Vol. 22, p. 274

323 Juan Cruz Ferrer: 21st Century Economic Nationalism, March 26, 2018 <http://www.leftvoice.org/21st-Century-Economic-Nationalism>

324 Simon Zamora Martin: Neue Eskalationsstufe im Handelskrieg der USA gegen China, 19. Sep 2018, <https://www.klassegegenklasse.org/neue-eskalationsstufe-im-handelskrieg-der-usa-gegen-china/>

325 As a side-note, we draw attention to a particularly extreme example of such sterile dogmatism resulting in refusing to recognize the social-historical developments: the so-called “*Fracción Leninista Trotskista Internacional - Colectivo por la Refundación de la IV Internacional*”. This is a small international grouping in the tradition of Morenoism with its headquarter in Argentina. While these comrades take a correct side in important current issues of the international class struggle (like the Syrian Revolution), the miserable fail to understand the main features of the world situation. They not only deny the imperialist character of China and Russia. Stating that these are semi-colonies, they carry this nonsense to its extreme conclusions. Instead of recognizing the rise of Russia and China as the most serious capitalist challenge for Western imperialism since many decades, the FLTI recasts the reality and characterizes Putin and Xi as “hitmen of U.S. imperialism” (See e.g. „*Down with the Vienna Summit the Peace of the Cemetery prepared by Obama and his Hitman Putin!*” (FLTI: Vienna Summit with US, Putin, Iranian Ayatollahs, the genocidal Al Assad, Zionism, Qatar, Turkey taking in its hand bourgeois generals of FSA, the chiefs of ISIS of Saudi Arabia, the Kurdish bourgeoisie... Under the command of Obama, all the executioners of the revolutions in the Maghreb and the Middle East are meeting, 4.11.2015, [https://www.flti-ci.org/ingles/medio\\_oriente/noviembre2015/proclama\\_viena03nov2015.html](https://www.flti-ci.org/ingles/medio_oriente/noviembre2015/proclama_viena03nov2015.html)) For a critique of the FLTI analysis of China see e.g. chapter 10 of our book *The Great Robbery of the South*. For an overview of our critique of the FLTI we refer to: Michael Pröbsting: Summary of Our Main Differences with the FLTI, October 2015, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/critique-of-flti/>

## XI. Revisionist Whitewashing: When the Category “Imperialism” has no Meaning (CWI/IMT/IST)

Let us move now to the *Committee for a Workers International* (CWI), whose dominant section is the *Socialist Party* in Britain. This organization is certainly one of those groups which throughout their whole history were struggling with theory in general and Marxist theory in particular. In the 1990s and the 2000s it was discussing if capitalism finally had been restored in China or if it is still a deformed workers state. While this issue seems to be solved by now, the CWI has no clear line on the question if Russia and China are imperialist or not.

On one hand, this or that national section occasionally publishes articles which designate these two Great Powers as imperialist. The Russian section of the CWI has characterized “its” state as “imperialist” on several occasions. Likewise, its comrades in Hong Kong have published recently an article with a correct assessment of China and its *Belt and Road Initiative*: “*In reality, however, the BRI is an expression of the explosive emergence of China as a new global imperialist power vying with its older rivals, chiefly the US, to secure spheres of economic influence and control.*”<sup>326</sup>

However, the CWI has rather a federalist approach on such theoretical issues. So the Russian or Chinese comrades are free to publish such characterizations if they like, but this has no meaning for the CWI as a whole. Such characterizations of Russia or China as an imperialist power by individual comrades or sections are not reflected in any way in the international theoretical and programmatic documents of the CWI and don’t influence their analysis of the world relations.

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326 Vincent Kolo: ‘Belt and Road’: Imperialism with Chinese characteristics. Gigantic Belt and Road infrastructure plan – spearhead for Chinese dictatorship’s economic and geopolitical strategy, February 19, 2018 <http://chinaworker.info/en/2018/02/19/16985/>. The same position is articulated by another comrade from the CWI in Hong Kong who speaks unambiguously and correctly about “*the US and China, the two largest imperialist powers.*” (Pasha: China: Deepening crisis and mass resistance, Socialist Action (CWI in Hong Kong), 14 August 2018 <http://www.socialistworld.net/index.php/international/asia/china/9905-china-deepening-crisis-and-mass-resistance>)

## CWI: “Forgetting” about Russia’s or China’s Imperialist Character?

This becomes obvious when we look at the most comprehensive analytical documents of the CWI on the world situation of the last years. We are talking about the World Perspective documents which have been discussed and adopted either by the CWI World Congress or by its highest leadership body (the International Executive Committee or the International Secretariat).<sup>327</sup> In the five World Perspectives documents which the CWI has published since 2011, with a combined length of nearly 68,000 words, China is not characterized a single time as “imperialist”. And only one of those five documents talks twice about “imperialist interests” of Russia. (More on this below) At the same time, the CWI talks in these documents extensively about US and European imperialism.

This failure to understand the class character of the Great Powers which are dominating world capitalism is also reflected in the CWI’s analysis of flash-points of the world situation. When Russia and the U.S. nearly clashed on Syria in April 2018, the relevant CWI article repeatedly attacked U.S. and Western imperialism by name, but failed to mention a single time that Russia is an imperialist power too!<sup>328</sup>

This fundamental failure to comprehend the class character of the Great Power dominating the world situation is accompanied by a superficial and confusing use of the category of “imperialist interests”. As mentioned above, the CWI occasionally talks about “imperialist interests” of Russia. However, this rather reflects their indifference to central categories of Marxist theory. They use such categories also for countries which are clearly no imperialist powers but rather semi-colonies. In their World Perspectives document adopted in December 2014, for example, the CWI speaks about the “*regional imperialist reasons*” of the

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327 See: CWI: World Perspectives, 08 December 2017, CWI International Executive Committee, <http://www.socialistworld.net/index.php/theory-analysis/9544-cwi-world-perspectives>; CWI: CWI World Congress 2016 World Perspectives, <http://www.socialistworld.net/index.php/other-topics/activities/7517-11th-CWI-World-Congress--World-Perspectives>; CWI: World Perspectives: A turbulent period in history, International Secretariat of the CWI, 27 November 2014 <http://www.socialistworld.net/index.php/other-topics/activities/6995-World-Perspectives--A-turbulent-period-in-history>; CWI: World perspectives, Thesis for the International Executive Committee (IEC) of the CWI 2013, 22/11/2013, <http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/6565>; CWI: World Perspectives - New Period of Instability and Revolutions, Thesis of the European Bureau of the CWI, May 6, 2011, <http://www.socialistalternative.org/news/article11.php?id=1590>. A recently published article about the discussion on World Perspectives at the CWI School 2018 reports about the contribution of a comrade from Hong Kong who characterized China as imperialist. There is however no indication that this would influence the CWI’s analysis of the world situation. (Kevin Parslow, Socialist Party (CWI in England & Wales): CWI School 2018: 10 years after 2007/8 crisis, capitalism has solved nothing, 08 August 2018 <http://www.socialistworld.net/index.php/192-cwi/9901-cwi-school-2018-world-perspectives>)

328 Serge Jordan: No to the bombing of Syria! Build a mass movement against the war, CWI 12 April 2018 <http://www.socialistworld.net/index.php/international/middle-east/151-syria/9750-no-to-the-bombing-of-syria-build-a-mass-movement-against-the-war>

Turkish president Erdoğan.<sup>329</sup>

Such confusion is not accidental but reflects the fundamental failure of the CWI throughout its history to understand Lenin's theory of imperialism. As we have demonstrated in our book *The Great Robbery of the South* the CWI repeatedly confusingly applied the category of imperialism, usually in order to justify its opportunist adaption to social-imperialist forces. Hence, for example, the CWI suggested that Argentina would be a kind of imperialist state which, conveniently, helped their leadership to justify its capitulation to British imperialism during the Malvinas war in 1982. Likewise, they flirted with the idea of designating Iraq as imperialist in 1990/91 when the Western imperialist powers were assembling their forces to attack this Arab country.<sup>330</sup> Another example of the CWI's adaption to social-imperialism is their support for the Zionist settler state Israel's right to exist.<sup>331</sup> Finally, in our opinion, the article on China mentioned above is mistaken to characterize India as "a rival Asian imperialist power".<sup>332</sup>

## IMT: A purely formal Recognition of Russia and China as Great Powers

The situation is similar with the *International Marxist Tendency* (IMT). If we take the central analytical and programmatic documents of this organization, we effectively get the same picture as with the CWI. The IMT has published three lengthy World Perspective documents since 2014 (plus an update) with a combined length of nearly 78,000 words.<sup>333</sup> Like their former comrades, the IMT talks incessantly about U.S. and European imperialism (like the CWI they tend to "forget" about Japan which is a result of their Europe-centeredness). But, again, *not a single time* do they characterize China or Russia as imperialist in these lengthy documents! This demonstrates that a formal recognition of Rus-

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329 CWI: World Perspectives. A turbulent period in history, 15/12/2014 <http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/7008>

330 See Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South*, Chapter 9, pp. 211-215

331 See on this e.g. Yossi Schwarz: *Occupied Palestine / Israel: Dead End for the Two-State Solution. The Palestinian Liberation Struggle and the CWI's Centrist Adaptation to Zionism*, 12.11.2015, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/palestine-and-cwi/>; Michael Pröbsting: *The CWI's "Socialist" Zionism and the Palestinian Liberation Struggle. A Reply from the RCIT*, 15.9.2014, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/cwi-and-israel/>; see also Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South*, Chapter 9, pp. 349-365

332 Vincent Kolo: 'Belt and Road': Imperialism with Chinese characteristics. Gigantic Belt and Road infrastructure plan – spearhead for Chinese dictatorship's economic and geopolitical strategy, February 19, 2018 <http://chinaworker.info/en/2018/02/19/16985/>

333 IMT: World perspectives: 2018 – a year of capitalist crisis, 05 April 2018 <https://www.marxist.com/world-perspectives-2018-a-year-of-capitalist-crisis.htm>; IMT: World Perspectives 2016 – An update, 06 December 2016, <https://www.marxist.com/world-perspectives-2016-an-update.htm>; IMT: Crisis and Class Struggle: World Perspectives 2016, 26 March 2016 <https://www.marxist.com/crisis-and-class-struggle-world-perspectives-2016-part-one.htm>; IMT: Perspectives for World Revolution 2014, 29 January 2014, <http://www.marxist.com/world-perspectives-2014.htm>;



sia and China as Great Powers has no consequences for the IMT’s analysis of the world situation and the dynamic of the global contradictions. They are like those children who promise their mother to learn for school when admonished but never do so. An empty promise (to apply the Marxist analysis) without consequences.

The IMT’s failure to understand the class character of the Great Powers which are dominating world capitalism is reflected in its analysis of flashpoints of the world situation. When the civil war in the Ukraine escalated, the IMT supported the pro-Russian side. An article on the conflict in the Ukraine denounces repeatedly U.S. and European imperialism but mentions only once “*Russian imperialist ambitions*”.<sup>334</sup> This suggests that Russia *would like* to become an imperialist power (i.e. it is not such a power *yet*.)

Concerning China the IMT publications are confused. There exists one or another article which speaks explicitly about “*Chinese Imperialism*.”<sup>335</sup> Various other articles on China either do not characterize it as “imperialist”<sup>336</sup> or talk about “*burgeoning Chinese imperialist aspirations*.”<sup>337</sup> In several recently published articles on the looming Global Trade War, the IMT suggests that this reflects an inter-imperialist rivalry.<sup>338</sup> One article talks about China as a “*rising, capitalist power*.”<sup>339</sup> In summary, it is fascinating how difficult it is for the IMT, faced with such obvious expressions of inter-imperialist rivalry, to utter the simple truth that China has become an imperialist Great Power since about one decade!

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334 Francesco Merli: Russian annexation of Crimea – What consequences for world relations? 21 March 2014 <https://www.marxist.com/russian-annexation-of-crimea-what-consequences-for-world-relations.htm>

335 Adam Pal: Pakistan: The ever growing power of China, 02 March 2017, <http://www.marxist.com/pakistan-the-ever-growing-power-of-china.htm>

336 Daniel Morley: China and the World Economy in 2016: “Sell Everything”, 12 January 2016 <http://www.marxist.com/china-world-economy-2016-sell-everything.htm>

337 Zhan Dou Zhe and Dan Morley: Where is China going: back to the planned economy or strengthening capitalism? 30 November 2017 <https://www.marxist.com/where-is-china-going-back-to-the-planned-economy-or-strengthening-capitalism.htm>

338 See e.g. several articles by Niklas Albin Svensson: The real stakes in the Trump-China trade war, 08 October 2018 <https://www.marxist.com/the-real-stakes-in-the-trade-war-between-trump-china-trade-war.htm>; China: a trade war the bourgeois can get behind, 21 June 2018 <https://www.marxist.com/china-a-trade-war-the-bourgeois-can-get-behind.htm>; Trump’s war on globalisation, 04 June 2018 <https://www.marxist.com/trump-s-war-on-globalisation.htm>; World trade: Trump sets his eyes on China, 29 March 2018 <https://www.marxist.com/world-trade-trump-sets-his-eyes-on-china.htm>. see also Rob Sewell: “Trade wars are good” – Trump threatens fragile world economy, 12 March 2018 <https://www.marxist.com/trade-wars-are-good-trump-threatens-fragile-world-economy.htm>

339 Joe Attard (IMT): US-China trade dispute: Trump’s recklessness deepens instability, 17 May 2018 <https://www.marxist.com/us-china-trade-dispute-trump-s-recklessness-deepens-instability.htm>

## SWP: Theoretical Indifference

When we come to the *Socialist Workers Party* (SWP), the main force of the so-called *International Socialist Tendency* (IST), we see a similar picture. The main difference to the other centrist organizations mentioned in this chapter is that the SWP/IST is more open, more bold, in its explicit rejection of the Marxist theory of imperialism as it was developed and defended by Lenin and Trotsky.<sup>340</sup> However, the result is very similar. While the SWP/IST has published in its theoretical journals a number of articles on China in the recent period (including a whole special issue of its journal *Socialist Review* dedicated to China), not a single one of those characterizes China as imperialist.<sup>341</sup> The same is true for the SWP's articles on the looming Global Trade War.<sup>342</sup> Likewise, a longer theoretical article on China published some years ago fails to characterize the Great Power as "imperialist".<sup>343</sup>

There is a single exception as in one article, the SWP manages to speak out: „But for the moment at least the growing inter-imperialist rivalry between the two „giant ships“, the US and China, is being pursued by economic means.“<sup>344</sup> However, while a grain of salt can improve the soup, a spoon of soup does not transform a pot of salt into a delicacy.

In summary, we see in the case of the SWP the same fundamental problem as with the other centrist organizations. They completely fail to recognize the basic changes in world politics which, however, is the prerequisite for Marxists to find the correct orientation.

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340 We have dealt with the SWP's specific form of revisionism in the field of imperialism theory in chapter 9 of our book *The Great Robbery of the South*, pp. 216-236.

341 Adrian Budd: Rulers make ready for discontent, *Socialist Review*, Issue: October 2018 <http://socialistreview.org.uk/439/rulers-make-ready-discontent>; Simon Gilbert: Focus on China: Workers and the national question, *Socialist Review*, Issue: September 2018 <http://socialistreview.org.uk/438/focus-china-workers-and-national-question>; Simon Gilbert: China: A labour movement in the making, *Socialist Review*, Issue: April 2018, <http://socialistreview.org.uk/434/china-labour-movement-making>; Adrian Budd: China: New strains on state capitalism, *Socialist Review*, Issue: May 2018, <http://socialistreview.org.uk/435/china-new-strains-state-capitalism>; Lawrence Wong: China and nationalism, *Letters*, *Socialist Review*, Issue: October 2018 <http://socialistreview.org.uk/439/china-and-nationalism>; Sally Kincaid: Women and China: what has changed? *Socialist Review*, Issue: June 2018, <http://socialistreview.org.uk/436/women-and-china-what-has-changed>

342 Charlie Kimber: Trump ramps up trade wars to boost his flagging support, 18 Sep 2018, *Socialist Worker* Issue No. 2622, <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/47220/Trump+ramps+up+trade+wars+to+boost+his+flagging+support>; Alex Callinicos (SWP): The global trade war hasn't been resolved, 31 Jul 2018, *Socialist Worker*, Issue No. 2615, <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/46986/Th+e+global+trade+war+hasnt+been+resolved>; Alex Callinicos: Darkening prospects, *International Socialist Journal*, Issue: 159 (2018), <http://isj.org.uk/darkening-prospects/>; Alex Callinicos (SWP): Trump's trade war means chaos for the ruling class, 6 Mar 2018, *Socialist Worker*, Issue No. 2594 <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/46224/Trumps+trade+war+means+chaos+for+the+ruling+class>

343 Jane Hardy and Adrian Budd: China's capitalism and the crisis, *International Socialist Journal*, Issue: 133, 9th January 2012, <http://isj.org.uk/chinas-capitalism-and-the-crisis/>

344 Alex Callinicos (SWP): Trump gets serious, *International Socialist Journal*, Issue: 158 (2018), <http://isj.org.uk/trump-gets-serious/>

As we will see below such confusion on the Marxist theory of imperialism is not accidental. Neither is it exclusively the result of its theoretical ignorance. Such theoretical confusion also conveniently serves to justify an arch-opportunist practice in failing to side with oppressed people attacked by imperialist powers or their local proxies.

We conclude this chapter by drawing attention to the important relationship of a correct analysis of the inter-imperialist rivalry and the resulting tactical platform. We have summarized this relationship in our 6 POINTS document:

*"It is only possible to understand the driving dynamic of the present period of capitalist crisis and to take a correct position if one recognizes the imperialist character not only of the US, EU and Japan but also of the new emerging powers, Russia and China. Only on such a basis is it possible to arrive at the only correct, anti-imperialist program on this issue – proletarian internationalism and revolutionary defeatism, i.e., the perspective of consistent struggle of the working class independent of and against all imperialist powers. This means that revolutionaries refuse to lend support to any Great Power in inter-imperialist conflicts under the slogan 'The main enemy is at home!' (...) Those who fail to recognize the reactionary and imperialist character of these Great Powers will inevitable fail to take a consistent anti-imperialist, i.e. Marxist, line and will end up, consciously or unconsciously, supporting one or the other imperialist camp as a 'lesser evil'".*<sup>345</sup>

Unfortunately, the leaderships of the centrist organizations with which we have dealt in the last chapters are far away from such a Marxist line!

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345 RCIT: Six Points for a Platform of Revolutionary Unity Today, February 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/6-points-for-a-platform-of-revolutionary-unity-today/>



*Part 3:*

*The Program of  
Revolutionary Defeatism  
against All Great Powers*



## XII. Is World War III Inevitable? (Critical Notes on Michael Roberts)

The RCIT has repeatedly pointed out that the acceleration of the rivalry between the Great Powers since the beginning of the new period in 2008 will unavoidable result in a new World War. The only chance to avoid such an apocalyptic scenario is, as we state in the *“Theses on Revolutionary Defeatism in Imperialist States”*, the revolutionary class struggle of the working class against the imperialist warmongers resulting in their overthrow.

Many socialists reject such a perspective. Let us deal with some arguments which have been put forward by Michael Roberts. Roberts is a Marxist economist who regularly produces well-conceived analyses of the capitalist world economy. In a recently published essay he elaborates his thoughts about the possible end of the present long depression and the transition to a new phase of long boom. We will first quote the relevant paragraphs of his article and then critically discuss its contents. In a chapter titled *“A new phase of imperialism ahead?”* Roberts writes:

*“The world economy is in a Long Depression. However, world capitalism will not stay in this depressed state. Eventually, probably after another slump that will destroy sufficient value (the value of means of production, fictitious capital and employment), profitability for those capitals that survive will rise again to start a new upwave in investment and growth. This assumes, of course, that the class struggle does not lead to the forces of labor triumphing over capital in any major imperialist economy.*

*A new wave of globalization is thus possible. There are yet more human beings in the world to be exploited and there are always new technological innovations that can provide a new cycle for expansion of value and surplus value. There are still huge reserves of labor as yet untapped, particularly in Africa. The latest UN projections for the world’s economies show that Africa is expected to dominate population growth over the next ninety years as populations in many of the world’s developed economies and China shrink. Africa’s population is expected to more than quadruple over just 90 years, while Asia will continue to grow but peak about 50 years from now and then start declining.*

*Can capitalism get a further kick forward from exploiting these hundreds of millions coming into the labor forces of Asia, South America, and the Middle East? While the industrial workforce in the mature capitalist economies has shrunk to under 150 million; in the so-called emerging economies the industrial workforce now stands at 500 million, having surpassed the industrial workforce in the imperialist countries by the early 1980s. In addition, there is a large reserve army of labor composed of unemployed, underemployed, or inactive adults of another 2.3 billion people that could also be exploited for new value.”*<sup>346</sup>

Lenin liked to say about Maxim Gorki – a famous Russian writer and socialist supporter of the working class struggle who, however, made bad blunders in politics – that one should not judge too harsh about him. He is a great artist, Lenin said, and one should not expect such people to find their way in the labyrinth of class struggle. Michael Roberts provokes a similar judgment about great economists. His writings on the world economy are often excellent and we have referred to them repeatedly in our economic analyses. But in the field of politics, this former supporter of Ted Grant’s centrist CWI/IMT tradition, has not overcome the shortcomings of this political teachers.

For example, he still considers China to be a non-capitalist “deformed workers state”.<sup>347</sup> Unfortunately, his theory about a new long boom is not much better. His main arguments for predicting the possibility of a new long boom are basically i) that eventually another slump will destroy sufficient capitalist value in order to create the preconditions for profitable investments and ii) that there are still large sectors of labor forces in Africa and other parts of the semi-colonial world which could be integrated into the capitalist process of exploitation.

Of course, it is true that major slumps can destroy huge amounts of capitalist value and this, in turn, is a precondition for a period of capitalist upswing. And it is also true the growing young population in Africa and Asia could be integrated into the capitalist market.

## Population Growth and Long Upswings

However, there are a number of flaws in this thesis. Let us deal first with the argument of the young population in Africa. As a matter of fact the growth rates of the world population were higher in the past decades than they are currently and they are predicted to be even lower in the decades ahead. (See Table 26 and Figure 31)

In Figure 32 we can see that the working-age population grew in all parts in the world from 1970 to 2015 but is predicted to decline in all parts of the world (except Africa) in the decades ahead.

So in summary, the “*huge reserves of labor*” have grown much larger in the past than they are predicted to grow in the future. And despite a higher growth rate of the working population (than predicted for the future), the growth rates of the capitalist world economy were declining in the past decades as we have demonstrated in chapter 1. In short, it is devoid of logic to assume that the lower population growth rates in the future could be the basis for a long upswing of capitalism.

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Magazine, Issue 1, <https://rupturemagazine.org/2018/01/25/imperialism-globalization-and-the-profitability-of-capital/>

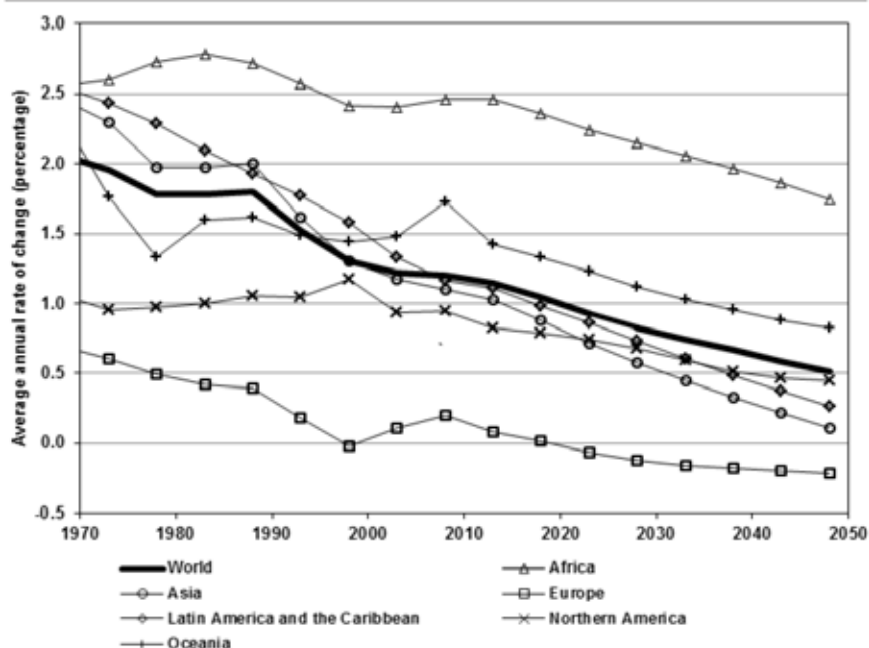
<sup>347</sup> We have dealt with this myth here: Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South, chapter 10, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>; Michael Pröbsting: World Perspectives 2018, p. 59 (Footnote 99), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/>.



**Table 26. Total Population of the World by Decade, 1950–2050 (historical and projected)** <sup>348</sup>

Year	Total world population (mid-year figures)	Ten-year growth rate (%)
1950	2,556,000,053	18.9%
1960	3,039,451,023	22.0%
1970	3,706,618,163	20.2%
1980	4,453,831,714	18.5%
1990	5,278,639,789	15.2%
2000	6,082,966,429	12.6%
2010*	6,848,932,929	10.7%
2020*	7,584,821,144	8.7%
2030*	8,246,619,341	7.3%
2040*	8,850,045,889	5.6%
2050*	9,346,399,468	—

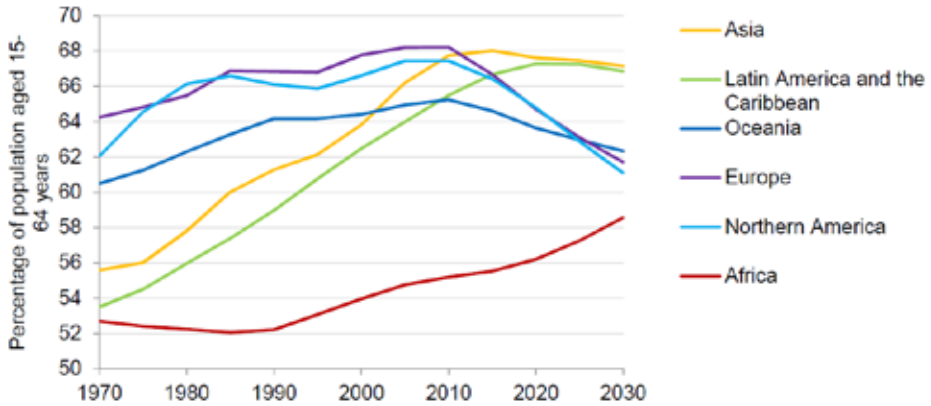
\* Projected

**Figure 31. Average annual rate of population change, for the world and major areas, 1970-2050** <sup>349</sup>

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<https://www.infoplease.com/world/population-statistics/total-population-world-decade-1950-2050>

349 The World Population Situation in 2014. A Concise Report, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 2014, p. 4

**Figure 32. Percentage of the Population aged 15-64, by Region, 1970-2030**<sup>350</sup>

Data source: United Nations (2015). *World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision*.

Let us add, that the declining dynamic of capitalism was not even reversed after the collapse of Stalinism in 1989-91, when the disappearance of the degenerated workers states in Russia, China and other parts of the world added hundreds of millions of additional labor force to the capitalist world market. We note in passing that various revisionists at that time assumed that this event would open a period of long boom – something against which we always strongly argued against.<sup>351</sup>

## What are the Conditions for Long Upswings?

The second argument of Michael Roberts is also flawed. True, a slump destroys capitalist value. But the history of capitalism in the epoch of imperialism has demonstrated that a slump in itself, or the destruction of capitalist value in general, is not sufficient to create the conditions for a long period of capitalist upswing. Let us recapitulate: economic and military catastrophes led to massive destructions of capitalist value in 1914-18, 1929-33, 1937 and 1939-45 and then we had the severe recessions in 1974/75, 1980-82, 1990-91, 2000-01 and the Great Recession 2008-09. Only in a single case (the World War II) did this open the road for a long period of capitalist upswing. So it is obvious that such

<sup>350</sup> Population 2030. Demographic challenges and opportunities for sustainable development planning, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 2015, p. 24

<sup>351</sup> See e.g. the book by Richard Brenner, Michael Pröbsting, Keith Spencer: *The Credit Crunch - A Marxist Analysis*, London 2008.

slumps are not a sufficient precondition for another capitalist boom.

This leads us to the issue of the causes of a long period of capitalist upswing. Michael Roberts makes the mistake of approaching the issues from an eclectic economic point of view (maybe not untypical for an economist). He imagines understanding the historical development by analyzing this or that factor of the economy. However, it is not for nothing that Marxists speak about the “political economy”. Capitalism does not exist exclusively as a *mode of production* but is also a *socio-economic formation*. The economy can not exist without a state to regulate the class contradictions and the world economy can not exist without nation states.

Capitalism in the epoch of imperialism is characterized by historic tendency to decline, as Marxists have explained repeatedly.<sup>352</sup> In contrast, supporters of the mechanistic theory of long waves believe that there is a kind of trans-historical law that a period of capitalist upswing must be followed by a period of capitalist depression to be followed by a period of capitalist upswing and so. It seems that Michael Roberts also adheres to this wrong conception.<sup>353</sup>

As we have explained somewhere else, Marxists recognize the period of the “Long Boom” in the 1950s and 1960s. But one has to see that this period was an *exception* in the imperialist epoch, a result of extraordinary historic circumstances. First, the world war caused massive capital destructions. Second, fascism resulted in historic defeats for the working class. Add to this the devastating role of the Stalinist bureaucracy which betrayed revolutionary working class struggles in 1945-48 and, by this, helped the stabilization of capitalism. Furthermore Stalinism agreed with the imperialist powers in establishing a reactionary world order – the “Yalta agreement” – which lasted more or less until 1989-91.

Finally, and particularly important, World War II resulted in the emergence of an undisputed hierarchy of the imperialist powers with the US as the absolute hegemon. This was not the case after World War One which did not result in the emergence of a hegemonic imperialist power. Hence the tumultuous 1920s and 1930s resulting in World War II. It was the reordering of the inter-imperialist relations resulting from Germany’s and Japan defeats and the undisputed U.S. dominance which meant that for a whole historic period – effectively until the late 2000s – the rivalry between the imperialist Great Powers played only a secondary role.

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352 Our analysis has been summarized, among others, in: Michael Pröbsting: The Catastrophic Failure of the Theory of “Catastrophism”, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-catastrophic-failure-of-the-theory-of-catastrophism/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South, chapter 3, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>; Michael Pröbsting: Imperialism, Globalization and the Decline of Capitalism, in Richard Brenner, Michael Pröbsting, Keith Spencer: The Credit Crunch - A Marxist Analysis, London 2008, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-and-globalization/>

353 For our critique of the theory of long waves see e.g. Michael Pröbsting: The Catastrophic Failure of the Theory of “Catastrophism”, pp. 22-24; Richard Brenner: Globalization and the Myth of the New Long Wave, in: The Credit Crunch - A Marxist Analysis, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/globalisation-andmyth-new-longwave>

So what, theoretically, could be the preconditions for a new period of long capitalist boom? We elaborated in an essay published some time ago the following arguments:

*“[T]he precondition for this are:*

*\* that the ruling class inflicts historic defeats on the working class and by this lowers the price of the commodity labour to a qualitative lower level,*

*\* that a huge mass of superfluous capital is destroyed (via wars or similar catastrophes) and*

*\* that a new capitalist world order under the undisputed hegemony of an imperialist power is formed (in the 19th century this was Britain, after 1945 it was the USA) (...)*

*Could we experience another long boom in the future, similar to that in the 1950s and 1960s? From a Marxist point of view, it would be wrong to exclude such a possibility. But it would be equally wrong to envisage such a possibility as a simple repetition of the events that led to this upturn. The monopoly capitalism of the 21st century is not the same as that of the 50s and 60s. The productive forces have developed enormously since then, and with them also the destructive forces. A world war today would have immeasurably worse consequences for humanity than World War II (including the wiping out of part of humanity and the destruction of civilization). The fine interconnection of the globalized world economy means that any serious regional upset – whether economic, political or military – would engulf the whole planet. The likelihood of even a temporary lessening of imperialist contradictions and a new long upturn is therefore much less than during the middle of the 20th century. The alternative, “socialism or barbarism”, on the other hand, arises sharper than ever in the 21st century. The more imperialism decays in its senility, the more explosive its contradictions become. The preconditions for a temporary escape from its decline and another boom period would be an unprecedented massive destruction of capital, huge historic defeats for the working class and a war between the Great Powers so that a leading imperialist power could stabilize the world situation as an absolute hegemon. In other words, capitalism would require such barbaric methods that it would put the survival of humanity in question.”<sup>354</sup>*

Of course, it would be wrong to exclude any theoretical possibility of a longer life span of capitalism. It would be wrong to exclude a scenario that a nuclear war between Great Powers results in the annihilation of one side and the relatively unharmed situation of the other camp. Or that one part of the planet is destroyed by an environmental catastrophe or a pandemia and another is not. Theoretically, such devastating events resulting in the widespread annihilation of millions of people as well as industry and infrastructure could theoretically create the conditions of a new capitalist upswing. However, it does not need much explanation that socialists have no reason to speculate or even to build a perspective of struggle on such a scenario which would definitely represent a horrible social regression.

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<sup>354</sup> From an essay of the author written in 2007, quoted in Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South*, pp. 376-377, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>

## An Element of Kautskyanism

Let us finally emphasize that our insistence on the inner dynamics of capitalism resulting inevitable in wars is in accordance both with the lessons of history as well as with the classic teachings of Marxism. It has always been the case in the history of class societies that Great Powers and Empires did not peacefully hand over power to a rival. They always tried to keep their power by any means necessary and their rivals attempted to topple them with the same ferocity. Just think about the rivalry between the Roman Empire and Carthage, between the Chinese Three Kingdoms (Wei, Shu and Wu), between China and Japan, between Britain and France or between the modern Great Powers involved in the two World Wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In fact, it is a classic position of Marxists to recognize that the contradictions between the capitalist monopolies and the imperialist Great Powers can not be mitigated by some economic slumps. No, these antagonisms must inevitable result in world wars. This has been always a basic assumption of Lenin.

*“War is no chance happening, no “sin” as is thought by Christian priests (who are no whit behind the opportunists in preaching patriotism, humanity and peace), but an inevitable stage of capitalism, just as legitimate a form of the capitalist way of life as peace is.”*<sup>355</sup>

*“...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.”*<sup>356</sup>

*„Under capitalism, particularly in its imperialist stage, wars are inevitable.”*<sup>357</sup>

In fact, it would be a petty-bourgeois illusion to imagine that the escalation of the rivalry between the Great Powers does not inevitable result in a new World War if the working class does not overthrow capitalism on this planet and destroys imperialism. Such a pacifist myth has already been raised long time ago by the founding father of centrism, Karl Kautsky. He proclaimed, only a few weeks after the beginning of World War I (!), that it would be possible to transform violent, imperialist capitalism into a peaceful “Ultraimperialism”.

*“What Marx said of capitalism can also be applied to imperialism: monopoly creates competition and competition monopoly. The frantic competition of giant firms, giant banks and multi-millionaires obliged the great financial groups, who were absorbing the small ones, to think up the notion of the cartel. In the same way, the result of the World War between the great imperialist powers may be a federation of the strongest, who renounce their arms race. Hence from the purely economic standpoint it is not impossible that capitalism may still live through another phase, the translation of cartellization into foreign policy: a phase of ultra-imperialism, which of course we must struggle*

355 V. I. Lenin: The Position and Tasks of the Socialist International (1914) ; in: CW Vol. 21, pp. 39-40

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

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

*against as energetically as we do against imperialism, but whose perils lie in another direction, not in that of the arms race and the threat to world peace.”*<sup>358</sup>

Lenin pointed out many times that this was a reactionary dream aimed at pacifying and disarming the working class and confusing its perspective of revolutionary struggle against the capitalist class. In a preface to a book of his collaborator Nikolai Bukharin on imperialism, he commented on Kautsky's idea:

*“With Kautsky, in particular, his clear break with Marxism has not taken the form of a denial or neglect of politics, or of a “leap” over the political conflicts, upheavals and transformations, so numerous and varied in the imperialist epoch; it has not taken the form of an apology of imperialism but of a dream of “peaceful” capitalism. That “peaceful” capitalism has given way to non-peaceful, aggressive, cataclysmic imperialism Kautsky is forced to admit, because that is something he had admitted as far back as 1909 in the paper in which he last produced some integrated conclusions as a Marxist. But if it is impossible to toy in rude, simple fashion with the dream of a straightforward retreat from imperialism to “peaceful” capitalism, why not let these dreams, which are essentially petty-bourgeois, take the form of innocent speculation on “peaceful” “ultra-imperialism”? If the international integration of national (rather nationally isolated) imperialisms is to be called ultra-imperialism, which “could” remove the conflicts, such as wars, political upheavals, etc., which the petty bourgeois finds especially unpalatable, disquieting, and alarming, why not, in that case, make an escape from the present highly conflicting and cataclysmic epoch of imperialism, which is the here and now, by means of innocent dreams of an “ultra-imperialism” which is relatively peaceful, relatively lacking in conflict and relatively uncataclysmic? Why not try to escape the acute problems that have been and are being posed by the epoch of imperialism that has dawned for Europe by dreaming up the possibility of it soon passing away and being followed by a relatively “peaceful” epoch of “ultra-imperialism” that will not require any “abrupt” tactics? Kautsky says precisely that “such a [ultra-imperialist] new phase of capitalism is at any rate imaginable”, but that “there are not yet enough prerequisites to decide whether or not it is feasible” (Die Neue Zeit, 7 April, 1915, p. 144). There is not a whit of Marxism in this urge to ignore the imperialism which is here and to escape into the realm of an “ultra-imperialism” which may or may not arrive. In this formulation, Marxism is recognised in that “new phase of capitalism” which its inventor himself does not warrant can be realised, while in the present stage (which is already here) the petty-bourgeois and profoundly reactionary desire to blunt the contradictions is substituted for Marxism.”*<sup>359</sup>

We would not be mistaken to say that historically speaking we are entering a pre-WWIII period. To avoid any misunderstanding, we do not assume that such a World War III is around the corner. What we currently see with the Global Trade War is a prelude, a beginning, of a longer historic period of prepara-

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358 Karl Kautsky: *Der Imperialismus*, in: *Die Neue Zeit* 32-II, 1914, 21, p. 921, in: English: Karl Kautsky: *Selected Political Writings* (edited and translated by Patrick Goode), The Macmillan Press, Hong Kong 1983, p. 88, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1914/09/ultra-imp.htm>  
 359 V.I.Lenin: Preface to N. Bukharin's Pamphlet, *Imperialism and the World Economy* (1915), in: *LCW* Vol. 22, pp. 105-106

tions of such a devastating war. Yossi Schwartz, a leading comrade of the RCIT, pointed out in an article that the ruling class must deal severe historic defeats to the working class before it can mobilize it for such a World War.

*“Without such a series of demoralizing defeats, WWII would never have existed. Today, the international working class has not yet been defeated. The outcome of the growing crises of the world economy will lead either to socialist revolutions or defeats that will open the road to a third world war.”*<sup>360</sup>

The conclusion of this is not to be petrified about such dangers but rather to organize the working class vanguard on a sober perspective and a revolutionary program for struggle against the imperialist warmongers.

*“Finally, if the imperialist Great Powers are not smashed by revolutionary international working class, their rivalry will lead to World War III. The working class can only end this continuous chain of misery, wars and catastrophes via a world socialist revolution. Rosa Luxemburg’s statement that humanity is faced with the alternative “Socialism or Barbarism” is more relevant than ever. Under the conditions of the early 21st century, the concretization of Luxemburg’s statement means: “Socialism or Widespread Death through Climate Destruction and World War III!”*<sup>361</sup>

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360 Yossi Schwartz: Capitalist Trade and the Looming 3rd World War, 15 July 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/capitalist-trade-and-looming-3rd-world-war/>

361 RCIT: World Perspectives 2016: Advancing Counterrevolution and Acceleration of Class Contradictions Mark the Opening of a New Political Phase. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries (January 2016), Chapter II, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2016/>; see also RCIT: Six Points for a Platform of Revolutionary Unity Today, February 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/6-points-for-a-platform-of-revolutionary-unity-today/>

### XIII. The Proletariat as an International Class

The program of *Revolutionary Defeatism* means that the working class in imperialist countries must never defend its "fatherland". This reflects the sharp opposition of the working class against the imperialist state. It represents the fact that there are no common interests whatsoever between the proletariat and the oppressed on one hand and their imperialist masters on the other.

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. This has been already most famously formulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their *Communist Manifesto* in 1847:

*"The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word."*<sup>362</sup>

This statement has caused many protests as well as confusion. The right-wing chauvinists have utilized these words in order to slander socialists as "*men without fatherland*" ("*vaterlandslose Gesellen*" as they used to say in Germany). The opportunist social democrats and Stalinists have internalized this reactionary prejudice and work hard to prove to the bourgeois "public opinion" that they are different to the Marxists, i.e. that they have become loyal defenders of their imperialist fatherland.

Other critiques, often progressive people with better intentions than the chauvinists and social democrats but not necessarily with more brain, interpret the words of the founders of scientific socialism in another distorted way. They deduce from the *Communist Manifesto* that socialists have not interest in the *national question* and, consequently, refuse to defend peoples against national oppression.

It needs only a small amount of historical knowledge to understand that nothing could be more at odds with the truth than such a misinterpretation. It should be sufficient to point out that, at the same time when Marx and Engels were writing the *Manifesto* and spreading it to the European continent, they rallied in words and deeds for the support of the national liberation struggle of the Polish people. In fact, the cause of Poland's independence was one of the most important factors which led to the foundation of the First International in 1864 as David Riazanov, the famous founder of the Marx-Engels Institute in

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<sup>362</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Manifesto of the Communist Party (1847), in: MECW Vol. 6, pp. 502-503



the Soviet Union (until his persecution by the Stalinists in 1931), pointed out.<sup>363</sup>

Likewise Marx and Engels supported the national unification of Germany, called for a revolutionary war of Germany against Tsarist Russia and sided with the Italian people against Habsburg Empire. Later they continued their unconditional support for the national liberation struggles of oppressed people like e.g. the Irish people or the Indians fighting against the British occupation.<sup>364</sup>

At the first sight this seems to be a contradiction ... but only if one approaches this issue from a formalistic and mechanistic point of view. Let us explain the Marxist method on internationalism and the national question in more detail.

When Marx and Engels stated that "*the working men have no country*", they meant that the working class has no "natural" loyalty to the specific country of their origin. The workers of this or that foreign country are to them as close as the comrades from their own country.

The relation of a class conscious worker to the imperialist state is similar to the relation to the corporation in which she or he is employed. The worker will have the same solidarity to the worker of another corporation (regardless whether the two corporations are rivals on the market or not) than to the worker of his or her corporation. The whole idea of workers solidarity and trade unions is built on this fundamental insight in the *class nature* of workers.

The same holds true for workers solidarity when it comes to border, passport and skin color. The class conscious worker feels the same attachment to the worker living in another country, coming from another country or having a different skin color like the worker living in his or her own country, being born in the same country or having the same skin color.

What constitutes our identity is not the passport or the skin color but our existence as a class which faces basically the same conditions of exploitation and oppression by the capitalists and their state machinery. The identity across the classes based on passport or skin color is a result of manipulation by the ruling class, their media, and their political preachers. Only the identity of class irrespective of passport or skin color is the true identity of the proletariat and the oppressed.

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363 See David Riazanov: Die Entstehung der Internationalen Arbeiter-Assoziation (Zur Geschichte der Ersten Internationale), in: Marx-Engels-Archiv. Zeitschrift des Marx-Engels Instituts in Moskau, Vol. 1, pp.165-173, Marx-Engels-Archiv Verlagsgesellschaft, Frankfurt am Main 1925 (Politladen-Reprint, Erlangen 1971)

364 For Marx and Engels approach on the national question see e.g. Roman Rosdolsky: Engels and the „Nonhistoric“ Peoples: The National Question in the Revolution of 1848, Critique Books, Glasgow 1986; Michel Löwy: Marxists and the National Question, in: New Left Review 96, March-April 1976, pp. 81-100; Neil A. Martin: Marxism, Nationalism, and Russia, in: Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 29, No. 2 (April-June 1968), pp. 231-252

## Internationalism and National Liberation

So why did Marx and Engels support various national struggles and why do we so today? It is because we fight for the eradication of all forms of exploitation and oppression. National oppression is a form of oppression which serves the ruling class of this or that country. This is why revolutionaries must support the struggle to smash such national oppression.

But class conscious workers approach such opposition against national oppression from an *internationalist* point of view. This means that they support the struggle for national equality of *all* oppressed people – irrespective if these oppressed people live in the same country or another, if they live on the same continent or another or if they have the same skin color or another. We fight against national oppression because we know that only the absence of any oppression can open the road to freedom and wealth for humanity and not because we share the same passport or skin color with the oppressed people concerned.

This is what Marx and Engels meant in the *Communist Manifesto* and this is what we mean when we say that the working class is essentially an international class.

From this fundamental proletarian internationalist understanding logically follows the tactics of *Revolutionary Defeatism*. The class conscious worker in the corporation A can not actively support his or her boss to prevail over the rivaling corporation B in the economic competition. The class conscious worker of the corporation A will seek contact to their colleagues employed in the corporation B so that they can stop being played against each other and fight together against both bosses.

Likewise will the class conscious worker fight against any chauvinist position of his or her colleagues who oppose that a migrant worker could join the workforce. And so will progressive male workers reject any opposition against employing a woman worker or elder workers will reject any opposition against employing a young worker. Such opposition against any form of reactionary chauvinism and backward guildism has always been a basic principle of the workers movement since the day of the First International in the times of Marx and Engels and so it is today.

It has also been an axiom for the revolutionary workers movement that the capitalist state is a thoroughly alien body which the proletariat does not defend but which it has to be destroyed and replaced with a new commune-type of state based on workers and poor peasant councils and militias. Or, to put it in the words of Lenin:

*„Imperialism—the era of bank capital, the era of gigantic capitalist monopolies, of the development of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism—has clearly shown an extraordinary strengthening of the “state machine” and an unprecedented growth in its bureaucratic and military apparatus in connection with the intensification of repressive measures against the proletariat both in the monarchical and in the*

*freest, republican countries..“* <sup>365</sup>

This is why the Marxists have always rejected the daydreams of reformists and centrists that the state can be reformed and capitalism be transformed without violence: „*The supersession of the bourgeois state by the proletarian state is impossible without a violent revolution.*“ <sup>366</sup>

The same idea has been articulated by Nikolai Bukharin, a leading theoretician of the Bolshevik Party:

*„The general pattern of the state’s development is therefore as follows: in the beginning the state is the sole organization of the ruling class. Then other organizations begin to spring up, their numbers multiplying especially in the epoch of finance capitalism. The state is transformed from the sole organization of the ruling class into one*

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365 V. I. Lenin: *The State and Revolution. The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution*; in: CW Vol. 25, p.326

366 V. I. Lenin: *The State and Revolution. The Marxist Teaching on the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution* (1917), in: LCW Vol. 25, p. 405. See also: „*The proletarian revolution is impossible without the forcible destruction of the bourgeois state machine and the substitution for it of a new one which, in the words of Engels, is “no longer a state in the proper sense of the word.”*“ (V. I. Lenin: *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, in: LCW Vol. 25, p. 237). Lenin’s position, which has become the fundament for the Marxist theory of revolution (despite the rejection by the revisionists of past and present who believe in the possibility of peaceful transformation to socialism like Kautsky in the last century and Peter Taffee’s CWI or Alan Woods IMT today), is based on the analysis of Marx and Engels. See e.g.:

*„The centralized State power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, and judicature organs wrought after the plan of a systematic and hierarchic division of labour- originates from the days of absolute monarchy, serving nascent middle-class society as a mighty weapon in its struggles against feudalism. (...) ; but its political character changed simultaneously with the economic changes of society. At the same pace at which the progress of modern industry developed, widened, intensified the class antagonism between capital and labour, the state power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour, of a public force organized for social enslavement: of an engine of class despotism.“* (Karl Marx: *The Civil War in France*, in: MECW Vol. 22, pp. 328-329)

*“This executive power with its enormous bureaucratic and military organisation, with its extensive and artificial state machinery, with a host of officials numbering half a million, besides an army of another half million, this appalling parasitic body, which enmeshes the body of French society like a net and chokes all its pores, sprang up in the days of the absolute monarchy, with the decay of the feudal system, which it helped to hasten. The seigniorial privileges of the landowners and towns became transformed into so many attributes of the state power, the feudal dignitaries into paid officials and the motley pattern of conflicting medieval plenary powers into the regulated plan of a state authority whose work is divided and centralised as in a factory. The first French Revolution, with its task of breaking all separate local, territorial, urban and provincial powers in order to create the civil unity of the nation, was bound to develop what the absolute monarchy had begun: the centralisation, but at the same time the extent, the attributes and the agents of governmental power. Napoleon perfected this state machinery. The Legitimist monarchy and the July monarchy added nothing but a greater division of labour, growing in the same measure as the division of labour within bourgeois society created new groups of interests, and, therefore, new material for state administration. Every common interest was straightway severed from society, counterposed to it as a higher, general interest, snatched from the activity of society’s members themselves and made an object of government activity, whether it was a bridge, a schoolhouse and the communal property of a village community, or the railways, the national wealth and the national university of France. Finally, in its struggle against the revolution, the parliamentary republic found itself compelled to strengthen, along with the repressive measures, the resources and centralisation of governmental power. All revolutions perfected this machine instead of breaking it. The parties that contended in turn for domination regarded the possession of this huge state edifice as the principal spoils of the victor.”* (Karl Marx: *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), in: MECW Vol. 11, pp. 185-186)

of its organizations, its distinction being that it has the most general character of all such organizations. Finally, the third stage arrives, in which the state swallows up these organizations and once more becomes the sole universal organization of the ruling class, with an internal, technical division of labor. The once-independent organizational groupings become the divisions of a gigantic state mechanism, which pounces upon the visible and internal enemy with crushing force. Thus emerges the finished type of the contemporary imperialist robber state, the iron organization, which with its tenacious, raking claws embraces the living body of society. This is the *New Leviathan*, beside which the fantasy of Thomas Hobbes looks like a child's toy." <sup>367</sup>

In summary, as we stated in the *Theses on Revolutionary Defeatism*, 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. As the workers want to weaken, defeat and finally expropriate the owners of "their" corporation, so do the workers of a given imperialist country desire to weaken, defeat and finally overthrow the ruling class. 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.

The working class will wholeheartedly defend its fatherland or its enterprises *only after* it has overthrown and expropriated the imperialist bourgeoisie and created a socialist state and economy. Only under such conditions is any patriotism towards their country justified and progressive.

The same holds true for the working class of semi-colonial countries which is under attack by imperialist powers or oppressed people fighting against foreign occupation or a reactionary dictatorship. In such cases, the defense of the fatherland is also legitimate.

## On Aristocracy and the Labor Aristocracy

We will finish this chapter by briefly discussing an argument which is raised by some sectors of socialists against our theory. There is the criticism that the international unity of the working class between the imperialist and the semi-colonial countries is not possible since the monopoly capitalists bribe the whole working class in the imperialist countries.

It is the classic Marxist position, which the RCIT has defended and elaborated in various documents, that the upper stratum of the proletariat in the imperialist countries is indeed bribed by the bourgeoisie. <sup>368</sup> However, we think it would be a wrong and superficial exaggeration to imagine that the *mass of the workers*

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367 Nikolai Bukharin: *Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State* (1915), in: Robert V. Daniel: *A Documentary History of Communism*, Vol. 1, Vintage Russian Library, Vintage Books, New York 1960, p. 85, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1915/state.htm>

368 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *Marxism and the United Front Tactic Today. The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony in the Liberation Movement in Semi-Colonial and Imperialist Countries in the present Period*, RCIT Books, Vienna 2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/book-united-front/>, Chapter III

in the imperialist countries have been bribed. True, *to a certain degree* the mass of the workers in the imperialist countries gain from the super-exploitation of the semi-colonial world – for example from the import of cheap consumer commodities like clothes, television or mobile telephones. This was not the first time in capitalism's history. For example, as a result of its world hegemonic role as a colonial power British capitalism enjoyed price deflation in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Theodore Rothstein – a Russian-Jewish publicist living in Britain who was a supporter of the Bolsheviks and a leader of the left wing of the British Socialist Party – elaborated in his book on the history of the workers movement in Britain the important role of price deflation in strengthening reformism and the politics of class collaborationism in the working class and hence the labor bureaucracy.<sup>369</sup>

But this must be qualified against the disadvantages of capitalist globalization for the mass of the workers in the imperialist countries. The outsourcing of production, the depression of wages because of the international trade and migration etc. – all this is to the disadvantage of the lower and middle strata of the proletariat in the imperialist countries.

As we have shown above the mass of the working class – the low- and middle-skilled labor – in North America, Western Europe and Japan have massively lost income in the past decade and only the upper stratum, often part of the privileged labor aristocracy, has been able to increase their share of income. But it is this low- and middle-skilled labor which constitutes the majority of the proletariat – even in the old imperialist countries.

In Table 27 we see that 60.7% of the labor force in the old imperialist countries belongs to the low- and middle-skilled sectors. (The share of the low and middle strata of the global labor force is even bigger with 82%.) If we bear in mind that not all labor force are part of the working class (just take into account the salaried intermediate layer among which a disproportional high share is high-skilled), we can see that a decisive majority of the working class in the old imperialist countries does not belong to the upper stratum of which a significant sector is part of the bribed labor aristocracy.

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369 See Theodore Rothstein: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung in England*, Vienna 1929, Chapter "Die Periode des Trade Unionismus"

**Table 27: Share of Employment by Broad Occupation (Skill),  
World and Regions, 2013**<sup>370</sup>

<i>World region</i>	<i>Low-Skilled</i>	<i>Medium-Skilled</i>	<i>High-Skilled</i>
World total	16.0%	66.0%	18.0%
Developed Economies	9.8%	50.9%	39.3%
Central & South Eastern Europe	14.1%	52.4%	33.5%
East Asia	8.2%	79.7%	12.1%
South East Asia and the Pacific	22.0%	65.6%	12.4%
South Asia	27.7%	58.5%	13.8%
Latin America and the Caribbean	19.0%	61.3%	19.8%
Middle East and North Africa	12.0%	65.7%	22.4%
Sub Saharan Africa	16.2%	79.2%	4.6%

In our opinion one can say that while the labor aristocracy has some short-term (but not fundamental, historic) interests in keeping capitalism, this is not the case for the mass of the workers in the old imperialist countries. They have no interest whatsoever in defending the capitalist system. Their interest is to join the big majority of the world proletariat which is living in the semi-colonial and emerging imperialist countries and to fight together for the permanent revolution to build world –wide socialism.

Given the fact the huge majority of the international proletariat lives outside the old imperialist countries and given the fact that it is less infected by the imperialists' pacifying mechanism (the weight of the class-collaborationist ideologies of reformism, the hope to be part of the "rich islands" in a tumultuous world, the sophisticated techniques of an manipulating and integrating media world, etc.), it is clear that the focus of the international class struggle and of the world working class is outside of the old capitalist countries. In other words, the focus has moved to the South as well as new capitalist countries with a powerful proletariat like China.

From this follows also the specific and important role of migrants as they are coming from the South and live now on North America, Western Europe or Russia. They can play the role of transmission belts between the two parts of the world: they can bring the militant fighting spirit from their home countries to the North and transmit various skills and experiences from the North to the South.

<sup>370</sup> International Labour Office: World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2015, pp. 72-89, Supporting Data

## XIV. The Internationalist Character of the Struggle against Imperialist War and the Social-Patriotic Nature of the Stalinist Theory of “Socialism in One Country”

It is also necessary to point out additional factors which make it obligatory to view the proletariat as an international class and, hence, the class struggle as international by its nature. Marxists have always insisted that capitalism in general and monopoly capitalism (i.e. capitalism in the epoch of imperialism) in particular can only be grasped if it is understood as a political and economic *world* system. The political and economic relations in each country can never, from a Marxist point of view, be derived simply from internal factors. Imperialism does not constitute a set of national states and economies which are strung together. It is rather the case that the world economy and world politics are the decisive driving forces. They act as a melting pot for national factors, forming an independent totality raised above and imposed upon the national states. The combined and uneven development of world capitalism concurs with the given local peculiarities of a country and fuses with the specific national dynamic of the political and economic relations of that state.<sup>371</sup>

Marx already pointed this out in the *Grundrisse*, his “groundwork” for *Capital*: „In the world market the connection of the individual with all others, but at the same time also the independence of this connection from the individuals, has itself developed to such a point that its formation already contains the conditions for its being transcended.”<sup>372</sup>

Later, Trotsky systematically elaborated these fundamental ideas and developed his theory of permanent revolution. He emphasized that one must not start with the national economy but with the world as an entirety. Trotsky correctly stressed the importance of the world market. The same is true on the terrain of politics.

“Marxism takes its point of departure from world economy, not as a sum of national parts but as a mighty and independent reality which has been created by the international division of labour and the world market, and which in our epoch imperiously dominates the national markets.”<sup>373</sup>

If we look at the developments in the world economy in the recent decades

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371 We have dealt with this issue in more detail in an essay by Michael Pröbsting: Capitalism Today and the Law of Uneven Development: The Marxist Tradition and its Application in the Present Historic Period, in: Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory, Vol. 44, Issue 4, 2016, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03017605.2016.1236483>

372 Karl Marx: Grundrisse [Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft of 1857-58)]; in: MECW 28, p. 98

373 Leon Trotsky: The Permanent Revolution (1929), Pathfinder Press, New York 1969, p. 146

we can see a complete vindication of the Marxist prognosis of the increasingly dominant role of the world market. Globalization has led to the massive growth – in relation to global production – of the export and import of world commodities. Similarly, capital export has increased substantially in relation to the total global accumulation of capital.

As we have pointed out somewhere else, “*monopolies are driven to greater internationalisation by falling profit rates in their home markets, and such a high mass of capital accumulation that national markets alone are too small for them. This is because the huge investments in the ever bigger production facilities required by competition themselves require an ever bigger market in which to realise profits. This also drives them to the outsourcing of parts of production to the export markets and the cheapest labour on the planet. Modern technology and cheap transport costs help in this process. The forcing open of markets across the world goes hand in hand with this. The result of this development is that, in the last 25 years, the export of capital has become massively more important both in the imperialist states and in the semi-colonial world.*”<sup>374</sup>

Let us demonstrate this with two figures. As we show in Figure 33, capital export (expressed in Foreign Direct Investment) and the global integration of the world market have, via this phenomenon, risen to a level never before seen in the history of capitalism.

Likewise we demonstrate in Figure 34 the extent to which global trade has increased – when viewed relative to world output – throughout the entire history of capitalism from 1820 until today.

From such a *world* view of capitalism follows that Marxists base themselves on a *world* view of the proletariat and, hence, a *world* view of the class struggle. This has profound consequences for the politics of the working class in general and in its anti-war and anti-imperialist tactics in particular.

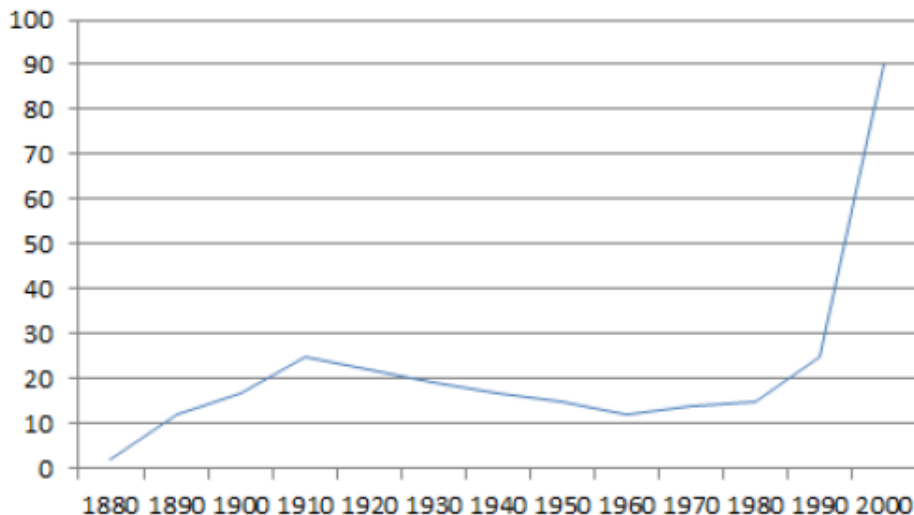
Such a view is in complete contradiction to the reformist theory of “*socialism in one country*” which was developed by the Stalinists and which they counterposed to the internationalist strategy developed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks and later defended by Trotsky’s Fourth International. This Stalinist theory declared that socialism, i.e. a prosperous society with a higher living standard for the population than capitalism can provide, could be built in a single country without the victory of the working class in other countries. From this followed that the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, and hence the politics of the Communist International, had to serve no longer the goal to internationalize the revolution, but rather to help building “socialism” in Stalin’s USSR.

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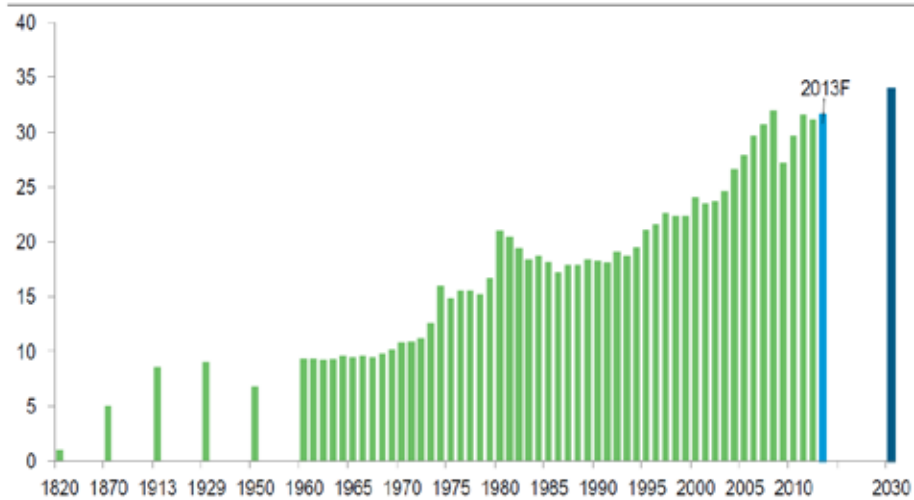
374 See Michael Pröbsting: *Imperialism and the Decline of Capitalism* (2008), in: Richard Brenner, Michael Pröbsting, Keith Spencer: *The Credit Crunch - A Marxist Analysis* (2008), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-and-globalization/>



**Figure 33. Global FDI flows to GDP (in %), 1880-2000** <sup>375</sup>



**Figure 34. World Exports as a Share of World GDP, 1820–2013** <sup>376</sup>



Source: Angus Maddison, IMF WEO, Standard Chartered Research

<sup>375</sup> Michael Roberts: A world rate of profit. Globalisation and the world economy (2012), p. 2, [http://thenextrecession.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/roberts\\_michael-a\\_world\\_rate\\_of\\_profit.pdf](http://thenextrecession.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/roberts_michael-a_world_rate_of_profit.pdf)

<sup>376</sup> The super-cycle lives: EM growth is key, Standard Chartered Bank, Special Report, 06 November 2013, p. 13

Trotsky summarized the contrast between the two theories in his book on the permanent revolution in the following words:

*"It is precisely here that we come up against the two mutually exclusive standpoints: the international revolutionary theory of the permanent revolution and the national-reformist theory of socialism in one country. Not only backward China, but in general no country in the world can build socialism within its own national limits: the 'highly-developed productive forces which have grown beyond national boundaries resist this, just as do those forces which are insufficiently developed for nationalization. The dictatorship of the proletariat in Britain, for example, will encounter difficulties and contradictions, different in character, it is true, but perhaps not slighter than those that will confront the dictatorship of the proletariat in China. Surmounting these contradictions is possible in both cases only by way of the international revolution. This standpoint leaves no room for the question of the 'maturity' or 'immaturity' of China for the socialist transformation. What remains indisputable here is that the backwardness of China makes the tasks of the proletarian dictatorship extremely difficult. But we repeat: History is not made to order, and the Chinese proletariat has no choice."*<sup>377</sup>

What does this mean for the revolutionary struggle against imperialist aggression and war?

The Stalinists, believing in the possibility of nationally isolated enduring victories of the working class, conclude that it is possible to build socialism in a single country if only the working class succeeds in stopping the imperialist bourgeoisie from interfering and attacking the socialist country. They ignored the fundamental truth, stated by Lenin and many other Marxists, that war is inevitable in capitalism and that the imperialists will never and can never peacefully co-exist with a workers state. Hence, the imperialists provoked World War II, the Korea War, the Vietnam War and the Cold War between the West and the USSR until the collapse of the latter in 1989-91.

As a tactical consequence of their mistaken theory, the Stalinists proclaimed the possibility of the *"neutralization of the world bourgeoisie"*, i.e. to put pressure on it so that it would desist on attacking the workers state. This theory was theoretical nonsensical and historically falsified.

*„A condition in which the proletariat is as yet unable to seize power, but can prevent the bourgeoisie from utilizing its power for a war, is a condition of unstable class equilibrium in its highest expression. An equilibrium is called unstable precisely when it cannot last long. It must tip toward one side or the other. Either the proletariat comes to power or else the bourgeoisie, by a series of crushing blows, weakens the revolutionary pressure sufficiently to regain freedom of action, above all in the question of war and peace. Only a reformist can picture the pressure of the proletariat upon the bourgeois state as a permanently increasing factor and as a guarantee against intervention. It is precisely out of this conception that arose the theory of the construction of socialism in one country, given the neutralization of the world bourgeoisie (Stalin). Just as the owl takes flight at twilight, so also did the Stalinist theory of the neutralization of the*

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377 Leon Trotsky: *The Permanent Revolution* (1929), Pathfinder Press, New York 1969, p. 255

*bourgeoisie by the pressure of the proletariat arise only when the conditions which engendered this theory had begun to disappear.*"<sup>378</sup>

Such pacifist nonsense about the possibility to make the bourgeoisie pacifist had to result inevitable in an open capitulation to imperialism. Trotsky already foresaw in 1928 that the Stalinist nationalist deviation had to result in a social-patriotic collapse and the collaboration of the bureaucracy with one camp of imperialism (against the other).

*"It is possible to lead the proletariat to the position of defeatism in relation to the bourgeois state only by means of an international orientation in the program on this central question and by means of a ruthless rejection of the social-patriotic contraband which is masked as yet but which seeks to build a theoretical nest for itself in the program of Lenin's International."*<sup>379</sup>

One could belittle the relevance of these thoughts for today as no workers states exist anymore. But, first, a significant sector of Stalinists and semi-Stalinists still view China as a "socialist state" or a "deformed workers state", as we have demonstrated above. Other revisionists don't go that far but still view China and Russia as something political qualitatively superior to the old imperialist states and, hence, advocate support for the emerging Great Powers. Furthermore, it is easily comprehensible to imagine a scenario where reformists will defend a, let us say, "liberal", "more democratic" European Union against a "semi-fascist", ultra-reactionary USA. Social-patriotism knows many different roads but it all ends up in the camp of defense of the imperialist fatherland. Or to put it in Trotsky's formula: *"Social patriotism is only a mask for social imperialism."*<sup>380</sup>

Its theoretical root is the ill-fated revisionist theory of *"socialism in one country"* which liquidates the international nature of the working class and the internationalist essence of class struggle embodied in the program of revolutionary defeatism.

*"The theory of the possibility of realizing socialism in one country destroys the inner connection between the patriotism of the victorious proletariat and the defeatism of the proletariat of the bourgeois countries. The proletariat of the advanced capitalist countries is still traveling on the road to power."*<sup>381</sup>

The disastrous Stalinist theory of *"socialism in one country"* is not only relevant for the issue of revolutionary struggle against imperialist war. It has also massive influence on the issues of program and party-building. *"Socialism in one country"* means to prioritize the class struggle in one's own country and to deprioritise the class struggle in other countries. Consequently, it also means to

378 Leon Trotsky: The Permanent Revolution (1929), Pathfinder Press, New York 1969, pp. 267-268

379 Leon Trotsky: The Third International After Lenin. The Draft Program of the Communist International: A Criticism of Fundamentals (1928), Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, p. 73

380 Leon Trotsky: Progressive Paralysis. The Second International on the Eve of the New War (1939), in: Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1939-40, p. 37

381 Leon Trotsky: The Third International After Lenin. The Draft Program of the Communist International: A Criticism of Fundamentals (1928), Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, p. 72

prioritize the building of a party in one's own country and to deprioritise the same in other countries. Furthermore, it usually goes also hand in hand with an ignorant or even social-chauvinist attitude towards national minorities and migrants in their own country. In short, "*Socialism in one country*" results in national-centeredness and national-reformism in the theoretical, programmatic and organizational field.

As a matter of fact, we see numerous organizations which are willing to act as revolutionaries but which are, unconsciously, infected with the ideas of "*socialism in one country*" since they put a strong priority on national work in contrast to international work. As a result they refuse to deal appropriately with issues of the international class struggle and the building of Revolutionary World Party.

Trotsky explained in 1928 in his critique of the Stalinist program that an international program is not only important for a world party but even for any national organization since national politics can not be understood without the international context:

*"In our epoch, which is the epoch of imperialism, i.e., of world economy and world politics under the hegemony of finance capital, not a single communist party can establish its program by proceeding solely or mainly from conditions and tendencies of developments in its own country. This also holds entirely for the party that wields the state power within the boundaries of the U.S.S.R. On August 4, 1914, the death knell sounded for national programs for all time. The revolutionary party of the proletariat can base itself only upon an international program corresponding to the character of the present epoch, the epoch of the highest development and collapse of capitalism. An international communist program is in no case the sum total of national programs or an amalgam of their common features. The international program must proceed directly from an analysis of the conditions and tendencies of world economy and of the world political system taken as a whole in all its connections and contradictions, that is, with the mutually antagonistic interdependence of its separate parts. In the present epoch, to a much larger extent than in the past, the national orientation of the proletariat must and can flow only from a world orientation and not vice versa. Herein lies the basic and primary difference between communist internationalism and all varieties of national socialism."*<sup>382</sup>

For the same reason a revolutionary organization can not built on the national terrain alone. It must be built simultaneously as an international organization. Trotsky replied to those revolutionaries who considered the building of an international organization as "premature" the following:

*"Your conception of internationalism appears to me erroneous. In the final analysis, you take the International as a sum of national sections or as a product of the mutual influence of national sections. This is, at least, a one-sided, undialectical and, therefore, wrong conception of the International. If the Communist Left throughout the world consisted of only five individuals, they would have nonetheless been obliged to build an*

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382 Leon Trotsky: *The Third International After Lenin* (1928), Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, p.4

*international organization simultaneously with the building of one or more national organizations.*

*It is wrong to view a national organization as the foundation and the international as a roof. The interrelation here is of an entirely different type. Marx and Engels started the communist movement in 1847 with an international document and with the creation of an international organization. The same thing was repeated in the creation of the First International. The very same path was followed by the Zimmerwald Left in preparation for the Third International. Today this road is dictated far more imperiously than in the days of Marx. It is, of course, possible in the epoch of imperialism for a revolutionary proletarian tendency to arise in one or another country, but it cannot thrive and develop in one isolated country; on the very next day after its formation it must seek for or create international ties, an international platform, an international organization. Because a guarantee of the correctness of the national policy can be found only along this road. A tendency which remains shut-in nationally over a stretch of years, condemns itself irrevocably to degeneration.*

*You refuse to answer the question as to the character of your differences with the International Opposition on the grounds that an international principled document is lacking. I consider such an approach to the question as purely formal, lifeless, not political and not revolutionary. A platform or program is something that comes as a result of extensive experiences from joint activities on the basis of a certain number of common ideas and methods. Your 1925 platform did not come into being on the very first day of your existence as a faction. The Russian Opposition created a platform in the fifth year of its struggle; and although this platform appeared two and a half years after yours did, it has also become outdated in many respects.”<sup>383</sup>*

*In summary, capitalism and imperialism exist and can only exist as a world system. The struggle against it must take the road of the international class struggle and its must aim for the creation of a socialist world economy and a worldwide federation of workers and peasant republics. Such a struggle requires a world party, i.e. an international organization and not national-isolated groups.*

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383 Leon Trotsky: To the Editorial Board of Prometeo (1930); in: Writings 1930, pp. 285-286

## XV. The Meaning of the Dictum *“War is the Continuation of Politics by Other Means”*

The Marxist approach to conflicts and wars is based on the understanding that they are not a separate issue of politics in general but rather a specific aspect of it. Friedrich Engels and V.I. Lenin were big admirers of the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, who summarized the essence of any military conflict by the famous words: *“War is a mere continuation of policy by other means.”*<sup>384</sup>

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 according to its own laws.”*<sup>385</sup>

Indeed, wars are waged by any class not as an end in itself but for specific political and economic goals, i.e. in order to impose their interests. This applies both to the policy of the bourgeoisie as well as for the policy of the proletariat and other oppressed classes.

An imperialist state might attack a rival in order to get control over strategic territories or its colonies (e.g. World War I between Germany, France, Britain, Russia, et.), a Great Power might attack a semi-colony in order to rob its economic resources (e.g. the US invasion of Iraq 2003) or to stop a rebellion undermining the imperialist domination in the region (e.g. Russia’s two wars against Chechnya in the mid-1990s and early 2000s). Or it can be a war of the oppressed classes in order to drive out foreign invaders (e.g. the Afghan resistance against the U.S. forces since 2001 or the Somali struggle against the Ethiopian-led AU troops) or to bring down a reactionary dictatorship (e.g. in Cuba against Batista 1953-59, in Libya against Gaddafi in 2011 or in Syria against Assad since 2011).

To put it in the words of Lenin: *„With reference to wars, the main thesis of dialectics, which has been so shamelessly distorted by Plekhanov to please the bourgeoisie, is that “war is simply the continuation of politics by other [i.e., violent] means”. Such is the formula of Clausewitz, one of the greatest writers on the history of war, whose thinking was stimulated by Hegel. And it was always the standpoint of Marx and Engels, who regarded any war as the continuation of the politics of the powers concerned — and the various classes within these countries — in a definite period.”*<sup>386</sup>

384 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>

385 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>

386 V.I.Lenin: *The Collapse of the Second International* (1915), in: *LCW* Vol. 21, p.219 (Emphasis in the original)

War is part of politics; the latter can not exist without the former. A pamphlet of the US-American Trotskyists published in 1936 formulated this fundamental idea with much apropos:

*"The moral, religious, racial and ideological disguises that war wears must not be allowed to hide the fundamental conflicts which are the true sources of modern war. The general conclusion is inescapable: Modern war is neither accidental nor due to the evil of human nature nor decreed by God. War is of the very essence of imperialist-capitalism, as much a part of capitalism as wage labor. To speak of capitalism without war is like speaking of a human being without lungs. The fate of one is inextricably bound to the fate of the other."*<sup>387</sup>

From this follows that Marxists approach issues of wars not with a different method than other features of the struggles between classes. Hence, the working class policy is directed towards defending its independence from the ruling class (respectively its different factions) of all imperialist powers in times of peace *as well as* in times of war. And it is fighting in order to weaken the capitalists and eventually to overthrow them in times of peace *as well as* in times of war.

Lenin pointed to the fundamentally same principles of the class struggle in times of peace as well as during wars: *"War is a continuation of policy by other means. All wars are inseparable from the political systems that engender them. The policy which a given state, a given class within that state, pursued for a long time before the war is inevitably continued by that same class during the war, the form of action alone being changed."*<sup>388</sup>

This idea was repeated by Trotsky in the founding program of the Fourth International: *"Imperialist war is the continuation and sharpening of the predatory politics of the bourgeoisie. The struggle of the proletariat against war is the continuation and sharpening of its class struggle. The beginning of war alters the situation and partially the means of struggle between the classes, but not the aim and basic course."*<sup>389</sup>

This is true both for issues of domestic as well as foreign policy. Trotsky insisted in his theses on *War and the Fourth International* on the close and inseparable relationship between the internal and external policies of both the ruling class and the proletariat. The vanguard of the proletariat advocates a policy of class independence from any imperialist bourgeoisie and from each of their fractions – both of those at home and of those abroad: *"The foreign policy of each class is the continuation and development of its internal policy."*<sup>390</sup>

In other words, the entire method of revolutionary defeatism has no "special tactics" for war, but rather dictates the continuation of tactics directed to promote the independence of the working class of every imperialist bourgeoisie

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387 John West (James Burnham): *War and the Workers* (1936), Workers Party Pamphlet, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/burnham/1936/war/index.htm>

388 V. I. Lenin: *War and Revolution* (1917), in: LCW 24, p. 400

389 Leon Trotsky: *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International. The Transitional Program* (1938); in: *Documents of the Fourth International*, New York 1973, p. 199

390 Leon Trotsky: *War and the Fourth International* (1934), in: *Trotsky Writings 1933-34*, p. 313

(and each fraction of this), which are valid for all phases of the class struggle – whether in times of war or peace.

For this reason, Marxists apply the very same method of “revolutionary defeatism” not just in cases of conflicts between imperialist countries. Likewise the RCIT also applies such a method, for example, on issues like the membership of imperialist states in inter-state alliances (e.g. the issue of membership in the European Union).<sup>391</sup>

Another, similar, issue is the case of elections in which only open-bourgeois candidates are competing (e.g., in the presidential election in the USA between the candidates of the Republican and the Democratic Parties). In such situations, revolutionaries cannot support *any* of these candidates and therefore call for abstention.<sup>392</sup>

In this context it is worth drawing attention to Lenin’s observation that revolutionaries should study the writings of Clausewitz because of the closeness of political tactics and military tactics. In an article published during the last period of Lenin’s lifetime, the Soviet historian V.I. Sorin attributed to the leader of the Bolshevik the following views on the significance of Clausewitz: “*Lenin said that ‘political and military tactics are called Grenzgebiet (a borderland) in German and party workers could study with advantage the works of Clausewitz, the greatest of*

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391 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Marxism, the European Union and Brexit. The L5I and the European Union: A Right Turn away from Marxism. The recent change in the L5I’s position towards the support for EU membership represents a shift away from its own tradition, of the Marxist method, and of the facts; August 2016, in: Revolutionary Communist No. 55, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/eu-and-brexite/>; Michael Pröbsting: Does the EU Represent “Bourgeois Democratic Progress”? Once again, on the EU and the Tactics of the Working Class – An Addendum to our Criticism of the L5I’s Turn to the Right and Its Support for EU Membership, 16.09.2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/eu-brexite-article/>; RCIT: After the BREXIT Vote – Stormy times ahead for the workers and oppressed in Britain, 24.6.2016, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/brexit-vote-results/>; RED\*LIBERATION (Bulletin of Socialists in the Labour Party): UK: No to Cameron’s Trap: Neither YES nor NO to UK membership in the EU! For Abstention in the Referendum! We call on Momentum to create a “Third Camp” and to launch a socialist and internationalist campaign! For international Unity of the British, Migrant and European Workers! 25 February 2016, <https://redliberation.wordpress.com/2016/05/02/100/>; RCIT und RCIT Britain: Boycott Cameron’s Trap: Neither Brussels, nor Downing Street! For Abstention in Britain’s EU-Referendum! For international Unity and Struggle of the Workers and Oppressed! Fight against both British as well as European Imperialism! Forward to the United Socialist States of Europe, 2 August 2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/eu-referendum-in-uk/>; Michael Pröbsting: The British Left and the EU-Referendum: The Many Faces of pro-UK or pro-EU Social-Imperialism. An analysis of the left’s failure to fight for an independent, internationalist and socialist stance both against British as well as European imperialism, Revolutionary Communism Nr. 40, August 2015 <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/british-left-and-eu-referendum/>

392 See on this e.g. Yossi Schwartz: Why Not to Vote for the Democratic Party in the Forthcoming US Elections Or At Any Other Time, 2.3.2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/north-america/no-vote-sanders/>; Yossi Schwartz: Once Again: Opportunism of US Left Exposed. An Analysis of the US 2016 Elections Campaign, 14 August 2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/north-america/left-and-us-election/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Meaning, Consequences and Lessons of Trump’s Victory. On the Lessons of the US Presidential Election Outcome and the Perspectives for the Domestic and International Class Struggle, 24.November 2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/meaning-of-trump/>



*German military theoreticians.*" 393

In summary, Marxists don't change their approach to the ruling class in times of war, hence, the working class must fundamentally oppose its imperialist government equally in times of peace as well as in times of war. The politics of revolutionary defeatism has always the same programmatic root: namely, the struggle for the political independence of the working class from all fractions of the bourgeoisie and from all imperialist powers.

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393 V.I.Sorin: *Marxism, Tactics, and Lenin* (Pravda, No. 1, 1923), quoted in A.S. Bubnov: Preface to Lenin's "Notebook on Clausewitz" (1931), in Donald E. Davis and Walter S.G. Kohn: *Lenin on Clausewitz*, in: *Soviet Armed Forces Review Annual*, Vol. I, Academic International Press, 1977, Gulf Breeze, Florida, p. 193. On Lenin's thoughts on Clausewitz and the military question in general, in addition to his Notebook mentioned above, see also: Jacob W. Kipp: *Lenin and Clausewitz: The Militarization of Marxism, 1914-1921*, in: *Military Affairs* Vol. 49, 1985, pp. 184-191; James Ryan: 'Revolution is War': The Development of the Thought of V. I. Lenin on Violence, 1899-1907, in: *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 89, No. 2 (April 2011), pp. 248-273; Israel Getzler: *Lenin's Conception of Revolution As Civil War*, in: *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (Jul., 1996), pp. 464-472.

We venture to take this opportunity to inform readers about the following little anecdote which is very characteristic for the phony character of Stalinism. As the author of these lines is in possession of both the German as well as the English language publication of Lenin's Notebook on Clausewitz, he could compare the prefaces of both editions. They are identical, word for word. However, while the original one was written by A.S. Bubnov in 1931, the German-language version has been published under the name "Otto Braun". The reason is simply that Bubnov meanwhile has been persecuted by the Stalinists so the German Stalinist simply took his preface and published it under his own name! (The German language edition is: W.I.Lenin: *Clausewitz' Werk 'Vom Kriege'*. *Auszüge und Randglossen*, Verlag des Ministeriums für nationale Landesverteidigung, Berlin 1957) We know that the Stalinists have implemented such a policy of suppression of original authors many times. For example, the "father" of the *Collected Works of Marx and Engels* was the great historian David Rjazanov. But since he was persecuted and later killed by the Stalinists, his name never appeared in the famous volumes! (On Rjazanov work on the *Collected Works of Marx and Engels* see e.g. David Borisovič Rjazanov: *Vorwort zur MEGA 1927*, in: *UTOPIE kreativ*, H. 206 (December 2007), pp. 1095-1011; Bud Burkhard: *D. B. Rjazanov and the Marx-Engels Institute: Notes toward further Research*, in: *Studies in Soviet Thought* 30 (1985), pp. 39-54; Colum Leckey: *David Riazanov and Russian Marxism*, in: *Russian History/Histoire Russe*, Vol. 22, N° 2 (1995); David Borisovič Rjazanov und die erste MEGA. *Beiträge zur Marx-Engels-Forschung*. Neue Folge. Sonderband 1. *Argument*, Hamburg 1996)

## XVI. Revolutionary Defeatism as a Combined Strategy

In our *Theses on Revolutionary Defeatism* we have stated the following idea: “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.”

As we consider this approach as one of the most important (and often ignored or misunderstood) aspects of the anti-imperialist struggle, we want to elaborate on it here in more detail.

To begin with, we have to emphasize again that the struggle against imperialism, militarism and war is not a separate struggle which would be subject to different laws than the struggle against other features of capitalism. No, militarism and war are part and parcel of the same system and, hence, the struggle against imperialism and war must be conducted with the same methods of independent class struggle like in all other fields of the class struggle. The Fourth International, led by Leon Trotsky, made this very clear in a resolution adopted at a congress in 1936:

*“The ‘struggle against war’ cannot be conducted as something separate and apart from the class struggle itself, from the intransigent struggle of the proletariat against imperialist capitalism, that is, against that social order which inexorably gives rise to imperialist war and oppression and which is inconceivable without these twin scourges. Any attempt to conduct a struggle ‘against war’ by means of ‘special, methods’ separate or ‘above’ the class struggle itself is at best a cruel illusion and as a rule a malicious deception that facilitates the work of the imperialist warmongers.”*<sup>394</sup>

As we will outline in the chapters below in detail, Marxists basically distinguish between two different types of wars: between *wars of oppression* and *wars of liberation*. Wars of oppression are wars of the ruling class in order to impose their reactionary interests at the expense of others – either against their capitalist rivals or against the working class and oppressed people. Socialists can never, under any circumstances, support such wars of oppression.

The only wars worthy of socialists’ support are wars of liberation. Such wars are wars in defense of the interest of the working class and the oppressed people. Such wars can take the form of *civil wars* – for example the Spanish Civil War 1936-39, India’s war against the Kashmiri people, Russia’s war against the Chechen people or the Syrian Civil War since 2011. They can also take the

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<sup>394</sup> Leon Trotsky: Resolution on the Antiwar Congress of the London Bureau (1936), in: Documents of the Fourth International, New York 1973, p. 98

form of *wars between states* – for example the imperialist wars against the Soviet Union or against semi-colonial countries (Afghanistan, Iraq etc.). Socialists are obligated to support the proletariat and the oppressed people in such wars and to work for the defeat of the reactionary camp.

Trotsky summarized the Marxist position on wars concurrently in a statement for an anti-war congress in 1932: „*Capitalist brigands always conduct a “defensive” war, even when Japan is marching against Shanghai and France against Syria or Morocco. The revolutionary proletariat distinguishes only between wars of oppression and wars of liberation. The character of a war is defined, not by diplomatic falsifications, but by the class which conducts the war and the objective aims it pursues in that war. The wars of the imperialist states, apart from the pretexts and political rhetoric, are of an oppressive character, reactionary and inimical to the people. Only the wars of the proletariat and of the oppressed nations can be characterized as wars of liberation (...)*”<sup>395</sup>

Marxists call the program to defend the camp of the working class and the oppressed people “*defensism*” while they call the program to defeat the reactionary camp “*defeatism*”. Trotsky emphasized that understanding the true character of a war and drawing the correctly programmatic conclusions is one of the most important tasks for any revolutionary organization: “*The problem or war, next to the problem of revolution, is the touchstone of a revolutionary party. Here no kind of equivocation is permissible. The principled decision is clear beforehand: defensism and defeatism are as incompatible as fire and, water. It is necessary to say this first of all. This truth must be taught the members of the party.*”<sup>396</sup>

In its most general definition, the Marxist program of defeatism means that revolutionaries continue the class struggle of the workers and oppressed against the imperialist ruling class in times of war and refuse any support for the class enemy. Revolutionaries desire to utilize the war conditions to weaken and eventually to defeat the class enemy. Here is how the Left Opposition, fighting against the Stalinist revisionists, formulated the essence of defeatism in an official document in 1927:

„*What is meant by the term defeatism? In the whole past history of the party, defeatism was understood to mean desiring the defeat of one’s own government in a war with an external enemy and contributing to such a defeat by methods of internal revolutionary struggle. This referred of course to the attitude of the proletariat towards the capitalist state.*”<sup>397</sup>

Trotsky himself gave a more or less identical definition in the same year: „*What is defeatism? It is a policy which aims at contributing to the defeat by of ‘one’s own’ state, which is in the hands of the enemy class.*”<sup>398</sup>

395 Leon Trotsky: Declaration to the Antiwar Congress at Amsterdam (1932), in: Writings 1932, p. 153 (emphasis in the original)

396 Leon Trotsky: Defeatism vs. Defensism (1937), in: Trotsky Writings 1937-38, p. 86

397 L. Trotsky, G. Zinoviev, Yevdokimov: Resolution of the All-Russia Metal Workers Union (1927); in: Leon Trotsky: The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926-27), pp. 249-250 (Emphasis in the original)

398 Leon Trotsky: ‘Defeatism’ and Clemenceau (1927); in: Leon Trotsky: The Challenge of the Left

Rudolf Klement, a leader of the Fourth International who was killed by the Stalinist GPU in 1938, summarized the principles of revolutionary defeatism in an article which was praised by Trotsky:

*“War is only the continuation of politics by other means. Hence the proletariat must continue its class struggle in wartime, among other things with the new means which the bourgeoisie hands him. It can and must utilise the weakening of its “own” bourgeoisie in the imperialist countries in order relentlessly to prepare and to carry out its social revolution in connection with the military defeat engendered by the war, and to seize the power. This tactic, known as revolutionary defeatism, is one of the strongest levers of the proletarian world revolution in our epoch, and therewith of historical progress.”*<sup>399</sup>

Revolutionaries fighting against the imperialist enemy desire to utilize each crisis – from economic recessions, political crisis to military conflicts – in order to strengthen the combative power and the consciousness of the working class and the oppressed masses and to weaken, and eventually to overthrow, the ruling class. This is why Marxists view imperialist wars always from the perspective how it can be transformed into a revolutionary war against the imperialist rulers.

## The Contradictory Nature of Imperialism as the Objective Basis for Anti-Imperialism

However, before we deal with the specific aspects of the program of revolutionary defeatism we have to clarify one of its most fundamental aspects. Revolutionary defeatism is a *combined strategy*. This means that it *combines the anti-imperialist struggle against all Great Powers with support for all liberation struggles of the workers and oppressed people against all Great Powers* respectively their proxies. The program of defeatism is either such a combined strategy or is not defeatist at all!

This is why Trotsky emphasized to analyze the character of each conflict as concrete as possible and, at the same time, to recognize the relations between them: *“To teach the workers correctly to understand the class character of the state imperialist, colonial, workers’—and the reciprocal relations between them, as well as the inner contradictions in each of them, enables the workers to draw correct practical conclusions in situation.”*<sup>400</sup>

Such a combined strategy is the only possible conclusion from the Marx-

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Opposition (1926-279), p. 252

399 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, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol1/no1/printact.html>. The RCIT re-published this text in: Revolutionary Communism No. 4 (2012), pp. 44-46.

400 Manifesto of the Fourth International on Imperialist War: Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution. Adopted by the Emergency Conference of the Fourth International, May 19-26, 1940, in: Documents of the Fourth International. The Formative Years (1933-40), New York 1973, p. 327, <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1938-1949/emergconf/fi-emerg02.htm>

ist theory of imperialism. As we have shown above, Lenin, Trotsky and other prominent Marxists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were always clear about the nature of imperialism as a system where a small number of monopolies and Great Powers rival against each other for domination of the world and the exploitation of its economic resources. Hence, imperialism, by definition, implies the oppression and exploitation of the dependent, subordinated countries and people of the South by these monopolies and Great Powers. Let us reproduce again Lenin's definition of imperialism:

*„We have to begin with as precise and full a definition of imperialism as possible. Imperialism is a specific historical stage of capitalism. Its specific character is threefold: imperialism is monopoly capitalism; parasitic, or decaying capitalism; moribund capitalism. The supplanting of free competition by monopoly is the fundamental economic feature, the quintessence of imperialism. Monopoly manifests itself in five principal forms: (1) cartels, syndicates and trusts—the concentration of production has reached a degree which gives rise to these monopolistic associations of capitalists; (2) the monopolistic position of the big banks—three, four or five giant banks manipulate the whole economic life of America, France, Germany; (3) seizure of the sources of raw material by the trusts and the financial oligarchy (finance capital is monopoly industrial capital merged with bank capital); (4) the (economic) partition of the world by the international cartels has begun. There are already over one hundred such international cartels, which command the entire world market and divide it “amicably” among themselves—until war redivides it. The export of capital, as distinct from the export of commodities under non-monopoly capitalism, is a highly characteristic phenomenon and is closely linked with the economic and territorial-political partition of the world; (5) the territorial partition of the world (colonies) is completed.“*<sup>401</sup>

From this follows that imperialist oppression and super-exploitation of the colonial and semi-colonial people are essential features of the present world system:

*„Imperialism means the progressively mounting oppression of the nations of the world by a handful of Great Powers (...) That is why the focal point in the Social-Democratic programme must be that division of nations into oppressor and oppressed which forms the essence of imperialism, and is deceitfully evaded by the social-chauvinists and Kautsky. This division is not significant from the angle of bourgeois pacifism or the philistine Utopia of peaceful competition among independent nations under capitalism, but it is most significant from the angle of the revolutionary struggle against imperialism.“*<sup>402</sup>

In other words, imperialist monopolies and Great Powers exist and can only exist a) in rivalry against each other and b) by oppressing and exploiting oppressed nations. Both aspects are related with each other because the monop-

401 V. I. Lenin: Imperialism and the Split in Socialism (1916); in: CW Vol. 23, pp. 105-106 [Emphases in the original]

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

lies' and Great Powers' strive for more profit and power can only be satisfied by expanding their global influence and market share at the cost of their rivals and by squeezing more wealth from the oppressed peoples.

Such a contradictory nature of imperialism constitutes the objective basis for the program of anti-imperialism and has profound consequences for the revolutionary struggle. As both aspects are organically and objectively linked with each other, any meaningful strategy against the Great Powers must take *both* of them into account and *integrate* them into a *single, unified* strategy.

This is why Lenin emphasized already in the middle of World War One, when the Great Powers were slaughtering millions of people of each other on the battle fields, the crucial importance of the liberation struggles of the oppressed nations. He did so despite the fact that at that time there were hardly any such national uprisings. But Lenin fully understood the close connection between Great Power rivalry and the imperialist oppression of the colonial and semi-colonial people. He emphasized this connection numerous times:

*"Theoretically, it would be absolutely wrong to forget that every war is but the continuation of policy by other means. The present imperialist war is the continuation of the imperialist policies of two groups of Great Powers, and those policies were engendered and fostered by the sum total of the relationships of the imperialist era. But this very era must also necessarily engender and foster policies of struggle against national oppression and of proletarian struggle against the bourgeoisie and, consequently, also the possibility and inevitability, first, of revolutionary national rebellions and wars; second, of proletarian wars and rebellions against the bourgeoisie; and, third, of a combination of both kinds of revolutionary war, etc."* <sup>403</sup>

*„Marxists have never forgotten that violence must inevitably accompany the collapse of capitalism in its entirety and the birth of socialist society. That violence will constitute a period of world history, a whole era of various kinds of wars, imperialist wars, civil wars inside countries the intermingling of the two, national wars liberating the nationalities oppressed by the imperialists and by various combinations of imperialist powers that will inevitably enter into various alliances in the epoch of tremendous state-capitalist and military trusts and syndicates."* <sup>404</sup>

From this follows that Marxists have to actively strive to win the vanguard of the working class and the oppressed for combining its struggle against the Great Powers with the liberation struggle of the oppressed people.

*„National wars against the imperialist powers are not only possible and probable; they are inevitable, progressive and revolutionary though of course, to be successful, they require either the concerted effort of huge numbers of people in the oppressed countries (hundreds of millions in our example of India and China), or a particularly favourable conjuncture of international conditions (e.g., the fact that the imperialist powers*

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403 V. I. Lenin: The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution (1916) ; in: LCW Vol. 23, p. 80

404 V.I.Lenin: Report on the Review of the Programme and on Changing the Name of the Party, March 8 (1918), in: LCW Vol. 27, p.130

*cannot interfere, being paralysed by exhaustion, by war, by their antagonism, etc.), or the simultaneous uprising of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in one of the big powers (this latter eventuality holds first place as the most desirable and favourable for the victory of the proletariat).“*<sup>405</sup>

The objectively combined character of the strategy of defeatism is also always reflected in the following fact. Given the objective interconnection between Great Power rivalry and the struggle of oppressed people against Great Powers, it often happens that the former influences the later and vice versa. We have dealt with this issue extensively in other works.<sup>406</sup> Sufficient to say at this place that there can be cases where such interference of Great Powers in an ongoing liberation struggle becomes so dominant that the character of this struggles gets transformed and it becomes a proxy struggle for the interests of one or another Great Power. However, it would be foolish to assume that Great Power interference as such already results in such a transformation. Marxists have to undertake a concrete analysis of the concrete situation.

History has seen numerous cases where such combinations of inter-imperialist wars and liberation wars took place. In our above mentioned analysis we have elaborated a number of examples. Here we limit ourselves to a few examples. In World War II revolutionaries had to take into account that this global war included three different types of war: a) the war between imperialist Great Powers (Germany-Italy-Japan vs. US-UK-France), the war between an imperialist Great Power and a Degenerated Workers State (Germany vs. USSR) and wars between Great Powers vs. oppressed people (Germany vs. oppressed people in occupied European countries; Japan vs. oppressed people in occupied South-East Asian countries, Britain vs. the Indian people, etc.) Naturally, each Great Power tried to weaken its enemy by supporting the USSR or oppressed peoples with weapons, etc. The Trotskyist Fourth International deployed a tactic which differentiated between the characters of the different types of wars. They took a position of revolutionary defeatism on both sides in the war between the two imperialist camps but they supported the USSR resp. the oppressed people against the respective Great Power.

Such complicated situations also exist today as we can currently see in Syria. Revolutionaries support the ongoing liberation struggle of the rebels against the Assad tyranny and its Russian imperialist masters. In the clashes between the pro-Turkish rebels (supporting the treacherous Astana/Sochi process) and the rebels opposing Astana, they side with the latter. They support the rebels in their struggle against Daesh/ISIS. But they oppose the US imperialist onslaught with the help of the Kurdish YPG/SDF against Daesh. In conflicts between the pro-Russian Assadist troops and pro-US YPG/SDF troops revolutionaries don't

405 V.I.Lenin: The Junius Pamphlet (1916), in: LCW Vol. 22, p.312 [emphasis in the original]

406 See e.g. 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, Autumn 2012, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/liberation-struggle-and-imperialism/>

take a side as they are both imperialist proxies.<sup>407</sup>

Another example is the Western imperialist air strikes in Libya during the popular revolution against the Gaddafi dictatorship. These air strikes, which revolutionaries resolutely opposed, did however not become the dominant element in the liberation struggle, i.e. the liberation struggle against Gaddafi kept its progressive character and was not transformed into a proxy war for the imperialists (contrary to the silly claims of the Stalinists and various pseudo-Trotskyists). This was confirmed by the events following the downfall of Gaddafi. Had the civil war against Gaddafi have been a proxy war of NATO agents (as the Stalinists and semi-Stalinists claim), NATO would have taken control after the downfall of Gaddafi in autumn 2011. However, the opposite took place: more than seven years after the fall of the dictatorship, the imperialists have still failed to bring Libya under control. In fact, they had to evacuate their embassies and a US ambassador was assassinated.<sup>408</sup>

Such a complex and contradictory nature of wars, when the aspect of liberation struggles and the aspect of imperialist intervention are both present, were not unknown to the Marxist classics. In fact Lenin and Trotsky were fully aware of such combinations of different types of wars and outlined a revolutionary response.

## The Marxist Classics on the Combined Strategy

Trotsky warned against any mechanic schemas which ignored the contradictory, dialectical nature of such conflicts. „*In ninety cases out of a hundred the workers actually place a minus sign where the bourgeoisie places a plus sign. In ten cases,*

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407 The RCIT has published a number of booklets, statements and articles on the Syrian Revolution which can be read on a special sub-section on this website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/collection-of-articles-on-the-syrian-revolution/>. In particular we refer to Michael Pröbsting: Is the Syrian Revolution at its End? Is Third Camp Abstentionism Justified? An essay on the organs of popular power in the liberated area of Syria, on the character of the different sectors of the Syrian rebels, and on the failure of those leftists who deserted the Syrian Revolution, 5 April 2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/syrian-revolution-not-dead/>; Michael Pröbsting: World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings, February 2018, Chapter V, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/chapter-v/>; Yossi Schwartz: Raqqa: Defeat the US Imperialist Offensive! An assessment of the US/SDF/YPG war against Daesh, April 2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/us-offensive-in-raqqa/>

408 See on this RCIT: Stop the US Bombing of Libya! 23.2.2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/us-bombing-libya/>; RCIT: Europe / North Africa: Storm the Gates of Rome! Open Borders for Refugees! Stop the Imperialist EU-War against Refugees! No to the Preparations for an Imperialist Aggression against Libya! 22.5.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/eu-war-against-refugees/>; RCIT: Revolution and Counterrevolution in the Arab World: An Acid Test for Revolutionaries, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/theses-arab-revolution/>; RCIT: General Sisi, Hollande, Obama: Hands Off Libya! Defeat General Haftars' Imperialist Lackeys! Down with the Daash-Gang of Killers! For a Workers' and Popular Government! 26.2.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/hands-off-libya/>



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.”<sup>409</sup>

Lenin explained, in the epoch of imperialism Great Powers will always try to interfere and utilize national and democratic conflicts. However, this fact should not lead Marxists to automatically adopt a defeatist instead of a revolutionary-defensist position in such conflicts. Rather, the position taken by Marxists should depend on which factor becomes dominant – the national, democratic liberation struggle or the imperialist war of conquest.

„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.”<sup>410</sup>

Later, when faced with the complex scenario of the approaching World War II, Rudolf Klement elaborated on the Marxist approach:

“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”

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

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

*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.”*

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.*” And, 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.*”<sup>411</sup>

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

And it is exactly this dialectical, contradictory nature of conflicts which nearly all reformists and centrists fail to understand. In the best case they take only one or another aspect of the defeatist program but not the strategy in its totality. Or worse, they don’t even understand a single of those complex elements of revolutionary defeatism as a combined strategy.

The result of such failure, as we stated in the *Theses* and as we elaborate more in detail below, is that an opposition against the Great Powers *without* full support for the liberation struggles of the oppressed people is “*platonic anti-imperialism*” at best or “*masked 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.

In short, “*anti-imperialism*” without pro-liberationism is not anti-imperialism but open or concealed social-imperialism!

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411 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, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol1/no1/printact.html>. The RCIT re-published this text in: Revolutionary Communism No. 4 (2012), pp. 44-46.

## XVII. The Relationship between War and Revolution

We have said above that since imperialism and war are organic part of capitalism, the struggle against these phenomena is subject to the same laws as the struggle against all other features of capitalism. However, this must not lead to ignore the specific elements embodied in this struggle. One of the most important of this is the relationship of war and revolution.

War represents the utmost extreme tension of all forces of a society. It helps the ruling class to suppress oppositional tendencies but, at the same time, below the surface, it accelerates the contradictions and prepares future catastrophes. The precursors to war – tensions between Great Powers, trade wars, jingoism, anti-migrant chauvinism etc. – do not have the same dramatic consequences but are steps in such a direction.

History has demonstrated such a relationship between war – and more precisely the defeat of a reactionary government in a reactionary war – and revolution numerous times. The reason for this is pretty obvious. Wars represent by definition the tension of all forces of a society. While a war of liberation usually succeeds in mobilizing the masses so that they voluntarily support resp. participate in it, this is different in a war of oppression. In such wars, the ruling class is compelled, to various degrees, to use a combination of chauvinist lies, war hysteria, military compulsion and repression against oppositional forces.

### **“Small” and “Large” Imperialist Wars**

Obviously there is a difference between “small” and “large” wars of oppression. By “small” wars we mean usually colonial wars like the US attack on Iraq or Afghanistan or Russia’s intervention in Syria. These are not small wars for the oppressed people – quite the opposite, these wars result in the slaughter of tens or hundreds of thousands of workers and peasants. But they are small from the point of view of the imperialists as they do not necessitate mass conscription or the mobilization of the whole economy for the military purpose. In short, they have much less consequences for the everyday life of the society in the imperialist countries.

This is completely different in the case of “large” wars by which we basically mean wars between Great Powers. Such large wars force the ruling class to a comprehensive tension of all social forces. Furthermore, such wars have also drastic consequences for the civilian population – food shortage, lack of medication right up to aerial bombardment. The First and even more the Second World War provide numerous examples for this. Any future World War between Great Powers will bear even more such a “total” character as it will nearly inevitable imply the deployment of nuclear weapons.

Of course, one should not make a too schematic division between “small” and “large” imperialist wars. A sustained colonial war, for example, might not necessitate a comprehensive tension of all social forces. However, its protracted nature, the accumulation of losses, the rising costs etc. will have important political consequences – particularly if they end in a defeat for the imperialists. Take for example France’s war in Algeria, the U.S. war in Vietnam or Yeltsin’s war in Chechnya.

From this results that the defeat of the ruling class in reactionary wars has potent effects. Its material strength as well as its political and moral prestige are severely shattered. At the same time, the masses are infuriated and “militarized”, i.e. more used in using weapons. This is all the more the case the “larger” (in the terms defined above) such a reactionary war of the imperialists is. This is why such wars go pregnant with revolutionary upheavals the oppressed masses and this is why Lenin, in the light of the defeat of Russia’s autocracy against Japan in 1904/05, spoke about “*the great revolutionary role of the historic war in which the Russian worker is an involuntary participant.*”<sup>412</sup>

History provides numerous examples of the relationship between wars lost by the ruling class and revolutionary developments. To name but a few historical examples we refer to the *Jacquerie*, the great peasant uprising in northern France during the Hundred Years War after the ruling class suffered a number of defeats against the English<sup>413</sup>; the heroic uprising of the Russian peasants led by Yemelyan Pugachev in 1774/75 at the end of the long and exhausting Russo-Turkish war<sup>414</sup>; the humiliating defeats of the despised Qing dynasty in the two

412 V. I. Lenin: *The Fall of Port Arthur* (1905), in: LCW Vol. 8, p. 53

413 See on this e.g. I. M. Shukow (Ed.): *Weltgeschichte*, VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, Berlin 1963, Vol. 3, pp. 730-758. The 10 volumes of *Weltgeschichte* (with a combined total of 8,500 pages) is the German-language translation of the famous *Soviet History Encyclopedia* published after the death of Stalin. To our knowledge, this encyclopedia has not been translated into English language (in contrast to the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*). Written by a large collective of Soviet historians under the direction of E.M. Zhukov, these ten volumes are a real treasure chest of historical knowledge as they combine detailed information with a materialistic approach. Nevertheless, one has to view this encyclopedia critically as it suffers from the unavoidable theoretical limitations of Stalinism, in particular, its mechanistic conception of history according to which *all* societies in history pass through one and the same sequence of stages of social-economic formations: primitive communism, slave holder society, feudalism, capitalism, and communism. Such a view excludes e.g. the so-called *Asiatic Mode of Production* to which Marx referred repeatedly. (See e.g. his *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* published in 1859, in: Marx Engels Collected Works, Vol. 29, International Publishers, New York 1987, p. 263.)

414 See on this e.g. Paul Avrich: *Russian Rebels, 1600-1800*, Schocken Books, New York 1972; Dorothea Peters: *Politische und gesellschaftliche Vorstellungen in der Aufstandsbewegung unter Pugačev (1773–1775)*. Wiesbaden, Berlin 1973; Marc Raeff: *Pugachev’s Rebellion*, in: Robert Forster (Ed.): *Preconditions of Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1970; Alice Plate: *Der Pugačev-Aufstand: Kosakenherrslichkeit oder sozialer Protest*, in: Heinz-Dietrich Löwe: *Volksaufstände in Rußland. Von der Zeit der Wirren bis zur «Grünen Revolution» gegen die Sowjetherrschaft*, Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2006; Leo Yaresh: *The „Peasant Wars“ in Soviet Historiography*, in: *American Slavic and East European Review*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (October 1957), pp. 241-259; Philip Longworth: *Peasant leadership and the Pugachev revolt*, in: *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 2:2 (1975), pp. 183-205; B. H. Sumner: *New Material on*

Opium Wars against the Western Great Powers which gave birth first to 110 local peasant insurrections in 1841-49 and finally to the powerful uprising of the religious social-revolutionary *Taiping* popular movement – one of the longest and bloodiest civil wars in human history (1850-64)<sup>415</sup>; and then we have the well-known examples of modern history with the Franco-Prussian War in 1870-71 leading to the *Parisian Commune*<sup>416</sup>, the Russo-Japanese war in 1904/05 which led to the first Russian Revolution in 1905-07<sup>417</sup>, World War I which resulted in the Russian October Revolution 1917 as well as a number of other workers uprisings in 1918/19 and finally World War II which provoked civil wars and revolutionary developments in various countries (e.g. China, Korea, Greece).

Already Marx and Engels recognized the potentiality of transforming a war into revolution: „*But we must not 'forget that there is a sixth power in Europe, which at given moments asserts its supremacy over the whole of the five so-called "Great" Powers and makes them tremble, every one of them. That power is the Revolution. Long silent and retired, it is now again called to action by the commercial crisis, and by the scarcity of food. From Manchester to Rome, from Paris to Warsaw and Pesth, it is omnipresent, lifting up its head and awaking from its slumbers. Manifold are the symptoms of its returning life, everywhere visible in the agitation and disquietude which have seized the proletarian class. A signal only is wanted, and this sixth and greatest European power will come forward, in shining armor, and sword in hand, like Minerva from the head of the Olympian. This signal the impending European war will give, and then all calculations as to the balance of power will be upset by the addition of a new element*

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the Revolt of Pugachev, in: *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 7, No. 19 (June 1928), pp. 113-127; B. H. Sumner: *New Material on the Revolt of Pugachev: II*, in: *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 7, No. 20 (January 1929), pp. 338-348; Alexander Pushkin: *Geschichte des Pugatschew'schen Aufruhrs*, Stuttgart 1840

415 *The Taiping Revolution* was a social-revolutionary movement of miners, poor peasants and ethnic minorities against the corrupt Qing dynasty which aimed to create an „*Heavenly Kingdom of Peace*“ and which was organized by an millenarian sect known as the God Worshipping Society led by Hong Xiuquan, who believed himself to be the younger brother of Jesus Christ. See on this, e.g., Franz Michael and Chung-li Chang: *The Taiping Rebellion. History and Documents* Vol.1, University of Washington Press, London 1966; Stephen R. Platt: *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom: China, the West, and the epic story of the Taiping Civil War*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 2012; I. M. Shukow (Ed.): *Weltgeschichte*, Vol. 6, pp. 440-455

416 Obviously, there exists a variety of literature on the Paris Commune. To name just a view socialist classics on this subject: von P. L. Lavrov: *Die Pariser Kommune vom 18. März 1871*, Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, Berlin 1971; Jean Villain: *Die großen 72 Tage. Ein Report von Jean Villain über die Pariser Kommunarden*, Verlag Volk und Welt, Berlin 1981; Prosper Lissagaray: *Geschichte der Kommune von 1871*, Rütten & Loening, Berlin 1956. See also Donny Gluckstein: *The Paris Commune: A Revolution in Democracy*, Bookmarks Publication, London 2006; I. M. Shukow (Ed.): *Weltgeschichte*, Vol. 6, pp. 628-643 and Vol. 7, pp. 15-39.

417 Again, there exist a variety of literature on the Russian-Japanese War 1904/05 and the subsequent Russian Revolution 1905-07. In place of many we refer to Leon Trotsky's *Die Russische Revolution 1905*, Vereinigung Internationaler Verlagsanstalten, Berlin 1923 (republished in Leo Trotzki: *Ausgewählte Werke*, Vol. 1, Verlag Neuer Kurs, Berlin 1972); M. Pokrowski: *Russische Geschichte*, Berlin 1930; M. Pokrowski: *Geschichte Russlands von seiner Entstehung bis zur neuesten Zeit*, C.L.Hirschfeld Verlag, Leipzig 1929, pp. 314-496; Abraham Ascher: *The Revolution of 1905*. Vol. 1 and 2, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1992.

*which, ever buoyant and youthful, will as much baffle the plans of the old European Powers, and their Generals, as it did from 1792 to 1800.*"<sup>418</sup>

It is worth noting that even the sagacious representatives of the ruling class were aware of the relationship of war and revolution. For example, the German Chancellor Bismarck noted in an expose for a meeting of his emperor Wilhelm I with Russia's Alexander III in November 1887: "*In our present time, more than in any other historical epoch, it is in the interest of the great monarchies to avoid war because today the nations tend to make their governments responsible for suffering military defeats. (...) Altogether, a possible next war would have less the character of a war between governments but rather of a war between the red flag and the elements of order and preservation.*"<sup>419</sup>

Later, Lenin and other Marxists processed the experiences of the Russian-Japanese War in 1904/05 and in particular of World War I. They understood that imperialist wars can massively accelerate the tempo of history: "*The war of 1914-1918 was a gigantic 'accelerator' (Lenin) of the socialist revolution.*"<sup>420</sup>

It was on this basis that they developed the slogan of the transformation of the imperialist war into civil war – not as a voluntaristic radical slogan but as a slogan which is *objectively* based on the potential of a reactionary war to result in collapse of the prevailing order and armed insurrections of the oppressed masses.

This is why Lenin poured scorn on reformist and centrist ideologists who complained about the destructive consequences of wars and hoped for a peaceful revolution. Such wrote Lenin in a polemic against the leading German centrist theoretician at that time, Karl Kautsky:

*„These are the two 'favourite points' of this 'extremely learned' man! The 'cult of violence' and the break-down of industry—this is what has driven him to the usual, age-old, typical whining and snivelling of the philistine instead of analysing the real conditions of the class struggle. 'We expected', he writes, 'that the revolution would come as the product of the proletarian class struggle.. .', 'but the revolution came as a consequence of the collapse of the prevailing system in Russia and Germany in the war. . . .' In other words, this pundit 'expected' a peaceful revolution! This is superb! But Herr Kautsky has lost his nerve to such a degree that he has forgotten what he himself wrote when he was a Marxist, namely, that in all probability a war would provide the occasion for revolution. Today, instead of calmly and fearlessly investigating what changes must inevitably take place in the form of the revolution as a consequence of the war, our 'theoretician' bewails the collapse of his 'expectations'!"<sup>421</sup>*

418 Friedrich Engels: The European War (1854), in: MECW 12, pp. 557-558

419 Quoted in: Heinz Wolter: Die Alternativkonzeption der Sozialdemokratie zum außenpolitischen Kurs Bismarcks nach 1871, in: Ernst Engelberg (Ed.): Diplomatie und Kriegspolitik vor und nach der Reichsgründung, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 1971, p. 255 (our translation)

420 The Platform of the Opposition (1927), in: Leon Trotsky: The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926-27), p. 382

421 V. I. Lenin: The Heroes of the Berne International (1919); in: LCW 29, p. 397. See on this also Nikolai Bukharin and Evgenii Preobrazhensky: The ABC of Communism (1920), published by the

This does not mean that every war will result in a revolutionary uprising of the popular masses. But the historical experience demonstrates that major wars which mobilize the resources of the whole economy, which affect all classes of the society and which influence the whole political life and hence the consciousness of the masses, that such events provoke massive social and political instability and hence can lead to revolutionary ruptures. As we are convinced that chauvinism, military tensions and wars are becoming an increasingly defining feature of the capitalist society, we think that such a development towards militarism will in the end also break ground for sharp class struggles and revolutionary explosions.

### **World War III and Revolution – A Contradiction in Itself?**

Finally, let us briefly deal with the following issue. As we have elaborated above in chapter XII we consider a new World War between the Great Powers as more or less inevitable if the working class does not overthrow the imperialists in time. Likewise, it is difficult to imagine such a world war without the Great Powers using their deadly arsenal of nuclear weapons. Should one conclude from this fatalistically that the relationship between war and revolution will not be existent in a future scenario of a World War III?

In our opinion, this question can not be answered in a schematic way. Yes, it is true, if a total World War III takes place with all Great Powers deploying all their nuclear weapons, humanity will be thrown back to the stage of barbarity. But, first, such a total nuclear war would not come out of the blue. It is very likely that such a catastrophic event would be preceded by a longer period of extreme global tensions between the Great Powers. Naturally, the ruling elite of the imperialist rivals will not start such an extremely risky event light-mindedly. True, there are lunatics like Trump but one should not assume that the U.S. elite would let Trump start a nuclear war against their will.<sup>422</sup>

No, it is far more likely that there would be a longer period of trade wars, smaller military clashes, severe domestic political crisis, maybe coup d'états, diplomatic crisis, etc. It is nearly inevitable that such events will spark revolutionary and pre-revolutionary crises which will offer the working class opportunities to weaken or overthrow the ruling class.

Furthermore, we can not foresee into the future. One can not exclude that such a World War might not end in the total annihilation of humanity but rather the defeat of one side or localized nuclear devastation. In such a case, a World

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Communist Party of Great Britain, 1922; Nikolai Bukharin: *Ökonomik der Transformationsperiode*. Mit Randbemerkungen von Lenin, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1990

422 It is likely that if there are advisers who steal Presidential orders from Trump's table in order to avoid them being implementing (and they can rely on the orange man's obliviousness so he doesn't notice it), there will be also Generals and Security Advisers who make sure that Trump would not get access to the Red Button. (May be they show him instead the red button to order his daily Coca Cola!)

War III could both result in the annihilation of many millions of people and, at the same time, open a period of global rebellion against the imperialist war-mongers.

In any case, the point is that revolutionaries should not get petrified by the danger of a World War III. The task is not to speculate about the future (or even to use such dangers as an excuse to become trapped in passivity) but to intervene resolutely in the class struggle and to mobilize the worker vanguard so that the chances of the international socialist revolution increase and the dangers of a World War III decrease!



## XVIII. Revolutionary Defeatism in Conflicts between Imperialist States: The Marxist Classics

The RCIT elaborates in its *“Theses on Revolutionary Defeatism in Imperialist States”* that the position of Marxists in inter-imperialist conflicts is based on the principles of *international working class solidarity*. Hence, they must refuse to side with their own ruling class as well as with that of the opposing imperialist camp. Their slogan must be: *Down with all imperialist Great Powers – whether the US, EU, Japan, China or Russia!*

Instead of supporting their “own” ruling class, they advocate irreconcilable class struggle as it was summarized by the famous German revolutionary leader Karl Liebknecht during World War I: *“The main enemy is at home”*. Revolutionaries try to utilize every conflict of the imperialist ruling against a rival in order to weaken the ruling class, to advance the class struggle and to finally transform such conflicts into a civil war against the ruling class.

These principles result, under the conditions of war, in the strategy which has become known as *“the transformation of the imperialist war into civil war”*, i.e. the advance of the proletariats’ struggle for power under the conditions of war. The same principles mean, under the conditions of a trade war between imperialist powers, to advocate the *transformation of the Global Trade War into domestic political class struggle against the ruling elite*.

In all scenarios it is the goal 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 with the social-imperialist lackeys* inside the workers movement.

Such are the strategic goals of the program of revolutionary defeatism. It is a program which is *always* part of the politics of the revolutionary party resp. pre-party organization. It would be an unforgivable mistake to believe that it would be only a program concerning the struggle against wars and, hence, that it would become relevant only once a war breaks out. If a Marxist organization only begins to fight against imperialist aggression and wars once such conflicts start, it will be too late. When a major war actually starts, the ruling class will have already fired up its political and ideological machinery of chauvinism long before. And if a revolutionary party opens the defeatist struggle only by then it will have no chance against a superior class enemy. No, the program of revolutionary defeatism has to be implemented from now on.

Such work for a revolutionary defeatist orientation requires comprehensive agitation and propaganda utilizing all legal means (according to the democratic space allowed by the ruling class) and illegal means. Such work must be conducted in workplaces, neighborhoods, schools, universities and barracks and,

where possible, also in parliament. The goal must be to rally the masses for class struggle actions like demonstrations, strikes up to general strikes, uprisings – again according to conditions and relation of forces.

Given the fact that revolutionaries constitute only a small minority today, it is urgent for them to apply the united front tactic. This means that they should call on workers and popular mass organizations (trade unions, parties, migrant organizations, etc), which are usually led by non-revolutionary forces, for joint activities against government plans for armament, against colonial aggression abroad, against protectionist measures and sanctions against rivals, etc. They should call such parties, where they have representatives in parliament, to vote against the military budget and against all such measures. Revolutionaries should criticize such forces – usually reformists and petty-bourgeois populists – whenever they fail to act against the ruling class' imperialist policy.

Furthermore, 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!

## Marx and Engels in the Pre-Imperialist Epoch

Before we go more into detail of the substance and the tactics of revolutionary defeatism, let us briefly elaborate on the historical background of this strategy.

As is well known, Marx and Engels lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. the pre-monopolistic epoch of capitalism. In this epoch, capitalism was booming and, hence, the bourgeoisie in the industrialized countries could occasionally play a historically progressive role. As a result, wars between European states, or between the North and the South in the U.S., did usually not have a reactionary character on both sides. The inter-state relations in the international political situation were rather, as Marx and Engels elaborated, characterized by the constant threat of Tsarist Russia as the biggest and most reactionary Great Power.<sup>423</sup> In addition, there existed looming historically progressive democratic tasks as the national unification of fragmented Germany as well as Italy, the national liberation of Poland as well as Ireland, etc.

It was such historical background where Marx and Engels called enthusiastically for revolutionary war of Germany against Tsarist Russia in 1848.

*„Only a war against Russia would be a war of revolutionary Germany, a war by which she could cleanse herself of her past sins, could take courage, defeat her own autocrats, spread civilisation by the sacrifice of her own sons as becomes a people that is*

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<sup>423</sup> Eleanor Marx Aveling, Marx's daughter, aptly summarized her fathers' view of Tsarist Russia as being *“the greatest enemy of all advance, the greatest stronghold of reaction.”* (Karl Marx: The Eastern Question. A Reprint of Letters written 1853-1856 dealing with the events of the Crimean War, Edited by Eleanor Marx Aveling and Edward Aveling, Swan Sonnenschein & Co, London 1897, p. ix)

*shaking off the chains of long, indolent slavery and make herself free within her borders by bringing liberation to those outside. The more the light of publicity reveals in sharp outlines the most recent events, the more facts confirm our view of the national wars by which Germany has dishonoured her new era.”*<sup>424</sup>

Likewise did the founders of scientific socialism later side with other powers like Britain or the Ottoman Empire in military conflicts with Russia.<sup>425</sup>

## The Bolsheviks and the Russian-Japanese War 1904/05

However, this changed with the transition from pre-monopolistic to the monopolistic capitalism, i.e. the beginning of the imperialist epoch at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Lenin explained in his writings during World War I, the bourgeoisie couldn't play a historically progressive role in any of the developed countries. Hence, the defense of the fatherland in the advanced capitalist countries had lost any progressive character:

*“What do we mean when we say that national states have become fetters, etc.? We have in mind the advanced capitalist countries, above all Germany, France, England, whose participation in the present war has been the chief factor in making it an imperialist war. In these countries, which hitherto have been in the van of mankind, particularly in 1789-1871, the process of forming national states has been consummated. In these countries the national movement is a thing of an irrevocable past, and it would be an absurd reactionary utopia to try to revive it. The national movement of the French, English, Germans has long been completed. In these countries history's next step is a different one: liberated nations have become transformed into oppressor nations, into nations of imperialist rapine, nations that are going through the “eve of the collapse of capitalism””*<sup>426</sup>

In other words, from now on the working class and the oppressed people did not face only Czarist Russia but all imperialist Great Powers as their *“greatest enemy and the greatest stronghold of reaction.”*

Lenin and the Bolsheviks fully elaborated the program of revolutionary defeatism at the beginning of World War I. However, they already developed key

424 Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: German Foreign Policy and the Latest Events in Prague (in: Neue Rheinische Zeitung 12 July 1848), in: MECW Vol. 7, p. 212

425 See on this, in addition to the two collections of Marx's writings on this subject mentioned above, e.g. Karl Marx: Die Geschichte der Geheimdiplomatie des 18. Jahrhunderts. Über den asiatischen Ursprung der russischen Despotie, Berlin, Olle & Wolter, Berlin 1977; David B. Rjazanov, Karl Marx über den Ursprung der Vorherrschaft Rußlands in Europa. Kritische Untersuchungen, in: Karl Marx, Die Geschichte der Geheimdiplomatie des 18. Jahrhunderts; M. Pokrowski: Geschichte Russlands von seiner Entstehung bis zur neuesten Zeit, C.L.Hirschfeld Verlag, Leipzig 1929; M. Pokrowski: Russische Geschichte, Berlin 1930; Paolo Dalvit: Die Außenpolitik im Klassenkampf. Die Position von Marx und Engels zum Krimkrieg; Hanno Strauß: Von Engels' „Panslawismus“ zu Marx' „Geheimdiplomatie“. Eine Herleitung politischer Ambitionen; both essays have been published in: Marx und Russland. Beiträge zur Marx-Engels-Forschung Neue Folge 2012, Argument, Hamburg 2014, pp. 9-20 resp. 83-104

426 V. I. Lenin: A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism; in: LCW Vol. 23, p.38

elements of this strategy during the war between Russia and Japan in 1904-05.<sup>427</sup> As is known, this war ended with a defeat for Russia and triggered the first Russian Revolution in 1905-07.

Lenin emphasized, already before the beginning of the revolutionary uprising in January 1905, the connection of war and revolution: *"we must recognise the great revolutionary role of the historic war in which the Russian worker is an involuntary participant."*<sup>428</sup>

*"Military disaster is inevitable, and together with it discontent, unrest, and indignation will inevitably increase tenfold. We must prepare for that moment with the utmost energy. At that moment, one of the outbreaks which are recurring, now here, now there, with such growing frequency, will develop into a tremendous popular movement. At that moment the proletariat will rise and take its stand at the head of the insurrection to win freedom for the entire people and to secure for the working class the possibility of waging the open and broad struggle for socialism, a struggle enriched by the whole experience of Europe."*<sup>429</sup>

As a consequence, the Bolsheviks advocated a defeatist position, i.e. they stood for the defeat of their "own" reactionary government.

*"The cause of Russian freedom and of the struggle of the Russian (and the world) proletariat for socialism depends to a very large extent on the military defeats of the autocracy. This cause has been greatly advanced by the military debacle which has struck terror in the hearts of all the European guardians of the existing order. The revolutionary proletariat must carry on a ceaseless agitation against war, always keeping in mind, however, that wars are inevitable as long as class rule exists. Trite phrases about peace à la Jaurès are of no use to the oppressed class, which is not responsible for a bourgeois war between two bourgeois nations, which is doing all it can to overthrow every bourgeoisie, which knows the enormity of the people's sufferings even in time of "peaceful" capitalist exploitation. (...) It was the Russian autocracy and not the Russian people that started this colonial war, which has turned into a war between the old and the new bourgeois worlds. It is the autocratic regime and not the Russian people that has suffered ignoble defeat. The Russian people has gained from the defeat of the autocracy. The capitulation of Port Arthur is the prologue to the capitulation of tsarism. The war is not ended yet by far, but every step towards its continuation increases immeasurably the unrest and discontent among the Russian people, brings nearer the hour of a new great war, the war of the people against the autocracy, the war of the proletariat for liberty."*<sup>430</sup>

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427 On the Russian-Japanese War in 1904-05 see e.g. John W. Steinberg, Bruce W. Menning, David Schimmelpenninck, Van Der Oye, David Wolff, Shinji Yokote (Eds.): *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective. World War Zero, Vol. I and II*, Brill, Leiden 2005 and 2007; J. N. Westwood: *Russia against Japan, 1904-1905: A New Look At the Russo-Japanese War*, State University of New York, 1986; Evgeny Sergeev: *Russian Military Intelligence in the War with Japan, 1904-05. Secret operations on land and at sea*, Routledge, New York 2007; Rotem Kowner: *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War*, Routledge, New York 2007; Josef Kreiner (Ed.): *Der Russisch-Japanische Krieg (1904/05)*, V&R unipress, Göttingen 2005

428 V.I.Lenin: *The Fall of Port Arthur (1905)*, in: *LCW Vol. 8*, p. 53

429 V.I.Lenin: *The Autocracy and the Proletariat (1904)*, in: *LCW Vol. 8*, p. 28

430 V.I.Lenin: *The Fall of Port Arthur (1905)*, in: *LCW Vol. 8*, p. 53

They polemicised against the Mensheviks because of their pacifist position. True, the latter did not take a social-patriotic stance – in this war, even large sectors of the urban intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie failed to support the militarist goals of the Tsar as they despised the autocracy. (In fact many opposition parties were even in contact with the Japanese secret service and took money from it! <sup>431</sup>) But the Mensheviks criticized Lenin's advocacy of "defeatism" and accused him of promoting "Japanophilism". In contrast they advocated the slogan of "immediate peace." <sup>432</sup>

Lenin rejected such a pacifist position: "Neither could the new Iskra help showing muddled thinking. It had quite a lot to say at first about peace at any price. It then made haste to "correct itself", when Jaurès showed plainly whose interests, those of the progressive or those of the reactionary bourgeoisie, would be served by a quasi-socialist campaign for peace in general. And now it has ended up with platitudes about the unreasonableness of "speculating" (!) on a victory of the Japanese bourgeoisie and about war being a calamity "regardless of whether" it ends in the victory or the defeat of the autocracy." <sup>433</sup>

As we see, the essential differences between the Bolshevik strategy of defeatism and the left-Menshevik strategy of platonic anti-militarism and pacifism were already visible one decade earlier.

## The Full Elaboration of Lenin's Defeatist Program in World War One 1914-17

Hence, it is not surprising that Lenin was able to fully elaborate a revolutionary defeatists program within days after the first shots opened World War I as close collaborators of him testified. <sup>434</sup> Following his release from prison

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431 See on this e.g. Akashi Motojirō: Rakka ryusui: Colonel Akashi's Report on His Secret Cooperation with the Russian Revolutionary Parties during the Russo-Japanese War. O. Fält and A. Kujala (Eds.), *Studia Historica* 31, Helsinki, 1988; Dmitrii B. Pavlov: Japanese Money and the Russian Revolution, 1904-1905, in: *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, No. 11 (1993), pp. 79-87

432 See Julius Martow: *Geschichte der russischen Sozialdemokratie* (1918/26), Erlangen 1973, pp. 93-95; see also Dmitrii B. Pavlov: *Japanese Money and the Russian Revolution*, p. 82

433 V.I.Lenin: *The Fall of Port Arthur* (1905), in: *LCW* Vol. 8, pp. 52-53

434 See e.g. the Recollections of the Old Bolshevik Shklovsky: "I may testify that the fundamental slogans of Lenin's tactic in the imperialist war had been formulated by him in Austria during the first few days of the war, for he brought them to Berne completely formulated. And further! I have every reason for stating that this tactic had matured in Lenin's head probably on the first day of the war. My arrest on the third or fourth day of the war may serve as a proof of this statement. ... My arrest was caused by a telegram from Vladimir Ilich [Lenin] addressed to me which was intercepted by the Swiss military authorities. In this telegram Lenin suggested that I should get in touch with our comrades in Paris for the purpose of organizing the issue of war leaflets and proclamations. This indicates that there was not a moment of doubt or vacillation on the part of Vladimir Ilich and that on the first day of the war he was already thinking of a war against war, i.e., of turning the imperialist war into a civil war. On about the second day [after Lenin's arrival in Berne] a meeting was held in the forest ... where Ilich spoke on the attitude toward the war this being the only possible subject of discussion for us at that time. A few days later, i.e. on September 6 or 7, a more intimate meeting was held in my apartment; at this meeting Ilich presented his theses on the war." (G. L. Shklovsky:

after eleven days in August 1914 in Galicia, Lenin, together with his wife and comrade-in-arms Nadezhda Krupskaya as well as Grigory Zinoviev and Zlata Lilina, went to Swiss where they threw themselves into working for the split of the politically collapsed Second International and the creation of the Third, revolutionary International.<sup>435</sup>

According to the memoirs of the Russian Bolshevik G. L. Shklovsky, Lenin proclaimed at the moment of his arrival in Swiss after the beginning of World War One: „*He is not a socialist who does not, in times of imperialist war, desire the defeat of his own country.*“<sup>436</sup>

On the next days after arriving in Bern, Lenin began to organize meetings with his comrades in which he explained them the necessary tactics in this imperialist war. He succeeded in this effort and his theses on the war, later expanded into a Manifesto and several resolutions, were agreed and adopted both by leading institutions of the underground party in Russia as well as the Bern Conference of Bolshevik groups abroad (in late February 1915).<sup>437</sup>

Recollections (1925), in: O.H. Gankin and H.H. Fisher: *The Bolsheviks and the World War*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1940, p. 143)

435 We note, as an aside, that the criticism of Lenin's strategy of revolutionary defeatism which has been articulated by various Marxists (in the broad sense of the word) after World War II, for example by people like Hal Draper or Brian Pearce, is completely unfounded. The first was a pseudo-Marxist academic, the second a scholar who did valuable work as translator of numerous works of Trotsky and others from Russian into English. Contrary to their accusations, neither did Lenin initially saw defeatism as a strategy only valid for Russia, nor did he later relativize or even drop defeatism. In this sense, we agree with the reply of Cliff Slaughter (*Lenin and the Imperialist War of 1914-1918*, in: *Fourth International*, Vol. 4, No. 3, November 1967, pp. 81-88). Brian Pearce elaborated his views in the essay *Lenin and Trotsky on Pacifism and Defeatism*, in: *Labour Review*, Vol. 6 (1961), No. 1, <http://www.whatnextjournal.co.uk/Pages/History/Pearce.html>. Hal Draper revisionist attack on Leninism is called: *The Myth of Lenin's "Revolutionary Defeatism"* and was initially published in the Shachmanite journal *New International* in 1953/54, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/draper/1953/defeat/index.htm>.

A much superior and accurate presentation of Lenin's program of defeatism has been published by Roman Rosdolsky in his work *Studien über revolutionäre Taktik. Zwei unveröffentlichte Arbeiten über die II. Internationale und über die österreichische Sozialdemokratie* (Verlag für das Studium der Arbeiterbewegung, West-Berlin 1973; this work was later translated into English with the title *Imperialist War and the Question of Peace* and can be read online here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/rosdolsky/1978/impwarqpeace/index.htm>). Rosdolsky has been a Ukrainian Trotskyist and an excellent Marxist scholar (see e.g. his work on the pre-history of Marx' *Capital*). Nevertheless, even his thoughtful study is not free of weaknesses as he relativizes Lenin's defeatism in cases when one Great Power could conquer the whole country of its rival.

436 Quoted in Alfred Erich Senn: *The Russian Revolution in Switzerland, 1914-1917*, University of Wisconsin Press, London 1971, p. 33

437 Shklovsky reported from the trial of the Bolshevik deputies to the Duma: *"From Deputy Petrovsky's testimony at the trial of the Bolsheviks it was revealed that these theses were also adopted by seven of the largest concerns in Petrograd."* The editors add in a note: *"In Russia these theses were mimeographed and sent to various large party organizations. Apparently they were discussed and adopted by the workers of a number of factories in Petersburg during the second half of September 1914; they were sent to Kamenev, in October they were discussed in Moscow, according to police records. They were discovered also in Baku. ... Samoilov recalls that in the middle of September 1914, immediately on his return from abroad, he presented the point of view of the Bureau of the Central Committee Abroad at a meeting of party members in Ivanovo-Voznesensk."* (ibid, p. 144)

The core idea of Lenin's approach was that revolutionaries must advance the struggle against the imperialist wars through the methods of the class struggle and utilize the crisis caused by the war for the revolutionary overthrow of one owns 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."*<sup>438</sup>

Lenin approvingly quoted the Italian Marxists who proclaimed at the beginning of the world war their defeatist position and stated that the only just war is the war of the oppressed to take power: *"We are always for 'santa guerra di tutti gli oppressi per la conquista delle loro patrie!'"* (a holy war of all the oppressed, for the conquest of their own fatherland!)<sup>439</sup>

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."*<sup>440</sup>

*"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."*<sup>441</sup>

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."*<sup>442</sup>

The Bolsheviks were fully conscious of the fact that the imperialist war inevitable provokes objective explosive situation which had to be utilized to advance the class struggle: *"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 unblushing 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*

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

439 V. I. Lenin: The European War and International Socialism (1914); in: LCW 21, p. 20

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

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

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

*“mass action” tactics inevitably lead to this. It is impossible to foretell whether a powerful revolutionary movement 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.”*<sup>443</sup>

## Bolshevik Agitation against the War in Russia

The Bolsheviks in Russia put all efforts in resisting against the mobilizations for the imperialist war. Despite suffering a wave of mass arrests in the weeks before, they distributed illegal leaflets in Petersburg and other cities in July, August and September 1914. Furthermore, they attempted to organize street demonstrations and protests of conscripted soldiers. In their propaganda the Bolsheviks advocated slogans like *“Down with the War!”*, *“Down with the Tsarist Regime!”* and *“Long live the Revolution!”*. They also raised slogans like *“Get politically organized!”* and *“Get Yourselves Weapons, Time is Running Out!”*<sup>444</sup>

Alexander Shlyapnikov, one of the Bolshevik leaders during the war period, reported in his recollection about the party’s anti-war agitation on the streets and in the factories. He quotes from a leaflet, issued by the Petersburg Committee of the party at the beginning of the war:

*“Down with the war!’ ‘War on war!’ must roll powerfully across city and hamlet alike across the width of our Russia. Workers must remember that they do not have enemies over the frontier: everywhere the working class is oppressed by the rich and the power of the property-owners. Everywhere it is oppressed by the yoke of exploitation and the chains of poverty. (...) Without having time to wash workers’ blood off the streets of Petersburg and only yesterday branding all of working-class Petersburg as well as all the workers of Russia as “enemies within” against whom savage cossacks and mercenary police went into action, they now call for the defence of the fatherland. Soldiers and workers! You are being called on to die for the glory of the cossack lash and for the glory of a fatherland that shoots starving peasants and workers and strangles its best sons in prison. No, we don’t want the war, you must declare. We want the freedom of Russia. (...) Down with the war, down with the tsarist government! Long live the revolution!”*<sup>445</sup>

In another leaflet, distributed in autumn 1914, they called the workers to organize themselves and get arms for the coming struggle.<sup>446</sup>

443 V.I. Lenin and G. Zinoviev: *Socialism and War* (1915), in: LCW 21, p.313

444 Quoted in Lenin: *Sämtliche Werke*, Band XVIII (Der imperialistische Krieg 1914-15), Verlag für Literatur und Politik, Wien 1929, p. 493 (our translation) See also e.g. Olga Hess Fisher, H.H. Gankin: *The Bolsheviks and the World War; the Origin of the Third International*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1940; Barbara C. Allen: *Alexander Shlyapnikov, 1885-1937. Life of an Old Bolshevik*, Haymarket Books, Chicago 2015, pp. 56-75; Alexander Shlyapnikov: *On the Eve of 1917* (1923), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/shliapnikov/1923/eve1917/index.html>; W. Astrow, A. Slepokov, J. Thomas (Eds): *Illustrierte Geschichte der Russischen Revolution 1917* (published in 1928, reprinted by Verlag Neue Kritik, Frankfurt am Main 1970), pp. 73-82

445 Alexander Shlyapnikov: *On the Eve of 1917* (1923)

446 See the historic notes in W.I.Lenin: *Sämtliche Werke* Band XVIII, Wien-Berlin 1929, p. 493. This



## Trotsky continues the Revolutionary Struggle against Imperialist War

Later, after the Stalinist bureaucracy transformed the Communist International into a revisionist force, Trotsky and the Fourth International continued to struggle for a revolutionary defeatist program against the imperialist war. Shortly before the beginning of World War II, Trotsky stated:

*“Defeatism is the class policy of the proletariat, which even during a war sees the main enemy at home, within its particular imperialist country. Patriotism, on the other hand, is a policy that locates the main enemy outside one’s own country. The idea of defeatism signifies in reality the following: conducting an irreconcilable revolutionary struggle against one’s own bourgeoisie as the main enemy, without being deterred by the fact that this struggle may result in the defeat of one’s own government; given a revolutionary movement the defeat of one’s own government is a lesser evil.”*<sup>447</sup>

Furthermore, Trotsky emphasized that the workers’ movement will be only prepared for the struggle against imperialist wars if it already learns opposing “its” imperialist state in times of peace.

*“The defense of the national state, first of all in Balkanized Europe – the cradle of the national state – is in the full sense of the word a reactionary task. The national state with its borders, passports, monetary system, customs and the army for the protection of customs has become a frightful impediment to the economic and cultural development of humanity. The task of the proletariat is not the defense of the national state but its complete and final liquidation. (...) A “socialist” who preaches national defense is a petty-bourgeois reactionary at the service of decaying capitalism. Not to bind itself to the national state in time of war, to follow not the war map but the map of the class struggle, is possible only for that party that has already declared irreconcilable war on the national state in time of peace. Only by realizing fully the objectively reactionary role of the imperialist state can the proletarian vanguard become invulnerable to all types of social patriotism. This means that a real break with the ideology and policy of “national defense” is possible only from the standpoint of the international proletarian revolution.”*<sup>448</sup>

It was during the years 1914-16 that the category “defeatists” and “defeatism” emerged. Initially it was used by the opponents of the Bolsheviks who accused them of “unpatriotically” advocating defeat (in Russian: „porashenzy” – “those advocating defeat”). Their social-patriotic enemies were called “Oboronzy” – „those defending the fatherland”. In addition, the category “defeatism” was also used (including by the Bolsheviks) to describe a wide-spread mood in the society of lacking support for the war-efforts of the ruling class.

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leaflet is also mentioned in Shlyapnikov’s recollection.

447 Leon Trotsky: A step towards social patriotism (1939), in: Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1938-39, p. 209

448 Leon Trotsky: War and the Fourth International (1934); in: Trotsky Writings 1933-34, pp. 304-305 (Emphasize in the original)

The Bolsheviks picked up this category and positively identified with it. Grigori Zinoviev, who edited together with Lenin the central organ of the Bolsheviks during World War I published in Swiss, wrote in a programmatic article in October 1916: *“It is impossible to be a consistent internationalist in the imperialist war 1914-16 without being a ‘defeatist’.”*<sup>449</sup> Later, the Bolsheviks, the Communist International and the Fourth International used the category *“defeatism”* or *“revolutionary defeatism”* more systematically.

It is also worth pointing out that the Bolsheviks’ strategy of defeatism could build upon statements of earlier Marxists. Gregory Zinoviev noted that Jules Guesde, a pioneer of Marxism in France, advocated *“defeatism”* on both sides when Russia and Britain came close to war over Afghanistan in 1885.

*“In 1885, Jules Guesde rejoiced at the threat of war between Russia and England in the hope that a social revolution would emerge from such a catastrophe. When Guesde acted in this way, when he called on the proletariat to make use of the war between two giant powers to hasten the unleashing of the proletarian revolution, he was much more of a Marxist than at present when, along with Sembat, he carries on the tradition of the ‘great pacifist orator Jean Jaurès.’”*<sup>450</sup>

Guesde published at that time an article entitled *“Long Live War”* in which he characterized Britain and Russia as *“equally oppressive, although in different ways”*. Guesde explained that whichever of the two governments is defeated, it will be a good thing *“for us”*, i.e. for socialism.

*“Russia’s defeat would mean the end of Tsarism, the political liberation of Russia. (...) And the first result, the inevitable result of a political revolution in Petersburg will be the liberation of the German workers. (...) Britain’s defeat would have no less and no less advantageous consequences. (...) it could liberate Ireland from the state of siege (...) while Sudan – and consequently Egypt – could liberate itself (...). Soon after the first misfortune of England, the separation of the biggest and most exploited colonies would begin ...”*<sup>451</sup>

Zinoviev summarized Guesde’s approach: *“The war between England and Russia could accelerate the solution, the end of the bourgeois social order. But – whose victory and whose defeat is desirable? England or Russia? I wish for the defeat of both.”*<sup>452</sup>

A few years later, the Communist International summarized the experience

449 Gregory Zinoviev: *Der ‚Defaitismus‘ früher und heute* (1916); in: Lenin/Sinowjew: G. Sinowjew / V. I. Lenin: *Gegen den Strom*, Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale, Hamburg 1921, p. 442 (our translation)

450 Gregory Zinoviev: *Pazifismus oder Marxismus (Böse Folgen einer Losung.)*, in: G. Sinowjew / V. I. Lenin: *Gegen den Strom*, Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale, Hamburg 1921, p. 119 (In English: *Pacifism or Marxism (The Misadventures of a Slogan)*, in: Spartacist English edition No. 64, Summer 2014, <http://www.icl-fi.org/english/esp/64/zinoviev.html>)

451 Quoted in: Gregorij Sinowjew: *Der Krieg und die Krise im Sozialismus*, Verlag für Literatur und Kritik, Wien 1924, p. 475 (our translation)

452 Quoted in: Gregorij Sinowjew: *Der Krieg und die Krise im Sozialismus*, Verlag für Literatur und Kritik, Wien 1924, pp. 475-476 (our translation). See on this also: Edgar Hardcastle: *Socialists and War* (on Boris Souvarine), *Socialist Standard*, August 1932, [https://www.marxists.org/archive/hardcastle/1932/socialists\\_war.htm](https://www.marxists.org/archive/hardcastle/1932/socialists_war.htm)

of the revolutionary struggle against the imperialist war. In a programmatic statement, adopted by the ECCI in March 1922, it listed the following measures as appropriate in the anti-militarist struggle.

*“Proceeding from these facts and considerations, the enlarged Executive of the Communist International declares that the only effective defence against the threatening danger of war is a proletarian revolution. . . . The assembled representatives of 36 nations therefore consider it the duty of all communist parties to prepare ideologically and organizationally for the most intense revolutionary class struggle to avert war. As means to this end they suggest:*

1. *Systematic education of the working masses, including youth, on the causes and character of wars.*
2. *Bringing before the court of the broadest masses all problems and decisions concerning foreign policy, armaments, etc.*
3. *Well-organized legal and illegal propaganda among the forces and armed formations of every kind to enlighten them on these questions.*
4. *Imbuing the proletariat with the resolve to prevent the transport of troops and army supplies by all means and at whatever cost, should imperialist war break out.*
5. *Strengthening the revolutionary will of the broadest masses to fight against the outbreak of imperialist war by street demonstrations, general strikes, armed uprisings..*
- ..
6. *The creation of legal and illegal bodies to work for the execution of these tasks.*
7. *The creation of legal and illegal bodies and institutions to ensure unified and energetic international co-operation of communists in those countries between whom contradictions are most acute.”*<sup>453</sup>

In the same spirit did the American Trotskyists define the tasks for revolutionaries in preparing for imperialist war: *“Meanwhile, in carrying on the daily struggle, it is the duty of the Marxists to prepare for the war crisis. To this end, they must constantly expose the war plans of the imperialist powers; they must resist the militarization of the masses; they must make clear to the working class each step in the progress toward war; they must combat the patriotic war propaganda; they must help strengthen, ideologically and materially, the organizations of the workers, so that these will not be crushed at the outbreak of the war. And they must everywhere and at all times expose the misleaders and the betrayers in the fight against war, from whatever camp—those who make ready, by a thousand and one devices, to turn over the workers to the war-makers.”*<sup>454</sup>

These tactics have not lost in validity since then!

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453 Communist International: Theses on the Fight against the War Danger (1922), in: Jane Degras: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents Volume I 1919-1922, p. 332

454 John West (James Burnham): War and the Workers (1936), Workers Party Pamphlet, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/burnham/1936/war/index.htm>; see also: A Manifesto against Imperialist War! The Executive Committee of the Fourth International (World Party of the Socialist Revolution) September 1938, in: Documents of the Fourth International, New York 1973, p. 171-176

## XIX. Revolutionary Defeatism in Conflicts between Imperialist States: Programmatic Components (1)

Let us now deal with various components of the program of Revolutionary Defeatism which the RCIT advocates in inter-imperialist conflicts.

### For Working Class Independence – No Support for Any Great Power!

The starting point for any correct orientation in a conflict between imperialist states must be the political independence of the working class. This means that socialists must reject support either for their “own” imperialist state or for any other imperialist state. In its programmatic document “*Six Points for a Platform of Revolutionary Unity Today*”, the RCIT summarized the Marxist position as follows:

*“It is only possible to understand the driving dynamic of the present period of capitalist crisis and to take a correct position if one recognizes the imperialist character not only of the US, EU and Japan but also of the new emerging powers, Russia and China. Only on such a basis is it possible to arrive at the only correct, anti-imperialist program on this issue – proletarian internationalism and revolutionary defeatism, i.e., the perspective of consistent struggle of the working class independent of and against all imperialist powers. This means that revolutionaries refuse to lend support to any Great Power in inter-imperialist conflicts under the slogan “The main enemy is at home!” (...) Those who fail to recognize the reactionary and imperialist character of these Great Powers will inevitable fail to take a consistent anti-imperialist, i.e. Marxist, line and will end up, consciously or unconsciously, supporting one or the other imperialist camp as a “lesser evil”.”*<sup>455</sup>

This line is in accordance with the class line as Lenin and the Bolsheviks elaborated it during World War One. In *Socialism and War*, one of their key pamphlets which they published shortly before the first international conference against the imperialist war in Zimmerwald in September 1915, the Bolshevik leaders emphasized that the working class must oppose it own as well as any other Great Power.<sup>456</sup>

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455 RCIT: Six Points for a Platform of Revolutionary Unity Today. A Proposal from the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), February 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/6-points-for-a-platform-of-revolutionary-unity-today/>

456 On the Zimmerwald Movement and, in particular the Zimmerwald Left led by Lenin see e.g. John Riddell, *Lenin’s Struggle for a Revolutionary International*, New York: Pathfinder, 1984; R. Craig Nation, *War on War*, Duke University Press, Durham 1989; Olga Hess Fisher, H.H. Gankin: *The Bolsheviks and the World War; the Origin of the Third International*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1940; Ian D. Thatcher: *Leon Trotsky and World War One August 1914–February*

„Social-chauvinism is advocacy of the idea of “defence of the fatherland” in the present war. This idea logically leads to the abandonment of the class struggle during the war, to voting for war credits, etc. In fact, the social-chauvinists are pursuing an anti-proletarian bourgeois policy, for they are actually championing, not “defence of the fatherland” in the sense of combating foreign oppression, but the “right” of one or other of the “Great” Powers to plunder colonies and to oppress other nations. The social-chauvinists reiterate the bourgeois deception of the people that the war is being waged to protect the freedom and existence of nations, thereby taking sides with the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. Among the social-chauvinists are those who justify and varnish the governments and bourgeoisie of one of the belligerent groups of powers, as well as those who, like Kautsky, argue that the socialists of all the belligerent powers are equally entitled to “defend the fatherland”. Social- chauvinism, which is, in effect, defence of the privileges, the advantages, the right to pillage and plunder, of one’s “own” (or any) imperialist bourgeoisie, is the utter betrayal of all socialist convictions and of the decision of the Basle International Socialist Congress.”<sup>457</sup>

Such a position must be taken also today. However, as we have elaborated above this is only possible if one is capable of correctly recognizing the class character not only of the old imperialist powers (U.S., EU and Japan) but also of the new emerging ones (China and Russia). Without such recognition, any organization will inevitable slide into the social-chauvinist swamp.

## The Struggle against Chauvinism

The struggle against imperialism and militarism is not one which starts only once shots are fired between the Great Powers. It is a combat which is organically related to the total struggle against the ruling class. Hence, as Trotsky once remarked, it requires a thoroughly internationalist, anti-chauvinist political consciousness of the workers vanguard, in the first place, and, eventually, the majority of the proletariat: “*The struggle against war is inseparable from the class struggle of the proletariat. Irreconcilable class consciousness is the first condition for a successful struggle against war.*”<sup>458</sup>

The struggle against war is closely related with the political struggle against all forms of ideological chauvinism, hatred against refugees, national oppression of migrants, jingoism against imperialist rivals, etc. In other words, the struggle against imperialism and militarism must be an organic part of the dai-

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1917, Macmillan Press Ltd, London 2000 (Chapter 4); Alfred Erich Senn: The Russian Revolution in Switzerland, 1914-1917, University of Wisconsin Press, London 1971; Akito Yamanouchi: “Internationalized Bolshevism” : The Bolsheviks and the International, 1914-1917, in: Acta Slavica Iaponica Vol.7 (1989), pp. 17-32; Horst Lademacher: Die Zimmerwalder Bewegung. Vol. 1 and 2, Den Haag 1967; Jules Humbert-Droz: Der Krieg und die Internationale. Die Konferenzen von Zimmerwald und Kienthal, Wien 1964; Angelica Balabanova: Die Zimmerwalder Bewegung 1914–1919. Hirschfeld, Leipzig 1928; Arnold Reisberg: Lenin und die Zimmerwalder Bewegung. Berlin 1966.

457 G. Zinoviev / V. I. Lenin: Socialism and War (1915) ; in: LCW Vol. 21, pp. 306-307 (our emphasis)

458 Leon Trotsky: How to Struggle against War (1937), in: Trotsky Writings 1937-38, p. 54

ly political work of any revolutionary organization.

In fact we see in the last years a massive surge of chauvinism in all Great Powers. Such chauvinism is first and foremost directed against migrants and national minorities. There has been a huge rise of anti-migrant chauvinism in the U.S., Western Europe and Russia in the past years, resulting both in an increase both of state repression as well as of racist right-wing and fascist forces (mostly directed against the Latinos and Black people in the U.S, Muslim migrants in Western Europe and Russia and, in the case of letter, also against the national minorities in the Caucasus). In China, there are currently only few migrants from abroad because there is a vast supply of “internal migrants” (as we have explained above). However, Beijing is wiping up chauvinism against its national minorities – in particular the Muslim Uyghurs in East Turkestan (or Xinjiang as the province is officially called by the Chinese authorities).<sup>459</sup> Japan, historically the most insulated of all Great Powers with hardly any migrants and with only a very small Korean minority, is traditionally very xenophobic (which will provoke domestic political tensions given the need of the capitalist class to import cheap migrant labor in the coming period.<sup>460</sup>)

However, Great Power chauvinism is also increasingly directed against imperialist rivals. See for example the Anti-Russia hysteria in the U.S. and the EU – in particular since the events in the Ukraine in 2014 and even more so since the US Presidential elections in 2016 and the poison attack on Sergei Skripal, a former Russian military officer and double agent for the UK’s intelligence services.<sup>461</sup> Likewise we see an increasingly aggressive campaign in the old imperialist states against China. Accusing it of striving to control modern technologies and to spy on the Western communication systems.<sup>462</sup> Vice versa the Russian state

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459 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: China: Defend the Muslim Uyghurs against Oppression! 18.10.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/china-defend-the-muslim-uyghurs-against-oppression/>

460 William Pesek: Abe’s Japan tries a decidedly foreign concept, November 19, 2018 <http://www.atimes.com/article/abes-japan-tries-a-decidedly-foreign-concept/>

461 See on this RCIT the literature mentioned in the special sub-section on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-russia-as-imperialist-powers/>. In particular we refer to our pamphlet by Michael Pröbsting: The Uprising in East Ukraine and Russian Imperialism. An Analysis of Recent Developments in the Ukrainian Civil War and their Consequences for Revolutionary Tactics, 22 October 2014, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/ukraine-and-russian-imperialism/>; see also the two joint statement of the RCIT and the MGKP (Russia): Military Escalation between Russia and Ukraine at the Kerch Strait. Down with the Reactionary Warmongering on Both Sides! 28 November 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/military-escalation-between-russia-and-ukraine-at-the-kerch-strait/> and Down with Imperialist Warmongering of All Great Powers! Syria attack, Protectionist Tariffs and Salisbury poisoning: Against all imperialist diplomatic, economic and military aggression! In U.S., EU, Russia and China: The Main Enemy is at Home! Support democratic and national liberation struggles of oppressed people! 13.04.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/syria-down-with-imperialist-warmongering-of-all-great-powers/>

462 See on this e.g. Yukon Huang: Opinion: China’s Trade War With U.S. Is About Technological Dominance, May 16, 2018 <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2018-05-16/opinion-chinas-trade-war-with-us-is-about-technological-dominance-101250670.html>; Gordon Watts: Meng arrest and

takes actions against various NGO's under the pretext that they act as "foreign agents". The chauvinist campaigns both in China and Japan around the conflict about the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea <sup>463</sup> or the chauvinist campaigns against the backdrop of looming Global Trade War are other examples.

Lenin emphasized that the reformists and centrists usually grossly underestimate the difficulties of fighting against imperialist war. They imagine that once a war starts, they will organize strikes or other mass actions in order to stop it. Lenin explained, in his notes for the communist delegation at an international congress organized by reformist trade unions in The Hague in late 1922, that this is a total illusion.

*"On the question of combating the danger of war, in connection with the Conference at The Hague, I think that the greatest difficulty lies in overcoming the prejudice that this is a simple, clear and comparatively easy question. "We shall retaliate to war by a strike or a revolution" — that is what all the prominent reformist leaders usually say to the working class. And very often the seeming radicalness of the measures proposed satisfies and appeases the workers, co-operators and peasants. Perhaps the most correct method would be to start with the sharpest refutation of this opinion; to declare that particularly now, after the recent war, only the most foolish or utterly dishonest people can assert that such an answer to the question of combating war is of any use; to declare that it is impossible to "retaliate" to war by a strike, just as it is impossible to "retaliate" to war by revolution in the simple and literal sense of these terms. We must explain the real situation to the people, show them that war is hatched in the greatest secrecy, and that the ordinary workers' organisations, even if they call themselves revolutionary organisations, are utterly helpless in face of a really impending war. (...) We must take special pains to explain that the question of "defence of the fatherland" will inevitably arise, and that the overwhelming majority of the working people will inevitably decide it in favour of their bourgeoisie."* <sup>464</sup>

One of the consequences of this assessment, in addition to prepare the revolutionary party and its cadres to work under illegal conditions, i.e. for underground work, is the necessity of the *political* preparation of the workers vanguard and the working class as a whole. Such a political preparation requires a thoroughly internationalist, anti-chauvinist education of the working class.

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Huawei claims illustrate China's high-tech dilemma, December 12, 2018 <http://www.atimes.com/article/meng-arrest-and-huawei-claims-illustrate-chinas-high-tech-dilemma/>; Joanna Plucinska, Anna Koper: Poland arrests two over spying allegations, including Huawei employee, January 11, 2019 / <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-security/poland-arrests-two-over-spying-allegations-including-huawei-employee-idUSKCN1P50RN>; David Hutt: Eye on US, Europe looks askance at Huawei, January 14, 2019 <http://www.atimes.com/article/eye-on-us-europe-looks-askance-at-huawei/>

<sup>463</sup> See on this Michael Pröbsting: No to chauvinist war-mongering by Japanese and Chinese imperialism! 23.9.2012, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/no-war-between-china-and-japan/>

<sup>464</sup> V. I. Lenin: Notes on the Tasks of our Delegation at The Hague (1922), in: LCW Vol. 33, pp. 447-448

Revolutionaries must combat any thought that the fatherland would be the fatherland of the workers. They have to explain that the fatherland is “owned” and controlled by a small minority of robber capitalists. These bandits exploit “us and them” – i.e. the native workers, the migrant workers and workers abroad. This is why workers in the imperialist countries must not defend the fatherland of the bosses. Only if the workers expropriate and expel the exploiters, only if they take power, only then does the fatherland become “their” fatherland, only then it becomes legitimate, indeed necessary, to defend the fatherland. This line, this spirit, must be a constant common thread in the propaganda and agitation of revolutionaries in imperialist countries!

We note, in passing, that the Marxists’ opposition against the empty threat of anarchists as well as opportunists to “*retaliate to war by a strike or a revolution*” has been distorted by various centrists in order to justify their opposition against organizing any strike activities against imperialist wars. However as a matter of fact, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were only opposed to the following specific idea: namely to threaten organizing a general strike only once a major imperialist war has started. They did so correctly because in such a situation, at the beginning of a major war with all the huge mobilizations of the bourgeois public opinion and state repression, it would be too late to organize such a general strike. However, Marxists were not at all opposed to organize strikes and general strikes against militarism and war-mongering, i.e. *before* such a major inter-imperialist war would start (or also later during such a major war as it was the case in Russia, Germany and Austria in 1916-18 or in Italy in spring 1943).

During the period when the Communist International was following a revolutionary path, it codified such an approach in its most important programmatic statement on the issue of the imperialist war (which we already mentioned above). Among the crucial means in the struggle against war the Comintern advocated: “*Strengthening the revolutionary will of the broadest masses to fight against the outbreak of imperialist war by street demonstrations, general strikes, armed uprisings.*”<sup>465</sup>

In this spirit, for example, did the Soviet trade union delegation at the international anti war congress in The Hague in December 1922 propose to organize an international anti-militarist campaign including an international 24-hour protest general strike.<sup>466</sup>

Lenin explained, in discussing the duty of Marxists in imperialist countries, that it is obligatory to unconditionally support the right of self-determination of oppressed nation. He emphasized that the importance of this is not only because of the legitimate nature of the liberation struggle of the oppressed nations but also because of the necessity to educate the native working class of the

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465 Communist International: Theses on the Fight against the War Danger (1922), in: Jane Degras: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents Volume I 1919-1922, p. 332

466 See on this e.g. Autorenkollektiv: Studien zur Geschichte der Kommunistischen Internationale, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1974, p. 101



Great Powers in the spirit of internationalism, of anti-chauvinism.

*„The important thing is not whether one-fiftieth or one-hundredth of the small nations are liberated before the socialist revolution, but the fact that in the epoch of imperialism, owing to objective causes, the proletariat has been split into two international camps, one of which has been corrupted by the crumbs that fall from the table of the dominant-nation bourgeoisie—obtained, among other things, from the double or triple exploitation of small nations—while the other cannot liberate itself without liberating the small nations, without educating the masses in an anti-chauvinist, i.e., anti-annexationist, i.e., “selfdeterminationist”, spirit.“*<sup>467</sup>

The same idea was defended by Trotsky as he explained in his famous theses *War and the Fourth International*, published in 1934: “A “socialist” who preaches national defence is a petty-bourgeois reactionary at the service of decaying capitalism. Not to bind itself to the national state in time of war, to follow not the war map but the map of the class struggle, is possible only for that party that has already declared irreconcilable war on the national state in time of peace. Only by realizing fully the objectively reactionary role of the imperialist state can the proletarian vanguard become invulnerable to all types of social patriotism. This means that a real break with the ideology and policy of “national defence” is possible only from the standpoint of the international proletarian revolution.”<sup>468</sup>

In fact, one can generalize this important thought of the leaders of the socialist October Revolution. Revolutionaries are obligated to utilize *all* issues related to the defense of the imperialist fatherland – from colonial wars, financial plunder of semi-colonial countries, closing the border for refugees, discrimination of migrants, “anti-terror laws”, Islamophobia, trade wars, patriotism against imperialist rivals, etc. – in order to educate the popular masses in the spirit of anti-chauvinism, of proletarian internationalism, of international working class solidarity.

Furthermore, the issue of consistent struggling against all forms of chauvinism, of anti-imperialism in words and deeds, is also a decisive criterion to evaluate the true political nature of organizations of the workers movement. Revolutionaries have to judge them – are they honest fighters against the imperialist ruling class, are they vacillating opportunists or are they social-imperialist lackeys of the bourgeoisie – by examining their positions on all these issues of domestic and foreign policy of imperialism.

Trotsky emphasized, in the same theses quoted above, the importance of such a test for any socialist organization: “At the same time, it is necessary to follow attentively the inner struggle in the reformist camp and attract in time the left socialist groupings developing towards revolution to a struggle against war. The best criterion of the tendencies of a given organization is its attitude in practice, in action, toward national defence and toward colonies, especially in those cases in which the bourgeoisie of a given country owns colonial slaves. Only a complete and real break with official

<sup>467</sup> V. I. Lenin: The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up (1916); in: CW Vol. 22, p.343

<sup>468</sup> Leon Trotsky: War and the Fourth International (1934), in: Trotsky Writings 1933-34, p. 305

*public opinion on the most burning question of the "defence of the fatherland" signifies a turn, or at least the beginning of a turn from bourgeois positions to proletarian positions. The approach to left organizations of this type should be accompanied by friendly criticism of all indecision in their policy and by a joint elaboration of all theoretical and practical questions of war."* <sup>469</sup>

## Changes in Conditions and its Consequences

Such a constant political education of the working class and the popular masses is even more important today for the following reasons. First, the ruling class has increased their already enormous possibilities to manipulate the working class and the popular masses. As a by-product of the development of productive forces, the volume of media and its every-day presence has also enormously increased – particularly in the imperialist countries. The expansion of TV and internet, its presence not only at home and work but also in public transport and shopping malls, the social media, the wide-spread use of smart phones, etc., all this gives the bourgeoisie the opportunity to expose the people with a permanent stream of ideological manipulation around the clock. 100 years ago, the working people were exposed to the slaveholder propaganda once a week when they visited the church or the mosque where the priest or the imam lectured the people on issues as instructed by the religious or state authorities. Today, the working people and youth are exposed to the finely woven ideological manipulations of the ruling class 24 hours every day and seven days a week. Now, it is not so much the priest or the imam but myriads of anonymous media stars, "influencers", "experts" plus, of course, the official politicians and their lackeys who are carrying out the ideological treatment of the people.

There are numerous examples which demonstrate how the ruling class and reactionary forces are able to utilize the social media in order to manipulate the popular masses. The spread of "fake news" about "criminal refugees" by reactionary racist forces in Europe, the demagogic campaigns by the right-wing Bolsonaro campaign during the Presidential elections in Brazil, or by the Assadistas and Putinistas against the Syrian Revolution, are just a few examples.

Lenin already drew attention to the fact that the popular masses are facing a massive web of institutions, ideologies, traditions, etc. which makes it impossible for them to spontaneously see through all of this and to recognize their class position and the corresponding tasks. Such recognition by the masses necessitates the aid of the organized Marxists.

*"The petty-bourgeois democrats, their chief present-day representatives, the "socialists" and "Social-Democrats", are suffering from illusions when they imagine that the working people are capable, under capitalism, of acquiring the high degree of class-consciousness, firmness of character, perception and wide political outlook that will enable*

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<sup>469</sup> Leon Trotsky: War and the Fourth International (1934), in: Trotsky Writings 1933-34, p. 328

them to decide, merely by voting, or at all events, to decide in advance, without long experience of struggle, that they will follow a particular class, or a particular party. It is a mere illusion. It is a sentimental story invented by pedants and sentimental socialists of the Kautsky, Longuet and MacDonald type. Capitalism would not be capitalism if it did not, on the one hand, condemn the masses to a downtrodden, crushed and terrified state of existence, to disunity (the countryside!) and ignorance, and if it (capitalism) did not, on the other hand, place in the hands of the bourgeoisie a gigantic apparatus of falsehood and deception to hoodwink the masses of workers and peasants, to stultify their minds, and so forth.“<sup>470</sup>

Of course, as Marxists we always recognize the inner contradictions of all phenomena. The expanded presence of internet and social media can not only be used by the ruling class but also by the working class and the oppressed. And, as we can see from numerous protests (most recently the *Yellow Vests* protests in France<sup>471</sup>), these media have been indeed used effectively to organize demonstrations and counter-mobilizations on short notice.

However, contrary to the petty-bourgeois ideologists who imagine that the “internet is free”, in the real world the means of production as well as the means of communication are usually owned and controlled by the ruling class. China’s strict state control of its internet, the rising number of censorships on Facebook, Twitter, etc. – all this reflects that the idea the internet and the social media would exist in a vacuum outside of capitalist control is a sheer illusion.

This does not mean that socialist activists should not make use as much as possible of the internet and social media. First, making such use without censorship is still possible in many countries. Second, even if these media are censored, it will be necessary to utilize them in a similar way as revolutionaries make use of limited legal possibilities in a semi-dictatorship (like, for example, the Bolsheviks did in Tsarist Russia after 1905 by publishing legal papers like the *Pravda* or by utilizing the State Duma as a tribune for revolutionary propaganda). Thirdly, revolutionary organizations have to make use of technically skilled activists who can circumvent the capitalist control of the media and utilize them in an illegal way (i.e. a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of illegal paper printing by revolutionaries in countries ruled by a dictatorship – like the Bolsheviks did when they produced *Sotsial-Democrat* or *Proletary* or the French Trotskyists during World War II when they produced *La Vérité* with the help of an underground printing shop).<sup>472</sup>

A further reason for the increasing importance of constant political education of the working class and the popular masses lies in the changing nature of

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470 V.I.Lenin: The Constituent Assembly Elections and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, in: LCW 30, pp. 266-267

471 See on this e.g. RCIT: France: Defend the “Yellow Vests” Movement against State Repression! 03.12.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/france-defend-the-yellow-vests-movement-against-state-repression/>

472 On the experience of the French Trotskyists in WWII see e.g. Yvan Craipeau: Swimming Against the Stream. Trotskyists in German Occupied France, Merlin Press, Pontypool 2013

warfare. The development of the productive forces has also resulted in the massive modernization of military technologies. This is not the place to discuss this important issue in detail. Sufficient to say that air planes, satellites, drones, the internet, etc. play an increasingly dominant role in military warfare.

On one hand, this makes the military less dependent on soldiers (and, hence, on the potential risk of the collapse of their patriotic moral). On the other hand, this development makes the military much more dependent on the industry and the people producing the necessary segments for the military hardware, i.e. the working class. From this follows, once more, that the struggle against imperialism and militarism must not be limited to the army itself but rather starts already in the factory.

Victor Serge, a revolutionary militant and Trotskyist cadre (one of the very few who could escape Stalin's Gulag in 1935), already drew attention to this development in a thoughtful article published in 1926: *"The very technique of war makes it increasingly difficult to sustain the distinction between combatants and non-combatants. In the last war there was – I believe – behind each gunner in the trench, five soldiers or workers absorbed by industrial work and the organisation of massacre. The number of workers behind the combatants will undoubtedly grow with the further mechanisation of slaughter. War is waged now in the factory, more than on the battle field. One is the prolongation of the other. It is the factory which determines the value of the soldiers and the talent of the officers that are at its service. From this fact, it follows that the industrial centers are more than fortresses, the vulnerable points of a country, they are the very places where each side will seek to land its mortal blow. A good industrial mobilisation is the underlying condition of military operation. Corollary: the war will start with the mobilisation of the whole nation. Indeed the life of the entire proletariat will be threatened because the development of aviation and of chemical weapons makes it possible for the enemy to achieve its goal, the destruction of the industrial centers. (...) In future wars, the mobilisation of the rear will have as much importance as that of the troops themselves. All is fixed. With each factory, each workshop has its task; each man his function. Not a machine is omitted from the inventories. In the preparation of the machine, it goes without saying, the apparatus of coercion will strike the first blow."*<sup>473</sup>

Today, nearly a century later, this observation is hundred times more relevant. The imperialist war machinery depends on metal production as well as computer, on tanks, air craft (including all the individual components) as well as on the internet. The struggle against imperialism and militarism can be and must be conducted in every workplace, in the internet, etc.!

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473 Victor Serge: New Aspects of the Problem of War (August 1926), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/serge/1926/08/war.htm>

## The Moral Crisis in the Western Imperialist Countries

Finally, we have repeatedly drawn attention to the important development of declining support of the popular masses in the imperialist countries for military adventures abroad. The decay of imperialism is reflected, among others, in the fact that the capitalist state is no longer able to manipulate the masses to such a degree that they totally identify themselves with the goals of the ruling class and are ready to make sacrifices in a war.

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. According to official figures of the Pentagon, the U.S. military lost 4,423 troops in Iraq between 2003 and 2010 and 2,216 troops in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014.<sup>474</sup> True, these are the official figures and it is quite possible that they underestimate the real numbers. But we can take it for granted that the deviations won't be that big since various documents about the casualties in the Iraq War have been published by Wikileaks and they do not indicate a different number.

Another example is Russia. Already in the first war in Chechnya in 1994-96 one could observe the low morale of the Russian soldiers. This resulted in the situation that the Chechen guerrillas were able to defeat the Russian army despite the fact that the later was about ten times as strong in numbers (about 70,000 soldiers) than the Chechen side.<sup>475</sup> Even today the Putin regime, which is in a much stronger position than its predecessor Yeltsin was in the 1990s, is cautious to avoid too many casualties in its military intervention in Syria. As a result, Moscow outsources many military tasks to mercenaries like the Private Military Contractors *Wagner Group*.<sup>476</sup>

Even the colonial settler state Israel faces a moral crisis. It lost its war in Lebanon against Hezbollah in summer 2006 despite the fact that only 122 Israeli soldiers were killed (out of 30,000 soldiers deployed). Or compare the result of the latest Gaza War in 2014 when Israel failed to defeat Hamas despite the fact only 73 Israelis (67 of them soldiers) died while more than 2,300 Palestinians (most of them civilians) were killed!

These developments reflect the fact that the working class in the imperialist

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474 U.S. Department of Defense: Casualty Status as of 10 a.m. EST Nov. 21, 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Casualty-Status/>

475 See on this e.g. Russian Troops Out! Self-determination for Chechnya! Joint Statement of the League for the Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) and the Trotskyist Faction, 30.06.1996, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/freedom-for-chechnya/>; Where does the RCIT Stand on Russia's Occupation of Chechnya? <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/russia-and-chechnya/>

476 TASS: Russia lost 112 servicemen over three years of counter-terror operation in Syria – MP, September 30, 2018, <http://tass.com/defense/1023714>

countries does not identify their state with any great idea and, hence, they are not prepared to make sacrifices for it. Victor Serge, in the article mentioned above, already pointed out: “*You cannot lead the masses to commit murder without justifying it by great ideas.*”<sup>477</sup>

This is evidently different to the oppressed people fighting against the imperialist and tyrannical aggressors. They struggle against occupation and dictatorship and are prepared to make many sacrifices for this goal. There is a famous saying among so-called Islamist Jihadis: “*We love death as you love life!*” Indeed, how many people in the imperialist states are prepared to give their life for “their” country?! Compare this with the incredible heroism of the people fighting for freedom in Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Kashmir, etc.!

One might object that this would be a religious issue and that only Muslim people would be prepared to make such sacrifices. But this is not true. There are also numerous examples of non-Muslim people who were ready to make huge sacrifices in their struggle for liberation. Take for example the Russian workers and peasants who successfully defended their revolutionary fatherland against the reactionary White Armies and the foreign imperialist invaders in the civil war 1918-21. Likewise, the Soviet army and the Partisans in Eastern Europe and the Balkans heroically fought against the Nazi occupants in 1941-45. The same could be observed in Vietnam against the US invaders in 1965-75 in which about one million Vietnamese were killed! Or take the Tamil people in Sri Lanka who defended their homeland successfully for a quarter of a century against a numerically superior enemy until they suffered a bloody defeat in 2009. (The “Tamil Tigers” had a special wing for suicide operations against the Sri Lankan army, the so-called “Black Tigers”).

In summary, 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.

Naturally, this task is part of a broader goal – the political education of the working class in the spirit of international solidarity, in the spirit of anti-chauvinism and rupture with any Great Power. This is the true meaning of the famous words from Marx and Engels’s *Communist Manifesto* – “*The workers have no fatherland*”. It is in this spirit that 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. Hence, socialists must explain the need for the workers to break *with every form of political and ideological identification with the imperialist national state*.

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477 Victor Serge: New Aspects of the Problem of War (August 1926), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/serge/1926/08/war.htm>

## XX. Revolutionary Defeatism in Conflicts between Imperialist States: Programmatic Components (2)

The task of educating and preparing the working class for the coming period of rabid chauvinism is not and must not be a purely literary task. It must be implemented in relation to various concrete, practical aspects of the political struggle.

### The Issue of Sanctions of one Great Power against Another

One form of inter-imperialist rivalry is sanctions imposed by one Great Power (or a group of Great Powers) against another (or another group of Great Powers). Currently such sanctions have been imposed by the U.S. and the European Union against Russia since the annexation of the Crimea and the beginning of the civil war in the East of the Ukraine. In response, Russia has retaliated with sanctions.

We have seen similar developments in the period before the Second World War. For example, the *League of Nations* (the predecessor organization of the imperialist-dominated *United Nations*) imposed economic sanctions against fascist Italy after the latter's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935.

Socialists have to oppose all kind of sanctions against imperialist rivals. Naturally, we don't do so out of sympathy with the Great Power affected by such sanctions. We oppose them because they are an instrument of economic aggression, of imperialist warfare by non-military means. Imperialist sanctions against rivals are the first step to military aggression. They serve to ideologically manipulate the domestic population, to rally them behind the Great Power(s) and to wipe up hostility against its or their rival.

The American Trotskyists warned aptly in a pamphlet published in 1936, in the light of Italy's invasion in Ethiopia and the resulting sanctions of the League of Nations against Italy, against the dangers of support for such imperialist sanctions: *"But sanctions are war measures. They include withdrawal of financial credit, embargoes on trade, various forms of boycott. To enforce them genuinely would require a blockade of the country against whom the sanctions were invoked. The probable, the almost certain outcome of such a blockade, as history has so often proved, is war—since the blockaded nation cannot accept such a measure peacefully without surrendering political sovereignty. (...) In both cases, support of sanctions to be applied by capitalist governments (whether or not these are League members) is in effect support of these governments themselves. This means that such support necessarily leads to a betrayal of the revolutionary struggle against war, and the revolutionary defense of Ethiopia, which is always a struggle against the capitalist governments and the bour-*

*geoisie whose governments they are. (...) Marxists, then, reject and expose as betrayal any and all advocacy of League or governmental "sanctions."*<sup>478</sup>

This does not mean in any way that the international working class should remain passive in face of reactionary attacks of a given Great Power. To take the example mentioned above, revolutionary Marxists mobilized for international solidarity with the liberation war of Ethiopia and advocated *workers sanctions* against Italy. Such sanctions consisted of boycott actions organized by trade unions and other proletarian organizations around the world against trade with Italy, against shipment of oil or weapons, etc. A similar boycott campaign was attempted in 1933 against Germany after Hitler came to power.

To quote again from the pamphlet of the American Trotskyists: "*Naturally, however, this does not mean that they take a passive, hands-off position in the present crisis or in any other. Marxists are not neutral in the dispute between Italy and Ethiopia. They are for the defeat of Fascist Italy and the blow to imperialism which such a defeat would be; and they are therefore for the victory of Ethiopia. But they propose to aid in such defeat and such victory not by appealing to capitalist governments and the imperialist League for their assistance and sanctions; but to the working class to apply its proletarian "sanctions". Only sanctions which are results of the independent and autonomous actions of the working class are of any value in the revolutionary struggle against war — since only these separate the class from the state and the class enemy, and only these build the fighting strength of the workers, which is alone the road to workers' power and thus to the defeat of war. Mass demonstrations, strikes, labor boycotts, defense funds for material aid to Ethiopia, refusal to load munitions for Italy, revolutionary agitation for Marxism as it applies to the war crisis, these are such sanctions as the working class must make use of. But these will be ineffectual in the immediate crisis? They are romantic and utopian? If so, then the revolutionary struggle is itself ineffectual, romantic and utopian. Perhaps such sanctions will not "solve" the present crisis. But they, and they alone, will help steel the class, materially and ideologically, for the struggle to come — the struggle for workers' power, which is, in the end, the only solution.*"<sup>479</sup>

However, as Trotsky explained at that time there is an important, indeed decisive, difference between *imperialist* sanctions and *workers* sanctions. The first is an instrument of the imperialist bourgeoisie of a given Great Power in the service of its expansionist goals against rivals. The second is an instrument of the international working class by its own methods and for its own goals.

Trotsky emphasized this difference in a polemic against the Stalinists: "*Most dangerous of all, however, is the Stalinist policy. The parties of the Communist International try to appeal especially to the more revolutionary workers by denouncing the*

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478 John West (James Burnham): War and the Workers (1936), Workers Party Pamphlet, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/burnham/1936/war/index.htm>; See also Maurice Spector: Sanctions and the Coming War (1935), New International, Vol.2 No.7, December 1935, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/spector/1935/12/sanctions.htm>

479 John West (James Burnham): War and the Workers (1936), Workers Party Pamphlet, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/burnham/1936/war/index.htm>



*League (a denunciation that is an apology), by asking for 'workers' sanctions,' and then nevertheless saying: 'We must use the League when it is for sanctions.' They seek to hitch the revolutionary workers to the shafts so that they can draw the cart of the League. (...) The truth is that if the workers begin their own sanctions against Italy, their action inevitably strikes at their own capitalists, and the League would be compelled to drop all sanctions. It proposes them now just because the workers' voices are muted in every country. Workers' action can begin only by absolute opposition to the national bourgeoisie and its international combinations. Support of the League and support of workers' actions are fire and water; they cannot be united.'*"<sup>480</sup>

Likewise, Trotsky explained in a polemic against the centrist "London Bureau" that revolutionaries must resolutely break with any organization which tolerates such "pro-sanctionists": "*The struggle against war, properly understood and executed, presupposes the uncompromising hostility of the proletariat and its organizations, always and everywhere, toward its own and every other imperialist bourgeoisie. Yet among the announced adherents of the London Bureau congress are to be found such notorious supporters of the League of Nations (i.e., imperialist) "sanctions" as the Italian Socialist Party, which is presumably to organize a common struggle against war with opponents of these "sanctions," such as the British ILP claims to be. A prerequisite for the proletarian struggle against war is not unity between pro-"sanctionists" and anti-"sanctionists" but the ruthless separation of them.*"<sup>481</sup>

In modern history we have seen cases of international popular solidarity campaigns against particularly reactionary states which provoked global hatred because of their crimes. One example for this was the international campaign against Apartheid in South Africa until 1994. In the last years we have seen the emergence of the *Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions* (BDS) movement against the reactionary Apartheid state Israel as a reaction to the brutal oppression of the Palestinian people. Likewise, most Muslim states refuse to entertain any economic or diplomatic relations with the imperialist Israeli state.

The RCIT 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, academic boycott, etc. Hence we critically support the BDS campaign against Israel despite its limitations.

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480 Leon Trotsky: *Once Again the ILP* (1935); in: *Trotsky Writings 1935-36*, p. 201; see also Leon Trotsky: *Open Letter To A British Comrade* (1936); in: *Trotsky Writings 1935-36*, p. 295

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

## Global Trade War and Internationalist Tactics

In the past few months we have seen the emergence of a Global Trade War between the Great Powers. Initiated by the Trump Administration, the Global Trade War – in particular between the two biggest powers U.S. and China – threatens to severely disrupt the world economy as they are imposing an increasing number of protectionist measures against another.

Again, such protectionism is not without precedence. As we have shown above, the Great Powers – like Germany, France, Russia, the U.S. etc (with the exception of the most powerful imperialist state at that time, Britain) – imposed high tariffs against each other in the two decades before World War One.

As we have explained in our statements and articles, the Global Trade War is not a purely economic conflict between two or more powers. It is inextricably linked with political and military tensions. It is inevitable connected with political and ideological mobilizations of chauvinism. It is, in the historic sense, a struggle for world domination and the prelude to World War III.

The Marxist classics always pointed out the interrelation of the economic, political, and military conflicts between the Great Powers. In an article published in 1911, Rosa Luxemburg wrote:

*„From this same standpoint the tasks of the Social Democrats with regard to the declarations of the kind made by the British Government can only be to show up the idea of a partial limitation of armaments, in all its impracticability, as a half-measure, and to endeavour to make it clear to the people that militarism is closely linked up with colonial politics, with tariff politics, and with international politics, and that therefore the present Nations, if they really seriously and honestly wish to call a halt on competitive armaments, would have to begin by disarming in the commercial political field, give up colonial predatory campaigns and the international politics of spheres of influence in all parts of the world – in a word, in their foreign as well as in their domestic politics would have to do the exact contrary of everything which the nature of the present politics of a capitalist class state demands. And thus would be clearly explained what constitutes the kernel of the Social Democratic conception, that militarism in both its forms – as war and as armed peace – is a legitimate child, a logical result of capitalism, which can only be overcome with the destruction of capitalism, and that hence whoever honestly desires world peace and liberation from the tremendous burden of armaments must also desire Socialism. Only in this way can real Social Democratic enlightenment and recruiting be carried on in connection with the armaments debate.“*<sup>482</sup>

Karl Radek, a leading collaborator of Lenin since 1914 and later of central figure in Trotsky's *Left Opposition* against the Stalinist bureaucracy in the 1920s, also emphasized in a study about imperialism that failure to recognize the imperialist character of a tariff conflict will result in failure to struggle against

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<sup>482</sup> Rosa Luxemburg: *Peace Utopias* (1911), in: Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido (Ed.): *Discovering Imperialism. Social Democracy to World War I*, Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden 2012, p. 447, online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1911/05/11.htm>

imperialism as such.

*“Whoever does not regard imperialism in its connection with the cartelisation of industry and the protective tariff-policy, i.e., as a necessary result of the last phase of capitalist development, will easily succumb to the temptation of underestimating imperialist antagonisms.”*<sup>483</sup>

Like in all other confrontations between imperialist Great Powers, Marxists must not lend support to any imperialist camp. The conflicts between the imperialist states – be in on the economic, political, or military field – require *one and the same* program of revolutionary defeatism and anti-imperialism. Consequently, revolutionaries must oppose the Global Trade War as we stated in our joint statement with a number of other revolutionary organizations:

*“In view of a looming global trade war, socialists call the workers and popular organizations around the world to act decisively on the basis of the principles of international working class solidarity. Such principles are valid in times of peace and war, in case of economic sanctions as well as in case of military aggression.*

*\* No to a global trade war! Oppose Great Power jingoism in West and East! Against militarist saber-rattling! In imperialist states, socialists say: “The Main Enemy is at Home!” In case of sanctions or a trade war between the U.S., China, European Union, Russia, Canada, Japan, or other powers, socialists in all countries involved must oppose such sanctions. (...)*

*\* Neither imperialist globalization nor imperialist protectionism! Against all Great Powers and capitalist corporations in West and East! For international solidarity and joint cross-border struggle in defense of the interests of workers and oppressed!”*<sup>484</sup>

Naturally, this does not mean that Marxists support in any form imperialist globalization. No, the workers movement must oppose all forms of domination by imperialist monopolies – whether in the form of globalization or in the form of protectionism. Naturally, this was different in the epoch of rising capitalism when the bourgeoisie still was a historically progressive class. In this epoch, Marx and Engels advocated free trade and opposed tariffs.<sup>485</sup>

However, with the transformation of capitalism into its stage of monopolism, i.e. the beginning of the imperialist epoch, the tactics of the revolutionary workers movement also changed accordingly. Free trade and protectionism became increasingly interwoven and were just different forms of imposing the domination of the imperialist monopolies against the oppressed peoples or against their rivals. While Marxist support measures of semi-colonial countries defend-

483 Karl Radek: *Our Struggle against Imperialism* (1912), in Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido (Ed.): *Discovering Imperialism*, p. 551. We note in passing that albeit the Bolsheviks – compared to the German left before 1914 – were superior in fighting against revisionism and in drawing conclusions from this, there is nevertheless a lot which can be learned from the experience of Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Radek, Mehring and others. See on this e.g. Kurt Mandelbaum: *Sozialdemokratie und Imperialismus* (1928), in: Kurt Mandelbaum: *Sozialdemokratie und Leninismus*, Rotbuch Verlag, Berlin 1974

484 Joint Statement: *Global Trade War: No to Great Power Jingoism in West and East!*

485 See e.g. Part V in Rudolf Hilferding: *Finance Capital. A Study of the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development* (1910), Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1981.

ing themselves against the domination of imperialist monopolies, they do not lend support to any camp in conflicts between imperialist corporations or powers.

For the same reasons Marxists can not support either camp in the so-called Brexit conflict, i.e. the question if Britain should remain in the European Union or leave it? The RCIT and its predecessor organization has always emphasized that both the imperialist national state (like Britain) as well as an imperialist state federation (like the EU) are two forms of imperialist political rule. As it is well known, the British ruling class is deeply divided between a faction which wants to stay and another one which wants to leave the EU. The later wants to keep a favorable trade agreement with the EU but also orientates more towards closer political and economic relations with other Great Powers (like the U.S.).

As we have elaborated in various pamphlets and statements, Marxists must not lend support to any of these two imperialist camps. They must not fight against imperialist protectionism and nationalism by “critically” supporting imperialist globalization and imperialist supra-national institutions like the EU, WTO, IMF, etc. Both represent reactionary forms of imperialist exploitation. Imperialist nationalism is only one form of the inherent drive to expansion of imperialist monopoly capital; imperialist globalization and creating of empires (like the EU) is another form.

As a matter of fact, imperialist globalization and imperialist protectionism are only relative opposites. In modern capitalism, there exists no absolute protectionism (i.e. full autarky). There are only different variations of international trade. The productive forces are developed to such a degree that insularity is simply impossible. At the same time, one should have no illusions about globalizations. Even in the past two decades – the highpoint of globalization – a number of “trade barriers” continued to exist between the imperialist nations (e.g. environmental regulations, safety regulations, etc.). We will not speak at this point about the trade agreements between the imperialist powers and the semi-colonial countries which were always disadvantageous for the latter.<sup>486</sup>

An actual example for the relativity of the contrast between imperialist globalization and imperialist protectionism is the recently renegotiated NAFTA agreement between the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Initially Trump withdrew from NAFTA with big fanfares. Later, a modified version of NAFTA was agreed with some more advantageous conditions for U.S. imperialism.<sup>487</sup> It would be

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486 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South*

487 See on this Joe Nocera: *This Map Shows Why Trump Couldn't Kill Nafta*, 1. Oktober 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2018-10-01/virginia-and-canada-forged-deals-through-nafta?srnd=premium-europe>; David Fickling: *Globalists Will Love Trump's New Nafta Deal*. Despite the fanfare, the agreement doesn't change much. 1. Oktober 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2018-10-01/globalists-will-love-trump-s-new-nafta-deal?srnd=premium-europe>; Jenny Leonard, Josh Wingrove, Jennifer Jacobs, and Andrew Mayeda: *Trump Clinches Rebranded Nafta as Canada Joins Pact With Mexico*, 1. Oktober 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-10-01/u-s-canada-agree-to-nafta-replacement-that-will-include-mexico?srnd=premium-europe>.

nonsense to see a qualitative difference between these two versions of trade agreement.

Socialists must not lend support to any of these forms of imperialist expansionism. Supporting Brexit or Remain is equivalent to supporting one of these two forms of imperialist political rule. Both are impermissible for revolutionaries. This is why the RCIT has always advocated a revolutionary, independent, defeatist position directed against both political forms of imperialist rule.

Such a tactic based on the principle of proletarian independence goes back to the standpoint of the Marxist classicists. For them it was a fundamental axiom that the working class cannot support any of the two factions of the monopoly bourgeoisie in the epoch of imperialism – neither those who favor free trade and the internationalization of production nor those who advocate protective tariffs and the promotion of the nation state market.

Rudolf Hilferding, an Austrian Marxist, who in 1910 published a groundbreaking book on the emergence of finance capital (later he became an ideologist of reformism), wrote:

*“While capital can pursue no other policy than that of imperialism, the proletariat cannot oppose to it a policy derived from the period when industrial capital was sovereign; it is no use for the proletariat to oppose the policy of advanced capitalism with an antiquated policy from the era of free trade and of hostility to the state. The response of the proletariat to the economic policy of finance capital - imperialism - cannot be free trade, but only socialism. The objective of proletarian policy cannot possibly be the now reactionary ideal of reinstating free competition by the overthrow of capitalism. The proletariat avoids the bourgeois dilemma - protectionism or free trade - with a solution of its own; neither protectionism nor free trade, but socialism, the organization of production, the conscious control of the economy not by and for the benefit of capitalist magnates but by and for society as a whole, which will then at last subordinate the economy to itself as it has been able to subordinate nature ever since it discovered the laws of motion of the natural world. (...) It is precisely in those countries where the policy of the bourgeoisie has been put into effect most fully, and where the most important social aspects of the democratic political demands of the working class have been realized, that socialism must be given the most prominent place in propaganda, as the only alternative to imperialism, in order to ensure the independence of working class politics and to demonstrate its superiority in the defence of proletarian interests.”*<sup>488</sup>

In his book on imperialism, Lenin approvingly cited this quotation from Hilferding, and added:

*„Kautsky broke with Marxism by advocating in the epoch of finance capital a ‘reactionary ideal’, ‘peaceful democracy’, ‘the mere operation of economic factors’, for objectively this ideal drags us back from monopoly to non-monopoly capitalism, and is a reformist swindle. Trade with Egypt (or with any other colony or semi-colony) ‘would have grown more’ without military occupation, without imperialism, and without fi-*

488 Rudolf Hilferding: Finance Capital. A Study of the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development (1910), Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1981, pp.366-367 (our emphasis)

nance capital. What does this mean? That capitalism would have developed more rapidly if free competition had not been restricted by monopolies in general, or by the 'corrections', yoke (i.e., also the monopoly) of finance capital, or by the monopolist possession of colonies by certain countries? Kautsky's argument can have no other meaning; and this 'meaning' is meaningless. Let us assume that free competition, without any sort of monopoly, would have developed capitalism and trade more rapidly. But the more rapidly trade and capitalism develop, the greater is the concentration of production and capital which gives rise to monopoly. And monopolies have already arisen—precisely out of free competition! Even if monopolies have now begun to retard progress, it is not an argument in favour of free competition, which has become impossible after it has given rise to monopoly. Whichever way one turns Kautsky's argument, one will find nothing in it except reaction and bourgeois reformism."<sup>489</sup>

The same position was later defended by Trotsky in his polemics with British reformists:

"One of the pretty clear reactionaries inside the British Labour Party, Dr. Haden Guest, a chauvinist, a militarist and a protectionist in parliament, mercilessly poured scorn on his own party's line on the question of free trade and protectionism: MacDonald's position, in Guest's words, has a purely negative character and does not indicate any way out of the economic impasse. That the days of Free Trade are over really is absolutely obvious: the break-up of Liberalism has also been conditioned by the break-up of Free Trade. But Britain can just as little seek a way out in protectionism. For a young capitalist country just developing, protectionism may be an unavoidable and progressive stage of development. But for the oldest industrial country whose industry was geared to the world market and had an offensive and conquering character the transition to protectionism is historical testimony to the beginning of a process of mortification, and signifies in practice the maintaining of certain branches of industry that are less viable in the given world situation, at the expense of other branches of the same British industry that are better adapted to the conditions of the world and the home market. The programme of senile protectionism of Baldwin's party can be countered not by an equally senile and moribund Free Trade policy but only by the practical programme of a socialist overturn. But in order to tackle this programme it is necessary as a preliminary to purge the party both of the reactionary protectionists like Guest and reactionary free traders like MacDonald."<sup>490</sup>

Such an approach is still valid today when revolutionaries are faced with the Global Trade War, Brexit and other forms of Great Power rivalry.

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489 V. I. Lenin: Imperialism. The Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916) ; in: LCW Vol. 22, pp. 289-290 (our emphasis)

490 Leon Trotsky: Where is Britain Going? (1925), in: Trotsky's Writings on Britain, Vol. 2, New Park Publications, London 1974, pp. 115-116

## Wars between Great Powers respectively their Proxies

As we already stated above, revolutionaries must not lend any support for one camp in a military conflict between Great Powers. They advocate 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”*. Where possible, they must vote in parliament against all measures supporting such a war. They must prepare themselves to face repression by the state and, hence, to work underground under illegal conditions. They should agitate against the war – by legal as well as illegal means – at workplaces, neighborhoods, among the soldiers, in schools and universities, etc. Where possible, they should advocate fraternizations between the troops and call for mass actions in protest against the war.

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). 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, as we mentioned above, the Fourth International called for the defense of the later. Likewise they supported the liberation struggle of the colonial people against their imperialist masters.)

Today, we see conflicts between the U.S. and the EU vs. Russia, the U.S. vs. China, Japan vs. China etc. While these conflicts have not escalated into a full-blown war until now, it is clear that the inner logic of global contradictions inevitable points in the direction of new big wars including, eventually, a World War III. Lenin’s warning stated at the beginning of WWI remains valid:

*“Imperialism sets at hazard the fate of European culture: this war will soon be followed by others, unless there are a series of successful revolutions. The story about this being the “last war” is a hollow and dangerous fabrication, a piece of philistine ‘mythology’”*<sup>491</sup>

As we have elaborated in past works, situations can exist where countries act as proxies of imperialist powers albeit they themselves are some form of semi-colonial state. In World War One, for example, Serbia (a semi-colonial country) didn’t play an independent role in its war with Austria-Hungary but rather acted as a proxy for the Entente powers. Hence, Marxists took a defeatist stand in Serbia – like in the other participating states.

Recently, we saw a certain similarity in the conflict between China and India. While the former is an imperialist power and the latter a semi-colony (albeit also a regional power given its huge size), the RCIT advocated nevertheless a

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491 V. I. Lenin: The Position and Tasks of the Socialist International (1914) ; in: CW Vol. 21, p. 40

defeatist position on both sides. We did so, as we explained in our pamphlet, because if India would enter into a conflict with imperialist China, it could only act under such circumstances as a proxy for US imperialism.<sup>492</sup> The same has been the case in the conflict between the Ukraine and Russia when they clashed in the Kerch Strait in November 2018.<sup>493</sup>

## Siding with the “Lesser” (Imperialist) Evil?

A consistent defeatist program must advocate fundamental opposition against *all* imperialist states. It must avoid supporting, siding with or opposing less one Great Power in relation to its rival. Various pseudo-socialist organizations do so by arguing that all forces should be supported which oppose the strongest imperialist power, i.e. the U.S. Such an approach has nothing to do with Marxism and independent socialism. It is rather *bourgeois geopoliticism* or *social-imperialism* – the foreign policy equivalent to the reformist popular-front strategy on domestic level. We characterize such an approach as *bourgeois geopoliticism* because it means defining the world situation and the tasks of the struggle not from the point of view of the *international class struggle* to advance the cause of the working class and the oppressed peoples but rather from the point of view of *reordering the world* to the disadvantage of the old Great Powers (U.S., EU and Japan) and to the advantage of the new Great Powers (China and Russia).

Marxists have always emphasized that it would be illegitimate for trade unions to make an alliance with a company exploiting 10,000 workers against another one which is exploiting 20,000 workers just because the latter is bigger (and hence the more powerful enemy). Likewise, socialists can not lend electoral support for a candidate of a smaller bourgeois party against a candidate of a larger bourgeois party. It is even less permissible to form a popular-front alliance with some liberal forces against more right-wing parties.

Such principles also apply on an international level. Socialist can not side with one Great Power against another just because one has conquered less sphere of influence until now than the other.

*„Let us suppose that two countries are at war in the epoch of bourgeois, national-liberation movements. Which country should we wish success to from the standpoint of present-day democracy? Obviously, to that country whose success will give a greater*

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492 See on this Michael Pröbsting: The China-India Conflict: Its Causes and Consequences. What are the background and the nature of the tensions between China and India in the Sikkim border region? What should be the tactical conclusions for Socialists and Activists of the Liberation Movements? 18 August 2017, Revolutionary Communism No. 71, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-india-rivalry/>; see also: Alan Boyd: Why the Quad can't get it together, November 20, 2018 <http://www.atimes.com/article/why-the-quad-cant-get-it-together/>

493 See on this e.g. Military Escalation between Russia and Ukraine at the Kerch Strait. Down with the Reactionary Warmongering on Both Sides! Emergency Statement of the RCIT and the Marxist Group “Class Politics” (Russia), 28 November 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/military-escalation-between-russia-and-ukraine-at-the-kerch-strait/>



*impetus to the bourgeoisie's liberation movement, make its development more speedy, and undermine feudalism the more decisively. Let us further suppose that the determining feature of the objective historical situation has changed, and that the place of capital striving for national liberation has been taken by international, reactionary and imperialist finance capital. The former country, let us say, possesses three-fourths of Africa, whereas the latter possesses one-fourth. A repartition of Africa is the objective content of their war. To which side should we wish success? It would be absurd to state the problem in its previous form, since we do not possess the old criteria of appraisal: there is neither a bourgeois liberation movement running into decades, nor a long process of the decay of feudalism. It is not the business of present-day democracy either to help the former country to assert its "right" to three-fourths of Africa, or to help the latter country (even if it is developing economically more rapidly than the former) to take over those three-fourths."*<sup>494</sup>

It is the task of working class to defeat the imperialists; such a task can not and must not be delegated to another Great Power, as Trotsky pointed out: *"But they are absolutely wrong in thinking that the proletariat can solve great historical tasks by means of wars that are led not by themselves but by their mortal enemies, the imperialist governments."*<sup>495</sup>

## The Poverty of Pacifism

A widespread but impotent answer to imperialist war is pacifism. In its most general form it counterposes appeals for peace and non-violent methods against military conflicts. As such, this is a thoroughly petty-bourgeois program. History has proven that all fundamental solutions for social conflicts included the use of force. Defending Greece against Xerxes huge army and navy 480-479 BC, destroying the oppressive Roman Empire in 476, defending Vietnam against the Mongol invasion 1258-88, liberating China from the Mongolian occupants by the *Red Turban Rebellion* in 1351-68, the American Revolution against the English colonial administration in 1775-83, the French Revolution 1789, the abolition of slavery in the U.S. in 1861-65, the Russian Revolution 1917, the destruction of the Nazi Third Reich in 1945, the destruction of the British and French colonial empires from Africa and Asia, to name just a few examples – not a single of these historical progressive steps would have been possible without violence!

Furthermore, it is bloody nonsense to imagine that capitalism could exist without conflicts, tensions and wars. It is a system based on class antagonism and competition. Such tensions inevitable must repeatedly provoke wars, as the U.S. Trotskyists already pointed out in a pamphlet published shortly before the beginning of World War II.

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494 V. I. Lenin: Under A False Flag; in: LCW Vol. 21, pp.143-144

495 Leon Trotsky: A step towards social patriotism (1939), in: Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1938-39, p. 211

*“Marxism points out that so long as capitalism endures, wars will come, that war under capitalism is not an “accident” or an “exceptional event” but an integral part of the very mechanism of capitalism. War is just as much a part of capitalism as are economic crises. You cannot have capitalism without having periodic crises and you cannot have capitalism without periodically having wars. The causes which bring about wars, the inescapable need for every advanced capitalist nation to attempt to expand its markets, gain cheaper sources of raw materials, find new outlets beyond the internal market for capital investment, can none of them be eliminated without eliminating capitalism itself.”*<sup>496</sup>

Preaching non-violent methods in contrast to the necessary measures to achieve liberation is in the best case naïve and helpless day-dreaming, in the worst case utter betrayal against the liberation struggle of oppressed people and against historical progress of humanity! As Trotsky put it: *“It is impossible to fight against imperialist war by sighing for peace after the fashion of the pacifists.”*<sup>497</sup>

Discussing the problem of pacifism more concretely, one has to make certain differentiations. First we have to differentiate between the honest pacifism of the masses and the factitious, hypocritical pacifism of the professional politicians and their hired academics. The former represents confused consciousness of the masses but contains a progressive wish to get rid of the plague of militarism and imperialist war. Naturally, revolutionaries have to explain pedagogically the short-comings of such a view but, at the same time, they have to try to relate to such hopes and utilize them for the advance of the collective struggle of the masses.

Pacifism of bourgeois politicians and phrase-mongering left-wing intellectuals is something different. Revolutionaries have to denounce them sharply and explain to the popular masses the objectively reactionary role of such frauds.

Pacifism in its pure form – consistent refusal of all forms of arms and violence – rarely exists. It is rather an exceptional phenomenon of honorable but harmless simpletons à la Bertha von Suttner. The more widespread form of pacifism is a rather inconsistent, “pragmatic” one. Such “pragmatic” pacifists do neither oppose the existence of armed police (or even an army) nor do they oppose state repression against “radical elements”. They only oppose wars before they start (usually, they become defender of the fatherland once the war has begun) or if the oppressed people in a colonial country use of force against the imperialist occupation forces.

Again, revolutionaries can afford to deal rather with irony in the case of the harmless muddleheads of the Suttner kind. However, they must vehemently denounce the treacherous “pragmatic” pacifists who are nothing but dangerous servants of imperialism.

Marxists do not deny the legitimacy of using the slogan of peace under cer-

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<sup>496</sup> James Burnham: How to fight war – Isolation, Collective Security, Relentless Class Struggle? (1938), SWP Pamphlet, p. 14

<sup>497</sup> Leon Trotsky: Lenin on Imperialism (1939), in: Trotsky Writings 1938-39, p. 167

tain conditions in their agitation. However, the question is *how* this is done. Calling for peace can be useful if it is combined with advocating class struggle methods against the imperialist war efforts, if it is combined with calling to turn the arms against the ruling class, if it is combined with a strategy to transform the imperialist war into civil war. This also means that revolutionaries sharply reject counter-posing an imperialist “peace” to imperialist war as this could only mean the temporarily cessation of military conflicts in order to prepare the next round of imperialist war.

However, the fundamental necessity remains for Marxist to explain the necessity to fight war with war, occupation war with liberation war, imperialist war with civil war. Preaching peace as such is no strategy, it is only confusing the consciousness of the masses. Gregory Zinoviev explained this idea very aptly in the Bolshevik’s central organ during World War I:

““Die Friedensidee zum Mittelpunkt” — “The idea of peace at the heart of our slogans”! Now they say that — after the first pan-European imperialist war has broken out! This is what you have learned from events!

“Nicht Friedensidee, sondern Bürgerkriegsidee” — not the idea of peace, but the idea of civil war — this is what we are tempted to shout at these great utopians who promise such a meager utopia. Not the idea of peace, but the idea of civil war, citizen Adler! This will be the central point of our program.

The problem is not that we failed to sufficiently preach the idea of peace before the war; it is that we did not preach the idea of class struggle, of civil war, enough or seriously enough. Because in wartime, the recognition of class struggle without a recognition of civil war is empty verbiage; it is hypocrisy; it is deceiving the workers.”<sup>498</sup>

“Yes, we are by no means principled pacifists; we are absolutely not opposed to all wars. We are against their wars, we are against wars of the oppressors, against imperialist wars, against wars whose goal is to reduce countless millions of workers to slavery. However “Social Democrats cannot deny the positive significance of revolutionary wars, that is, non-imperialist wars and, for example, those that were waged between 1789 and 1871 to overthrow foreign oppression and create capitalist national states out of fragmented feudal lands or wars that may be waged to safeguard conquests won by the proletariat in its struggle against the bourgeoisie” (see our resolution on pacifism in *Sotsial-Demokrat* No. 40).”<sup>499</sup>

A few years later, the Communist International summarized the dangers of pacifism in the following way: “Imperialism is the capitalist reality, bourgeois pacifism the capitalist illusion. Pacifism is as incapable as bourgeois social reform of over-

498 Gregory Zinoviev: Pazifismus oder Marxismus (Böse Folgen einer Losung.), in: G. Sinowjew / V. I. Lenin: Gegen den Strom, Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale, Hamburg 1921, p. 116 (In English: Pacifism or Marxism (The Misadventures of a Slogan), in: Spartacist, No. 64, Summer 2014, <http://www.icl-fi.org/english/esp/64/zinoviev.html>

499 Gregory Zinoviev: Pazifismus oder Marxismus (Böse Folgen einer Losung.), in: G. Sinowjew / V. I. Lenin: Gegen den Strom, Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale, Hamburg 1921, p. 119 (In English: Pacifism or Marxism (The Misadventures of a Slogan), in: Spartacist No. 64, Summer 2014, <http://www.icl-fi.org/english/esp/64/zinoviev.html>

*coming the contradictions, the evils, and the crimes of capitalism. But it will introduce dissension and uncertainty into the ranks of the bourgeoisie, the middle and petty bourgeoisie, and hence weaken the class enemy of the proletariat. Communists must take advantage of any such weakening by using the opportunity of every bourgeois pacifist initiative to lead the working class into struggle, in the course of which they will learn that militarism and imperialism cannot be abolished by the gradual triumph of reason and love of peace. . . . This conviction will counteract any crippling and debilitating effects of pacifism on the revolutionary militant energy of the proletariat, a danger associated with bourgeois pacifist propaganda. . . . The mists of pacifist sentimental hopes must not obscure the recognition that the bourgeoisie rule and exploit thanks to their command of the means of production of life and the means of production of death. The proletariat must take possession of both to liberate themselves from exploitation and bondage. Since they are kept from their freedom by force of arms, they must conquer it and defend it by force of arms.”*<sup>500</sup>

## The Slogan of Disarmament

The struggle against imperialist war and militarism necessarily includes the struggle against all military budgets as well as against every measure of armament of the imperialist state. However, such a necessary tactic in the class struggle must not be confused with support for a bourgeois strategy of disarmament as a way to avoid wars. In fact, it is a well-known method of the strongest imperialist powers to call for disarmament treaties in order to keep their military advantage against any emerging rival. In the end, as we can see today, all those treaties could not avoid the armament of the Great Powers, the emergence of new ones and the global arms race.

Paul Lensch, a leading representative of the left wing in German Social Democracy before World War I, formulated quite aptly in 1912: *“The idea of a limitation of armaments is foreign to our programme as well as to our theoretical literature. Up to now, it was considered a reactionary swindle or ridiculous pacifist babbling.”*<sup>501</sup>

In the same spirit wrote Trotsky, in a declaration for an anti-war congress in 1932: *„The pretense of “disarmament” has and can have nothing in common with the prevention of war. The program of “disarmament” only signifies an attempt—up to now only on paper—to reduce in peacetime the expense of this or that kind of armaments. It is above all a question of military technique and the imperialist coffers. The arsenals, the munitions factories, the laboratories, and finally, what is most important, capitalist industry as a whole preserve all their force in all the “disarmament programs.” But states do not fight because they are armed. On the contrary, they forge arms when they have to fight. In case of war, all the peace limitations will fall aside like so much chaff....*

500 Communist International: Theses on the Fight against the War Danger (1922), in: Jane Degras: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents Volume I 1919-1922, pp. 331-332

501 Paul Lensch, Eine Improvisation, in: Neue Zeit 30 (1912), quoted in English: Richard B. Day, Daniel F. Gaido (Eds): Discovering Imperialism: Social Democracy to World War I, Historical Materialism Book Series Vol. 33, Leiden 2012, p. 563

*It is pure charlatanism to attempt to distinguish between defensive and offensive machine guns, tanks, aeroplanes. American policy is dictated in this also by the particular interests of American militarism, the most terrible of all. War is not a game which is conducted according to conventional rules. War demands and creates all the weapons which can most successfully annihilate the enemy. Petty-bourgeois pacifism, which sees in a 10 percent, or 33 percent, or 50 percent disarmament proposal the "first step" towards prevention of war, is more dangerous than all the explosives and asphyxiating gases. Melinite and yperite can do their work only because the masses of people are poisoned in peacetime by the fumes of pacifism."*<sup>502</sup>

Furthermore, one has to ask: who controls if such disarmament treaties are implemented?! Take for example the *Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty*. Its purpose is primarily to stop semi-colonial countries from acquiring nuclear weapons so that they can not defend themselves against attempts at intimidation by Great Powers. Developments in recent years have demonstrated this very clearly. Israel is well known to possess unofficially up to 200 nuclear missiles. But no one cares and no one would punish the Zionist state for its violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Now, compare this to the reaction of the Great Powers when North Korea attempts to build nuclear weapons! The UN Security Council imposes one sanction after the other against Pyongyang. The Trump Administration threatened to wage war against the small country. What an example of imperialist hypocrisy! When Israel, a close ally of Western Great Powers, violates the treaty, it has no consequences at all. When North Korea attempts to do the same, it is threatened with annihilation!

It is the task of Marxists to explain the popular masses that any illusions in imperialist treaties on disarmament are completely misplaced and that the only solution is that the working class takes the whole arsenal of weapons in its own hands, i.e. that it overthrows the ruling class and takes the power!

## **International Courts of Arbitration and United Nations**

Another confusing slogan, in the same spirit of petty-bourgeois pacifism, is the call for International Courts of Arbitration and United Nations in order to solve conflicts between Great Powers. The UN, as well as its predecessor organization – the *League of Nations* –, has always been nothing but an instrument of the Great Powers. The UN can not make any binding decision against the veto of one of the Great Powers U.S., Russia, China, France or Britain. Hence, it will only impose decisions which are congruent with their political class interests. In other words, it will not and can not make any decisions against the imperialist interests.

The most obvious example is the case of Israel and the Palestinians rights of national self-determination. Since decades, one UN General Assembly (which

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<sup>502</sup> Leon Trotsky: Declaration to the Antiwar Congress at Amsterdam (1932), in: Writings 1932, S. 151-152

is the annual plenary assembly of all states) after the other adopts a resolution which condemns Israel and supports the creation of a Palestinian state. However, this has no consequence at all because U.S. imperialism and its allies stand behind the Israeli settler state and support it under any circumstances.

And if the U.S. agrees on joint measures one can take it for granted that it is against the interests of the oppressed people. See e.g. the U.N. decision in 1947 to support the creation of the colonial settler state Israel which resulted in the expulsion of the native Palestinian population; or the decision to support the imperialist war against North Korea in 1950; or the decision to impose sanctions against Iraq in 1990 which resulted in the U.S. war in January-March 1991; or the hunger sanctions against North Korea in the past years.

The smart politicians of the ruling class have been always aware of the true nature of such institutions already long ago. Kurt Riezler, a German diplomat and close advisor of Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg wrote in a book published shortly before the outbreak of World War I: "*By and large, the instrument of International Courts of Arbitration only serves to avoid the outbreak of unwanted wars, which could result from unforeseen incidents and which are not relevant for national vital interests.*"<sup>503</sup>

Trotsky's sharp denunciation of the UN predecessor organization was completely appropriate and remains valid until today: "*The League of Nations is the citadel of imperialist pacifism. It represents a transitory historical combination of capitalist states in which the stronger command and buy out the weaker, then crawl on their bellies before America or try to resist; in which all equally are enemies of the Soviet Union, but are prepared to cover up each and every crime of the most powerful and rapacious among them. Only the politically blind, only those who are altogether helpless or who deliberately corrupt the conscience of the people, can consider the League of Nations, directly or indirectly, today or tomorrow, an instrument of peace. (...)*"<sup>504</sup>

Hence, Marxists must always oppose any appeals to the UN. Such appeals can only create misplaced illusions in an imperialist institution. They must systematically denounce the UN and call the popular masses to fight themselves for liberation instead of hoping for help from such Great Power instruments.

Our assessment formulated in the RCIT program remains completely correct: "*The Bolshevik-Communists fight everywhere against bourgeois militarism and imperialist war. We categorically reject the policy of the pacifists, social democrats and Stalinists appeals for disarmament, to UN mediation, peaceful coexistence between states and the promotion of nonviolent resistance. The rulers with their talking shops as the UN or its hypocritical international courts can never abolish war from the world. This can only be achieved by the working class and the oppressed peoples themselves through the uncompromising class struggle – including the armed struggle. That is*

503 J. J. Ruedorffer: Grundzüge der Weltpolitik in der Gegenwart, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Berlin 1914, p. 167 (our translation). Ruedorffer was the pseudonym of Kurt Riezler.

504 Leon Trotsky: Declaration to the Antiwar Congress at Amsterdam (1932), in: Writings 1932, S. 151

*why we advocate a military training of the working class one under its own control. 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."*<sup>505</sup>

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505 RCIT: The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto, published in 2012, p. 62; online on the RCIT website at [www.thecommunists.net/rcitmanifesto](http://www.thecommunists.net/rcitmanifesto)

## XXI. Revolutionary Defeatism in Conflicts between Imperialist States and Oppressed Peoples

In this chapter we will elaborate the Marxist position on conflicts between imperialist states and semi-colonial countries. As we have explained above, revolutionary defeatism is a *combined* strategy. It integrates the consistent struggle against *all* Great Powers with the support for the liberation struggle of oppressed people against them.

However, at this place we will not deal with the issue of defeatism in the case of conflicts between imperialist states and semi-colonial countries in the same extensive way as we did with inter-imperialist conflicts in the previous chapter. The reasons for doing so are, on one hand, that the focus of this book is the Great Power rivalry and the strategy of defeatism in such conflicts. On the other hand, we have already elaborated on this issue extensively in our book *The Great Robbery of the South*.<sup>506</sup>

Likewise, we will not deal here with the issue of tactics in conflicts in wars between semi-colonial countries. First, this issue is beyond the scope of this book and, secondly, we have dealt with this issue extensively in a special chapter in our book on the World Perspectives 2018.<sup>507</sup>

For these reasons we will limit ourselves in this chapter on summarizing the main components of the revolutionary defeatist program in conflicts between Great Powers and oppressed peoples, outlining the approach of the Marxist classics on this issue as well as the discuss some important examples of such conflicts today.

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Let us start with a brief summary of the general approach which the RCIT and its predecessor organization have defended throughout their whole history. Basically, it is the duty of all socialists to take a clear position in conflicts between the imperialist bourgeoisie and oppressed peoples. They must unconditionally support the oppressed peoples against the imperialist aggressors and fight for the defeat of the latter.

Any other position is equivalent to social-imperialism, as Trotsky emphasized: „... *it is a bad Marxist who tries to fix common rules for imperialist France and*

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506 See chapters 12 and 13 in *The Great Robbery of the South*

507 See Chapter II in Michael Pröbsting: *World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries*, RCIT Books, Vienna 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/>



colonial China. Not to distinguish oppressor countries from oppressed countries is the same as not to distinguish between the exploiting class and the exploited. Those who place imperialist and colonial countries on the same level, no matter what democratic phrases they might use to conceal this fact, are nothing but agents of imperialism.”<sup>508</sup>

Supporting such liberation struggles includes the necessity to 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. Such leaderships are usually petty bourgeois nationalist or Islamist forces. We note, as an aside, that such a situation also existed in many colonial countries in the time of Lenin and Trotsky. In its programmatic theses on imperialist war, the Communist International stated: “*The devastation and spoliation wrought by the capitalist great Powers for four years aroused stormy revolutionary movements in the English colonies (...) which draw courage and strength from the example of the Russian revolution and the existence of Soviet Russia. They are primarily of a nationalist and religious character, but they are also bound up with social revolutionary struggles.*”<sup>509</sup>

There can be also cases in which even semi-colonial bourgeois states are standing at the top of a legitimate struggle against Great Powers (e.g. Iraq against the U.S.-led imperialist coalition in 1991 and in 2003).

Hence, while socialists fight merciless against all forms of imperialist chauvinism, they are obligated to support the *Anti-Imperialist Patriotism* of the oppressed and help them to develop a socialist, internationalist consciousness.

Fighting against Great Power domination and chauvinism includes combating the influence of social-pacifist and social-chauvinist forces in the imperialist countries. Such currents usually dominate the official workers movement (social democratic and Stalinist parties, trade unions and other mass organizations) as well the misnamed “radical” left. Usually, these forces abstain from actively supporting the struggle of the oppressed.

Such an anti-imperialist and internationalist program is based on the tradition of the revolutionary workers movement as it was originally elaborated by the Communist International in the time of Lenin and Trotsky and later upheld by the Fourth International. 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.

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508 Leon Trotsky: *Petty-Bourgeois Democrats and Moralizers* (1938-39); in: *Writings of Leon Trotsky*, Supplement 1934-40, p. 866

509 Communist International: *Theses on the Fight against the War Danger* (1922), in: Jane Degras: *The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents Volume I 1919-1922*, p. 330

## Imperialist Wars and Occupations of Semi-Colonial Countries

The whole history of imperialism is characterized by a series of military attacks of Great Powers against the people of the South, often resulting in occupation of their land. True, the *form* of imperialist domination has changed in the second-half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Direct, colonial domination* has been replaced, in most cases, by *indirect, semi-colonial domination*. While such changes, of course, were important, they couldn't change the *essence* of imperialist dependence and exploitation of these countries by the Great Powers and their monopolies. In fact, as we have demonstrated in *The Great Robbery of the South*, the imperialists are squeezing the oppressed peoples more than ever!

The Marxist classics were fully aware of the fact that formal independence of former colonies did not alter the essence of their domination by imperialism. In his famous book on imperialism Lenin referred explicitly to the semi-colonial countries as "*formally independent, but in fact, are enmeshed in the net of financial and diplomatic dependence*":

*"As to the "semi-colonial" states, they provide an example of the transitional forms which are to be found in all spheres of nature and society. Finance capital is such a great, such a decisive, you might say, force in all economic and in all international relations, that it is capable of subjecting, and actually does subject, to itself even states enjoying the fullest political independence; we shall shortly see examples of this. Of course, finance capital finds most "convenient", and derives the greatest profit from, a form of subjection which involves the loss of the political independence of the subjected countries and peoples. In this respect, the semi-colonial countries provide a typical example of the "middle stage". It is natural that the struggle for these semi-dependent countries should have become particularly bitter in the epoch of finance capital, when the rest of the world has already been divided up."*<sup>510</sup>

And he continued a few pages later:

*"Since we are speaking of colonial policy in the epoch of capitalist imperialism, it must be observed that finance capital and its foreign policy, which is the struggle of the great powers for the economic and political division of the world, give rise to a number of transitional forms of state dependence. Not only are the two main groups of countries, those owning colonies, and the colonies themselves, but also the diverse forms of dependent countries which, politically, are formally independent, but in fact, are enmeshed in the net of financial and diplomatic dependence, typical of this epoch. We have already referred to one form of dependence — the semi-colony. An example of another is provided by Argentina."*<sup>511</sup>

However, despite such formal independence, or rather because of it, the Great Powers repeatedly attack such countries or even occupy them temporarily in order to defeat popular insurgencies and to install reliable marionettes.

510 V. I. Lenin: Imperialism. The Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916); in: LCW Vol. 22, pp. 259-260

511 V. I. Lenin: Imperialism. The Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916) ; in: LCW Vol. 22, p. 263 (emphasis in original)

In recent past, we have seen a substantial increase of such attempts. To name a few examples we refer to the military interventions, wars and occupations of the U.S. in Afghanistan since 2001, in Iraq since 2003, of France in Mali since 2013, of Russia in Syria since 2015, etc. The ongoing occupation of Palestine by the Israeli settler state is another example.

There are also a number of cases where the Great Powers do not send their own troops but rather use troops of allied semi-colonial states to act as their proxies. As we have mentioned above, such tactics have been already developed by the British Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Great Powers increasingly deploy a similar policy today. As examples for this we refer to the so-called *African Union Mission in Somalia* (AMISOM) which was mandated by the UN Security Council (i.e. the imperialist Great Powers) in 2007. About 20,000 African troops, with Ethiopia as the most significant force and with the aid of the U.S. and French army, fight since 2007 against a popular insurgency led by the petty-bourgeois Islamist *Al-Shabaab* movement.

Another case in point is the recently formed *G5 Sahel* forces in West Africa. Initiated by France in 2014, these forces comprise about 10,000 troops from five Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger). Their mission is to fight, "in cooperation" with France (i.e. under the latter's command), against "terrorists".

The RCIT has always championed in such cases a consistent anti-imperialist stand calling for the defeat of the imperialist aggressors (resp. their proxies) and for the military victory of the forces representing the oppressed people.

Such an approach has always been the position of the revolutionary workers movement. The leaders of the Bolshevik Party were very outspoken on this issue. Such wrote Lenin:

*"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 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."* <sup>512</sup>

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*

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

victory over the oppressor, slaveholding and predatory "Great" Powers."<sup>513</sup>

At the Fourth Congress of the Communist International in 1922, Trotsky expressed the same approach: "Every colonial movement that weakens capitalist rule in the ruling country (*métropole*) is progressive, because it assists the proletariat in its revolutionary task."<sup>514</sup>

Likewise, the American Trotskyists stated in a pamphlet in 1936: "Therefore it is the business of Marxists not to stand aside, but to support actively, in every possible manner, any armed struggle that is aimed against, and capable of weakening, capitalism: for example, the revolts of colonies against their imperialist oppressors, and the uprisings of all oppressed and exploited races and nations—just as Marxists support strikes or any other manifestations directed against the capitalist class or its governments."<sup>515</sup>

Consequently, Trotsky sharply denounced all those pseudo-socialists who refused to take the side of the oppressed people: "The struggle against war and its social source, capitalism, presupposes direct, active, unequivocal support to the oppressed colonial peoples in their struggles and wars against imperialism. A "neutral" position is tantamount to support of imperialism. Yet, among the announced adherents of the London Bureau congress are found ILPers who advocate leaving the courageous Ethiopian warriors against marauding Italian fascism in the lurch on the grounds of "neutrality," and "Left" Poale Zionists who are even at this moment leaning upon British imperialism in its savage campaign against the legitimate, even if confused, struggle of the Arab peasantry."<sup>516</sup>

Such an unambiguous siding with the struggles of the oppressed people in wars with the Great Powers has been repeated hundreds of times on official proclamations of the Third and, later, the Fourth International. It has become an indispensable part of the programmatic arsenal of Marxism. There can be no revolutionary who does not implement such a line in words and deeds!

## Imperialist Non-Military Aggressions against Semi-Colonial Countries

Based on such an anti-imperialist approach, Marxists likewise oppose also all other, non-military, forms of imperialist aggression against semi-colonial countries. A well-known example of such pressure are economic sanctions of the Great Powers against selected semi-colonial countries which, in one way or another, dared not to comply with the imperialist wishes. The most horrific

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

514 Leon Trotsky: *Speech at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International* (1 December 1922), in: John Riddell (Ed.): *Toward the United Front. Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922*, Historical Materialism Book Series, Brill, Leiden 2012, p. 1000

515 John West (James Burnham): *War and the Workers* (1936), Workers Party Pamphlet, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/burnham/1936/war/index.htm>

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

recent example of such imperialist sanctions is the barbaric sanctions imposed by the United Nations against Iraq in the years 1990-2003. According to several studies, these sanctions caused the death of more than 500,000 children under the age of five.<sup>517</sup>

Other examples are imperialist sanctions against North Korea, Iran, Zimbabwe, and Venezuela. The RCIT has always called the international workers and popular movement to unconditionally oppose such sanctions and to support measures to undermine, break and, if possible, stop it.

Sometimes, the Great Powers justify such sanctions by claiming that they affect countries which would strive to possess nuclear weapons. Often, this is simply a lie. In any case, it is total hypocrisy that Great Powers which possess hundreds or thousands of nuclear missiles want to forbid others to do the same! In fact, the Great Powers want to keep a monopoly of nuclear weapons in order to be better able to impose their domination over the South. While socialists 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.

## Oppression of National Minorities

One characteristic feature of imperialism is the oppression of national minorities. Lenin recognized this principal fact already long ago when he concluded that this division of the world's nations into oppressor and oppressing nations is one of the most important characteristics of the imperialist epoch:

*"The programme of Social-Democracy (this is how the Marxists called themselves at that time, Ed.), as a counter-balance to this petty-bourgeois, opportunist utopia, must postulate the division of nations into oppressor and oppressed as basic, significant and inevitable under imperialism."*<sup>518</sup>

In another article Lenin repeats this idea which later became a fundamental pillar of the Communist International's program:

*"Imperialism means the progressively mounting oppression of the nations of the world by a handful of Great Powers (...) That is why the focal point in the Social-Democratic programme must be that division of nations into oppressor and oppressed which forms the essence of imperialism, and is deceitfully evaded by the social-chauvinists and Kautsky. This division is not significant from the angle of bourgeois pacifism or the philistine Utopia of peaceful competition among independent nations under capitalism, but it is most significant from the angle of the revolutionary struggle against imperialism."*<sup>519</sup>

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517 See e.g. UNICEF: Results of the 1999 Iraq Child and Maternal Mortality Surveys. The report has been published by the *Federation of American Scientists* ([fas.org/news/iraq/1999/08/990812-unicef.htm](http://fas.org/news/iraq/1999/08/990812-unicef.htm)) but has been deleted unsurprisingly in the recent past.

518 V. I. Lenin: *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (1916); in: LCW 22, p. 147

519 V. I. Lenin: *The revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (1915);

Trotsky emphasized the same idea: *“Modern humanity without exception, from British workers to Ethiopian nomads, lives under the yoke of imperialism. This must not be forgotten for a single minute. But this does not at all mean that imperialism manifests itself equally in all countries. No. Some countries are the carriers of imperialism, others-its victims. This is the main dividing line between modern nations and states.”*

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The burning actuality of the national question in imperialist countries can be observed by various crises, mass protests, popular insurgencies, and state repression. See for example the struggle for independence of the Chechen people which resulted in two wars with the Russian army. Other Caucasian people also resist the oppression by Moscow. In China, the Uyghurs and Tibetans are resisting increasing state repression. Likewise, we see mass movements for national self-determination in Catalonia as well as in Scotland.

Revolutionaries unconditionally oppose the oppression of national minorities and fully support the right of national self-determination of oppressed people. 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.

Bolshevism sharply condemned all those who refused to support the struggle of the oppressed people for national-self-determination: *„Socialists cannot achieve their great aim without fighting against all oppression of nations. They must, therefore, unequivocally demand that the Social-Democratic parties of the oppressor countries (especially of the so-called “Great” Powers) should recognise and champion the oppressed nation’s right to self-determination, in the specifically political sense of the term, i.e., the right to political secession. The socialist of a ruling or a colonial nation who does not stand for that right is a chauvinist.*

This principle is no less relevant today than it was at the times of Lenin!

## Tactics of Mass Struggle

Socialists living in imperialist countries have the obligation to support the liberation struggle of the oppressed peoples by a number of tactics. To win sympathy for the struggle of the oppressed peoples, socialists have to agitate in workplaces, neighborhoods, the schools, universities and in the trenches. They must raise an awareness of the just cause of the liberation struggle. They must combat the widespread chauvinist prejudices (e.g. hysteria about “terrorist threats”, “refugees invading our country”, Islamophobia, arrogance towards poor people in the South, etc.).

Revolutionaries have to support all practical actions which help to advance

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in: LCW 21, p. 409

520 Leon Trotsky: Fight Imperialism to Fight Fascism (1938); in: Writings of Leon Trotsky, Vol. 1938-39, p. 26

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.).

As an example for such solidarity activities of revolutionaries in imperialist countries might serve the campaign of the Communist Party of France (PCF) in support of the struggle of the Riffian Berbers in the early 1920s. This people fought, under the leadership of the petty-bourgeois Islamist Abd el-Krim, against the Spanish and French imperialists and attempted to drive these occupiers out of its country. The PCF waged a militant anti-colonial mass campaign in solidarity with the Riffians which even included a general strike on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1925. In its propaganda and agitation, the PCF publicly expressed its support for the Riffians struggle until “*Moroccan soil was completely liberated*” from both Spanish and French imperialists.<sup>521</sup>

One form of useful tactic of international solidarity is the *workers and popular boycott* against reactionary forces. 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. As we mentioned above the RCIT critically supports such sanctions imposed by semi-colonial countries while pointing out their limitations. 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.

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.

Oppressed people involved in armed liberation struggles are understandably in need for material, including military, aid. Such aid can only come from arms producers and states. Only platonic “anti-imperialists” and hypocrites can denounce such liberation forces to acquire weapons from such sources. We defend the right of oppressed peoples to get military and other material aid from other states (incl. imperialist states) as long as it does not lead to political subordina-

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521 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

tion 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.

It is crucial to build international movements for solidarity with liberation struggles of the oppressed peoples. A first step towards such a goal can be 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.

Revolutionaries, usually constituting small minorities among activists, must apply a useful tactic in order to achieve maximum unity in struggle. They must call the mass organizations of the workers and oppressed to organize effective mass campaigns. At the same time, it is essential that revolutionaries reserve themselves the freedom of independent propaganda and agitation. Such freedom includes also the right to criticize participating non-revolutionary forces whenever their activities violate the interests of the liberation struggle. Such a tactic avoids sectarian self-isolation and, at the same time, enables revolutionaries to help the workers and oppressed to make their experience with the shortcoming of the established leaderships. In the end, this tactic should help to advance the independent organization of the workers and oppressed and to win them for a revolutionary perspective.

We remark, as a side-note, that such tactics are even more important in the semi-colonial countries themselves where usually petty-bourgeois nationalist or Islamist forces play a leading role in liberation struggles. Such a tactic has become known in the revolutionary workers movement as the *anti-imperialist united front tactic*. It was originally elaborated by the Communist International in the times of Lenin and Trotsky and summarized in its *“Theses on the Eastern Question”* at its Fourth Congress in 1922.<sup>522</sup>

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522 The anti-imperialist united front tactic 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.”* (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) 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 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*



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 other classes and layers of the oppressed people towards liberation from the yoke of imperialism and capitalism.

We conclude by quoting an aptly summary of the program of revolutionary defeatism in the case of conflicts between Great Powers and oppressed people by Rudolf Klement, a young leader of the Fourth International in the 1930s: *“It is otherwise — so far as the outward form of its struggle goes — with the proletariat of the imperialisms engaged in a direct struggle against the progressive cause. In addition to its struggle for the revolution, it is its duty to engage in military sabotage for the benefit of the “enemy” — the enemy of its bourgeoisie but its own ally. As a means of revolutionary defeatism in the struggle between imperialist countries, military sabotage, like individual terror, is completely worthless. Without replacing the social revolution, or even advancing it by a hair’s breadth, it would only help one imperialism against another, mislead the vanguard, sow illusions among the masses and thus facilitate the game of the imperialists. On the other hand, military sabotage is imperiously imposed as an immediate measure in defense of the camp that is fighting imperialism and is consequently progressive. As such, it is understood by the masses, welcomed and furthered. The defeat of one’s “own” country here becomes not a lesser evil that is taken into the bargain (a lesser evil than the “victory” bought by civil peace and the abandonment of the revolution), but the direct and immediate goal, the task of the proletarian struggle. The defeat of one’s “own” country would, in this case, be no evil at all, or an evil much more easily taken into the bargain for it would signify the common victory of the people liberated from the existing or threatening imperialist yoke and of the proletariat of its enemy, over the common overlord — imperialist capital. Such a victory would be a powerful point of departure for the international proletarian revolution, not least of all in the “friendly” imperialist countries.”*<sup>523</sup>

## On Complex War Scenarios

There can be specific cases of conflicts between a Great Power and a semi-colonial country where the latter receives some kind of support from another Great Power (which is a rival to the former). Such situations existed during World War II when Anglo-American imperialism supported the USSR (a de-

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*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.”* (ibid, p. 390)

523 Rudolf Klement: Principles and Tactics in War

generated workers state) against German imperialism. There were similar cases when Western powers supported semi-colonial China against Japanese imperialism or Japan supported the Indian forces led by Subhash Chandra Bose fighting against the British. An actual example could be semi-colonial Iran, supported by China and Russia against the U.S. If the “peace talks” break down again, the U.S. aggression against semi-colonial North Korea, which receives support by Chinese imperialism, could be another example.

Similarly, there can be civil wars where the workers and oppressed fight against a reactionary dictatorship. The regime receives strong support from one Great Power and the rebels some support from a rivaling Great Power. Syria has been such a case until the U.S. gave up their already very limited support for the rebels.

We have dealt somewhere else in more detail with such complex war scenarios and the concluding military tactics.<sup>524</sup> At this point we limit ourselves to summarize our method in approaching such issues. The decisive point is to approach such issues in a dialectical way and not mechanistically. It would be totally simplistic to conclude that, because of the interference of imperialist and or reactionary forces on both sides, one is best advised to take a *neutral* position. While such a conclusion may be both correct and applicable in a number of cases, it can also be incorrect in other cases. Revolutionaries have to take into account the origin, history and driving factors (as well as secondary factors) of any given conflict, as well as the class nature of the different camps.

If this is not done, Marxist analysis and the revolutionary art of elaborating tactics would be reduced to a mere tallying of pluses and minuses. However, in fact, reality is a “*concrete totality, a unity of the universal and the particular*” – to use the words of the distinguished Soviet philosopher of the 1920s, Abram Deborin.<sup>525</sup>

Those socialists who always take a neutral, abstentionist position in such complex conflicts and wars, mistakenly believe that such a line will ensure that they defend the independence of the working class. However, in fact, they only defend the working class’ “independence” from objective reality by preventing it from advancing its own interests by participating in the concrete struggles between the social forces!

In contrast to such abstentionists, Marxists have to study concretely a given

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524 See Chapter II “Excuse: Different Types of Wars in the Present Period and Consequential Revolutionary Tactics” in Michael Pröbsting: *World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings*; Michael Pröbsting: *Dialectics and Wars in the Present Period*. Preface to Rudolf Klement’s *Principles and Tactics in War*, June 2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/dialectics-war/>; 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: RCIT: *Revolutionary Communism*, No. 5; <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/liberation-struggle-and-imperialism>

525 Abram Deborin: *Lenin als revolutionärer Dialektiker* (1925); in: Nikolai Bucharin/Abram Deborin: *Kontroversen über dialektischen und mechanistischen Materialismus*, Frankfurt a.M. 1974, p. 125 (out translation)

conflict or war and derive the appropriate tactics from it. Without such an approach Marxism is reduced to a sample of abstract truisms and a tactical passivity of waiting on the sidelines for better times, while in reality millions of workers and oppressed are fighting for their democratic and social rights against the ruling classes.

In conclusion, we repeat what we already stated some years ago: *“It is true that imperialist powers have historically tried to utilize democratic struggles for their own ends and interfere in them. Such interference must be opposed by 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. However, this fact should not lead Marxists to automatically adopt a defeatist instead of a revolutionary-defensist position in such conflicts. Rather, the position taken by Marxists should depend on which factor becomes dominant – the national, democratic liberation struggle or the imperialist war of conquest.”*<sup>526</sup>

## XXII. Revolutionary Defeatism and the Struggle for Full Equality of Migrants

As we have outlined above, the increasing share of migrants among the population of the imperialist countries results in the *multi-nationalization of the working class*. This has important consequences for the class struggle in general and for the defeatist struggle against imperialism and militarism in particular.

As we have stated above migrants coming from poorer, semi-colonial countries constitute a crucial transmission belt between the oppressed people living in their country of origin and the working class in the respective imperialist country. They can help in raising awareness among the native workers in the imperialist countries, they can introduce the militant fighting spirit from their home countries to the North and transmit various skills and experiences from the North to the South. The important role of migrants, and national and racial minorities in general, which they play in various class struggles underlines this fact.

In particular, migrants are a crucial sector of the proletariat to orientate to in cases of anti-imperialist solidarity work. There exists a natural tendency for them to stand in solidarity with the oppressed people under attack of the imperialist power. Prominent examples for this have been the central role of Muslim migrants in the mass movement against the Iraq war in 2003 or mass solidarity mobilizations for Palestine.

We think that, given a lower national identification of migrants with the imperialist state, migrants will also play an important role for the mass work of revolutionaries to undermine imperialist efforts for chauvinist and militarist mobilization. Building links with migrant communities and building a revolutionary party with a strong focus on migrants is therefore a central task for Marxists in imperialist countries.

The issue of racism and migration, by its very nature, touches on crucial elements of imperialist chauvinism. The anti-chauvinist struggle on this terrain challenges the “national” identity of the imperialist national state, it undermines the absolute dominance of the state language, it challenges the legal system which denies citizenship for many migrants (despite the fact that migrants have “the right” to increase the national wealth), it challenges the control of the imperialist state over its borders, etc.

For these reasons, the RCIT considers the policy on migrants and refugees as a preparation and a litmus test for every progressive organization. Its approach to this issue will test if it will be able to withstand the pressures of an imperialist war.

We have always emphasized that socialists must defend migrants and refu-

gees against national oppression and racist discrimination. They must struggle for full equality for migrants and sharply oppose any approach which considers them as “guest workers” or as “foreigners”. The imperialist powers have a long history of super-exploitation, military adventures, colonialism etc. from which the countries, where many migrants originate, still suffer. Today, these powers still gain enormously from the ongoing super-exploitation of the semi-colonial countries. Furthermore, the capitalists of the imperialist countries also profit from the super-exploitation of migrants as they receive lower wages (than the native workers), have less access to social service (than the native workers), etc. So it is self-evident that the migrants must have full equality.

Such equality includes the use of native language in schools, universities, public administration etc. As we have stressed repeatedly, the Bolsheviks called, at their time, for the abolition of state language and the equality of all languages spoken by the different people in Russia. Such a program is fully appropriate today. Another important demand is equal wages for equal work.

The RCIT opposes all social-chauvinist attempts to enforce any “assimilation” of migrants. We want unity on equal basis, mutual interaction and not domination of the native population over the migrants.

Socialists must also call for full citizen rights of migrants which include the right to vote, to assembly, to have access to public services, social security, health, etc. Such a consistent democratic perspective includes opposition against various so-called “anti-terrorist” laws which in effect are used by the police to suppress migrants.

The increasingly open religious discrimination of Muslims demonstrates how important it is for socialists to call for a complete separation of state and religion and the full freedom of all religious groups to exercise their faith.

Socialists should call for a public employment program which would include the building of new homes so that all can have affordable housing. Such a program would ensure the ending of unemployment. The chauvinists and reformists will object: “*How should this be financed?*” Our answer is to take the money from those who have robbed it en masse from the workers at home as well as abroad – the capitalists! Hence, such public employment program should be financed by massive increases in taxation of the rich and the expropriation of the super-rich.

Faced with the increasing number of racist attacks by right-wing groups as well as state forces, socialists must call for a united front in order to physically defend migrants and refugees against racist attacks (self-defense groups, etc.).

Another crucial issue, which affects in particular the issue of the power of the imperialist state, is the right of migrants and refugees to freely move across borders and to enter the wealthy countries. As we have elaborated in numerous documents, socialists must fight against racist immigration control in imperialist states and defend ‘*Open Borders*’ for refugees. We can observe the actuality of this issue in the U.S. with Trump’s attempts of mass deportations of migrants,

sending soldiers to the border with Mexico in order to stop the Migrant Caravan<sup>527</sup>, his determination to build a massive wall at the border, his “Muslim Ban”, etc..

The same applies in the Europe where refugees fleeing war, hunger and misery are threatened and stopped by the EU’s racist Frontex regime in the Mediterranean Sea and on the Balkans. Refugees who succeeded to enter Europe are harassed, discriminated and often expelled. Similar racist discrimination takes place in Russia against people from the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The strategic goal of such a revolutionary strategy is to work towards the *multi-national unity of the working class on an internationalist basis*. This means that we strive to unite the native workers and migrant workers living in the imperialist countries as well as the workers living in the imperialist countries with the oppressed people living in the semi-colonial countries of the South. Such a unity is only possible on the basis of consistent working class internationalism. It is only possible if the workers of the privileged, imperialist, countries understand the necessity to reject any aristocratic privileges and prejudices and accept the equality of their class brothers and sisters coming from or still living in other countries. In other words, Marxists must explain that the working class is by its nature an international class and, hence, that its interests can only be defended on the basis of internationalism. Consistent opposition against defending any special rights for a privileged minority of the world proletariat (those living in the rich countries) against the vast majority of the world proletariat (those living in the South) is a pre-condition for building such an international unity. For this reason Marxists have always opposed immigration control by the imperialist states and have supported the right of people to move freely.

As we stated above, the multi-nationalization of the working class creates an objective basis for the emergence of an internationalist consciousness. However, this tendency faces important counter-tendencies. These counter-tendencies are first the massive repressive pressure and chauvinist propaganda of the imperialist state machinery as well as the right-wing racist parties. Secondly, there is the tremendous influence of the reformist leaderships of social democratic and Stalinist parties as well as of trade unions which have always preached open or concealed social-chauvinism. In order to transform the *spontaneous tendencies* towards internationalism into a fully developed anti-chauvinist class consciousness, the intervention of a revolutionary party is indispensable.

Such an international unity between native workers and migrants can not be created by abstract appeals for international solidarity. Neither can it be created by adaption to the national-state. It can only 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 liberation struggles of the workers*

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527 See on this e.g. RCIT: Central America / Mexico / U.S.: Solidarity with the Migrants’ Caravan! 01.11.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/central-america-mexico-u-s-solidarity-with-the-migrants-caravan/>

and oppressed in the South.

The numerous joint campaigns to fight against Islamophobia, to oppose imperialist aggression in the South and to support liberation struggles, joint spontaneous uprisings of youth like in London's district Tottenham and other British cities in August 2011, spontaneous popular initiatives to help refugees fleeing war and misery (like it happened in various European countries in autumn 2015) – all these are examples that such a work in the spirit of anti-imperialist and anti-chauvinist internationalism has a real base to which socialists can relate.

Working towards such a strategy will help revolutionaries to counter the attempts of the ruling class to divide the working class and to promote hatred between its different national sectors via spreading chauvinist hatred against migrants and the hysteria about the so-called "Refugee Crisis". It will enable revolutionaries to transform such a reactionary polarization into the creation of international unity of workers and oppressed from different countries.

It is on the basis of such a program that revolutionaries try to organize migrants in trade unions and other mass organization of the working class. Most importantly, they must strive to build revolutionary worker parties in the imperialist countries with a strong focus on migrant workers and youth.<sup>528</sup>

Such a program is based on the revolutionary approach as it was developed by the Communist International in the times of Lenin and Trotsky. This position has been elaborated in the "*Theses on the Eastern Question*," adopted at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International in 1922. This document un-

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528 For a more detailed elaboration of the RCIT's position on migration and the internationalist program of revolutionary equality we refer readers to various documents which we have published and which are accessible on our website. See e.g., Michael Pröbsting: Patriotic "Anti-Capitalism" for Fools. Yet Again on the CWG/LCC's Support for "Workers" Immigration Control and Protectionism in the US, 30.5.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/cwg-lcc-us-protectionism/>; Michael Pröbsting and Andrew Walton: The Slogan of "Workers" Immigration Control: A Concession to Social-Chauvinism, 27.3.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/workers-immigration-control/>; Michael Pröbsting and Andrew Walton: A Social-Chauvinist Defence of the Indefensible. Another Reply to the CWG/LCC's Support for "Workers" Immigration Control, 14.5.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/cwg-immigration-control/>; RCIT: Marxism, Migration and Revolutionary Integration, <https://www.thecommunists.net/oppressed/revolutionary-integration/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South, chapter 8.iv) and 14ii), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>; Michael Pröbsting: The British Left and the EU-Referendum: The Many Faces of pro-UK or pro-EU Social-Imperialism, August 2015, Chapter II.2, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/british-left-and-eu-referendum/part-5-1/>; RCIT-Program, chapter V: <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/fight-against-oppression-of-migrants/>; RCIT-Manifesto chapter IV: <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-program-2016/chapter-iv/>; and various actual statements and articles here: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/articles-on-refugees/>. See also Michael Pröbsting: Migration and Super-exploitation: Marxist Theory and the Role of Migration in the present Period of Capitalist Decay, in: Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory (Volume 43, Issue 3-4, 2015), pp. 329-346. We have also published a detailed study on migration and the Marxist program in German. See Michael Pröbsting: Marxismus, Migration und revolutionäre Integration (2010); in: Der Weg des Revolutionären Kommunismus, Nr. 7, pp. 38-41, <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/werk-7>

ambiguously states:

*“In view of the coming danger, the Communist Parties of the imperialist countries – America, Japan, Britain, Australia and Canada – must not merely issue propaganda against the war, but must do everything possible to eliminate the factors that disorganise the workers’ movement in their countries and make it easier for the capitalists to exploit national and racial antagonisms.*

*These factors are the immigration question and the question of cheap coloured labour.*

*Most of the coloured workers brought from China and India to work on the sugar plantations in the southern part of the Pacific are still recruited under the system of indentured labour. This fact has led to workers in the imperialist countries demanding the introduction of laws against immigration and coloured labour, both in America and Australia. These restrictive laws deepen the antagonism between coloured and white workers, which divides and weakens the unity of the workers’ movement.*

*The Communist Parties of America, Canada and Australia must conduct a vigorous campaign against restrictive immigration laws and must explain to the proletarian masses in these countries that such laws, by inflaming racial hatred, will rebound on them in the long run.*

*The capitalists are against restrictive laws in the interests of the free importation of cheap coloured labour and with it the lowering of the wages of white workers. The capitalists’ intention to take the offensive can be properly dealt with in only one way – the immigrant workers must join the ranks of the existing trade unions of white workers. Simultaneously, the demand must be raised that the coloured workers’ pay should be brought up to the same level as the white workers’ pay. Such a move on the part of the Communist Parties will expose the intentions of the capitalists and at the same time graphically demonstrate to the coloured workers that the international proletariat has no racial prejudice.”*<sup>529</sup>

Such a communist approach has not lost its actuality!

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529 Communist International: Theses on the Eastern Question, Fourth Congress of the Communist International, December 1922, in: Jane Degras: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents. Volume I 1919-1922, pp. 391-392, <http://marxists.org/history/international/comintern/4th-congress/eastern-question.htm>



*Part 4:*

*The Failure of the Left*

*in the Struggle against Imperialism*



## XXIII. The Left Facing Great Power Rivalry: Pro-Western Social-Imperialists

In this chapter we will discuss the strategies which various left-wing forces are offering in response to the accelerating Great Power rivalry. Before doing this we will briefly summarize the main conclusions of the previous chapters in which we elaborated the strategy of revolutionary defeatism in the present period.

### General Introductory Remarks

The preconditions for any meaningful working class internationalism in the era of Great Power rivalry are:

- a) the recognition of the existence of these imperialist powers (i.e. that the U.S., the EU, Japan as well as Russia and China are such) and, consequential,
- b) that socialists must stand in intransigent and consistent anti-imperialist opposition against *all* Great Powers.

Hence, socialists must not choose a “lesser evil” in conflicts between the Great Powers (or their proxies) but must take a defeatist position against all of them. (“*The main enemy is at home!*”, “*Transform the imperialist war into civil war!*”)

Such categorical rejection of siding with any Great Power remains purely negative and platonic, if it is not *combined* with active support for the struggles of the workers and oppressed against the ruling class in all these countries as well as for the liberation struggles of oppressed peoples attacked by any of these Great Powers (or their proxies). Examples for such are national liberation struggles like those in Afghanistan against the U.S., in Syria against Russia and its marionette Assad, in Yemen against the Saudi-led (and Western-backed) coalition, of the Palestinian people against Israel or of the Uighur people against China. It also includes support for democratic struggles like those in Egypt against the military dictatorship of General Sisi or of the Kashmiri people against the Indian occupation. And it includes the defense of countries like North Korea, Cuba or Venezuela against the aggression of the U.S.

Furthermore, the consistent struggle for full equality of migrants in imperialist countries as well as for open borders for refugees is also part of such a consistent anti-imperialist strategy.

Without such a *combined strategy of anti-imperialism and pro-liberationism*, of opposition against *all* Great Powers and support for *all* liberation struggles of the workers and oppressed, without such a combined program it is *impossible* to pursue a Marxist line in the present historic period.

Unfortunately, such a program of revolutionary defeatism is partially or

completely rejected by most left-reformist and centrist forces. We have already discussed and criticized in previous chapters how these organizations fail to grasp the character of the new imperialist giants Russia and China and the consequences of this for the accelerating Great Power rivalry. Below we will deal with the consequences which these parties and organizations draw from their analyses for their tactics in the major struggles of the present period.

Basically we can classify the following currents among the left-reformist and centrist forces:

1. *Openly pro-Western social-imperialists*
2. *Openly pro-Eastern social-imperialists*
3. *Deniers of Russia's and China's imperialist character but hesitant to draw the conclusions*
4. *Eclectic Social-Pacifists*

Irrespective of their varying alliances and tactical differences, the pro-Western and the pro-Eastern social-imperialists share the same political and social-economic physiognomy. They have the same social-historic class basis as well as the same strategic outlook. In most cases these forces represent bourgeois workers parties, based on a reformist program. In some cases, they are bourgeois-populist formations like the Russian KPRF or simply parties representing the ruling state machinery like the "Communist" Parties in China, Cuba, Vietnam, etc.

These parties are usually well integrated in the political superstructure of the capitalist system – either by repeated participation in national or regional governments (in bourgeois democratic countries), by regular parliamentary representation, by integration in the trade union bureaucracy, etc. or simply by dominating it as the single existing, ruling party (in dictatorships).

In dictatorships like China, Cuba or Vietnam, these "Communist" parties simply represent the alliance between the state bureaucracy and the emerging bourgeoisie. In countries where the reformist forces are not long-standing ruling parties, they usually have their social basis in the labor aristocracy (i.e. the most privileged strata of the working class) and sectors of the middle class. They adapt to (a wing of) the bourgeoisie – either of their own imperialist country or of an imperialist rival.

The relationship of reformism, social-imperialism and labor aristocracy is a long-standing one and has already been emphasized by Lenin.

*„What is the economic substance of defencism in the war of 1914-15? The bourgeoisie of all the big powers are waging the war to divide and exploit the world, and oppress other nations. A few crumbs of the bourgeoisie's huge profits may come the way of the small group of labour bureaucrats, labour aristocrats, and petty-bourgeois fellow-travellers. Social-chauvinism and opportunism have the same class basis, namely, the alliance of a small section of privileged workers with "their" national bourgeoisie against the working-class masses; the alliance between the lackeys of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie against the class the latter is exploiting. Opportunism and social-chauvinism have the*

*same political content, namely, class collaboration, repudiation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, repudiation of revolutionary action, unconditional acceptance of bourgeois legality, confidence in the bourgeoisie and lack of confidence in the proletariat. Social-chauvinism is the direct continuation and consummation of British liberal-labour politics, of Millerandism and Bernsteinism.*"<sup>530</sup>

Today, with the much deeper integration of reformist parties in the bourgeois system, including their regular participation in regional and national governments, these social-imperialist tendencies have a much stronger, solid economic and political foundation.<sup>531</sup>

There is no Chinese Wall (pun intended) between the pro-Western and the pro-Eastern social-imperialists. They adapt to (wings of) the bourgeoisie of different national powers. But as it is well known, imperialist powers are alternating conflicts with collaboration between each other. Furthermore, the bourgeoisie of a given country is not a monolithic class but has different factions. Among them are often sectors which, at least for a certain period, rather favor collaboration with another power instead of confrontation.

This is particularly true given the fact that there exist sectors inside the ruling class (and even more so among the middle class) in the European Union and Japan which sympathize with a more "independent" global policy of their states, i.e. one which is independent of U.S. imperialism and which strives for more collaboration with Russia and China.

Hence, it is not surprising that there are contacts and sometimes cooperation between the parties of the pro-Western and the pro-Eastern camp. See e.g. the friendly relations and cooperation between the pro-Western social-imperialists of PEL, of pro-Eastern Stalinist parties, various centrists and the Kurdish YPG which is serving as proxies for U.S. imperialism in Syria.

Furthermore, reformist bureaucracies can swap the master which they are serving. The history of social democracy is full of such contradictions. Let us not forget that the social democratic parties in Western Europe in the 1920s and 1930s were part of the same organization (the Second International). However they were aligned with factions of their respective national bourgeoisie which often had hostile relations with each other (e.g. Germany vs. France or Britain). There were also periods in which such parties had close relations with U.S. imperialism. Naturally, this resulted sometimes in sharp ruptures between each other.

In this chapter we will deal with pro-Western social-imperialists. We characterize those reformist forces as openly pro-Western social-imperialists which side with "their" Western imperialist fatherland and support in words and deeds the political and economic interests of "their" bourgeoisie. As the most

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530 V.I.Lenin: Opportunism and Collapse of Second International (1915), in: LCW 22, p. 112

531 For a more detailed analysis of reformism today see Michael Pröbsting: Marxism and the United Front Tactic Today. The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony in the Liberation Movement in Semi-Colonial and Imperialist Countries in the present Period, RCIT Books, Vienna 2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/book-united-front/>

important parties of this current we can identify the left-reformist parties united in the *Party of the European Left* (PEL) as well as the *Japanese Communist Party* (JCP). The main parties of PEL are the *Parti Communiste Français* (France), die LINKE (Germany), and SYRIZA (Greece).<sup>532</sup> All these parties were former Stalinist forces which have meanwhile transformed into neo-social democratic parties.

## The Party of the European Left (PEL)

As we have already elaborated in a number of documents, the member parties of PEL are thoroughly reformist, pro-Western social-imperialist formations.<sup>533</sup> Let us demonstrate this with several examples. In the years 1997-2002, the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF) was part of the Jospin government which actively participated in the NATO wars against Serbia in 1999 and Afghanistan in 2001. Its member party in Italy at that time – the *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista* of Fausto Bertinotti – supported the neoliberal government of Romano Prodi in 1996-98 and joined a second Prodi government in 2006-08. In this role it voted for the Italian participation in the imperialist occupation of Afghanistan as well

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532 There has been a split recently in the PEL. Mélenchon's La France insoumise, PODEMOS in Spain, Bloco de Esquerda (Portugal), the Red-Green Alliance (Denmark), the Left Party (Sweden) and the Left Alliance (Finland) have founded a new movement called "*Maintenant le peuple*" ("Now the people). This new alliance will stand as a separate list at the EU elections in May 2019. Furthermore, a split is also looming in the German LINKE as Sarah Wagenknecht has launched their initiative *aufstehen*. However, until now the political differences between MLP and PEL are focused on the MLP's critique of SYRIZA's pro-austerity policy as well as PEL's critique of the MLP's adaption to populism. Pro-PEL forces also attack Mélenchon and Wagenknecht for their adaption to social-chauvinism (e.g. rejection of "open borders" for refugees). Indeed, as we will show below, Wagenknecht stands for reactionary positions on the issue of migration. Nevertheless, this is a ridiculous battle amongst hypocritical bandits. True, Mélenchon and Wagenknecht openly express social-chauvinist positions. However, SYRIZA, one of the main forces of PEL and the governing party in Greece, is *implementing* since years an arch-reactionary social-chauvinist program as it is participating in the imperialist Frontex regimes of the EU! Likewise, it has formed a coalition government with the extreme right-wing party ANEL. Given the bureaucratic nature of the split – in reality, the main issue are the number of seats both sides hope to win at the upcoming European elections – it is not clear until now if there are relevant consequences of this split for the specific character of their social-imperialist orientation. Consequently, it is not possible to take the issue of the PEL's split into consideration in this book. (For more information on the split see e.g. Angelina Giannopoulou: The Party of the European Left, Diem25 and the transnational campaign of Jean-Luc Mélenchon towards the European Elections in 2019, transform europe! 2018; Cécile Barbière: La France Insoumise wants to turn European elections into anti-Macron referendum, 3. Okt. 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-elections-2019/news/la-france-insoumise-wants-to-turn-european-elections-into-anti-macron-referendum/>; Steffen Vogel: Linke Sammlungsbewegung: Falsches Vorbild Mélenchon, aus: »Blätter« 3/2018, <https://www.blaetter.de/archiv/jahrgaenge/2018/maerz/linke-sammlungsbewegung-falsches-vorbild-melenchon>; Jürgen Meyer: »Maintenant le Peuple« (MLP, Jetzt das Volk): Spaltung der Europäischen Linken oder neue linke Sammlungsbewegung? 12. Juli 2018 <http://internetz-zeitung.eu/index.php/4839-%C2%BBmaintenant-le-peuple%C2%AB-mlp,-jetzt-das-volk-spaltung-der-europ%C3%A4ischen-linken-oder-neue-linke-sammlungsbewegung> )

533 See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South, Chapter 13

as for sending troops to Lebanon. The German LINKE did not participate in national governments until now (despite much desire of the party leadership) but it joined several regional coalition governments implementing neoliberal austerity policy.

SYRIZA heads the Greek government since January 2015 in alliance with the extreme right-wing party ANEL. In the past four years, it has implemented the EU-dictated austerity programs more successfully than any of its conservative or social democratic predecessors. In the *Council of the European Union* SYRIZA leader and Greece's Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras backed all decisions of EU imperialism including various sanctions against Russia.

Important member parties of PEL have also a shameful record of supporting the imperialist war-drive (under the pretext of the "war on terror") against the oppressed peoples in the Middle East and in Africa. They entertained close relations with the *Iraqi Communist Party*, which supported the US occupation of Iraq since 2003 and participated in various colonial administrations of the country. The PCF – as well as the *Front de Gauche* of Jean-Luc Mélenchon – expressed in their public statements that they "share the goals of the Mali government to defeat the Jihadist terrorists in the North".<sup>534</sup> When the social democratic government decided to send French troops to Mali, the PCF as well as Mélenchon fully supported this decision. It only criticized that such an intervention should have been mandated by the United Nations. PCF parliamentary deputy André Chassaing stated: "An international intervention was urgent and necessary to stop the offensive of the Islamist fanatics." The same position was expressed by François Asensi, a deputy of Mélenchon's FdG: "The position of the Left Front's deputies, both Communist and Republican, is clear: abandoning the Malian people to the barbarism of the fanatics would have been a political error and a moral sin. Non-intervention would have been the worst act of cowardice."<sup>535</sup>

After the attack on the racist magazine *Charlie Hebdo* on 7 January 2015 the PCF and Mélenchon's FdG praised this Islamophobic rag as "progressive". They joined the reactionary "Je Suis Charlie" campaign and called to participate in the pro-imperialist demonstration for "national unity" in Paris on 11 January – a globally televised march led by, among others, the heads of the Western imperialist governments including the war-criminal and President of Israel Benjamin

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534 See PCF: L' intervention militaire française comporte de grands risques de guerre (12.1.2013), <http://www.pcf.fr/33977>; PCF: C'est le Mali qu'il faut reconstruire, (11.1.2013), <http://www.pcf.fr/33940>

535 Quoted in Don Franks: Mali invaded in new 'scramble for Africa', February 2, 2013, <https://rdln.wordpress.com/2013/02/02/mali-invaded-in-new-scramble-for-africa/>. The same quote is reproduced in Kumaran Ira: French Left Front promotes war in Mali, WSWs, 22 January 2013, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2013/01/22/left-j22.html> as well as in CoReP: Down with the French imperialist intervention in Mali, <http://www.revolution-socialiste.info/CoRePCCItMaliEV.htm>; see also L'intervention jugée nécessaire par les députés, 16 Janvier, 2013, <https://www.humanite.fr/politique/l-intervention-jugee-necessaire-par-les-deputes-513009> and Raoul Rigault: Why French troops are in Mali and why the French Communist Party supports the war, 26 February 2013 <https://www.marxist.com/why-french-troops-are-in-mali-and-why-the-french-supports-the-war.htm>

Netanjahu. They even failed to vote in parliament on 13 January against the extension of France's military intervention in Iraq!<sup>536</sup>

After the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015, the PCF again joined the "*Union Nationale*". All their deputies voted for the state of emergency and, later, for its extension for three months!<sup>537</sup> It is hardly surprising that this social-chauvinist party also supports the ban of hijab and burka for Muslim women.<sup>538</sup>

The same social-chauvinistic spirit is behind the position of Sahra Wagenknecht and her *aufstehen* initiative. Wagenknecht is the leader of the parliamentary faction of the German LINKE. She openly denounces the slogan for "open borders" as "*quixotic*", criticizes the conservative government of Angela Merkel for letting so many male refugees in the country in 2015 and attacks – similar to the right-wing racists and Zionists – Muslim migrants for not "integrating themselves in the society".<sup>539</sup>

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536 See on this e.g. RCIT: France after the Attacks in Paris: Defend the Muslim People against Imperialist Wars, Chauvinist Hatemongering, and State Repression! 9.1.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/statement-paris-attacks/>; Michael Pröbsting: France: "Communist" Party fails to Vote in Parliament against Imperialist War in Iraq! 15.1.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/french-pcf-iraq-war/>; Michael Pröbsting: After the Paris Attack: Socialists must Join Hands with Muslim People Against Imperialism and Racism! Reformist and Centrist Forces try to derail the Workers Movement by Failing to Stand up for Solidarity with the Muslims and Against Imperialist War-Mongering! 17.1.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/france-defend-muslims/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Racist Character of Charlie Hebdo and the pro-imperialist campaign "Je Suis Charlie". Solidarity with Muslim People! NOT Solidarity with Charlie Hebdo! 17.1.2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/racist-charlie-hebdo/>

537 See e.g. RCIT: Terror in Paris is the Result of Imperialist Terror in the Middle East! Stop France's and other Imperialist Powers' Warmongering! No Mobilization of the Army inside France! Defend the Muslim Peoples against Chauvinist Hatemongering and State Repression! 14.11.2015, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/terror-in-paris/>; RCIT: Increasing Instability and Militarization in the European Union. On the Tasks of Revolutionaries in the New Political Phase which has Opened in Europe after the Terrorist Attack in Paris, 08.12.2015, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/militarism-in-eu/>

538 See on this e.g. RKO BEFREIUNG: Austria: Islamophobic Racism on the Rise! Solidarity with the Muslim Brothers and Sisters! No to the Closure of 7 Mosques and the Expulsion of 40 Imams and their Families! 8. June 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/islamophobic-racism-on-the-rise-in-austria/>; Almedina Gunić: Gegen das Verhüllungsverbot! Für Religionsfreiheit und Frauenrechte! Kampf dem islamophoben Rassismus und der Diskriminierung muslimischer Frauen! <https://www.rkob.net/aktuell/kurzmeldungen/kurzmeldungen-september-1/>; see also Yossi Schwartz: Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism, 16 November 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/anti-semitism-and-anti-zionism/>

539 See e.g. "Offene Grenzen für alle - das ist weltfremd", Interview mit Sahra Wagenknecht, erschienen im FOCUS am 10.02.2018, <https://www.sahra-wagenknecht.de/de/article/2713.offene-grenzen-f%C3%BCr-alle-das-ist-weltfremd.html>



## Islamophobia: the new Anti-Semitism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

At this point we want to briefly draw attention to the fact, largely ignored by many “leftists”, that imperialist Islamophobia is the new Anti-Semitism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While the Great Powers stand in rivalry against each other on numerous issues, they totally agree on one thing: discrimination and oppression of Muslim minorities. Naturally, they do so for *political* and not for religious reason. One of Washington’s key allies in the Middle East is the Wahhabite Kingdom in Saudi Arabia and one of Moscow’s key allies is the theocratic regime of Iran as well as the butcher Kadyrov in Chechnya.<sup>540</sup> But they preach and utilize hatred against Muslim minorities and Muslim people for several reasons:

- i) in order to oppress and super-exploit migrants as cheap labor forces in imperialist countries;
- ii) to oppress Muslim national minorities (e.g. Chechens and other Caucasian people, Uyghurs, etc.);
- iii) to legitimize support for “secular” dictatorships like those of Assad, General Sisi, in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, etc.;
- iv) to legitimize imperialist wars and interventions in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Mali, Niger, etc.

For these reasons, we consider the approach towards imperialist Islamophobia one of the most important tests for the so-called “left”. Making any kind of concession to this plague – whether on domestic issues concerning migrants or national minorities, or on foreign policy issues like military interventions in Muslim countries or on the approach towards Zionist Israel and the Palestinian liberation struggle – is unmistakable evidence of social-chauvinism and capitulation to imperialism. Unfortunately, the whole recent history of numerous reformist and centrist parties demonstrates that most of them have shamefully failed this test!

Such social-chauvinist policy is put into practice by SYRIZA – Greece’s ruling party and one of the major forces of PEL. It bears full co-responsibility for the EU imperialist assault on refugees as it agrees on all the anti-migrant programs in the *Council of the European Union* and implements them loyally (Frontex program, etc.). It is a long-standing Marxist truth that, as Lenin liked to say, *„men must not be judged by their words, however, but by their deeds.“*<sup>541</sup> Judged by their deeds, the PEL has nothing to do with anti-imperialism and internationalist

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540 On Kadyrov’s formal adaption to Islamism and, at the same time, serving as Putin’s local dictator against the Chechen people see e.g. Fred Weir: Kremlin frets as Russia’s once restive Islamist region takes up political Islam. Strongman Ramzan Kadyrov was installed by Putin to squelch Chechnya’s Islamist insurrection. But Kadyrov’s adoption of sharia and political Islam in the region is challenging Russia’s secular constitutional order, September 20, 2017 <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2017/0920/Kremlin-frets-as-Russia-s-once-restive-Islamist-region-takes-up-political-Islam>

541 V. I. Lenin: German and Non-German Chauvinism (1916); in: LCW 22, p. 183

solidarity for migrants and refugees!

Another expression of the PEL's deep-seated social-chauvinism is its support for the Zionist state Israel. Leading figures of PEL have repeatedly expressed their support for this colonial settler state. Gregor Gysi, a long-standing standing leader of the German LINKE and currently President of the PEL, repeatedly stressed that his party stands for "*Solidarity with Israel*". In a speech he characterized "*the solidarity with Israel as a well-founded moral element for the German reason of state*".<sup>542</sup>

During the Gaza war in 2008/09, the chairman of the LINKE in Berlin, Klaus Lederer, joined a demonstration with the slogan "*Support Israel - Operation Cast-Lead*" and was – alongside with politicians from the other bourgeois parties – one of the main speakers. The German LINKE even goes so far as to denounce any support for a one-state solution in Palestine as well as calls to boycott Israeli commodities or the participation in Gaza solidarity convoys. It even associates such activities with "*Anti-Semitism*". It also declares support for such positions as incompatible with membership in the parliamentary group! These positions were adopted in 2011 unanimously by the leadership, respectively the parliamentary group, of the LINKE!<sup>543</sup> As we have reported, the Austrian Communist Party, also a member of PEL, has repeatedly slandered the RCIT Section as "*Anti-Semitic*". It even expelled it from its public events because of our consistent Anti-Zionist position and the consequential support for the Palestinian liberation struggle.<sup>544</sup>

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542 Gregor Gysi: Die Haltung der deutschen Linken zum Staat Israel, Vortrag von Dr. Gregor Gysi auf einer Veranstaltung „60 Jahre Israel“ der Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung am 14.4.2008, [http://www.juedische.at/TCgi/\\_v2/TCgi.cgi?target=home&Param\\_Kat=3&Param\\_RB=33&Param\\_Red=9722](http://www.juedische.at/TCgi/_v2/TCgi.cgi?target=home&Param_Kat=3&Param_RB=33&Param_Red=9722)

543 See LINKE weist Antisemitismus-Vorwürfe zurück. Der Parteivorstand der LINKEN hat am 21. Mai 2011 ohne Gegenstimmen die folgende Erklärung verabschiedet: <http://www.die-linke.de/partei/organe/parteivorstand/parteivorstand20102012/beschluesse/linkeweistantisemitismusvorwuerfezurueck/>; Parliamentary Group of the LINKE: Entschieden gegen Antisemitismus, 8. Juni 2011, <http://www.die-linke.de/nc/dielinke/nachrichten/detail/artikel/entschieden-gegen-antisemitismus>

544 On the state repression against the Austrian section of the RCIT as well as the smear campaign and physical attacks by various "left-wing" forces see e.g. the following reports (which include links to more reports): RKOB: Public Prosecution Department in Vienna Stops Investigation against Michael Pröbsting, 09.02.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/investigation-vs-proebsting-stopped/>; RKOB: Austria: Right-Wing Party Opens Parliamentary Inquiry against the RCIT Section. Biggest Opposition Party smears the Trotskyists for alleged "Left-Wing Extremism", "Antisemitism" and "Radical Islamism" and asks the Federal Ministry of the Interior to officially investigate them, 29.01.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/parliamentary-inquiry-against-rcit-section/>; RCIT: Stop Judicial Prosecution for Solidarity with Palestine! A Call to the Austrian State to Drop Its Charges against Michael Pröbsting! <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/solidarity-proebsting/>; RKOB: Austria: "Left-Wing" Zionists Attack Arab Migrants at Demonstration in Solidarity with Refugees! Report (with Pictures and Videos) from the anti-racist Demonstration on 26 November in Vienna by the Austrian Section of the RCIT, 27.11.2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/zionists-attack-rcit-austria/>; RKOB: KPÖ schließt RKOB aus und macht den Weg frei für Frauenschläger der Anti-Nationalen Szene. Wiederholter körperlicher Angriff auf Genossin Gunić am Volksstimmefest, Bericht der Revolutionär-Kommunistischen Organisation BEFREIUNG zum Volksstimmefest 2016, 05.09.2016, <https://www.rkob.net/wer-wir-sind-1/rkob-aktiv-bei/bericht-vs->

In the light of the acceleration of Great Power rivalry, the PEL leadership supports the formation of the imperialist EU as an independent power: *“The individual nation states must stop allowing themselves to be played off against each other by corporations and banks. Countries such as Ireland must no longer be allowed to attract investors by cutting their taxes and lowering social and environmental standards. We’ll be able to do next to nothing to prevent such imbalances if we continue to oppose each other as nation states – which is why we need to embrace European integration. By themselves, individual nation states will never be able to effectively respond to a trade war with the US. Here, we need to see a united response from the European Union. Of course, I am aware of the sad state that some parts of this European Union are in. But the European economy, the environmental challenges faced by Europe, the prevention of war on this continent, and ultimately, the social question and young people in particular, who are increasingly embracing a European identity – they all call for European integration, and not its opposite.”*<sup>545</sup>

Of course, the PEL combines such support for imperialist military intervention in Africa or the Middle East, for Israel, or for the declaration of the state of emergency with endless invocations of pacifism, the *“importance of the United Nations”*, of *“the need for peaceful solutions”*, etc.<sup>546</sup> Such phrase-mongering is partly rooted in the decades-long petty-bourgeois pacifist tradition of these forces as (ex-)Stalinist opposition parties and partly in the fact that they are advocating a different foreign policy to the EU. They adapt to that wing of the European monopoly bourgeoisie which desires an independent position of Washington. Naturally, as an independent Great Power (i.e. without the U.S. military support), the EU would be politically and military much weaker. As such a weakened imperialist bloc, the EU must strive not for short-term confrontation with other rivals but rather for cooperation and *“pacifist”* relations with them.

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[fest-2016/](#); Report on May Day 2016 in Austria: Joint Resistance against Racist Attacks. Forceful, militant, internationalist demonstration despite racist attacks, Report (with Pictures and Videos) on the multinational, internationalist demonstration in Vienna marking May Day 2016 organized by the Revolutionary Communist Organization LIBERATION, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/report-may-day-2016-in-austria/>; RCIT: Victory! The Charge against RKOB Spokesperson and Palestine Solidarity Activist Johannes Wiener has been dropped! 10.1.2013, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/solidarity-with-wiener-won/>

545 An Internationalist Answer, Speech by Gregor Gysi, President of the European Left, held at the Federal Party Congress in Leipzig, 9 June 2018, on the dispute on refugees and migration, <https://www.transform-network.net/blog/article/an-internationalist-answer/>

546 The Marxists began to fight against such illusions in international courts of arbitration already before World War One. Unfortunately, the reformists still have not learned anything from this! (See on this e.g. Annelis Laschitzka: Zur Rolle des Zentrismus 1911/12. Ein Beitrag über den Zusammenhang von Imperialismus und Opportunismus, in: Fritz Klein (Ed.): Studien zum deutschen Imperialismus vor 1914, Berlin 1976)

## The Japanese Communist Party

The *Japanese Communist Party* (JCP) has never been part of a coalition government. It is a sizeable ex-Stalinist, social democratic opposition party which has officially about 300,000 member and 20,000 branches across the country. At the elections for the House of Representatives in the 2017, the JCP received 4.4 million votes, or 7.91%. And in the 2016 election for the House of Councilors, the party got 6.02 million votes, or 10.74%.<sup>547</sup>

A crucial programmatic feature of the JCP since the beginning of its legal existence in 1945 is the denial of the imperialist character of Japan. While the party accepts that Japan has been an imperialist power before 1945, it claims that a fundamental change has taken place since then. Already in a programmatic declaration adopted at the Plenum of the Central Committee held in August 1948, the JCP defined as its goals the reclaiming of Japan's status as an independent (i.e. independent imperialist) state. It called for "*Japan's right to self-defence*", the "*reversion to Japan of islands which nationally and historically belong to it*" as well for a "*guarantee for independence of the Japanese economy*":

"2. Independence: the complete recovery of sovereignty. (No obligation shall be borne that will infringe upon sovereignty). 3. Territory: the reversion to Japan of islands which are to originally belong to Japan nationally and historically. (...) 5. Denunciation of war and right to self-defence: the denunciation of war; opposition to any condition which might involve Japan into an international dispute and the approval of Japan's right to self-defence. 6. Economy: guarantee for independence of the Japanese economy and improvement of the people's life and the formation of equal economic relations with every country of the world."<sup>548</sup>

In a draft program published by the JCP's leadership in September 1957 (and later adopted at a congress), the following characterization was given: "*It is U.S. imperialism and Japanese monopoly capital, which is in subordinate allied relations with the former, that basically rule Japan today. While being a highly developed capitalist country, Japan has become a virtually dependent country semi-occupied by U.S. imperialism.*"<sup>549</sup> The party concluded from this that the main goal is a "*people's democratic revolution*" which main tasks is, among others, the achievement of "*complete independence of the nation*". Inner-party opponents, "*like Shojiro Kasuga, Tomochika Naito and others who regarded Japan as a basically independent imperialist power*" were denounced as "*revisionists*" and consequently expelled.<sup>550</sup>

547 What is the JCP? A Profile of the Japanese Communist Party (November, 2017), [https://www.jcp.or.jp/english/2011what\\_jcp.html](https://www.jcp.or.jp/english/2011what_jcp.html)

548 Central Committee of the Communist Party of Japan: The Fifty Years of the Communist Party of Japan, published by the Publication Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Japan, Tokyo 1973, p. 106

549 The Fifty Years of the Communist Party of Japan, p. 136

550 On the history of the Japanese Communist Party see also Hans Modrow, Manfred Sohn: *Vor dem großen Sprung? Überblick über die Politik der Japanischen Kommunistischen Partei*, GNN-Verlag, Schkeuditz 2000

The JCP upholds this position until the present day – more than 70 years after the end of World War II – when Japan has become one of the strongest imperialist powers in the global economy! In its program, adopted in 2004, the JCP gives the following characterization of Japan:

*“Although Japan is a highly developed capitalist country, it is virtually a dependent country, with an important part of its land, military matters and other affairs of state being controlled by the United States. (...) The United States still retains significant power over Japan’s military and diplomatic affairs, and constantly uses its enormous power to interfere with Japan’s economic affairs. In the United Nations and in other international forums, Japanese government representatives often play the role of spokespersons for the U.S. government. Japan-U.S. relationship is not one of an equal rights alliance. The present state of Japan is marked by its state subordination to the United States, which is extraordinary not only among the developed capitalist countries but in international relations of the present-day world, in which colonization is history. The U.S. domination of Japan clearly has an imperialistic character because it tramples on Japan’s sovereignty and independence in the interests of U.S. world strategy and U.S. monopoly capitalism.”*<sup>551</sup>

From this follows the programmatic tasks of the JCP which effectively is the creation of an independent (of course, “peaceful”) imperialist state:

*“A change Japanese society needs at present is a democratic revolution instead of a socialist revolution. It is a revolution that puts an end to Japan’s extraordinary subordination to the United States and the tyrannical rule of large corporations and business circles, a revolution that secures Japan’s genuine independence and carries out democratic reforms in politics, the economy, and society. Although these are democratic reforms realizable within the framework of capitalism, their full-fledged achievement can be made possible through a transfer of state power to the forces that represent the fundamental interests of the Japanese people from those representing Japan’s monopoly capitalism and subordinate to the United States. Success in achieving this democratic change will help solve problems that cause the people to suffer and pave the way for building an independent, democratic, and peaceful Japan that safeguards the fundamental interests of the majority of the people.”*

According to the JCP program, such an independent imperialist Japan would abrogate the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty ... and continue cooperation with U.S. imperialism “on an equal footing”! “Japan will conclude a friendship treaty with the United States on an equal footing. Unjustifiable U.S. intervention will be rejected also in economic affairs, so as to establish independence in all fields, including finance, foreign exchange, and trade.”

While the JCP, as all left-reformist parties, preaches pacifism and praises the United Nations<sup>552</sup>, it also indicates in its program its willingness to support the

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551 Program of the Japanese Communist Party, adopted on January 17, 2004 at the JCP 23rd Congress, [http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/23rd\\_congress/program.html](http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/23rd_congress/program.html)

552 See e.g. the JCP’s enthusiastic support for the noncommittal and meaningless calls of the United Nations to ban nuclear weapons: JCP Chair Shii issues statement to welcome the nuclear weapons ban treaty, July 9, 2017 <http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jcpcc/blog/2017/07/20170709jcp-chair-shii->

imperialist “war on terror”: “Oppose both indiscriminate terrorist attacks that victimize the general public and retaliatory war, and work to heighten international calls and increase common action for eradicating terrorism.” Likewise, the JCP’s leader Shii Kazuo called “the global community” (i.e. the imperialist Great Powers dominating the UN Security Council) to join forces “to eliminate terrorism”: “He (Shii, Ed.) goes on to emphasize the need for the global community to unite in efforts to eliminate terrorism from around the world.”<sup>553</sup>

## JCP: Advisor for an Alternative Strategy for Japanese Imperialism

Such a support for an independent imperialist Japan is reflected in social-imperialist positions on central issues in the current period. In a programmatic statement, published in September 2000, the JCP declared once more its will to work towards a peaceful world and the disbandment of the army ... albeit with two crucial qualifications. First such a pacifist scenario should only be desired “on condition that stable peace in Asia is maintained firmly, and that public consensus has matured on the complete implementation of the Constitution’s Article 9.” Since “stable peace” can not and will not exist in a world dominated by imperialist powers (and certainly does not exist given the rivalry between the U.S., China, Japan and India for hegemony in East and South Asia) and since “public consensus” means that also the reactionary forces of Japanese monopoly capital would have to agree to disarmament (which, of course, they never will), such a pacifist future is postponed to a very distanced future.

The most important statement of the whole declaration however is the very last sentence: “It will be natural for us to make use of the existing SDF, if the situation demands it, to assure the people’s safety.”<sup>554</sup> This means nothing else but the JCP’s support for the deployment of Japan’s imperialist army “if the situation demands it”.

In effect, the JCP acts as an advisor for Japanese imperialism to “emancipate” itself from its subordinated role to U.S. imperialism. Another example for this is the JCP’s criticism of the Abe government for not joining the China-dominated *Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank* (AIIB) which was founded in 2015 as an alternative imperialist financial institution. The JCP’s leader Shii Kazuo demanded “that the Japanese government join the planned new global investment bank with its focus on Asia [in reaction to] the government decision to not become a founding member of the *Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank*.”<sup>555</sup> Grotesquely, the JCP leadership

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[issues-statement.html](http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jcpcc/blog/2017/05/20170524shii-issues-statement.html) and Shii issues statement welcoming draft N-ban treaty, May 24, 2017 <http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jcpcc/blog/2017/05/20170524shii-issues-statement.html>

553 Shii condemns terror attacks in Paris, November 15, 2015 <http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jcpcc/blog/2015/11/20151115-shii-condemns-terror-attacks-in-paris.html>

554 JCP’s view on relationship between Constitution’s Article 9 and the Self-Defense Forces, September 30 2000, [https://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jps\\_weekly/e000930\\_03.html](https://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jps_weekly/e000930_03.html)

555 Not too late for Japan to join AIIB: Shii, April 2, 2015 <http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jcpcc/>

justifies this proposal by claiming that “*the AIIB represents a move to explore an alternative international economic order displacing the current order centering on the major economic powers.*” Obviously, they have not heard about the fact the China itself has become already a “*major economic power*”. Of course, in reality this is all nothing but hypocritical phrase-mongering obscuring the JCP’s concept to offer a strategy for independent Japanese imperialism.

Another example for the JCP’s social-imperialist role as advisor for Japan to act as a Great Power is its criticism of the conservative Abe government for not negotiating hard enough with the Trump Administration in the recent tariff conflict: “*The JCP strongly opposes the bilateral trade negotiations between Japan and the U.S. that sell out Japan’s economic sovereignty to the U.S.*”<sup>556</sup>

Furthermore, the JCP also continues to call for the return of respectively for defending various islands which Japan has conquered in its history. Such it demands in its 2004 program “*the return to Japan of the Chishima (Kurile) Islands as well as the Habomai Islands and Shikotan Island, which are historically part of Japan.*” (These islands have been controlled by the USSR resp. Russia since 1945.<sup>557</sup>) Likewise they insist on Japan’s right to control the Senkaku/Diaoyu-islands which were handed over to Japan by U.S. imperialism in 1972. However, these islands are also claimed by China and, as a result, there have been heated tensions between the two powers in 2012.<sup>558</sup> However, the social-imperialist JCP has strongly defended Japan’s claims from 1972 until today.<sup>559</sup>

[blog/2015/04/20150402i.html](http://blog/2015/04/20150402i.html)

556 JCP opposes the Japan-U.S. trade negotiations which disregards Japan’s economic sovereignty, September 28, 2018, <http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jcpc/blog/2018/09/20180928-jcp-opposes-the-japan-us-trade.html>

557 We note in passing that the JCP already demanded the handing over of these islands since 1945, i.e. in a time when the Soviet Union was a Degenerated Workers State (or a “socialist country” as the JCP even claimed). In other words, it was such a social-chauvinistic party that it put the “national rights” of Japanese imperialism higher than that of a foreign “socialist country”! Their understanding of “socialism in one country” meant that they were first Japanese patriots and only secondly “socialists”!

558 Michael Pröbsting: No to chauvinist war-mongering by Japanese and Chinese imperialism! 23.9.2012, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/no-war-between-china-and-japan/>

559 1972, when US imperialism handed the Senkaku/Diaoyu-islands over to Japan, the JCP on 31.3.1972 issued a statement, “*The Senkaku Islands – Japanese Territory*”, to state its position: “*The Okinawa Legislature, in the March 3 plenary session resolved that ‘It is clear that the Senkakus are Japanese territory and there is no room for dispute over their territorial right’. The opinion of our party is that this claim is correct. We would again like to make clear our party’s view on the Senkakus question. For some time now our party has carried out investigations and studied the historical background and relations under international-law in connection with this. Our investigations have made it clear that the Senkakus are Japan’s territory.*” (The Senkaku Islands--Japanese Territory. Press Conference by Tomio Nishizawa, JCP Standing Presidium Member, Akahata, 31.3.1972; [http://www.japan-press.co.jp/modules/feature\\_articles/index.php?id=34](http://www.japan-press.co.jp/modules/feature_articles/index.php?id=34)) It reiterated this position in a statement in 2010: “*Even with historical documents made available after the publication of the statement, no finding which makes it necessary for the JCP to revise this view has been introduced. Under international law, a country can exclusively exercise its sovereignty within its territorial waters. Therefore, it is a matter of course for the Japan Coast Guard to crack down on illegal operations of foreign ships.*” (How to solve the issue of the Senkaku Islands: Japan justifiably claims sovereignty; 20.9.2010, [http://www.japan-press.co.jp/modules/feature\\_articles/](http://www.japan-press.co.jp/modules/feature_articles/)

The JCP has the same social-patriotic position when it comes to Japan's claims over the *Dokdo/Takeshima Island*. These islands were robbed by Japanese imperialism from Korea in 1905 and are also claimed since long by South Korea.<sup>560</sup>

However, an even worse example for the JCP's social-imperialism has been its full and unconditional support for the Great Power's aggression against North Korea when the latter dared to make nuclear and missile tests during the last years.<sup>561</sup> Instead of supporting this small country against the pressure of the biggest imperialist powers (the U.S. with the support of Japan and even the tacit support of China and Russia), instead of defending North Korea's right to obtain some nuclear missiles so that it can defend itself against the imperialist

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[index.php?id=34](http://www.japan-weekly.com/index.php?id=34); [www.japan-weekly.com](http://www.japan-weekly.com) is the website of the JCP paper Japan Weekly Press) And again, in the midst of an escalation with China, the reformist JCP insisted on 21.8.2012: "Regarding the Senkaku Islands, Ichida referred to the JCP's 2010 statement which made clear that Japan's possession of the islands is legitimate based on history and international law." (Calm diplomatic efforts needed to solve territorial issues: JCP Ichida; 21.8.2012, [http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jps\\_2012/20120821\\_04.html](http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jps_2012/20120821_04.html))

560 The JCP's leadership stated in 1977: "... the JCP in 1977 expressed its view that Japan has the historical legitimacy to claim Japan's sovereignty over Takeshima Island" (Takeshima issue should be solved through diplomacy: JCP chair; August 11, 2012, [http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jps\\_2012/20120811\\_01.html](http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jps_2012/20120811_01.html)) This viewpoint was repeated in August 2012: "Regarding Takeshima Island, Ichida referred to the JCP's 1977 statement which stated that Japan has historical grounds to claim its sovereignty over the island." (Calm diplomatic efforts needed to solve territorial issues: JCP Ichida; August 21, 2012, [http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jps\\_2012/20120821\\_04.html](http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jps_2012/20120821_04.html))

561 See the RCIT: Has the Trump-Kim Summit Opened the Road to Peace in East Asia? 14.06.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/has-the-trump-kim-summit-opened-the-road-to-peace-in-east-asia/>; RCIT: North Korea: Stop the American Warmongers! Defend North Korea against the Madman of US Imperialism! Down with the imperialist sanctions against North Korea! No political support for the Stalinist Kim Regime! 11 August 2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/stop-us-madman-threatening-north-korea/>; RCIT: US Sanctions against Russia, Iran, and North Korea are an Economic Declaration of War, 30 July 2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/north-america/us-sanctions-vs-russia-iran-north-korea/>; RCIT: North Korea: Stop the War Mongering of US Imperialism! 4 April 2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/us-aggression-vs-north-korea/>; RCIT: New Imperialist Threats in East Asia: Hands off North Korea! 12.3.2013, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/defend-north-korea/>; RCIT: No War against North Korea! Call for Protests on the Day when a War starts! 6.4.2013, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/no-war-against-north-korea/>; Michael Pröbsting: US Aggression against North Korea: The CWI's "Socialist" Pacifism, 12.09.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/cwi-and-north-korea/>.

On the issue of capitalist restoration in North Korea we refer readers to several essays which we have published recently: Michael Pröbsting: Has Capitalist Restoration in North Korea Crossed the Rubicon or Not? Reply to a Polemic of Władza Rad (Poland), 15 July 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/has-capitalist-restoration-in-north-korea-crossed-the-rubicon-or-not/>; Michael Pröbsting: In What Sense Can One Speak of Capitalist Restoration in North Korea? Reply to Several Objections Raised by the Polish Comrades of "Władza Rad", 21 June 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/north-korea-and-the-marxist-theory-of-capitalist-restoration/>; Michael Pröbsting: Again on Capitalist Restoration in North Korea, 12 June 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/again-on-capitalist-restoration-in-north-korea/>; Michael Pröbsting: World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries, RCIT Books, Vienna 2018, Chapter VI. The Korean Peninsula: Imperialist Aggression, Capitalist Restoration and Revolutionary Defensism, pp. 95-105, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/>



aggression, instead of all this, the social-imperialist JCP issued a series of hostile statements. It *“strongly condemns North Korea’s reckless action. (...) The JCP strongly demands that North Korea comply with the UNSC resolutions and stop engaging in any further military provocations.”*<sup>562</sup> It even goes so far to demand explicitly the implementation of the hunger blockade against North Korea calling for *“the strict implementation of increased economic sanctions against the country.”*<sup>563</sup>

In summary, both the PEL as well as the JCP are staunch pro-Western social-imperialist parties. They advocate an alternative policy for European respectively Japanese imperialism (for independence from the U.S., for cooperation with Russia and China) instead of a socialist program in the interest of the working class. They combine such a social-imperialist program with pacifist phrase-mongering.

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562 Kazuo Shii: JCP strongly condemns North Korea’s ballistic missile launch and again calls for immediate direct talks to overcome the current crisis, November 29, 2017 <http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jcpcc/blog/2017/11/20171129-jcp-strongly-condemns-north-koreas.html>. The same position is expressed in various other statements. See e.g. JCP condemns North Korea’s nuclear test and again calls for direct talks to defuse current crisis, September 4, 2017, <http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jcpcc/blog/2017/09/20170904-jcp-condemns-north-koreas-nuclear.html>; Shii issues statement protesting against N. Korea’s ballistic missile launch, May 22, 2017 <http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jcpcc/blog/2017/05/20170522shii-issues-statement.html>; Shii protests North Korea’s missile launch, February 14, 2017 <http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jcpcc/blog/2017/02/20170214-shii-protests-north-koreas.html>; Shii welcomes new UNSC sanctions on North Korea, March 4, 2016 <http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jcpcc/blog/2016/03/20160304-shii-welcomes-new-unscc-sanctions-on-north-korea.html>

563 Shii issues statement condemning N. Korea’s missile launch, August 30, 2017 <http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jcpcc/blog/2017/08/20170830-shii-issues-statement.html>; the same formulation is repeated in Shii explains to press JCP proposal on North Korea issue, February 20, 2017 <http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jcpcc/blog/2017/02/20170220-shii-explains-to-press.html>

## XXIV. The Left Facing Great Power Rivalry: Pro-Eastern Social-Imperialists (Stalinists)

Traditionally, Stalinism (like reformism in general) has always strived for a *strategic alliance* with one sector of the bourgeoisie against another. It has been willing to *subordinate and manipulate* its influence amongst the workers and oppressed for this goal. This was true both on the national as well as on the international terrain. In contrast, authentic Trotskyism always strived to rally the working class and the oppressed, nationally and internationally, against *all* sectors of the bourgeoisie and against *all* Great Powers.

Hence, when the Stalinists were a globally stronger force, i.e. before the collapse of the USSR in 1989-91, they used to look for collaboration with a “democratic”, “antifascist”, “patriotic” faction of the imperialist bourgeoisie against a “reactionary” faction. This was the theoretical justification for joining popular front governments with imperialist parties (e.g. in France in 1936, 1945, 1981 or 1997; in Italy in 1945, 1996, 2004).<sup>564</sup> And it was also the theoretical justification for supporting one camp of imperialist states against the other (e.g. in WWII support for the US and UK against Germany and Italy).

In the case of Maoist and post-Maoist China this reformist theory was even used to justify the ultra-reactionary collaboration with U.S. and European imperialism against the supposed “social-imperialist” USSR.<sup>565</sup> (In fact, all Stalinist states – both in the USSR-led camp as well as in China – were not capitalist or even imperialist states but rather degenerated workers states in which a bureaucratic caste dictatorially ruled over the working class and peasantry on the basis of a post-capitalist planned economy.<sup>566</sup>) As a result, to mention a bizarre anecdote, members of Maoist groups in Western Europe were instructed in the

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564 There exists a vast literature on the Stalinist policy of the Popular Front. See e.g. Tom Kemp: *Stalinism in France*, New Park Publications, London 1984; Jaques Danos, Marcel Gibelin: *Die Volksfront in Frankreich. Generalstreik und Linksregierung im Juni '36*, Junius Verlag, Hamburg 1982. Leon Trotsky has extensively critiqued this Stalinist conception. See e.g. Leo Trotsky: *Whither France?* New Park Publications, London. The leading Stalinist theoretician stated the concept of the Popular Front in various speeches and writings after 1935. They are summarized in: Georgi Dimitroff: *The United Front. The Struggle Against Fascism and War*, Proletarian Publishers, San Francisco 1975

565 See on this e.g. the chapter “The Maoist Origin of the Super-Power Theory” in our pamphlet *Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power* (see footnote above for the full title and link).

566 A more detailed elaboration of the Trotskyist theory of the Stalinist states can be read in Leon Trotsky: *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), Pathfinder Press 1972. The RCIT's analysis is summarized in chapter II in our book Michael Pröbsting: *Cuba's Revolution Sold Out? The Road from Revolution to the Restoration of Capitalism*, Vienna 2013, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/cuba-s-revolution-sold-out/>. See also Yossi Schwartz: *Was the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen a Deformed Workers State?* August 2015, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/south-yemen/>

1970s to join the imperialist army in order to defend their “fatherland” against the “social-imperialist threat from the East”!

In short, the Stalinist parties justified their collaboration with one camp of the bourgeoisie against the other, respectively with one camp of imperialist states against the other, by arguing that this would help defending the “socialist” states (USSR, China, Eastern Europe, Vietnam, North Korea, Cuba, etc.). As a result, they were pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist pseudo-socialists in the service of the ruling Stalinist bureaucracy of degenerated workers states.

However, this is different to the present situation since today no “socialist” state, i.e. degenerated workers state, exists any more. Now, these Stalinists serve *directly* a faction of the ruling class respectively one camp of the imperialist states – and not indirectly via the conservative bureaucracy of a degenerated workers state. This is why this kind of social-imperialism takes the form of *bourgeois geopoliticism*. We say bourgeois geopoliticism because it means defining the world situation and the tasks of the struggle not from the point of view of the international class struggle to advance the cause of the working class and the oppressed peoples but rather from the point of view of reordering the world to the disadvantage of the old Great Powers (U.S., EU and Japan) and to the advantage of the new Great Powers (China and Russia). Bourgeois geopoliticism is the bastard child of the classic Stalinist theory of “socialism in one country”. It deletes “socialism” and is satisfied with some kind of “capitalism in one country”.

## The Stalinist Alliance around the *International Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties*

Since the collapse of the USSR, the Stalinist parties are split and divided and lack any international centralized organization. In a number of countries there exist several Stalinist formations in parallel. True to their “socialism on one country” dogma, they exist first and foremost as *national* parties and subordinate any international tactic to their national interests. However, this does not mean that the Stalinist parties do not take positions on issues of world politics. Nor does it mean that they do not strive for international collaboration.

Today many Stalinist parties are loosely affiliated around the so-called *International Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties* (IMCWP). This is an annual conference which has been initiated by the *Communist Party of Greece* (KKE) in 1998. The parties attending this conference issue joint declarations. A number of them publish a journal – the *International Communist Review*<sup>567</sup> - and constitute a *Working Group*. While these structures exist on a very federalist and loose basis, they nevertheless manage sometimes to initiate joint statements on important world political events.

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<sup>567</sup> Until now, 8 issues of this journal have appeared. Its website is <https://www.iccr.gr/en/home/>.

A number of the Stalinist parties mentioned above often take part in the IMC-WP conferences. Among them are the ruling Stalinist parties of China, Vietnam, Cuba, North Korea and Laos; other parties are the two big Communist Parties of India – CPI and CPI(M) - , the Russian KPRF and RKRП, the CP's of South Africa, Brazil, Venezuela, Syria, Greece, Portugal as well as a number of other, smaller parties.

Several of these parties, as we demonstrated above, consider imperialist China as a “socialist state” which they unconditionally support. Among them are the state parties – the Chinese, the Cubans, etc. as well as others like the CPSA. However, the Stalinist parties do not have a unified view of the class character of Russia and China. The Greek KKE, for example, is more critical and expresses its dissatisfaction about the market reforms. Likewise, there are different views about the class character of Russia – including among the Russian participating parties as we have shown above.

However, they all agree to view the world *not* as one characterized by rivalry between different imperialist Great Powers (including China and Russia) but rather as one which is dominated by *one* imperialist camp with the U.S. and its allies at the top. As a result, they also agree to support those forces which are in conflict with the U.S. and to denounce those forces which are in conflict with the Chinese/Russian camp.

This becomes evident from various joint declarations of the annual IMCWP. In their latest declaration, adopted at a conference in Athens in November 2018, the Stalinist parties use the category “imperialist” only when talking about the U.S. and their allies. Russia and China are not mentioned nor any conflict of oppressed people against these Great Powers.

*“The Communist and Workers’ Parties welcome the struggles of the workers and the peoples around the world against the offensive of imperialism, against occupation, against any threats to sovereign rights and national independence, for peace, for the defense and the widening of social and democratic rights. The experience gained in many countries from the struggles against the imperialist plans and political line of the USA, NATO, the EU and their allies is valuable.*

*The sharpening of the contradictions involves the risk of new imperialist wars, for the control of wealth-producing resources, markets and energy pipelines; this risk sets serious tasks for the workers’ movement and the communists for the strengthening of a broad anti-imperialist struggle for peace and disarmament, the intensification of the struggle against the political line of bourgeois governments that serves the profitability of big capital and imperialist aggression and war. (...)*

*They reaffirmed their internationalist solidarity with the Syrian, Palestinian, Cypriot peoples; with the peoples of Lebanon, of Sudan, of Socialist Cuba, of Venezuela, of Brazil, of Iran, with all the peoples which face imperialist attacks and threats. (...)*”

When it comes to activities for which these Stalinist parties call, again it is solely directed against the U.S. and its allies (in addition, they also call for activities around May Day, various anniversaries etc.).

*“The Communist and Workers’ parties call for the development of common and convergent actions in the next period along these main axes:*

*Against imperialist war, interventions and militarization.*

*Actions against NATO - whose 70th anniversary is on April 4, 2019 - and the EU, which is being further militarized with PESCO and other mechanisms. (...)*

*To strengthen Internationalist Solidarity with the struggling peoples, which face occupation, imperialist threats and interventions*

*To strengthen internationalist solidarity and struggle demanding the end of the US blockade against Cuba and the interventions and threats against Bolivarian Venezuela. To support the struggle of Palestinian people for the end of the occupation and self-determination, establishing a national, independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the UN resolutions, supporting the resistance of the Palestinian people and condemning the criminal policy of Israel. To denounce imperialist interventions in the Korean Peninsula and express solidarity with the Korean people for independent and peaceful reunification. To express solidarity with refugees and with all peoples facing occupation, intervention and blockades by imperialism.”*<sup>568</sup>

We see, while the Stalinist parties condemn U.S. imperialism and its allies, they “ignore” the other states in the Great Power rivalry – China and Russia. They side with the Assad regime which has been saved temporarily by the massive military intervention of Russia. They defend the Palestinian people but don’t lose a word about the Egyptian people brutally oppressed by the military dictatorship of General Sisi (who has good relations with Moscow and who’s coup in July 2013 was supported by Egypt’s Communist Party). They don’t lose a word about the Chechen people oppressed by Russia or the Uighur people suffering in Chinese concentration camps. Characteristically, these Stalinist parties even go so far and uncritically praise the Stalinist-Capitalist cult regime of Kim Jong-Un in North Korea!<sup>569</sup>

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568 Appeal of the 20th International Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties, 29.11.2018, <http://www.solidnet.org/article/20-IMCWP-Appeal-of-the-20th-International-Meeting-of-Communist-and-Workers-Parties/>

569 In a joint statement, signed by 63 Stalinist parties attending the 20<sup>th</sup> annual IMCWP congress in November 2018, they declared: *“We, participants in the 20th International Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties held in Athens, Greece on November 23–25, 2018 express full support for and solidarity with the just cause of the Workers’ Party of Korea and the Korean people for realizing an independent and peaceful reunification of Korea and maintaining peace and security on the Korean peninsula. (...) The just cause of the Workers’ Party of Korea and the Korean people to defend the peace and security of the Korean peninsula and build a powerful socialist country constitutes an active contribution to the struggle of Communist and Workers’ Parties to secure international justice and peace and victoriously advance the cause of socialism on the global scale. (...) We hope that the international community will respond positively to the measures taken in good faith by the DPRK toward the ease of tension and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula and call upon all Communist and Workers’ Parties and progressive organizations of the world to intensify the international solidarity movement for the just cause of the Workers’ Party of Korea and the Korean people.”* (Statement of Solidarity of Communist and Workers’ Parties in Support of the Just Cause of the Workers’ Party of Korea and the Korean People for an Independent and Peaceful Reunification of Korea and for Peace and Security on the Korean Peninsula, 20 IMCWP, Statement of Solidarity of Communist and Workers’ Parties, November 25, 2018 Athens, Greece, <http://www.solidnet.org/article/20-IMCWP-Statement-of-Solidarity-of-Communist-and-Workers-Parties/>)

## Stalinism and Counterrevolution in Syria

An actual example for the reactionary, anti-liberationist and pro-Russian/Chinese character of these Stalinist parties is the civil war in Syria. When the Trump Administration ordered its navy to fire some missiles on empty houses in Syria in April 2018 (in “retaliation” for another Chemical Weapons massacre committed by the Assadist forces against the Syrian people), the Stalinist parties rallied in defense of Moscow’s puppet regime in Damascus.<sup>570</sup>

As we have analyzed somewhere else, the Stalinists’ reaction to this event was characteristic.<sup>571</sup> In two statements, signed by dozens of Stalinist parties (most of them from Europe but also from other countries), they limited their condemnation exclusively to the actions of U.S. imperialism. They do so irrespective of the fact that, according to its own account, Moscow has sent 63,000 Troops since the beginning of its intervention in September 2015 and has killed 85,000 “terrorists”.<sup>572</sup>

*“The signatory Parties express their vehement condemnation of the imperialist military aggression against the Syrian Arab Republic carried out by the USA, United Kingdom and France”*<sup>573</sup>

*“The communist and workers’ parties of Europe condemn the escalation of the imperialist aggressiveness and the sharpening of the situation in Syria and the broader region after the statement of D. Trump, President of the USA, on April 11th about bombarding Syria under the pretext of the use of chemical weapons, something that the USA have repeatedly done in the past.”*<sup>574</sup>

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570 See on this the following RCIT documents: Down with Imperialist Warmongering of All Great Powers! Syria attack, Protectionist Tariffs and Salisbury poisoning: Against all imperialist diplomatic, economic and military aggression! In U.S., EU, Russia and China: The Main Enemy is at Home! Support democratic and national liberation struggles of oppressed people! Joint Statement of the RCIT and the Marxist Group ‘Class Politics’ (Russia), 13.04.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/syria-down-with-imperialist-warmongering-of-all-great-powers/>; ISL: On Trump’s attack on Syria, 15.04.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/on-trump-s-attack-on-syria/>

571 See on this Michael Pröbsting: Syria and Great Power Rivalry: The Failure of the „Left“. The bleeding Syrian Revolution and the recent Escalation of Inter-Imperialist Rivalry between the US and Russia – A Marxist Critique of Social Democracy, Stalinism and Centrism, 21 April 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/syria-great-power-rivalry-and-the-failure-of-the-left/>

572 AFP: Russia says over 63,000 troops have fought in Syria, August 22, 2018, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/russia-says-over-63-000-troops-fought-syria-141424820.html>; TASS: Russia lost 112 servicemen over three years of counter-terror operation in Syria – MP, September 30, 2018, <http://tass.com/defense/1023714>; see also Michael Pröbsting: 63,000 Troops. Russian Imperialist Forces back up the Reactionary Assad Regime in Syria, 27.08.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/63-000-russian-troops-in-syria/>

573 Joint statement: Condemnation of the bombing of Syria by the USA, United Kingdom and France, 17 April 2018, <http://www.solidnet.org/portugal-portuguese-communist-party/portuguese-cp-condemnation-of-the-bombing-of-syria-by-the-usa-united-kingdom-and-france-en-fr-es-pt>

574 Statement of the Communist and Workers Parties of Europe condemning the escalation of the imperialist aggressiveness in Syria, 13 April 2018, <http://www.solidnet.org/greece-communist-party-of-greece/cp-of-greece-statement-of-the-communist-and-workers-parties-of-europe>

Likewise they express, in more or less explicit terms, their support for the Assad regime against the popular uprising:

*“The signatory Parties call for solidarity with the Syrian people who have, for seven years, been confronting the aggression by US imperialism and its allies – whether directly or by the proxy action of terrorist groups –, resisting and fighting to defend the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of their country, and their right to decide about their destiny, free from any interference.”*

*“The communist and workers’ parties express their internationalist solidarity to the people of Syria and the other peoples of the region, they call upon the working class, the people’s forces to reinforce the struggle against the imperialist interventions and wars, of the NATO, the USA and the EU.”*

It is therefore only logical that one of the two statements was co-signed by the Syrian Communist Party which is part of the official ruling bloc in Assad’s pseudo-parliament in Damascus.

We find the same position in a statement issued at the same time by the Stalinist-dominated *World Federation of Trade Unions*. They sharply condemn “[t]he governments of the USA, France and Great Britain and their allies [which] are performing war preparations and threatening Syria and the Syrian people with missile attacks.”. They claimed that the accusations about the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime are “false” and decry “the dirty role of the majority of the NGOs like the ones that are denounced to have set up the provocation with the chemical weapons.” Likewise the Stalinists denounce “the dirty role of yellow trade union leaderships who supported the imperialist interventions in Iraq, Libya, Lebanon, Syria, and now they are once more justifying the strategies of NATO and of the European Union.”<sup>575</sup>

Again, not a single word about Russia’s military intervention in Syria which has been much bigger and much more deadly than the one of the West. And not a single word against the tyrannical Assad regime which is slaughtering the Syrian people.

In another, earlier, statement the Greek KKE also stated explicitly its condemnation for the Arab Revolution and the Syrian uprising in particular: “It should be noted that the KKE from the very first moment, in 2011, denounced the intervention that has very serious consequences for the people of Syria and also for the people of the wider region. When bourgeois and opportunist parties celebrated the so-called “Arab Spring”, our party exposed the organized efforts to fund and arm the so-called Syrian opposition by the imperialist powers.”<sup>576</sup>

As we noted at an earlier occasion, the Stalinists hypocritical approach to the

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[condemning-the-escalation-of-the-imperialist-aggressiveness-in-syria-en-ru-es-ar-fr-sq](#)

575 WFTU on the Situation in S.E. Mediterranean, 12 Apr 2018, <http://www.wftucentral.org/wftu-on-the-situation-in-s-e-mediterranean/>

576 Elisseos Vagenas: The Military-Political Equation in Syria, (Extensive excerpts from the article published in “Kommounistiki Epitheorisi”, the political-theoretical journal of the CC of the KKE, issue 1 of 2016), <https://inter.kke.gr/en/articles/THE-MILITARY-POLITICAL-EQUATION-IN-SYRIA/>.

Great Powers' intervention in Syria reminds us to the policy of its precursor in 1939-41 when the "Communist" International denounced one-sidedly British and French imperialism for its colonial policy and for its aggressive foreign policy but sparred Nazi Germany.

Let us now deal with some key Stalinist parties. We will not deal with the official state parties since their policy is identical with that of the Chinese, Cuban, Vietnamese etc. state apparatus. In fact, these parties are not so much parties in the real sense but rather a key component of the respective state apparatus – initially of a degenerated workers state, meanwhile of a capitalist state.

## Russian Social-Imperialism: The KPRF, the RKRP and the OKP

As we already mentioned above, the *Communist Party of the Russian Federation* (KPRF) led by Gennady Zyuganov is the largest Stalinist party in Russia. It does not consider Russia as an imperialist Great Power and is a committed defender of the "fatherland". In fact, it is a Great Russian social-imperialist party.

The KPRF views Russia as a country which is threatened by Western imperialists (as well as by "homosexuals" and "migrants"). Against such foreign threats, it calls for a "national liberation struggle" – as if Russia would not be an imperialist but an oppressed semi-colonial country!

Such, the party states in its program: "*In the present conditions, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation sees its task in uniting the social class and national liberation movements into a united popular front. (...) The party is fighting for the unity, integrity and independence of the Fatherland, for the restoration of the fraternal Union of Soviet Peoples, for the well-being and security, the moral and physical health of citizens. (...)*

*[It also fights for] ensuring the territorial integrity of Russia and the protection of compatriots abroad; (...) The fires of international conflicts do not subside. The Russian question acquired extreme urgency after the years of capitalist restoration. Today, the Russians have become the largest divided people on the planet. There is a frank genocide of a great nation. The number of Russians is decreasing. Historically established culture and language are destroyed. The tasks of solving the Russian question and the struggle for socialism are in essence the same.*"<sup>577</sup>

Frankly, this is a program of Great Russian chauvinism. Fighting for "the unity and integrity" of the fatherland means nothing else than denying national minorities, like e.g. the Chechens, the right of separation. Calling for "*the protection of Russian compatriots abroad*" is the program of expansionism.

And indeed, the KPRF openly calls for expansionism in order to create a Greater Russian Empire. Its leader Zyuganov recently called for the annexation of the Donbass in the Ukraine. "*If I would be President (of the Russian Federation, Ed.) I would make the Donbass immediately make part of Russia. First, we recognize the Donetsk and Lugansk Republic, just as it once was with South Ossetia and Abkhazia.*"

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577 KPRF: Party Programme (2008), <https://kprf.ru/party/program> (our translation)



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Likewise, the KPRF sided with the Putin regime when it started the second war against Chechnya in 1999 as well as in the case of Russia's military intervention in the Ukraine in 2014.<sup>579</sup> In other words, Zyuganov is such a committed "patriot" that he might soon wear a cap with the slogan "Make Russia Great Again"!

Animated by the same Great Russian spirit, the KPRF also support the efforts of the Putin regime to promote the Russian language among the national minorities in Russia. Artem Prokofiev, a KPRF Deputy of the State Council of Tatarstan, expressed the party's opinion that "that the Russian language in Tatarstan is taught in a much smaller volume than the average in Russia. But we must remember that according to the results of the Unified State Exam in Russian, Tatarstan held a very good position. If the volume of Russian language teaching increases, the results will be even better."<sup>580</sup>

In an article with the self-explaining title "How to protect the Russian language?" (really? the Russian language is endangered in Putin's Russia?!), an author close to the KPRF calls for increased efforts for the "defense of the state language."<sup>581</sup>

Likewise, as a truly "patriotic" party, Zyuganov's KPRF supports the anti-migrant policy of the Putin regime, opposes "homosexual propaganda" and praises the role of the Orthodox Church.<sup>582</sup>

It is therefore only logical that the KPRF also supports Putin's war in Syria since the beginning. For example, it expresses its admiration for the Assad tyranny in an article with the self-explanatory title "Syrian President Bashar Assad praised the help of the Communist Party and its leader, G.A. Zyuganov."<sup>583</sup> In another article, the KPRF applauds "the legitimate government of Syria [that it] is doing everything for Christians and Muslims to live in peace." (by killing half a million of

578 Зюганов попросил признать Донбасс территорией России (Zyuganov asked to recognize the Donbass as territory of Russia), dp.ru, 11.09.2018, <https://www.msn.com/ru-ru/news/feature/d/%D0%B7%D1%8E%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BB-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8C-%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B1%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%81-%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%80%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B5%D0%B9-%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%B8/ar-BBN8FXU> (our translation)

579 See on this e.g. Gennady Zyuganov: The crisis in Ukraine and its deep roots, September 2014, <http://cprf.ru/2014/09/1108/>

580 Екатерина Коростиченко: «Изучение татарского превращается в муку для родителей», 8 сентября 2017, <https://vz.ru/society/2017/9/8/886257.html> (our translation)

581 Viktor Kozhemyako: How to protect the Russian language? 15.06.2012, [https://kprf.ru/rus\\_soc/107254.html](https://kprf.ru/rus_soc/107254.html) (our translation)

582 For example, Zyuganov wrote in 2012: "It is a holy duty of Communists and the Orthodox Church to unite." (Mansur Mirovalev: Russia's Communist Party turns to the Orthodox Church. After decades of militant atheism, Russian Communists turn to religious establishment to gain supporters, 2016-12-12, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/12/russia-communist-party-turns-orthodox-church-161212075756966.html>)

583 Президент Сирии Башар Асад высоко оценил помощь КПРФ и ее лидера Г.А. Зюганова, 25.10.2015, <https://kprf.ru/dep/gosduma/activities/147743.html> (our translation)

them!)<sup>584</sup>

The KPRF is certainly one of the most outspoken, undisguised Stalinist, social-chauvinist parties serving an imperialist Great Power. It is such a chauvinist, social-imperialist party that even a number of Stalinists feel embarrassed about it. Nevertheless, it has participated in all 20 IMCWP meetings and is a central force of this loose Stalinist “International”.

As we said already above, the *Russian Communist Workers' Party – Revolutionary Party of Communists* (RKRP-RPK) led by Viktor Tyulkin has a more differentiated position. It recognizes the imperialist character of Russia. Unfortunately, as unashamed admirers of Stalin, the party's leadership sticks to the classic theory of differentiating between “democratic”, “anti-fascist” imperialist states which should be supported against the “reactionary”, “fascist” imperialist rivals. One can not fail to recognize the irony in the wrong application of a wrong theory. If it would be legitimate to differentiate between “democratic” and “reactionary” imperialist states, the RKRP – following consistently its erroneous logic – would be obligated to rather side with the West against Russia and China. They can hardly deny that there exists more bourgeois democracy in North America, Western Europe and Japan than in the two Eastern Great Powers!

But the RKRP leadership does not consider Marxist theory as a scientific guideline but rather as a pragmatic servant for its support of Great Russian imperialism. Hence, it bends into shape the Stalinist differentiation between “good” and “bad” imperialism in order to legitimize its support for Moscow's reactionary foreign policy. Such, for example, the RKRP leadership supports Russia's military interventions abroad, like those in the Ukraine or in Syria. *“The Russian authorities today, expressing the interests of Russian capital, support the just struggle of Syria and the Donbass”*<sup>585</sup>

The party's criticism of the Putin regime is not that it is implementing imperialist interventions but that it is not intervening energetically enough! Such wrote Viktor Tyulkin, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the RKRP: *“For instance, we see this struggle at the Donbass and Syria. The position of the Russian Federation objectively contributes to the fight of Donbas militias against the fascist regime of Poroshenko in this struggle. The RKRP not only approves of the assistance of the Russian authorities to Donbas, but requires more, requires a principled assessment of the Poroshenko regime as a fascist, requires more consistency. (...) Russia and China as imperialist countries form some kind of union (including the BRICS) and oppose the more aggressive and impudent US imperialism. This is quite understandable and provides opportunities at certain stages and specific situations to use this struggle in*

584 Сирия: Так было и так будет! 17.04.2018, <https://kprf.ru/party-live/opinion/174882.html> (our translation)

585 RKRP: Against war! Against warmongering! 16.04.2018, <https://rkrp-rpk.ru/2018/04/16/%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%B2-%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B9%D0%BD%D1%8B-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%B2-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BD/> (our translation)

*the interests of the working class and the world.*"<sup>586</sup>

In this context it is crucial to recognize that "criticism" of the Putin regime is not per se progressive. To give an analogy: the German government led by the conservative party of Angela Merkel has faced various criticisms about their refugee policy in the last years. Progressive, internationalist forces have denounced it for being restrictive and discriminating. Right-wing and semi-fascist forces (including the AfD) violently attacked Merkel for being too liberal towards refugees. Hence, criticism of Merkel's refugee policy is not progressive per se. one has to judge concretely if such criticism comes from a reactionary, nationalist point of view or from a progressive, internationalist point of view.

It is similar with criticism of Putin's foreign policy. One can attack it for being too chauvinistic and for lending support for reactionary forces like Assad. Or one can attack it for being not supportive enough for such imperialist goals. The first criticism is progressive, the second ultra-reactionary. Unfortunately, the Stalinists choose the latter option.

One aspect of the RKRП's support for Russia's reactionary foreign policy has been their uncritical appraisal of Aleksey Mozgovoy, a late military commander of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic in Donbass. In a necrology, the RKRП praised him as a "spontaneous communist": "*He was very close to toilers, he was the most «red» among commanders. He has the most communists division and has red banners with slogans «Death to fascists invaders!» He has accepted the international anti-fascist forum, which was refused by the administration of the LPR. (...) He was a spontaneous communist by his intentions and spirit. Such persons are usually called non-party communist.*"<sup>587</sup>

However, as a matter of fact, Mozgovoy combined communist phraseology with Great Russian chauvinism and Anti-Semitism (or Judeophobia). As his published diaries demonstrate, he accused the "Jewish Nazis" of the most absurd things, subscribing to classic Anti-Semitic conspiracy theories: "*They [Jewish Nazis] are not only destroying the countryside and cities of Donbass. They are also destroying the Ukrainian army grinding it in kettle pots and pointless advances. Their doctors and their sanitary brigades dismember the soldiers of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the civilians of Donbass, gathering rich by looting from the human organs that are flowing to Israel, Europe and the USA. They have already openly stated that they are building a new Israel in Ukraine. They are doing this together with the Russian oligarchy. (...) The killing of writers, priests, and deputies is not about the "agony of the Kiev junta" nor about the "anger of the Ukrainian nationalists," as it is presented*

586 Viktor Tyulkin: Some words on the Russian imperialism, 09.10.2017, <https://rkrp-rpk.ru/2017/10/09/%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BA%D0%BE-%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B2-%D0%BE-%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%B9%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BC-%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%BF%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B0%D0%BB/> (our translation)

587 On the death of comrade, 24.05.2015, <https://rkrp-rpk.ru/2015/05/24/%D1%83%D0%B1%D0%B8%D1%82-%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%B9-%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%B7%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B9/> (our translation)

*in the media. It is Jewish terror after the Jewish revolution that has won in Ukraine. It is the same as in 1917. It has unfolded now in our Donbas.*"<sup>588</sup>

How absurd for the RKRП to praise Mozgovoy as communist hero when he was in fact an Anti-Semite lunatic! We note in passing that this is also true for many Western "anti-fascist" supporters of the Donbass Republics who publicly admired Mozgovoy.

In short, the RKRП claims that supporting Russian and Chinese imperialism against the Western rivals as well as siding with reactionary, anti-popular dictatorships like Assad or the Donbass puppet regimes would aid the class struggle and the interests of the international working class. As we explained above, such an approach is bourgeois or social-imperialist geopoliticism. The Bolshevik leaders argued against such nonsense already long time ago:

*„From the standpoint of bourgeois justice and national freedom (or the right of nations to existence), Germany might be considered absolutely in the right as against Britain and France, for she has been "done out" of colonies, her enemies are oppressing an immeasurably far larger number of nations than she is, and the Slavs that are being oppressed by her ally, Austria, undoubtedly enjoy far more freedom than those of tsarist Russia, that veritable "prison of nations". Germany, however, is fighting, not for the liberation of nations, but for their oppression. It is not the business of socialists to help the younger and stronger robber (Germany) to plunder the older and overgorged robbers. Socialists must take advantage of the struggle between the robbers to overthrow all of them. To be able to do this, socialists must first of all tell the people the truth, namely, that this war is, in three respects, a war between slave-holders with the aim of consolidating slavery. This is a war, firstly, to increase the enslavement of the colonies by means of a "more equitable" distribution and subsequent more concerted exploitation of them; secondly, to increase the oppression of other nations within the "Great" Powers, since both Austria and Russia (Russia in greater degree and with results far worse than Austria) maintain their rule only by such oppression, intensifying it by means of war; and thirdly, to increase and prolong wage slavery, since the proletariat is split up and suppressed, while the capitalists are the gainers, making fortunes out of the war, fanning national prejudices and intensifying reaction, which has raised its head in all countries, even in the freest and most republican."*<sup>589</sup>

As we mentioned above, the United Communist Party (OKP), an ally of the pseudo-Trotskyist Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International (CRFI) around the Argentinean Partido Obrero, considers Russia not as an imperialist state but as a "peripheral capitalist country". This of course fits quiet well to implement a "patriotic" policy of defending the "fatherland" against the Western imperialist. We mentioned above the "patriotic" Japanese Communist Party which demands the return of the Kurile Islands to Japan. The OKP, driven by the same social-imperialist chauvinism, strongly rejects any

<sup>588</sup> Quoted in: Дневник комбрига. Алексей Мозговой, 22.06.2016, <http://rusdozor.ru/2016/06/22/dnevnik-kombriga-aleksej-mozgovoj/> (our translation)

<sup>589</sup> G. Zinoviev / V. I. Lenin: Socialism and War (1915) ; in: LCW Vol. 21, pp. 303-304

concessions to Japan. It is certainly no less “patriotic” than the Japanese “comrades”! In a statement titled “*We reject territorial concessions made against the will of the working people*”, the leadership of the UCP denounces that Japan wants to “cancel Russia’s sovereignty over part of the South Kurils. (...) We reject any territorial concessions made against the will of the working people of Russia and serving as a countertrade with the imperialists.”<sup>590</sup>

Likewise, the OKP leaders also support various military interventions of Russia abroad. Darya Mitina, a central leader of the OKP, served for some time as the head of the Moscow branch of the Foreign Ministry of the Donetsk People’s Republic.<sup>591</sup> Likewise the OKP leaders “critically” support the tyrannical Assad regime as well as the pro-imperialist PKK/YPG: “Yes, today PKK and Assad are far from ideals of socialism and Marxism. However, they are probably the only ones who bring real internationalism to the conflict in the Middle East.”<sup>592</sup> Darya Mitina even got her picture taken with a huge portrait of Assad, posing admiringly in front of it!

It is characteristic for the social-imperialist position of the OKP that Darya Mitina stated in a commentary that she sides with the imperialist puppet regime in Afghanistan against the petty-bourgeois Islamist Taliban which are at the top of a popular insurgency. She commented in reaction to Moscow’s initiative to host negotiations between the warring parties in Afghanistan:

*“I didn’t think what I will live up to such disgrace. (...) Terrorists, murderers and cannibals shake their hands, ask about their opinion, make pictures with them on the background of state symbols of Moscow at a high level. «The Taliban are not ready for direct negotiations with the government of Afghanistan and will conduct a dialogue with the United States,» Mohammad Abbas Stanakzai, the head of the Taliban’s department in Moscow, will hold talks on Friday. “First of all, we will not negotiate with them,” he noted. In my opinion, the official Kabul is absolutely right. No one should drink tea at the President hotels with terrorists, they must be destroyed.”*<sup>593</sup>

No doubt, this is the disgusting voice of an advisor for the imperialist masters, not of a socialist standing on the side of anti-imperialist popular insurrections!

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590 Заявление Президиума ЦК ОКП: Мы отвергаем территориальные уступки, осуществленные против воли трудящихся, 21 Дек. 2016 <http://ucp.su/category/news/683-my-otvergaem-territorialnye-ustupki-osushestvlenny/> (Statement of the Presidium of the CC OKP: We reject territorial concessions made against the will of the working people, 21 December 2016) (our translation)

591 [https://wikivisually.com/wiki/Darya\\_Mitina](https://wikivisually.com/wiki/Darya_Mitina)

592 UCP commentary about destruction of statues in Palmira, [https://vk.com/wall-9225\\_48085](https://vk.com/wall-9225_48085) (our translation)

593 Darya Mitina: Comment on the Taliban in Afghanistan, Не думала, что доживу до такого позорища, November 10th, 2018, <https://kolobok1973.livejournal.com/4688030.html> (our translation)

## “Defending the Sovereign Rights of Greece”: The Stalinist KKE as an Example of Bourgeois Social-Chauvinism

As we said already above, the Greek Communist Party KKE plays a key role in the European and worldwide Stalinist milieu.<sup>594</sup> It is a classic example of traditional Stalinism, i.e. national-centered reformism.<sup>595</sup> It condemns imperialism and monopoly capital ... in general declarations. However, when it comes to its own bourgeois state and the chauvinism of its “own” bourgeoisie, the KKE swaps its internationalism with social-chauvinism. Internationalism is excellent ... when it is directed against foreign enemies. However, it is rather an obstacle when the KKE has to deal with the holy “sovereign rights of Greece”.

It doesn't matter for this issue that Greece is an advanced semi-colonial country which, in the 1990s, failed to become an imperialist state.<sup>596</sup> It is not relevant in this context because the KKE leadership itself denies the semi-colonial nature of Greece and (wrongly) emphasizes that it has become an imperialist state.<sup>597</sup>

594 For the RCIT's assessment of the KKE see e.g. RKOB: Perspectives on the Greek Revolution, 10.11.2011, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/greece-revolution-or-tragedy/>; Michael Pröbsting: Greece: For a Workers' Government! Critical electoral support for SYRIZA and KKE! Workers: Organize and prepare yourselves for the struggle for power! 6.6.2012, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/greece-for-a-workers-government/>; Michael Pröbsting: After SYRIZA's victory in the Greek elections: The question of a Workers Government and the revolutionary way forward, June 2012, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/after-the-greek-elections/>; Michael Pröbsting: Greece: A Modern Semi-Colony. The Contradictory Development of Greek Capitalism, Its Failed Attempts to Become a Minor Imperialist Power, and Its Present Situation as an Advanced Semi-Colonial Country with Some Specific Features (chapter IV.4 Excuse: The KKE and the Class Character of Greece), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/greece-semi-colony/>

595 The RCIT and its predecessor organization have analyzed Stalinism – a fester on the workers movement – on numerous occasions. See e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Cuba's Revolution Sold Out? The Road from Revolution to the Restoration of Capitalism, August 2013, RCIT Books, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/cuba-s-revolution-sold-out/>. See also LRCI: The Degenerated Revolution: The Origin and Nature of the Stalinist States, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/stalinism-and-the-degeneration-of-the-revolution/>

596 See on this Michael Pröbsting: Greece: A Modern Semi-Colony (see chapter III and IV), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/greece-semi-colony/>

597 Such the KKE states in its program, adopted in 2013: “Capitalism in Greece is in the imperialist stage of its development, in an intermediate position in the international imperialist system, with strong uneven dependencies on the USA and the EU. (...) The participation of Greece in NATO, the economic-political and political-military dependencies on the EU and the USA limit the room of the Greek bourgeoisie to manoeuvre independently, as all the alliance relations of capital are governed by competition, unevenness and consequently the advantageous position of the strongest; they are formed as relations of uneven interdependence.” (Programme of the KKE, adopted in 2013, <http://inter.kke.gr/en/articles/Programme-of-the-KKE/>)

Likewise, Aleka Parariga, the KKE General Secretary at that time, wrote: „The basic position of opportunism in Greece is that the country is under German occupation, that it is being transformed or has been transformed into a colony and is being plundered primarily by Mrs. Merkel, the creditors. The triad of the representatives of the EU, the European Central Bank and the IMF which superoise and determine the management of the internal or external debt, the fiscal deficits is seen as the main enemy apart from Germany

Furthermore, it is also not relevant because the “enemies” against which the social-chauvinist KKE defends the “sovereign rights of Greece” are not imperialist powers attacking the country but rather its long-standing “enemies” and neighboring countries – in particular Turkey and Macedonia. These two latter countries are themselves semi-colonial states and Macedonia has experienced bullying and exploitative relations with Greece since it declared its independence in 1991.<sup>598</sup>

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*itself. They accuse the bourgeois class of the country and the governmental parties as being treacherous, unpatriotic, subordinate and subservient towards Germany, the creditors or the bankers.*

*Those who talk of subordination and occupation do not acknowledge the export of capital from Greece (a characteristic feature of capitalism in the imperialist stage), which was significant before the crisis and continues undiminished in the conditions of the crisis. The export of capital is being carried out for productive investments in other countries and of course in European banks until conditions are formed so that they can re-enter the process of ensuring the maximum possible profit. They see a shortage of capital and not over-accumulation.*

*They do not see the issue of over-accumulation because they will be forced to admit the character of the capitalist economic crisis, something which blows to smithereens their pro-monopoly political proposal. The bourgeois parties as well as the opportunists, despite the various differences they have, support the safeguarding of the competitiveness of the domestic monopolies which inevitably brings the reactionary restructurings to the forefront, ensuring cheaper labour power, intensification of state intimidation, repression and anti-communism, and at the same time particularly focus on expanding Greek capital in the wider region (the Balkans, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Black Sea area). This is amongst other things a vicious circle which leads to a new and deeper crisis cycle.*

*Lenin and his work on imperialism adds that the comparison cannot be made between developed capitalist countries and backward capitalist countries but between capital exports, an issue which opportunists everywhere do not want and do not dare to acknowledge because their view regarding the occupation of Greece, that Greece is a colony, is refuted by this criterion alone. (...)*

*Consequently the position of the KKE that Greece belongs to the imperialist system, is organically incorporated and plays an active role in the war as an ally of the leading players is absolutely vindicated. This is the choice in the interests of the bourgeoisie that has twice invited British and US imperialism to smash the armed people with military forces, weapons and direct military operations.” (Aleka Parariga (KKE General Secretary): The Position of Greece within International Capitalism, Article for “El Machete,” the Theoretical and Political Review of the CP of Mexico, <http://mltoday.com/the-position-of-greece-within-international-capitalism>)*

For the RCIT critique of the KKE’s analysis of Greek capitalism see chapter IV.4 *Excuse: The KKE and the Class Character of Greece* in our book *Greece: A Modern Semi-Colony* mentioned above.

598 On the RCIT’s analysis of Turkey as an advanced semi-colony see: Michael Pröbsting: *World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings. Theses on the World Situation, the Perspectives for Class Struggle and the Tasks of Revolutionaries* (Chapter V), RCIT Books, Vienna 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2018/>; 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* (Chapter 9), RCIT Books, Vienna 2013, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>; TEK YOL DEVRİM! Action Program for Turkey by Sınıf Savaşı (Section of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency in Turkey), October 2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/program-turkey/>.

On Macedonia see RCIT: *Macedonia: Stop the Police Violence! Support the National Self-Determination of the Albanian Minority! For a Workers and Peasants Government! For a Socialist Federation of the Balkan People!* 8.5.2015, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/macedonia-statement/>; see also chapter II.3 *Excuse: Greek Chauvinism and the Macedonian Question* in our book *Greece: A Modern Semi-Colony* mentioned above.

In fact, the bourgeois state of Greece has a long and disgraceful history of oppression and ethnic cleansing of national minorities on its territory. In fact, Athens has expelled hundreds of thousands of Turkish, Macedonian and other citizens from its territory since the 1920s. Marxists have always categorically opposed any form of Greek chauvinism against these minorities and defended their right of national self-determination.<sup>599</sup>

*The KKE promises to “annihilate any foreign intruder who dares to attack Greece”*

However, the Stalinist KKE is far away from such a communist anti-chauvinist position. In its program, adopted at a congress in 2013, it declared categorically that its program for “socialism” in Greece is inextricably linked with the defense of its present borders and the “sovereign rights of Greece”. *“The struggle for the defence of the borders, the sovereign rights of Greece, from the standpoint of the working class and the popular strata is integral to the struggle for the overthrow of the power of capital.”*<sup>600</sup>

This means nothing else than the defense of the capitalist state against any “enemy” as well as the defense of this state against the national rights of any oppressed minorities since this would endanger the chauvinist “sovereign rights of Greece”! In other words, the KKE’s “anti-imperialist” shell conceals a bourgeois social-chauvinist core.

This becomes evident at any occasion when the alleged “sovereign rights of Greece” are at risk – at least when such risk exists according to the hysterical

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599 See on this Michael Pröbsting: Greece: A Modern Semi-Colony (see chapter II.3 Excuse: Greek Chauvinism and the Macedonian Question as well as chapter V.3 The Struggle against Greek Chauvinism: The Macedonian Question), <https://www.thecomunists.net/theory/greece-semi-colony/>. As we show in that book, Leon Trotsky and the Greek Trotskyists always took a consistent internationalist position on this issue. They opposed Greek chauvinism and defended the rights of the national minorities. For example, Trotsky advised the Greek Marxists concerning the Macedonian question: *“We merely say that if the Macedonians want it, we will then side with them, that they should be allowed to decide, and we will also support their decision. What disturbs me is not so much the question of the Macedonian peasants, but rather whether there isn’t a touch of chauvinist poison in Greek workers. That is very dangerous. For us, who are for a Balkan federation of soviet states, it is all the same if Macedonia belongs to this federation as an autonomous whole or part of another state. However, if the Macedonians are oppressed by the bourgeois government, or feel that they are oppressed, we must give them support.”* (Leon Trotsky: A Discussion on Greece (Spring 1932), In: Writings of Leon Trotsky: Supplement (1929-33), Pathfinder, New York 1979, pp. 129-130)

Pantelis Pouliopoulos, the first General Secretary of the KKE and historic leader of Greek Trotskyism in the 1920s and 1930s, also stated categorically: *“Whoever refutes the existence, unresolved until today, of a national Macedonian question in Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian Macedonia, is without a doubt a lapdog of the bourgeoisie. Whoever refutes the historical liberation movement of the Macedonians, is either ignorant and must learn the history of that movement and its national heroes, or is again a lapdog of one of the three oppressing bourgeoisies.”* (Pantelis Pouliopoulos: Communists and the Macedonian Question [May 1940], Republished in Spartakos No. 30, 1991, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pouliop/works/1940/05/commac.htm>)

600 Programme of the KKE, adopted at the 19th Congress of the KKE, 11-14 April 2013, <http://inter.kke.gr/en/articles/Programme-of-the-KKE/>



bourgeois media. We will demonstrate this with two recent examples. During a period of tensions between Greece and Turkey in 2018, the Greek fascists accused the KKE that they would, in case of a war with Turkey, not defend their country. In response, the KKE voiced its indignation. Its General Secretary, Dimitris Koutsoumbas, literally said at a public rally in Thessaloniki: *“We communists will, as we have always done in our century-long history, stand in the front row defending our territorial integrity and our sovereign rights. We are doing this so that any foreign intruder who dares to attack Greece will be annihilated.”*<sup>601</sup>

We see that the KKE has no problems in praising Marxism-Leninism and the principles of anti-imperialist internationalism. However, when the *“territorial integrity and sovereign rights”* of its homeland are (supposedly) endangered by Turkey, the KKE leadership transforms in a split second into ferocious chauvinists who are ready to annihilate its neighbors.

The speech of the KKE leader was not a rhetorical gaffe since the party reprinted it approvingly in its press as the quote above demonstrates. This is also confirmed by the fact that the party repeated this social-chauvinist line in programmatic theses which it published for an international conference in April 2018.

*“Particularly in our region, the sharpening of the situation between Greece and Turkey with the involvement of other countries as well is possible. The questioning of the borders and sovereign rights of Greece on the part of the Turkish bourgeois class is integrated in the framework of its competitive relations with the Greek bourgeois class in the region. The Greek bourgeois class actively participates in the imperialist plans, interventions, competition and wars, guided by its aim to strategically enhance its position in the wider region. It bears responsibilities for the possible entanglement of the country in a war. The Programme of the Party has determined our position concerning the imperialist war and the line of our activity, where it is notes that: “The struggle for the defence of the borders, the sovereign rights of Greece, from the standpoint of the working class and the popular strata is integral to the struggle for the overthrow of the power of capital. It does not have any relation with the defence of the plans of one or the other imperialist pole and the profitability of one or the other monopoly group. In the instance of Greece’s involvement in an imperialist war, either in a defensive or aggressive war, the Party must lead the independent organization of the workers’-people’s struggle in all its forms, so as to lead to the complete defeat of the bourgeois class, both the domestic one and the foreign invader, and link it in practice with the conquest of power.”*<sup>602</sup>

All the KKE’s talk about opposition *“against imperialist wars”* and for *“the con-*

601 Quoted in Nikos Mottas: Was werden die griechischen Kommunisten im Falle eines Krieges tun?; in: Einheit und Widerspruch (Theoretisches und Diskussionsorgan der Partei der Arbeit Österreichs), Heft 6, Juni 2018, p. 117, [http://parteiarbeit.at/?page\\_id=1915](http://parteiarbeit.at/?page_id=1915) (our translation)

602 The danger of the imperialist war and the stance of the Communists, Theses of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) at the 12th International Conference “V.I. Lenin and the Contemporary World”, 20.04.2018, <https://inter.kke.gr/en/articles/THESES-OF-THE-COMMUNIST-PARTY-OF-GREECE-KKE-AT-THE-12TH-INTERNATIONAL-CONFERENCE-V.I-LENIN-AND-THE-CONTEMPORARY-WORLD/>

*quest of power*” is empty rhetoric in order to conceal its social-patriotic capitulation to Greek chauvinism. As a matter of fact, this party is far away from conquering power. This has been proven once more by its utter failure to increase its influence – not to speak about taking power – during the pre-revolutionary crisis in Greece in the last decade. In fact, after 35 general strikes and numerous ferocious class struggles, the KKE receives less votes at elections than it did before!

While conquering power is an uncertain possibility in the distant future, the tensions with Turkey or with Macedonia, and the chauvinist propaganda of Greece’s public opinion, take place today. And today, in such conflicts, the KKE promises to defend the “*territorial integrity and sovereign rights*” of the Greek capitalist state against any “*foreign invader*”!

Authentic communists must not lend support either to Greece or to Turkey. Both are capitalist semi-colonial states dominated by a reactionary bourgeoisie which are collaborating with imperialist powers like the U.S., the EU and Russia. None of them is “the lesser evil”. The Leninist program of revolutionary defeatism is fully applicable in such a case, as our comrades in Occupied Palestine stated already some time ago:

*“To reiterate, in a case of war just between Turkey and Greece the RCIT calls for revolutionary defeatism on both sides. This means socialists must not support the war efforts in each country and stand for the defeat of “their” state. Naturally, the involvement of imperialist powers on each side (not excluded given the close relationships both countries have with Great Powers) could alter the character of the war. As a general principle we state that the RCIT opposes both US, EU as well as Russian imperialism.”*

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### ***The KKE denies the national rights of Macedonia***

The KKE displayed the same disgusting chauvinism when Macedonia held its referendum about the change of its official name. We do not discuss the issue of this referendum at this point and refer readers to the statement of the Trotskyist comrades of the Greek OKDE which we republished (with a brief preface) on our website.<sup>604</sup> What is of interest here is the position and the arguments of the KKE.

In a recently published official statement, the KKE criticizes the agreement between the Greek and Macedonian governments not only because of its pro-NATO content (which revolutionaries naturally also reject) but also because it supposedly opens the door for “*Macedonian irredentism*”!

*“The agreement between the governments of Greece and FYROM was achieved by*

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603 See on this, in addition to our book on capitalist Greece mentioned above, e.g. Max Bonham: On the Escalating Greek-Turkish Tensions, Internationalist Socialist League (RCIT Section in Israel/Occupied Palestine), 30 April 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/escalating-greek-turkish-tensions/>

604 OKDE: Prespa Agreement – Referendum in neighboring Macedonia, 24.9.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/forum/okde-greece-referendum-in-neighboring-macedonia/>

*the overt intervention of the USA, of NATO and the EU, bears their seal and has been signed on the premises of the deadlines and agendas that these organizations have determined, in order for the euroatlantic integration to advance in the Western Balkans. This objective derives clearly from the text of the agreement. It is not by chance that the first to greet this agreement were the State Department, NATO and the EU. That is why the whole process focused on the issue of the name of the neighboring country, while a series of critical issues, such as countering irredentism, making necessary changes in the Constitution of the neighboring country, not only are postponed to an uncertain future, but also the situation becomes more complicated with the acceptance by the Greek government of positions regarding "Macedonian citizens" and "Macedonian language", positions that constitute the essence of irredentism. Consequently, it is an agreement that cannot guarantee a solution in favor of the Greek people, of the people of the neighboring country nor of the peoples of the region."*<sup>605</sup>

Nothing could be more absurd! The Greek state has a long history of brutal oppression of the Macedonian people which resulted in the expulsion of nearly all of them. Today, only a small minority of Macedonians continue to live in northern Greece. Macedonia is a small and poor country, exploited by foreign capitalist monopolies (among them not a few from Greece). Greece has a long and disgraceful tradition of anti-Macedonian chauvinism. (For example, the biggest demonstrations in the country's history took place in 1992 and 1994 in protest against the fact that the independent republic Macedonia dared to choose the name "Macedonia" in its official designation!)

Irrespective of this chauvinist tradition, or rather because of it, the KKE joins the Greek nationalist mainstream and accuses Macedonia of "irredentism" (instead of accusing the Greek state for its unbearable chauvinism)! It even accuses the reformist SYRIZA government of making concessions to "Macedonian irredentism" because it accepts talking about "Macedonian citizens" and a "Macedonian language"!

This statement reflects, once more, that the KKE fully supports the most reactionary lies which Greek chauvinism has disseminated throughout its whole history and which simply deny the existence (not to speak about the rights) of the Macedonian nation!

This is also confirmed by a recently published article in its theoretical journal which states: "A real solution means guarantees of the elimination of irredentism, nationalism, [territorial] claims, ensuring the inviolability of the borders, which means changes now, not in the near future, to the Constitution of the FYROM." The KKE insists that any name adopted by the Republic "must have a strictly geographical definition."

Furthermore, the KKE repeats, with no shame, the classic Greek chauvinist myth denying the national existence of other Balkan peoples: "A historically formed 'Macedonian' nation, 'Macedonian' ethnicity, 'Macedonian' language, which

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605 KKE: On the agreement between Greece-FYROM, 14/6/2018, Press Office of the CC of the KKE, <http://www.solidnet.org/article/CP-of-Greece-On-the-agreement-between-Greece-FYROM/>

*form the basis of irredentism and raise questions of the existence of a minority, claims and defense of its rights etc., do not exist.”*<sup>606</sup>

### **Conclusions**

Lenin used to say about Russian communists who failed to consistently oppose chauvinism: “*Scratch some Communists and you will find Great Russian chauvinists.*”<sup>607</sup> It is obvious that it is not necessary to scratch at all in order to see the unrestrained reactionary Greek chauvinism of the KKE leadership!

In summary, the Greek KKE is an excellent example for our analysis of Stalinism as a bourgeois reformist trend. When it comes to imperialism and war, the Stalinist might refer to the Marxist classics and recite one or another quote of Lenin on imperialism. But in essence, they follow a reactionary social-chauvinist line and defend the capitalist state of Greece and its present borders against any “foreign invader”. They are not defeatist against their own bourgeoisie. They are only defeatist against the international working class and the oppressed peoples!

### **Stalinists Cheer Serbian Chauvinism against Kosovo Albanians**

It would be entirely wrong to imagine that such chauvinist outbursts are a kind of peculiar issue of the Greek KKE alone. No, adaption to chauvinism of oppressor nations is in the political DNA of Stalinism. When it serves the interests of a ruling bureaucracy or allied states, the Stalinists have always been willing to support the oppression of national minorities and to preach chauvinism. Stalin’s policy of making Great Russian chauvinism the official policy of the USSR and the horrific deportations of Caucasian people in 1944 are well known.<sup>608</sup>

The Stalinists continue to adapt to chauvinism also many years after they lost the citadel of their bureaucratic power by the collapse of the bureaucratic regimes in Eastern European and the USSR in 1989-91. We have already given the example of the Greek KKE. Here is another actual example.

Many Stalinist parties support until today the Serbian expansionist claim to

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606 Kommounistiki Epitheorisi (No. 2, 2018), quoted in SL: For a Socialist Federation of the Balkans! Greece: Chauvinist Frenzy over Macedonia, Part One, Workers Vanguard No. 1142, 19 October 2018, <https://www.icl-fi.org/english/wv/1142/macedonia.html>

607 V. I. Lenin: Speech Closing The Debate On The Party Programme, Eight Congress of the R.C.P.(B.) March 18-23, 1919, in: LCW Vol. 29, p. 194, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1919/rcp8th/04.htm>

608 See on this e.g. William Flemming: The Deportation of the Chechen and Ingush Peoples: A Critical Examination, in: Ben Fowkes (Ed.): Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crisis. Essays on Russo-Chechen Relations, Macmillan Press Ltd 1998, pp. 65-88; Alex Marshall: The Caucasus under Soviet rule, Routledge, London 2010, pp. 244-271; Brian Glyn Williams: Inferno in Chechnya, University Press of New England 2015, pp. 46-75; John Dunlop: Russia Confronts Chechnya. Roots of a Separatist Conflict, Cambridge University Press 1998, pp. 46-74; Amjad Jaimoukha: The Chechens. A handbook, RoutledgeCurzon 2005, pp. 60-73

Kosovo (Kosova in Albanian language). 36 Stalinist parties, attending the 20<sup>th</sup> annual IMCWP congress in November 2018, have published a joint statement which we reproduce here in its entirety:

*“Support for Kosova [sic] as an Integral Part of the Republic of Serbia*

*The Party “Communists of Serbia” is asking for support from Communist and Workers’ Parties of the world to support Kosovo as an integral part of the Republic of Serbia, which has been under occupation of NATO since 1999 and a subordinate regime of Albanian separatists.”*<sup>609</sup>

Likewise, the Austrian Stalinists, the *Party of Labour* (Partei der Arbeit) which also participated in this congress, published a report about their activities in which they referred to Kosova in the same Serbian chauvinist spirit (“*the Serbian province of Kosovo*”).<sup>610</sup>

This is a shameful scandal given the fact that Kosovo is populated by a 90% Albanian majority! They had been nationally oppressed by Serbia since the beginning of its colonial occupation in 1913 and had always desired independence from Belgrade. Throughout the entire history of the occupation the Kosovo Albanians resisted and attempted popular uprisings which were brutally smashed by the Serbian occupation forces. Finally, an armed insurrection, which began in 1997, succeeded and the Kosovo Albanians got rid of the Serbian tyranny.

However, the Kosovars’ legitimate liberation struggle, which was led by the petty-bourgeois nationalist UÇK, got hijacked by NATO imperialism in 1999 and exploited in order to occupy the new republic.

The RCIT respective our precursor stood for the victory of the uprising and called for a Kosova workers republic. We gave no political support to the UÇK leadership and defended Serbia against the NATO bombardment. Our Austrian section participated in solidarity activities with the Albanian community during the uprising in 1997/98. Today the RCIT unconditionally support the Kosova people’s desire to get rid of the NATO/EU occupation and to have a fully independent state which, in our opinion, should be a workers republic. While supporting minority rights for the Serbian population in Kosova, we sharply denounce any attempts of the Serbian state to reoccupy the country.<sup>611</sup>

Some decades ago, the Stalinists justified their support for Serbian chauvinism by referring to the “socialist” character of the Tito regime in former Yugo-

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609 20 IMCWP, SUPPORT FOR KOSOVA AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA, 12/10/2018 <http://www.solidnet.org/article/20-IMCWP-SUPPORT-FOR-KOSOVA-AS-AN-INTEGRAL-PART-OF-THE-REPUBLIC-OF-SERBIA/>. It is a funny anecdote that the stupid Stalinists have not recognized that they unintentionally wrote the name “Kosovo” in the title in its Albanian version (Kosova)! Or maybe the translator of the original text into English language expressed his or her disgust about this statement in this way?

610 20 IMCWP, Informative note of Party of Labour of Austria, 11/19/2018 <http://www.solidnet.org/article/20-IMCWP-Informative-note-of-Party-of-Labour-of-Austria/>, <http://parteiderarbeit.at/?p=5020>

611 See e.g. Johannes Wiener and Ime Berisha: Freedom and Self-Determination for Kosovo! Down with the Government of Isa Mustafa Hashim Thaçi, Lackeys for the Rich and Imperialism! 31.01.2015, <https://www.thecomunists.net/worldwide/europe/freedom-for-kosova/>

slavia. Naturally, this was no legitimate reason to suppress the Albanian desire for independence. However, such support for Serbian claims under today's conditions lacks even such pseudo-justification. There are no Tito and no Yugoslavia anymore and Serbia has become a capitalist state. Even more, Serbia is ruled by the government of Aleksandar Vučić and his SNS, a split from the semi-fascist Chetnik party SRS led by the notorious war criminal Vojislav Šešelj. These arch-reactionaries justify their historic claims by referring to the so-called *Battle of Kosovo Field*, an event in the year 1389 shrouded in myth.

However, all these facts are no obstacle for the Stalinists to adopt a joint statement in which they call “to support Kosovo as an integral part of the Republic of Serbia” and to denounce the “Albanian separatists”. This is nothing but unashamed support for reactionary Serbian expansionism against the will of nearly the whole people of Kosovo!

Of course, the logic of the Stalinists is as transparent as reactionary. In their view, only the U.S., the EU and Japan are imperialist while Russia and China represent allegedly “socialist” (or at least “progressive”, “anti-imperialist”) forces. In consequence, the Stalinists support all regimes and forces – including e.g. the monarchists, fascists and semi-fascists in the Donbass – which are allied with Russia and China.

It is symbolic that this statement has been signed by the Assad-bootlicking *Syrian Communist Party*, various Russian Stalinist parties (e.g. Zyuganov's KPRF and Tyulkin's RKRPP-RPK), the Greek KKE, the German DKP, the Communist Party (Italy) and others.

Finally, we also have to point out that by supporting Serbian chauvinism the Stalinists share the company of various ultra-reactionary forces. All Great Russian chauvinists, including the White Russian monarchists, support Serbia's claim to Kosovo. The same is true for various radical right-wing parties in Western Europe. For example, the Austrian FPÖ has always declared that Kosovo is part of Serbia. Its leader, HC Strache, proudly wears the so-called *Brojanica* – a Serbian-orthodox rosary – on his wrist.<sup>612</sup> What an unholy alliance of “left-wing” and right-wing chauvinists!

All this proves once more: Stalinism never was, is not and never will be a working class internationalist force. It is organically corrupt and chauvinistic. In the current age of Great Power rivalry, the Stalinists inevitable serve as lackeys of one or the other imperialist Great Power. Revolutionaries must mercilessly expose this bourgeois reformist trend!

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612 See e.g. “Solidarität mit Serbien”: Jubel für Strache in Belgrad, *Der Standard*, 5. Mai 2008, <https://derstandard.at/3290627/Solidaritaet-mit-Serbien-Jubel-fuer-Strache-in-Belgrad>

## The Ultra-Stalinist CPGB-ML: Loyal Cheerleaders of Russian and Chinese Imperialism

We mentioned already above the ultra-Stalinist *Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist)*. This group considers Russia's and China's role as "progressive and anti-imperialist". Albeit these worshippers of Stalin, Gaddafi and Assad are dumbass in the field of Marxist theory, one can not deny that they are more consistent and outspoken than most of their Stalinist fellow travelers. They hail Assad and call for the "Victory to the Syrian president, government, army and people!" (in that order!).<sup>613</sup>

Joti Brar, one of their leaders, made it unambiguously clear that the CPGB-ML stands also for the victory of China and Russia against their Western rivals: "Moreover, if Britain and the US do indeed start a war against Russia or China, it is the CPGB-ML's view that true anti-imperialists and socialists will support the defence of those countries and work for the defeat of their own ruling class. The slogans of a truly anti-imperialist anti-war movement in such a case must be: Victory to Russia and China; Defeat for British imperialism; No cooperation with British imperialist wars!"<sup>614</sup>

The same line was confirmed in a resolution adopted at their latest congress: "Congress confirms that in the event of such a war breaking out, the British proletariat would have no interest in the victory of 'its own' imperialist bourgeoisie, and every interest in a victory for the forces of anti-imperialism. (...) Congress further resolves that in the event of the war breaking out, our party shall call for the victory of Russia and China and shall work to mobilise the masses against the imperialist system itself, which is the cause of all war in the modern world."<sup>615</sup>

These ultra-Stalinists are certainly more consistent in drawing tactical conclusions than most other supporters of Russian and Chinese imperialism. Their call for Moscow's and Beijing's victories against their Western rivals qualifies them as full-blown pro-Eastern social-imperialists. This is the perfect complement to their role as reactionary supporters of the capitalist dictatorships of Assad and Gaddafi which slaughtered their people rising up for freedom!

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613 See e.g. a recently published article of the CPGB-ML which concludes: "Standing firm against all the plots and intrigues by which imperialism hopes to cheat the Syrian people of their victory, Assad affirmed: "This is our land, it's our right, it's our duty to liberate [these occupied areas], and the Americans should leave. Somehow, they're going to leave." Victory to the Syrian president, government, army and people!" (CPGB-ML: Syria advances to liberation. The Syrian people are standing firm against all the plots and intrigues by which imperialism hopes to cheat them of their victory, 10 July 2018, <https://www.cpgb-ml.org/2018/07/10/news/syria-advances-to-liberation/>); see also: CPGB-ML: US imperialism losing the plot in Syria. The imperialists are raging as strong diplomacy combined with military advances edge the Syrian people ever closer to their final victory, 9 December 2018, <https://www.cpgb-ml.org/2018/12/09/news/us-imperialism-losing-the-plot-in-syria-war/>

614 Joti Brar: *The Drive to War Against Russia and China*, CPGB(ML), Shakun Printers, Shahdara 2017, p. 45

615 CPGB(ML): Beware the drive to WW3 with Russia and China, Party statement of the CPGB(ML) 8<sup>th</sup> Congress, 21 November 2018 <https://www.cpgb-ml.org/2018/11/21/news/beware-the-drive-to-ww3-with-russia-and-china/>

No doubt, these British Stalinists see themselves as hard-core anti-imperialists as they oppose “their” bourgeoisie and support the rivals of NATO. Their stand resembles the “defeatist” approach of the British Stalinists in the period of the Hitler-Stalin-Pact when the CPGB furiously denounced British imperialism and made it (and France) the sole responsible forces for the World War (while praising Hitler’s so-called “peace-initiative”!). Naturally, this pseudo-defeatist position was unceremoniously replaced by ultra-servile patriotism when Moscow demanded so after 22 June 1941.

Obviously such a kind of “defeatism” at that time had nothing to do with “anti-imperialism” as it was not directed against imperialism but just against the interests of one Great Power and in favor of the interests of another Great Power. Trotsky correctly denounced such pseudo-defeatism when a similar policy was displayed by the German reformists after 1933.

*“Let us recall that all the leaders of the German Social Democracy in emigration are “defeatists” in their own fashion. Hitler has deprived them of their sources of influence and income. The progressive nature of this “democratic”, “anti-fascist” defeatism is exactly zero. It is bound up not with revolutionary struggle but with pinning hopes on the “liberating” role of French or some other imperialism. The authors of the document, obviously against their own will, have taken, alas, a step in this very direction.”*<sup>616</sup>

He added: *“But they are absolutely wrong in thinking that the proletariat can solve great historical tasks by means of wars that are led not by themselves but by their mortal enemies, the imperialist governments.”*<sup>617</sup>

In summary, the unashamed adulation of Russia and China by the CPGB-ML is nothing but a modern version of Stalin’s social-imperialist policy.

## **Excuse: Some Observations on the “Pacifist” and the “Belligerent” Social-Imperialists**

At this point, we wish to make an observation about an interesting and important “methodological” difference between the pro-Western and the pro-Eastern social-imperialists. The former, i.e. the *Party of the European Left* (PEL) and the *Japanese Communist Party* (JCP), usually criticize their governments for being too aggressive and confrontational against Russia and China. They call their governments to agree with various initiatives of Putin and Xi (e.g. the creation of the *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank*). They preach the need for pacifism and reconciliation of interests between the West and Russia resp. China.

Things are different with the pro-Eastern social-imperialists. If they express criticism against the Putin and Xi regime in the domain of foreign policy, it is *not* that they would be too hostile to the West but, on the contrary, that they

616 Leon Trotsky: A step towards social patriotism (1939), in: Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1938-39, p. 209

617 Leon Trotsky: A step towards social patriotism (1939), in: Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1938-39, p. 211



would be too compromising. Some Russian Stalinists even claim that the Kremlin would be a servant of the U.S.!<sup>618</sup> For example, various Russian Stalinists and other left-wing intellectuals like Buzgalin and Kagarlitsky criticize the Russian state not from an anti-imperialist point of view. Quite the opposite, they attack the policy of Putin's government for being "not enough aggressive", for not fulfilling its promises to Assad, etc. The website *Vestnik Buri* is a supreme example. In their social network's propaganda they are stating: "Just recall the shoot-down of Su-24, Su-25 and Tu-154 (in Sochi), An-26, Su-30, which were lost in various circumstances. Recall the hidden losses among regular troops. Recall the unanswered blows by the US/Israel-led coalition against the sovereign state which is allied to us (sic!). How Bashar Asad asked Russia for help in 2011, including air defense complexes, and help came only in 2014, when the situation was almost hopeless. The fact that Syria is divided into zones of influence and one of the tasks of our (sic!) military (the preservation of the territorial integrity of Syria) failed."<sup>619</sup>

*Vestnik Buri's* denouncement of Russia's policy is made in such manner that it suggests that if it's authors were in charge of the Russian state they would immediately brutally crush foreign rivals in contrast to the supposedly "weak" current government. Such a social-imperialist policy is often not made conscious but rather the byproduct of adaptation to reformist forces – in the case of *Vestnik Buri* it is the bureaucratic leadership of the CLR trade unions.

So while the pro-Western social-imperialists urge their governments to deal more cooperatively with Russia and China, the pro-Eastern social-imperialists urge their governments to act more antagonistic. What is the reason for this difference?

The main reason for this is not so much to be found in the specific ideologies or programs of these parties. They are basically all reformist forces adapting to sectors of the ruling class. But they have to adapt to ruling classes in different countries, to ruling classes which face different concrete conditions of the specific economic basis and political superstructure.

As we elaborated above, the ruling classes of the Great Powers in the West and the East are characterized by different dynamics. The West in general, and the U.S. in particular, are in decline while Russia and, in particular, China, are rising. From this fact follow several important consequences:

a) A social sentiment of relative pessimism among the former societies and of relative optimism among the latter.

b) Among the Western Great Powers: domestic crisis, deep divisions inside the bourgeoisie as well as serious ruptures within the "historic bloc" of the ruling class, the middle class and the labor aristocracy; in comparison, there is relative strong social support for the regime or at least no deep divisions and no strong

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618 See e.g. the Stalinist website Politsturm: Почему Путин помог Майдану победить? (Why Putin helped Maidan to win), 16.08.2018, <https://politsturm.com/pochemu-putin-pomog-majdanu-pobedit/>

619 [https://vk.com/wall-73211733\\_50539](https://vk.com/wall-73211733_50539)

oppositional forces in China and Russia.

As a result, there are sectors among the European and Japanese bourgeoisie and the middle class which looks for cooperation and not confrontation with the Eastern Great Powers (or which even sympathizes with their political type of rule). They want to become more independent of the traditional U.S. hegemon. The pro-Western social-imperialist parties are adapting to these sectors. In contrast, the pro-Eastern social-imperialists adapt to sectors among the Russian and Chinese bourgeoisie and the middle class which support a more aggressive approach against the Western rivals, which hate Western neo-liberalism, etc. This is the material foundation for the differences between the “pacifist” and the “belligerent” social-imperialists.

## XXV. The Left Facing Great Power Rivalry: Pro-Eastern Social-Imperialists (Non-Stalinists)

It would be wrong to imagine that the current of pro-Eastern social-imperialists would be limited to Stalinist parties. As a matter of fact, there are also a number of non-Stalinist forces which view, with more or less criticism, Russian and Chinese imperialism as allies. In this chapter we will deal with a few representative examples.

### **Boris Kagarlitsky and *Rabkor*: Great Russian “Marxists” ready to fight for Moscow’s Interests “with Blood and Iron”**

We already mentioned above Boris Kagarlitsky who is the Director of the *Institute of Globalization and Social Movements* (IGSO) in Moscow as well as the editor of the online magazine *Rabkor*. Albeit he does not represent a party, his theories are quite influential among the Russian left and highly respected among Western leftists. Unfortunately, Kagarlitsky who has never been a Stalinist (he was a dissident in the 1980s) has developed more and more into a “Marxist” supporter of Great Russian chauvinism.

As we demonstrated in chapter VIII, he does not recognize Russia as an imperialist state but rather as a “*peripheral capitalist state*” comparable to other larger semi-colonial countries like Mexico or India (similar to the positions of LIT and UIT). This assessment is used as theoretical justification to support Russian imperialism and its reactionary allies in practice.

For example, Kagarlitsky and his *Rabkor* magazine have become supporters of the Russian intervention in the Ukraine since 2014. In 2016, this magazine published an article which warned about the Ukraine’s transformation “*from Weimar into a new Reich*”, awakening associations with Hitler’s Third Reich! Consequently, the magazine called Moscow to deal with the Ukraine “*with blood and iron*”!

“*So, Russians will observe the transformation of Ukraine from Weimar Republic into the Reich. However, if Russia is not willing to deal with the Reich, it does not mean that the Reich will leave Russia in peace. No, Russia will have to face a transformed Ukraine in the future and the only instruments for dealing with this problem will be the blood and iron.*”<sup>620</sup>

So we see it is only a small step from denying Russia’s imperialist character to become a fervent whip of reactionary war-mongering!

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<sup>620</sup> Ivan Lisan: Weimar republic to Reich, 01.02.2016, <http://rabkor.ru/columns/debates/2016/02/01/weimar-republic-to-reich/> (our translation)

It is hardly surprising that Kagarlitsky and his *Rabkor* magazine have also offered their space for the extremely right-wing adventurist Igor Strelkov. Strelkov is said to be a retired colonel of the GRU (Russia's external military intelligence organization). He became prominent in 2014 as a military leader of the Donbass Republic in its first phase. He is a Great Russian chauvinist, a White Russian monarchist and an Anti-Semite. He describes himself openly: "*I consider myself a supporter of the autocratic monarchy in Russia.*" Characteristically he talks about his opponents' "*interests [which] are inextricably linked to international Judeo-Anglo-Saxon capital*".<sup>621</sup> In 2016, he founded a new party called *Russian National Movement* which calls in its Manifesto for "*uniting the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, and other Russian lands into a single all-Russian state and transforming the entire territory of the former USSR into an unconditional zone of Russian influence.*" It also favors strict quota system for migrant workers from the former Soviet republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus.<sup>622</sup>

All this did not stop Kagarlitsky and his *Rabkor* magazine to promote Strelkov and to give him a tribune for his reactionary propaganda. In 2015, it published an interview with Strelkov in which the latter called for the creation of a red-brown alliance.<sup>623</sup>

And it is also the same reactionary red-brown spirit which guided Kagarlitsky to participate in meetings with fascist and semi-fascist figures from the Aleksandr Dugin's Eurasian movement.<sup>624</sup>

We note in passing, that Kagarlitsky first adaption to Great Russian chauvinism began already long before the Ukraine war in 2014. In his book on Russia's history – which has been published in 2008 and which covers also the most recent events in Russia – he completely ignores the tragic fate of the Chechens in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The barbarian deportation of this small Caucasian people by Stalin, the two genocidal wars of Russia – the first waged by Yeltsin in 1994-96 and the second by Putin in 1999-2002 – all this is not worth even a single word for this Great Russian "Marxist"!<sup>625</sup>

621 Both quotes taken from: Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski: Ukraine: Russian White Guards in the Donbass, 29 June, 2014, <https://www.nihilist.li/2014/07/25/russkie-belogvardejsy-nadonbasse/#english>

622 Ex-Separatist Leader Launches Party Aimed at Restoring Russia's Empire, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160620241435/http://georgiatoday.ge/news/3927/Ex-Separatist-Leader-Launches-Party-Aimed-at-Restoring-Russia%E2%80%99s-Empire>

623 Стрелков рассказал, что сейчас объединяет "красных" и "белых", 24.01.2015 <http://rabkor.ru/columns/events/2015/01/24/conference-novorossia/>. Driven by the same reactionary red-brown solidarity, Dzarasov Ruslan Soltanovich, a researcher of the Central Economics and Mathematics Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences and an associate of Kagarlitsky, stated in 2016: "*I will not hide that I cannot accept the anticommunist worldview of Strelkov. However, I will abstain from criticising him, because I do not want to even indirectly support the ideological campaign against him, who has become the symbol of the Novorossiya rebellion.*"

624 See on this Anton Shekhovtsov: Boris Kagarlitsky, a Kremlin's mole in the leftist movement, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.co.uk/2014/09/boris-kagarlitsky-kremlins-mole-in.html>

625 Boris Kagarlitsky: Empire of the Periphery. Russia and the World System, Pluto Press, London 2008

Such a reactionary adaption to Great Russian imperialism has inevitable massive consequences for Kagarlitsky's views on other subjects. In an editorial, Kagarlitsky's *Rabkor* magazine proclaims that revolutionary defeatism as it was elaborated by Lenin is no longer valid. "Defeatism", Kagarlitsky claims, has become "bourgeois":

*"There is no use one hundred years after the First World war to make references to Lenin, the Zimmerwald conference and anti-imperialist «defeatism». Firstly, because, contrary to the beginning of 1914, there is no war, it will not and can not happen. Secondly, the defeatism at the beginning of the XX century was anti-systemic and anti-bourgeois. But today we are dealing with the fully bourgeois ideology, orientated on the promotion of the same neoliberal politics with each every socialist must fight. No matter how one assesses the position of Lenin or Martov in 1914, they did not go to the demonstrations under the German and Austrian flags, did not write pamphlets calling on these empires to increase pressure on the Russian army."*<sup>626</sup>

In an article on the popular independence movement in Catalonia, Kagarlitsky sharply denounces this revolt.<sup>627</sup> He declares: "The Catalan revolt, like Scottish separatism, is an uprising of the rich against the poor. It is a protest of a liberal society against the remnants of a redistributive social-state." He even denounced the nationalism of the oppressed people – putting it on the same level like the chauvinism of an oppressor nation: "So, the left do not dare to recognize that nationalism of minorities is no less hostile to toilers' interests than any other nationalism."<sup>628</sup>

So it was not surprising but rather confirming Kagarlitsky's transformation into a "critical" mouthpiece of the Putin regime, when he welcomed the electoral victory of the ultra-reactionary U.S. President Trump! He praised him for being an opponent of the financial oligarchy as well as a representative of the anti-liberal ideology of imperialist protectionism – something which he considers worthy of support against imperialist globalization. He even called the working class to back Trump in this. In an article, published by *Counterpunch*, he told a baffled readership:

*"Besides, Trump never said anything wrong regarding African Americans, women or gays, except for a private conversation many years ago, when he told his friend about an unsuccessful attempt to molest some lady..."*

*"The forty-fifth President of the United States is firmly committed to the principles of protectionism; he will protect US markets and jobs. And, most importantly, he encourages other countries to do the same, not taking into consideration the interests of*

626 Editorial: Russia and Crimea, 24.03.2014, <http://rabkor.ru/columns/editorials/2014/03/24/russia-and-crimea/> (our translation)

627 The RCIT has published a number of documents on the independence struggle of the Catalan people. They are collected at a special sub-page on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/collection-of-articles-on-catalunya-s-independence-struggle/>. In particular we refer to a longer essay about the background of this struggle: Michael Pröbsting: Catalonia's Struggle for Independence and its Pseudo-"Left-Wing" Critiques, 27.10.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/catalunya-s-struggle-for-independence-and-its-pseudo-left-wing-critiques/>

628 Boris Kagarlitsky: Revolt of the Rich, 06.10.2017, <http://rabkor.ru/columns/editorial-columns/2017/10/06/bunt-bogatih/> (our translation)

*multinational corporations based in the United States. Worse, he considers these corporations to be the main threat to America."*

*"This part of bourgeoisie quite naturally rebelled against the transnational corporations (...) The average business, which rebelled against transnational oligarchies, was forced to look for allies. In turn, the lower classes of society, who for decades suffered from neoliberal policies, enthusiastically joined the revolt. Such alliance will not last for too long, but it is not accidental. The development of industry, internal market, and social policy that strengthens the position of the workers, and gives them confidence is needed in order to restore the workers' movement, to allow it to gain momentum. In short, we need protectionism."*

*"Undoubtedly, the ideology of the forty-fifth President of the United States is woven of contradictions, his program, as well as the coalition of social forces which established around it, is transitional, focused only on the decision of one, but absolutely fundamental task – to undermine the rule of the financial oligarchy. There is no way we can support his actions preventing Muslim people from Syria or Iran (just any people) entering the US. There are plenty of other decisions and policies of Trump the Left will never agree with. Yet administration in Washington, finally, appears to be headed by a politician who is determined to put into practice the demands that the radical activists put forward at least since the time of the protests in Seattle in 1999. And this is really a historic turning point."*

*"... the US President is well aware that he faces a potential coup and he knows where the threat is coming from. He will be forced to contribute to the mobilization and organization of the lower classes. In this situation, no one will help him, but the working class."<sup>629</sup>*

That Trump is the incarnation of a corrupt, speculating oligarchy, that he is a reactionary enemy of the workers, migrants and women, that he is a (Cold) War monger against the U.S. rivals – all that is conveniently swept under the carpet by this Putinist "Marxist"!

We conclude this chapter by noting that also other reformist world-system thinkers like Alexander Buzgalin and Ruslan Dzarasov share a "critical" support for the Russian state and its intervention in domestic and foreign policy. Buzgalin, for example, promotes an alliance of the left with the Russian state and demands reform in order to establish some social welfare combined with elements of state-capitalist planning (Buzgalin's "*Gosplan of the XXI century*"). It is not surprising that pro-Russian imperialist economists connected with the state like Sergey Glazyev also refer repeatedly to the World System analysis.<sup>630</sup>

629 All quotes from Boris Kagarlitsky: The Choices for the Left in the Age of Trump, February 7, 2017, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2017/02/07/the-choices-for-the-left-in-the-age-of-trump/>

630 See e.g. Why Does the West Hate Putin? – RAI with A. Buzgalin (10/12), July 25, 2018, <https://therealnews.com/stories/why-does-the-west-hate-putin-rai-with-a-buzgalin-10-12>; Демидова Светлана Евгеньевна Особенности индикативного планирования в России // Вестник Псковского государственного университета. Серия: Экономика. Право. Управление. 2016. №3. URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/osobennosti-indikativnogo-planirovaniya-v-rossii>; Александр Бугзалин: «Российский капитал не пустили на рынки – и он начал драться»,

## The Pro-Russian/Chinese Pseudo-Trotskyists (PO/CRFI)

There are also several pseudo-Trotskyists who refuse to recognize the imperialist character of Russia and China and who, consequently, openly side with them against the Western rivals. The largest of these social-imperialist “Trotskyists” is the international tendency around the Argentine *Partido Obrero* (PO, Workers Party), which is called *Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International* (CRFI) and which also includes the PT (Uruguay), EEK (Greece) and DIP (Turkey). And, as we already mentioned above, the PO/CRFI also collaborates with the Russian Stalinists (and Assad supporters) of the *United Communist Party* (OKP).

As we described in detail above, the PO/CRFI denies that capitalist restoration has been completed in Russia and China. Consequently, they strongly reject the notion that these states have become Great Powers. In a recently adopted statement, they proclaim that Russia and China have not become imperialist and can not become such. They state that these countries only have the alternative to either become colonies of Western imperialism or socialist states. They consider our class characterization of China and Russia as “imperialist propaganda”: “*The reflection of this imperialist propaganda on the left, be it consciously or otherwise, is to describe Russia and China as imperialist powers.*”<sup>631</sup>

From this, they draw the inevitable conclusion that Russia and China have to be defended today against the U.S., EU and Japan. We note, as an aside, that the PO/CRFI theory would have obligated them, in retrospective, to side with capitalist Russia in an isolated war with Germany or Britain before 1917.<sup>632</sup>

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16.03.2018, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/382298>.

We note in passing that there are also a few exceptions. Alexander Tarasov, for example, is also a left-wing supporter of the World-System analysis and considers Russia as a semi-periphery and semi-colony. However, in contrast to the social-imperialists like Kagarlitsky, Buzgalin and Dzarasov, he is a courageous opponent of the Russian imperialist state. He was already a dissident under Stalinism, building a clandestine group called the “*Party of New Communists*” in the early 1970s for which he was imprisoned by the KGB. In opposite to others ex-dissidents, he refused any collaboration with the capitalist state after 1989. He remains a honourable left-wing activist and writer, even if many of his position are rather “post-Marxist” and ultra-left.

631 Levent Dölek: *The Character of War in 21st Century: Are China and Russia a target or a side of the war?* In: *World Revolution / Revolución Mundial* Issue 1 (Autumn 2018), p. 49

632 As we elaborated above, the new theory of PO/CRFI denies Russia’s imperialist character not only for today but even for the period before 1917. As the following quote shows, this brings them close to renounce the revolutionary defeatist program of the Bolsheviks: “*The elements of militarism and feudalism that dominated Russian imperialism were also present in Ottoman imperialism. However, the Ottoman Empire was a semi-colony and did not possess the distinct characteristics of imperialism defined as the highest stage of capitalism. Therefore, neither Russia nor the Ottoman Empire cannot be seen as imperialist powers that defined the (imperialist) character of the World War I. They were dependent on great imperialist powers and therefore occupied a secondary position (at best) in the inter-imperialist rivalry. Hence, the imperialism of Russia and the Ottomans resembled the imperialism of the Greater Rome rather than capitalist imperialism. (...) Lenin continuously stressed this distinction especially with regard to Russia. On the other hand, Lenin used the tactic of “revolutionary defeatism” and strategy of “transforming war into civil war” in the struggle against Russia which joined World War I on the side of English and French imperialism and*

Lenin liked to say: „*Our doctrine is not a dogma, but a guide to action.*“<sup>633</sup> A correct theory guides a party to a correct practice. In reverse, we can say that a revisionist theory guides a party to a revisionist practice.

Unfortunately, this is the case with the PO/CRFI. From their analysis – that Russia and China are not imperialist power – they draw the strategic conclusion to support these Eastern powers against their Western rivals. This becomes evident from a recently published joint statement in reaction to the latest escalation of the tensions between the Great Powers:

*“The escalating international trade war between America, Europe, Russia, and China is intensifying the imperialist war drive everywhere. From the war volcano of Middle East to the Balkans and the Eastern borderlands of Europe in Ukraine, from the Caucasus to Central Asia to the South China Sea and Korea, imperialism is already in confrontation, directly or indirectly, with Russia and China to fragment and re-colonize them, absorbing them in world capitalism. Working class and popular movements cannot be neutral in this confrontation, which threatens humanity and every living being on Earth with world war and nuclear extinction: we declare war against the imperialist war of re-colonization of Russia and China, without supporting or cultivating any illusions in the restorationist Bonapartist elites in Kremlin or Beijing.”*<sup>634</sup>

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*waged a war with a colonial/plunderer character. This struggle undoubtedly necessitated stressing the unjust and imperialist character of the war led by the dominant classes of Russia. The mistake of those claiming that Russia has always been imperialist stems from a misreading of this emphasis.”* (Levent Dölek: The Character of War in 21st Century, pp. 52-53)

This effectively means the following revisionist idea: Russia before WWI was not an imperialist power but rather a semi-colony (“like the Ottoman Empire”). If Russia would have not been involved on the side of the imperialist powers Britain and France in WWI but, let us assume, would it have waged a war exclusively with Germany (which was undoubtedly an imperialist power, even by the PO/CRFI standards), the PO/CRFI comrades would have been obligated to defend (“semi-colonial”) Russia against (imperialist) Germany! One need to think only a second to imagine the horror Lenin and the Bolsheviks would have felt hearing about the PO/CRFI position!

633 V.I. Lenin: Certain Features of the Historical Development of Marxism (1910); in: CW 17, p. 39

634 Emergency Euro-Mediterranean Encounter Final Resolution: Fight imperialism and war with the international socialist revolution! Forward to the revolutionary International! Eretria, Greece, 25 July 2018 (Thesis 3), <http://redmed.org/article/emergency-euro-mediterranean-encounter-final-resolution-fight-imperialism-and-war>.

The same idea is elaborated in the recently published article in the PO/CRFI journal: „*The whole world realizes that we are on the precipice of a new war. It is now widely accepted that the US will constitute one side of the fighting forces, whereas Russia and China, in one way or another, will position themselves against the US.*“ (Levent Dölek: The Character of War in 21st Century, p. 49) See also: “*What determines the character of war in the 21st century is the encirclement of Russia and China by US imperialism, in alliance with its subordinate allies of European and Japanese imperialism, in order to integrate the former countries into the imperialist world system in unrestrained fashion by bringing the process of capitalist restoration in these countries to its completion. (...) The interest of the world proletariat lies in the defeat of imperialism. The military power of Russia and China reduces the possibility of an imperialist invasion to almost impossible. However, prior to a military attack, these countries are faced with the risk of an economic and political collapse, resulting from the destruction of all the achievements of the proletarian revolution and the sharp mobilization of all the capitalist crisis dynamics into those countries. That is to say that, even though those powers may resist imperialism, they cannot defeat it. On the other hand, the defeat of Russia and China at the hands of imperialism would give rise to retrogressive results worldwide. Thus, no impartiality is possible between imperialism and these countries. On the contrary, each blow received by imperialism would*



One has to thank the PO/CRFI comrades as they articulate more explicitly than other supporters the devastating consequences of the “Russia and China are semi-colonies” thesis. The same position has been expressed in a statement adopted at a congress of the CRFI in April 2018.

*“An imperialist capital has not been created in Russia or China, and the likelihood of an exclusively state-based imperialism is a flimsy hypothesis. These regimes of transition to capitalism face, on the one hand, imperialist colonization (and wars) and, on the other, proletarian revolution. Given a hypothesis of imperialist war against Russia and / or China, to carry out a capitalist restoration of a colonial nature, revolutionary socialists will fight for the complete defeat of imperialism and will take advantage of this struggle to promote the resurgence of the soviets, as the independent political power of the working class; to expropriate the oligarchy and the bureaucracy and develop a socialist revolution, defending the free self-determination of the peoples, in the perspective of the reconstruction of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics [inspired] in the revolutionary and internationalist origin of the October revolution.”*<sup>635</sup>

The pseudo-socialist rhetoric can barely conceal the social-imperialist position contained in this statement. If Russia and China are not imperialist (in fact, according to the PO leadership, they are not even fully capitalist) and if the Western Great Powers are imperialist, then the formulation “*revolutionary socialists will fight for the complete defeat of imperialism*” can have only one meaning: that PO is siding with Russia and China against the old imperialist powers.

This is the theoretical and strategic basis for the alliance which the PO/CRFI leadership has created with the Russian Stalinist OKP of Darya Mitina. As we did show above this party also rejects the notion of Russia as an imperialist state and considers it rather as a “*peripheral capitalist country*”. On such a common basis these forces can agree on supporting Russian and Chinese imperialism. We see: theoretical confusion and abysmal failure to recognize social-historical developments of world politics inevitable results in taking the wrong side in the class struggle and in open betrayal to the cause of the liberation of the international proletariat and oppressed peoples! Revisionist theory creates revisionist whitewashers of Chinese and Russian imperialism. And all this in the name of “Marxism” and “Anti-Imperialism”!

Nevertheless, one has to thank the PO/CRFI comrades for one thing: as we have shown in other works, many self-proclaimed “Trotskyist” organizations share the thesis that Russia and China are not imperialist states. However, only few are prepared to articulate so consistently and explicitly the devastating consequences of this position in calling to support China and Russia against their Western rivals.

Authentic Marxists draw a dividing line between consistent anti-imperialism

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*pave the way for revolutionary dynamics.”* (ibid, pp. 58-59)

635 Partido Obrero, PT (Uruguay), DIP (Turkey), EEK (Greece): Declaration of the International Conference, 13 April 2018, <http://www.prensaobrera.com/prensaObrera/online/internacionales/declaration-of-the-international-conference>

and pro-Eastern social-imperialism. The former opposes all Great Powers and supports the liberation struggle of oppressed peoples against them. The latter sides with China and Russia against their Western rivals and refuses to support those liberation struggles of oppressed people which are directed against the Putin and Xi regimes resp. their local allies. And indeed, it is only logical that the PO/CRFI leadership refuses to lend any support to the Syrian people fighting against the Assad tyranny and their Russian and Iranian imperialist masters. In fact, they are preparing to openly join the camp of Assad, as they are warning in their latest joint statement:

*"The 4<sup>th</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Conference in May 2017 had emphasized the implications of the first trip of Trump outside the US in Saudi Arabia and Israel: the formation of a pro-imperialist war axis of Israel, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Sudan aimed against Iran and its allies in the region, first of all Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Syrian regime of Bashar al Assad."* <sup>636</sup>

Denying the imperialist character of Russia, which is the master of Iran and Syria, they view the political events in the Middle exclusively through the prism of opposition against Western imperialism. So what does it mean when the PO/CRFI raises, as they did in this statement, the call *"Imperialists out of Syria"* but never mention the necessity for the Russian and Iranian troops to be expelled from Syria?! It means nothing else but the implicit support for the continuation of the presence of the counterrevolutionary Russian and Iranian forces which are deployed on Syrian soil to suppress the popular liberation struggle! Obviously revolutionary Marxists are sharply opposed to such revisionist whitewashing of Chinese and Russian imperialism.

We conclude in reiterating our position which we have outlined in our *"Theses on Revolutionary Defeatism in Imperialist States"*: *"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!"*

*"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" inevitable results in "supporting Russian and Chinese imperialism."* <sup>637</sup>

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636 Emergency Euro-Mediterranean Encounter Final Resolution: Fight imperialism and war with the international socialist revolution! Forward to the revolutionary International! Eretria, Greece, 25 July 2018 (Thesis 4), <http://redmed.org/article/emergency-euro-mediterranean-encounter-final-resolution-fight-imperialism-and-war>

637 RCIT: Theses on Revolutionary Defeatism in Imperialist States, 8 September 2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/theses-on-revolutionary-defeatism-in-imperialist-states/>

## The Spartacist sects and their defense of the Chinese “Deformed Workers State”

Let us mention, in passing, that there are also other pseudo-Marxist groups who arrive to similar conclusions like the Stalinists. Examples for this are the WWP and the PSL in the U.S. as well as some “Trotskyists” – let us better say caricatures of Trotskyism. Such Stalinophile sects like the Spartacist ICL, the IBT or Jan Norden’s IG/LFI claim that China would be still a “deformed workers state” – more than a quarter of century after capitalist restoration! Surely, the numerous Chinese billionaires would not stop laughing in case they would come across such proclamations! They also suggest that Russia is not an imperialist state.<sup>638</sup> As we mentioned above, the *World Socialist Website* (WSWS) even published a polemic against the RCIT because we dared to characterize China and Russia as imperialist powers.

Consequently, they all refuse to support the ongoing popular liberation struggle of the Syrian people against the Assad dictatorship. Some, like the American WWP and PSL or the British grouplet *Socialist Fight* even have come up with statements of support for Russia and Assad against the US and against the Syrian Revolution.

As a result, these groups call for a *social-imperialist united front* with Russia against the US – instead of an “*anti-imperialist united front*” as they pretend: “*We do not call for Russians out, as this would be objectively aiding the U.S./NATO imperialists and the jihadist groups they support (as well as those they oppose, i.e., the I.S.). If the U.S. and its NATO allies directly attack Russian forces in Syria, we are for defense of the [sic!] those forces against imperialism.*”<sup>639</sup>

Writing in the same spirit, the SF group titled a statement: “*Defend Syria and Russia: Imperialism out of the Middle East*”<sup>640</sup>

On the surface it might seem that the Marxists agree with the Stalinists and pseudo-Trotskyists in the opposition against the military interference of U.S. imperialism in Syria and the whole Middle East. But the truth is that one can oppose the US foreign policy in this region for very different reasons. One can oppose it from a revolutionary internationalist and anti-imperialist point of view. But one can also oppose it from a petty-bourgeois pacifist, liberal-human-

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638 The small group IBT recently had a split with one part – which continues to call itself IBT in opposite to the other – changed their traditional position on Russia. We note with approval that this current now recognizes that Russia has become an imperialist power in the 2000s. It also draws the necessary tactical conclusions from this and stands for a defeatist position in Russia. (See IBT: A Note on the World Situation. Recent Departures & Line Change on Russia, 27.10.2018, [http://www.bolshevik.org/statements/ibt\\_20181019\\_world\\_situation.html](http://www.bolshevik.org/statements/ibt_20181019_world_situation.html)) Unfortunately, these comrade still – at the end of the year 2018! – believe that China is a “deformed workers state”!

639 See IG: Drive the Imperialists Out of the Middle East! U.S./NATO: Get Your Bloody Claws Off Syria! <http://www.internationalist.org/syriausnatobloodyhands1804.html>

640 See SF: Defend Syria and Russia: Imperialism out of the Middle East, 14/04/2018 <https://socialistfight.com/2018/04/14/defend-syria-and-russia-imperialism-out-of-the-middle-east/>

ist, or from a pro-Russian social-imperialist, pro-Assad, or even from a fascist point of view.<sup>641</sup>

Trotsky once remarked that dialectical thinking requires fusing the general analysis of the world situation with a concrete analysis of the crucial factors and its interaction. Repeating common phrases about “imperialism” and focusing only on the old Great Powers of the West without understanding the fundamental changes which have taken place in the past one, two decades – such schematic, mechanistic thinking must unavoidable result in gross misjudgments of the dynamics of the world situation and, hence, of the consequential tasks for the class struggle.

*“Marxist thought is concrete, that is, it looks upon all the decisive or important factors in any given question, not only from the point of view of their reciprocal relations, but also from that of their development. It never dissolves the momentary situation within the general perspective, but by means of the general perspective makes possible an analysis of the momentary situation in all its peculiarities. Politics has its point of departure in precisely this sort of concrete analysis. Opportunist thought and sectarian thought have this feature in common: they extract from the complexity of circumstances and forces one or two factors that appear to them to be the most important (and sometimes are, to be sure), isolate them from the complex reality, and attribute to them unlimited and unrestricted powers.”*<sup>642</sup>

And, indeed, the objective reality – characterized by inter-imperialist rivalry between the Great Powers and ongoing liberation struggles of oppressed peoples – is a closed book for these groups. Lacking any theoretical compass, they are forced to stumble in the camp of Russian imperialism with a far more pathetic consistency than most Stalinists do.

Lenin has warned of such confused organizations: *„We are constantly making the mistake in Russia of judging the slogans and tactics of a certain party or group, of judging its general trend, by the intentions or motives that the group claims for itself. Such judgment is worthless. The road to hell—as was said long ago—is paved with good intentions. It is not a matter of intentions, motives or words but of the objective situation, independent of them, that determines the fate and significance of slogans, of tactics or, in general, of the trend of a given party or group.”*<sup>643</sup>

Likewise, it is today with the pro-Eastern social-imperialists. They praise an-

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641 A number of articles have been published documenting the support of many fascist organizations for the Assad regime. See e.g. Alex Rowell: Small wonder: The global fascist love affair with the Assad regime, <https://pulsemedia.org/2017/08/20/small-wonder-the-global-fascist-love-affair-with-the-assad-regime/>; Patrick Strickland: Why do Italian fascists adore Syria’s Bashar al-Assad? 14 Feb 2018, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/italian-fascists-adore-syria-bashar-al-assad-180125115153121.html>. On the opposition to the latest U.S. strike against Syria by U.S. Nazis see e.g. the statement of Gregory Conte and Richard Spencer: Stay Out Of Syria, April 14, 2018 <https://nationalpolicy.institute/2018/04/14/stay-out-of-syria/>

642 Leon Trotsky: *Ultralefts in General and Incurable Ultralefts in Particular (A Few Theoretical Considerations)*, 1937, in: Leon Trotsky: *The Spanish Revolution (1931-39)*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p. 292, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1937/1937-ultra.htm>

643 V. I. Lenin: *Word and Deed (1913)*; in: *LCW 19*, p. 262

ti-imperialism and many other good things. But a few Trotskyist phrases can not conceal their pro-Russian or pro-Chinese social-imperialist politics. As a matter of fact, neither will the sinner enter heaven just because he said some hurried prayers nor will the camouflaged semi-Stalinists join the camp of working class internationalism just because they recite some memorized quotes from Trotsky's books.

One must not ignore the bitter truth: the pro-Russian/Chinese pseudo-Trotskyists who combine meaningless and empty admiration for the founder of the Red Army with revisionist whitewashing of Chinese and Russian imperialism are nothing but Stalinist wolves in "Trotskyist" sheep's clothing!

## XXVI. On Inverted Social-Imperialism and the “Anti-Imperialist” Appeal of Russia and China

In this chapter we want to deal with some specific issues which are arising from the peculiar character of China and Russia as emerging imperialist Great Powers. In particular we will discuss the consequences of this peculiar character for the specific political physiognomy of social-imperialism.

### What are the reasons for the misplaced “anti-imperialist” Appeal of Russia and China?

It seems important to us to understand the specific appeal which pro-Eastern social-imperialism might have for a number of activists. It might be the case that to some these forces siding with Russia and China look more radical, more “anti-imperialist” than the pro-Western social-imperialists. For most progressive activists, it does not need much explanation why the U.S., the European powers or Japan have to be considered as imperialist. These imperialist powers have a long history of decades or even centuries of direct or indirect oppression and exploitation of the people of the South.

It is different in the case of Russia and China. China’s history as an oppressive Great Power more or less ended with the first Opium War in 1839-42 when the Western Powers attacked the Middle Kingdom and began the humiliation of this proud nation. Before that, Beijing dominated various Muslim people, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, etc – directly or indirectly via the *Cefong System* (China’s Imperial Tributary System). However, from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, China struggled against the domination of the European Powers, Russia and Japan. After the Revolution of 1949 it rebuilt itself as a Stalinist state. Only in the past one, two decades did Beijing attempt to rebuild the Middle Kingdom as a global acting power.

Similar with Russia. While it was an expanding and oppressive Great Power for centuries, this radically changed with the socialist October Revolution in 1917. With the creation of the Soviet Union, it was no longer an imperialist power but rather the most important opponent of the Great Powers and a key ally of many oppressed people fighting against imperialist domination. While Moscow lost its revolutionary appeal with the Stalinist degeneration, it remained a progressive factor, to a certain degree, in a world dominated by U.S. imperialism and its allies. After the restoration of capitalism in 1991/92, Russia remained rather a weak state for the first years. Its rise as a new imperialist power is, like in the case of China, a rather recent phenomenon.

It is hardly surprising that both Beijing as well as Moscow emphasize that

they are not striving for hegemony. A central theme in their propaganda is the opposition against the “*unipolar world order*” and the advocacy of “*multilateralism*”, i.e. the co-existence of several Great Powers in East and West. Such an ideology has a basis in objective reality as Russia respectively China can not realistically expect to defeat the U.S. and to replace it as *the* new world hegemon in the foreseeable future. To a certain degree their position is similar to the U.S., Japan or Germany in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century which also were “*late-coming*”, emerging powers. In contrast to Britain, France or Russia, they hardly had any colonial possessions and claimed their “*fair share*” of the cake.

For all these reasons, it is not surprising that Russia and China appear for many progressive activists around the world not as “*imperialists*” but rather as opponents or challengers of the old imperialist powers of the West. (Likewise, the U.S. under President Wilson also appeared to many as a “*progressive*” and not as an imperialist power.) In fact, similar to the periods before the two World Wars, the world situation is characterized by the rise of imperialist Great Powers striving to challenge the old powers. As a result, *both* – the old as well as the new imperialist powers – are fueling the arms race and are threatening the oppressed peoples.

This is why the RCIT warns against any illusions in the emerging Great Powers and against any support for them. Trotsky explained in the 1930s that the Stalinist Comintern was the most dangerous enemy for the liberation struggle as it was less discredited than the social democrats:

*“The struggle against war is inseparable from the class struggle of the proletariat. Irreconcilable class consciousness is the first condition for a successful struggle against war. The worst wreckers of class consciousness and the worst saboteurs of the revolutionary struggle at the present time are the so-called ‘communists’. (...) That is why the struggle against war must begin and end with the unmasking of the treacherous role of the Comintern, which has finally become an agent of the imperialist bourgeoisie. The Second International is, of course, no better. But it is more compromised and therefore less dangerous.”*<sup>644</sup>

From this follows that any support for China’s and Russia’s strategic goal of a “*multilateral world order*”, as it is proclaimed by the pro-Eastern reformists, is inherently social-imperialist. Since a “*multilateral world order*” means nothing else but a world order with several Great Powers which, by their nature, stand in thorough rivalry against each other, the Stalinists support for such a goal has nothing to do with socialism and everything to do with bourgeois geopoliticism. One does not need to be an Einstein to understand that such a world order would not be more peaceful but at least as crisis-ridden and war-mongering as it was in the past.

Behind this reformist pipe dream of a long-term and stable “*multilateral world order*” is the revisionist illusion of the possibility to pressurize the imperialist bourgeoisie to stop striving for expansion and agree to a peaceful coexis-

644 Leon Trotsky: How to Struggle against War (1937), in: Trotsky Writings 1937-38, p. 54

tence with its rivals. It is, as we already pointed out above, a result of the false Stalinist theory that a “*neutralization of the world bourgeoisie*” would be possible. Trotsky’s criticism has not lost its validity: „*The struggle against war is decided not by pressure upon the government but only by the revolutionary struggle for power. The ‘pacifist’ effects of the proletarian class struggle, like its reformist effects, are only by-products of the revolutionary struggle for power; they have only a relative strength and can easily turn into their opposite, that is, they can drive the bourgeoisie to take the road to war.*“<sup>645</sup>

Consequently, these social-imperialists view the liberation struggles of the workers and the oppressed from the point of view if they advance the goals of such reordering of the world in the interest of Russia and China or not. They will only support those struggles which will weaken the West and which will strengthen the global position of the Eastern Powers. Hence, the resistance of the Yemeni people against the U.S. ally Saudi Arabia is good. So is the resistance of Iran and Venezuela against the U.S. So is the mass movement of the “*Gilet Jaunes*” (Yellow Vests) since it is directed against a government of the EU. It is different with strikes of Chinese or Russian workers, with national struggles of the Chechens or the Uyghurs or of the Syrian people against Russia’s ally Assad.

Again, we see that the Stalinist “anti-imperialism” is only “anti-imperialist” against one camp of the Great Powers but not against the other. This is not better than those liberal forces in Russia and China which support Western sanctions and pressure of the “international community” against “their” governments in order to improve the human rights situation in their countries. True, the Stalinists in Western countries usually wrap up their support for the Eastern Great Powers in “socialist” language while the petty-bourgeois or bourgeois democrats in Russia and China rather refer to the UN Human Rights Charta. But this means nothing else than that their fig leaf might differs. The essence is in both cases the same: inverted social-imperialist support for a rivaling Great Power. In other words, such “anti-imperialism” is only half “anti-imperialism” and half “pro-imperialism” which, in the end, equals social-imperialism.

Such pseudo-“anti-imperialism” is often combined with isolationist national-centeredness. Such Stalinists or semi-Stalinists claim that the only important issue would be to oppose their own bourgeoisie. To justify such a stand, they refer to the famous formula “*The main enemy is at home*”. Of course, such an argument lacks any basis. As if Lenin and Liebknecht would have opposed only the Russian or the German ruling class! As every freshmen of the history of the workers movement during World War One is aware, the Marxists opposed not only “their” ruling class but also all other ruling classes of the Great Powers participating!

Remaining content with opposing one owns bourgeoisie reflects the Stalinist “socialism in one country” theory. It expresses the wrong idea that authentic

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645 Leon Trotsky: *The Permanent Revolution* (1929), Pathfinder Press, New York 1969, p. 268



socialist policy can be defined on purely national lines, by taking a stand only on issues relevant in one own's borders. But as a matter of fact, this is impossible for socialists! The political issues of a given nation are inextricably linked with global issues. Imperialism is a world system. Opposition against imperialism is only possible on a world scale and not in only one country! If "socialists" oppose their "own" imperialist rulers but support the rivals, they are not social-imperialists in regard to their own bourgeoisie but in regard to the rivaling bourgeoisie! They are simply *inverted social-imperialists* as the Fourth International called such forces! <sup>646</sup>

It is a well-known practice of Great Power to support struggles of oppressed people against their imperialist rivals. The Japanese did so during their war against Russia in 1904/05; the Germans supported the Irish revolutionaries against Britain during World War I; during World War II the Japanese supported the *Indian National Army* of Bose and the Western imperialists supported the Chinese forces fighting Japan as well as the anti-German Partisans on the Balkan. One could go on with many more examples. In short, supporting a liberation struggle against a rival Great Power does not necessarily demonstrate anti-imperialism but can simply serve to aid the Great Powers interests of one imperialist camp.

Let us note finally that powerful states can also sometimes agree and join forces to fight against this or that force in semi-colonial countries. This was already the case during the Taiping Uprising in China in the 1850s and 60s or against the so-called Boxer Uprising in China in 1899-1901. Actual examples are the Great Power hostility against the Arab Revolution and against various petty-bourgeois Islamist forces. It is therefore not surprising that also pro-Eastern and pro-Western social-imperialist parties sometimes agree, e.g. against so-called radical Islamists.

The task of authentic revolutionaries is not to reorder to world to the advantage of this or that Great Power but to fight against all great Powers and to completely destroy the imperialist order and to replace it with a socialist world!

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646 "The German Stalinists in emigration have become inverted social-patriots, transforming themselves from nationalist champions against the Versailles Peace Treaty to defenders of the status quo created by this very same treaty. It follows from the present position of the German Stalinist that they will transform themselves into real social-patriots as soon as the fascist dictatorship in Germany is replaced by another type of bourgeois regime." (The Evolution of the Comintern. Resolution of the First Conference for the Fourth International in July 1936, in: Documents of the Fourth International, New York 1973, p. 127)

## Inverted Social-Imperialism as a Variation of Class-Collaboration

It is necessary in this context to briefly deal with the historic roots of the phenomenon of inverted social-imperialism. As we just explained this category characterizes those pseudo-socialist forces which, openly or concealed, support not their own imperialist bourgeoisie but the imperialist bourgeoisie of a rivaling Great Power. The Marxist classics have repeatedly drawn attention to the fact that there is not just a single form of social-chauvinism but rather several variants. Lenin and Trotsky explained that, in addition to capitulation to one's own imperialist ruling class, there also exists social-chauvinism as capitulation to the ruling class of the rivaling imperialist powers. During World War I, a significant sector of the petty-bourgeois *Jewish Bund* in Russia (which was part of the Second International) supported the German imperialist camp, as they considered the Tsar to be the main enemy. Another famous example was the Russian-Jewish socialist Alexander Parvus, a former close collaborator with Trotsky in his younger days, as well as of the left-wing wing in German social democracy. He later became a reformist and collaborator of German imperialism.

In the 1920s – during the so-called period of “stabilization” of capitalism – Europe's social democracy became an advocate of the Dawes Plan and supported America's hegemony over the old continent. It collaborated with U.S. imperialism and was in a kind of opposition to “their” ruling classes. As Trotsky put it at that time: “*the European Social Democracy is becoming before our very eyes the political agency of American capitalism.*”<sup>647</sup>

Similarly, in the 1930s and during World War II, the German, Austrian, and Italian social democrats, Stalinists, and most centrists like the SAP supported Western imperialism. They justified their support for French, British, and US imperialism by stating that their main enemy was the fascist ruling class at home. When the ruling bureaucracy in the Soviet Union was in an alliance with Hitler in 1939-41, the Stalinists made advances towards the Nazis and focused their fire against the war-mongering “plutocratic democracies” Britain and France.<sup>648</sup>

647 Leon Trotsky: Perspectives of World Development (1924), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/07/world.htm>

648 The Fourth International condemned the sudden 180-degree turn around of the Stalinists after the signature of the Hitler-Stalin-Pact: “*At first sight the conduct of the French and English sections of the Communist International appeared to be diametrically opposite. In contradistinction to the Germans, they were compelled to attack their own government. But this sudden defeatism was not internationalism, but a distorted variety of patriotism – these gentlemen consider their fatherland to be the Kremlin, on which their welfare depends. Many of the French Stalinists behaved with unquestionable courage under persecution. But the political content of this courage was besmirched by their embellishment of the rapacious policy of the enemy camp. What must the French workers think of it?*” (Fourth International: Imperialist War And The Proletarian World Revolution, Adopted by the Emergency Conference of the Fourth International, May 19-26, 1940; in: Documents of the Fourth International, The Formative Years (1933-40),

The Trotskyists always sharply condemned such inverted social-imperialists, not less than they condemned the “ordinary” social-imperialists. Such wrote the American Trotskyists about the pathetic nature of the exiled leaders of German social democracy after 1933:

*“While a measure of bourgeois democracy is maintained in a country, that is, while the social democracy is tolerated, it [social democracy, Ed.] proves its indispensability to the bourgeoisie in all crises, above all when war comes, for then it does not allow itself to be excelled in patriotic zeal. But what about the social democratic party of that country in which fascism has rudely suppressed or exiled it, in which there is not even a pretense of democracy – how can it come out in favor of the “defense of the fatherland”? It cannot and, as a rule, it does not. What it does do, however, is hire out its services to the ruling class of a foreign democracy, asking in return only that it be brought back to the position it once occupied in its native land on the gun carriages of its temporary foreign employer. The exiled German social-democratic leadership is now playing precisely that not very dignified role in world affairs. A blatant example was the revelation a year and a half ago that the sorry hero of the Saarland social democracy, Max Braun, had applied to the French government for financial support to his newspaper and his movement in return for military propaganda among the youth of the German emigration which would convert them into ardent soldiers for the French army “against German fascism”. The perverted war-mongering of the German social-democratic leaders, who capitulated cravenly to fascism when they had invincible forces at their command and now hope to restore their power by “a policy that expects salvation by foreign bayonets”, as one of their dissident number puts it, is not confined to France. In all the imperialist “democracies” the German social democrats have their emissaries and representatives whose main activity is directed towards mobilizing the labor movement for the new Holy War, this time not “against czarism” but “against fascism”. The United States has its share of these ladies and gentlemen, mainly former members of the Weimar Reichstag.”*<sup>649</sup>

Trotsky also totally rejected the argument of those who justified support for an imperialist state with the argument of the necessity to fight fascism. He replied to those who distorted his support for an intervention of the Red Army of the Soviet Union against Hitler in 1933:

*“But they are absolutely wrong in thinking that the proletariat can solve great historical tasks by means of wars that are led not by themselves but by their mortal enemies, the imperialist governments. One may construe the document as follows: during the crisis over Czechoslovakia our French or English comrades should have demanded the military intervention of their own bourgeoisie, and thereby assumed responsibility for the war – not for war in general, and of course not for a revolutionary war, but for the given imperialist war. The document cites Trotsky’s words to the effect that Moscow should have taken the initiative in crushing Hitler as far back as 1933, before he be-*

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Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p. 337, <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1938-1949/emergconf/fi-emerg02.htm>)

649 Max Shachtman: Old Garbage in New Pails, in: New International, Vol.5 No.6, June 1939, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/shachtma/1939/06/garbage.htm>

came a terrible danger (Biulleten Oppozitsii, March 21, 1933). But these words merely mean that such should have been the behaviour of a real revolutionary government of a workers' state. But is it permissible to issue the same demand to a government of an imperialist state?"<sup>650</sup>

Today we are witnessing a similar phenomenon among the so-called "Anti-Germans" or "Anti-Nationals" in Germany and Austria. This is an arch-reactionary, pseudo-left-wing current which is extremely pro-Zionist and pro-American, and which justifies their support for these reactionary forces with their opposition to chauvinism and the purportedly inherent "Anti-Semitism" of the German and Austrian people.

Lenin and Zinoviev gave the following comprehensive definition of social-chauvinism which made clear that this current includes not only those who support their "own" imperialist bourgeoisie but also those who support the ruling class of a rivaling imperialist power.

*„Social-chauvinism is advocacy of the idea of “defence of the fatherland” in the present war. This idea logically leads to the abandonment of the class struggle during the war, to voting for war credits, etc. In fact, the social-chauvinists are pursuing an anti-proletarian bourgeois policy, for they are actually championing, not “defence of the fatherland” in the sense of combating foreign oppression, but the “right” of one or other of the “Great” Powers to plunder colonies and to oppress other nations. The social-chauvinists reiterate the bourgeois deception of the people that the war is being waged to protect the freedom and existence of nations, thereby taking sides with the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. Among the social-chauvinists are those who justify and varnish the governments and bourgeoisie of one of the belligerent groups of powers, as well as those who, like Kautsky, argue that the socialists of all the belligerent powers are equally entitled to “defend the fatherland”. Social- chauvinism, which is, in effect, defence of the privileges, the advantages, the right to pillage and plunder, of one’s “own” (or any) imperialist bourgeoisie, is the utter betrayal of all socialist convictions and of the decision of the Basle International Socialist Congress.“*<sup>651</sup>

It goes without saying that Trotsky and the Fourth International resolutely denounced all such manifestations of inverted social-imperialism. Authentic Marxism is both consistently internationalist and anti-imperialist or it is not Marxism at all! The RCIT fights for a new Revolutionary World Party based on a consistent anti-imperialist program. Such a program includes unconditional opposition to *all* forms of social-imperialism.

650 Leon Trotsky: A step towards social patriotism (1939), in: Writings 1938-39, p. 211

651 G. Zinoviev / V. I. Lenin: Socialism and War (1915) ; in: LCW Vol. 21, pp. 306-307 (our emphasis)

## What will Inverted Social-Imperialists do in Case of a Major War?

What will happen in case of a qualitative acceleration of inter-imperialist conflicts? Will the inverted social imperialists remain loyal supporters of the rivaling Great Powers or will they collapse and capitulate to their own ruling class?

One could take the example of the Stalinists in the 1930s and 1940s. By and large they implemented loyally every turn which Moscow dictated: they served their own bourgeoisie and they served the rivals – whatever was requested by the Comintern headquarter. There were some difficulties when the French and British Stalinists had to declare “their” bourgeoisie as main enemies in autumn 1939 (instead of Hitler). For example, one third of the Stalinist Members of Parliaments in France left the party and many members left the “Communist” parties at that time. But, by and large, Moscow succeeded to avoid major ruptures.

Will we see a repetition of such a scenario in future war-like periods? Of course, this is not easy to predict. However, we think that this is rather unlikely as it seems to us that the differences between the present and the then situation outweigh the similarities. First, the Stalinists at that time had a consolidated international organization with many highly loyal cadres who still saw the USSR as the fatherland of the October Revolution. Many cadre spent time in Moscow and were trained there for years. Nothing of this sort exists today. There is no Comintern – the IMCWP is a loose and heterogeneous alliance without any organizational centre; in short: it is no unified organization at all. The Stalinists side with Russia but it would be total nonsense to see them as organic part of the Putin regime’s apparatus. The Chinese never – even in the Maoist golden age – attempted to build anything which would come close to a Comintern-type of organization. They were always much more national-centered than their Stalinist rivals in Moscow.

Furthermore, the Stalinist Comintern spent a lot of money to finance the party apparatus in numerous sections. As a result, these parties were highly dependent on the Soviet bureaucracy. Today, neither Moscow nor Beijing spend similar significant sums. Yes, there are various media outlets like *Russia Today* or academic institutions like the China-based *World Association for Political Economy* (WAPE) but this is nothing compared with the efforts of the USSR at that time.

So in general when push comes to shove, the inverted social-imperialists – trained in the mindset of patriotism – would likely, in their majority, drop their pseudo-defeatism and join the ranks of the patriotic defenders of their fatherland. The only factor pushing in the opposite direction would be a situation like Germany after 1933 when a new regime would simply imprison all oppositionists en masse. In such conditions, even critical reformists would see no benefit in being social-patriots but would rather turn to an imperialist rival in the hope to regain their position at a later point. That would be a situation in which the reformists would be no longer “fat” but would have become pretty “lean” to

use the aptly characterization of Trotsky.

*„The camp of the lean parties is depicted by a different picture. In the character of their ruling bureaucracy, in their entire past and in their aspirations these parties do not differ from the fat ones. But they, alas, have been deprived of pastures just as the imperialist fatherlands which cast them out were deprived of colonies. The fat ones are most of all concerned with preserving the status quo both within their own countries as well as internationally. For the lean ones, status quo implies impotence, exile, meager rations. The Italian, German, Austrian, and now the Spanish socialist parties too are not directly bound by the discipline of national imperialism which rejected their services with a kick. They were cast into an illegality counter to their traditions and their best intentions. Because of this, naturally, they have not in the slightest degree become revolutionary. They do not of course so much as think of preparing the socialist revolution. But their patriotism is temporarily turned inside out. They stubbornly dream that the armed force of the “democracies” will overthrow their national fascist regime and enable them to reestablish themselves in their former posts, editorial offices, parliaments, leading bodies of the trade unions and to reopen their bank accounts. While the fat ones are interested only in being left in peace, the lean ones, on the contrary, are interested in their own way in an active international policy.“*<sup>652</sup>

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652 Leon Trotsky: Progressive Paralysis. The Second International on the Eve of the New War (1939), in: Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1939-40, p. 37

## XXVII. The Left Facing Great Power Rivalry: Deniers of Russia's and China's Imperialist Character without Drawing Conclusions

We will now deal with those organizations which deny the imperialist character of Russia and China but which, in contrast to the forces discussed before, do not consistently draw the conclusions (yet) to side with them against the Western powers. As we discussed above, these organizations – the Morenoite LIT, UIT as well as the FT – equate Russia and China with larger semi-colonial countries like Brazil.

As we already elaborated, such a class characterization of Russia and China as non-imperialist, semi-colonial countries would force them – if they would think the issue consistently to its logical conclusion – to side with the Eastern Powers against their Western rivals. This is because, as it is well-known, it is the classic and correct position for Marxists to support in any given conflict semi-colonial countries against imperialist powers. Taking the example of a conflict between semi-colonial Brazil and imperialist Britain, Trotsky made this unmistakably clear:

*"I will take the most simple and obvious example. In Brazil there now reigns a semi-fascist 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, slaveowners, and robbers!"*<sup>653</sup>

It is true that the LIT and UIT leaders have fortunately not drawn such conclusions (until now) to side with Russian and Chinese imperialism against the U.S. But this is not the result of their correct analysis but rather a product of their political indolence. Their theoretical failure to understand what imperial-

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

ism is and what it is not is without doubt a scratch which can easily become gangrene.

While the FT has also not drawn such social-imperialist conclusions, there are statements of them which reflect the inherent danger of their wrong analysis of Russia and China. Philippe Alcoy, one of their leaders in France, stated in a recently published statement that while the Putin regime is reactionary, it is not imperialist. He emphasized that this regime represents a (wrong) reaction *against* the imperialist offensive.

*“Does this all mean that the working-class movement and the revolutionary left must see in Putin a kind of “anti imperialist”? No. Putin is on the top of a reactionary regime; he is the face of contemporary Russian capitalism. And, as we can see, to defend the interest of Russian capitalists he is able to produce humanitarian disasters, massacres, and support murderous dictators as Assad in Syria. But it will be impossible to fight Putin’s influence among the Russia working and popular classes if the revolutionary left doesn’t has a clear anti-imperialist stance. Putin is a result of the imperialist offensive in Russia in the 1990s, representing Russian capitalism’s reactionary answer to that offensive. The revolutionary left must condemn and denounce the Western offensive against Russia, including the economic sanctions, which hurt not so much oligarchs but the Russian working class and the large majority of ordinary people. Of course, this should never mean expressing political support for Putin. A class stance against imperialist aggression is the better way to fight Putin, too.”*<sup>654</sup>

While not drawing openly social-imperialist conclusions, this statement opens the door in such a direction. Characterizing the Putin regime as a “*reaction against the imperialist offensive*”, opposing sanctions against Russia (but not those vice versa), calling to workers movement to denounce the West (but not Russia) – all this suggests to side with Russia instead of keeping a defeatist position against both imperialist camps.

The FT’s characterization of the Russian Putin regime in this statement resembles rather a semi-colonial bourgeois regimes (e.g. like the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein in Iraq). As we stated before, Marxists condemn such regimes and characterize them as reactionary but they also defend such countries even with such a reactionary regime at the helm. While such an approach was and remains completely legitimate in the case of a semi-colonial country attacked by imperialist powers, it is totally wrong when it comes to Great Powers. However, such a disastrous social-imperialist defense of Russia and China (against the U.S. or Japan) is only the logical consequence of the FT’s fatal analysis of these Great Powers as non-imperialist states.

It is not accidental that the theoretical confusion of LIT, UIT and FT in the field of Great Power rivalry corresponds with similar confusion in other important world political events. To their credit, LIT and UIT still defend the Syrian

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654 Philippe Alcoy (FT in France), in: Rossen Djagalov: We Asked: Geopolitics and the Left (Part I: Russia & the West), LeftEast April 19 2018, <http://www.criticatac.ro/lefeast/we-asked-rusia-and-the-west/>



Revolution against the Assad regime – in contrast to many other centrists. Here is not the place to deal with the weaknesses of their solidarity with the Syrian Revolution. At this point it is sufficient to say that they are part of the small minority of socialists who continue to support the Syrian liberation struggle.

However, one can not fail to point out that such plus on their side is devalued by devastating positions on other central struggles where these organizations have sided with the counter-revolution. We have in mind, for example, their support for the right-wing, semi-fascist rebellion in the Ukraine in 2014<sup>655</sup> or for the reactionary provocations of the right-wing opposition in Venezuela against the left-bourgeois Bonapartist Maduro government.<sup>656</sup> The LIT leadership went even further and praised the Egypt military coup of General Sisi in July 2013 as a “*second revolution*” and cheered the impeachment of Rouseff and the arrest of Lula by the reactionary bourgeoisie in Brazil.<sup>657</sup>

Likewise, the comrades of the FT suffer from gross disorientation on crucial events of the world class struggle. They characterize the Syrian Revolution (as well as the national liberation struggle in Yemen) as a “*reactionary civil war*” between “*the despotic regime of Bashar al-Assad*” and “*the so-called ‘rebels’*”.<sup>658</sup>

At their recent XI. Conference, the FT comrades confirmed this assessment. They explicitly stated in their central world perspectives document: “*From our point of view, the democratic uprising against Assad, which was part of the ‘Arab Spring’, has already been transformed into a totally reactionary civil war long time ago.*”<sup>659</sup>

We remark in passing that the same refusal to support the ongoing liberation struggle of the Syrian people is shared by other, smaller, groups like the “*League for the Fifth International*” (L5I)<sup>660</sup> or the *Permanent Revolution Collective* (CoReP).

655 For an overview of the RCIT's analysis of the events in the Ukraine and a critique of the reformist and centrist left see our numerous articles on this subject in the sub-section on Europe on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/>

656 For an overview of the RCIT's analysis of the events in the Venezuela see our numerous articles on this subject in the sub-section on Latin America on our website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/>

657 For an overview of our critique of the LIT/PSTU see e.g. RCIT: In the Wake of the PSTU/LIT-CI Split, What Lessons Can Be Learned? An Open Letter to Members and Sympathizers of the International Workers League (Fourth International), 11.7.2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/open-letter-lit-qi/>

658 Claudia Cinatti: The Geopolitics of the Civil War in Syria, September 14, 2016, <http://www.leftvoice.org/The-Geopolitics-of-the-Civil-War-in-Syria>

659 See the central resolution adopted at the recent FT conference quoted above.

660 While the comrades of the *League for the Fifth International* (L5I) sided with the Syrian Revolution for some years, they later dropped their support and concluded that “*there is a need to recognise that the Syrian revolution has been defeated.*” They declare the Arab Revolution as finally over: “*Now, even if the brutal civil war in Syria resumes, with Idlib and other remaining liberated areas coming under renewed attacks, we have to recognise that the Syrian revolution, which began six years ago, has suffered a strategic defeat. Indeed, we can apply this judgment to the entire Arab Spring, given the reactionary nature of the civil wars in Libya and Yemen. It was defeated by a range of counterrevolutionary forces; military bonapartists, such as el-Sisi or Assad, monarchist, as in Bahrain, or salafist-jihadists who emerged out of the resistance. The task of revolutionaries in the Middle East and internationally is to face the truth, no matter how bitter,*

<sup>661</sup> While these groups are at least capable to recognize the imperialist character of Russia and China, they capitulate to the Western Islamophobia and use the Islamist leadership of the popular struggle against the Assad dictatorship as a pretext to take an abstentionist, Third-Campist position in Syria.

Those comrades, who deny the imperialist character of Russia and China but hesitate to draw the logical (at least for Marxists) conclusions, i.e. to call for the victory of the Eastern Great Powers against their Western rivals, should bear in mind the programmatic statement of the Left Opposition as formulated in their platform against the Stalinist bureaucracy in 1927:

*“The slogan “Defence of the Fatherland” would be a false disguise serving the interests of imperialism in all bourgeois countries, except the colonial and semi-colonial countries that are carrying on a national revolutionary war against the imperialists. In the Soviet Union the slogan “Defence of the Fatherland” is correct, because we are defending a socialist fatherland and the base of the world working class movement.”*<sup>662</sup>

It is either-or: if China and Russia really would be semi-colonial countries, it would be the duty of the comrades of LIT, UIT and FT to side with them against the Western imperialists. If they do not side with China and Russia because their political instinct tells them that this would be wrong, they should draw the theoretical conclusion and recognize that the emerging Great Powers are imperialist. Either-Or!

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*that they now face a counterrevolutionary period, whose duration cannot be known, before there will be a re-emergence of mass struggles.”* (L5I: Resolution on Syria, 02/03/2017, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/resolution-syria>) What an unfortunate opportunistic adaption to the middle-class leftist milieu in Western Europe which despises the liberation struggles of the supposedly “backward” Muslim people!

<sup>661</sup> CoReP: The Liaison Committee of Centrists capitulates in front of Islamism, 2 October 2016, <http://www.revolucionpermanente.com/english/?p=250>. In this bizarre statement, the CoReP group attacks those Trotskyists, including the RCIT, who continue to support the liberation struggle in Syria, as “*capitulators to Islamism*”. In fact, this article is rather a damning indictment of the French CoReP leadership’s adaption to Islamophobic social-chauvinist public opinion of imperialist France!

<sup>662</sup> The Platform of the Opposition (1927), in: Leon Trotsky: The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926-27), pp. 367-368

## XXVIII. The Left Facing Great Power Rivalry: Eclectic Social-Pacifists

We have elaborated above that there are several centrist organizations like Peter Taaffe's CWI, Alan Woods' IMT and Alex Callinicos' IST which managed to characterize Russia and China as "imperialist", at least occasionally. However, as we explained, this is a rather platonic "name-calling" which does not find expression in the world political analysis of these forces. Unfortunately, such theoretical confusion is combined with a failure to understand the Leninist program of revolutionary defeatism, to say nothing of applying it.

In our book *The Great Robbery of the South* we demonstrated that both the CWI as well as the IMT openly reject Lenin's strategy of revolutionary defeatism.<sup>663</sup> Let us briefly summarize our critique at this point. Basically these two organizations advocate an opportunist interpretation, better say, distortion of Lenin's theory which serves to lend legitimacy to their social-pacifist adaption to the Great Powers. (We note in passing, that, not accidently, the CWI and the IMT also preach the reformist theory that the working class could take power in a peaceful way and via parliamentary reforms.)

Such falsification of Leninism is desperately needed by the CWI and the IMT as they have to justify their repeated betrayal of legitimate liberation struggles of semi-colonial countries and oppressed people against Great Powers – in particular against Britain where these currents have their "mother sections".

### CWI/IMT: Refusal to Defend Semi-Colonial Countries against Imperialism

As we have shown in detail somewhere else, the CWI/IMT – they were still united in a single organization at that time – refused to defend semi-colonial Argentina against British imperialism during the Malvinas war in 1982 when London was sending its fleet to the South Atlantic in order to keep their colonial possessions in this area. (The SWP/IST also refused to defend Argentina in this war.<sup>664</sup>) These centrists claimed that siding with Argentina would be "ultra-left" and, instead, they called for a "*Labour Governments waging a socialist war*

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663 See Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South*, Chapter 13 (Sub-Chapter: Is Revolutionary Defeatism too much for the Working Class? On the CWI' and IMT's Falsification of Lenin's and Trotsky's Method, pp. 357-365)

664 The SWP/IST proclaims that in the war between Britain and Argentina in 1982 "[t]here was not a progressive and a reactionary camp." (Alex Callinicos: *Marxism and Imperialism today*, in: A. Callinicos, J. Rees, C Harman & M. Haynes: *Marxism and the New Imperialism*, London 1994, p. 51)

against Argentina"! In an article published 25 years later, the CWI still defended their shameful capitulation to British imperialism. *"Yet the ultra-left sects of today, determined to demonstrate their intransigent 'Marxist' approach, continue to advance slogans based on their misconception of 'defeatism'."* Siding with Argentina, the CWI proclaims, would only repel the British workers (which seems to be the most important criterion for these "internationalist"): *"[T]hey (the so-called 'sects', Ed.) believe it can be done by support for the Junta, when most workers have an instinctive hatred for what they see as a 'fascist' regime, and an understandable desire to see it defeated. The Tories, of course, are cynically exploiting the workers' anti-fascist feelings; but support for the Junta would put Marxists beyond the pale in the eyes of workers, leaving the Tories free hypocritically to capitalise on the 'fight against fascism'."*

Furthermore, it is decisive for these "anti-imperialists" to defend the rights of the small group of British settlers living on the Malvinas Islands in front of the Argentinean coast: *"The pseudo-Marxists also believe, it seems, that support for a socialist opposition to the war can be won through a policy which abandons the Falkland Islanders to the tender mercies of the Junta, writing off their rights in favour of the Junta's legalistic claim to the land under their feet."*

Consequently, the CWI denounced the application of the Leninist position of calling for the defeat of the British Navy ("Task Force"): *"The most monstrous absurdity of the sects' position, however, is the idea that workers can be won to a socialist position on the basis of calling for the defeat of the Task Force, calling literally – as representatives of the sects have stated in public – for "the sinking of the fleet"! They are in favour of the slaughter of workers in the ranks of the navy and army, and on this basis they will win mass support from the working class! This is a travesty of Marxism which, in so far as it has any effect at all, can only play into the hands of the Tories and Labour's right, allowing them to portray 'Marxists' as idiots who support the Argentinean junta."*<sup>665</sup>

The CWI/IMT even went so far to refuse calling for an end of the British war against Argentina or for the withdrawal of the British fleet ... because *"the workers would not have understood it!"* They argued: *"To force the withdrawal of the Task Force would have involved the organization of a general strike, which itself would have posed the question of the coming to power of a socialist government. Yet at the outset of the war, such a demand would have received no support from the British workers. (...) Nor would the call to stop the war or to withdraw the fleet have provided a basis even for a mass campaign of demonstrations, meetings and agitation."*<sup>666</sup>

This embarrassing adaption to the most backward social-imperialist prejudices among the British labor aristocracy was not a singular slip. It is rather an expression of the political DNA of this current – its social-pacifist, centrist

665 Socialist Party (CWI): Falklands war: what lessons for the labour movement? In: Socialism Today, No 108, April 2007, <http://www.socialismtoday.org/108/falklands.html>

666 Peter Taaffe: The Rise of Militant, London 1995, Chapter 20 "The Falklands/Malvinas War", <http://socialistalternative.org/literature/militant/>

method. Compare this with the attitude of the Bolsheviks at the beginning of World War I in 1914. Albeit the Bolsheviks had to work under conditions of repression and illegality and albeit the fact that in this imperialist war Marxists could not support any side (in contrast to the Malvinas war in 1982), irrespective of all that, the Russian revolutionaries never took such a coward and social-patriotic stand as the CWI/IMT does!

As we demonstrated above in chapter XVIII, the Bolsheviks became feverishly active in spreading anti-war agitation on the streets and in the factories at the beginning of World War I. They published leaflets in Petersburg which proclaimed 'Down with the war!' and 'War on war!' What a difference to the pathetically coward position of the CWI and IMT in an imperialist war!

During the imperialist war and occupation of Afghanistan since 2001 – another important military adventure of Britain – the CWI again strongly refuses to lend any support for the Afghan struggle against the occupiers and their puppets which has been led by the petty-bourgeois Islamist Taliban movement.

In a programmatic essay, the CWI's central leader Peter Taaffe contrasted the CWI policy to those of principled anti-imperialists like our organization: *„If, therefore, we perceive this war as thoroughly reactionary on the part of imperialism, does this mean that we throw in our lot, albeit 'critically', with those who have allegedly 'resisted' the US juggernaut, namely bin Laden, his al-Qa'ida and the Taliban government? Unbelievably, this is the position of some small Trotskyist groups, such as Workers Power (our predecessor organization, Ed) and the Morenoite LIT. The latter is largely based in Latin America. Their approach will find absolutely no echo amongst the world working class, particularly the proletariat in the developed capitalist countries. Nevertheless, because they utilised some of the past writings of Trotsky to justify their position during the war they could, and did in some instances, confuse and befuddle some young people and workers who came into contact with them.“*<sup>667</sup>

This quote indicates that Taaffe has been aware that the CWI's position is in obvious contradiction to Trotsky's method. As we did show above, Trotsky called to defend even a "semi-fascist" Brazil against "democratic" British imperialism or the absolute monarchy of Ethiopia against Italy in 1935. However, the CWI claims that Trotsky's approach would be no longer valid today: *"It is nonsense to imply, however, as the sectarian organisations do by quoting these remarks of Trotsky, that the mass of the populations in most industrialised countries could take the same attitude today towards bin Laden and the Taliban."*<sup>668</sup>

In short, forces like the CWI, the IMT or the IST, refuse to defend semi-colonial countries and oppressed peoples because, as they claim, the political backward workers in the imperialist Great Powers "would not understand such a position". This is the classic logic which social democracy used in 1914 to legitimize their support for the "defense of the imperialist fatherland". *"The workers would not have*

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667 Peter Taaffe: Afghanistan, Islam and the Revolutionary Left (2002), <http://www.socialistworld.net/pubs/afghanistan/afghanchp1.html>

668 *ibid*

*understood if we would have opposed the war*” – this was the rallying cry for Noske, Ebert and Kautsky at the beginning of WWI. *“The workers would not understand if we take the side led by the Taliban or the Argentinean military junta”* – this is the rallying cry of the CWI and the IMT today! Different times but the same social-pacifist logic!

These centrists ignore the historical fact that the majority of the working class usually supports the defense of its imperialist fatherland at the beginning of a major war, as Lenin and Trotsky explained repeatedly. When he summarized the experience of the Bolsheviks during the World War I, Lenin wrote in 1922 about the policy towards the workers movement concerning a coming war: *“We must take special pains to explain that the question of “defence of the fatherland” will inevitably arise, and that the overwhelming majority of the working people will inevitably decide it in favour of their bourgeoisie.”*<sup>669</sup>

Trotsky also emphasized this idea in his *Transitional Program* in 1938: *“At the beginning of the war the sections of the Fourth International will inevitably feel themselves isolated: every war takes the national masses unawares and impels them to the side of the government apparatus. The internationalists will have to swim against the stream.”*<sup>670</sup>

It is the same method which leads the CWI to defend the existence of Israel – a colonial settler entity imposed by the imperialist powers by expelling the native Arab population.<sup>671</sup> As Peter Taaffe said, the CWI can not support the destruction of the Israeli Apartheid state and its replacement by a Palestinian state with minority rights for the Israeli Jews because *“the Israeli Jews would oppose this”*: *“... the idea of a Palestinian state with minority rights for Israelis still appears. Such an abstract slogan would never be accepted by the Israeli population.”*<sup>672</sup>

Following the same logic of adaption to social-imperialism, the CWI as well as the IMT has – like numerous other centrist forces – dropped their support for the Syrian Revolution long ago. Since a number of years, both organizations claim the liberation struggle has degenerated into a “sectarian civil war” with no side worthy of support:

*“The situations in Iraq and Syria constitute at the moment the epicentre of the crisis engulfing the Middle East. The order inherited from the legacy of imperialism is exploding in the most brutal manner, under the effect of the power struggles for influence taking place between various reactionary forces and regimes. (...) On Syria, some on the*

669 V.I. Lenin: Notes on the Tasks of our Delegation at The Hague (1922); in: LCW 33, p. 447

670 Leon Trotsky: *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International. The Transitional Program* (1938); in: *Documents of the Fourth International*, New York 1973, p. 200

671 On the RCIT’s critique of the CWI reactionary support for an Israeli state see Yossi Schwarz: *Occupied Palestine / Israel: Dead End for the Two-State Solution. The Palestinian Liberation Struggle and the CWI’s Centrist Adaptation to Zionism*, 12.11.2015, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/palestine-and-cwi/>; Michael Pröbsting: *The CWI’s “Socialist” Zionism and the Palestinian Liberation Struggle. A Reply from the RCIT*, 15.9.2014, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/cwi-and-israel/>

672 Peter Taaffe: *A socialist World is possible - the history of the CWI*, 31.08.2004 <http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/4779>

*international left have wrongly adopted some variant of a “campist” attitude, either by prettifying the -mostly jihadist- armed rebels fighting Assad, or by their apologism for the latter.”*<sup>673</sup>

*“This is fundamentally a result of the counter-revolution that unfolded in Syria following a genuine mass revolt against the rule of Assad in 2011, inspired by revolutionary movements in Tunisia and Egypt. In the absence of strong, united, working class organisations and a socialist leadership, sectarian and Islamic forces were able to step into the vacuum, aided by reactionary Gulf States and Turkey and by Western powers. This led to the degeneration of the mass revolt into a vicious, multi-faceted civil war.”*<sup>674</sup>

## **IMT Russia: No Support for “Chechen Separatism”**

Another example of such adaption to social-chauvinism is the position of the IMT and their Russian section on the independence struggle of the Chechen people. As we have stated above, the Chechen people declared an independent state after the collapse of the USSR in 1991/92 and defended their national rights heroically in two wars against the military aggression of overwhelming Russia. Today, it is the task of Russian Marxists to defend the Chechens against the brutal oppression by the Moscow’s local henchman, the butcher Ramzan Kadyrov.

However, the IMT takes a different stand. Despite the explicit wish of the Chechen people to gain their own state, the IMT adapts to Russian social-chauvinism. It denounces “separatism” and calls the Chechens and other oppressed people to stay in imperialist Russia:

*“Thus, there is nothing wrong with defending territorial integrity against separatism – be it in Russia or the Ukraine. Of course, this does not mean that we should not oppose a military solution of the issue, as long as it is possible. It does not mean that we should not oppose the atrocities of the bourgeois military, etc. But to support separatism under the slogan of the struggle of nations for self-determination is not necessary, especially separatism, which has the character of armed struggle like in the Donbas, the Caucasus or Northeast India. Often, such separatism does not lead to anything except to reduce the development of productive forces in the region. Here it is worth separating such separatism from the struggle for the liberation of the colonies. The inhabitants of Vietnam, Algeria and Palestine were not citizens of their oppressor countries. Therefore, the struggle for the creation of a national state in such cases merges with the struggle for equality. (...) We can often hear that nationally homogeneous states will experience a shift to class problems rather than national ones. Perhaps, this was true in the first half of the 20th century. However, many multinational empires have already collapsed, and*

673 CWI: Theses on Middle East, December 2016, <http://workerssocialistparty.co.za/committee-for-a-workers-international/cwi-international-executive-committee-2016/cwi-international-executive-committee-2016-doc-3/>

674 Niall Mulholland: Trump orders missile strikes against Shayrat air base, Committee for a Workers’ International, The Socialist issue 944, 12 April 2017 [https://www.socialistparty.org.uk/keyword/Committee\\_for\\_a\\_Workers\\_International/Cwi/25244/12-04-2017/attacks-ratchet-up-syrian-conflict-and-fuel-tensions-between-powers](https://www.socialistparty.org.uk/keyword/Committee_for_a_Workers_International/Cwi/25244/12-04-2017/attacks-ratchet-up-syrian-conflict-and-fuel-tensions-between-powers)

*modern Russia is already more homogeneous than at the beginning of the last century. Thus, there is no need to bring homogeneity to the absolute. (...) If we separate the territories inhabited by small nationalities from countries, immigrants will not disappear anywhere. And modern nationalism is directed mainly against them. All of these leads to the conclusion that at current stage of development of capitalism, there is no point in supporting the struggle to separate some nations from others, especially armed ones. It is better to fight against any wars that bourgeois governments are waging and for the future socialist revolution.”*<sup>675</sup>

This statement of the Russian IMT comrades betrays a gross accommodation to social-chauvinism! It is utterly wrong to counterpose the national liberation struggles of the Vietnamese, Algerian and Palestinian people to those of the people in Chechnya or Kashmir. It is only a formal difference that they might have the passport of their oppressor state. It was certainly not the voluntary wish of the Chechen or the Kashmiri people to have the passport of their oppressor state but was rather forced on them! So how can this fact be used by “Marxists” in order to refuse support for their liberation struggle?!

It is certainly true that Russia “*is already more homogeneous than at the beginning of the last century*”. But what does this mean? Does the IMT suggest that Moscow has the right to oppress a certain amount of people albeit not as many as it did at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?! No, Marxists oppose every individual case of national oppression. We support the liberation struggle of oppressed nations – irrespective if it is armed or unarmed and irrespective if the oppressor state subjugates one, five or ten smaller people!

Another example for the social-chauvinist logic of the CWI’s policy is their support for the “*British Jobs for British Workers*” strike in 2008. At that time British workers at the Lindsey Oil Refinery wanted to stop the hiring of migrant workers. Shamefully this reactionary strike received support from the trade union bureaucracy and several pseudo-Trotskyist organizations like the CWI and the IMT. Until this very day, the British section of the CWI even proudly boasts that one of its members was a leader in this strike!

It is in the same logic that the CWI leadership opposes the right of migrants to cross borders without any imperialist border control. Why? Well, you know, “the workers will not understand” (obviously the CWI only has in mind the British labor aristocratic workers and not the mass of the workers of the world living and suffering in the South!)<sup>676</sup>

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675 IMT Russia: Украина и национальный вопрос (Ukraine and the national question), <http://www.1917.com/XML/E3YCowmZXwKhYk2bWYgKwrZ-lZ4.xml> (our translation)

676 We note, in passing, that rejection of “open borders” under the pretext of “progressive positions” is a phenomenon not limited to the CWI. For example, Angela Nagle recently published an essay “*The Left Case against Open Borders*” which has been cheered by right-wing chauvinists for obvious reasons. (American Affairs, Volume II, Number 4 (Winter 2018), pp. 17–30, <https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2018/11/the-left-case-against-open-borders/>). Some groups like the CWG even manage to legitimize their opposition to open borders with pseudo-Trotskyist “arguments. (See on this Michael Pröbsting: Patriotic “Anti-Capitalism” for Fools. Yet Again on the CWG/LCC’s Support for “Workers” Immigration Control and Protectionism in the US, 30.5.2017, <https://www.>



*“Of course, we have to stand in defence of the most oppressed sections of the working class, including migrant workers and other immigrants. We staunchly oppose racism. We defend the right to asylum, and argue for the end of repressive measures like detention centres. At the same time, given the outlook of the majority of the working class, we cannot put forward a bald [sic] slogan of ‘open borders’ or ‘no immigration controls’, which would be a barrier to convincing workers of a socialist programme, both on immigration and other issues. Such a demand would alienate the vast majority of the working class, including many more long-standing immigrants, who would see it as a threat to jobs, wages and living conditions. Nor can we make the mistake of dismissing workers who express concerns about immigration as ‘racists’. While racism and nationalism are clearly elements in anti-immigrant feeling, there are many consciously anti-racist workers who are concerned about the scale of immigration.”*<sup>677</sup>

The CWI’s adaption to social-chauvinism is also reflected in its support for Brexit, i.e. Britain leaving the European Union. As we have demonstrated in a special pamphlet on this issue, the CWI leadership justifies this stand by claiming that the (imperialist) national state is preferable to the (imperialist) European Union.<sup>678</sup>

In contrast to these cowardly opportunists, Marxists consistently fight against all forms of social-chauvinism and imperialist aggression. The RCIT and like-minded revolutionaries are not content with abstract phrases of “anti-imperialism” but take the side of the oppressed peoples fighting against an imperialist Great Power. The decisive criterion for Marxists is not if this or that politically correct position is already shared by the majority of workers. It is exactly the task of a revolutionary vanguard organization to withstand such pressure and to defend the positions based on the Marxist program. It is our task to transmit such correct ideas into the working class and not to wait until the majority of workers develop such positions by themselves!

Hence, while we do not politically support the non-revolutionary forces at the top of these struggles, we don’t take our disagreement with such views as a pretext to desert a just liberation struggle. No, revolutionaries must support all legitimate liberation struggles against any Great Powers even if such a struggle is led by non-revolutionary forces. This was the method of the Bolsheviks and the Trotskyists and this is our method today!

*“Whoever directly or indirectly supports the system of colonization and protector-*

[thecommunists.net/theory/cwg-lcc-us-protectionism/](http://thecommunists.net/theory/cwg-lcc-us-protectionism/); Michael Pröbsting and Andrew Walton: The Slogan of “Workers’” Immigration Control: A Concession to Social-Chauvinism, 27.3.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/workers-immigration-control/>; Michael Pröbsting and Andrew Walton: A Social-Chauvinist Defence of the Indefensible. Another Reply to the CWG/LCC’s Support for “Workers’” Immigration Control, 14.5.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/cwg-immigration-control/>

<sup>677</sup> Socialist Party: British Perspectives 2013 (Congress Document), [http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/partydoc/British\\_Perspectives\\_2013\\_a\\_Socialist\\_Party\\_congress\\_document/16413](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/partydoc/British_Perspectives_2013_a_Socialist_Party_congress_document/16413)

<sup>678</sup> See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: The British Left and the EU-Referendum: The Many Faces of pro-UK or pro-EU Social-Imperialism (Chapter II.2. SPEW/CWI: The Hidden Patriotic “Socialists”), August 2015, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/british-left-and-eu-referendum/>

ates, the domination of British capital in India, the domination of Japan in Korea or in Manchuria, of France in Indochina or in Africa, whoever does not fight against colonial enslavement, whoever does not support the uprisings of the oppressed nations and their independence, whoever defends or idealizes Gandhism, that is, the policy of passive resistance on questions which can be solved only by force of arms, is, despite good intentions or bad, a lackey, an apologist, an agent of the imperialists, of the slaveholders, of the militarists, and helps them to prepare new wars in pursuit of their old aims or new."<sup>679</sup>

## Did Lenin “correct” his Program of Revolutionary Defeatism?

Unfortunately, the CWI’s and IMT’s revisionism goes so far that they explicitly claim that Lenin would have “exaggerated” his formula of revolutionary defeatism and later corrected himself. Based on such historic falsification, these centrists seek justification for their own dropping of defeatism and adapting to social-imperialism.

In a long programmatic essay, the IMT’s central leader Alan Woods attempts to argue such a case:

*“The difference between abstract politics and the dialectical method is shown by the evolution of Lenin’s position on revolutionary tactics in the period 1914 to 1917. In August 1914, the split in the 2nd International created an entirely new situation. In the light of the unprecedented betrayal of the Social Democracy, it was necessary to regroup and re-educate the small and isolated forces of Marxism internationally. Lenin in this period laid heavy emphasis on the basic principles of revolutionary internationalism, above all the impossibility of returning to the old International, and implacable opposition to all forms of patriotism (revolutionary defeatism). In order to combat the doubts and vacillations of the Bolshevik leaders, Lenin gave the sharpest possible expression to these ideas, such as “turn the imperialist war into civil war,” and “the defeat of one’s own bourgeoisie is the lesser evil.” It is arguable that, on occasion, he exaggerated [sic]. It would not be the first time that, in order to “straighten the stick,” Lenin bent it too far in the other direction [sic]. On the fundamental issues, there is no doubt whatever that Lenin was right. But unless we understand his method, not just what he wrote but why he wrote it, we can end in a complete mess.*

*Ultra-left and sectarian groups always repeat Lenin’s words without understanding a single line. They take his writings on war as something absolute, outside of time and space. They do not understand that, at this time, Lenin was not writing for the masses, but for a tiny handful of cadres in a given historical context. Unless we understand this, we can make a fundamental mistake. In order to combat chauvinism, and stress the impossibility of any reconciliation with the Social Democracy, and particularly its left wing (Kautsky and the “centre”), Lenin used some formulations which were undoubtedly exaggerated [sic]. Such exaggerations, for example, led him to characterise*

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<sup>679</sup> Leon Trotsky: Declaration to the Antiwar Congress at Amsterdam (1932), in: Writings 1932, S. 153

Trotsky's position as "centrism" which was entirely incorrect. Endless confusions have arisen from the one sided interpretation of Lenin's position of this period.

When Lenin returned to Russia after March 1917, he fundamentally modified his position [sic]. Not that his opposition to the imperialist war was any less, or his opposition to social chauvinism any less implacable. He continued to be vigilant with regard to any backsliding on the part of the Bolshevik leaders on the question of the war. But here it was no longer a question of theory, but of the living movement of the masses. Lenin's position after March 1917 bore little resemblance to the slogans he had advanced earlier [sic]. He saw that, in the concrete circumstances, the mass of the workers and peasants had illusions in "the defence of the Revolution," as they understood it. It was absolutely necessary to take this into account, if the Bolsheviks were to connect to the real mood of the masses. If Lenin had maintained the old position, it would have been merely doctrinaire. It would have entirely cut the Bolsheviks off from the real movement of the workers and peasants. Only hopeless sectarians and doctrinaires could fail to see the difference. (...) As a matter of fact, the slogans of "revolutionary defeatism" played no role in preparing the masses for the October revolution."<sup>680</sup>

Hardly any sentence of this long quote makes sense. Alan Woods, who ridicules the "ultra-left sects", neither understand Lenin's and Trotsky's position nor historical facts.

Woods claims that Lenin "exaggerated" the Bolshevik defeatist program against the imperialist war. So that would mean that he later withdrew it. As a matter of fact, as we demonstrated above, the Bolsheviks, the Comintern and later the Fourth International later confirmed all the essential ideas and slogans which Lenin raised in 1914.

Trotsky himself stressed the crucial importance of the principles of revolutionary defeatism in the program of the Fourth International: "The fundamental content of the politics of the international proletariat will consequently be a struggle against imperialism and its war. In this struggle the basic principle is: "the chief enemy is in your own country" or "the defeat of your own (imperialist) government is the lesser evil." (...) It will be the duty of the international proletariat to aid the oppressed countries in their war against oppressors. The same duty applies in regard to aiding the USSR, or whatever other workers' government might arise before the war or during the war. The defeat of every imperialist government in the struggle with the workers' state or with a colonial country is the lesser evil."<sup>681</sup>

Rudolf Klement, another leader of the Fourth International, repeated the validity of the Leninist program of revolutionary defeatism: "In the application of revolutionary defeatism against the imperialist bourgeoisie and its state there can be no fundamental difference, regardless of whether the latter is "friendly" or hostile to the cause supported by the proletariat, whether it is in—treacherous—alliance with the

680 Alan Woods: Marxism and the State, International Marxist Tendency, December 2008, <http://www.marxist.com/marxism-and-the-state-part-one.htm>

681 Leon Trotsky: The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International, p. 200 (emphasize in the original)

*allies of the proletariat (Stalin, the bourgeoisie of the semi-colonial counties, the colonial peoples, anti-fascist liberalism), or is conducting a war against them. The methods of revolutionary defeatism remain unaltered: revolutionary propaganda, irreconcilable opposition to the regime, the class struggle from its purely economic up to its highest political form (the armed uprising), fraternisation of the troops, transformation of the war into the civil war.”*<sup>682</sup>

Alan Woods claims that Lenin changed his position after the February Revolution in 1917 when he returned to Russia. This is simply a centrist invention! What Lenin did was not to give up the position of defeatism or the necessity of the transformation of the war into the civil war. What he rather did was to *adapt* the same program to the new conditions and to pedagogically explain it to the masses. This is not a change of position but a change of presentation of the very same position. This became evident from a speech Lenin gave to delegations for the Third Congress of the Comintern in 1921:

*“At the beginning of the war we Bolsheviks adhered to a single slogan — that of civil war, and a ruthless one at that. We branded as a traitor everyone who did not support the idea of civil war. But when we came back to Russia in March 1917 we changed our position entirely. When we returned to Russia and spoke to the peasants and workers, we saw that they all stood for defence of the homeland, of course in quite a different sense from the Mensheviks, and we could not call these ordinary workers and peasants scoundrels and traitors. We described this as “honest defenceism”. I intend to write a big article about this and publish all the material. On April 7 I published my theses, in which I called for caution and patience. Our original stand at the beginning of the war was correct: it was important then to form a definite and resolute core. Our subsequent stand was correct too. It proceeded from the assumption that the masses had to be won over. At that time we already rejected the idea of the immediate overthrow of the Provisional Government. I wrote: “It should be overthrown, for it is an oligarchic, and not a people’s government, and is unable to provide peace or bread. But it cannot be overthrown just now’ for it is being kept in power by the workers’ Soviets and so far enjoys the confidence of the workers. We are not Blanquists, we do not want to rule with a minority of the working class against the majority.” The Cadets, who are shrewd politicians, immediately noticed the contradiction between our former position and the new one, and called us hypocrites. But as, in the same breath, they had called us spies, traitors, scoundrels and German agents, the former appellation made no impression. The first crisis occurred on April 20. Milyukov’s Note on the Dardanelles showed the government up for what it was an imperialist government. After this the armed masses of the soldiery moved against the building of the government and overthrew Milyukov. They were led by a non-Party man named Linde. This movement had not been organised by the Party. We characterised that movement at the time as follows: something more than an armed demonstration, and something less than an armed uprising. At our conference on April 22 the Left trend demanded the immediate overthrow of the Government. The Central Committee, on the contrary, declared against the slogan of*

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682 Rudolf Klement: Principles and Tactics in War

*civil war, and we instructed all agitators in the provinces to deny the outrageous lie about the Bolsheviks wanting civil war. On April 22 I wrote that the slogan "Down with the Provisional Government" was incorrect' since if we did not have the majority of the people behind us this slogan would be either an empty phrase or adventurism."*<sup>683</sup>

So we see that Lenin and the Bolsheviks fought for the very same strategic goals – transforming the imperialist war into civil war, fighting for the overthrow of the bourgeois government and for working class power – in all these years. They first tried to win the vanguard for such a program and later the masses. It could not be otherwise as one can not win the masses without winning the vanguard before. But the CWI and the IMT never even tried to win the vanguard for revolutionary defeatism, let alone the masses. They excuse themselves by referring to the problem that "*the workers don't understand this*". As if the CWI and the IMT would be confronted with the task of winning the majority of the working class! They never were nearly as strong as the Bolsheviks were even in their weakest phase! Before they cudgel their brain about the challenge to win the majority of the working class, they should try to win a few thousand vanguard workers for revolutionary defeatism in a war! They did not and they could not. Why? Because they themselves, the leaders and probably many amongst their membership who were trained for years in opportunism, did not share a Marxist position on the imperialist war! This is the truth which the CWI and IMT leaders try to hide behind their phrases on what the workers supposedly understand and don't understand!

As we see, the CWI's and the IMT's interpretation of the classic Marxist position on revolutionary defeatism is based on thorough falsification. It is however not an accidental falsification. The whole tradition of Ted Grant, which shaped both the CWI of Peter Taaffe and the IMT of Alan Woods, is marked by the systematic adaption to the ideological prejudices of the reformist bureaucracy. Hence the CWI/IMT nonsense of the peaceful transformation of capitalism into socialism, the strange idea of the possibility of such a transformation via a "socialist majority" in the bourgeois parliament, the characterization of police men and women as "workers in uniform" and so on.<sup>684</sup> This extreme right-wing opportunism also finds naturally its expression in the issue of imperialist wars which is one of the sharpest forms of class antagonism.

There can be no doubt that the CWI and the IMT are useless centrists in the coming period of accelerated rivalry between the Great Powers and liberation struggles of the oppressed people. Trapped in the logic of social-imperialism,

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683 V. I. Lenin: *The Third Congress of the Communist International, Speeches At A Meeting Of Members Of The German, Polish, Czechoslovak, Hungarian And Italian Delegations*, 11.7.1921, in: LCW Vol. 42, p. 325

684 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *Five days that shook Britain but didn't wake up the left. The bankruptcy of the left during the August uprising of the oppressed in Britain: Its features, its roots and the way forward*, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 1, pp. 30-31 (September 2011), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/britain-left-and-the-uprising/sp-and-committee-for-a-workers-international>

the can neither apply a program of revolutionary defeatism in conflicts between Great Powers nor can they fight for a pro-liberationist program of supporting the struggle of the oppressed.

## The Russian Socialist Movement: Confused Eclecticists

Let us finally briefly deal with another centrist group in Russia which includes a number of members of the Mandelist "Fourth International". To their credit, this organization recognizes the right of peoples to self-determination and opposes the language law which discriminates the non-Russian people. Likewise, they are aware of the imperialist character of Russia and oppose its military adventures in Syria and the Ukraine. In this regard, they contrast favorable from the Great Russian Stalinists à la Zyuganov et al. However, they also feel obligated to state their opposition to an independent Chechen state! Such they write in their program:

*"The RSM recognizes the right of peoples to self-determination, because it understands that forcibly keeping nations within Russia from a historical perspective will not lead to anything except bloody conflicts and the collapse of the country. At the same time, we believe that the separation of Chechnya or other nations from Russia will not bring the working people of these peoples either genuine independence, peace or prosperity. The formation of small, economically weak states inevitably transforms them into impoverished semi-colonies of imperialist countries, destined to plunder and political instability."*<sup>685</sup>

It is certainly true that real prosperity is only possible through a socialist revolution of the working class in Chechnya, Russia and internationally. But why on earth should the Chechens prefer to live in an impoverished colony instead of an impoverished semi-colony where they are at least not humiliated and threatened every day by Russian soldiers and their local lackeys?! Or does the RSM want to deny the fact that Chechnya is a devastated colony under the bloody boots of Putin and Kadyrov?!

Unfortunately the RSM manages to combines such concessions to Russian chauvinism with preaching bizarre illusions in European imperialism. Such the RSM proposes that *"a socialist Russia should join the European Union"*! Such an idiotic proposal is combined with support of the reformist perspective of reforming the EU. Again, the RSM is not content to repeat this nonsense of the *Party of the European Left* but goes further and claims that this would be the best road to a *"world republic of Soviets"*!

*"We are optimistic about the possibility of socialist Russia joining the structures of the European Union and other integration structures under the condition that such accession does not mean our subjugation to international imperialism and the logic of capital accumulation. We support the proposals of the European left-wing parties and*

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685 Russian Socialist Movement: Программа (Program), <http://anticapitalist.ru/programm/> (our translation)

politicians for the debureaucratization of the EU and its transformation from the current top-level union of states into a single "political nation". Perhaps, such a scenario is the best path to the world republic of the Soviets today, which we dreamed of a hundred years ago in our country." <sup>686</sup>

Well, as a matter of fact, the EU has always been an imperialist institution and can not be otherwise. Calling to join it "but without imperialist subjugation" is as realistic like joining a grizzly bear in its cave "under the condition that it does not touch you". Not contend with such a bizarre idea, the RSM leaders also suggest that "*debureaucratization of the EU*" would be sufficient to make it an instrument of advance socialism! Neither in Russia nor in Europe is any socialist revolution possible by "*debureaucratization*". Such an advance is only possible by expropriating the capitalist class and destroying the bourgeois state apparatus!

How do the RSM leaders arrive at such pro-EU imperialist conclusions? Could it play a role that a number of their cadres are close to the *European University at Saint Petersburg* which is funded by the EU?! Or could it be connected with their orientation to the bureaucratic leaders of the CLR trade unions who promote a kind of class-collaborationism a la ILO?

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686 Russian Socialist Movement: Социализм и загадка наций (No to Imperial language policies!), 27.06.2016, <http://anticapitalist.ru/2016/06/27/337/> (our translation)





*Part 5:*

*The Task of Organizing  
the Anti-Imperialist Struggle*



## XXIX: Building the Revolutionary World Party in the Age of Great Power Rivalry

No one with open eyes can deny that the world is heading towards a period of catastrophes and profound upheavals. The decay of capitalism pushes the Great Powers – the old ones as well as the new ones – to fight each other and to tighten the exploitation of the oppressed peoples. This provokes inevitable trade wars, diplomatic tensions and, ultimately, major wars and a world war between the imperialist powers. It results, equally inevitable, in economic squeezing of the poor countries by the multinational corporations as well as in an increasing number of military interventions in order to secure imperialist domination.

Such a development is not caused by particularly bad individuals. If Trump would be replaced by someone else, the U.S. might have a President who sends less Twitter messages and who masters the English Grammar. But the fundamental dynamic of world politics would not be different. It is capitalism in its decay, and not individual lunatics, which threatens to lead the world into the abyss.

Salvation will not *happen*. Salvation can only be *enforced*. Enforced *against* the imperialist monopolies and governments. Enforced by the *powerful intervention* of the working class and the oppressed peoples. An intervention which will not and which can not take place spontaneously but which has to be *planned and organized*. There can be no plan without planners and no organization without organizers. In other words, there can be no conscious intervention of the working class and the oppressed peoples without a revolutionary party. And no party can come into existence without the preceding creation and building of a pre-party organization.<sup>687</sup> Such a party can elaborate a program, a perspective, a plan for struggle. The explicit thesis of the Communist International has not lost its validity: “*The Communist Party is the principal and fundamental weapon for the emancipation of the working class.*”<sup>688</sup>

Leon Trotsky summarized this conclusion in 1924 in one of his fundamental documents, *The Lessons of October*, with the following trenchant words: „*Without a party, apart from a party, over the head of a party, or with a substitute for a party, the proletarian revolution cannot conquer. That is the principal lesson of the past de-*

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687 On the RCIT's analysis of the revolutionary party see e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice. Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of Organized Struggle for Bolshevism, Vienna 2014, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/rcit-party-building/>

688 Communist International: Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution, approved by the Second Comintern Congress (1920); in: John Riddell (Ed.): Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite! (Volume 1), Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress of the Communist International, 1920, p. 200

cade.”<sup>689</sup>

Since capitalism exists, and can only exist, as a *world* system, the working class must organize and fight not only on the national but, simultaneously, also on the international terrain. It is impossible to fight against the imperialist powers in America, Europe and Asia with a nationally isolated organization. National-centeredness is always wrong. But it is devastating in the age of Great Power rivalry when the working class needs an organization which is able to withstand the inevitable national pressures and which can raise its program above the national borders and above any national-centered interests.

We repeat what the RCIT has emphasized already many times: From its beginning, a truly revolutionary party or pre-party organization must be an *international formation*. Only as an international organization we can develop a truly internationalist outlook, internalize international experience and work as internationalist revolutionaries. If a group exists for too long as a national organization, it runs into serious danger of developing a nation-centered experience and perspective. And this means, ultimately, a non-revolutionary experience and perspective!

Furthermore, the international character of the party corresponds to the nature of the revolutionary program and activity. Just as the revolutionary program can only live, breathe, and develop in an organization of revolutionary militants, so can the international program as well as proletarian internationalism and solidarity only exist in an *international* organization. Without it, national centeredness and finally nationalist deviations are unavoidable. Trotsky once rightly remarked: “*Marxist policies ‘in one country’ are as impossible as the construction of a socialist society ‘in one country’.*”<sup>690</sup>

Such a conception is true for both a party and a pre-party organization, as Trotsky explained in numerous articles and letters:

„From its very first steps the Opposition must therefore act as an international faction – as did the Communists in the days of the publication of the **Communist Manifesto**, or in the Zimmerwald Left at the beginning of the war. In all these cases the groups were for the most part small numerically or it was a matter of isolated individuals; but they nevertheless acted as an international organization. In the epoch of imperialism such a position is a hundred times more imperative than in the days of Marx.

Those who believe that the International Left will someday take shape as a simple sum of national groups, and that therefore the international unification can be postponed indefinitely until the national groups “grow strong,” attribute only a secondary importance to the international factor and by this very reason take the path of national opportunism.

It is undeniable that each country has greatest peculiarities of its own; but in our epoch these peculiarities can be assayed and exploited in a revolutionary way only from

689 Leon Trotsky: *The Lessons of October* (1924); in: Leon Trotsky: *The Challenge of the Left Opposition* (1923-25), Pathfinder Press, New York 1975, p. 252

690 Leon Trotsky: *Unifying the Left Opposition* (1930); in: *Writings 1930*, p. 99

*an internationalist point of view. On the other hand, only an international organization can be the bearer of an international ideology.*

*Can anyone seriously believe that isolated Oppositional national groups, divided among themselves and left to their own resources, are capable of finding the correct road by themselves? No, this is a certain path to national degeneration, sectarianism, and ruin. The tasks facing the International Opposition are enormously difficult. Only by being indissolubly tied together, only by working out answers jointly to all current problems, only by creating their international platform, only by mutually verifying each one of their steps, that is, only by uniting in a single international body, will the national groups of the Opposition be able to carry out their historic task.”*<sup>691</sup>

## **Changes in the Conditions to Build a Revolutionary World Party**

Some critics might object that the conditions for building a revolutionary party are very different from the times of Lenin. This is, of course, true. But one has to understand *wherein exactly* lays the difference. The development of the productive forces has certainly important consequences for the education level, the skills, the communication technologies, etc. Today, the education level of the working class is definitely much higher today than it was in the past. This makes it easier for revolutionaries to spread their agitation and propaganda. Internet and smartphone also change the way of communication and make international collaboration much easier. Killing also has become much easier for armies with modern machine guns, drones and nuclear weapons.

But all these technological developments have not altered the essence of capitalism and imperialism. Exploitation of the working class continues to exist as well as misery of the poor peasants. The weapons have changed but the reactionary character of imperialist wars has remained the same.

This is not to deny that there have been significant changes which affect the revolutionary work. As we have already elaborated in *The Great Robbery of the South* and also briefly in this book, there has been a significant shift of capitalist production and, consequently, of the international working class from the old imperialist countries to China and the semi-colonial South. This has profound consequences for the priorities of building a Revolutionary World Party as such an organization must have a focus on those countries where nowadays about 85% of the international proletariat works and fights.

One hundred years ago, when  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the world proletariat was located in Europe and North America, there existed a certain justification of focusing revolutionary work to these regions. However, even at that time, the communists emphasized the importance of work among the colonial people. However, today, when the relation of forces has turned around and when more than  $\frac{4}{5}$  of the world proletariat is located in the new imperialist countries like China and

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<sup>691</sup> Leon Trotsky: An Open Letter to All Members of the Leninbund (1930); in: Writings 1930, pp. 91-92

Russia as well as in the semi-colonial South, under such conditions we consider any backward insistence on focusing party-building still on the old imperialist states as backward *First-Worldism*. Such *First-Worldism* is thoroughly reactionary and an obstacle in building the Revolutionary World Party!

Another change which has to be taken into account is the fact that the imperialist states have become much richer. This means that the ruling class has gained the opportunity to build a more finely woven super-structure in order to integrate and manipulate the working class and the youth. Likewise, their resources to bribe and integrate the labor aristocracy have increased.

In addition, we can observe the following, highly contradictory development: in the past decades of globalization a peculiar discrepancy has emerged respectively has been reinforced. On one hand the world has become "integrated" more than ever before – not only economically but also socially via access to information (internet, smartphone, etc.), migration, travelling, etc. On the other hand, social inequality – both between countries as well as within countries – also has substantially increased.

As a result of this combination an enhanced clash between two worlds is taking place – between the rich and the poor countries, between the upper strata and the lower strata. A right wing reflection of this development is Samuel Huntington's famous thesis of "*the Clash between Civilizations*".<sup>692</sup> Such a clash pushes the liberal middle class and the labor aristocracy to stubbornly defend their privileges against "the plebs" in the inner-cities and suburbs and against the "backward barbarians" from the South. This finds its ideological justification in ideologies like defending bourgeois secularism against the "*fanatic Muslims*" or defending the institutions dominated by "*educated people*" against the "*stupid, fake-news manipulated people*". Of course, the middle class and the labor aristocracy are also suffering in the age of austerity. But compared with the huge majority of the world working class – with which the middle class and the labor aristocracy increasingly comes into contact – they are still highly privileged. This contradiction is intensified by the fact that meanwhile the bulk of the global capitalist value is no longer created in the old imperialist countries.

This is an important factor, albeit not the only one<sup>693</sup>, for the growing polarization inside the "so-called" left in imperialist countries and for the hostility of many reformists and centrists against the uprisings of migrant youth and against the Arab Revolution.

In other words, these developments are massively reinforcing the tendencies of aristocratism among the reformist and centrist left. This makes it all the more

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692 See Samuel P. Huntington: *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1996

693 As reasons for the strengthening of reactionary developments among significant sectors of the reformist and centrist milieu in the old imperialist countries one has to add a) the accelerating rivalry between the Great Powers and b) the political defeats which the labor movement has suffered after 1968 as well after the collapse of Stalinism in 1989-91 and which is expressed in its political, ideological and organizational decline.

urgent for revolutionaries to fight against the aristocratism and to orientate to the lower strata of the proletariat and to the popular masses in the semi-colonial world.

Finally, and most importantly, the revolutionary forces are much weaker today and the class consciousness of the proletariat is more backward than this was the case hundred years ago. At the same time, the influence of the reformist bureaucracy and of petty-bourgeois populist forces has substantially increased.

Recognizing such a disadvantageous development does not equal pessimism and certainly does not justify the skepticism and cynicism which is so widespread among the so-called left.

First, one must not forget that the main factors for the development of the consciousness of the masses are the objective developments of the contradictions of the capitalist system as well as between the classes and states. It was first and foremost not the small underground literature of the Bolsheviks which galvanized the consciousness of the workers and poor peasants but rather their brutal living conditions as well as the wars in 1904/05 respectively in 1914-17 – in particular when the ruling class suffered severe defeats and lost its prestige. There can be no doubt that the coming period is full of such economic and ecological catastrophes, political crisis and military disasters. This will provide Marxists with ample opportunities to intervene in class struggles and to explain to the workers and oppressed the necessity to organize on the basis of a revolutionary program.

Secondly, it is true that revolutionaries today are much smaller in numbers than they were one hundred years ago. But the acceleration of the contradictions between the states and between the classes will inevitably weaken and undermine the reformist and populist apparatus and open the road for authentic Marxists. The ideas of social-imperialism and pacifism will be exposed by reactionary Great Power policy and political crisis. The line of working class internationalism based on the independence of all Great Powers and on support for all liberation struggles will gain in attractiveness.

In our opinion, revolutionaries should draw the following consequences from such an assessment: a) that uniting the small forces on a principled basis is highly urgent and b) that a new party can only be built by fusing our program with the new layers of working class and youth activists which are gaining experience in the struggles. They might be still politically raw but militant and open for new ideas. This is the milieu to which revolutionaries must orientate and with whose aid the Revolutionary World Party will be built!

## Orientation to the New Militant Layers of the Working Class and Youth

At this point it is useful to draw attention to the following issue. One of the main dividing lines today between revolutionary Marxism and the various shades of centrism is the approach towards the “backward” masses. Such “backward” masses could be the workers and poor peasants rallying against Great Powers and their local dictators under religious-inspired petty-bourgeois ideologies, an oppressed people fighting for freedom under the banner of nationalism, the migrant youth in the banlieues around Paris in 2005, the black and migrant youth in Tottenham in 2011 or the peri-urban masses demonstrating in Yellow Vests in France in 2018.

As we have discussed on numerous occasions, Marxists must energetically *support* such struggles – despite the petty-bourgeois leadership and despite a politically less developed consciousness of the masses.<sup>694</sup> In contrast to various centrists who arrogantly glance down to the “backward” masses and who prefer to stand aside of their struggles (or even to support their enemies in the name of “secularism” or “public security”!), revolutionaries wholeheartedly side with and join such liberation struggles of the workers and oppressed. The centrists say that such masses are hopelessly backward and one should wait until they have learned and only then one could join forces with them. In contrast, the Marxists insist on joining the fighting masses already now while they still follow wrong ideologies but struggle against their oppressors and, during and in the midst of such struggles, we will help them to politically learn and to advance their consciousness.

Trotsky aptly summarized these different approaches:

*„Nevertheless, Ledebour’s position even on this question does not leave the precincts of centrism. Ledebour demands that a battle be waged against colonial oppression; he is ready to vote in parliament against colonial credits; he is ready to take upon himself a fearless defense of the victims of a crushed colonial insurrection. But Ledebour will not participate in preparing a colonial insurrection. Such work he considers putschism, adventurism, Bolshevism. And therein is the whole gist of the matter.*

*What characterizes Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude to-*

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694 See on this e.g. RCIT: France: Defend the “Yellow Vests” Movement against State Repression! 03.12.2018, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/france-defend-the-yellow-vests-movement-against-state-repression/>; Nina Gunić and Michael Pröbsting: These are not “riots” – this is an uprising of the poor in the cities of Britain! The strategic task: From the uprising to the revolution!, 10.8.2011, <http://www.rkob.net/new-english-language-site-1/uprising-of-the-poor-in-britain/>; Michael Pröbsting: The August uprising of the poor and nationally and racially oppressed in Britain: What would a revolutionary organisation have done?, 18.8.2011, <http://www.rkob.net/new-english-language-site-1/august-uprising-what-should-have-been-done/>; Bericht der RKO-Delegation über ihren Aufenthalt in London 2011, <http://www.rkob.net/international/berichte-uprising-in-gb/>, Michael Pröbsting: Britain: “The left” and the August Uprising, 1 September 2011, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/britain-left-and-the-uprising/>



*ward oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics. Bolshevism does not confine itself to recognizing their "right" to self-determination and to parliamentary protests against the trampling upon of this right. Bolshevism penetrates into the midst of the oppressed nations; it raises them up against their oppressors; it ties up their struggle with the struggle of the proletariat in capitalist countries; it instructs the oppressed Chinese, Hindus, or Arabs in the art of insurrection and it assumes full responsibility for this work in the face of civilized executioners. Here only does Bolshevism begin, that is, revolutionary Marxism in action. Everything that does not step over this boundary remains centrism."*

This is related to the strategic difference between Marxism and centrism, between Bolshevism and Menshevism on the issue towards which layers to focus in party building. The Mensheviks always orientated to the intelligentsia and the upper strata of the working class while the Bolsheviks primarily orientated to the lower strata of the working class (including the youth). Trotsky summarized this approach in the well-worded formula:

*„The strength and meaning of Bolshevism consists in the fact that it appeals to oppressed and exploited masses and not to the upper strata of the working class.“*<sup>695</sup>

This difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism in party building was related to the differences in the strategic lines of the revolution. The Mensheviks considered the liberal bourgeoisie as the central ally of the proletariat in the coming the revolution. On the other hand, they thought of the peasantry as a conservative, backward mass which could not play any progressive role in class struggle. In contrast, the Bolsheviks considered the liberal bourgeoisie as a central enemy in the revolutionary struggle while they viewed the poor masses of the peasantry as the most important ally of the working class. Lenin summarized these differences in the strategic orientation like this:

*“The experience of the 1905 Revolution and of the subsequent counter-revolutionary period in Russia teaches us that in our country two lines of revolution could be observed, in the sense that there was a struggle between two classes—the proletariat and the liberal bourgeoisie—for leadership of the masses. The proletariat advanced in a revolutionary fashion, and was leading the democratic peasantry towards the overthrow of the monarchy and the landowners. That the peasantry revealed revolutionary tendencies in the democratic sense was proved on a mass scale by all the great political events (...) The first line of the Russian bourgeois-democratic revolution, as deduced from the facts and not from “strategic” prattle, was marked by a resolute struggle of the proletariat, which was irresolutely followed by the peasantry. Both these classes fought against the monarchy and the landowners. The lack of strength and resolution in these classes led to their defeat (although a partial breach was made in the edifice of the autocracy).*

*The behaviour of the liberal bourgeoisie was the second line. We Bolsheviks have always affirmed, especially since the spring of 1906, that this line was represented by the*

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695 Leon Trotsky: Perspectives and Tasks in the East. Speech on the third anniversary of the Communist University for the Toilers of the East (21. April 1924); in: Leon Trotsky Speaks, Pathfinder 1972, p. 205

*Cadets and Octobrists as a single force. The 1905-15 decade has proved the correctness of our view. At the decisive moments of the struggle, the Cadets, together with the Octobrists, betrayed democracy and went to the aid of the tsar and the landowners. (...)*

*The Bolsheviks helped the proletariat consciously to follow the first line, to fight with supreme courage and to lead the peasants. The Mensheviks were constantly slipping into the second line; they demoralised the proletariat by adapting its movement to the liberals (...). Only these trends – the Bolshevik and the Menshevik – manifested themselves in the politics of the masses in 1904-08, and later, in 1908-14. Why was that? It was because only these trends had firm class roots—the former in the proletariat, the latter in the liberal bourgeoisie.”*<sup>696</sup>

Naturally, the concrete situation in world capitalism in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century differs from Russia a century ago. But the basic differences in class orientation between opportunism and Marxism have remained the same. The reformists orientate towards an alliance with a “progressive” sector of the bourgeoisie, with a Great Power opposing U.S. imperialism, with the enlightened intelligentsia, etc. In contrast, they despise the “primitive” masses, the “uneducated” lower strata, the religious-minded migrant youth, the “fanatic” people in the South shouting “*Allahu akbar*”, etc. The centrists usually follow them and prefer the company of the reformists, of the “educated” people at the universities and the labor bureaucrats than the politically raw workers and the migrant youth of the banlieues.

The Bolshevism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is categorically opposed to any alliance with sectors of the imperialist bourgeoisie or with any Great Power. While applying the united front tactic to the labor bureaucrats and progressive academic whenever it is necessary in order to mobilize the masses, revolutionaries focus on working among these “backward” masses. It is impossible to build a revolutionary party in the 21<sup>st</sup> century without fully understanding this question!

## Reformism and Centrism as Obstacles

The struggle against imperialism and war must be based on two fundamental and interrelated principles:

- a) Fight against *all* Great Powers – both in East and West;
- b) Support *all* liberation struggles of the workers and oppressed peoples against any Great Power or its reactionary lackey.

Without basing its policy on these two, inter-related principles no organization can implement a consistent anti-imperialist program.<sup>697</sup>

It is evident, and we have demonstrated this in detail in this book, that the struggle to rally the working class against imperialism and war does not take

696 V. I. Lenin: On the Two Lines in the Revolution (1915), in: LCW Vol. 21, pp. 416-417

697 We refer readers to the RCIT's central programmatic documents: “*The Revolutionary Communist Manifesto*” (2012) and the “*Manifesto for Revolutionary Liberation*” (2016). Both can be read online or downloaded at our website at <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-manifesto/> and <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit-program-2016/>.

place in a vacuum. In fact, the official workers movement is dominated by pro-Western and pro-Eastern social-imperialists. The various centrist forces, vacillating in-between, are prisoners of their past programmatic failures and of their opportunist adaption to the reformist bureaucracy.

Hence, the struggle of any revolutionary organization to win the workers vanguard and, via the workers vanguard, the proletarian masses, is inevitable linked with the struggle against these social-imperialist and social-pacifist forces.

Marxists have repeatedly emphasized that the ruling class has not successfully sustained its dominance because of its inner strength, but because of the support it receives from the labor bureaucracy. James P. Cannon, the historic leader of American Communism and Trotskyism, once stated: *"The strength of capitalism is not in itself and its own institutions; it survives only because it has bases of support in the organizations of the workers. As we see it now, in the light of what we have learned from the Russian Revolution and its aftermath, nineteenth of the struggle for socialism is the struggle against bourgeois influence in the workers' organizations, including the party."*<sup>698</sup>

And indeed, all the pro-Western and pro-Eastern social-imperialist forces are agents of such bourgeois influence since they aid this or that Great Power and since they, by this, divide and confuse the international working class.

As we have demonstrated in the chapters above, the Stalinist, ex-Stalinist, and semi-reformist forces serve, openly or concealed, one or another imperialist Great Power. Various centrists are incapable to understand the true character of Russia and China and, hence, fail to recognize the nature of the present historic period as one of accelerating Great Power rivalry in which revolutionaries must fight against all imperialist states. Likewise, many of them fail to consistently support the liberation struggles of the oppressed peoples against one or the other Great Power.

It is obvious that these reformist and centrist forces are an *obstacle* for the liberation struggle of the international working class. Hence, the struggle to win the workers vanguard for a consistent anti-imperialist program can not advance without the energetic struggle against the influence of the social-imperialists and social-pacifists.

As a matter of fact, many of these reformist and centrist forces have become so rotten that one can not expect that they could play any progressive role in the class struggle ahead. The RCIT considers it a mistake by various revolutionaries to hope for a kind of self-curing process of such forces which are adapting since years and decades to the bourgeois order. No, the future party of revolution will be primarily not built from fragments of reformist or centrist parties but rather from the new emerging militant layers of the working class and the oppressed. These new, raw elements will provide the dynamic and fruitful mate-

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698 James P. Cannon: E.V. Debs (1956); in: James P. Cannon: The First Ten Years of American Communism, Pathfinder Press, New York 1962, p. 270

rial to build a revolutionary party with a healthy spirit and militant dedication to the cause of the liberation struggle.

As we have stated above, the struggle *against* imperialism is simultaneously a struggle *for* the liberation of the workers and oppressed. A revolutionary organization can not wage such a struggle as a substitutionist struggle for the proletariat but only with and via strong roots among the proletarian masses. The numerous capitulations of reformist and centrist forces in the imperialist countries to the chauvinist pressure is related to their failure to base themselves on the lower strata of the working class, the oppressed masses, the migrants, the people of color, etc. In fact, a revolutionary organization must strive to have a membership and leadership which is not dominated by intellectuals and labor aristocrats but by activists from the lower and oppressed strata of the working class.

Likewise, a revolutionary International today must not have its main basis in the old imperialist metropolises in North America and Western Europe. In times when the huge majority of the world proletariat in the 21st century – about 85% - lives in the South, i.e., outside the old imperialist metropolises, any revolutionary world party must focus to build among these masses.

We are fully aware that the authentic revolutionary forces today are weak. A new World Party of Socialist Revolution will not fall from heaven. Building such a party requires a longer process of building roots among the masses, education of cadres, practical tests, etc. But recognizing the difficulties and weaknesses is no reason to despair but rather to consciously tackle the existing problems and to energetically going to work!

The words of Seneca, the famous Roman philosopher, have not lost their significance: *Fata volentem ducunt, nolentem trahunt* (the Fates lead the willing and drag the unwilling). No doubt, “fate” (i.e. the laws of class struggle) will drag the revisionists in a cul-de-sac. However, revolutionaries who are willing to fight and to learn, can utilize the coming crises of capitalism and the storms of class struggles in order to advance in building a powerful instrument for the liberation struggle!

Today the RCIT is a pre-party organization committed to build such a world party. We are still a small organization but in the course of the past seven years we have managed to build an international organization with sections and fraternal groups in 18 countries on all continents. We reach out to all revolutionary organizations and activists around the world who agree with us on the most important issues of the global class struggle. Let us join forces in building a Revolutionary World Party! Let us build a joint international organization which fights against *all* Great Powers – both in East and West – and which supports *all* liberation struggles of the workers and oppressed peoples against any Great Power or its reactionary lackey.

Join us in this struggle! Join the RCIT!

## Appendix: Theses on Revolutionary Defeatism in Imperialist States

*Resolution of the International Executive Committee of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 8 September 2018*

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 proletariats’ 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 in subordinate 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 "*platonian 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 illusionary 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 simple 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 inevitable 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 RKRK 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, RKRП 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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## About the Author

Michael Pröbsting was born in Vienna (Austria) in 1967. He became politically active when he was 14 years old and has been an organized Trotskyist militant since the age of 16. After five years of membership in the *United Secretariat of the Fourth International* of Ernest Mandel, he joined the *League for a Revolutionary Communist International* (later renamed to *League for the Fifth International*) in February 1989. He served on the leadership bodies of the Austrian section from 1989 and of the LRCI/LFI since 1994, until he and his comrades-in-arms were expelled by the majority of this organization in April 2011. Soon after this, they founded the *Revolutionary Communist Organization for Liberation* in Austria and the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* which has sections, activists and fraternal organizations in 18 countries on all continents. He serves as the International Secretary of the RCIT.

As part of his international political work, Michael Pröbsting has spent lengthy periods in Occupied Palestine (Israel) in 1985, Eastern Germany during the political revolutionary process of 1989-91, Britain in 1994, and during the revolutionary period in Argentina in 2002. In addition, he gained experience in workers' and anti-imperialist movements during visits to numerous countries in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America.

Michael Pröbsting is the author of many articles and pamphlets in both German and English of which a number have been translated in other languages. His books are:

\* *Rosa Luxemburg – "Ich bin ein Land der unbeschränkten Möglichkeiten"* (Co-Author, 1999)

\* *The Credit Crunch – A Marxist Analyses* (Co-Author, 2008)

\* *Marxismus, Migration und revolutionäre Integration* (2010)

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\* *Cuba's Revolution Sold Out? The Road from Revolution to the Restoration of Capitalism* (2013)

\* *Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice* (2014)

\* *Greece: A Modern Semi-Colony. The Contradictory Development of Greek Capitalism* (2015)

\* *Marxism and the United Front Tactic Today* (2016)

\* *World Perspectives 2018: A World Pregnant with Wars and Popular Uprisings* (2018)











In *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* Michael Pröbsting analyses the accelerating rivalry between the imperialist Great Powers – the U.S., China, EU, Russia, and Japan. He shows that the diplomatic rows, sanctions, trade wars, and military tensions between these Great Powers are not accidental or caused by a mad man in the White House. They are rather rooted in the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system. This rivalry is a key feature of the current historic period and could, ultimately, result in major wars between these Great Powers.

*Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* demonstrates the validity of the Marxist analysis of modern imperialism. Using comprehensive material (including 61 Tables and Figures), Michael Pröbsting elaborates that a correct understanding of the rise of China and Russia as new Great Powers is crucial for assessing the character of the current inter-imperialist rivalry.

In *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* Michael Pröbsting critically discusses the analysis of modern imperialism by a number of left-wing parties (left social democrats, Stalinists, Trotskyists and others). He demonstrates that most of these organizations fail to understand the nature of the Great Power rivalry and, consequently, are not able to take an internationalist and revolutionary stance.

The author elaborates the approach of leading Marxist figures like Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg to the problems of Great Power rivalry and imperialist aggression against oppressed peoples. He outlines a Marxist program for the current period which is essential for anyone who wants to change the world and bring about a socialist future.



Michael Pröbsting is a revolutionary activist since more than 35 years. He is the author of many articles and pamphlets in English and German language. He published a number of books which deal with issues of modern capitalism and class struggle, the history of the workers movement as well as with issues of Marxist theory. He is the International Secretary of the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency*.