

# World War: The Correct Stand Is a Class Question

The factors for world war are rapidly rising. This is a blunt assessment, but one that is confirmed every day by the words and the actions of the two superpowers. Should anyone doubt it, he would do well to consider Angola, where the rulers of the U.S. and the USSR instigated and fueled a reactionary and vicious civil war in which more than 100,000 people died—all to determine which superpower would get the inside track in its rivalry to control Angola and all of Southern Africa.

The superpowers carry on about "fighting imperialism" or "defending freedom" and they mean imperialist adventure and heightened rivalry. They speak with pious determination about "national defense" and seek to justify stepped up war preparations.

Can a new world war be prevented and if not how should the working class prepare for it and what are its interests and goals if such a war does break out? These are critical questions which demand careful and deep-going answers and not slick or panicky responses.

Fortunately, the international proletariat has considerable experience in two world wars, summed up by some of its greatest leaders, to draw on. While the working class suffered greatly in World War 1 and World War 2, where the correct Marxist-Leninist line was applied, great advances were won, including the victory of socialism in several countries.

The basic approach of the working class in analyzing and responding to a war in the era of imperialism was laid out clearly by Lenin in polemics with various opportunists during World War 1. First, he demystified war, quoting the bourgeois military expert von Clausewitz: "All know that wars are caused only by the political relations of governments and of nations; but ordinarily one pictures the situation as if, with the beginning of the war, these relations cease and a totally new situation is created, which follows its own laws. We assert, on the contrary, that war is nothing but the continuation of political relations, with the intervention of other means." Politics, Marxism teaches, is concentrated *economics*, is based on the relationship between different classes in society. Lenin summed up, "The class character of war—that is the fundamental question which confronts a socialist." (*The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, p. 78)

## World War 1

World War 1 was a war between two blocs of imperialist powers which broke out in 1914 over the existing division of colonies and large sections of Europe. Ever since the complete division of the world among the Great Powers by the late 1800s, some rising imperialist classes, particularly the German capitalists, had begun pushing hard for a redivision, for a bigger piece of the action. Small skirmishes instigated by the Great Powers took place in Egypt, Morocco, the Balkans and elsewhere, and alliances between the different governments were made, broken and rearranged. Two years before the war broke out it was clearly predicted by the socialist parties of the world assembled in the Second International.

The war was finally triggered by the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of the Austro-Hungarian Empire on Serbian soil. Austria, with Germany's blessings, invaded Serbia to "extract reparations" and the alliances as they then stood swung into combat, basically pitting Germany and Austria-Hungary against France, Britain and Tsarist Russia.

Lenin summed up the class character of the war after it had broken out: "This war is in a treble sense a war between slave-owners to fortify slavery. This is a war firstly, to fortify the enslavement of the colonies by means of a 'fairer' distribution and subsequent more 'concerted' exploitation of them; secondly, to fortify the oppression of other nations within the 'great' powers, for both Austria and Russia (Russia more and much worse than Austria) maintain their rule only by such oppression, intensifying it by means of war; and thirdly to fortify and prolong wage slavery, for the proletariat is split up and suppressed, while the capitalists gain, making fortunes out of the war, aggravating national prejudices and intensifying reaction." (*"Socialism and War," in Lenin on War and Peace*, FLP, Peking, pp. 10-11) In article after article, speech after speech, Lenin hammered home to the workers Marx's great message, "The workers have no fatherland," and warned them they were being used as cannon fodder in a war between international bandits.

His task was made more difficult by the collapse of the Second International as the leaders of most of its member parties scurried at the outbreak of the war into bed with their respective bourgeoisies, uttering little squeals about "defending our country."

Lenin mercilessly ripped the covers off these traitors to socialism and exposed the moralistic rationalizations they used to justify their treachery, like pointing to the *other* side as "expansionist" or the "aggressor" in the war. Lenin countered this with the internationalist stand of the revolutionary working class: "The character of the war (whether it is reactionary or revolutionary) does not depend on who the attacker was, or in whose country the 'enemy' is stationed; it depends on *what class* is waging the war, and of what politics this war is a continuation." (*The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, p. 80)

Lenin refers to "the German financiers" as having "started the war" *once* in his 52 page article "The Collapse of the Second International" (*Lenin Collected Works*, Volume 22) and not at all in many others, so little importance does he attribute to this question. Similarly he points out that the struggle of the small Serbian nation against Austria *by itself* reflects the national-liberation movement of the Serbs, but that, "The national element in the Serbo-Austrian war is not, and cannot be, of *any* serious significance in the general European war." (*"Collapse of the Second International," Vol. 22, p.235*)

The working class could in no way unite with or give the least aid to its own ruling class in such a war, this much was clear, but at the same time, World War 1 was not merely a fatal tragedy. Indeed, Lenin showed, it created a very favorable situation for the working class for overthrowing the bourgeoisie amidst the mi-

sery their war caused in the countries involved. "The war has undoubtedly created a most acute crisis and has increased the distress of the masses to an incredible degree. The reactionary character of this war, and the shameless lies told by the bourgeoisie of *all* countries in covering up their predatory aims with 'national' ideology, are inevitably creating, on the basis of an objectively revolutionary situation, revolutionary moods among the masses. It is our duty to help the masses become conscious of these moods, to deepen and formulate them. This task is correctly expressed only by the slogan: convert the imperialist war into civil war; and *all* consistently waged class struggles during the war, all seriously conducted 'mass action' tactics inevitably lead to this." (*"Socialism and War," p. 22*)

With this revolutionary perspective, it was not enough for the proletariat merely to *refuse to support* its own ruling class in its war effort. "A revolutionary class cannot but wish for the defeat of its government in a reactionary war, cannot fail to see that its military reverses facilitate its overthrow." (same, p. 25)

In short, the Leninist line, forged in ideological and political struggle during World War 1, is that the response of communists to a war between imperialist bandits is to use the mass line to mobilize the working class and its allies against the bourgeoisie's war efforts and for revolution. It was this line that led to the victory of the great October Revolution and the birth of working class rule in the Soviet Union out of the flames of World War 1.

## What Has Changed?

It would not do, however, to apply Lenin's line mechanically or indiscriminately to the present situation. It is necessary to determine if matters have changed in the 60 years that have elapsed since World War 1.

Are we in a different historical era or epoch than that Lenin was dealing with? This question has been answered with exceptional clarity by the Communist Party of China and the Chinese people in their struggle to repudiate the counter-revolutionary Lin Piao. The late comrade Chou En-lai summed it up in the main report to the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party of China, "Chairman Mao has often taught us: We are still in the era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution. . . Stalin said, 'Leninism is Marxism in the era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution.' This is entirely correct. Since Lenin's death the world situation has undergone great changes. But the era has not changed. The fundamental principles of Leninism are not outdated; they remain the theoretical basis guiding our thinking today."

Today there are no longer a half a dozen or so imperialist more or less equal "Great Powers." Among the imperialist countries, there are now only two serious contenders for the throne of chief exploiter and oppressor of the world's people—the United States ruling class, "our" bourgeoisie, and the new capitalist class which tore down the great socialist society built by the workers of the Soviet Union and established its own corrupt rule there. No other imperialist power is strong enough to contend as an equal with either superpower, especially in forming blocs for the purpose of world domination. The "lesser" imperialist powers align themselves with one superpower or the other as the most feasible route to expanding their own empires. Although this basic drive puts the rulers of these countries in contradiction, to an extent, with the superpowers, it mainly shows they are still the moribund and parasitic bandits Lenin described so well. As the threat of war sharpens, their drive to share in the redivision of the world—and their fear of being among the redivided—will tend to compel them ever more to fall in line as junior partners in one camp of thieves or the other. And certainly superpower status doesn't make the U.S. or USSR any different in essence from the "Great Powers" of Lenin's day.

Does his description of "the younger and stronger robber (Germany)" out "to rob the older and over-gorger robbers," not precisely describe the relation between the USSR and the U.S.? Is it not the case that the roots of a third world war lie precisely in the fact that the existing "partition of the world *compels* the capitalists to go over from peaceful expansion to an armed struggle for the *repartitioning* of colonies and spheres of influence?" (*The Collapse of the Second International," p. 226*)

It is this compulsion, this drive to "expand or die," that is pushing the world toward World War 3, independent of anyone's will or desires. "Either the working class in the U.S. and the Soviet Union will prevent such a war by overthrowing these greatest oppressors, in conjunction with the world-wide struggle against

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"Turn the Imperialist War into a Civil War!" This was the policy and a slogan of the Bolsheviks during World War 1. Russian workers and peasants turned their guns at their own government and made revolution. By correctly analyzing the class forces involved and fighting fiercely for the interests of the proletariat, Marxist-Leninists have been able to lead the working class to great victories and advances during the previous two world wars.

# World War...

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them, or they will launch a world war before they can be overthrown." (*Programme of the RCP, USA*)

Another potential objection to carrying out the line Lenin developed should an inter-imperialist war break out is that conditions in the U.S. (and the USSR) are not the same as they were in Europe and especially Tsarist Russia at the outbreak of World War 1. The argument goes: There is not a large class conscious workers movement strong enough to or prepared to topple even a weakened bourgeoisie and patriotic sentiments are so strong that a line of "revolutionary defeatism" could never take root. Lenin himself dealt with this kind of cowardly capitulation, answering opportunists whose arguments he characterized as, "Hopes for a revolution have proved illusory, and it is not the business of a Marxist to fight for illusions." ("The Collapse of the Second International," p. 213)

He ridiculed this "realistic" stand on two counts. Firstly as discussed above, war and especially imperialist world war tends to create revolutionary situations by its very nature—putting unprecedented strains on the bourgeois state and unprecedented hardships on the working class and masses of people. Secondly, he pointed out, "No socialist has ever guaranteed that this war (and not the next one), that today's revolutionary situation (and not tomorrow's) will produce a revolution. What we are discussing is the indisputable and fundamental duty of all socialists—that of revealing to the masses the existence of a revolutionary situation, explaining its scope and depth, arousing the proletariat's revolutionary consciousness and revolutionary determination, helping it to go over to revolutionary action, and forming, for that purpose, organizations suited to the revolutionary situation." (same, pp. 216-17)

Nor is a revolutionary situation a precondition for this work. "It is impossible to foretell whether a powerful revolutionary movement will flare up during the first or second war of the great powers, whether during or after it; in any case our bounden duty is systematically and undeviatingly to work precisely in this direction." ("Socialism and War," p. 22)

Only such a policy will strengthen the working class in the course of the war so that, even if it is unable to make revolution, it will still be in the best position to deal with the result of the war for the bourgeois "fatherland"—victory, defeat, stalemate or even occupation.

## Existence of Socialist Countries

Is there then no significant change since World War 1 that affects Lenin's line on war and revolution? Of course there is such a change—the existence since 1917 of the Soviet Union and since World War 2 of a number of socialist countries, despite the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union and several Eastern European nations. While in the most fundamental sense Marx's statement that "The workers have no fatherland" remains true and crucial for exposing the patriotic appeals of imperialist ruling classes, it can also be said that a genuine socialist country like the Soviet Union until after Stalin's death or like China today belongs not only to its own people but to the international working class for whom it is a beacon-light.

Lenin wrote about the possibility of wars involving socialist countries in 1916, well before the October Revolution gave birth to the first one. He correctly analyzed that socialism would not win victory everywhere at once and that some countries would remain under bourgeois rule. "This must not only cause friction, but a direct striving on the part of the bourgeoisie of other countries to crush the victorious proletariat of the socialist state. In such cases a war on our part would be a legitimate and just war. It would be a war for socialism, for the liberation of other nations from the bourgeoisie." ("The War Programme of the Proletarian Revolution," in *Lenin on War and Peace*, p. 61)

Understanding this principle is the key to understanding World War 2 and how it changed from an inter-imperialist war to a war of the type Lenin describes. Like WW1, the Second World War when it began was a war to redivide the world, with Germany—now allied with Italy—once again in the position of the up and coming imperialist bandit.

Like World War 1 it was preceded by shifting alliances and smaller conflicts and acts of aggression. Full scale war broke out when Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, to annex it. Alarmed by German successes, France and Britain declared war on Germany.

Mao Tsetung, the great leader of the Chinese revolution and the international working class, declared, "On whichever side the Anglo-French or the German, the war that has just broken out is an unjust, predatory and imperialist war." ("The Identity of Interests Between the Soviet Union and All Mankind," *Selected Works*, Vol III, p. 277) This analysis went to the heart of the situation. Although bourgeois rule in

Germany had a fascist character and the German ruling class openly attacked Poland first, this did not change the character of the war. "Germany started the war in order to plunder the Polish people and smash one flank of the Anglo-French imperialist front. As for Britain and France, they have regarded Poland as an object of plunder for their finance capital, exploited her to thwart the German imperialist attempt at a world re-division of the spoils, and made her a flank of their own imperialist front. Thus their war is an imperialist war, their so-called aid to Poland being merely for the purpose of contending with Germany for the domination of Poland, and this war, too, should be opposed, not approved." (same, p. 279)

Thus for the international proletariat, the tasks were the same as they had been in World War 1. In Mao Tsetung's words, "The Communist Parties and the people of all countries should rise up against it and expose the imperialist character of both belligerents, for this imperialist war brings only harm and no benefit whatever to the people of the world, and they should expose the criminal acts of the social-democratic parties in supporting the imperialist war and betraying the interests of the proletariat." (same, p. 277)

In the same article, Mao also cautioned that the nature of the war could change and objective circumstances could call for the entry into the war of the Soviet Union and the peoples of the world. Less than two years later, on June 22, 1941, this occurred. Hitler launched the bulk of his forces against the Soviet Union, boasting they would drive to the Ural mountains in three months. The next day Mao Tsetung summed up the changed world situation in an inner Party directive: "for communists throughout the world the task now is to mobilize the people of all countries and organize an international united front to fight fascism and defend the Soviet Union, defend China, and defend the freedom and independence of all nations." ("On the International United Front Against Fascism," *Selected Works*, Vol III, p. 29) This was the general line for the duration of the war.

## Change in World War 2

The change in the character of World War 2 was not to a "war for democracy," or just an "anti-fascist war." There was no change in the character of the class rule in the imperialist powers—for the "worse" in Germany or for the "better" in England, the U.S., etc.

The new character of the war was determined by the event which changed it, the attack on the Soviet Union and its entry into the war. The war became, as the *Programme of the RCP, USA* points out, "...a battle for the defense of the future as it was already being realized by the Soviet working people in building socialism. Millions of workers and other oppressed people around the world fought and died to defeat the fascist Axis in order to defend socialism and to advance their own march toward socialist revolution."

Opportunists in the leadership of some communist Parties took advantage of the necessity to unite with their bourgeoisie in fighting this war, in order to cave in entirely to them—to negate what was now the secondary aspect of the war—that Britain, the U.S. and so on were still in it for the same imperialist reasons they had been from the beginning. These revisionists—Earl Browder, who headed the Communist Party in this country, chief among them—used the war to put their Parties entirely at the service of the capitalists.

However, this was not the main trend. In many cases, communists grasped the necessity of entering the war on the same side as the imperialist bloc that had been forced to ally with the Soviet Union and turned this necessity into freedom. They took advantage of the split in the imperialist camp and the alliance of one bloc with the Soviet Union, to fight for leadership of the struggle against the Axis, and use that leadership to advance the struggle to socialism. Within a few years of the end of World War 2 the socialist camp had grown to a dozen countries.

## Today's Situation

Since World War 2, the world has undergone many changes. The socialist camp no longer exists and the country that was its core, the Soviet Union, is now one of the two main capitalist enemies of the world's people.

Today the world is in a very volatile situation. Everywhere contradictions are heating up, among them the desperate contention between the rulers of the U.S. and the USSR. How should the international working class take the growing danger of world war into account? The RCP has dealt with this question at some length in an article in the November 15, 1975, *Revolution*, "On the World Situation, War and Revolutionary Struggle." Some of its points are summarized below.

In the approach of the international proletariat to the question of war, the role of the People's Republic of China, a socialist country belonging to the workers of the world, is of great importance. As a country where the working class holds state power, "China is able to use its diplomacy and state to state relations to make use of contradictions among the imperialist

and reactionary forces, and to build unity between peoples and countries in resisting superpower domination." China does this, paying particular attention to thwarting Soviet expansion, in order to delay the onset of war and enable the people of the world to be in a better position should war break out. China also follows this policy in order to make it more difficult for the Soviet Union to attack China, which stands as a bulwark of world revolution. Defending China is an objective and a duty not only of the Chinese people but of workers all over the world.

"What form this defense would take, and how it would relate to the struggle in different countries, could only be decided, of course, on the basis of analyzing the actual situation at that time, the balance of forces—fundamentally class forces—and a concrete determination of what would advance the overall revolutionary struggle under the concrete conditions. But in one form or another the working class in every country must support and defend as its own the countries where our class has won political power and is building socialism, and must link this with the fundamental task of advancing the struggle toward the goal of revolution and socialism in all countries.

"In the countries where the proletariat has not yet won political power the working class has different tasks than in the socialist countries and makes different contributions to the international struggle. Not having state power it cannot use state to state relations and other similar means to make use of contradictions among the imperialist and reactionary forces and unite the greatest number of forces against the two superpowers.

"Nor, lacking state power, is it yet able to give the same kind of support to revolutionary struggles that a proletariat in power is able to give. The working class in countries where it has not yet seized power can and must support the revolutionary movement in every country and support the struggle against the two superpowers as the main enemies on a world scale. But it must combine this with carrying out what, overall, is its main task—the building of the revolutionary movement in its own country and the carrying forward of this fight, through whatever necessary stages, to the final goal of socialism under the rule of the working class.

"By the same token, a working class which does not have state power, while it does not have the same ability as the socialist countries to use state to state relations, etc. to further the worldwide struggle, also does not have the necessity to make compromises with various imperialist and reactionary forces and governments, in the same way as the socialist states do in order to make use of contradictions, etc."

By focusing its efforts on building the struggle for revolution, the working class is dealing genuine blows to the two superpowers and making the best possible preparations for carrying on the struggle under conditions of war.

As it has in the past, the question of war today provides a big opening for opportunist lines. One form is to speculate on the twists and turns the struggle may take in the future, on the character a new world war may assume if it should break out, all to set aside the difficult task of waging the revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie. Often a cover-up is pretending to carry out China's foreign policy to the letter. Some may say, "Why should we bother to develop our policy and tactics by applying Marxism to the concrete analysis of concrete conditions? We'll let the Chinese comrades do it for us."

As pointed out in the November 15 *Revolution* article, Mao Tsetung himself dealt with this question very sharply in 1946, at a time when the Soviet Union was making certain necessary agreements with imperialist countries. He put forward a principle that still holds today: "Such compromise does not require the people of the capitalist world to follow suit and make compromise at home. The people in these countries will continue to wage different struggles in accordance with their different conditions." ("Some Points in Appraisal of the Present International Situation," *Selected Works*, Vol IV, p. 87)

Proletarian internationalism means nothing if it is not based on the struggle for proletarian revolution.

In summation, the experience of the working class over two world wars has provided a rich legacy to learn from today in the face of the growing drive to war on the part of the superpowers. Confronted with the threat of war, the U.S. working class and its Party has to cut through the imperialist-spread smokescreen of calls for "national unity for national defense," which are nothing but justification for imperialist crimes.

The key weapon for doing this—for coming through a war fighting for and advancing the interests of the working class—is the method of *class analysis* of the war's general character. Only in this way can the real causes of the war, and the road forward be discovered.

Armed with this understanding and deep knowledge of the particular conditions in each country, the proletariat decides its policy and its tactics, no matter what difficulties or twists and turns may arise in the actual situation, always based on what will advance the struggle to overthrow capitalism, build socialism and move to communist society. ■