

THE POLITICS OF WAR

A Communist View

We are living in an era where both war and revolution are the order of the day. The world is in a state of great turbulence and unrest and no matter how badly the people may want peace, unless the causes of war are eliminated, war will continue to be a reality. As the Chinese expression goes: "The trees want peace, but the wind will not subside."

Communists have always been the most outspoken opponents of war. But our opposition to war is different from that of the pacifists and of the ruling classes, who commonly can be heard speaking about a "generation of peace" and an "era of detente."

Unlike the pacifists, communists don't oppose all wars. They deal with each war separately. Clausewitz, one of the most famous writers on the philosophy and history of war, said: "War is the continuation of politics by other means." Clausewitz drew this dictum after careful study of the history of wars following the period of the Napoleonic wars, which were wars of national conquest.

Marxism bases its view of war on this dictum, that war is the continuation of politics by other (i.e., violent) means. History shows that wars are divided into two different types—just and unjust. Just wars are those that are waged to liberate classes, nations or countries from oppression and exploitation. Unjust wars are those waged

to conquer and enslave others.

Examples of just wars were the revolutionary wars waged by the workers and people of Russia and later China and other countries to overthrow feudalism and tsarism as well as capitalism in order to build socialism. They were wars fought to end the long history of domination and exploitation of the working people. Another example is the just war waged by the Vietnamese and Cambodian peoples against U.S. imperialism and aggression towards their countries by foreign powers.

The Second World War also became a just war waged by the people of the world against the forces of fascism and aggression even though it began as an inter-imperialist rivalry. The victory over fascism in WWII was a severe blow to international imperialism. It was a struggle that was led by the working class and socialist forces and was fought in defense of the Soviet Union, the first socialist state, which was also the focal point of the fascist assault.

An example of an unjust war was World War I where both sides fought a war for the redivision of the world among the different groups of imperialists, using the working people of all countries to carry out their dirty work.

LIVING IN ERA OF IMPERIALISM

We are living in the era of imperialism. It is an era which is marked by the constant struggle among the "great powers" for colonies and markets. Imperialism, which is capitalism developed to its most advanced stage, has developed its productive forces to such a level that its drive for profits and markets can no longer be contained within its own national borders. The people of the world are faced with the choice of either going over to socialism or of suffering endlessly from the destruction and death caused by the armed struggle of the big powers for the artificial preservation of capitalism through imperialist war.

As long as imperialism exists we will have wars of the World War I type as well as just, revolutionary wars. The situation can be compared to the period of slavery when slaves waged heroic rebellions and wars of emancipation. At the same time, the different group of slave-owners

also fought each other to conquer each other and redivide their holdings.

The question of who "started" the war is of no significance in determining the just or unjust character of it. If the slaves were the first to lash out against the slave-owners, their struggle was still a just and heroic one. On the other hand, no matter which slave owner attacked first, the war between them was an unjust war of plunder.

The imperialist powers generally use the rhetoric of "liberation" to describe their wars of conquest. "Liberation" was Hitler's cry when he marched into Poland. This was also the slogan under which the Japanese invaded China in the 1930's. When the U.S. invaded Indochina they claimed they were "keeping the world safe for democracy." The present military occupation of Eastern Europe by the Soviet social-imperialists is being carried out under the banner of "defense of socialism."

That is why we cannot be misled by demagogy and rhetoric but must examine the question of war concretely, basing ourselves on scientific investigation. As they have historically done, the biggest of the imperialist "great" powers are again preparing for another imperialist war, an unjust war for a new redivision of the world. They are stockpiling massive amounts of weapons of the nuclear and conventional types. They are increasing their military budgets and the size of their armies. Again they are carrying out these preparations under the rhetoric of "detente."

This new war threat is a continuation of imperialist and social-imperialist politics "by other means." Everywhere in the world today the two superpowers, the U.S. and the Soviet Union, are contending and trying to forge new alignments so that they can go into the war stronger than the other.

The imperialists are also waging a propaganda campaign among the people of their own countries based on national chauvinism and phony "patriotism" in order to gain enough support from among the people to fight another war of plunder for them. In this country the campaign is taking the form of the "Bicentennial" campaign.

Everywhere in the world where there is conflict, the

two superpowers fan the flames and interfere in the internal affairs of other countries in order to expand their spheres of influence. The latest example is in Angola, where the U.S. and especially the USSR are both arming different liberation groups to make civil war against each other. Behind these superpower adventures can be seen the drive to "redivide the world" which takes place through imperialist war.

Again communists stand opposed to these war preparations. But unlike the pacifists and liberal war opponents, we know full well that a revolutionary war is needed if the threat of imperialist war is to be ended. If the two imperialist superpowers launch a new world war, they will also be forced to wage war against their own people in order to bring them into line. The threat of war represents an attack on the democratic rights of the people of the U.S. and the Soviet Union and on their living standards.

On the question of a third world war our attitude must be two-sided. First, we stand against it; secondly, we are not afraid of it. The First World War, which caused tremendous suffering and destruction, was also followed by the birth of socialism in the Soviet Union. Although this revolution was later reversed, it marked a great and historic advance for the people of the world. The Second World War was followed by the victory of socialism in a host of countries. The aggression against Indochina led to the victory of the national democratic revolutions in those countries.

If the superpowers launch a new world war, it will only further their own collapse. If we prepare ourselves and have a correct stand towards the new imperialist war threat and are not taken in by the "detente" rhetoric of the superpowers, we will be in a strong position to oppose the war on a revolutionary basis.

If we seize the time and get prepared; if we build our organizations, from the working class party to the mass organizations of the people under revolutionary leadership, we will be able to turn the imperialist war into a just war of the working class and the people against imperialism. The final victory of this just revolutionary war will put an end to war once and for all.