

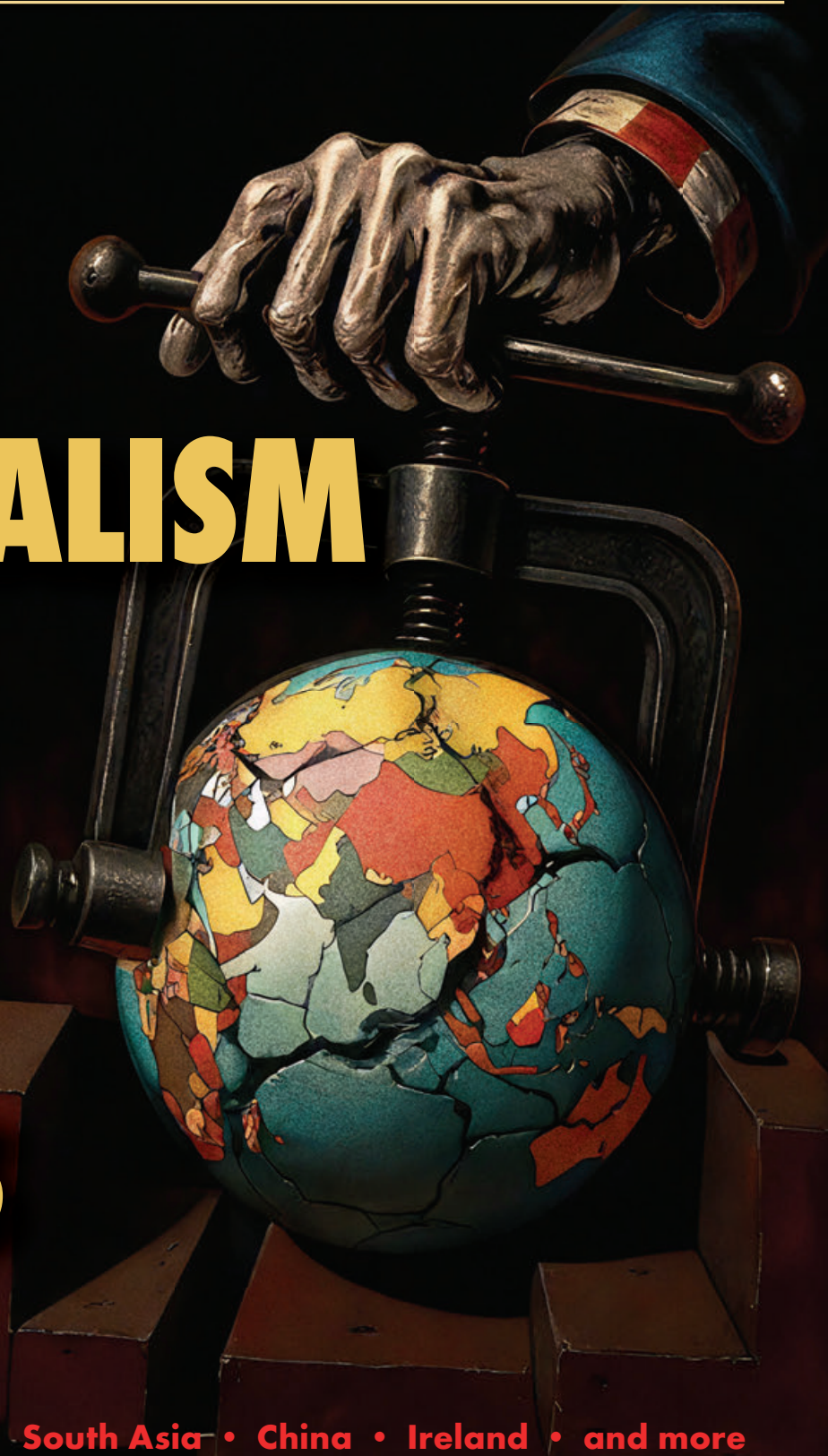
SPARTACIST

NUMBER 70

ENGLISH EDITION

MAY 2025

U.S. IMPERIALISM TURNS THE SCREWS



Also in this issue: Palestine • South Asia • China • Ireland • and more

Editorial

The Empire Strikes Back

In our last issue of *Spartacist*, we warned of tough times ahead. Looking at the world right now, that prognosis couldn't have been truer. It is clear to everyone that with the election of Donald Trump the world is experiencing massive shifts. What isn't clear is why and what to do about it. This current *Spartacist* is a product of the ICL's latest International Executive Committee plenum. The purpose of the plenum and this *Spartacist*, in particular the main memorandum "U.S. Imperialism Turns the Screws" (page 20), is to cut through all the confusion and hysteria that has been rampant since Trump's election by taking stock of the changing world situation, how these changes reflect the needs of U.S. imperialism, and to orient revolutionaries in this current period.

The U.S. imperialist rulers are on the offensive, hellbent on shoring up their slipping global position. For this, they are ripping up the previous liberal world order, putting the

squeeze on their domestic working class, their allies and the Global South and setting their sights on war with China. With all this on the horizon the question posed is: will U.S. imperialism be defeated or will it be allowed to wreak devastation upon the working class and oppressed of the world? The answer to this depends on the orientation of the workers movement in the coming period.

While the U.S. tightens the noose, we put forward that in order to weather this imperialist onslaught, the working class must take a defensive position. Workers everywhere must brace for impact and wage defensive struggles to protect their livelihoods and make sure that the U.S. rulers do not take any more out of the hide of the working class than they already have. With this in mind it is essential that the left break out of its petty-bourgeois academic bubble where most Marxist organizations have their base, and go to the

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English Edition

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Cover graphic: Joe Sol



The Crisis in the Marxist Left and the Tasks of the ICL

The following is a presentation to the April IEC plenum by comrade Perrault of the ICL's International Secretariat.

In the previous point we projected that the coming period will be one of reactionary capitalist offensives. As the U.S. tears up the post-Soviet liberal world order, the working class and petty bourgeoisie internationally will face a drastic contraction in their economic and social conditions. We also discussed how the current leaders of the working class, whether in the West, China or the Global South, are actively sabotaging the necessary struggle against U.S. imperialism. Against this path of capitulation, we laid out the broad strokes of an alternative program to unite the proletariat, confront the coming onslaught and open the road to workers power.

But here we run up against the problem that has plagued the Marxist movement ever since the degeneration of the Comintern: the crisis of revolutionary leadership. How can we translate our program for the coming period into reality? It goes without saying that the ICL as a tiny international organization does

not have the means to exert any kind of decisive influence on the struggle of the masses. However, this does not mean that we can satisfy ourselves with making broad statements as we sit back and observe events unfold before our eyes. It

is essential to situate our small International within the political context and understand *how* we can advance our broader goals, starting from current objective conditions.

In the words of Trotsky, “To understand the causal sequence of events and to find somewhere in the sequence one’s own place—that is the first duty of a revolutionary” (*My Life*, 1930). This is what I will strive to do in this report.

There Is a Problem with the Left

The first thing to understand when approaching our tasks is that the ICL is one small piece of a large matrix of splintered Marxist organizations. As everyone knows, our current weakness is largely the product of our disorientation over the past 30 years. At our 2023 conference, we made a sharp political turn. But we cannot in the short

“We will never forget that our party is now the greatest lever of history. Separated from this lever, every one of us is nothing. With this lever in hand, we are all.”

—Leon Trotsky,
“The Founding of the
Fourth International”
(October 1938)

term erase the accumulated consequences of our past mistakes. It is because of these that we find ourselves with a small and aging party, overwhelmingly confined to Western imperialist countries, mostly cut off from the left and with very little material ability to impact the class struggle.

However, when we take a step back and look at the bigger picture, it is obvious that the Marxist movement as a whole isn't in a much better state. In fact, it is no great mystery that the entire movement has been in a deep and continual crisis. Some parties have collapsed, others have seen numerous splits leading to more and more parties with ever smaller numbers that cannot convincingly explain what distinguishes them from the others.

It is true that some organizations sometimes achieve success in recruitment. But the real measure of success for a revolutionary organization is not the number of members at a given time but its impact on the class struggle. And it is in this regard that the bankruptcy of the left is most apparent. In none of the great conflicts of the past decades have Marxists played any kind of decisive role in pushing forward the interests of the workers and oppressed.

Today Marxists clearly have far less influence on the working class than they did in 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed. The truth, which is rather obvious but something everyone denies, is that no Marxist organization has been spared the crisis shaking the movement. If there were any one tendency that had a uniquely correct orientation over the course of decades, it would not be a mystery and they would stand out quite clearly.

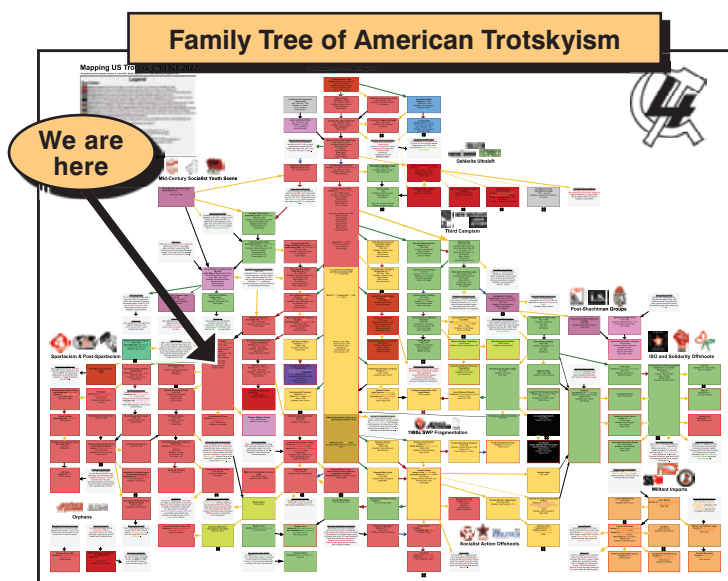
Why We Can't Ignore Other Groups

Generally speaking, the practice in the left is to ignore other organizations of a similar or smaller size. However, as much as it would be nice to overlook the left and directly impact the masses, this is impossible. Not only do we not have the social weight to be able to achieve broad influence, but the existing organizations, which are often orders of magnitude larger than us, stand as barriers. There is no possibility of us recruiting in a linear way to the point where we can impose ourselves as a decisive force on the left.



Shout!

People's Front of Judea denounces Judean People's Front in 1979 movie *Monty Python's Life of Brian*.



Amal Samaha

Even if we were much bigger it would be wrong to ignore other organizations. Firstly, because it is utterly irresponsible to stand before the working class without being able to clearly and convincingly explain why two organizations that appear to have similar politics do not unite.

But more importantly, *there is a political reason for the disunity of the left today*. It is not the product of misguided individuals or wrong organizational practices but reflects the political crisis of an epoch. It is not possible to divorce the construction of a party from the task of clarifying and overcoming the political reasons at the root of the left's disunity. When you think about it, this is obvious. To successfully build a revolutionary workers party, you need to understand why everybody else so far has been failing. And you cannot do that if you ignore what others are doing.

For all these reasons, the perspective of the ICL is to work toward a political realignment in the international left. We must seek to regroup the truly revolutionary elements that are today spread across various organizations as a result of coincidence and political unclarity. Our objective is not ultimately to win one or two members from other organizations but to engage in a genuine fusion process with much larger forces.

What Has the ICL Achieved So Far?

Here it is legitimate to ask what a small party such as ours can contribute to this process. I have already mentioned how our long-drawn-out internal crisis has left us in a weak position. However, unlike everyone else we have confronted the reasons for our crisis. As far as I know, no other tendency has gone through a deep review and re-evaluation of their work to the extent that we have. Everyone maintains the illusion that they, unlike everyone else, have been right all along. But more than just recognize that we were wrong, we have sought to explain the fundamental political reasons behind our disorientation. And surprise, surprise, it turns out that our disorientation is inherently

connected to that of the rest of the left during the post-Soviet period.

The basic problem is simple enough. The Marxist left has been unable to root its tasks in a correct understanding of the world situation. In our document “The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony & the Struggle for Workers Power” (*Spartacist* No. 68, September 2023), we explain how the post-Soviet order has been characterized by the hegemony of the United States, a fact obvious to anyone who cared to look. We explained how the hegemony of the United States and its alliance with the other imperialist powers were necessary conditions for the era of globalization. Finally, we showed how liberalism was the dominant ideology of the period and expressed the material interests of U.S. imperialism. The conclusion that flowed from this analysis is that the task of revolutionaries internationally was to fight against the U.S.-dominated world system, and the way this was posed concretely was in the struggle to break the working class from the influence of liberalism.

At the heart of our understanding is the fact that the workers movement’s association with liberalism—whatever the specific form it took in a given country—was the main factor driving the divisions within the left. Ultimately this is because liberalism in this period reflected loyalty to the U.S. world order, which was plundering the planet. The only way to unite the proletariat internationally was in struggle *against* this world system and *against* liberalism. To paraphrase Lenin, unity with liberals means splitting the international working class.

After we published our 2023 conference document, many leftists asked us what we mean by liberalism and why we’re making such a big fuss about it—indeed, it is not easy to understand something when you are submerged in it. Today, however, as the liberal facade of the world order comes crashing down, everyone is commenting about liberalism and its failure. Suddenly everyone is making similar statements to us. That said, these comments are reactions to the empirical evidence standing in front of everyone’s eyes and are not derived from a material analysis of the inner dynamics of the U.S.-led world order.

What Has Changed and What Hasn’t

All this goes to say that for less than two years the ICL was able to identify the task of communists in a world order that lasted more than 30 years. By no means is this a great success. We had only a very short period of time in which to implement our perspective for the post-Soviet period, and now already we must readjust.

Today our overriding task can no longer be reduced to breaking the workers movement from liberalism. Both the working class and the ruling class are decisively turning away from liberalism. It is true that here and there the liberal establishment is still mounting a resistance. But these are leftovers from the previous epoch that will be swept away soon enough.

This does not mean that we are back at square one. The fact that we were able to draw lessons from the previous epoch gives us an important advantage over the rest of the left. Crucially, we understand that opposition to U.S. imperialism remains the key to the political unification of the world proletariat.

In the U.S. itself, the working class will be squeezed in the name of the reactionary foreign ambitions of the ruling class. In the imperialist countries allied to the U.S. and in many U.S.-aligned semicolonies, the ruling classes continue to be fundamentally tied and subordinate to the current order—we can see this clearly through their worship of NATO and similar U.S. alliances. Until this decisively changes, fighting the U.S. will be an integral part of fighting the domestic capitalist class of these countries. As for oppressed countries and workers states that are threatened by economic asphyxiation and military aggression, it goes without saying that fighting the current imperialist system is essential. There our tasks will be to contrast our proletarian strategy with that of the rulers of these countries, who will conciliate the U.S. by holding back the masses from engaging in revolutionary struggle.

Everywhere opposition to U.S. imperialism remains central. It is in this great struggle that we can unify the working class across borders. And it is this struggle that will be essential to forging a unified international vanguard of the working class.

Understanding the Coming Crisis

Another key advantage we have is that we can explain the inner dynamics of the current turmoil shaking the world. And unlike everyone else, we can consciously prepare for what is to come. As the saying goes, in the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed man is king.

As far as I know, no one has yet seriously tried to explain what the end of liberalism will concretely mean for the left. To understand the sheer scale of the shock to come, we must understand how tied and dependent the left has become to the status quo. Whether in the West or in the Global South, the left has not built itself up in opposition to liberal movements and institutions. In fact, it has mainly functioned and grown by serving as the left flank of liberalism. Its activities have been overwhelmingly concentrated on campuses, in liberal social movements and in the orbit of NGOs. These are all sectors facing catastrophic collapse.

Throughout the West there is a looming crisis in higher



Gabriela

Leaders of Filipino leftist Makabayan coalition meeting UN Special Rapporteur Irene Khan. Faith in UN plagues left in Global South.



Misha Jordaan/Gallo

Gwede Mantashe (left), leading member of South African Communist Party, shakes hands with fellow government minister Leon Schreiber of pro-imperialist DA, July 2024.

education, a sector that has become a gigantic parasite dependent on extorting money from ever-growing numbers of foreign students. In the coming era, the bourgeoisie will have no interest in having so many people study subjects that are not useful to its strategic interests and will seek to drastically clamp down on the number of students. As we are already seeing, this will go hand in hand with a crackdown on radical political activity on campuses. What Trump has done to Columbia, cutting its funding and demanding that it increase the repression of the Palestinian movement, shows what is to come. Given that the campuses are probably the largest source of recruitment for leftist parties internationally, and that academic careers are a key source of influence and income for radicals, these shocks will have a profound impact.

In the Global South, many leftist organizations are intermingled with the NGO sector. Today this entire ecosystem faces collapse. In the blink of an eye, Trump destroyed USAID, the largest single donor of foreign aid. Soon afterward, Keir Starmer mimicked his master and cut the British foreign aid budget by 40 percent—and this came from a government full of liberal lawyers and NGO workers. In Argentina, left groups often rely on social work to build their influence among the masses; now Milei is gutting the funding for such programs along with every other legacy of Peronist governments. Once again, all these signs are only indicators of what is to come as international tensions mount and budgets get squeezed.

Some of the larger Marxist parties concentrate much of their activity on the electoral field. Of course, it is necessary to participate in elections. But a drift toward electoralism and the dependence on state subsidies that come with this are mortal dangers, particularly in a period of great political shocks. In South Africa and India, the Communist parties are utterly opportunist, buried deep in the politics of liberal coalitions and parliamentarism. They have directly participated in despicable crimes against the masses in order to satisfy their coalition partners and narrow electoral interests. As the political center of gravity moves to the right,

these parties will be kicked to the curb and find themselves isolated, hated by the bourgeoisie as well as by the masses.

Parties like the KKE in Greece strike a more orthodox pose. But it, too, has become increasingly dependent on and oriented toward elections. At the same time, it has betrayed genuine possibilities to lead mass struggle against the imperialist oppression of Greece, undermining its credibility and influence in the working class.

Many left organizations retain cadre and in some cases a mass membership in the workers movement. However, this does not necessarily translate into real influence among the proletariat. Many of the French Trotskyist organizations have significant numbers of cadre in industry, but their policies are totally divorced from the dominant sentiments in the class. Their constant push to throw the vanguard of the working class onto the offensive has bred demoralization and isolated the left. This is not helped by the fact that the French left generally refuses to oppose liberal pillars such as the European Union, leaving the field open to the right, which has become the dominant force among workers.

In other cases, such as Britain, the left's influence in the working class is essentially concentrated in the trade-union bureaucracy, which itself sits atop a hollow shell standing miles away from the sentiments and needs of their working-class membership. As soon as the pressure mounts, these positions will crumble.

When it comes to the liberal movements that have punctuated the post-Soviet period, whether for immigrant rights, black lives, environmentalism or LGBTQ+ rights, they will face both the hostility of an insurgent right wing as well as total abandonment from the liberal wing of the bourgeoisie, which had been their base of social support. This is not to say that these causes will no longer be of central importance, but simply that these movements will go through a period of deep crisis and will need to be rebuilt on fundamentally different and more durable foundations. Again, this will have profound consequences for the left parties that have orbited such movements.

Every single one of these examples points to left organizations being faced with existential shocks in the coming period for which they are utterly unprepared. It is important that we ourselves take stock of what is to come, understand that our own status quo is going to change radically and do what we can to prepare ourselves and others.

Defensive, Offensive or Abstentionist?

In a sense, it can seem somewhat surprising that the left has not given more thought to the consequences of the coming shocks. After all, there is generally little controversy over the fact that we are entering a period of acute crisis. Many, like us, consider that we are in the early days of a devastating economic depression. It is also impossible to deny that in the U.S. and much of Europe the right is on the offensive. But for most of the left, none of these factors point to a worsening of their own situation. In fact, most see the coming period as one of great opportunity for the revolutionary left. We do not think this is the case at all.

Of course, we do not deny that *eventually* crisis will lead to offensives by the working class and openings for revolutionaries. Rather, our difference lies in the *short-term* prospects for the class struggle, especially in Europe and North America.

We draw our prognosis not from our wishes but from the

outcome of struggle in the past few years. Since the end of the pandemic, there has been a whole series of important class battles around the world. In many cases the working class had a distinct chance of turning the tide of reaction and emerging onto the political scene as a decisive factor. In every case we fought as hard as we could for this outcome. However, the verdict is now *in* and nowhere was the working class able to achieve a decisive victory.

In France and Britain, strike waves ended in defeat. In the U.S., the ruling class essentially bought social peace by bribing the upper layer of the working class. In Greece, the Tempe struggle was allowed to evaporate into an apolitical movement. The uprisings in Iran, Kenya and Nigeria were crushed. In Bangladesh, the Yunus government is now in charge and the revolutionary impulse of the masses has been tamped down for the time being. As for the Palestinian struggle, a huge international movement spread across the world following October 7, but today this movement has collapsed and Gaza finds itself more isolated than ever in the face of the Israeli genocide.

In politics timing is crucial. The failure of the working class to capitalize on the openings it had, hampered at every step by its leadership, has meant that the initiative has decisively passed into the hand of the U.S. ruling class. Now Trump is launching a full-blown international and domestic offensive. This in turn will have an impact on the political situation around the world. For a time, workers will be on the back foot, worried about their own future and reluctant to go on the offensive. These are the clear signs we are getting everywhere from our comrades in the working class. As the economic crisis intensifies, the ICL insists that the orientation must be to the *defensive*. In the U.S. and everywhere else we say: *Brace for impact!*

The working class must defend its economic conditions. Unions must be strengthened and brought to a position where they can effectively combat the coming offensive. The Palestinian struggle must regroup and reorient radically. The trans movement, the immigrant movement,



U.S. section of RCI. We suggest they try connecting with the working class.

the black struggle—all need to take stock of their current isolation and forge ties with the workers movement. To be on the defensive does not mean to stop the struggle. It means struggling to defend the positions conquered by the oppressed as they come under attack.

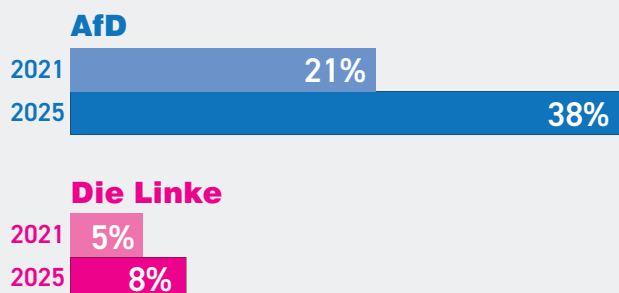
Needless to say, this is not the stance taken by anyone else. Whereas we think that Europe is on the verge of a sharp shift to the right, the Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas in Argentina considers that “Europe is probably the epicenter of this new wave of class struggle” (revolutionpermanente.fr, 22 March, our translation). Like many others, it considers the growth in the Left Party vote in Germany to be a sign of political awakening and radicalization of youth. In France its sister organization, Révolution Permanente, is multiplying its calls for a great democratic struggle against the Fifth Republic.

What is shocking is that these various prognoses and perspectives are not based on the belief that the working class is moving toward the left—they know this *isn't* the case. Rather, it is a reaction to layers of the liberal petty bourgeoisie that are vibrating to their impending political doom. Of course, we must seek to connect with these layers. But we want to calm them down and organize them for what is to come, not throw them into battle as a tidal wave of reaction is about to come crashing down.

We see similar tendencies in the United States. The left has issued countless calls for broad movements to defend immigrants and other victims of the Trump offensive. However, all these calls aim to resurrect the movements of the liberal era, a hopeless and bankrupt enterprise in the current period. Any successful struggle *must* take as its starting point the sharp shift to the right that has occurred in the U.S.

When it comes to the newly proclaimed Revolutionary Communist International (RCI), they are also extremely optimistic. The central course they advocate is to build a revolutionary party. Fair enough, but what does this mean? It means join the RCI. OK, and what course should the unions follow according to the RCI? Beyond the occasional bombastic call for occupying factories, they have no perspective. But what should the oppressed do faced with a wave of reaction? Join the RCI, of course. How to fight austerity and war? Join the RCI. And what does the RCI do?

Share of Working-Class Vote in German Elections



Spartacist Graph, source: infratest dimap

Youth in Germany may be voting Die Linke, but working class is voting AfD.

It reads books, sells papers once a week and makes long analyses of the world. As for seeking to play any kind of decisive role in the class struggle? That's not for them. First, they must have 10,000 members.

An important Trotskyist organization bucking the trend of fatuous optimism is Lutte Ouvrière in France. No one can accuse them of being optimistic. They predict wars and crisis and believe nothing much can be done about it. For them the task is simply to hold to the ideas of communism and wait for better times (sounds familiar). Needless to say, in a period of acute crisis, when the working class is facing devastating attacks, it will have little good to say about those who abstractly preach about the future and provide no concrete road out of the hell it faces today.

A prognosis is only a prediction. It is normal to make mistakes. There are many things we will get wrong. The problem is not so much making mistakes but insisting on a course shown by events to have been wrong. Events today already clearly show that the working class is on the back foot. Yet most persist in denying this reality. This can only lead to disaster. To go on the offensive in a period of reaction is always what causes the greatest losses in the ranks of the vanguard. As for the abstentionists, this may seem like a safer course, but the truth is that in times of crisis this is a declaration of bankruptcy.

Right now, one of our key roles is to warn and orient the vanguard elements of the working class and try to knock some sense into the left. At the moment, we insist on defensive struggles. But it will be just as important to recognize when the situation changes and to rapidly readjust. As Trotsky once wrote, "There is nothing more dangerous, at the time of sharp turns of history, than to hang on to the old customary and comfortable formulas; this is the direct road to decay" ("KPD or New Party [III]," 29 March 1933).



Jason Redmond/AFP

15 October 2024: Boeing strikers march toward picket lines instead of attending rally featuring Democratic Party speakers organized by IAM bureaucracy. SL/U.S. fought to escalate strike at every step.

Perspectives for the ICL

I think it is fair to posit that decay is exactly what awaits much of the left today. The combination of the collapse of the liberal world order—for which it is not prepared—and political disorientation—thinking that down means up and up means down—will necessarily produce a deepening of the crisis in Marxist parties. It is likely that we will witness the organizational collapse of many of these parties. In any case, we can expect the situation in the left to become much worse before it gets better. In no way is any of this good for the working class—or for the ICL for that matter.

We should not expect great breakthroughs in the immediate future. Any openings we have will be tempered by the generally reactionary context. We must also understand that knowing tough times are ahead does not in any way make us immune to the coming shocks. Like the left in most countries, our party was built in a period of relative peace and democratic liberties. We cannot know exactly how it will react under increased pressure. Like the working class as a whole, our comrades will be affected by the attacks of the bourgeoisie. With the working class, we will bear these attacks. But we will do so with an understanding of the general course of events and armed with a clear view of our own place in the course of historical development—as a pole of proletarian clarity among the confusion and crisis.

In order to play this role, we propose three broad orientations around which to organize our work.

1. Political Clarification

First, we must continue our work of political clarification and theoretical preparation. In a period of great disorientation and turmoil, it is essential to help the workers movement orient itself. We have already started this in different ways. We have published key theoretical articles about the countries where we have sections as well as on other vital issues such as China, India, Palestine and the trans question. We

Spartacist Letters
A Journal of Polemic and Exchange

Letters on ICL's Reorientation

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iclfi.org/spart-letters

continue this work at this plenum by adopting a fundamentally new approach to the national question in Ireland.

We must also continue to devote a substantial amount of resources to corresponding and debating with other tendencies. Our new publication, *Spartacist Letters*, is aimed at pursuing discussions with other organizations and individuals. While this work has been modest, I think it sets a positive example of how to conduct substantial and constructive debates.

As the left sinks deeper into crisis, we must do everything we can to limit the loss of Marxist cadre. It does not help the workers movement for organizations to collapse and demoralize their activists because of scandals, fights over bureaucracy or personalist conflicts. At bottom, these are just symptoms of broader disorientation. We must help the elements who are determined to fight for revolution to understand the fundamental reasons behind the havoc within their organizations and to fight for political clarification on essential questions.

2. Orient to the Working Class

Our second focus must be to orient to the proletariat. Our small roots in the working class give us key insights into its moods and aspirations and are essential to orienting our party.

This work also provides us an important terrain on which to test our ideas and build our influence among workers. In this work we can see concretely how the intervention of revolutionaries can have an impact on the balance of class forces at the workplace and in the class struggle. In the last few years, we have gained a lot of experience in conducting this work. We must continue to train and recruit proletarian cadre, the backbone of any revolutionary organization.

It is not the case that because the working class is turning to the right in many countries we must step away. Quite the contrary. It is more important than ever to develop our influence among workers. Orienting to the working class is inherently linked to defending the most vulnerable in society. With the liberals abandoning the cause of immigrants, women, black people and the LGBTQ+ movement, only the

working class can serve as a reliable rampart against reaction. It is essential to build solid alliances between oppressed sectors and the proletariat. This must be an integral part of our orientation in the coming period.

3. Orient to the Global South

Finally, it is crucial to extend our links in the Global South. In many parts of the world, the Marxist left is practically nonexistent. In many others, the organizations that do exist are nationally isolated. This is often the case even when they are part of international tendencies. Generally, the left in the West, which dominates many of the international Marxist tendencies, devotes a very small proportion of their material and political resources to work in the Global South. Meanwhile, it is in the Global South that much of the working class is concentrated and where there is the most potential for proletarian uprisings.

The ICL has in the past period taken important steps toward the Global South. The first and most important of these has been to correct our approach to the national question and to place the fight against imperialism at the center of our perspective. We have also organized many trips, increased the amount of material we translate into foreign languages and written a number of key articles. We must redouble these efforts. Now that we have largely finished the work of reorienting our national sections, we must concentrate on extending our political reach across borders. This effort must not be that of a handful of specialists but must be shouldered by the entire party. Every comrade is expected to learn about other countries and help the party extend its reach internationally.

Each of these three orientations is integrally linked to the others. By advancing all of them together, we aim to position the ICL to play a key role in regrouping the vanguard elements in the period of turmoil and chaos that stands before us. These are our current tasks; they are ambitious yet rooted in the current conditions of the class struggle, the general state of the left and in our small but determined forces. ■



Boniface Muthoni/SOPA

Nairobi, Kenya:
Youth-led upsurge
against tax hikes,
June 2024. Marxists
must seek to increase
their influence in the
Global South.

ICL Contributions for Meeting of Internationalist Forces in Paris, May 2025

U.S. Hegemony and the Crisis of the Revolutionary Movement

The following articles, translated from French, were submitted by the ICL for the Meeting of Internationalist Forces in Paris in May 2025.

* * *

For many years, the international revolutionary movement has been in profound crisis. This crisis is not fundamentally the product of objective circumstances, much less of personal conflicts or organizational methods. *If there is a crisis, it's because the Marxist movement has not correctly set out its tasks in light of the realities of the international situation.*

After the fall of the USSR, the international position of the United States became hegemonic. Globalization, the European Union, free trade and privatization all evolved under the aegis of the U.S., to the detriment of workers and under the ideological cover of liberalism. So what was necessary was to fight *against U.S. imperialism and the influence of liberalism*. If the revolutionary left is weak, it's because it didn't even recognize this task.

The ICL has not been spared post-Soviet political disorientation. Our organization was shaken by successive internal crises, and its interventions in the class struggle were sterile and sectarian. What sets us apart today is that we have sought to *understand the origins of our crisis* and to *apply the lessons we have learned in practice*.

Today, the world situation is evolving by leaps and bounds. Trump has shed the mask of liberalism and is pursuing an aggressive and openly reactionary policy to counter the relative decline of the United States. *It's up to revolutionaries to provide clear answers to the great problems of our time.*

Marxism versus Dogmatism

All too often, Marxist thought is replaced by abstract formulas totally disconnected from historical development and

from the dynamics of the class struggle. This is the case particularly when it comes to major world conflicts.

A series of arbitrary facts are selected and used to determine whether we have before us an "imperialist state," a "non-imperialist state" or a "workers state." Once a label has been selected, no further thought is necessary; one can come up with a quick mathematical formula: imperialist state + non-imperialist state = defeatism. And this passes for Marxism!

Many claim to be Leninists while forgetting *the political considerations behind Lenin's analysis*. When he insisted on the interimperialist character of the First World War, it was not out of dogmatism but to advance *the political unity of the proletariat*. In his time, the world was divided between a handful of colonial empires that oppressed the majority of peoples and nations. Unity of the oppressed was *impossible* as long as workers in imperialist countries were fighting alongside their own bourgeoisie to defend its right to oppress other nations.

Now, as then, *the unity of the working class against the bourgeoisie must be the primary consideration guiding a Marxist analysis of the world*. Indeed, it is this very consideration that will enable the international revolutionary vanguard to put an end to its own divisions. *Truth is always concrete*, so let's set aside empty formulas and abstractions and set the tasks of the proletariat in the framework of the historical development of imperialism.

Imperialism Since 1945

From the rubble of the Second World War, the United States forged a new world order. The old colonial powers soon ceased to play a truly independent role on the international stage and became second-rate partners in a capitalist world dominated by the U.S. giant.

The destruction of the USSR in 1991 fundamentally changed the balance of international forces, but it did not

change the alliance between the imperialist powers. *The EU was founded with the agreement and assistance of the United States* to promote the eastern expansion of finance capital. Japan, Australia and the U.S. similarly worked together in Asia to exploit the continent.

Today, the world is still ruled by the American empire and its postwar institutions. Neocolonial countries are plundered by debt owed in U.S. dollars and guaranteed by the U.S. military. The balance of international power has certainly changed. *But the world has not been redivided. There are no new imperialist powers.* We are still in a world shaped by the postwar era and the collapse of the USSR.

Every day Trump shows that the United States is not going to give up its dominant position without waging a merciless struggle against its rivals and the world's oppressed. *To think that U.S. hegemony has already been broken, without a war, without a crisis, reflects a liberal-pacifist view of history.* "Peaceful" economic development constantly alters the international balance of forces, *but an imperialist order is born and dies through iron and blood.*

The Ukraine War

The war in Ukraine is the result of *American overextension*. Since 1991, *NATO has been constantly expanding, not Russia.*

This in no way means that Russia is waging a just war in Ukraine. Russia seeks to *dominate Ukraine*, and the resulting national oppression can only *poison relations* between Russian and Ukrainian workers. It's true that Ukraine's defeat will be a defeat for the United States. But this defeat doesn't directly involve the U.S. military. The United States is already showing that it is ready to abandon Ukraine, reach an agreement with the Russians and concentrate its resources against China—*predictable and reactionary developments.*

It is totally legitimate for Ukrainians to defend their independence. *But it is not legitimate to fight to bring pro-Russian regions back under Kyiv's control.* National unity around this chauvinist goal, and the alliance with Western imperialism, *give a reactionary character to the Ukrainian war effort.* Moreover, this strategy undermines Ukrainian national defense.

Internationalist unity requires:

- A rejection of Western imperialism
- A mutual guarantee of the right to self-determination
- Opposition to the Russian and Ukrainian bourgeoisies
- Fraternization and revolutionary defeatism

China

Many consider China to be an imperialist power. *But China does not oppress any nation outside its borders!* Its investments abroad are entirely dependent on institutions set up by the United States. Be it in Ukraine, Palestine or the various African conflicts, China plays a conservative role. *The political instability on the international scene is not due to Chinese expansionism but to U.S. imperialism, which is seeking to maintain its domination by suffocating China.*

Some revolutionary parties believe that *capitalism was never abolished* in China, while others believe there has been a gradual restoration of capitalism, *without a counter-*

revolution. Let's put aside the categories for a moment and look at the facts:

- In 1949, a peasant insurrection *liberated China* from imperialist oppression and *drove out the Chinese bourgeoisie*, which fled to Taiwan.
- The Communist Party of China (CPC) led the revolution based on a *bureaucratic Stalinist* program.
- After the fall of the USSR, the CPC embarked on a policy of economic liberalization while *keeping the state and political structure intact.*

—Did workers need to defend the gains of the 1949 Chinese Revolution? Yes!

—Should they have supported the CPC's policies? No!

—Is there anything to defend in China today? Yes!

Chinese workers have *every interest in fighting the United States*, which seeks to subordinate China and destroy its economy. They also have a vested interest in *defending the Chinese state forged in the revolution* which has led to economic development never seen in history. But they must also *oppose the CPC*, which *conciliates* the capitalists and *undermines the gains* of the revolution.

The example of the USSR shows the disaster a capitalist counterrevolution entails. We cannot afford for such a catastrophe to be repeated!

Palestinian Liberation

Israel's genocidal war *is a war of national oppression.* The Palestinian *national liberation* struggle is a *just struggle*. To reject this is a gross capitulation to imperialism and to Zionism.

That said, *Palestinian liberation cannot be won with a bourgeois-nationalist strategy.* The tactics and policies of Hamas are *counterproductive* to Palestinian national liberation.

What is needed is a program that unites national liberation and proletarian internationalism—in other words, the program of permanent revolution.

- U.S. imperialism is the *main reactionary force* in the region.
- There can be no Palestinian national liberation without the destruction of the Zionist state.
- The oppression of Israeli workers is *heightened* by the oppression of the Palestinians.
- Proletarian unity can only be forged with *mutual respect* for national rights.
- Bourgeois nationalism is an *obstacle* to the struggle against imperialism.

Analysis and Program

Analytical debates reflect class relations. The main error of contemporary Marxist analyses reflects the main political error: *a conciliation of U.S. imperialism in its liberal form.* Equally problematic are those who attribute a progressive character to the actions of Russia, the CPC or nationalism.

Against these two poles, what's necessary is *an independent proletarian path.* This alternative must be forged *in struggle against the current leaders of the workers movement*, who everywhere are leading workers to defeat and defending the interests of "their" national bourgeoisie.

For Revolutionary Work in the Trade Unions

Internationally, trade unions are now a shadow of what they used to be. Everywhere they are led by traitors who have overseen countless concessions and defeats. Yet despite the crying need for a fighting leadership that can truly defend the working class, *the influence of revolutionary parties on the working class is weak and/or weakening.*

This failure is not explained by a simple lack of forces, but by *the refusal or inability to build a consistent opposition to the union bureaucracy.* However, the Theses on Tactics of the Third Comintern Congress were clear:

“The Communist International rejected sectarian tendencies by calling on its affiliated parties—*no matter how small*—to participate in the trade unions, in order to *defeat the reactionary bureaucracy from within and to transform the unions into revolutionary mass organizations of the proletariat.*” (emphasis added)

—Quoted in John Riddell, ed., *To the Masses: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Communist International, 1921* (Haymarket Books, 2015)

At bottom, if the so-called revolutionary organizations have failed, it is because they are pursuing *wrong strategies* in their industrial work. In this respect, the ICL has been no exception. But for our part, we have in recent years drawn lessons from our failures.

The following theses are based on our experience of intervening in the strike waves that have recently shaken several countries, notably at Boeing in the U.S. But just as important is our experience in smaller conflicts and everyday struggles in a context of growing international reaction.

We Need a Revolutionary Strategy

The starting point for revolutionary work in industry is that *the working class needs a Marxist program to guide its struggles.* A revolutionary program is essential regardless of whether it is a reactionary period, a period of economic strikes, or one of great political struggle. However, *the majority of Marxist organizations explicitly reject the struggle for a revolutionary leadership of the unions.*

When it comes to war, everyone understands that an army must be led by a general staff that seeks to *defeat the enemy.* A high command that seeks to temper the conflict rather than win it will not only make victory difficult, if not impossible, but will deploy tactics that maximize losses and minimize gains.

The same is true of the class struggle. Working-class leaderships that seek coexistence with capitalism will conciliate at every stage of the struggle. They maximize defeats and do nothing to advance workers’ strategic interests. On the other hand, a revolutionary leadership, far from sacrificing immediate gains, *employs tactics that can maximize partial victories while advancing the historic interests* of the working class.

The Danger of Opportunism

The most common problem in industrial work is conciliation of the union bureaucracy. *In its most right-wing form, this policy takes the form of open support for non-revolutionary union leaderships.* This support is usually justified with the false argument that a “left wing” leadership encourages workers to fight.

As an intermediate layer, close to the capitalists in its aspirations but dependent on the workers for its influence, *the union bureaucracy plays no independent role in the class struggle.* The political stance it takes reflects pressure from the bourgeoisie or from its working-class base. But fundamentally, the bureaucracy seeks to *conciliate* capitalism. *When it veers to the left, it does so not to foster working-class militancy but to keep it contained as far as possible within channels acceptable to the bourgeoisie.*

This does not mean it’s never principled to form a united front with a wing of the union bureaucracy. But any temporary bloc must be formed based on a *real class line* (e.g., in a strike or against national unity), *and must never impute a progressive role to the bureaucracy.* The aim of such a bloc is not to cease hostilities but to demonstrate *in action* why a revolutionary program is necessary.

Left-Wing Criticism

In many cases, conciliation of the union bureaucracy takes an indirect form. Sharp criticism is leveled at the workers’ leadership, but *this criticism remains at the tactical level and is not aimed at replacing these traitors with a revolutionary leadership of the unions.*

Such an approach *limits the role of revolutionaries to putting pressure on the current leadership.* Pressure from the left can force the bureaucracy to adopt a more militant stance and tactics, or even push workers to temporarily go beyond their leadership. But *unless a fundamentally different strategy is offered*, around which the elements of a new leadership can rally, *the movement is condemned to remaining in the hands of the bureaucracy.* When the time comes, the bureaucrats will be able to sabotage the struggle, no matter how much pressure was put on them previously.

Criticizing the tactics of the union leadership without seeking to build a new leadership based on a revolutionary strategy is to attack the symptoms of the disease without touching its cause.

Anti-Union Ultraleftism

A sectarian policy toward trade unions is just as harmful as an opportunist one. While this is most often cloaked in radical verbiage, the practical consequence is the same: the absence of an alternative to the bureaucracy.

Some organizations associate the pro-capitalist policies of the union leaderships with the unions themselves. In so doing, they deny what every class-conscious worker intuitively understands: even the most reactionary of unions is a bulwark against the bosses and a stepping stone for collective action. The result of the reactionary ultraleft position is to abandon the workers when their organization is under attack by the state or the bosses, leading such “Marxists” to lose all credibility in the eyes of the workers.

Radical Abstentionism

A less reactionary but equally sterile expression of sectarian politics is to denounce the union bureaucracy with revolutionary verbiage without offering anything in the way of answers to the concrete problems workers are facing. At best, this approach is totally sterile.

Grand proclamations about the need for revolution might provide an image of yourself as a great revolutionary. But they do nothing to advance class consciousness. The only way to truly increase the influence of revolutionary ideas is to *show how they are essential to advancing workers struggle*.

Adventurism

It is easy for an organization that has no real influence in an industry to put forward radical demands with no consideration of the political context or the obstacles to their implementation. The result is sterile and generally irrelevant. It is far more dangerous when those who do exert real influence push workers onto the offensive when conditions are unfavorable.

The practical consequence of criticizing the bureaucracy based solely on its lack of radicalism is to constantly push for more radical action. In the absence of a broader revolutionary understanding of the political situation, the result is a caricature, with small groups of isolated workers going on the offensive or staying on strike when they have no chance of victory. This policy demoralizes the vanguard and can lead to catastrophic consequences far worse than a simple policy of conciliation.

A revolutionary leadership must guide the class struggle

both when it is on the offensive and when it is on the defensive, not call for an offensive in all circumstances!

Economism

The pressure of work in industry tends to narrow political horizons to the most immediate problems. The task of revolutionaries is not only to offer workers a broader perspective on their oppression but also to *show them that a general understanding of class relations, the political context and international conditions is vital for struggle to be successful, no matter how modest it may be*.

An economist conception of trade-union work, on the contrary, accommodates the political consciousness of backward layers of the working class. For example, in reaction to racial tensions, the economist response is to advocate unity against the bosses in the abstract. What isn't said is that *workers have a vested interest in actively fighting racial oppression*. In this way economism seeks to “maintain unity” not on the basis of higher class consciousness but according to the lowest common denominator. *Thus, the antagonisms that divide workers are maintained*.

Minimum and Maximum Program

Revolutionary work in industry is necessarily concrete. It must tackle the most pressing problems facing workers in their daily lives. This does not make this work reformist; *overcoming the obstacles that keep the working class docile and divided requires a Marxist understanding of capitalist society*.

It is by putting the Marxist program into practice against the pro-capitalist bureaucracy—the main obstacle to class consciousness—that trade-union work becomes revolutionary work. The synthesis between minimum and maximum program is achieved precisely *when a broad revolutionary conception is employed to guide the proletariat's immediate struggles*. The errors listed in this document all have the common thread of breaking this vital link.

* * *

To see how the ICL puts these principles into practice, see: <https://icli.org/topics/en/labor> and <https://icli.org/topics/en/trade-unions>. ■

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For a United Irish Workers Republic!

The following motion, drafted by Eibhlin McColgan, was adopted at the April plenum of the ICL's International Executive Committee.

The national liberation of Ireland from 800 years of English domination is an unfinished task that poses a challenge to revolutionaries. After centuries of struggle for freedom, including numerous insurrections, in 1921 the nationalist leaders accepted independence for 26 counties but acceded to partition which conceded six counties in Ulster to the British imperialists. The partition of Ireland divided the nation, intensified the oppression of the Catholics within the Orange state and deepened the religious divide in the working class. In the 1990s, 30 years of armed resistance by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) resulted in a repeat of 1921: the nationalist leaders gave up the gun and bowed to the rule of the British Crown. And yet today Sinn Féin promises that in the foreseeable future Ireland will be reunited through a gradual, mutually agreed upon process. The notion that Ireland is continually progressing toward unity, which has been embraced by much of the left, rests on liberal faith in the goodwill of British and U.S. imperialism.

The Marxist movement's approach to national oppression proceeds from the understanding that national and social emancipation are interlinked. Applied to Ireland, this means that national liberation is not separate from the struggle of the working class to overthrow its exploiters, but central to it. For Marx and Engels, the task of revolutionaries of that era was "to make the English workers realize that for them the national emancipation of Ireland is not a question of abstract justice or humanitarian sentiment but the first condition of their own social emancipation" (Karl Marx to Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt, 9 April 1870). Lenin too argued that "we must *link* the revolutionary struggle for socialism with a revolutionary programme on the national question" ("The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination," October 1915). He insisted that imperialism intensified the oppression of small nations, which increased the likelihood of national revolts, and that the task of revolutionaries was to support every act of resistance by oppressed nations and use every crisis of the imperialist powers to advance the struggle for their overthrow. In "The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up" (July 1916), Lenin also took aim at those social-

ists who dismissed the Easter Rising of 1916 as opponents of self-determination, for whom small nations "cannot play any role against imperialism," and who believed "that support of their purely national aspirations will lead to nothing." Lenin continues: "Whoever calls such a rebellion a 'putsch' is either a hardened reactionary, or a doctrinaire hopelessly incapable of envisaging a social revolution as a living phenomenon."

Likewise, James Connolly wrote that "We cannot conceive of a free Ireland with a subject working class; we cannot conceive of a subject Ireland with a free working class" ("Economic Conscription," December 1915). Connolly fully understood that England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity. Amid the carnage of WWI, before leading his Citizen Army into the Easter Rising, he had expressed his hope that:

"Ireland may yet set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord."

—"Our Duty in This Crisis" (August 1914)

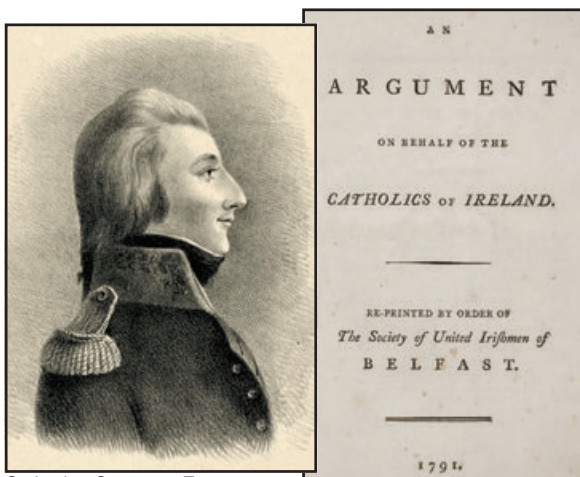
Our task is to draw the lessons of the past and put forward a perspective for a *united Irish workers republic*. This requires an anti-imperialist, anti-sectarian, working-class-centered struggle against British imperialism and the Irish national bourgeoisie. Today, a revolutionary perspective must also include opposition to U.S. imperialism, which exploits Ireland for the benefit of finance capital.

Origins of the Irish National Question

Today, Irish liberal historians equate the struggle for independence with sectarianism, for which they overwhelmingly blame the nationalists. The present Taoiseach (prime minister), Micheál Martin, stated this view bluntly last year. The Troubles did not have two sides, he said, it was "a war imposed by the IRA on its own people." The sectarian divide pitting Catholics against Protestants was not caused by the struggle for independence but rather was engineered by the British to thwart independence. Throughout the history of the struggle, the sectarian divide has been *the* strategic obstacle to freeing Ireland from British domination. For the nationalist movement, it has been an insurmountable obstacle to victory.



Seal of United Irishmen, revolutionary republicans who fought to free Ireland from British tyranny.



Catherine Sampson Tone



British Library

Left: Wolfe Tone (1763-1798), heroic leader of United Irishmen; of Protestant origin, he fought for Catholic emancipation. Right: Battle of New Ross, Wexford, 1798.

The Irish question as we know it has its origins in Oliver Cromwell's conquest of Ireland in the 17th century and the plantation of Ulster with Protestant colonial settlers from Scotland and England. The settlers were a significant class of tenant farmers renting their land from the English aristocracy. In return for defending the landlord's land from the dispossessed Irish peasants, the settlers were given tenancy agreements which enabled those who were better off to accumulate capital. Over time, a national bourgeoisie arose out of the settlers, who became increasingly hostile to the shackles that the Empire placed on their trade and business interests. A bitter struggle developed between the rising Irish capitalist class, which was mainly Protestant, and the British Empire, which led to the first struggle for Irish independence.

The modern nationalist movement began with the United Irishmen, a revolutionary democratic movement inspired by the French Revolution whose goal was an independent Irish republic. The father of modern republicanism is Wolfe Tone, a Protestant revolutionary who was clear about his life's aims:

"To break the connection with England, the never-failing source of all our political evils, and to assert the independence of my country, these were my objects. To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter, these were my means."

—Quoted in *Irish Republican News*, 23 November 2023

Tone worked with the leaders of the First Republic in France in organizing military expeditions to Ireland. The United Irishmen mobilized the Protestant vanguard in the cause of an Irish republic. Tone's famous 1791 pamphlet, *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*, won the support of the Catholic peasantry.

The example of the United Irishmen shows that the struggle for Irish independence began *not* as a sectarian struggle of Catholic vs. Protestant but as a *united national movement*. It was pledged to forming a brotherhood "among Irishmen of every religious persuasion." The lesson for us today is clear: the struggle for Irish independence must be waged as a *revolutionary* movement that *unites the nation across the religious divide*.

Sectarianism was deliberately fomented by the British imperialists in their determination to crush the United Irishmen. The Orange Order was founded for this purpose, using Protestant religious zeal to foment anti-Catholic bigotry and deepen the religious divide. Its purpose has been unambiguous, as the Museum of Orange Heritage website makes clear: "The whole influence of the Order was to be on the side of continuing union with Great Britain" (orangeheritage.co.uk). Orange reaction played a crucial role in the defeat of the United Irishmen's uprising of 1798. As a result, in 1801 all of Ireland was incorporated into the United Kingdom.

What Are the Protestants?

A perspective of united working-class struggle must start by addressing prevalent myths about what the Protestants are, and are not. This is not simply an analytical question. The idea that the Protestants have separate national rights leads to reactionary conclusions: acceptance of partition and rejection of struggle for a united Ireland. The Protestants of Ulster are not a nation, nor do they aspire to become one. They do not meet even *one* of the criteria for nationhood specified in Stalin's famous checklist, according to which a nation must have a common territory, economy, language and culture ("Marxism and the National Question," January 1913). Unlike the Israelis, the Ulster Protestants have no common national territory; they are not trying to expand their land, to drive the Catholics off it or subject them to genocide. Unlike the Palestinians, the Catholics are not fighting to take back the land that was seized from their ancestors.

Furthermore, the Protestants do not have—and never did have—a separate economy. The Northern Ireland economy is intimately tied to that of the south, as the post-Brexit hoopla over cross-border trade shows. Far from having a separate language and culture, Catholics and Protestants who grow up there can barely tell who belongs to which denomination, if not for the rigid system of segregation that separates them. Belfast's Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods exist side by side but are physically divided by miles of metal barriers that are up to eight meters high and known as "peace lines." Only 7 percent of pupils attend integrated schools.

The Ulster Protestants have lived in Ireland for centuries and are every bit as Irish as the descendants of the

Puritans are American. They were regarded as part of the Irish nation by Wolfe Tone: the clue is in the name of his Protestant-led movement, the United *Irishmen*. Connolly was of the same opinion. He wrote that “the rank and file of the armies of the conquerors” and their descendants “are now an integral part of the Irish nation” (*The Reconquest of Ireland*, 1915). The Protestants are *Irish*. They are a religious minority within the *Irish* nation. Their struggle does not aim for national independence—quite the opposite. They identify as British as an expression of their political desire for the six counties to remain within the UK. But a Unionist political orientation does not change one’s nationhood: a Scottish Unionist who identifies as British remains unquestionably Scottish.

The Protestants were designated by the British overlords as a *separate* people purely for the purpose of *denying independence to the whole of Ireland*. The British establishment only reluctantly embraced partition to prevent independence for all of Ireland. Indeed, many prominent politicians previously *rejected* separate status for Ulster Protestants on the grounds that their purpose was to ensure that *all of Ireland* remained in the Empire. Far from advocating separation of Ulster, until partition, England had ruled Ireland as a *single entity* for some 750 years, during which Protestants lived there for at least 250 years.

The Bankruptcy of Irish Nationalism

To understand why the nationalist movement failed to achieve an independent united Ireland we must look at the position of the Irish bourgeoisie, both in relation to British imperialism and to the Irish masses. The Irish bourgeoisie yearned to shake off the constraints imposed on its business and trading interests by the Empire, but were too weak to defeat the British on their own. So, they leaned on the anti-imperialist sentiments of the masses to achieve their aims, but they knew only too well that mobilizing the masses to defeat the British would pose a risk to their interests as a property-owning class. The weak national bourgeoisie was forced to choose between the pressure of the insurgent pro-

letariat and peasantry on the one hand, and their interest as an aspiring ruling class which needed to maintain business relations with the British. The Irish capitalist class put itself at the head of the national struggle but applied the brakes and prevented it from developing into a mass revolutionary upsurge that could have defeated the imperialists.

British rule in Ireland was shaken to its foundations by the 1916 Easter Rising. The war of independence, led by Michael Collins, forced the British to offer a treaty. British PM Lloyd George threatened Collins with “immediate and terrible war” if he refused to accept Britain’s terms, which included partition. Britain in 1921 was in no position to wage a war on Ireland. It was losing its position of world dominance, facing revolts in the colonies and had been forced by the working class at home to end its military intervention in Soviet Russia. But instead of Collins calling Britain’s bluff, Lloyd George called the nationalists’ bluff, forcing them to make a choice: either escalate the Irish struggle to full-scale insurrection, or back down. The nationalists had reason to fear the masses—the landless peasants were seizing land; workers struggles were spreading; Dublin dockers were refusing to handle British military goods; workers had taken over the city of Limerick. The way forward to victory was to escalate these struggles to revolutionary heights. But that was unthinkable for the Irish bourgeoisie, who had waged an all-out battle in 1913 to crush the Dublin working class and feared the wrath of the working masses more than the British.

The nationalist leadership had no strategy to prevent partition. Far from being able to appeal to Protestants to join the national struggle, the nationalist leadership was identified with the Catholic church. Politically, the nationalists could only pursue the struggle in the north along sectarian lines. As a result of the class interests of the Irish bourgeoisie and their inability to win over the Protestants, Collins caved to the demands of the British, including partition. The nationalists came to power in the 26 counties and, at the behest of the British, crushed the most militant republican fighters against British imperialism in the civil war.



Irish Citizen Army group outside Dublin’s Liberty Hall. Inset: Marxist James Connolly led 1916 Easter Rising that sought to liberate Ireland.

National Library of Ireland; David Granville



De Luan/Alamy



Joe Marquette/AP

Left: Michael Collins heroically fought British, signed Partition treaty. Right: Gerry Adams heroically fought British, signed Good Friday Agreement. “History does not repeat itself but it often rhymes.”

This act of treachery set the stage for the Irish bourgeoisie, led by what became Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, to run the country for decades as lackeys of British and more recently U.S. imperialism.

From Michael Collins to Gerry Adams

Partition divided the nation, deepened the sectarian polarization in the working class and created the reactionary Catholic state as well as the Orange supremacist state in the north. The subjugation of the Catholics in the north gave rise to the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Its leadership restricted its demands to calling for an end to discrimination against Catholics, deliberately avoiding the question of Irish unity. Nonetheless, the movement was met with a ferocious Orange backlash and ultimately the British army was deployed on the streets. For three decades, the Provisional IRA waged a guerrilla struggle against the British army. And while armed defense of the besieged Catholic areas was certainly necessary, the nationalist strategy meant that its armed struggle inevitably targeted Protestants, who were seen as the enemy. Sectarian atrocities are totally counter to the interests of the working class. They strengthen the hold of the Loyalist paramilitaries over Protestant communities and perpetuate a cycle of communalist violence that deepens the divide in the working class. Similarly, indiscriminate attacks by the IRA in English cities fuel anti-Irish chauvinism and squelch any sympathy for the Irish cause among the British proletariat.

The IRA's armed struggle caused a split in the republican movement, with the Officials cloaking themselves in Marxist phraseology while renouncing the armed struggle. Marxists *do* recognize the need for armed resistance and we are in favor of united-front actions with nationalist forces. But this must be part of a broader anti-imperialist, anti-sectarian strategy. Winning over a section of the Protestants, particularly its working class, to an anti-imperialist, anti-sectarian perspective is the only way to break the connection with Britain and achieve a united Ireland. It means appealing to the Protestant working class that their own class interests

lie in joining with Catholics in a united struggle against British imperialism.

The IRA failed to defeat the British army; the army failed to defeat the IRA and in 1998 both sides signed the Good Friday Agreement. The successor to the 1921 Treaty was brokered by Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, who convinced the IRA to disarm itself and paved the way for British troops to be withdrawn from the streets. In a rerun of the dead end reached by Michael Collins in 1921, the nationalist leadership under Gerry Adams agreed to ongoing British rule of the Six Counties. Sinn Féin leaders today bow down to King Charles, Colonel-in-Chief of the Parachute Regiment which carried out the 1972 Bloody Sunday massacre in Derry. Today, almost three decades after the end of the armed struggle, Northern Ireland is more segregated than ever and ranks among the poorest regions of the impoverished, run-down United Kingdom.

The Left Rejects Nationalism... for Pro-Imperialist Labourism

The IRA's armed struggle posed a test for the Marxist movement, which responded in one of two non-revolutionary ways. The first was to uncritically support the nationalists, which was fashionable in the 1970s. Leftists who tailed the nationalists rejected any perspective of uniting the whole working class, Protestant and Catholic, against imperialism and denied any independent role for revolutionaries. Leaving the struggle against imperialism in the hands of the nationalists is counterposed to the tasks of revolutionaries, which are to intervene into the national struggle with an independent working-class perspective aiming to show in practice that the nationalist strategy is a dead end.

The other wing of the socialist movement completely renounced the struggle for national liberation in the guise of opposing IRA nationalism and sectarianism. The result was an abject capitulation to British imperialism through the embrace of the pro-imperialist politics of the British Labour Party. On Ireland, Labourite politics means unity

with imperialism against the national struggle. A grotesque example is Arthur Henderson who, as a member of the British cabinet, cheered on the executions of the leaders of the Easter Rising. This rotten tradition was represented by the (now defunct) Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) which accepted partition and refused to mount any opposition to British rule in the Six Counties. Instead, it claimed to offer a non-sectarian, class-based alternative to the Unionists and nationalists by focusing on “bread and butter” issues faced by the working class. The NILP’s tradition was embraced by Peter Hadden of the former Militant tendency which also accepted partition and rejected the national struggle. This rotten perspective was also prominently upheld by our own international tendency for half a century (codified in “Theses on Ireland,” *Spartacist* No. 24, Autumn 1977) until we repudiated it in 2023. Our old position explicitly rejected the struggle for a united Ireland, accepted partition, peddled the Unionist myth that Protestants are not part of the Irish nation, denied that Orange ideology is Great Power chauvinism and claimed to offer a path toward class unity between Catholics and Protestants by forgetting about national oppression and focusing instead on economic struggles of the working class.

But economic struggle by itself while ignoring the national question cannot unite the working class. The clearest example is the 1919 Belfast engineering strike which paralyzed most of the city. The strike of overwhelmingly Protestant skilled workers was led by a Catholic, Charles McKay, who was a socialist. The strike was immensely powerful in forging unity in struggle between Catholic and Protestant workers. The Independent Labour Party attracted the support of many Catholic workers and class-conscious Protestants. But despite a public fight waged by Connolly against leading ILPer William Walker in 1911, the ILP refused to take a position in favor of Home Rule. This capitulation to Unionism undermined the ILP’s ability to win over Protestant workers to a program of opposition to

Unionism, the ideology of the trade-union leadership, which tied the workers to the Orange bosses and to British imperialism. The Belfast strike went down to bitter defeat at the hands of this pro-imperialist leadership and was followed by bloody pogroms which drove Catholic workers *and* Protestant socialists out of their jobs.

To this day, Labour politics means unity with the British establishment, dividing the working class and weakening its struggle. In a crass example of Labourite leaders kowtowing to the British establishment against the interests of the working class, outgoing RMT union leader Mick Lynch—a son of Irish republican parents—called off strikes by his union as a mark of “respect” when the Queen died. Also at that time, Pat Cullen, who was then leader of the RCN union and is now a Sinn Féin MP, also paid homage to the Queen on the occasion of her demise. With leaders like these, it’s no wonder the Irish struggle and the class struggle have been driven into the ground.

For a United Irish Workers Republic!

Facing the Trump era, which will mean sharp shocks including for Ireland, the challenge for the Irish working class and the left is to break with liberal gradualism which Sinn Féin, the left and trade-union leaders are mired in. From the era of the Celtic Tiger to the calamity of the 2008 crash, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael adopted liberal colors while fleecing the working population to compensate the global banking system. As a consolation prize, they offered social liberalism, which cost nothing. Inevitably, these twin parties became despised by working people, and Sinn Féin positioned itself as a viable alternative for the bourgeoisie. As true heirs to Michael Collins and the Free State government, Sinn Féin signaled its support to U.S. imperialism, dropping its pledge to withdraw from NATO’s “Partnership for Peace” and the EU’s military arrangements, while promising to keep Ireland’s non-jury courts that were set up to convict republicans. This was part of Sinn Féin’s assurances



Belfast, 1976: RUC police and occupying British troops face down demonstrators.

Terry Fincher/Popperfoto



Mary Lou McDonald

Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald meets Genocide Joe in Washington, 2022. Irish freedom requires struggle against U.S. imperialism.

that, if elected, it would keep Ireland profitable for U.S. tech giants and for the global banking system. At the same time Sinn Féin soothed the working masses with populist rhetoric about easing the housing crisis, supporting Palestine and promising a referendum on Irish unity—none of which they can deliver.

According to Sinn Féin's perspective, Irish unity will be achieved without a struggle against the imperialist powers. This fantasy comes from their liberal faith in the benevolence of U.S. imperialism and its junior partner, the EU. Irish liberals regard support for the EU as sacrosanct. They went apoplectic over Brexit, which ruptured the liberal European order. In their view, membership in the EU put an end to Ireland's status as a poor country and allowed it to sit at the top table. The 2008 crash brought a sharp reminder that Ireland is a dependent minion of the Great Powers: the EU forced Ireland to repay in full the debts of all the country's banks—which were largely owed to *foreign banks*.

As regards Irish unity, Sinn Féin built its reputation, north and south, on the Good Friday Agreement which was intended to *bury* the national question. But the national question will not go away as long as Britain occupies the north. It is very much alive among the Catholic working class and youth, who want to see a united Ireland. To realize this goal, they must reject the myth that a united Ireland will be achieved by a gradual alignment of factors, *without* a struggle against imperialism. For starters, the Catholics becoming a majority in the north does *not* mean the Orange state will leave the scene without a fight. Likewise, social liberalism in the south has *not* caused the Catholic church to disappear, to give up its influence in the schools, or to surrender its vast real estate holdings. Liberalism has *not* made a united Ireland more attractive to Protestants.

Another gradualist myth is the view that Britain will simply hand Northern Ireland back. The supposed evidence for this is the fact that after Brexit, British rulers antagonized

Unionist politicians who have taken to howling against an imaginary border in the Irish Sea. But it's delusional to imagine the British imperialists handing back the six counties which they conquered and held by force for centuries. Imperialist domination is not reducible to an economic system whereby the Great Powers return the unprofitable bits to the rightful owners. The British establishment is obsessively concerned with its own decline in the Great Power league tables. It is liberal fantasy to imagine that it will accelerate its own downslide by handing over the six counties, opening the door to Scottish independence and pulling the plug on the United Kingdom.

The way forward for the Irish struggle today requires struggle against imperialism, and against its liberal front men, on two essential questions:

1. Oppose NATO!

Ireland out of the Partnership for Peace and all EU military commitments. In the face of renewed pressure on Ireland to massively increase its military budget—not a cent for the army! To end all U.S. military use of Shannon airport, build a movement in opposition to NATO and to the EU military agreements.

2. Demand a referendum on Irish unity!

Sinn Féin has promised one but won't campaign for it. The Good Friday Agreement promised a referendum, but only if the British government agrees to it. This is an outrage—the *Irish people* should decide if they want a united Ireland, not the British imperialists! We Marxists do not share Sinn Féin's touching faith that Irish unity will be achieved by a vote. History shows that it will take revolutionary, anti-sectarian, working-class-based struggle against the imperialists and the Irish bourgeoisie.

But many people in Ireland do believe in a referendum. That is a progressive aim and we will support them in trying to achieve it. We will appeal to Protestants not to go down with British imperialism's sinking ship, which has brought them deindustrialization, misery and ruin. We will campaign for a referendum on Irish unity as a step toward reviving the Irish movement, breaking illusions in liberalism, and showing that the path to Irish unity cannot be divorced from revolutionary struggle by the working class against the imperialists and the local capitalist exploiters on the road to a united Irish workers republic. ■

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**In Defense of
Permanent Revolution**



**For Communist Leadership of
the Anti-Imperialist Struggle!**

From *Spartacist* No. 68, September 2023





U.S. Imperialism Turns the Screws

Introduction

The following memorandum, drafted by Vincent David, was adopted at the April plenum of the ICL's International Executive Committee.

Donald Trump's re-election as U.S. president has triggered a political earthquake, and his first months in office have confirmed that we are in a period of profound global shifts. Yet the rapid pace of events is matched only by the confusion gripping the left and political commentators more generally. On the one hand, some are beginning to understand what they previously couldn't. Among liberals and socialists, it is now common to speak of the crisis and failure of liberalism. On the other hand, panic and hysteria are rife. Many have reacted to J.D. Vance's speech at the Munich Security Conference by declaring that the U.S. is abandoning Europe, or that it is "the end of the West." Some believe that Trump is capitulating to Russia and/or that he is a fascist cozying up to others of his type. Others think he is simply insane. And on the other end of the spectrum are those imagining Trump and Elon Musk as political masterminds who will purge the deep state and usher in a golden age for American capitalism.

To make sense of anything, we must put the liberal frenzy aside and look at the actual trend behind daily events. The U.S. is not about to abandon Europe, where it has huge economic interests and more than 100,000 troops. Nor is Trump capitulating to Putin. He is simply aligning U.S. policy with the reality on the battlefield in Ukraine in order to shift U.S. attentions elsewhere. And, obviously, it isn't the end of the West. It is the *liberal* West that is on its deathbed.

The long-term trend defining the changes in the world is the relative decline of the U.S. For 80 years, the U.S. has been the hegemonic power of the capitalist world, and of the entire globe following the fall of the USSR. But American

supremacy also contained the seeds of its own decline. Once-mighty U.S. industry was largely offshored to the Global South. The U.S. military overextended itself. And other countries have seen substantial economic growth—China in particular. Yet the U.S. remains the world's superpower, controlling the world's reserve currency and financial system while the American military—still the largest—remains the main guarantor of security worldwide. The growing contradiction between the U.S.'s hegemonic position and its declining economic power has now reached a breaking point. This explains the turmoil in the world's situation.

Far from being insane, what Trump represents is a fundamental shift in the strategy of U.S. imperialism, which aims to reassert its dominance and reverse its decline, or at least slow it down. To do this, Trump is seeking to reindustrialize the U.S. for war and to further squeeze U.S. allies and neocolonies. The new administration is breaking with liberal ideals and institutions, which dominated the U.S. system for decades but have now become a hindrance to shoring up the U.S.'s position. Behind trade wars, negotiations with Russia and fiery speeches against the "enemy within" lies the need for the U.S. to cohere a bloc, firmly aligned behind U.S. trade and foreign policies, in order to confront, isolate and asphyxiate the People's Republic of China, the U.S.'s main economic rival.

Contrary to widely held belief, particularly on the left, the source of turmoil in the world is not the rise of Chinese or Russian so-called imperialism. China has seen an economic development unprecedented in human history, yet this has unfolded *within* the U.S.-led world order. As the U.S. moves to isolate China, the Communist Party bureaucracy in Beijing hopes to preserve the old global system, just without U.S. dominance—a complete fantasy. As for Russia, despite its huge military, it has a tiny economy compared to the U.S. What has driven the oligarchs' war in Ukraine has *not* been an expansionist Russian capitalism but a reaction to the U.S. *overextending* itself to the very borders of Russia.

Despite what Western media might repeat, the world remains very much an *American empire*. China, Russia, the BRICS+ alliance—none are vying for world domination. Nor are they building an alternative *system* to that of the U.S. They are simply seeking to insulate themselves from U.S. aggression. But for the world's superpower, even such modest moves constitute a fundamental—even existential—challenge to its supremacy that must be confronted.

The reassertion of American dominance is provoking major economic and political crises. Many obstacles stand in the way of U.S. designs, and there is a difference between the aims and ambitions of the American ruling class and its capacity to carry those out. The new administration is already confronting the anger of other countries. Domestically, while no serious force currently threatens Trump, opposition will grow. And sooner or later, Trump's brutal attacks will face working-class resistance, at home and abroad.

A lot of noise is coming from the rulers of Europe and Canada resisting U.S. demands. However, they are dependent on the U.S. and, in the short term, will have no choice but to get into line. An economic crisis combined with U.S. pressure will likely further accelerate the shift to the right and facilitate the downfall of European and Canadian liberal politicians. Indeed, the forces best placed to benefit from an economic downturn in the short term are right-wing parties, which are on the rise everywhere in the West. This faction fight within the ruling class promises to be a stormy process, as the liberals are clinging to power and using all means to keep it.

Dynamics will be different in the neocolonial world—Latin America, Asia, Africa, etc. Most of those countries are already suffocated by imperialism. The U.S.'s tightening noose will be a disaster, as there is already barely any fat to cut and hundreds of millions live in complete misery. This situation will fuel an impulse among the working class and the broader masses to combat American domination and resist the pillage of the IMF. We have already seen such revolts in recent years.

As for China, instability will come not from it being starved of resources, at least in the short term, but from the



Shuttered steel plant in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

Spartacist

Hysteria and confusion

13 February 2025

Trump's senseless capitulation to Putin is a betrayal of Ukraine - and terrible dealmaking

Timothy Garton Ash



RICH LOWRY

NEW YORK POST

OPINION

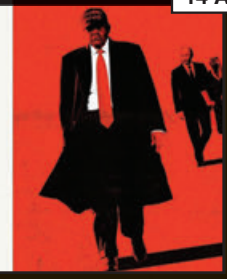
Trump will destroy a world economy that has us at the apex and only getting stronger

14 April 2025

27 February 2025

Leaders | The end of the post-1945 order
Donald Trump has begun a mafia-like struggle for global power
But the new rules do not suit America

The Economist



inner contradictions in its system. The Communist Party regime is a bureaucratic caste, which is seeking to reconcile capitalism and a planned economy and whose growth model has relied on the U.S.-led globalized order. But now the U.S. is moving more aggressively to isolate and confront China. Tremendous pressure will be put on the Communist Party tops, both from capitalists, whose profits are melting, and China's massive working class, whose living conditions are getting squeezed. The Stalinist bureaucracy will have to perform an ever more difficult balancing act to contain those contradictory forces, doing everything from subsidizing industries and indulging in left-wing phraseology to increasing repression. But this will not be enough to delay indefinitely the fundamental choice facing the People's Republic: either capitalist restoration or working-class political revolution.

In this period of imperialist offensive, rearmament and growing crises, the question posed is: Will U.S. imperialism be defeated or will it continue to drag the world into a spiral of reaction, immiseration and wars? For communists, the task of the epoch is to forge revolutionary leaderships capable of uniting workers and the oppressed and leading the struggle against American hegemony to victory. Placing hope in the Chinese Stalinists, Russian oligarchs, nationalists or social democrats of all types will prove fatal. As they do not seek to overthrow U.S. hegemony, and given their opposition to working-class revolution, they are incapable of waging a consistent or truly progressive struggle against imperialism. The freedom of

the world's toilers from oppression and exploitation will advance and succeed only under the banner of a reformed Fourth International.

The purpose of this document is to orient revolutionaries for the period ahead. This is particularly crucial as revolutionary forces everywhere are weak, discredited and tremendously disoriented. We hope this document can contribute to resolving this state of affairs.

Part One: Marxism vs. Gradualism

Politically, Western liberals, social democrats, trade-union bureaucrats, advocates of the BRICS+ alliance, Chinese Stalinists and many so-called revolutionaries all share something in common. That is, variations of a *gradualist* and *pacifist* conception of history and world relations that paralyzes them in the face of Trump's renewed offensive.

For liberals, it is the notion that social progress and democracy gradually develop with the march of history. Similarly, social democrats and reformist union leaders think the development of working-class organizations gradually leads to progress, and even socialism. The advocates of BRICS+ view the incremental development of China, Russia and the Global South as an upward, linear march toward a new, fairer and "multipolar" world order. Everywhere, we see the same tendency: the great trends of history are reduced to gradual and incremental development, leading to constant, incremental progress.

Unfortunately for them, this is not how the world works. Throughout history, we see that gradual development leads



Joe Rosenthal

Battle of Iwo Jima, February 1945. The American empire was built through blood and iron. It will not leave the scene peacefully.

“In England at the end of the 17th century, they arrive at a systematical combination, embracing the colonies, the national debt, the modern mode of taxation, and the protectionist system. These methods depend in part on brute force, e.g., the colonial system. But they all employ the power of the State, the concentrated and organised force of society, to hasten, hothouse fashion, the process of transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode, and to shorten the transition.

Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power.”

—Karl Marx, *Capital* (1867)
[our emphasis]

to violent and sudden shocks. Capitalism gradually developed within the feudal system, and then burst out of it through revolutions and wars. Financial speculation gradually leads to economic crisis. The exploitation of workers gradually leads to a strike. The gradual accumulation of quantity turns into quality, not peacefully but through sudden shocks. And the motor force of change in societies is the class struggle between the oppressed and oppressors, which inevitably leads to violent confrontations.

The dominance of gradualist conceptions among many on the left reflects the past three decades of relative stability. The hegemony of the U.S. following the destruction of the USSR enabled globalization and the rapid expansion of world trade. Under U.S. military and economic supremacy, almost all countries fell in line and capital could freely move, while the U.S.'s imperialist wars were limited to the few countries defying its diktats. Economic growth and relative social progress gave the illusion that the world was gradually reaching new heights. This was the economic basis for liberalism, the dominant ideology of the post-Soviet period.

Billionaires from Russia bought football teams in Britain. Industrial magnates from India acquired mansions in California. The European Union was unified under the watchword of peace and liberal values. Even the Chinese Stalinists discarded Mao-style attire and donned suits and ties to disguise themselves as respectable capitalists. Economic relations appeared organic, natural and as free as the global flow of trade. Many on the left came to forget that imperialism maintains itself through force. They reduced it to a vague economic notion about the “export of capital,” and since most countries exported some capital, then imperialism is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Any country with big GDP growth, a big army and a lot of

millionaires had become somewhat imperialist, on a long, sliding scale of imperialism.

However, the post-Soviet period was made possible by the supremacy of a *single* imperialist power: the U.S., which came to dominate the world not through a peaceful and gradual process but through World War II, the greatest carnage in human history. The U.S.'s victory enabled it to unify all the old colonial powers—Japan, Germany, France, Britain, Italy—in a U.S.-led alliance to confront the Soviet Union. The U.S. came to dominate the entire globe by finally destroying the Soviet Union through capitalist counterrevolution, which rolled back the gains of 1917 and shattered the social fabric of Russia and Eastern Europe.

Now, Trump is setting U.S. imperialism on a war footing. He is reversing globalization, breaking with liberal values and institutions and moving to confront China. Those who are the most shocked in the face of Trump's offensive are those who hold onto gradualism. They cannot understand how the U.S.'s gradual economic decline would *inevitably* lead to a sudden and brutal turn by the American ruling class to shore up its position by any means necessary. The advantage of Marxists is precisely that we understand that empires are built through war and maintain themselves not only through economic relations but through *force*. We understand that the U.S. empire will not leave the scene of history gradually and peacefully but only through its forcible displacement. That is, "either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes," to use the words of the *Communist Manifesto*.

However, many Marxist groups today believe that U.S. hegemony is already over! They believe that Russia and China have *gradually* become imperialist powers. They believe that the world has *already* been reddivided, that the U.S. lost its hegemonic position *peacefully*, through gradual economic development alone and without any major fracture or war, and that the world is now divided between competing imperial blocs. They often say this while claiming to be Leninists. Yet Lenin constantly hammered on how *wars* were an inevitable feature of the imperialist system and the

means by which great powers fight to redive the world into spheres of influence. The left's revisionism of Lenin reveals a gradualist conception, *disappearing* that the world remains an American empire whose ultimate power is based on the U.S. military and its 750 bases spread over all continents.

In a certain sense, Trump has a better feel for this than the gradualists. He knows that to shore up the U.S.'s position he needs to prepare for war and choke off China. And he knows that to do this, he needs to smash the liberals and the fainthearted standing in the way. At least, Trump might have the effect of clarifying for our gradualists a thing or two about the true nature of imperialism and world relations. This is key, as those who want to fight U.S. imperialism must rid themselves of any gradualist illusions. Without doing this, it is impossible to understand the world, the direction it is going in and, crucially, what to do.

Part Two: How the U.S. System Works

Many know that the U.S. dominates the global economy. But few actually understand how it does this. In order to make sense of what Trump is doing, it is important to take a step back and understand the mechanism used by U.S. imperialism, its inner workings and its limits.

What enabled the U.S. to come out victorious from World War II and tower over all its rivals was its industrial might, providing the U.S. with the most powerful military. It is from this position that the U.S. was able to impose the dollar as the world's reserve currency (used for most international trade and kept in reserve by banks and governments). The dollar was tied to gold, which gave it stability. Broadly speaking, the U.S. loaned money to other capitalist countries, which in turn used it to purchase goods made in American factories. In this way, an American empire was built, and the old colonial powers were co-opted as junior partners to dominate the rest of the world and confront the USSR. For the first time, the capitalist world was *unified* around the power and the currency of a *single* hegemon.

But as the U.S. waged war against Soviet allies across the globe and Europe and Japan rebuilt their industrial base, this relationship changed. U.S.-manufactured goods became less competitive and the U.S. started to decline economically. Foreign wars were putting tremendous strain on the U.S. budget. Before long, to finance growing imports and military adventures, the U.S. was printing more money than its gold reserves could back. Traditionally, this would have meant bankruptcy. However, the U.S. was able to turn this to its advantage in a unique way.

Since the U.S. was now importing more than it exported, foreign countries accumulated



Keystone

Row of Army C-47 Skytrains, January 1945. U.S. supremacy was possible due to its formidable industrial base.



Tim Page/Corbis

U.S. 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vietnam, September 1965. Heroic struggles of Vietnamese people for national and social liberation strained U.S. imperialism's economic and military resources.

a lot of dollars, assuming they were convertible into gold. But President Nixon limited convertibility and in 1971 abolished the gold standard altogether. The U.S. could now print money without limit. Furthermore, it demanded that foreign countries with dollar surpluses buy U.S. Treasuries, that is, U.S. debt (lending to the U.S. government for interest). Thus, from now on foreign countries would manufacture products for the U.S., get dollars in exchange and *return* those dollars through Treasuries in order to finance the growing American budget deficit. Dollars would also come back to the U.S. through investments in the stock market or the purchase of assets in the U.S. (property, etc.). In other words, foreign countries would pay for the U.S.'s wars, and since the U.S. could print an unlimited amount of dollars, it could borrow without limit.

The end of the gold standard sent shockwaves around the world and provoked economic unrest and inflation. European imperialists were angry at this unilateral move, with France lashing out at the U.S.'s "exorbitant privilege." But in the end, Europe had no alternative. European imperialists, and also the Japanese, benefited greatly as junior partners in the U.S. empire, which secured their interests at home and abroad. Since refusing to concede would mean breaking with the U.S., they accepted taking an economic hit in order to keep their privileged position. The U.S. also struck a deal with the Saudi monarchy and other OPEC countries to sell oil only in dollars, buying U.S. Treasuries in exchange for military protection. This forced anyone who wanted to buy oil to hold large reserves of dollars.

Meanwhile, the Third World was forced into submission. To get dollars, those countries would be forced to take on loans at extortionate rates from U.S. banks. When they could not pay, the IMF would force them to implement austerity

and privatizations and to open their markets to U.S. companies, choking dozens of countries into a debt crisis that continues to this day. Those who looked to the USSR as an alternative would face Washington's might, from economic sanctions and blockades to regime change. The whole capitalist world submitted to the U.S., either forced to do so or because of their economic interests in the American empire. In both cases, this was possible because the U.S. remained the uncontested military power of the capitalist world.

Economist Michael Hudson's book explains:

"The United States achieved what no earlier imperial system had put in place: a form of global exploitation that controlled debtor countries by imposing the Washington Consensus via the IMF and World Bank, while the Treasury-bill standard obliged the payments-surplus nations of Europe, OPEC and East Asia to extend forced loans to the U.S. Government. Against dollar-deficit regions the United States continued to apply the classical creditor leverage that Europe and Japan were unable to use against it. Debtor economies were forced to impose austerity to block their own industrialization and agricultural modernization. Their designated role was to export raw materials and provide low-priced labor whose wages were denominated in depreciating currencies."

—*Super Imperialism: The Economic Strategy of American Empire* (ISLET, 1972; third edition, 2021)

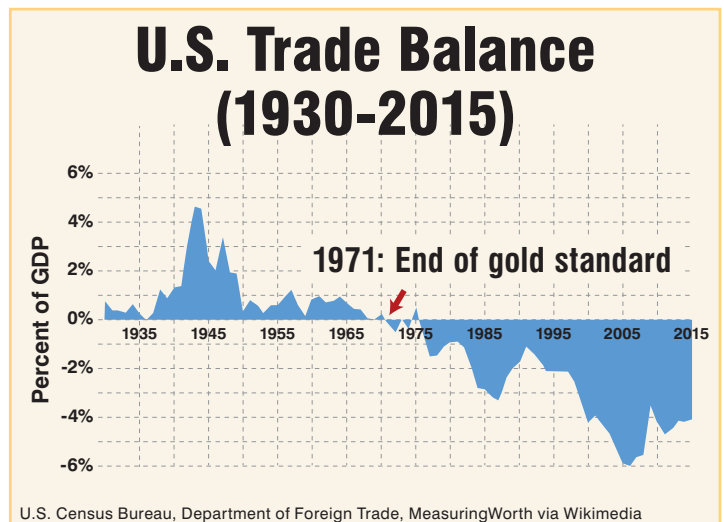
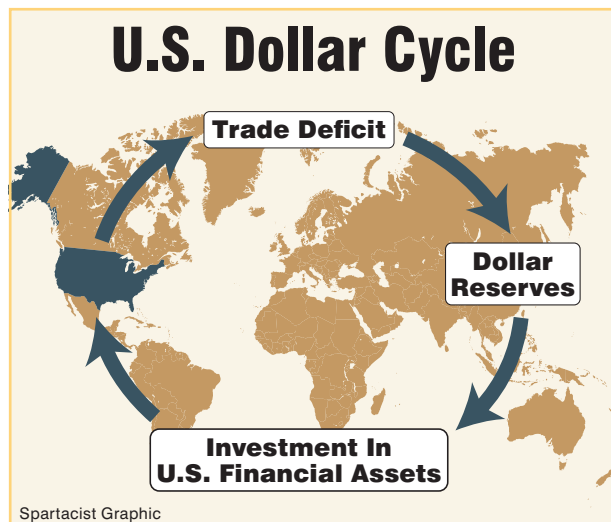
While Hudson is able to describe quite well the mechanics of exploitation of the U.S. system, he constantly presents those as mistaken political choices by rulers in Washington, who instead could have used their advantage to do good in the world. What he denies is that the creation of a unique mechanism of exploitation flowed from the very logic of capitalism in its imperialist stage, i.e., it flowed from the *material interests* of the American imperialist ruling class.

We see that as the economic weight of the U.S. declined and its industry became less competitive, domestic production alone was no longer sufficient to sustain the cost of its empire. Its maintenance required printing more fictitious money and extorting more value from other countries—through forced loans via U.S. Treasuries, debt repayment to U.S. banks or cheap labor for U.S. companies. The more the productive capacities of the U.S. *declined*, the more it needed



Sergio Dorantes/Sygma

February 1986 protest against Mexican government, IMF, with banner reading, "North American Imperialists: Enemy of Its Own People and All Peoples of the World."



to use *parasitical* means to maintain its global empire. The contradiction between the declining productive forces of the U.S. economy and the burden of empire is constantly getting stretched, with the elastic becoming thinner and thinner.

In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed under intense pressure from U.S. imperialism. Suddenly, the U.S. system was extended to the *entire* planet, bringing massive profits to the U.S. while also fueling its decline. Capital could expand everywhere and into new markets. But this process accelerated deindustrialization in the U.S. and other imperialist powers, reducing their economic weight and increasing financialization. The world economy became even more organized around a group of countries in the Global South—China in particular—whose cheap labor produced goods for the U.S./Western markets, while another group of countries was kept in utter destitution through financial strangulation.

China saw an unprecedented industrial boom, exporting large quantities of manufactured goods to the U.S. and the West. It accumulated massive reserves of dollars, which it reinvested in U.S. Treasuries. By the 2000s, China was holding hundreds of billions of dollars in U.S. debt, worrying some in Washington. In this way, China played and still plays a significant role in the dollar system, as we will see with the 2008 crisis. However, China's industrial power, the sheer size of its economy and its growing trade relations started to undermine U.S. dominance. Take, for example, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's program to develop its trade by providing infrastructure projects, loans and cheap goods to the Global South. Although carried out within the U.S. system (many investments are made in U.S. dollars), the BRI was nevertheless undermining its foundations. For the U.S. rulers, China was becoming a growing threat.

The 2008 financial crisis exposed the weaknesses of the U.S. empire. However, its consequence in the short term was to *strengthen* the role of the dollar. To prevent a banking collapse, the U.S. brought its "exorbitant privilege" to new heights, printing huge amounts of dollars to throw into the stock market. As the U.S.'s junior partners were also about to collapse, it extended *unlimited* lines of credit to central banks in Europe and to other allies—the "swap lines." These became a permanent feature as the entire financial system now required ever larger sums of fictitious money to prevent its collapse. The Global South also got

loans from the IMF to prevent the collapse of their economies. All of this was paid for by massive austerity programs, including in Europe. But the U.S. also financed this by demanding that China buy huge amounts of Treasuries. Wanting stability, the CPC bureaucracy did so and actually bankrolled the dollar system throughout the crisis.

The same process happened again during the pandemic, at an even higher level. As economies stalled, the U.S. printed even more money (more than its entire spending during World War II, adjusted to today's dollars). Its allies did the same, using the swap lines. This stretched the system to extreme limits, provoking inflation and a massive stock market bubble. The U.S. deficit also exploded, to the point where the U.S. now spends a trillion dollars a year on interest payments alone. Furthermore, after the Ukraine war began, Russia was essentially cut out of the dollar system. This was the first time since the Cold War that a significant economy had been excluded, but it did *not* crush Russia. In fact, Russia was able to function and even win on the battlefield. All of these factors and more have stretched the U.S. system to existential limits. A new strategy for U.S. imperialism is urgently needed, which is why Trump is tearing apart the status quo.

Part Three: The Coming Economic Crisis

Trump's tariffs are already wreaking havoc on the stock market. Financial instability is sure to burst the massive asset bubble, which has been building up since 2008. Our 2023 International Conference document expected it to burst sooner (see "The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony & the Struggle for Workers Power," *Spartacist* No. 68, September 2023). However, further speculation on AI and big tech kept it going a little longer. But now the AI boom is drying up and the new U.S. administration is not spending huge



Joaquin Montenegro Humanante/picture alliance

amounts like before. An economic crisis, or at least a major recession, is a certainty.

An economic downturn will exacerbate all current economic and political trends. We cannot know exactly how it will unfold, but two broad scenarios are possible: either the whole postwar order will shatter, ending the dominance of the dollar, or else a majority of countries will once again accept giving away a pound of flesh to save the U.S. system, which would continue on an even more oppressive basis. Our belief is that the latter option is much more likely, at least in the short term.

As seen in 2008, a financial meltdown will not push countries to opt out of the dollar. When crisis hits, dollars go back to the U.S. “safe haven,” starving everyone else of dollars. And who has their hands on the dollar tap? The U.S. rulers, of course. Now that the U.S., which remains the biggest consumer market, has imposed tariffs on everyone, it has gained more leverage. This is why on the world scene an economic crisis will *not* undermine Trump but will in fact *strengthen* his hand against everyone else.

Banks in Europe, Japan, Canada and other U.S. junior partners will need massive cash inflows to stave off collapse. They will turn to the U.S., which will demand a price in the form of austerity and concessions for American companies. Much has been said about the possibility of the U.S. imposing a “Mar-a-Lago Accord” on its allies—a plan to force them to buy new U.S. Treasuries with long-term commitment and lower interest rates, increase their defense spending (by buying U.S.-made weapons) and help devalue the dollar to boost U.S. exports. In other words, to sabotage their economies in order to shore up the U.S.’s while financing the U.S. deficit at a much cheaper rate. Confronted with a crisis, the pressure on U.S. allies will increase tenfold to accept such a deal.

In the Global South, investments and capital will be sucked out. A crisis will also burst the smaller bubbles, like the one currently driving the stock market in India. Remittance money will decrease. This is money sent from migrants working abroad (often in the West), constituting huge sources of revenue and liquidity. (For example, remittances account



Eduardo Soteras/Bloomberg

Left: Indigenous demonstrators in Quito, Ecuador, June 2022. Above: Residents of refugee camp in Sudan waiting for aid, October 2024. Global South will be hit hardest by increased world turmoil.

for 8.5 percent of GDP in the Philippines and 4.5 percent in Mexico. Many other countries face the same situation.) The lack of dollars will be acutely felt, particularly to pay the debt which, in dozens of countries, is at an all-time high. The IMF will step in with “debt-restructuring” programs, which come at the expense of government spending, state-owned assets, protectionist barriers and national revenue.

Many of these countries are already at a breaking point. In Mexico, 70 percent of the population receives financial support from the state, which often prevents starvation. A crisis will likely ax many such state-sponsored social programs. In India, only 10 percent of its 1.4 billion inhabitants have money to spend while 90 percent live from hand to mouth. A further squeeze is bound to be explosive, including by inflaming caste, religious and national divisions that are already rife. In South Africa, where unemployment already stands at 32 percent, the U.S. has made it a point to crush the country, and a crisis there is sure to further asphyxiate its economy.

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The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony & the Struggle for Workers Power

A PROGRAM FOR THE
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These are countries in which the U.S. and the West more broadly have economic interests. They will want to bail them out, surely at an extortionate price. However, there is a layer of countries that the imperialists have no qualms about leaving in a state of utter chaos, as long as they can pillage resources and no force emerges capable of uniting everyone against their plunder. This is the case for much of East and Central Africa and certain countries of the Middle East. Already torn by famine and wars, a crisis will wipe out the meager revenues they obtain from the world market. It is expected that economic pressure there will further fuel bloody regional and ethnic wars as well as ever-larger flows of refugees.

The state of dire misery existing throughout the Global South (minus China and Russia) will provoke social explosions and put tremendous pressure on the regimes. The weak national bourgeoisies will be increasingly forced to oscillate between aligning themselves fully behind U.S. designs or leaning on the anti-imperialist sentiment of the masses. In either case, this would mean an increasing tendency toward bonapartism and even possible coups.

As for Russia, its transformation into a war economy has enabled growth despite its exclusion from the dollar system. The regime of the oligarchs is relatively solid, particularly given its imminent victory in Ukraine. But a crisis will crash the price of oil, one of Russia's main exports, and inevitably create difficulty there too. However, Russia's real trouble will likely start after the Ukraine war, when war production stops and tens of thousands of soldiers are demobilized.

One of the biggest questions posed by a coming crisis is what will China do? As we have seen, back in 2008 the CPC leadership effectively propped up the dollar system by purchasing massive amounts of U.S. Treasuries. As the U.S. will need to once again put the money presses to use, it is likely that they will again demand that China contribute to stabilizing the U.S.-led world economy. With the U.S. openly seeking to strangle China, this would seem unthinkable. However, the Communist Party bureaucracy is a *conservative* force, interested in its own stability and privileges and caught between a huge working class and U.S. imperialism. Therefore it is likely that it will *want* to save the dollar system in a time of crisis. We cannot know exactly how this will proceed or if the CPC will be forced into a more confrontational stance. But one should never underestimate the determination of Stalinist bureaucracies to seek accommodation with world imperialism.

These projections are based on the short-term impacts a crisis will likely have, as the U.S.'s control of the world's reserve currency and of capital flows will serve to strengthen its hand. But this will be true only *initially*. The world is not the same as in 2008. The U.S.'s hand is weaker as it faces growing challenges, and the price it must demand to shore up the dollar system is higher. The extortion of the world through the dollar system depends, above all, on the willingness of the empire's junior imperialist partners to accept their subordinate role in exchange for certain privileges; on the lack of alternatives for others; and on sheer coercion for the rest. In the medium and long term, any one of these forces could, in various ways, break from the dollar system. This would

not automatically be a progressive development. It can only be progressive if it advances the struggle of the international working class against the entire imperialist system.



No other issue has generated as much hysteria among liberals as Trump's approach to the Ukraine war and the shift in policy his administration is implementing. Many have screamed betrayal, arguing that Trump is capitulating to another autocrat and abandoning Europe, which now stands alone as the bearer of freedom, democracy and the values of the postwar order. Here again, to understand anything, the first step is to put aside the liberal frenzy.

Contrary to the claims of Ukraine's Ministry of Defence, whose reports on the military situation are uncritically parroted by the liberal media and politicians, Ukraine is losing this war. Zelensky's Kursk adventure has ended in a complete disaster and, throughout the front line, the army is facing shortages of men and weapons and is getting destroyed. Meanwhile, Russian forces are advancing everywhere, the size of its army is increasing and a major offensive appears in preparation. While the Ukrainian economy is in ruins, Russia's economy has been growing despite heavy sanctions, and has been reorganized for massive military production. Furthermore, supplying Ukraine for a high-intensity industrial war has depleted Western weapons stocks at an unsustainable rate. A stark light has been shed on the West's industrial impotence: while all of NATO can collectively produce 1.2 million artillery shells a year, Russia alone produces over three million.

From the standpoint of Washington, which has been by far the biggest donor of military aid, the policy of complete



Kostiantyn Liberov/AP

September 2022: Ukrainian soldier helps wounded comrade.

NATO's Eastward Expansion



From the Kremlin's standpoint, Ukraine—a border country that has historically been in Russia's sphere of influence—is of vital interest. The hue and cry over Russian expansionism masks the reality that for the last three decades it has been NATO and the EU that have expanded all the way to Russia's borders, despite its constant objections. What Putin wants, and what he has long sought, is an agreement with the West to secure its western border, end NATO's expansionism and assure Russia's sway over Ukraine. This is why he has carefully welcomed Trump's overture. That said, the Russian ruling class has no interest in embracing the West and cutting its ties with China. On the contrary, from their standpoint an agreement with the U.S. would be beneficial

hostility to Russia and support to Ukraine until total victory has been a costly failure. The new administration is simply shifting U.S. policy in line with this reality. The U.S. has no vital interests in Ukraine. While Russia does represent a geostrategic challenge to American designs, its small economy is in no way a threat on the level of China. This is why for many in the new U.S. administration, three years of war in Europe have been a waste of resources that could have been put to better use in the Pacific. The Ukraine war has also strengthened ties between Russia and China, which is a problem for U.S. interests. For all these reasons, it makes sense for the U.S. to seek not only to bring the war to an end—even if this means making concessions to Russia—but also to achieve an economic and political rapprochement with Russia. This could potentially bring Russia closer to the Western fold and away from China, or at a minimum neutralize it as a nuisance.

not only for ending NATO's expansion but also for enabling them to play China against the U.S. and vice versa, reaping benefits from both sides to develop its economy.

Recent developments have shown how those on the left who sided with either Ukraine or Russia have been totally wrong. The main argument of those socialists who supported Russia has been that its victory would be a blow to the U.S., and therefore a progressive development. The coming Russian victory clearly shows the bankruptcy of such a position. While the U.S. is indeed losing the war, it is not fighting directly but *through a proxy*. This key feature has been dismissed as irrelevant by pro-Russian "socialists." Yet this is what enables the U.S. to now simply shift its stance, throw its proxy under the bus and seek a deal with Russia to jointly plunder Ukraine. As a result, whatever the content of a future U.S.-Russia deal (if there is one), Russia's war will *not* have advanced the struggle against imperialism in Eastern Europe, nor will it have weakened the U.S. in a fundamental way. Rather, the result will be the oppression of Ukraine by Russia, the rearmament of Europe and a shift in the U.S. focus toward confronting China—all *reactionary* and predictable developments.

Equally bankrupt have been those socialists who supported Ukraine. Their main argument has been the need to defend the sovereignty of a small nation against foreign aggression. But Ukraine's sovereignty could only be defended *against* its government. For years, the regime in Kyiv has pursued a policy of oppressing the Russian-speaking minority—roughly 20 percent of the population—while waging war to retain Crimea and the eastern regions that clearly sought secession. At the same time, it has aligned itself with NATO, the EU and the U.S., ceding its military and economic sovereignty to those imperialists. The result was to transform Ukraine into a Western colony while guaranteeing total hostility from Russia, providing it with the perfect war claims. Zelensky's disastrous strategy of tying Ukraine's fate to the U.S.—best shown in his humiliation in the Oval Office—has tragically con-



Ding Haitao/Xinhua

Xi Jinping meets Vladimir Putin in Kazan, October 2024. Ukraine war has strengthened ties between China and Russia.



Jim Lo Scalzo/EPA

Volodymyr Zelenskyy humiliated in White House, 28 February. Trump tells it like it is: Ukrainian government was just a puppet cynically used to further U.S. interests.

firmed Henry Kissinger's words: "It may be dangerous to be America's enemy, but to be America's friend is fatal." Those socialists who defended the Ukrainian government, critically or not, ended up as useful idiots in the imperialists' games.

The only socialist policy in such a reactionary war was and still is to fight for the fraternization of Ukrainians and Russians, based on unconditional opposition to Western imperialism and its Ukrainian puppets and opposition to Great Russian chauvinism, coupled with defense of the rights of Russian minorities. This is the only course that can unite the working class of the entire region. This is how Russia's encirclement by the imperialists can be broken in a progressive manner, how Ukraine's freedom can be secured and how all of Eastern Europe can be freed from national oppression. This perspective was always going to face significant obstacles, yet it remains the *only* progressive path. The failure of the workers movement to adopt an independent policy—with its leaders falling behind either the imperialists and their puppets or the Russian oligarchs—has now made certain that the war's outcome will be a disaster for workers in Ukraine, Russia and all of Europe.

Negotiations between Russia and the U.S. are still at an early stage and could last for months. While the U.S. wishes to conclude the war as soon as possible, Russia is in no rush. It is winning on the battlefield, preparing new offensives and seeing little need to make concessions. This will prove problematic for the U.S., which will want to limit the damage. Furthermore, the U.S. must manage its Ukrainian proxy, which it has bolstered for over a decade by fueling Ukrainian ultra-nationalists who are not known for their conciliatory stance toward Russia. So far, the Ukrainians have done everything to derail negotiations. Thus, the question is not if Zelenskyy will be overthrown but when, how and by whom. The U.S. must also manage the hostility of most of the European establishment as well as a part of the American political class.

Given the inertia in the West, it might be that Russia will need to make further gains through a major breakthrough on the front line, including tanks reaching Kyiv, a prospect

that is no longer far-fetched. Then the path would be cleared for a U.S.-Russia deal on Russia's terms. This would include securing Russian control of the four eastern regions of Ukraine, the removal of the Zelenskyy regime, the end of NATO's eastward expansion and of its support to what is left of Ukraine. Some sanctions may be lifted, although it remains to be seen if trade relations with Europe will get back to pre-2014 levels. In exchange, the U.S. would likely lean on Russia to help it elsewhere, for example, pressuring Iran to abandon its nuclear program.

However, there is a more fundamental consequence of a potential U.S.-Russia security agreement: to squash Europe into a reactionary arrangement. Neither the U.S., the master of Europe, nor Russia has an interest in European instability. That has always been a bad omen for Russia, and the U.S. needs a stable Europe in order to focus its attention elsewhere. Russia, with its military might, abundant natural resources and reservoir of religious conservatism could very well find common cause with

American finance capital and its newly dominant right-wing Christian establishment in squeezing liberal Europe. A rapprochement between the U.S. and Russia would serve as *a conservative and reactionary stabilizing factor in Europe.*

This was Russia's role in European politics throughout the 19th century: a bastion of reaction which Britain, the great power of the time, could lean on to stabilize Europe. While the situation today is obviously different, an American-Russian agreement defining European politics would be in the interests of both Russia and U.S. imperialism, particularly as the latter is pushing a fundamental political realignment on the continent.

Part Five: Europe and America

Trump's negotiations with Russia, his humiliation of Zelenskyy in the Oval Office, the imposition of tariffs and J.D. Vance's speech denouncing the European liberal establishment as the "enemy within" have sent shockwaves throughout Europe. In the space of a few weeks, the European order based on globalization, free trade, liberal values and hostility to Russia—a system built for years under U.S. leadership and guaranteed by its military might—came under constant attacks from the White House. Panic is gripping the European elites. For years, liberal politicians who had become increasingly hated by their own population could at least take comfort in the fact that they remained in the good graces of the world's superpower. No more. Trump's new administration has marked the death of liberalism throughout the U.S. empire, making liberal, "freeloading" Europe a prime target for political realignment.

The Trump administration needs to extract more from Europe in order to shore up the U.S. position, particularly

in regard to defense spending and trade conditions. Far from abandoning Europe, the U.S. needs it to consolidate a more aggressive anti-China bloc that can better contribute to U.S. security. The issue, however, is that for this to happen Europe needs a massive realignment. European institutions and governing structures were built to serve the past U.S. liberal order. The European Union—a huge bureaucratic apparatus tied to countless liberal institutions—has entrenched economic interests in the status quo. And Europe is still led by politicians like Emmanuel Macron, Friedrich Merz, Ursula von der Leyen, Keir Starmer and Pedro Sánchez. These leaders, whose careers were built in the old liberal order and who are clinging to it, in many ways represent the huge political gap between the old, post-Soviet Europe and the new, right-wing U.S. administration.

After Trump humiliated Zelensky, Kaja Kallas, EU head of foreign policy and *über* anti-Russia warmonger, declared that “the free world needs a new leader” and “it’s up to us, Europeans, to take this challenge.” Countless liberal commentators and politicians have similarly called for Europe to finally chart its own path, independent of the U.S., to uphold liberal values, confront Russia and prop up Ukraine longer. This only underlines how Europe’s political leadership lives in a parallel world. In reality, all major European economies are in a miserable state of stagnation. With the partial exception of Germany, they have lost almost all their industry, relying largely on finance, services and tourism. Throughout the continent, infrastructure is crumbling and the population is aging. On the military level, Europe is currently unable to sustain any sort of conventional war. Its small and outdated armies are dependent on American air power, logistics, intelligence, supplies and command systems for any serious operations.

Polish prime minister Donald Tusk might repeat that Europe taken as a whole is stronger than Russia, but this does not make it true. Europe is balkanized into various countries with contending interests. What liberals always forget is that it was U.S. economic and military domination over



Thibault de Champrosay

French post-World War II poster reads: “Marshall Plan—Cement of Europe.” U.S. dominance in Europe has been precondition to European unity.

Europe since 1945 that made European unity possible and prevented the continent from tearing itself apart. The ambitions of European leaders to take over leadership of the “free world,” to build a “coalition of the willing” or to achieve “strategic autonomy” are nothing but fantasies. Europe is completely dependent on the U.S., both militarily and economically. In the short term, and probably even in the medium term, Europe, or any single European power, *will not* and *cannot* play any role independent of the U.S.

What lies behind the bravado, fierce declarations and denial of reality in European ruling circles is an anomaly that has been reinforced over time. There is a growing contradiction between Europe’s political superstructure—its institutions, ideology, bureaucracy, politicians, etc.—and its actual economic base, i.e., its state of utter weakness and dependence on the U.S. Sooner or later, this contradiction must be resolved, and Europe will have no choice but to discard its dated liberalism and fall in line behind the U.S. The rise of right-wing populist parties represents this growing trend (e.g., the AfD in Germany, the RN in France, Reform UK in Britain, the FPÖ in Austria, Meloni in Italy—who is already in power). The U.S. administration favors those, not so much out of agreement on policies but because they are the one force that can break through the liberal status quo in a manner best serving U.S. interests.



Neil Hall/EPA

Keir Starmer’s coalition of the impotent, 2 March.

So far, the political center in Europe is holding. The fact that many politicians feel strong enough to (partially) resist U.S. demands and (halfheartedly) defend the liberal status quo reflects entrenched economic interests. These

are, first and foremost, the European capitalists who have greatly benefited from the arrangement of the last three decades, are resistant to change and may not fully trust the emerging right-wing parties *yet*. Secondly, there is the inertia of European institutions and bureaucracy. Thirdly, in the advanced European countries there is still a sizable middle class. Often tied to European institutions and enjoying a relatively high standard of living, this layer serves as the main base of support for centrist parties. This applies to Britain, too. Formalists on the left might robotically repeat that the Labour Party is a bourgeois workers party. While this retains a grain of truth, the reality is that currently Labour's base of support is the urban middle class, not workers.

The trend described above was seen in the February German elections. While support for the right-wing AfD increased substantially (particularly among workers), the traditional parties retained a vast majority of the electorate, showing that German liberalism is not completely dead yet. The surge in support for the Left Party, celebrated by most of the far left internationally, came in fact mostly from ex-Green petty-bourgeois voters and must be interpreted as a defense of the liberal status quo. In Germany as elsewhere, popular support to right-wing, anti-establishment parties has come mainly from the working class, particularly its lower strata but also in layers of the labor aristocracy.

Thus, Europe continues to be dominated by “transition” politicians—Macron, Starmer, Merz & Co.—who have one foot in defense of the liberal European order and the other in right-wing reaction, as they try to cover their right flank. This has the usual result of dissatisfying everyone. These governments, which have come to power in order to block the “far right,” are utterly discredited with the population and living on borrowed time. But their downfall and replacement by the right, which is almost inevitable at this point, will not be a peaceful and linear process but the result of acute political and economic crises. On paper, elections in Britain and Germany are years away. Macron still has two years before the next presidential elections, and the French establishment has just banned Marine Le Pen from running. The liberals will use every trick to stay in power. But given U.S. demands for a political realignment, as well as the gap between Europe's economic base and the ideas and ambitions of its political class, this situation cannot last.

The coming economic crisis will lay bare the completely rotting character of European economies. It is expected that an economic shock, combined with major austerity measures, will hit the middle and working class quite hard. The need for rearmament also comes at the expense of the welfare system, which remains sizable in some countries. Massive discontent, which already exists, will grow. This will generate significant political crises that will make impossible the continued rule of halfway house politicians, who will have to cede their place to more decisive rulers.

Of course, in European countries oppressed by imperialism, political dynamics are different. Serbia and Greece



Imago/Alamy

Athens, 28 February: Mass protest on second anniversary of Tempe train tragedy that killed 57. Struggle for justice against Greek government and EU could have changed tide of class struggle in Europe.

have been rocked by mass popular movements against their governments that were fueled by anger at imperialist pillage. Greece in particular already went through a massive crisis in the 2010s that devastated large sectors of the population. In these countries, the petty bourgeoisie is much more impoverished, as is the working class. An economic crisis and austerity will have a much more explosive character, making the threat of bonapartist rule more potent. On the other hand, we can look at Hungary to get an idea of where Europe is heading politically. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, a reactionary Christian close to Russia and the U.S., has long been the *bête noire* of the EU for his opposition to liberalism. Today, however, he is ahead of the times.

Given the current position of the working class, an economic downturn will most likely dampen rather than encourage militancy, at least in its initial stage. A rise in unemployment and the devastation of living standards in the working and middle classes does not provide a good context for working-class struggles. Furthermore, an economic crisis will *accelerate* current political dynamics, which favor right-wing, anti-establishment parties. This is because for the last decade, the left has miserably failed to impose itself as a force because of its support to the liberal status quo, pushing growing numbers of workers to the right. Many workers have seen their living standards devastated and, given the left's embrace of liberalism, have found an outlet for their anger in anti-immigrant poison.

There were also significant trade-union struggles in 2022-23, like the pension movement in France and the

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strike wave in Britain. These were important opportunities to tilt the balance of forces in favor of the working class and position the workers movement as a force against the status quo. But all these movements were led to defeat by their own leaders, who refused to organize a real confrontation with the ruling class. More often than not, those traitors were supported by the far left. In Greece recently, we have witnessed another missed opportunity with the Tempe movement, in which the leaders of the workers movement proved to be utterly impotent. These betrayals greatly undermined the position of the working class and further fueled the right-wing shift.

What will also fuel right-wing parties is that the left in Europe *continues* to cling to liberalism, the EU, the “Green” agenda or arms for Ukraine (many of them now openly support rearmament)—all things that workers hate. And the left continues to join the “popular fronts” of the ruling class to block the right, whose only effect is to strengthen the right’s appeal among workers and further discredit the left. The one left-wing force from the 2010s upsurge that has not yet completely melted is Mélenchon and La France Insoumise. Yet they also cling to the dead weight of the Parti Socialiste and embrace the anti-RN *front républicain*, things that only help the RN win working-class votes.

In this difficult context, the task of communists is to struggle to put the working class in a better *defensive* position. This is not the time for reckless offensives. Massive attacks are on the horizon and the workers movement in Europe is weak and divided. Its organizations, a shadow of what they used to be, are hollowed out. Trade unions are often stratified in tiers and craft divisions and limited to sections of the labor aristocracy. Communists must be at the vanguard of the struggle to break down these divisions, strengthen workers’ organizations and lead defensive

actions. At every step, this must be done in complete *opposition* to the trade-union bureaucracy. Communists must forge caucuses fighting for a communist strategy to lead the unions, one that is able to connect workers’ immediate demands with the need for working-class power, all the while exposing the treachery of union bureaucrats. This is how communists can regain authority in the working class and undermine the appeal of the right wing.

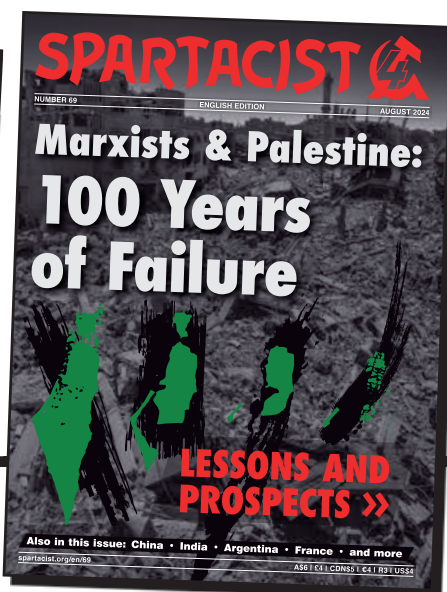
There might be feeble remnants of liberal movements against the right stirring for a little while. These will be the last gasps of a dying breed. As the liberal bourgeoisie gets squeezed by the U.S. and the petty bourgeoisie is increasingly ground down, there will no longer be the basis for mass liberal movements for democracy, immigrant rights, etc. An ever-smaller layer of leftists will try to keep these alive, further discrediting the left in the working class (as we are seeing now in the U.S.). We must intervene in those milieus, urging those leftists to wake up, ditch liberalism and *turn to the working class*. We must fight to rebuild movements in defense of immigrants and Muslims and against the right, but on a different basis—away from the dead end of liberalism and onto a *working-class* and *anti-imperialist* basis, including against the EU.

Those tasks also apply to oppressed countries (the Balkans, Eastern Europe, etc.). There the task is to tie the struggle against immiseration with the fight to *free the country from imperialist oppression*. This also requires continually exposing the misleadership of the masses, be they nationalists, Stalinists or union bureaucrats, for their conciliation of the U.S. and the EU or for their refusal to connect the struggle of the masses to the foreign oppression of the country. That is the only way to unite all the oppressed and national minorities and win workers and youth to a *class-struggle strategy* for national and social emancipation. ■

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South Asian Powder Keg

Clockwise from top left—Karachi: Mass rally for Imran Khan, 10 April. Kolkata protest against anti-Muslim Waqf Bill, 4 April. Dhaka: Uprising against Sheikh Hasina, August 2024. Colombo: April 2022 uprising against Rajapaksa.

by Mansa Kaur

South Asia is home to a quarter of humanity, immense poverty and explosive contradictions that threaten to turn into ethnic and religious carnage even under normal circumstances. Now, as U.S. imperialism turns the screws, the instability and shocks underway will turn South Asia into a veritable powder keg. Where more than a billion live from hand to mouth, the masses in South Asia *literally* cannot afford more assaults on their livelihoods. To avoid being crushed, they will have little choice but to rise up in revolt—as seen in the recent uprising in Bangladesh that led to the ouster of Sheikh Hasina, or the *Aragalaya* in Sri Lanka that sent the Rajapaksa dynasty fleeing.

As far as we are concerned, the question is not *if* the South Asian powder keg will detonate, but when, how, and to whose detriment: will it be the corrupt ruling classes who emerge weaker, or the masses? In the face of such a prognosis, the task of revolutionaries is to provide a perspective that will prepare the working class in the subcontinent to emerge as an *independent political factor* that can change the balance of forces in its own favor. Key to such an aim is to unite the masses—a basic yet momentous task given the national, religious, ethnic and caste-based antagonisms that characterize South Asia. These deepgoing divisions can

only be overcome through an opposition to U.S. imperialism and the ruling classes that are now pivoting toward the West either willingly, such as in India, or under pressure from financial strangulation, like Sri Lanka.

"MAGA + MIGA" = MEGA Disaster in Modi's India

Modi was one of the first world leaders to visit the Trump White House. During a press briefing, he announced that "when America and India work together, this MAGA [Make America Great Again] plus MIGA [Make India Great Again] becomes a mega partnership for prosperity." In other words, MAGA plus MIGA, equals MEGA! This clear shift toward the U.S. in India's foreign policy caught many by surprise, owing to India's longstanding approach of "non-" or "multi-" alignment.

S. Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister, articulates the logic behind the MAGA/MIGA view more clearly: "We see a president and an administration moving toward multipolarity, and that is something which suits India." But this raises more questions than it answers. Trump has threatened 26 percent tariffs on "tariff king" India, which will likely



Ron Sachs/dpa

Tell me who your friends are.... Modi's embrace of Trump spells disaster for India's workers, peasants.

devastate sections of India's economy. In response, instead of mounting a resistance, India has signaled its willingness to cut tariffs on several goods and the Modi government is rushing to reach a bilateral trade agreement. Already, Apple has announced that it will seek to shift all U.S. iPhone production from China to India by 2026. And during his recent visit to India, J.D. Vance called for closer ties between India and the U.S., noting that "if we fail to work together successfully, the 21st century could be a very dark time for all of humanity."

What is behind this love affair between Modi and Trump? Why is Modi capitulating so easily to Trump? To make sense of the developing situation, we need to understand the aims and interests of the Indian ruling class.

A Convergence of Interests

The Indian big bourgeoisie today is composed of several billionaires with vested interests in strategic sectors of the national *and* international economy. They are firmly tied to the West and imperialist finance capital—whether it's the ArcelorMittal steel magnate who enjoyed "non-dom" tax status in Britain for decades, or Ambani buying strategic

ports in Israel and striking a deal with Musk's Starlink. Today's Indian bourgeoisie firmly looks to the West. Its model to develop the country is to deepen its integration with finance capital. It is also ardently anti-China.

When it comes to the tariffs, the billionaires are not so worried. They see an opportunity to access the U.S. consumer market at the expense of their Asian competitors. As the anti-China drive escalates and countries like Vietnam and Cambodia reel from heavy tariffs, capital will look for other destinations, devastating these export-based economies. India seeks to take advantage of this dynamic by lowering its tariffs and further liberalizing its economy so that it can finally become the manufacturing alternative to China that it has long sought to become. In this vein, it is trying to strike trade deals not just with the U.S., but also the EU and Britain.

The global order is in the process of being restructured and things are in flux. But what is certain is that the U.S. is forcing the majority of the world into line behind its own aims. It is difficult to predict Trump's next move, but based on the interests of the Indian big bourgeoisie and the reports on the India-U.S. trade negotiations, we can say that the scenario outlined above is the likely direction of travel. This would bring India's economic orientation in line with its anti-China strategy, which is seen, for example, in its membership in the Quad military grouping.

Disaster for the Masses

Before such a prognosis is borne out, economic catastrophe for the masses is certain. First, all signs point to an international economic crisis. The tariff turmoil has pushed stock and bond markets into a sell-off and heightened fears of looming crisis. India's "middle class" is deep in debt and the stock bubble is on the verge of bursting. This will evaporate the small savings of the urban petty bourgeoisie, which has taken to investing in stocks instead of gold as their parents and grandparents did.

The situation is much grimmer for the poor masses. The images of hundreds of thousands walking hundreds of miles back to the countryside during Covid, many dying along the way, are still fresh in their minds. An economic crisis today promises to be devastating, mostly due to the scale of the speculative bubble, but also due to the objective conditions



Rajanish Kakade/AP



Frank Bienewald/LightRocket

Left: Tab for July 2024 wedding of Anant Ambani, son of Asia's richest man, ran close to \$1 billion. Right: Kolkata family in slum beside railroad tracks.

in India, where there is nearly 45 percent unemployment among those between 20 and 24. During a crisis, capital flight occurs en masse as it seeks safety back in the imperialist heartlands. This will destroy growth and exacerbate unemployment.

Second, the trade deal between India and the U.S. will further open up key sectors of the Indian economy, something that has been fiercely resisted from most corners of society. This was expressed in the mass farmers' protests against the Modi government's move to liberalize agriculture by removing the minimum support price—the only thing preventing huge swaths of the peasantry from being crushed under the pressures of the world market. Any move to dispense with the status quo in agriculture in a direction that favors the capitalists will absolutely *destroy* the small and medium farmers. When 46 percent of the workforce *still* works in agriculture, such a move will send unemployment soaring and drive more people into already overcrowded cities in search of a living. While we don't know what a future trade deal will entail, Trump has his eyes set on Indian agriculture.

Could Modi Go More Bonapartist?

Yes. The trends outlined above point to one conclusion: an increasing likelihood of social discontent and explosions. To control this, the Modi regime will turn toward more bonapartism in order to maintain its grip on power. It will double down on the communal card as a means of further dividing the masses along religious, ethnic or national lines to undercut the prospect of a united struggle. As the crisis unfolds, the increased drive toward state-engineered communal conflict will go hand in hand with increased repression. The anti-Muslim poison coming from the establishment following the attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir (see page 36), illustrates this most graphically.

The ramming through of the Waqf (Amendment) Bill increases the Indian state's ability to encroach upon the religious property rights of Muslims. There has been huge opposition to the bill among the Muslim population as well as liberal forces, but the state has preemptively cracked down and is suppressing this opposition from turning into a movement by threatening one-million-rupee fines for any disturbance of the peace. Despite this, riots broke out in West Bengal, leading to the death of several involved.

As the prospects for economic disaster heighten and India and Pakistan beat war drums, the working masses face calamity. Meanwhile, the liberal anti-Modi brigade has demonstrated its incompetence through eleven years of failure. Modi returned to power for a third consecutive term, albeit in a coalition government. While this puts limits on his power, it is also the condition for him to crack down even more in order to keep his allies in line and dissent in check. To combat a more bonapartist and pro-U.S. Modi, what is needed is a *political alternative* that can channel the discontent into a progressive struggle. So, what are the alternatives to Modi and what are their prospects?

A Paralyzed Congress

Ironically, given India's turn to the U.S., it is those who have been driving the economic liberalization agenda that are now the champions of retaliation and resistance. They bemoan the end of the old days of non-alignment, when India's foreign policy was



Samir Jana/Hindustan Times

Kolkata, 10 April: Movement against Hindu-chauvinist Waqf Bill has prompted crackdown by Modi government. Defense of Muslims is key to forging unity of all India's oppressed masses.

"bold and independent." Congress old-timer and former diplomat in the Indian Foreign Service, Mani Shankar, recently complained:

"And now that India is directly threatened by Trump's 'tariff war,' are we standing up as Nehru always did for an India that was then much weaker economically and militarily than Modi's India of today?"

—Frontline, 8 April

Rahul Gandhi, the figurehead of the Congress dynasty and the leader of the parliamentary opposition, has made a number of declarations criticizing the Modi government's conciliation of Trump. This puts Gandhi in an awkward position. It is much more difficult to attack Modi for capitulating to the U.S. when Gandhi and Congress have spent the last decade begging the "liberal democratic" West to help defend Indian democracy! Now, confronted with a bonapartist Trump in



Freedom for Kashmir!

Azadi!

APRIL 26—Pahalgam is the latest in a long list of atrocities to occur on the soil of Indian-occupied Kashmir. Carried out by The Resistance Front (TRF), a Kashmiri separatist group, the attack claimed the lives of 26 tourists, making it the deadliest non-military event in the conflict since 2000. Within hours, tensions between India and Pakistan escalated sharply. India blamed Pakistan for “terrorism” and downgraded diplomatic ties. It also halted the water-sharing Indus Waters Treaty, a provocation that Pakistan declared an “act of war.” Pakistan retaliated by suspending the Simla Agreement, a peace treaty between the two nuclear-armed countries. Their armies have even exchanged fire.

Meanwhile, anti-Muslim sentiment in India is rising ever higher, and nationalist demagoguery has exploded on both sides. With Modi roaring that India will pursue the attackers to “the ends of the earth,” the military wants to apply Israel’s playbook on Gaza to Kashmir. As we go to press, the region stands on a knife’s edge. Pahalgam is a glaring example of the South Asian powder keg.

Behind the grandstanding of both countries, what is lost is the question of Kashmir itself. Carved up between India

and Pakistan during Partition, both countries claim Kashmir; it has been at the heart of tensions and wars between the two since 1947. Yet Kashmir belongs to no other than the *Kashmiri people* who have been struggling against their national oppression since Partition. The most elementary duty of any revolutionary in the subcontinent is to champion the democratic struggle of the Kashmiri people against their national oppression and demand: **Freedom for Kashmir! For the right of self-determination for all of Kashmir!**

The Hindu-supremacist Indian state calls the struggle for Kashmir “terrorism” in order to impose draconian measures on the region (such as the Unlawful Activities [Prevention] Act, or UAPA), justify its forcible occupation, crush the fighting spirit of the Kashmiris and whip up anti-Muslim sentiment among India’s Hindu majority. India also uses Kashmir as a club against Pakistan and to foster divisions between the two populations. Pahalgam is a direct outgrowth of these dynamics: the TRF was founded in 2019 with the explicit aim of fighting for secession as a response to the government’s stripping Kashmir of its special status, further subjugating it to the

the White House, Gandhi is trying to figure out how best to navigate Congress out of this bind.

The problem with Congress is that it has a *thoroughly pro-imperialist stance*. It is completely bankrupt in terms of having any answers to the questions facing the country. India has seen decades of Congress rule; its abject failure to develop the country prompted broad layers of society to turn to Modi. The possibility is not ruled out that, facing devastation, the masses could bring Congress back to power to protest Modi’s strategy, or even that Congress could pivot left under pressure. But Congress has absolutely zero strategy for steering India in the new world order. Such a scenario could well be the final nail in its coffin.

The Anti-Imperialism of the Communist Parties

The mainstream Stalinist parties—Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) and Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation—are calling out Modi’s embrace of U.S. imperialism. At its recently held 24th party congress on 2 April, longstanding CPI(M) leader Prakash Karat raged about Trump:

“The repercussions for our country are going to be severe. The Modi government is already surrendering India’s vital interests.... This is the time for the CPI(M) and the Left to actively develop anti-imperialist struggles and expose the pro-imperialist policies of the Modi government.”

Similarly, Liberation writes that “at stake is not just India’s

national pride as a sovereign country which attained independence through protracted anti-colonial resistance, but also India’s vital economic interests and strategic autonomy to pursue domestic and foreign policies needed for India’s own development” (*ML Update*, 11 March).

The talk of anti-imperialist struggle is certainly refreshing. Yet, these “anti-imperialists” are in an anti-Modi political bloc with the pro-imperialist Congress! Such anti-imperialism is a bunch of hot air so long as they remain hitched to Congress, as it will *never* go against the Indian bourgeoisie which is tied to the hip of imperialist finance capital. Through the alliance with Congress, not only can they *not* wage an anti-imperialist struggle, but they are *undermining* the struggle against Modi by subordinating it to the liberal representatives of the bourgeoisie.

The failure of the Communist parties to organize a genuine struggle against the Modi government is seen sharply in the Kashmir crisis. Following the Pahalgam attack, India has been in the throes of a national unity campaign whipped up with anti-Kashmir and anti-Pakistan bile and inevitably directed against Indian Muslims. In response, the CPI(M) has called to “curb divisive moves” while Liberation denounced “rising communal hatred and bigotry.” *However, these parties refuse to stand for the self-determination of Kashmir!* For Indian Communists to refuse to fight for Kashmir’s freedom is to concede to the very Hindu chauvinism they claim to oppose. After all, it is obvious that the national oppression

Indian state. *Down with the UAPA! Indian troops out of Kashmir!*

We reject the indiscriminate killing of civilians and condemn the Pahalgam attack. Such acts are counter-productive. It is not the tourists who are the problem but India's rulers. Murdering civilians can only breed distrust and anger among the broader masses who are themselves crushed by the Indian state and whose support is crucial to mount an effective struggle against it. Such methods only deepen the poisonous divisions that are fostered by the ruling classes.

Kashmiri militants must win over the Hindu, Sikh and other working masses of India to their cause and show why fighting for the freedom of Kashmir must be part of their own struggles. This is not only necessary but *possible*. The Modi government, licking Donald Trump's boots, will devastate the poor and farmers, while throwing Sikh nationalists in jail and further imposing Hindi on the Tamils—all while Manipur continues to burn. *For a united struggle against the pro-imperialist Hindutva government!*

The escalation with Pakistan threatens communal carnage and nuclear war. As the two governments go head-to-head, the disastrous consequences will be borne by ordinary people who have no interest in going to war to kill their neighbors. The rulers sow divisions because it helps them create an "enemy" against which they can build and secure domestic support. Anti-Pakistan sentiment builds national unity in India, so that youth temporarily overlook the massive unemployment crisis and focus on the "terrorists" on the other side of the border. Likewise, anti-India sentiment in Pakistan allows the Sharif-Bhutto govern-

of Kashmir and the defense of the integrity of the Indian state are at the very heart of Modi's anti-Muslim offensive and demagoguery.

Prospects and Tasks for Revolutionaries

The strategy of relying on finance capital to usher in growth—the cornerstone of Modi's "Gujarat Model"—*cannot* solve even the most basic problems of India's gargantuan needs of development. The sheer scale of the task demands a massive expansion in the productive forces, nationalization of banks and key industries, expropriation of the parasitic billionaires and a radical democratic resolution of the agrarian problem—all of which demand a direct confrontation with the pro-imperialist ruling class.

However, there are *some* prospects for growth through Modi's capitulation to Trump. A pro-U.S. strategy could eventually lead to the growth of industrial zones and a parallel growth of the proletariat. This layer—which would be a *small sliver* of the massive population—could see a relative rise in its living standards. Overall, this would strengthen the social weight of the working class in the country and enhance the potential for the Indian proletariat to play a role in social struggles—it has so far failed to emerge as an independent force under Modi's rule. Whether or not this will be possible, however, depends on its *political education* in the coming period of turmoil.

It is safe to say that the left is *not prepared* and will be smacked in the face by the coming catastrophe. While the



Protesters in Muzaffarabad, capital of Pakistani Kashmir, demand united independent homeland, July 2024.

AFP

ment to distract from the massive economic crisis crushing the masses and cover the fact that its own army does the exact same thing to the Baloch people that the Indian army does to the Kashmiri people!

Ultimately, behind the escalation and national unity are the narrow interests of the elites of both countries. Ordinary people in India and Pakistan have nothing to gain from this. Instead, they must combat the propaganda of their governments, forge *working-class unity* with their Hindu and Muslim brothers and sisters across the border, and together raise: *Freedom for Kashmir! Kashmir ke liye, azadi!*

Stalinists debate endlessly about whether the Modi government is fascist or neo-fascist to best justify their alliance with Congress, many smaller left groups are largely restricted to student and campus bubbles, either replicating their own versions of obscure debates, or liquidating into whatever movement peeks its head out.

The Communist Party of India (Maoist), one of the main Naxalite parties, illegal and hunted by the state in the jungles, recently announced it is open to talks with the government. This is a sign of desperation as it loses militants through Operation Kagar, an intensified push by the state to eliminate the Maoists. This setback signals that not just the mainstream left but even the more radical forces are in a position of *weakness*.

To emerge from this, the Marxist parties and groups must *turn to the working class!* Some might say that the Stalinists already have mass organizations and trade unions. But in a country of over a *billion* this is a drop in the ocean! There is an urgent need to intervene into the *daily struggles* of the masses, not merely offer them abstract lectures on the necessity of revolution. It is also urgent to *win* pro-Modi workers, not merely shun them for being chauvinist. Marxists must fight to unite the working class and overcome the various divisions, not play by the liberal framework of good versus bad workers based on the thoughts inside their heads. We must explain how they can only improve their fate through a struggle against this genocidal Hindu-chauvinist regime.

The decisive point is that *none* of this can be achieved



(CPI)Maoist



Naxalite CPI (Maoist), shown at 2007 Congress, seeks peace talks as government drives to finally crush decades-long resistance.

through an alliance with Congress, a status quo party which has itself benefited from the various divisions plaguing Indian society. Crucial is also the *necessity* to champion freedom for Kashmir, not kowtow to the government's propaganda on "terrorism." The prerequisite to waging an anti-imperialist, anti-Modi struggle is a *political break* with Congress and all forces that conciliate it. To achieve this, it is necessary to polarize the pro-Congress anti-imperialists by explaining to their members why an alliance with Congress undermines the struggle against U.S. imperialism. To advance this break between the subjectively anti-imperialist elements and their wretched leaderships, we put forward the following platform and urge the small forces of Trotskyism to join us in this fight to build a genuine revolutionary party based on *complete political independence* from all bourgeois forces.

Down with the QUAD and U.S. imperialism! No support to Congress!

Freedom for Kashmir! Down with the Waqf Bill and Operation Kagar!

For an anti-imperialist alliance of the working class and peasantry!

Pakistan: Free Imran Khan! Down With U.S. Imperialism!

Pakistan is facing a revolt by the masses. Last year, there were huge national protests in support of former prime minister Imran Khan of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (Movement for Justice [PTI]), who was ousted in 2022 in what was essentially a U.S.-backed coup and later thrown behind bars. The protests were violently attacked by the military, culminating in a massacre in Islamabad last November. Since then, the Bhutto and Sharif dynasties—historic rivals—have shared power in a shaky coalition government whose sole aim is to crush the support behind Imran Khan. An uneasy calm prevails but nothing has been resolved and support for Khan today is stronger than ever. The escalation with India over Kashmir is building national unity and helping the despised military and government gain support.

On the economic front, the country is a basket case of years of double-digit inflation, high interest rates and a falling cur-

rency. Decades of dependence on imperialism have left Pakistan choking on foreign debt. It has had 23 IMF bailouts since its creation in 1947 and is currently negotiating another loan, which will squeeze it further. As with all countries under the boot of the IMF, it will be the masses who bear the brunt. The only way to push back against economic devastation and the threat of war is through an anti-imperialist struggle. To understand why, we must first untangle the dynamics driving domestic politics.

The Cycle of Pakistani Politics

There's a saying that to run Pakistan you need the support of the "Three As": America, the Army and Allah. Since the 1950s, the country has been controlled by the military, which legitimizes its role as the guardian of Pakistan against attack by its archenemy, India. Pahalgam shows just how. The generals use the danger from India to justify slavish support to the U.S., which has historically played the two enemies against each other in order to strengthen its influence in the region. American interference in Pakistan has been almost a fact of life, starting when it was a U.S. ally in the Cold War against the Soviet Union. The dependence on the U.S. was strengthened even more during the U.S. "war on terror." The never-ending cycle of Pakistani politics boils down to the following dynamics: when a regime supports the U.S., the population comes to revile it, rendering it ineffective as a tool of the imperialists on the one hand, and heightening Islamist insurgency on the other. The U.S. pushes for regime change, and the process repeats all over again.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan is less and less strategic to U.S. interests. As a result, the U.S. has drastically curtailed aid, forcing Pakistan to turn to the IMF and to look to China to ease the pressure. However, the continued repayment of foreign debt has meant a steep rise in the cost of necessities, squeezing working people further. It is urgent to break this cycle of Pakistani politics and chart a way forward in opposition to U.S. imperialism.

Khan and the Left: An Open Capitulation to U.S. Imperialism

A temporary break in this cycle came with the election of former-cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan. He facilitated the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 by

bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table. But he dramatically fell out with the U.S. in 2022 when he refused to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Within weeks, a secret U.S. diplomatic cable signaled to the Pakistani army that Washington wanted rid of Khan. In due course, he was removed from office and thrown into prison on charges of corruption. The irony is that these charges were laid by some of the most corrupt politicians on this planet.

The immense support for Khan stems from the fact that he went up against the status quo of Pakistani politics and resisted the diktats of the U.S. He railed against corruption and military rule, winning the support of the masses who were sick of business as usual. Khan was sentenced to 14 years, the maximum penalty for corruption. The imprisonment of Khan at the behest of the U.S. is a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty. The demand for his freedom is therefore a basic democratic right to defend Pakistan from imperialist interference.

But many on the left in Pakistan refuse to champion Khan's freedom. Why? They argue that he is on a spectrum with the rest of the pro-U.S. establishment. In one sense, this is true. Khan had the backing of the U.S. initially, and he does not have a history of radical anti-imperialism. But the truth is concrete: Khan was increasingly pushed into a confrontation with the U.S., and is now a direct victim of U.S. machinations in Pakistan. This is no longer a mere dispute among the domestic wings of the ruling class in which there is no side. It is an open attack by U.S. imperialism and revolutionaries must take a side and defend Imran Khan against this. Concretely, this means waging a fight for his freedom. To refuse to do so is a gross capitulation to U.S. imperialism!

The left comes up with all manner of justifications for this capitulation. Ammar Ali Jan, the General Secretary of the



W.K. Yousufzai/AP

September 2024 Islamabad rally in defense of former prime minister Imran Khan, imprisoned by military regime after falling out with U.S.

Haqooq-e-Khalq Party (People's Rights Party [HeK]), writes: "His stint in power was marred by the fact that he and his party offered precious little in terms of new ideas for Pakistan's political economy....

"PTI's strength remains its ability to harness the anger of the people through the production of a catchy narrative that feeds into the anxieties and aspirations of people."

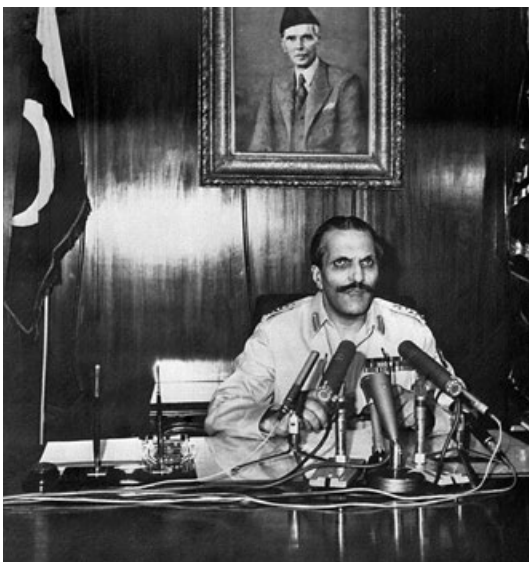
—*Dawn* (22 September 2024)

Of course, Imran Khan offered little and of course he played by the rules of the IMF. We can go on and on with his past crimes, but doing so amounts to denying the *current reality*. HeK opposes repression against the PTI, but what is *key* is to fight for Khan's freedom! It is one thing to oppose repression in general—any liberal can do this; it is another to take up the fight against the military and imperialism by championing Khan's freedom, which is how his defense is posed concretely. In failing to do this, HeK rejects the duty of providing leadership to the masses yearning to fight against the status quo. Indeed, as Jan acknowledges, Khan's party is harnessing the anger of the people. The task for the left must be to intersect this sentiment in the population in order to make a revolutionary intervention that is able to expose Khan as fundamentally incapable of addressing their fears in any way. This is only possible by *pushing forward* the struggle against imperialism, which today takes the form of the pro-Khan protests. The prerequisite to doing so is to demand his freedom.

In the event that Khan is brought back to power, it will then be possible to expose the limits of his anti-imperialism. For example, placing demands on him that would force him to encroach upon imperialist interests would show the emptiness of his anti-imperialist stance and why it is an obstacle. This would undercut support for Khan, winning the masses to the banner of Marxism instead.

Free Balochistan!

A crucial way to expose Khan would be to fight for the right of self-determination for Balochistan, an oppressed nation divided among Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. The



AFP

Pakistan army chief Zia-ul-Haq as he seized power in July 1977 coup.



Top: Balochi nationalists following setback in armed struggle, October 2015. The struggle to free Balochistan is intensifying in response to military repression.



Kapoor, Dry—University of Helmortion

struggle of the Baloch people has taken a more and more insurgent form in opposition to increased repression by the Pakistani state, marked by military encounters, disappearances and indiscriminate killings of Baloch nationalists.

Recently, armed militants of the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) hijacked a civilian train, taking hundreds hostage. Armed confrontation with the Pakistani military followed. There are conflicting reports about the results of the confrontation, with the state claiming that all 33 militants were massacred, and the BLA rejecting this as government propaganda. In a bid to undermine the reputation of the Pakistan military as defenders of Pakistan, the BLA claims it killed even more civilians than the state reported.

Such tactics on the part of the BLA alienate the Pakistani masses from the cause of the Baloch people, pitting them against the fight for their liberation. While we reject the BLA's methods, it is nonetheless necessary to champion the struggle for Baloch liberation. Revolutionaries must use the Baloch national struggle as a *lever* for a united struggle against the Pakistani ruling class and military, longstanding servants of U.S. imperialism. Led on an anti-sectarian and working-class program, the Baloch struggle has the poten-

tial of channeling the resentment of the masses in a revolutionary direction. This is especially true now, as Kashmir is caught in the crosshairs of an all-out war between Pakistan and India. Pahalgam gives the Sharif-Bhutto regime a great opportunity to further suppress the Baloch people and any opposition. Revolutionaries must fight for the right of self-determination for both Balochistan and Kashmir!

Failing to do this will allow the imperialists to use the Baloch struggle as a tool to further their own narrow interests in the anti-China campaign. The U.S. wants to undermine China's efforts to build a port on the Arabian Sea. But the CPC's strategy of building infrastructure under the Belt and Road Initiative in an alliance with the local ruling classes plays into the imperialists' trap. The Baloch come to see China as an enemy since the CPC is in cahoots with the Pakistani ruling class, their main oppressor. It is necessary to combat this strategy: the fight for the freedom of Balochistan is in the interest of *both* the Pakistani working class *and* China as it would undermine imperialist designs in the region. A free Balochistan would be able to negotiate trade and development with China on their own terms.

But this is the farthest thing from what Imran Khan wants. Certainly, Khan's party criticized the military's handling of the train hijacking, which was easy to do since it jives with the anti-military sentiment of its base. But Khan, as a representative of the Pakistani elite, is completely committed to retaining Balochistan within Pakistan, a prison house of peoples. Any redrawing of the borders of Pakistan would call into question the territorial rights of *all* countries in South Asia, all of which were arbitrarily carved out by British imperialism.

Today, an unstable South Asia is not something that U.S. imperialism has an interest in, as this could undermine its anti-China strategy. Calling on Khan to advocate the right of self-determination for the Baloch people—an essential task to build the unity of oppressed peoples against imperialism—would show how his commitment to the integrity of Pakistan's borders is in fact an obstacle to freeing the masses from U.S. oppression.

Prospects and Tasks

Pakistan's left is weak and insignificant. Parties like the Haqooq-e-Khalq mentioned above are led by Marxoid academics who as a rule shun the sentiments of the masses as a crucial factor in guiding the struggle. With respect to the Marxist left, the Revolutionary Communist International has made inroads into the country, launching the Inqalabi [Revolutionary] Communist Party. But their revolutionary activities amount to holding poetry readings on the streets of Lahore and issuing abstract calls to join the communists to fight for revolution. All the while, they refuse to call for the freedom of Imran Khan, the main cause animating the masses.

Pakistan is simmering and it's only a matter of time for quantity to turn into quality. The left is utterly unprepared to face or deal with the basic questions animating the masses. Without a clear perspective to go forward, this situation will lead to disaster and put the ruling elites and military in a stronger position. We propose that militants in Pakistan cohere their forces around these demands to prepare the masses for the coming onslaught:

Free Imran Khan! Down with military rule! Down with U.S. imperialism! Cancel the debt!
Free Balochistan! For the right of self-determination of Kashmir and all oppressed nations!

Bangladesh: Who Will Sweep Away Yunus?

The mass uprising last year overthrew Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, putting an end to her 15-year corrupt rule. Since then, the leadership of the movement has put its faith in the interim government led by micro-finance pioneer and renowned darling of liberal NGOs, Muhammad Yunus. The international shocks unfolding today pose imminent disaster for Yunus's project of installing liberal democracy and restoring stability in Bangladesh.

Globalization turned Bangladesh into the garment sweatshop of the world. The sector accounts for roughly 80 percent of Bangladesh's exports, a large proportion of which head to the U.S. As Trump unleashes trade terror, this growth model is in complete crisis. Trump's 37 percent tariff threat will completely devastate the garment sector. Already, due to the chaos of uncertainty, many companies are halting orders. This means shuttering factories, huge job losses and crashing wages, all of which will further devastate the countryside, which relies on remittances from garment workers.

The August 2024 uprising was an explosion of built-up anger amidst a declining economy, worsening wages and conditions, rising unemployment and mounting foreign debt. These problems will get *worse* as a result of Trump's assault on the neocolonial world. As Bangladesh is squeezed between U.S. imperialism and the tremendous social pressure domestically, the basis for illusions in Yunus's liberal project will shrink and he will face rising instability. Just as with the events



Chip Somodevilla/Getty

Liberal darling Muhammad Yunus, seen receiving Medal of Freedom from Obama.

that ousted Hasina, the central question confronting the Bangla masses remains the same: *Which class will run society?*

Yunus is a figure suited to the conditions of yesterday's liberal world order. Today, trying to navigate the choppy seas, he seeks to strategically balance U.S. and China relations on the assumption that Bangladesh has a degree of independence which it absolutely does not have. On the one hand, Yunus has made concessions to Trump's threats and he is also looking to make deals with the EU, Canada and Japan in the hope that these moves can help cushion the blow. At the same time, he recently completed a four-day trip to China with a delegation that included advisers on infrastructure and trade, prompting commentators to ask whether Bangladesh is tilting East.

Yunus finds himself in a bind. As he proves incapable of steering the ship in the storm, the masses will look for answers elsewhere. Lacking a working-class alternative, this could prompt them to turn toward the explicitly reactionary offers. Already, this is the aim of the Hindu nationalist propaganda machine in India which is harboring ousted prime minister Hasina and would like to see her and her party return to power. As a means to achieve this, Indian media has consistently played the religious minority card in order to stoke fears among Bangladesh's Hindu minority and spread communal divisions. At the same time, rumors are circulating that the Bangladesh military is planning a coup to oust Yunus as a means of further clamping down on the student movement—Yunus's base and source of legitimacy. These may well just be rumors for now, but such an outcome is not ruled out given the juncture Bangladesh finds itself in.



K M Asad/AFP

Dhaka, August 2024: Protesters storm palace of ex-prime minister Hasina after she fled to India.

As U.S. imperialism goes on the offensive, Bangladesh offers an example of how small nations will face existential threats. From the point of view of the ruling class, the trend will be to look for strongmen who can steer the ship effectively and put an end



Munir Uz Zaman/AFP

Garment factory outside Dhaka. Trump's tariffs mean devastation for Bangladesh's proletariat.

to domestic unrest. This is something that the liberal lame ducks of yesterday are not well-suited for. Whether it takes the form of a military coup, an unlikely return of the discredited Awami League through Indian interference or the conservative religious Bangladesh Nationalist Party taking power, the scenario will be devastating for the masses.

During last year's upheaval, the left either played lackey to Yunus, or failed to fight for a revolutionary program in the movement that could advance the struggle for the working class to take *political power* (see "Bangladesh: Tasks and Dangers," *Workers Hammer* No. 254, Autumn 2024). The central task remains to break the hold of the Yunus liberals over the anti-Hasina movement and to fight for an anti-imperialist and non-sectarian movement based on the *class interests* of the working masses. To this end, we call on the Bangla left to fight for the following program to prepare for the cataclysm on the horizon:

Break with Yunus! Cancel the debt!

Defend religious minorities!

Workers to power! For the national liberation of Bangladesh!

Sri Lanka: Still on the Brink

As Sri Lanka peeks its head out from the rubble of complete economic collapse, it faces an upending of the old liberal order on which its growth was based. Having exited sovereign default status only in December 2024 and facing a 17th IMF loan, Trump's threat of 44 percent tariffs will bury Sri Lanka back in the rubble and plunge the masses deeper into misery. The conditions for a mass upheaval, like the one that brought down the Rajapaksas in 2022, will only be exacerbated as the new world order takes shape.

In April 2022, Sri Lanka was plunged into its worst economic crisis since independence and defaulted on its foreign debt. This was the result of a growth model based on luring in foreign capital by offering high interest rates, only for it to be invested in what one analyst calls "political vanity"

projects that catered to the whims of corrupt politicians. Accumulating since the 2000s, the debt burden was compounded by Sri Lanka's acute vulnerability to global shocks: tourism and remittance payments—key sources of income—evaporated during the pandemic, sending its stockpile of dollars plummeting; and the Ukraine war undermined its food security and choked off key supply chains that weakened its export industries, the main drivers of the economy.

This combination of events resulted in a full-blown political crisis. Facing shortages in food, medicine and fuel, rolling blackouts, huge inflation and crippling debt, the masses rose up in revolt and overtook the Presidential Palace, sending the Rajapaksa clan fleeing for safety overseas. Now, the question on everyone's mind is: how will the new left-wing government led by Anura Kumara Disanayake's National People's Power (NPP) deliver the stability and change it promises? Sick of Rajapaksaism and economic mismanagement, the masses and even the middle classes and a large proportion of Tamils have placed their faith in Disanayake and NPP, giving it a historic supermajority. But can it lift Sri Lanka, which is on its knees before the IMF? Based on everything so far, the answer is a categorical *no*. A new course is necessary! Prepare for the second *Aragalaya*!

The Noose of the IMF & the Legacy of Genocide

It is necessary to understand the problems confronting Disanayake and his party, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front [JVP]), which is the main force behind the NPP. Two things are key: first, the economic situation. As two analysts noted, "the 17th IMF programme is the noose that hangs around the NPP government's neck" (cadtm.org, 22 November 2024). For an economy geared to exporting to the West, high tariffs and the IMF will make it impossible for Sri Lanka to get back on its feet. Any economic growth in these conditions will come through opening the country up to imperialist vultures and India, the regional power to the north. This road will only lead to another disaster for the masses.

Second, only in 2009 did Sri Lanka emerge from the throes of a 26-year-long civil war between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority, which led to the murder of at least 70,000 Tamils at the hands of the military. The murderous divisions between Tamils and Sinhalese have not gone anywhere. Tamils are oppressed at the hands of the Sinhala-Buddhist Sri Lankan state and continue to fight for justice against the state's genocidal war upon them. The JVP is a Sinhala-based party and it has historically been ferociously against rights for Tamils. Its bid to create the NPP was in part to rid itself of this chauvinist image. Disanayake may be soft on the Tamil question for now—18 Tamil MPs were elected under his banner—but he is firmly steeped in this tradition.

The economy and the Tamil question are key to understanding why Disanayake's left-populism cannot deliver any genuine improvement for the masses of Lanka. Where he promised to challenge IMF diktats before elections, the NPP in office continues to implement the IMF program. It is set to capitulate to Trump, and is also making overtures to the Modi government in the north, all the while looking to China. Rather than options, these are just three giants squeezing Sri Lanka to various degrees.

Cooperation with India can give Sri Lanka a lifeline to resist the imperialists to some degree, but the terms of this cooperation are crucial. The Modi government is about to become Trump's guard dog in the region and it has no interest in helping defend Sri Lanka from the economic storm. It is only using the island to advance its own security interests and those of its billionaires. Only cooperation based on an opposition to imperialist interests in the region can lead to beneficial terms for Sri Lanka.

On the one hand, Sri Lanka's economic future is fraught with difficulties. On the other, Dissanayake, by capturing a huge supermajority, is now beholden to his majority Sinhalese base, large segments of which previously backed the genocidal Rajapaksa governments. Between these two, the Tamil minority will be squeezed; Tamil resistance against deteriorating conditions will place the national question back on the political center stage.

Prospects and Tasks

In this context, the task is to cohere a left-wing opposition to the Dissanayake government, including by trying to split the huge base of the JVP. This means two things. First, revolutionaries must put forward key planks for an anti-imperialist perspective and fight for it within the NPP and JVP. In these historic elections, a huge number of common people have been elected in the hope of fighting for an end to business as usual. It is the duty of revolutionaries to provide a way forward in opposition to Dissanayake's capitulations and show what a genuine left-wing, anti-imperialist government would do.

Second, only united struggle of Tamil and Sinhalese workers against Sri Lanka's subjugation to imperialism can keep the country from descending back into turmoil. Sinhalese revolutionaries in Lanka must raise the right of Tamil self-determination as a means of winning over the Tamil minority. This is the only means to undercut the drive toward ethnic and religious bloodshed. Crucially, this means exposing the Sinhala chauvinism of the Dissanayake regime, and fighting to win over the poor Sinhalese masses who voted for the NPP to the banner of Tamil self-determination, as part of a united struggle against the new rulers in Colombo who are beholden to the IMF. Similarly, Tamil militants must not shun Sinhalese

workers, but win them to the cause of Tamil Eelam (homeland) as part of building a revolutionary anti-imperialist alliance on the island.

Down with IMF diktats! Cancel the debt!

NPP no answer—for a working-class opposition to Dissanayake! No bowing to Modi!

For Sinhala-Tamil unity! Forward to a Tamil Eelam!

Unity and Disunity in South Asia

Not only are the individual countries of South Asia powder kegs, but they are all part of a regional dynamic which is itself explosive. Carved out by British imperialism in an alliance with the colonial bourgeoisies and their parties at the time, the national divisions between countries are drawn in blood. Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan are archenemies and have been to war multiple times for control of Muslim-dominated Kashmir, which only threatens to break out once again. Pakistan and Bangladesh, while both Muslim-majority countries, have been rivals ever since the latter achieved its independence from the Urdu-speaking Pakistani ruling class with the military help of India.

Since the departure of the British, U.S. imperialism has used these national antagonisms in South Asia to advance its own aims in the region, whether it was against the Soviet Union then, or China today. Nationalism is used by the ruling classes to stoke hatred and suspicion among the masses of these countries in order to keep their own internal contradictions muted. India-Pakistan cricket matches have turned into clashes between fans; Muslims in India are baited for being anti-national; Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (rightly) fear Indian interference—the list goes on.

As we enter this new period, these tensions will only be exacerbated—we are already witnessing this. A divided South Asia can only weaken the masses in the face of the coming shocks; unity can come only in opposition to the depredations of U.S. imperialism, the main force wreaking havoc in the world.

The only way to overcome the various divisions is through mounting an opposition to U.S. imperialism and its national lackeys. It is the duty of the dominant peoples of these countries to champion the rights of *all* of the oppressed groups within their borders in order to win their trust, and for the people of one country to defend their neighbor from imperialist oppression. Crucial also is the defense of China, a deformed workers state that the U.S. wants to asphyxiate as part of its plan to subjugate the whole of Asia. The toilers of South Asia must look to the powerful Chinese working class. Freed from the shackles of the conservative CPC bureaucracy, the People's Republic can become the greatest lever to lift the entire continent from U.S.-imposed misery. Only such a perspective stands a chance of beating back the fury unleashed by U.S. imperialism.

Forward to a united anti-imperialist front of peoples in South Asia and China! ■



Colombo, July 2022: Price surges and shortages of necessities fueled popular revolt that toppled hated Rajapaksa regime.

Amalini

Editorial...

(continued from page 2)

working class. Workers need leaders that can actually prepare them for the attacks to come and lead their struggles to victory (see “For Revolutionary Work in the Trade Unions,” page 12).

Right now, the working class is weighed down by divisions according to race, nationality, gender, etc., all facilitated by the bourgeoisie and reinforced by the treacherous union leadership, to make sure that when the shoe drops, the working class will tear itself apart instead of fighting the source of all its misery: U.S. imperialism. It is imperative that the left combat these divisions, by connecting the fight against special oppression to that of the working class. The left must build its influence in the workers movement in order for Marxism to be seen as a viable alternative and not just a wild pipe dream. This is why turning to the working class is a key perspective for the ICL. Reflecting this we had a panel on our modest but important work in the trade unions at our plenum.

In the Global South, where there is no fat to cut, an offensive by the U.S. will have devastating consequences that will likely provoke massive social explosions. In many countries, all it takes is a spark for massive explosions to erupt. The question is: will these be directed against the imperialists or will workers turn the guns against each other? This all depends on the question of leadership. Our job is to counterpose an anti-imperialist proletarian strategy to that of the national bourgeoisie who, no matter how they posture, will always hold back the revolutionary energy of the masses. Turning to the Global South is another one of our orientations in the coming period. With this in mind, our plenum included a panel on our work in the Global South, with several contributions making their way into this issue of *Spartacist*.

As the U.S. targets China, the defense of the People's Republic is needed now more than ever. But as the article “China: Do Nothing, Lose” (page 57) lays out, this requires fighting the Communist Party of China's (CPC) strategy of clinging to the dying liberal world order. In this vein we have written an open letter to the CPC (see page 60) laying out a program on the best way to defend the workers state. And as the article on the national oppression in China makes clear (see page 72), taking up the fight of the oppressed nationalities in China, against the Han chauvinism of the CPC, is essential to unite the masses against U.S. imperialism and defend China.

The article “South Asian Powder Keg” (page 33) shows how U.S. imperialists will exacerbate the fractures in the region, leaving it more vulnerable to the coming crises and attacks. True unity can only be built through resistance to U.S. imperialism. Overcoming the divisions of the subcontinent requires opposing both imperialism and its nationalist lackeys. At the heart of this struggle is the need to uphold the rights of all oppressed peoples within each country, earning their trust and fostering solidarity among neighboring nations to collectively resist imperialist aggression. This is our aim with our recent statement on Kashmir (see page 36), a flashpoint in the tensions between India and Pakistan which poses the threat of nuclear war. As Kashmir faces the

threat of genocide, the only way out is for the Indian and Pakistani masses to champion the freedom of Kashmir and forge working-class unity across borders.

Latin America is in the front line of Trump's attacks. In Mexico (see page 56) the working class is being lulled to sleep by its leaders, being told to join hands with the government and national bourgeoisie, who will not hesitate to sell them out to Trump when the time comes. In Argentina (see page 55), Trump is looking at Milei's regime as the type of shock therapy that he would like to apply to the rest of the neocolonial world. But the Peronist trade unions are sabotaging the fight against Milei and imperialism, and the left refuses to wage an actual struggle in the working class to fight for a different leadership.

West Asia is racked by explosive conflicts. The main one has obviously been Israel's genocide of the Palestinians. The article “After October 7: Where Are We Now?” (see page 45) takes stock of the Palestinian struggle and shows how its leaders have led the movement to defeat. Gaza has been decimated and Netanyahu has no plans to give up on his genocidal war. The pro-Palestinian movement must regroup radically. The strategy of Hamas, the Axis of Resistance and the international protest movements cannot stop the Zionist genocide because it is based on illusions in the Muslim regimes and futile appeals to the “international community,” rather than on the class struggle.

Massive protests have rocked Türkiye following the arrest of Istanbul mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu. As the article “Down With Erdoğan! Down With NATO!” (page 52) makes clear, the struggle against authoritarianism needs to be linked with the fight against imperialist subjugation, which is responsible for the current economic devastation of Türkiye and breeds regimes like Erdoğan's. This struggle must be tied to the fight for Kurdish independence, which just suffered a massive betrayal by its leaders' capitulation to imperialism (see “Öcalan, Rojava: No to the Betrayal!” page 53).

As Trump tears up the liberal order, Ireland will be squeezed and national tensions in the North will once more flare up. To overcome the deep sectarian divide between Protestants and Catholics, fostered for centuries by British imperialism, and to advance the struggle for true Irish freedom, only Marxism can offer a solution. A motion, reprinted in this issue (“For a United Irish Workers Republic!” page 14) was passed at the plenum to make this perspective a reality. It represents a major line change for the Spartacist tendency, reflecting our reorientation on the national question and permanent revolution.

The ICL's third major orientation is toward the Marxist left. In his presentation to the plenum (see page 3), comrade Perrault explained how “it is essential to situate our small International within the political context and understand *how* we can advance our broader goals, starting from current objective conditions.” The Marxist left worldwide is weak, discredited and often has little influence on the struggles of the working class. The main reason for this is that, during the post-Soviet period, it failed to center its tasks on the struggle against the U.S. liberal world order (see “U.S. Hegemony and the Crisis of the Revolutionary Movement,” page 10). In the current period of imperialist offensives, this task remains essential for the struggle of the oppressed, and for the forging of revolutionary unity among Marxists.

Forward to a reformed Fourth International! ■

After October 7

Where Are We Now?



Hani Alshaer/Anadolu;Omar al-Qattaa/AFP

Above: Palestinians celebrate destruction of Israeli tank, 7 October 2023. Right: Gazans rush injured girl from site of Israeli strike on displacement camp, 23 March.



Conditions in Palestine before October 7 were comparatively stable, although “stable” does not mean “good.” In fact, conditions had been deteriorating for years, while Netanyahu’s government became known for its policy of “managing the conflict,” which rejected any negotiation attempt. Instead, Israel pursued a policy of carrots and sticks. As carrots, money would be provided to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza in order to ensure stable governing services. As sticks, the West Bank and East Jerusalem would be increasingly militarized, with settlers empowered to encroach upon more Palestinian territory. In these areas, each year from 2021 to 2023 broke the record for the most Palestinians killed by the Israeli military outside of “war time.” In Gaza, “managing the conflict” also meant “mowing the grass” every few years, with Israel committing massacres to sow demoralization. They did this with increasing intensity in 2008, 2012, 2014 and 2021.

During this period of “conflict management,” Israel began to go through its own internal crises related to Netanyahu’s corruption and his attempt to seize control of the judiciary, culminating in a general strike against Netanyahu dominated by liberal forces. Regionally, the Syrian war had been frozen for years, with the Assad regime seemingly coming out on

top. Despite the unpopularity of the intervention by Hezbollah and Iran on Assad’s side, they maintained a relatively strong military position.

October 7 and Hamas’s Strategy

October 7 shattered the status quo in the region. The Hamas-led assault breaching the Gaza fence, engaging the IDF and massacring hundreds of civilians represented the most serious attack on Israel since the 1973 Yom Kippur war. The Israeli regime shifted its course from “managing the conflict” to “solving” it. How? By “eliminating Hamas,” meaning the elimination of all Palestinian resistance and forcing Palestinians into submission through death, ethnic cleansing and surrender.

Nineteen months later, the balance of forces has shifted toward the Israeli state and U.S. imperialism. Gaza lies in ruins, more than 50,000 Palestinians have been killed (many estimate a much higher figure) and the path is now clear for Israel to intensify its genocidal war and starve the Strip. This dire situation is not merely the result of Israel’s military superiority. It is also due to Hamas’s own strategy, which relied on a number of false assumptions:

- 1) That U.S. imperialism would intervene and force Israel to make concessions to the Palestinians.



Omar al-Qattaa/AFP

22 February: Hamas at hostage handover in Rafah during ceasefire.

- 2) That the U.S. would be forced to do this through pressure from the “international community,” public opinion and protest movements.
- 3) That Iran and the rest of the Axis of Resistance would be forced to declare a regional war against Israel.
- 4) That chaos in Israel was so great that the military would crumble from within.

The first assumption speaks to Hamas’s illusions in U.S. imperialism. They believed that the weakening of U.S. power would mean it would be more willing to concede and retreat from its spheres of influence. In reality, *the opposite is true*. With its hegemony threatened, the U.S. must rely even more on its Israeli attack dog.

The hopes expressed in the second assumption deny that the U.S. leads the international community. It was wishful thinking to believe that Western countries or the subservient Arab regimes would defy U.S. diktats. As for protest movements, in the West they remained dominated by liberal politics, guaranteeing their impotence. Throughout the Middle East, the movements were either sponsored by the regimes as a way to blow off steam and cover their own inaction and/or were led by Islamists whose politics were similar to Hamas’s. In both cases, the impulses of the masses were restrained.

The third assumption showed blind faith in the Islamic Iranian regime and Hezbollah. The clerical regime in Tehran and the leaders of the Shia movement in Lebanon have always placed their own internal stability and narrow interests above that of the Palestinians. This is what is behind their doctrine of “strategic patience”: the idea that the Axis of Resistance would wage a long-term war of attrition against Israel and the U.S., gradually draining their military power, together with diplomatic appeals based on “international law” and liberal principles. In reality, *“strategic patience” conceded all of the initiative to Israel and the U.S.*, which were perfectly willing to constantly escalate, deliver the strongest possible blows and violate every norm of previous conflicts. Meanwhile, the Axis of Resistance, despite considerable military capacity, remained politically paralyzed and in constant retreat.

The fourth assumption showed Hamas’s misunderstanding of the crisis inside Israel. Divisions within Israeli society are certainly deep. However, a shock like October 7, with its indiscriminate massacre of kibbutzniks and festival-goers, was not going to exacerbate such divisions but rather provide the means to bridge them. This kind of action emboldens the ruling class and all wings of Zionism, which present the Israeli state as the only bulwark against a new holocaust. This is why the idea—widespread in the Palestinian movement—that Israeli society will crumble at any serious shock is wrong and profoundly disorienting. Furthermore, Hamas was under the illusion that pressure from liberal Zionists to continue negotiations for a ceasefire would lead to concessions for the Palestinian side. But the liberals do not have the upper hand; Netanyahu’s right-wing government does. He has made clear that the main priority is destroying Hamas, and if the hostages die, as many

have, so be it. While this policy has caused liberals in Israel much horror, they have no way to challenge it since they share with Netanyahu the underlying premise of the war.

Therefore, despite the fact that October 7 did deliver serious blows to Israel, the strategy behind the operation was mired in political problems that could only lead to disaster for the liberation struggle. Hamas knew full well that October 7 would open up a new, devastating war against Gaza. And they knew they could not win it. Their strategy consisted in offering up Gaza for slaughter in the hope that the Axis of Resistance would enter the war and that this would force the international community and the U.S. to intervene against Israel.

Instead, the indiscriminate massacre of civilians was seized on by the Israeli government to openly proceed toward genocide with full U.S. support. Iran and Hezbollah spent the war temporizing and wavering, a weakness Israel exploited to devastating effect. As for the international community, the U.S. made sure it would do nothing other than issue meaningless declarations and UN resolutions. Now, with the Palestinian movement receding in the West, reactionary politicians are cracking down on activists with a vengeance. In the end, the pro-Iranian motto of slowly “boiling the Israeli frog” proved fatal compared to the Talmud’s saying, “If someone comes to kill you, rise up and kill him first.”

The Axis of Resistance

Hamas isn’t gone and Israel hasn’t gotten off scot-free. But it’s clear that Israel has the upper hand, and whatever capability Hamas still has will not be enough to improve the balance of forces for the Palestinians. The Hamas leadership has already conceded control of Gaza, stating only that the “arms of the resistance are a red line.”

In Lebanon, Israel successfully deterred Hezbollah, one of the biggest challengers to the IDF in the region. Hezbollah’s entire intervention in the war was to keep the Lebanon front active as long as the fighting in Gaza raged on. In his final speech, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said that “the Lebanon front will not stop before the aggression on Gaza stops” and that Netanyahu “won’t be able to ‘return’



Amir Cohen/Reuters

Ashkelon, October 2024: Iranian missiles were able to penetrate Israel's Iron Dome shield.

the settlers to the North and do whatever [he] want[s].” Days later, Nasrallah was ready to sign a ceasefire agreement. Soon after, on 27 September 2024, he was assassinated. Hezbollah’s war aim was foiled and the organization was decapitated. Of course, Hezbollah is still standing—the massive funeral for Nasrallah was a huge show of force and the largest gathering in Lebanon’s history. Nonetheless, Israel still occupies five observation points in Lebanon and continues to strike Hezbollah targets.

Iran, the central force behind the Axis of Resistance, has emerged from this war with egg on its face. Palestinians and Lebanese commonly say that Iran should have intervened more forcefully from the beginning. Instead, it spent most of the war trying to build up diplomatic pressure for a ceasefire. Iran intervened only when it was absolutely forced to, after countless Israeli provocations, from the bombing of its consulate in Syria to the killing of almost the entire Hezbollah leadership. Iran’s attacks on Israel, notably the second one in October 2024, which included 180 ballistic missiles and was carried out without warning, did show its military capacities. Multiple new-generation missiles pierced Israel’s air defense systems and struck Israeli bases with precision. This restrained some in Israel who were advocating war with Iran.

Iran’s missile attack underlined that its main strategic problem in the conflict was not military but *political*. The Islamic regime, in constant fear of the Iranian masses and embroiled in economic crisis, still looks for accommodation with the U.S., which Ayatollah Khamenei pursues under the cover of the reformist faction. It is this situation that was the source of its constant wavering and inaction throughout the genocide. After the missile exchanges, the initiative went right back to Israel, which continued to massacre Palestinians, Hamas and Hezbollah militants, et al.

Another serious blow for Hezbollah and Iran has been the fall of the hated Assad dictatorship

in Syria, which used to guarantee them supply routes for weapons (see “Only Anti-Imperialism Can Unite the Peoples of Syria,” *Workers Hammer* No. 255, Winter 2025). The new Syrian government has been very clear from the beginning that it opposes the “Iranian project” and has been appealing to Western imperialism, even after Israel invaded the south of Syria and seized the highest point in the country.

That said, the new regime’s attitude can change. Israel has made a number of statements declaring that it wants the area south of Damascus “demilitarized” and claims that it is ready to invade to defend the Druze minority in Damascus. As these threats ramp up, the new regime might face pressure to mount some sort of response, although this would be incredibly weak given the divisions in the new state. In early April, the regime issued statements attacking the Israeli presence, and local militias in Daraa province (not part of the HTS militia that took power in Damascus) engaged Israeli occupation forces in the South. It remains to be seen how far Israel will go toward expansion. Whatever the case, the local Syrian militias do not pose a serious threat.

Israel is fanning the flames of sectarianism in Syria, trying to reach out to the Alawite, Christian and Druze minorities that were pillars of the Assad regime. The recent mass killings of Alawites on the coast preclude any prospect of Syrian unity under the new regime. Until Assad was toppled, October 7 seemed to unify the Sunnis and Shias of the region against Israel’s aggression. His fall has removed this facade: Sunni sectarian politics are resurfacing in Lebanon, Hamas and the Axis are divided on Syria, and the Syrian regime is clashing with Hezbollah and the Axis.

The Houthis are the only force in the Axis of Resistance whose authority has been strengthened. Despite constant bombing by the U.S., Britain and Israel, they have continually been able to disrupt trade in the Red Sea and even attack Israel directly. As Trump seeks to bomb them into submission yet again, there is little indication that this will be more successful



Daniel Carde/Getty

Beirut, 23 February: Funeral for assassinated Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah was largest gathering in Lebanon’s history.

than Biden's failed campaign. Nevertheless, the Houthis are now much more isolated. Iran's negotiations with the U.S. do not bode well for them.

Israel

The internal situation in Israel is complex. The ruling class is not an independent force, and since the 1956 Suez Crisis and particularly the 1967 war it has been tied to U.S. imperialism. What is decisive in Israel are the winds blowing from the U.S. Israel's primary importance has never been its natural resources or industries but its utility as a military outpost serving to ensure the imperialist division and exploitation of the Middle East. Zionism provides the superstructure to rationalize this role.

For years, a faction fight has raged in the Israeli ruling class between liberal Zionists tied to the military-intelligence establishment and big tech firms and right-wing Zionists led by Netanyahu and supported by settler organizations. October 7 put a pause on competing mass demonstrations by these factions. But the burden of the war, the worsening economic crisis, Trump's re-election and Netanyahu's renewed push to overhaul the judiciary and security apparatus have brought the polarization back into the open. Regular protests in favor of a hostage deal and semi-regular demonstrations of the far right in support of continuing the genocide are one manifestation. Recent protests against Netanyahu's firing of Shin Bet head Ronan Bar are another.

Netanyahu has presented himself as a defender of democracy against the deep state, fighting the judiciary and security apparatus which remain dominated by liberal Zionists and Ashkenazim (Jews of European descent). He has successfully exploited the frustrations of Mizrahim (Jews of Middle Eastern and North African descent), who make up around half of Israeli society and for whom liberal Zionism and Ashkenazi control have meant contempt and discrimination in housing and jobs. (This helps explain why many Mizrahim have become settlers in the West Bank.) While the entire Israeli population was pushed into a genocidal frenzy after October 7, anger at the liberal establishment has made it easier for the government to argue that the only solution to the Palestinian "problem" is the final solution.

Liberal Zionists have always supported the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and the goals of Eretz Israel but have sought to do so with a democratic cover (at least for Jews

inside the Green Line). But since October 7, the farce of Israel as "the Middle East's only democracy" has been roundly discredited internationally. Netanyahu's faction has been betting that they don't need to keep up the farce anymore, even for Jews, as they proceed toward consolidating a bonapartist, militarized theocracy. Through land grabs, ethnic cleansing and shocks to the Axis of Resistance, Netanyahu has succeeded in realigning Israeli politics, with the political space for liberal Zionism crumbling away. Thus, even if the liberals return to power, it would be in a changed political context. Netanyahu's agenda would be pursued, only presented in a different envelope.

The Histadrut trade-union bureaucracy remains fully in the camp of Israel's liberal bourgeoisie, with its leaders committed to genocide. Early in the war, Histadrut leader Arnon Bar-David proudly signed a bomb on behalf of the union to be dropped on Gaza. In the last few years, every time the Histadrut has launched a general strike, it has had the backing of sections of the ruling class. That said, the strike movement is contradictory: while the consciousness of workers is still liberal Zionist, chauvinist and hostile to Palestinian liberation, it also reflects anger over the pursuit of the war. Communists must intervene in these strikes to show that national chauvinism is a dead end in advancing the struggle to free the hostages, topple the government and improve living conditions, and that the workers' greatest allies in this struggle are Palestinian and Arab masses fighting U.S. imperialism and the Zionist rulers.

The Left in Israel

The left in Israel remains dismally small and mired in liberal liquidationism. The most prominent are the Israeli Communist Party (ICP) and the more recently formed Standing Together (ST), many of whose leaders come from the ICP. They also both have a mixed Arab and Jewish membership, with the ICP being predominantly Arab. Both groups have a strong tradition of class collaboration and liberal Zionism, promoting the farce that equality for Palestinians can come through a two-state solution. The ICP even capitulates to centrist Zionist forces, as seen when its parliamentary group endorsed Benny Gantz as prime minister in 2019.

Standing Together, meanwhile, tries to build a left-populist movement in the style of the post-2008 left formations in Europe, with entirely liberal and moralistic politics designed to make the Palestinian question palatable to Zionists. For example, they grotesquely equated Hamas's Yahya Sinwar and Netanyahu as "cynical politicians who do not care about human lives." Yet despite their histories of capitulation, both groups, and particularly the ICP, are often the first organizations Arab and anti-Zionist youth look to for struggle, particularly in the universities. To win over their best elements, Marxists must intervene in those organizations by motivating the need for a break with Zionism and U.S. imperialism and insisting on the duty to champion the liberation of Palestine as essential to the liberation of Israeli workers.

The vanguard of centrism in Israel/Palestine is the International Socialist Alternative's Socialist Struggle Movement (SSM). While the SSM, on paper, opposes the ST's "succumbing to the pressures of Israeli chauvinism/nationalism," their own program capitulates to liberal Zionism. The SSM's demands are pretty much the same liberal slogans as ST, such as "stop the war," "all for all" (all hostages/prisoners





Mostafa Alkharouf/Anadolu

Tel Aviv, 24 April: Arabs and Jews organized by Standing Together hold up photos of children killed in Gaza and banners demanding release of Israeli hostages and permanent ceasefire.

should be freed on both sides) and for a “life with dignity.” This while *not* directly taking a side with the Palestinian resistance struggle. They also completely capitulate to the rotten Histadrut bureaucracy. During the 2024 Israeli general strike, their main criticism of the thoroughly pro-capitalist Zionist bureaucrats is that they should have organized a strike sooner, and that the one-day strike (supported by a wing of the ruling class) should be turned into a 48-hour one. Communists should seek common work with the SSM while exposing their concessions to Zionism and the liberal character of their interventions.

Another trend is represented by the Internationalist Socialist League, the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency’s (RCIT) section in Israel/Occupied Palestine. The RCIT supports the Palestinian resistance and calls for the destruction of the Israeli state through an Arab revolution led by a working-class party. But its interventions too often limit themselves to denouncing Israel’s crimes and declaring military support to the Palestinian resistance. Like many other leftists, the RCIT never puts forward an alternative, Marxist strategy of struggle to advance Palestinian liberation in counterposition to that of the nationalists. The other side of these politics is abandoning any perspective to split Israeli society along class lines. In this way, the RCIT liquidates the vanguard role of communists into the nationalist camp, transforming revolutionaries into mere cheerleaders of non-communist forces (see “Polemics with Revolutionary Communist International Tendency on Israel/Palestine,” *Spartacist Letters* No. 1, November 2024).

Lastly, among explicitly liberal and moralist leftists, we find the phenomenon of conscientious objectors, who try to convince Israeli youth to refuse service in the army. What this concretely means is sacrificing the fight to *weaken the IDF from the inside* through class struggle. Despite the small and marginal character of these forces, they shouldn’t be ignored. Communists must defend them against repression while making the case that the only way to destroy the

Zionist war machine is by splitting the army along class lines and forming an alliance with the toilers of the whole region.

Prospects

It’s clear that the balance of forces has shifted in Israel’s favor. The Axis of Resistance has taken serious hits and the international Palestine solidarity movement is being smashed by various Western governments, with Trump leading the way. With little deterring Israel, we can expect a long period of continued aggression in different spheres, from Gaza and the West Bank to Lebanon and Syria. This will prepare the ground for a popular explosion, although the time frame can’t be predicted. Until then, however, the national bourgeois forces in the Middle East are heading toward accepting this new normal: Iran is negotiating with the U.S., the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is try-

ing to increase its influence after Hamas’s setbacks, Egypt continues to keep its border with Gaza shut and Lebanon and Syria are abdicating defense against continued Israeli attacks.

The ceasefire agreement turned out to be just a piece of paper, and little stands in the way of Netanyahu implementing the “Trump plan” to ethnically cleanse Gaza. Despite Israel’s resumption of its military campaign, Trump and his envoy Steve Witkoff have hinted at a new ceasefire agreement. It’s likely that if any “sustainable calm” arises in Gaza, the Israeli government will try to thin out the population by offering “voluntary migration” to as many residents as possible. Going too far with complete ethnic cleansing could threaten the existence of subservient Arab regimes, specifically Jordan and Egypt, which face pressure from their populations and army rank and file to declare war on Israel. So far Saudi Arabia also feels that normalization with Israel in the current context might not be in its interests.

Amid the apparent temporary unity of the Arab regimes, the UAE stands as an outlier. Jockeying for influence over the Gaza Strip, they are mounting a campaign to marginalize Hamas. The dead-end strategy of Hamas has emboldened this pro-imperialist opposition. Within Gaza, recent protests echoed the slogans of the pro-UAE Fatah faction of Mohammad Dahlan, denouncing Hamas as “terrorists” and fomenting anti-Shia sectarianism. Recent episodes of *Arab Cast*, a new, UAE-funded podcast, have featured prominent Arab intellectuals and politicians calling for negotiations with Israel and supporting the UAE plan against Hamas in Gaza. If the U.S. administration and the Israeli regime find the original “Trump plan” too costly, they could settle for an agreement with the UAE and Mohammad Dahlan to administer some version of Gaza for some period of time. However, any arrangement would be racked by instability.

The Tasks of Communists

With the U.S. and Israel on the offensive and the Palestinian movement on the defensive everywhere, the overarching



Sercan Ozkurnazli/dia images

Istanbul: Mass protest demands end to massacre in Palestine, 1 January.

tasks of communists must be to struggle to put the movement on a stronger defensive footing. While many pro-Palestinian militants are still blind to the dire state of the movement, others are disappointed and disillusioned. We must reach both these layers and fight with them so that they draw the lessons of the last period, help them see the class origins of the leaders' failed strategies and put forward an internationalist revolutionary program for national liberation.

In Gaza, the situation is extremely difficult. With Israel's renewed genocidal campaign, communists must be at the forefront of the defense of Gaza, in a united front with other resistance organizations. It is crucial to struggle against the growing defeatist sentiment and oppose the pro-UAE, pro-imperialist and anti-Hamas movement in the Strip. While its

representatives are exploiting the masses' very real exhaustion, they are laying the ground for a surrender to Israel that can only be a catastrophe for the Palestinian people. In combatting those forces and resisting the IDF, communists must *not* give an inch of political support to Hamas but must constantly expose its bankrupt strategy and military tactics. Against the odds, communists must seek to keep the resistance alive and maintain pressure on the IDF in order to limit the damage of its devastating campaign.

Any victories in this struggle will not come from Gaza alone. The only way to undercut the growing defeatist sentiment and go forward is with a perspective encompassing the entire region. An anti-imperialist united front throughout the Middle East is urgently needed to confront the renewed genocidal campaign. While this need has always been imperative, its failure to materialize is entirely due to the treachery of the various regimes in the region, and to the leaders of the Palestinian movement looking to them. From the corrupt Arab rulers to the Iranian clerics and Erdoğan in Türkiye, all have shown that their priority is to maintain their brutal rule. They will not risk a significant intervention on behalf of the Palestinians.



Aashish Kiphat/Sipa

Washington, D.C.: Thousands demand end to deportation of pro-Palestine activists, 5 April.

Thus, revolutionaries must seek to build an anti-imperialist united front by reaching out directly to *the masses* of the Middle East and *in opposition* to their rulers—whatever pro-Palestinian verbiage they might utter. It is by connecting the massive support for Palestine in the region with the struggle for the most felt needs of the masses—against their hated rulers, the U.S. and Israel—that the movement can really start to shatter the

status quo. This is also how sectarian, ethnic and national divisions can be overcome.

Such a front must be extended to Israeli workers. Without a rupture in Israeli society along class lines, Palestinian freedom will remain a distant prospect. Communists must wage a resolute struggle against the rest of the left by making clear that the emancipation of Israeli toilers requires a *break* with Zionist forces and ideology. The capitulation of most of the left to liberal Zionism is the greatest danger to the revolutionary movement. Communists must also reach the Mizrahim and seek to show that their oppression will be solved not by further embracing Zionism—as if to show that they are “good” Jews—but by rejecting it. For all Israeli workers—Mizrahim in particular—the improvement of their lives actually goes through an alliance with Arabs *against* the Zionist rulers.

Work in the IDF is of primary importance. The army is facing its worst refusal crisis in decades, with more than 100,000 reservists refusing duty. This shows how opposition to a prolonged war is fermenting in the ranks. Communists must go into the army and seek to channel soldiers’ discontent along class lines by exposing the true nature of this genocidal war.

In the West, the first task of communists is to realize that the movement is defeated and isolated and to understand why this is the case. The movement has been led by liberals and sometimes direct representatives of the imperialists (Democrats in the U.S., Labourites in Britain, Mélenchonists in France, etc.). With such leaders and dominated by liberal politics, the movement failed to connect with the working class, presenting itself as a moral stance for enlightened people rather than a pole of working-class struggle. This explains why it made no significant gains. It also enabled most trade-union leaders to do next to nothing for the movement, apart from occasional solidarity speechifying. It is urgent for communists to intervene to rebuild the Palestine movement, but on a clear working-class and anti-imperialist basis. It is by connecting the question of Palestine and imperialism with the

struggle for workers’ basic living conditions that the movement can become a real force. Militants must understand that pandering to liberal politicians and trade-union bureaucrats who shield the ruling class only *hampers* the movement.

As the winds of reaction blow in the West, activists are coming under increased repression. From Anasse Kazib in France and Michael Pröbsting in Austria to Mahmoud Khalil in the U.S., the ruling class wants to make an example of prominent militants. Rebuilding the movement must start with mounting campaigns against this crackdown, which is but one aspect of the broader ruling class drive to regiment society behind a reactionary status quo.

Since the beginning of the war, the ICL has continually fought for a Marxist strategy for the Palestinian movement, against its liberal and nationalist dead ends. Our intervention, unfortunately limited mostly to the Western world, has tirelessly warned that without a fundamental reorientation, the movement would face defeat. We particularly focused our fire on most of the socialist left. In our article “Marxists & Palestine: 100 Years of Failure—Lessons and Prospects” (*Spartacist* No. 69, August 2024), we wrote:

“The Palestinians are facing annihilation, not liberation. In order to provide a way forward for the Palestinian struggle, it is necessary to start by telling the truth about the current situation. Far from doing this, most Marxist groups internationally are actively cheering on the movement as it heads toward defeat. Rather than fighting for a different course, they tail the movement’s leadership, whether liberal or nationalist. As a result, while so-called Marxists have been omnipresent in the struggle, they have been largely irrelevant to its outcome.”

Our warnings were met with accusations of pessimism and were countered with arguments about how many people were getting involved in the movement, which seemed to ride atop an unbreakable rising tide. Unfortunately, the current dire situation has proved us correct. The first duty of every serious pro-Palestinian fighter must be to confront head-on the causes of the failure up to now. This is the first step in going forward. ■

Anti-Imperialism vs Moralism

Lessons from the Defeat of the Student Struggle

Workers Vanguard
No. 1182, Sept. 2024

Gaza ceasefire
Palestine needs a real victory

Workers Hammer
No. 255, Winter 2025



Red Battler
ICL interventions in Palestinian movement. All our sections fought against reliance on liberals, for anti-imperialist strategy. Above: Melbourne, 10 March 2024.



Down With Erdoğan! Down With NATO!

Can/ZUMA

Istanbul, 21 March: Mass protest against arrest of Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu by Erdoğan regime.

The following article first appeared in Workers Vanguard No. 1184 (3 April 2025).

The arrest of Istanbul mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu on March 19 has brought great unrest in Türkiye, with President Erdoğan trying to crush any resistance to his authoritarian regime through repression, bans and arrests. İmamoğlu is accused of corruption, bribery and links to terrorist organizations. Also, the University of Istanbul has withdrawn his degree, which is required to be able to run for the country's presidency.

At the same time, the working masses, who despise Erdoğan's authoritarian regime, are faced with a devastated economy and constantly increasing cost of living and social inequalities. In the face of miserable working and living conditions, a strike wave has broken out across the country, among them wildcat strikes for better wages in many factories.

Erdoğan—squeezed on the one hand by growing discontent over his hated regime and on the other by the threat İmamoğlu poses to his rule—made a desperate move to crush the opposition. The goal is to get İmamoğlu out of the way, just as he was being nominated the Republican People's Party (CHP) candidate for the next presidential election in 2028.

Since İmamoğlu's arrest, large demonstrations have been held daily across the country, with the largest in Istanbul drawing 2.2 million people. Students, workers, Kurds and others have taken to the streets in defense of İmamoğlu, calling for his release as well as that of all those arrested, including many leftists. They are also calling for justice and democracy in opposition to Erdoğan's increasingly authoritarian regime.

We oppose the repression and authoritarianism and call for the release of İmamoğlu and all those arrested. How-

ever, it is essential to understand the *source* of the increasing authoritarianism. The root of authoritarianism, as well as poverty and misery, lies in the oppression of the country by imperialism, which plays the leading role in the country. So, there is a direct connection between authoritarianism and the increased pressure exerted on Türkiye by the imperialist powers due to its subordinate status. To save its rule, the bourgeoisie, whether under Erdoğan or the Kemalists, marches shoulder to shoulder with foreign capital, smashing the workers and establishing a more or less totalitarian regime. As Trotsky wrote:

“Thus, the feebleness of the national bourgeoisie, the absence of traditions of municipal self-government, the pressure of foreign capitalism and the relatively rapid growth of the proletariat, cut the ground from under any kind of stable democratic regime. The governments of backward, i.e., colonial and semi-colonial countries, by and large assume a Bonapartist or semi-Bonapartist character.”

—“Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay,” 1940

Thus, the struggle against authoritarianism and for democracy needs to be linked with the fight against imperialist subjugation, i.e., it goes *hand in hand* with the struggle against NATO. But the Kemalists can in no way lead this struggle. They are more openly pro-NATO and pro-imperialist than Erdoğan. For years, they have been the conduit for imperialist oppression, heading regimes as authoritarian as Erdoğan's.

In order to push forward the struggle against Erdoğan, achieve democracy and advance the interests of Turkish workers, Kurds and the poor, the urgent task for the left today is to forge a proletarian front against U.S. imperialism, which calls the shots. In the course of this fight, the Kemalists will be exposed as an obstacle, to both democracy and the liberation of the country from the imperialist yoke. *Down with Erdoğan! Down with NATO!* ■

Öcalan, Rojava: No to the Betrayal!

The following article first appeared in Workers Vanguard No. 1184 (3 April 2025).

On February 27, Apo (Abdullah Öcalan), the leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), called for all Kurdish groups to disarm and the PKK to dissolve itself. Less than two weeks later, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) shook hands with the leader of the new Syrian government, Ahmed al-Sharaa, agreeing to liquidate SDF militias into the Syrian army. All this is an absolute betrayal of the Kurdish liberation movement—suicidal acts that would mean death to Kurdish fighters—and a logical consequence of the Kurdish leadership's capitulation to imperialism and its agents in the region.

In calling for disarmament, Apo dropped the very fundamentals of the Kurdish national liberation struggle. Armed struggle has been critical to the achievements in Rojava and defense of the Kurdish people. While the current struggle is not being waged in a way that can lead to victory, to surrender can only lead to disaster. In his statement, Apo repudiated the struggle for a separate national state and even “administrative autonomy” for the Kurds. He emphasized the “democratic consensus.” Such talk is delusional when for months the “democratic” government of Erdoğan has been removing Kurdish officials from their posts and replacing them with his *kayyums* (trustees). The former leader of the Kurdish party Selahattin Demirtaş has been in jail since 2016.

Apo's call serves only the Turkish state, which aims to remove the “Kurdish problem” as an obstacle in order to be able to skim more cream off the top as a subordinate player to the imperialists in the Middle East. The Turkish army now has greater control of the border area separating Rojava from Bakur (north Kurdistan). Apo's betrayal was part of a plan made by Erdoğan and his allies to give Erdoğan a boost at a time when he has been losing popularity due to insane inflation, increased repression and horrendous living conditions.

SDF Bows to HTS

The SDF's call to abandon its militias threatens everything won in Rojava. These achievements were made in a period of turmoil after the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, when the fighting forces were constantly shifting in that country. Rojava's gains came out of democratic and armed struggles and created a measure of safety for Kurdish people who had never experienced any in Bashar al-Assad's Syria, while also establishing a certain autonomy and communal social structures. Rojava was primarily able to maintain itself through a strong militia that countered many threats, including Türkiye and ISIS.



Qereman/Reuters

16 March: Kurdish protest in Rojava against new Islamist regime in Syria and mass killings of Alawites.

The YPG, the main component of the SDF, made an alliance with the U.S. at the time of the siege of Kobani in 2014. It was one thing to accept aid from and be in an objective alliance with the U.S. to stop the serious threat of genocide of the Kurdish people at the hands of ISIS. But it was another thing entirely when the YPG launched an offensive in conjunction with the U.S. in territories overwhelmingly inhabited by Arabs. This was effectively the seed that undermined the Kurdish struggle, deepening national divisions. The YPG became a pawn of U.S. imperialism and eventually signed off on their own demise by subordinating the struggle to defend the gains of Rojava to imperialist interests, instead of setting a course to spread those gains to Bakur and other regions.

Having capitulated to the U.S. imperialists, the Kurdish leadership refused to mobilize against the genocide being carried out in Palestine by the U.S.-backed Zionists. And now the head of the SDF claims, referring to Israel, that “we welcome anyone in the world who can help support our rights and protect our achievements.” This has aroused deep distrust and hostility among the non-Kurdish Muslim and Arab masses, further isolating the Kurds.

Today, the government of the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) has adopted a “temporary” constitution based on Islamic law. Protests broke out in Rojava against the new constitution and the massacres of Alawites. It is clear that the new SAR will not tolerate any advance of the Kurdish liberation struggle. In fact, the SAR is demanding of the SDF that all “foreign” Kurdish forces leave Rojava. This underscores again how the moves by Apo and the SDF are endangering the very lives of the Kurdish fighters.

Kurdish fighters: These two capitulations must be resisted and the struggle must be organized based on a genuine revolutionary and democratic strategy. Do not surrender your arms! Organize against U.S. imperialism, their lackeys and the Zionist butchers! For joint struggle with the working class in Türkiye against Erdoğan and NATO! Forge an alliance with the Arab toilers in the region! ■

South Africa

The “Middle Road” Is a Road to Hell

The following was submitted by our comrades of Spartacist/South Africa.

Since 20 January, South Africa has been reeling under Trump’s attacks. From suspending HIV/AIDS funding to expelling the ambassador, threatening sanctions on ANC politicians and ripping up the AGOA trade agreement, they all follow one aim: blackmailing the country, saying, “Either get in line against China or we will destroy you.” There is a keen desire to defend our national sovereignty against this imperialist bullying. But despite this sentiment, many can sense that the country is like a deer trapped in the headlights, about to be smashed by the Trump train.

Why is this? What must be done to break the paralysis and prepare an effective defence? To begin with, it’s impossible to defend ourselves without confronting the Fifth Column of white monopoly capital that aids Trump and Musk from within the country. The backing of American imperialism is existential for the Randlords. They will do their utmost to maintain it, no matter how ruinous to the South African economy. To fight the enemy within, we must confront the policies of the parties leading the black masses, which all reinforce in their own way the national paralysis. From the ANC-led Tripartite Alliance to Jacob Zuma’s uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), all proclaim to varying degrees the need to resist US dictates and push back against economic subordination to the West. But their strategies end up disorganising and obstructing a real fight against US imperialism. Despite their political differences, all are based on hitching the struggle against Trump to the interests of the black elites—who themselves are fractured, weak and strangled by white monopoly capital yet at the end of the day are ready to sacrifice the national interest to benefit their own narrow interests.

With the ANC, this is clear to anyone who cares to see. They have already formed a GNU coalition government with openly pro-imperialist, white-dominated parties like the Democratic Alliance (DA) and are ratcheting up privatisation and shredding trade-union rights. They have no intention of putting up a serious fight against Trump and his Fifth Column, which could only blow the GNU apart. Instead, the ANC clings to the fantasy of charting a “middle road” between the US and China, hoping that relations can be fixed if Ramaphosa chats with Trump and exposes the fallacies of Afriforum’s racist propaganda! Failing that, the ANC tops pin their hopes on European junior imperialists and the WTO to stand up for the country as part of defending the liberal global order. This will do nothing to stop Trump. The only thing it will do is repel those with an objective interest in defending South Africa and other targets of US imperialism: workers in the Global South and the West.

What about MK and the EFF? As the main parties in opposition to the GNU, they are much more strident in

denouncing Trump, excoriating the ANC’s weak-kneed response. They call for a shift in foreign policy in response to the US tariffs: drop the fantasy of “non-alignment” and ally with China and others challenging US hegemony. While this appeals to the masses’ appetite to resist US imperialism, MK and EFF both tell them that this can best be done with gradualist, parliamentary means. At the national level, they push for Ramaphosa to kick the DA out of the GNU and bring them in; internationally, they look to Xi, Putin and other Global South elites in BRICS+. Instead of forging anti-imperialist unity, this plays right into imperialist divide-and-rule: we already see BRICS+ heads enlisting in Trump’s trade war, while the DRC’s Tshisekedi and other African elites are also lining up behind the US master. This strategy will only lead to defeat. Instead of preparing the masses to defend themselves, it lulls them into passivity.

The EFF leaders put a radical face on the nationalist strategy, appealing to militant moods in their base in order to fend off competition from MK, for example, talking about the need for class struggle against imperialism and proclaiming 2025 the “Year of the Picket Lines.” At the same time, they have constantly offered the EFF as coalition-partners-in-waiting for Ramaphosa, ready to prop up the government if the ANC grows tired of kowtowing to the DA. In the end, this balancing act confuses and disorganises the most militant section of the masses. With such a strategy, of course you are not going to do what’s needed to organise the masses for struggle.

The task of revolutionaries in this situation is to defend the oppressed against Trump along *class-struggle* lines. This will sharpen the contradiction between the anti-imperialist aspirations of the masses and the nationalist strategy of their leadership. It is the opposite of what most of the Marxist left is doing, which is to cede the struggle to the nationalists. Some even declare that “workers have no side” in the trade war between the US and China. No! We *must* take a side with China against the US trade war and strengthen economic collaboration. To put that collaboration on a solid foundation, one that strengthens anti-imperialist unity against the US, it must be based on the needs of the working masses—in South Africa, throughout the continent and in China. This means fighting for a *different leadership and strategy*.

- To fight Trump and the DA, dump the butchers of Marikana!
- Fight the jobs bloodbath! Nationalize without compensation foreign-owned factories, mines and farms that retrench workers.
- For anti-imperialist unity! Workers in Africa, China: Elect delegates to work out a joint five-year economic plan aimed at countering Trump’s tariffs and addressing the urgent problems of national development.
- From Lagos to Nairobi, from Cairo to the Cape: Repudiate the debt to the imperialist bloodsuckers! ■

Argentina

The Downward Spiral

Continues

The election of the right-wing libertarian Javier Milei in Argentina in 2023 anticipated the sharp right-wing shift that is now occurring more widely. The imperialists see Argentina as a model for the kind of “shock therapy” Trump wants to impose on the neocolonies to shore up U.S. hegemony: debt strangulation, squeezing the working class dry and further opening the economy to imperialist exploitation. Milei’s attacks have resulted in a drastic drop in the standard of living, unprecedented levels of poverty and hunger, and slashing of social services. In response, there have been a number of massive demonstrations and three one-day national strikes called by the major union federations. These show that there is a will to fight, however they have not prevented Milei from successfully wielding his chainsaw.

The responsibility for this abysmal situation lies with the wretched leadership of the working class. The Peronists, who are responsible for leading the country to the present economic abyss, command the allegiance of most of the union membership. They have openly betrayed workers’ interests, refusing to wage a serious struggle against the government. Their strategy is to call (very infrequent) limited, one-day strikes while preaching social dialogue with the government. The latest mobilization on 30 April even included paying homage to the recently deceased Pope. At the same time, the Peronists play on legitimate anger about the country’s resources being sold off to the imperialists to posture as the best defenders of Argentina’s sovereignty.

The bulk of the left refuses to challenge the Peronists on this terrain, either on the ridiculous pretext that Argentina is not oppressed by imperialism or on the grounds that the fight for national liberation is bourgeois (because it is currently raised by the Peronists who are a bourgeois force). There is also a sector of the left that sees no independent path to fight imperialist subjugation and simply looks to the Peronists to liberate Argentina. Either way, the struggle is left in the hands of the Peronists, whose ties to the Argentinian bourgeoisie mean they are incapable of fighting the imperialist oppression of the country.

The socialist left, including the Trotskyist organizations that claim tens of thousands of members and actually have the potential to provide a different political leadership, are refusing to fight for an alternative to this treacherous lead-



Rosana Álvarez Mullner/Sipa

12 March: As misery spikes in Milei’s Argentina, protests by retirees, football fans and activists meet heavy cop repression.

ership in the unions. Instead, they are pushing for parallel and/or alternate organizations and assemblies, while leaving the Peronist union bureaucracy unchallenged and pressuring them to be slightly more militant based on the same, losing strategy. The fact that it is left to the retirees and the footballers to play a vanguard role in the struggle against Milei is a sure sign of the total failure of the leadership of the working class. The left grossly prettifies the situation after a year of Milei in power, painting a false picture of a government on the ropes coupled with a rising tide of social struggle. They see their role as cheerleading every demonstration in the streets, without putting forward any *program* to push the struggle *forward* by tackling the very real *obstacles* that stand in the way.

It is urgent to bridge the gap between the workers and the left, which is the only way to successfully fight back against Milei and his imperialist backers. A pillar of our intervention has been the call for a FITU-CGT-CTA government as a way of offering a real political alternative to both neoliberalism and the hated Peronists. The left has reacted overwhelmingly negatively to this call for a workers government, and they themselves provide no perspective of political struggle for workers power. A serious reorientation is necessary both among the Trotskyists and in the unions. Without this, Argentinian workers are facing a historic defeat. However, if workers can turn the tide in Argentina, it would be electrifying for the working masses of Latin America, who are facing the same reactionary onslaught from U.S. imperialism. ■

Mexico Facing Trump

The following was submitted by our comrades of the Grupo Espartaquista de México.

In the past decade, Mexico became a beacon for foreign investment as the imperialists pulled their capital out of China. This process of nearshoring allowed AMLO's populist government to strengthen its position vis-à-vis the U.S., but it also led to an enormous growth of the proletariat, which now holds in its hands a very large portion of the U.S. economy. Today, Trump's tariffs and policies threaten to put an end to this equilibrium and redouble the oppression of the U.S.'s main semicolon.

After Trump's first attacks, the newly elected president and heir to AMLO's Morena party, Claudia Sheinbaum, has emerged with a strengthened authority. She has been presented as a model of firmness in defense of Mexico's sovereignty. However, this analysis is based on fatuous optimism about the country's ability to navigate this turbulent period. The populist government's foundations are highly unstable and dependent on foreign investment, and are coming under strain as Trump's attacks intensify. Tariffs on the auto industry, as well as on steel and aluminum, are already sending shock waves throughout the Mexican economy—which could enter recession this year—resulting in layoffs and attacks on living and working conditions. Trump's decision not to apply tariffs to all imports from Mexico is about the calculations of the imperialists and the deep interpenetration of economies, not Sheinbaum's diplomatic skills or Mexico getting “preferential treatment.”

What is most urgently posed is the defense of Mexico against imperialist attacks. Defensive strike actions must be prepared and carried out against wage cuts and layoffs. However, the union leaderships are wasting precious time. They openly support Sheinbaum's response and lull the workers to sleep by pushing the populists' “national unity.” Instead of organizing their own independent struggle, workers are told to rally behind the national bourgeoisie and the government, who will not hesitate to betray the workers and the national interests of Mexico to save the privileges of the elites.

In the face of Trump's protectionist attacks, there is growing pressure in the working class to defend the USMCA. This comes from the union misleaders, who are seeking to obtain a place at its renegotiating table, claiming that they can use its labor chapter to advance the interests of the workers. This also is the policy of the populists. Sheinbaum too defends the predatory USMCA, seeking to convince the U.S. imperialists that the way to compete with China and stop its growth is to strengthen the North American trade zone. Her Plan México speaks of strengthening the domestic market, expanding self-sufficiency in food and energy, promoting domestic production and strengthening social programs. But this is nothing more than a pipe dream of the Mexican bourgeoisie, which is trying to reconcile the country's devel-

opment with the sharpening of imperialist subjugation under Trump. Achieving each of these things requires fundamentally challenging imperialist domination and wresting from it the resources needed, a line Sheinbaum is unwilling to cross.

Against Morena's policy of appeasement, Mexico must repudiate the USMCA, secure control over its foreign trade and strengthen ties with China. To confront the U.S.'s attacks, a genuine anti-imperialist government would take steps to strike at imperialist property in Mexico. An elementary measure would be to expropriate the energy sector and the mines without compensation. To confront the imperialists' financial extortion and ensure the livelihood of the people, the banks should be nationalized and the debt repudiated.

Sheinbaum, like AMLO before her, claims to oppose the imperialists' meddling in Latin America, but has collaborated with imperialist forces on issues of security and combating crime in Mexican territory and has mobilized thousands of National Guard troops to stop the flow of illegal migrants to the U.S. A government that truly seeks to combat the depredations of imperialism would mobilize and unify Latin America, as opposed to the various national lackeys who think they can get a better deal with the imperialists at the expense of the Latin American masses. In addition, it would also forge an alliance with the workers and oppressed in Canada and the U.S. against their common enemy: U.S. imperialism. ***For an anti-imperialist united front of the Americas to fight Trump!***

Trump's plans will not be smoothly implemented. Resistance is to be expected, and workers and peasants will enter the scene in opposition to imperialist plunder. But in the absence of a revolutionary pole, the anti-imperialist impulse of the masses will be diverted toward reform of Morena or a new populist option. The question of leadership will be posed pointblank. Part of the Marxist left counters Sheinbaum by vociferating that she and Morena are bourgeois, repressors, lackeys of imperialism, etc.; but these accusations, while true, are sterile, since they do not deal with the contradictions of the populists and do nothing to dent the massive illusions that exist in them.

Other leftists speak of the need to make a front against the imperialists, but end up dismissing the crucial role of the powerful proletariat and are incapable of pushing a strategy different from that of Morena and the union bureaucracies. That is why the Mexican left is marginal. It is urgent that it reorient itself! The task of revolutionaries is to offer a road to victory for every working-class struggle, linking it to the broader struggle for national and social liberation. It is a matter of using every opportunity to counterpose a truly anti-imperialist program to Morena's dead end, showing ***concretely*** the weaknesses and vacillations of the populists in the struggle against the imperialists, in order to wrest the leadership of the struggle from them. ■

China

Do Nothing, Lose



Lintao Zhang/Getty; Tom Williams/CQ-Roll Call



“In a world full of uncertainties, China remains committed to joining hands, not throwing punches; removing barriers, not erecting walls....”

—Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, 15 April 2025

The following memorandum, drafted by comrade Qinjin, was adopted at the April plenum of the ICL's International Executive Committee.

From the liberals in the Élysée Palace to the Stalinists in Zhongnanhai, a temporary united front of outrage against Trump has converged. Against the Tariff Man, Xi Jinping's regime has howled that they will “fight to the end.” But for the Communist Party of China (CPC), this is about defending their whole growth model, which was dependent on and subservient to the U.S.-ruled global economic system. As Martin Wolf put it in the *Financial Times* (1 April), “In today's world, the US is a revolutionary—more precisely, a reactionary—power, while supposedly communist China is a status quo power.” Indeed, China's swift counter-tariffs have been aimed at *defending* the dying global liberal order.

After so-called Liberation Day, the fantasy land that the CPC lives in was on full display: Trump's chaos is supposedly going to gradually and peacefully push other countries into China's arms. Temporarily there will be diplomatic noise and perhaps some countries may come closer to China's orbit. But Trump's imperialist clampdown will force the vast majority of U.S.-dominated states to kowtow to his demands for an anti-China alliance.

The left believes either that the People's Republic of China (PRC) is a rising imperialist power or that it is the tip of the anti-imperialist spear. Both characterizations are fundamentally mistaken in assuming that the CPC is looking to upend the American order. At heart, what characterizes the rulers of China is their *conservative bureaucratism*. Pressure from the imperialists pushes the CPC to defend the workers state in its own, disfigured way. Yet its overarching goal is not to break up and replace the American world order but to stay number two.

To paraphrase Gramsci, as the old world dies and a new one struggles to be born, now is the time of monsters. Today this applies precisely because the unraveling of the American world order is creating a power vacuum that the septuagenarian Stalinist bureaucrats of the CPC are unwilling to fill. Their refusal to fight for a global socialist order exacerbates the conditions for crisis in China and the whole Global South. *No* country today apart from China can supplant the U.S. empire. This is why, despite the rotting out of American industry, the rest of the world continues to bow to Washington and Wall Street's dictates.

For China, the old model of integration into U.S.-led globalization cannot continue when Trump & Co. are blowing it

apart. No matter how many billionaires Xi Jinping summons to Beijing, the imperialists are now determined to strangle the People's Republic, even if this means they cannot take advantage of cheap Chinese labor anymore. But what is the CPC doing? Continuing on the same old model of exports, which has led to workers and youth facing wage cuts and ballooning unemployment. The PRC continues to depend primarily on the dollar to trade, keeping the economy hostage to Wall Street and the Fed. As a result of bureaucratic infighting for petty privileges, huge imbalances in the economy are left unresolved, leaving factory workers unpaid for months. To satisfy the imperialists, domestic capitalists are allowed to make gigantic profits in necessities such as healthcare, education and housing.

Wang Yi, China's foreign minister, recently restated the CPC's dictum that "economic globalization is irreversible" (Xinhua, 24 February). This is an *objectivist* view of history, one in which the global division of labor and production will simply grow with the passage of time. Prosperity and peace are supposed to follow from this rational configuration. What the CPC denies is that U.S. hegemony was the essential condition for the expanding global economy, with American ships commanding the world's oceans. The CPC's view covers up the decay of imperialism as an obstacle to the internationalization of the productive forces and thus rejects the struggle against imperialism.

This refusal to recognize the reality of globalization as U.S.-led has serious strategic consequences for China. For example, the CPC clings to the illusion that the EU can become a geopolitically autonomous pole. China's economic woes from U.S. tariff pressure are supposed to be resolved by trade with the European continent—as if Europe were not dependent on and aligned with the U.S. The continent's "great" powers depend on the U.S. for bailouts when recessions hit, and their armies cannot fight for more than a couple of weeks without American aid. Furthermore, the European imperialists don't want to see a workers state become the architect of an alternative order (nor do the national capitalists of the Global South, for that matter).

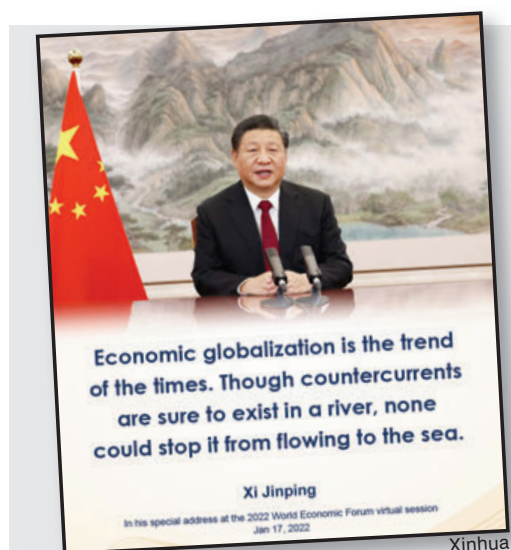
The CPC's pacifist illusions in the world order stem

directly from its nature as a bureaucratic caste. Xi Jinping and his gang aim to protect their parasitic rule on top of the People's Republic and its state-controlled economy. Without class struggle as the compass guiding their actions, and espousing "socialism in one country," the bureaucracy can only seek accommodation with world imperialism. Even when the bureaucracy is pushed into confrontation, its narrow national outlook leads toward seeking deals with the imperialists at the expense of the global anti-imperialist struggle. Ultimately, with international socialism not in their sights, they can only hold on to the illusion of "peaceful coexistence." The crux of the problem is that the capitalists do *not* see peaceful coexistence as possible with a workers state.

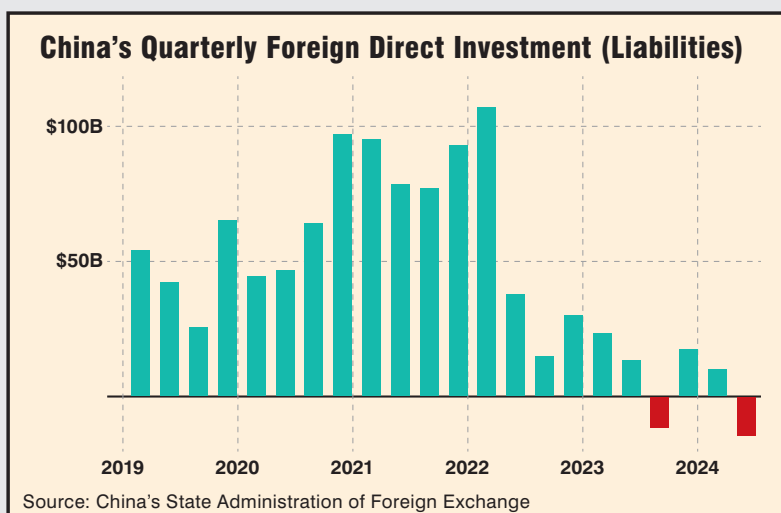
There is no doubt that the Chinese Stalinists are being pushed into a more confrontational stance against the U.S. imperialists. But what drives them is the defense of their own privileges. A swing to the left will be conducted in a repressive, bureaucratic manner that undermines the defense of the workers state. Rather than seeing the workers and peasants of China as potential enemies to be surveilled and controlled, genuine communists would aim to unleash the potential of the masses in the struggle against imperialism.

Without a perspective of global socialism, China can be isolated. The nationalistic Maoists argue that this would not be a problem because China today is not the technologically backward China of the Great Leap Forward. But even the Soviet Union under Brezhnev, which was on a par with the U.S. militarily, couldn't break the imperialist encirclement. From Brezhnev's USSR to Xi's China, without a plan elaborated by soviet democracy, bureaucratic command stifles advancements in technology and in the masses' living standards. Even now the CPC's plans to automate production are putting millions of manufacturing jobs on the line.

The status quo is not tenable. Moving against the imperialists would also entail clamping down on the Chinese capitalists. This could be explosive within the bureaucracy itself, as many have material ties to that class. To radically change course would also cause shocks that would invite the specter of mass upheaval. Ultimately, the Stalinists can-



Xinhua



Katherine Li/Semafor

No, comrade Xi. As CPC clings to collapsing globalization model, foreign investment in China plunges.



Imago/Alamy

Beijing, 1 October 2019: Dongfeng nuclear missiles in parade celebrating 70th anniversary of PRC.

not provide a road forward for China, no matter which face they present. A revolutionary internationalist program is the only way out for a workers state under siege. This is the lesson to be learned from the destruction of the Soviet Union. The ultimate choice for China is either political revolution or social counterrevolution. Stalinist autarky will only delay the inevitable.

World Conflicts

Today, China is the world's pre-eminent industrial power. Its shipbuilding capacity is 232 times that of the U.S. Yet compared to its hard economic and military strength, China's actual influence on global events is small. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is seen nowhere in the world's major conflicts.

NATO accuses China of aiding Russia's war in Ukraine with "dual use" technology. The reality is that China has not sent a single round or shell. It has economically propped up Russia by exploiting the sanctions to get cheap gas (and flooding Moscow with cars). But trade is not the same thing as direct military assistance, which the Americans have given Zelensky's Ukraine in heaps. As China's representative to the United Nations Security Council put it in referring to the length of the war: "If China had really provided military supplies to Russia, the situation on the battleground would not have been where it is now" (un.china-mission.gov.cn, 16 January).

Similar can be said of Israel's genocide in Gaza. Unlike Soviet military aid to the Palestinians, PLA missiles are not in the hands of Hamas or Hezbollah. Instead, there are only calls to return to "international law." China's lack of engagement in the Palestinian conflict disproves both the claims that China is an imperialist power and that the CPC is an anti-imperialist force. If either of these claims were true, China would be heavily intervening to deal a blow to the Americans. Under revolutionary internationalist leadership, the People's Republic would aim to forge an anti-imperialist alliance with the workers and oppressed of the Global South. Palestinian fighters with Dongfeng missiles and drone swarms dealing a blow to the imperialists in the Middle East would not only advance their own liberation

but also restrict the imperialists' ability to strangle China through a military buildup in the first island chain.

Taiwan

Then there is Taiwan. The imperialists have drawn countless projections of when and how a war could take place. For the U.S., Taiwan is a chess piece too precious to simply give up. Militarily, it is an unsinkable aircraft carrier right off the mainland. Economically, this is where the majority of advanced semiconductors are made. And importantly, there is Taiwan's political use: both as an example of Chinese "liberal democracy" to lambast the Stalinists with and as a trap for a PLA invasion that could shatter the brittle bureaucracy and open the road to counterrevolution.

As for the CPC, it does not want to cross any red lines over Taiwan, insofar as it wants to grow the Chinese economy within the U.S. order. But if Beijing is kicked out of the U.S. order (despite the CPC's wishes), then the prospect of war over Taiwan could increase. A serious economic downturn could also make war an attractive option for the regime. However, armed reunification under its "One Country, Two Systems" scheme would mean trying to conquer Taiwan with a program that *alienates* the proletariat and *retains* capitalism, thereby maximizing opposition to the PRC. Instead, Trotskyists would aim for revolutionary reunification by extending a social revolution to Taiwan, with an expansion of democratic liberties for the working class, and political revolution in the mainland, with workers taking the reins of power.

In line with Trump's belligerence, the quisling bourgeoisie in Taiwan is upping the ante by deporting pro-unification influencers. It has also agreed to build multiple TSMC chip factories in the U.S. Workers in Taiwan clearly fear war and therefore wish to keep the status quo. However, this status quo is being ripped apart by the island's imperial masters. This makes the struggle against U.S. imperialism the burning task, which can be led by neither Taiwan's capitalist parties nor the Stalinists, who want to retain capitalism and thus seek alliances with the island's bourgeoisie. Only a proletarian revolutionary struggle against American domination could mobilize the working masses. This would

Open Letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China

The following letter was delivered to the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN.

1 May 2025

Dear Comrades,

In the context of the Trump administration's ongoing campaign of economic, political and military aggression, the International Communist League firmly stands in defense of the People's Republic of China. U.S. imperialist aggression against China is not only a dagger pointed at the Chinese people but a threat to the economic and social conditions of the entire international proletariat.

As genuine Trotskyists, we believe it is the duty of all communists to oppose U.S. attacks on China and to unconditionally defend the gains of the 1949 Revolution. Although our forces are small, they are steadfast in their determination to fight for this cause from the imperialist heartlands to the countries of the Global South.

We stand with China today just as we fought with all our might against the counterrevolutions in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is of the utmost importance that the catastrophe which befell the Soviet Union is not repeated in the PRC. It is from this vantage point, and drawing the lessons from our own experience, that we write this letter. First and foremost, we are concerned that the current policy followed by the Communist Party of China repeats mistakes made by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

1) Only the International Working Class Can Defend China

It is our firm conviction that to defend the PRC, the international working class and the oppressed peoples of the world are the only truly reliable allies. We believe that there is grave danger

in placing the slightest faith in the multilateral international institutions that were set up by the U.S. and will always be beholden to capitalist interests. The European powers, Japan and other close U.S. allies may today appear to be critical of the Trump administration, but when the master barks they will stand to attention.

As for Russia and the countries of the Global South, they may well have a material interest in strengthening their economic ties with China. However, they are all ruled by capitalist or bureaucratic cliques that will always put their own reactionary interests before those of the working class. If they must choose between U.S. imperialism and socialism, they will choose the former. The PRC must not place any faith in these unreliable friends. It must look to the workers.

In the Pacific, the imperialists seek to encircle China, whipping up provocations over Taiwan. We must appeal to the workers and peasants of the region to form an anti-imperialist united front. The people of East Asia have common cause in opposing Japanese and Western imperialism. There is no better way to undercut the reactionary designs of the U.S. than for the PRC to stand as a beacon of national and social liberation.

In the Middle East, we believe that rather than invoking "international law"—which has always been the law of brigands—the PRC should play a proactive role in assisting the peoples' struggles to throw off imperialist domination. The PRC should urgently provide wide-ranging and comprehensive material support to the Palestinian struggle. Such concrete acts of international solidarity are sure to win millions of supporters across the Muslim world. Moreover, a blow to U.S. designs in West Asia would fundamentally undermine a U.S. pivot to East Asia.

In formulating the above recommendations, we claim no independent discovery. Rather, we simply seek to apply to

also be the most effective safeguard of peace in the Taiwan Strait—if you kick the Americans out, there would be less cause for the PLA to invade.

Global Trade

The CPC's whole development strategy has been based on exports, whether those be Nike shoes in the 1990s or homegrown electric cars today. This has meant integration and participation in global trade via the dollar. For many decades, dollars gained by Chinese exporters have been recycled back into the U.S. Treasury, financing America's debt-fueled expansion by extorting the Chinese working class. Simultaneously, this allowed U.S. capitalists to gut industry and weaken the American proletariat—without a corresponding collapse of living standards.

Unlike what Xi Jinping claims, China's trade with the U.S. has *not* been "mutually beneficial and win-win." In China, massive economic resources have been devoted to exports rather than consumption, keeping 900 million people living on less than 3,000 yuan per month (approx. \$412

USD). The doubling down on this model, even with high-tech products, means that the Chinese economy is more vulnerable to tariffs than that of U.S. imperialism.

Since 2013, the bureaucracy under Xi Jinping has consciously tried to shift away from this dependency on the U.S. dollar. In came the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) and "renminbi internationalization." Instead of buying more U.S. Treasuries, China would use dollars to build infrastructure abroad and push others to trade with the yuan. The problem is that without a political and economic *break* with the imperialists, this simply amounts to dollar exchanges with extra steps.

State control of the yuan, while an important tool for China to protect its economy, also means that trading abroad with it is essentially bilateral bartering. The yuan is still largely pegged to the dollar in order to keep exports flowing and ensure China is a stabilizing factor in the American order. In fact, while the BRICS blow hot air about "de-dollarization," all their currencies rely on the dollar. Instead, the People's Republic should establish a convertible currency backed by

today's conditions the policies followed by Lenin after the 1917 Revolution. His response to imperialist encirclement and counterrevolutionary threats was to found the Comintern and rally the workers of the world around the great cause of international proletarian emancipation.

2) The Greatest Danger Is Domestic

We must never forget that the Soviet Union was defeated not by the barrel of the gun but because of the internal flaws of the regime. The PRC has made giant strides in its technological, industrial and military prowess, which have given it the ability to resist imperialist aggression. However, when it comes to the domestic front, the PRC finds itself in a much more vulnerable situation. In this sense, we agree with the following warning made by Mao Zedong:

“The imperialists and the domestic reactionaries will certainly not take their defeat lying down; they will fight to the last ditch. After there is peace and order throughout the country, they are sure to engage in sabotage and create disturbances by one means or another and every day and every minute they will try to stage a come-back. This is inevitable and beyond all doubt, and under no circumstances must we relax our vigilance.”

—“The Chinese People Have Stood Up!” (21 September 1949)

Today the capitalist class in China holds great economic and political influence. The growth of this class poses a direct threat to the continued existence of the People's Republic. Their words of “loyalty” must not make us lose sight of the fact that *they will try to stage a comeback*. Moreover, capitalist economic relations have exacerbated the injustice, exploitation and corruption in China. This has alienated the proletariat, the backbone of the PRC.

Against this growing cancer of internal division, we advocate the following measures:

- The domestic capitalists should be expropriated and all industry brought under state control.
- Party officials should not receive compensation exceeding that of the average worker.
- Workers must be given democratic control over industry and the state, with full liberty to express their views and differences.

real value, such as gold, giving it global circulation. To prevent potential capital flight from China, the domestic capitalists should see their wealth expropriated under workers control. Creating the basis for an alternative world trading system, one based on the interests of the international proletariat and where global exchanges occur outside of the dollar, would directly undercut U.S. imperialism.

Such a break with U.S. hegemony requires defeating the CPC bureaucracy's program of “socialism in one country.” What is posed is not a return to the autarkic poverty of the Maoist period but a struggle for the international extension of social revolution. By this, we do not mean that China must militarily export revolution but that its trade and foreign policy should act in the interests of the international proletariat—the best way to safeguard the People's Republic.

In contrast, many of the Belt and Road projects were built with imported Chinese workers, often to the detriment of the local working class. Where those workers are not excluded, BRI operations abroad suppress union organizing. This inflames nationalist tensions in the Global South

To be effective, these measures must not rely on domestic self-sufficiency but must be part of a plan of international socialist construction. The PRC should coordinate its economic plan with the needs and aspirations of the workers of the Global South. It should directly confront the stranglehold of the U.S. dollar system on the world. At the same time, it is important to extend a hand to the workers of imperialist countries and support them in their struggles against our common enemy. The sum of these policies will undercut domestic counterrevolutionary forces, reinforce international working-class solidarity and push forward common economic prosperity.

Finally, we must touch on the national question inside China. There is no doubt that the imperialists have always sought to manipulate nationalism and regionalism to subjugate the Chinese nation. However, the answer to the national aspirations of the Uyghurs and Tibetans must not be repression and co-optation. Such a policy can only push these peoples into the arms of counterrevolution. We must look back to the early days of the CPC, when it stood for the right of self-determination. Lenin taught us that unity between peoples can be forged only by opposing every form of national oppression. Only by granting the right of self-determination can true socialist unity be built against imperialism.

Of course, our proposals will require a struggle within the party and throughout the PRC. But if it is based on the struggles and aspirations of the working class, victory is assured. This is not only the correct way but the only way.

Down with U.S. imperialism!

Defend the People's Republic of China!

Workers of the world, unite!

Communist Greetings,

G. Perrault

For the International Secretariat

International Communist League
(Fourth Internationalist)



against China and makes it much harder to show workers that they have an interest in its defense.

Development plans should be drawn up in the interests of the *global* working class. Right now, China's torrent of exports is causing deindustrialization across the Global South. Thousands of South African steel workers are threatened with layoffs not only because of U.S. tariff threats but also due to overcapacity in China. Instead, production quotas should be determined under the joint control of the two countries' workers. Rather than excluding local workers, Chinese manufacturers moving abroad should be under PRC control, with local workers hired under unionized conditions. Paying these workers a living wage would completely undercut the imperialists, whose whole m.o. is to pay starvation wages, and gain for the People's Republic millions of staunch defenders.

If genuine Bolsheviks were in charge, workers in China's factories abroad would receive political training with the aim of fostering proletarian anti-imperialist struggle. As the imperialists try to squeeze China out of the Global South, the People's Republic should rely on workers instead of the



Zhu Wei/Xinhua

Rail construction in Malaysia, April 2023, in extension of Belt and Road Initiative. Project was carried out in face of local protests.

fickle and weak local bourgeoisies to defend its factories. Moreover, industrializing the Global South would lift billions out of poverty while also boosting consumption and living standards in China.

Economic Stagnation

The acute sense of crisis in China comes as the regime doubles down on the old economic model while the Americans drive it off a cliff. This explains the increasingly rapid musical chairs within the Central Committee, with ministers for Defense, Agriculture and Technology being “disciplined.” Furthermore, a global economic slump would give the U.S. imperialists a chance to massively increase sanctions on China. Cutting off cheap Chinese imports goes hand in hand with the imperialists’ attempt at reindustrialization in the West.

A major slowdown for the world economy would mean a huge economic shock to China. But the bureaucracy cannot afford millions of unemployed workers, who could threaten another 1989 Tiananmen. The economy would likely be left in a zombie-like condition, with nonproductive factories kept running for the sake of keeping people employed. As the old Soviet joke goes, “they pretend to pay us, and we pretend to work” (although in China this is for 72 hours a week). Even now, state industries producing low-quality steel have been kept running despite the construction slump. Such a Brezhnev-like stagnation would push China far back in the technological race against the West. Already this is the case in the sluggish property sector, where prices are stabilized by *state-owned* real estate companies buying up land from... *state-sponsored* land auctions. Young people already speak of the regime as having entered “garbage time.”

More and more of the economy is reliant on the state sector. Foreign investment has dropped sharply while gigantic amounts of state credit are directed toward solar panel and electric vehicle factories. Obviously, this has a hugely progressive element. Mass electrification and automation

could mean a significant rise in living standards and a rapid reduction in working hours. Resources could be poured into social needs to conquer the “mountains” of healthcare, education and, increasingly, elderly care.

But the rule of the CPC parasites distorts economic planning and prevents workers from enjoying the fruits of their labor. Solar farms were left disconnected from the electricity grid for years while petty provincial bureaucrats preferred to build plants burning local coal. Twenty million electric cars can be produced each year, yet the average worker can barely afford one. The state economy must be put under the control of workers rule, acting in the interests of the masses and not those of the bureaucrats.

The bureaucratic caste cripples its own ability to plan by eliminating or obscuring economic data. This pogrom against statistics is committed so that careerists can fake figures, get promoted and hide how much production is being siphoned off for their private interest. Meanwhile, Beijing continues to demand an ultra-high tempo of growth, which gives the bureaucrats prestige and legitimacy. This means continuing the obscene overcapacity and wasteful production, all to meet a GDP target. The tempo of investment in exports must be lowered. Excess capacity should be retooled toward other social necessities as well as to drastically reduce prices and allow workers to live better.

For the People’s Republic to weather the unraveling of the American world order, the CPC’s “socialism with Chinese characteristics” must be *swept out*. For the last 40 years, this deal with the devil appeared to have brought immense success to the Chinese economy. The reality is that it buttressed the decaying American order, allowing the imperialists to spend above their means by enslaving the world proletariat. Now the devils in Washington are rejecting this deal. But the bureaucrats in Beijing are so thickheaded as to believe that their strategy of essentially doing nothing is winning(!). No. The Chinese economy is far more vulnerable to imperialist strangulation than the other way around. The task of revolutionaries is to ensure that the People’s Republic minimize its vulnerability in the coming crises by extending the forces of socialism on the world arena. There is little time to lose. ■

斯巴达克派



美国霸权的衰落与
争取工人权力的斗争
为第四国际提供的纲领

既不是帝国主义，也不是资本主义的一个国家
中国的阶级性质

特朗普卷土重来
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A.A. Levitsky



Timur Kocaoğlu

Left: V.I. Lenin, November 1921. Right: Three months earlier, Congress of Bukharan People's Soviet Republic (in today's Uzbekistan) met as revolutionary struggle spread in Central Asia. Banners hail Comintern and Bukharan Communists, celebrate national homeland.

National Oppression in Xi's China...

(continued from page 72)

precious gift to the imperialists, who wield the cause of Uyghur and Tibetan liberation as a means to weaken and vanquish the PRC.

The Marxist left has fallen on either side of the line drawn by the CPC. The British Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) and International Socialist Alternative (ISA) have condemned the repression in Xinjiang but embrace counterrevolutionary "democracy" as the answer. Others, like the U.S. Workers World Party, the Party for Socialism and Liberation and the British-based "Friends of Socialist China," have hailed the Beijing Stalinists for defeating the "terrorist" threat. Neither side offers a way to defend China's workers, peasants and national minorities against imperialism and counterrevolution.

The CPC sells its chauvinist campaign as necessary for internal stability and national unity against imperialist threats. The effect is the exact opposite. By building a wall of hostility between Han and minority workers and peasants, the CPC divides the very people who must be united in struggle against imperialism and counterrevolution. The task for communists is to forge anti-imperialist unity between Han workers and China's national minorities and join their causes in a fight to oust the CPC parasites and take power in their own name.

The purpose of this article is to begin developing a program that can do that, including by raising the call for an independent socialist Xinjiang. In doing so, we are not blazing a new path. In fact, we are returning to the road paved by the Communist International in V.I. Lenin's time, including the early CPC, and continued by Leon Trotsky's

Fourth International. This is the necessary starting point for Marxists.

From Lenin's Internationalism to Stalin's Chauvinism

Even the most anti-communist historians admit that the Bolsheviks' championing of self-determination in the tsarist "prisonhouse of peoples" was crucial to the success of the October Revolution in 1917. What they rarely acknowledge is the continuity of that struggle contained in the constitution that established the USSR. Written in 1923 and adopted the following January, the document enshrined the right to self-determination for its constituent republics and wielded that right as part of the fight for world revolution. The constitution declared that

"the right to freely withdraw from the Union is assured to each Republic, that access to the Union is open to all Republics already existing as well as those that may be born in the future, that the new federal state will be the worthy crowning of the principles laid down as early as October 1917 of the pacific co-existence and fraternal collaboration of peoples, that it will serve as a bulwark against the capitalist world and mark a new decisive step towards the union of workers of all countries in one world-wide Socialist Soviet Republic."

In late 1922, Lenin had waged a fierce battle against the vicious abuse of Georgian Bolsheviks by J.V. Stalin and his cohorts in the party leadership. This struggle spurred Lenin to insist that the right to separation be guaranteed in the USSR. At the same time, the new constitution mandated a high degree of centralization, particularly to meet the needs of the Soviet economy. Thus it embodied a contradiction between the need for centralism and the demands of national development for the non-Russian peoples.

For Lenin's Bolsheviks, Soviet democracy and revolutionary internationalism provided the means to resolve disputes arising from this conflict in a progressive way. However, the party bureaucracy under Stalin would soon bury both of these principles after usurping political power beginning in late 1923. Trotsky described what this meant

“The Ukraine is being strangled by the very same Bonapartist reaction that strangles the whole of the USSR, and undermines its capacity for self-defense....

The national revolutionary Ukrainian movement is an integral part of the mighty revolutionary wave which is now being molecularly prepared underneath the crust of triumphant reaction. That is why we say: Long Live the Independent Soviet Ukraine!”

—Leon Trotsky, “Democratic Feudalists and the Independence of the Ukraine,” 5 August 1939



ally and the development of a global socialist economy. But from the former USSR to China today, the ruling bureaucracies seek accommodation with the imperialists and not their overthrow, which would threaten their own privileged positions. As a consequence, these regimes favor the dominant nationality in their societies as they administer scarcity, all the while taking the best for themselves and their families.

Under Stalin and his successors, the Soviet constitution's guarantee of self-determination became a dead letter. Added to other social grievances, the bureaucracy's Great Russian chauvinism fueled national resentments, especially in the USSR's Baltic republics and in Eastern Europe, that were seized on by the imperialists during the Cold War. For their part, by the late 1980s many hardline Russian Stalinists were joining forces with outright fascists in the “red-brown coalition.”

To defeat the nationalists on all sides required a revolutionary vanguard that would win the leadership of oppressed national minorities, uniting

for national minorities in his analysis of the degeneration of the workers state, *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936). He noted that while “the tendencies of cultural autonomy and economic centralism come naturally from time to time into conflict,” this contradiction is “far from irreconcilable.”

Trotsky continued:

“Although there can be no once-and-for-all prepared formula to resolve the problem, still there is the resilient will of the interested masses themselves. Only their actual participation in the administration of their own destinies can at each new stage draw the necessary lines between the legitimate demands of economic centralism and the living gravitations of national culture. The trouble is, however, that the will of the population of the Soviet Union in all its national divisions is now wholly replaced by the will of a bureaucracy which approaches both economy and culture from the point of view of convenience of administration and the specific interests of the ruling stratum.”

Trotsky acknowledged that “the Soviet bureaucracy still continues to carry out a certain part of the progressive work, although with immoderate overhead expenses.” This was certainly the case in more backward areas such as Central Asia, where the extension of Soviet rule led to a flowering of national development for Kazakhs, Uzbeks and others. David Brophy's *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier* (Harvard University Press, 2016) documents how Uyghurs living in that area developed a national consciousness for the first time, with many becoming Communists in the process. This development fortified the links between Uyghurs, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz in the USSR and their brethren in Xinjiang.

The core problem, however, was unresolved. The only basis for finally overcoming national divisions and achieving the voluntary amalgamation of peoples is the elimination of scarcity. This requires the overturn of capitalist rule internation-

ally and the development of a global socialist economy. But from the former USSR to China today, the ruling bureaucracies seek accommodation with the imperialists and not their overthrow, which would threaten their own privileged positions. As a consequence, these regimes favor the dominant nationality in their societies as they administer scarcity, all the while taking the best for themselves and their families.

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To defeat the nationalists on all sides required a revolutionary vanguard that would win the leadership of oppressed national minorities, uniting them with the mass of Soviet workers in a fight for political power and joint struggle against imperialism. The ICL tackled this question at our Eighth International Conference in 2023. We upheld Trotsky's call for an independent Soviet Ukraine, which he raised on the eve of World War II to rally support for political revolution in the USSR and socialist revolution in capitalist states with Ukrainian national minorities. Applying this framework to China today, one of the ICL's conference documents declared:

“Trotsky's programmatic approach is urgently needed to intervene to channel Tibetan and Uighur national grievances away from the reactionaries and into the powerful current of proletarian opposition to Stalinist rule, championing the right of self-determination as a lever for political revolution to defend and extend the gains of the 1949 Revolution.”

—“In Defense of Permanent Revolution—For Communist Leadership of the Anti-Imperialist Struggle!” *Spartacist* No. 68, September 2023

This document was a corrective to our tendency's long-standing deformation of permanent revolution. Similarly, its





RGASPI



Dictionary of Mongolian History

CPC leader Chen Duxiu (left) faced Sun Yat-sen's wrath for supporting Mongolian independence, achieved through 1921 victory of Soviet and Mongol armies (right).

application to China is a correction to our articles “Communal Violence in Xinjiang” (*Workers Vanguard* No. 941, 28 August 2009) and “‘Free Tibet’: Rallying Cry for Counterrevolution in China” (WV No. 695, 28 August 1998), both of which rejected the fight for self-determination as a crucial part of the program for political revolution in China.

Uyghur Nation: Fact vs. Fiction

China, whose people are more than 90 percent Han, is not the same as the former USSR, where Russians made up barely half of the population. Also, China was not a weak imperialist country before its revolution but a country carved up and subjugated by British, American, Japanese and other powers. The task of national unification and liberation from imperialism, a driving force in each of China's revolutions, was achieved only with the smashing of capitalist rule in 1949. All the same, the crucial lesson applies to China as it did to the Soviet Union: if Marxists do not raise the banner of liberation for national minorities, then the imperialists and reactionaries will.

Developing a Marxist program for Xinjiang starts with a materialist understanding of the Uyghur question. In July 2019, Beijing's State Council Information Office issued a paper titled “Historical Matters Concerning Xinjiang” to defend its crackdown. Asserting that “the various ethnic groups in Xinjiang have long been part of the Chinese nation,” it claimed that the Uyghur identity “came into being through a long process of migration and integration; it is part of the Chinese nation.” This is pure deception.

The Uyghurs have been under Chinese rule for less than half of their existence as a people. Culturally rooted in what is known historically as Turkistan, the Uyghurs came under the control of the Han, Tang, Yuan (Mongol) and finally the Qing (Manchu) dynasties—with enormous gaps in between—as those realms reached their greatest geographical extent. Even then, imperial China exerted at most only weak control. After the Tang rulers lost even that in the eighth century, “there would not be direct rule over Xinjiang by a China-based state for almost exactly one thousand years” (James Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* [Columbia University Press, 2007]). The

name the Qing gave the region—Xinjiang, meaning New Frontier—shows just how un-Chinese it is.

From the time the 1911 Revolution toppled the decrepit Qing rulers, bourgeois nationalists have insisted that China's unification and its ability to resist the imperialists requires the adherence of national minorities to a single state led by the more “advanced” Han. With some minor variations, this notion is baked into Stalinist ideology as well. Underpinning this view is the myth of five peoples—Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Tibetan and Hui (as all Muslims were originally labeled)—sharing thousands of years of history that point to their merging into a single nation.

Sun Yat-sen, founder of the bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang, would accept no redrawing of the borders established by the Qing. It was fine to grant autonomy to national minorities. But when Mongols seized the opportunity provided by the fall of the Manchus to declare independence in 1912 (as did the Tibetans), Sun raised a call to arms to put down the rebellion and would soon harden the Chinese nationalist program into one of forced assimilation.

How the CPC Turned Han-Chauvinist

It was the October Revolution that taught Chinese revolutionaries that freedom for oppressed minorities was not counterposed to China's own liberation. On the contrary, those struggles needed to be united as part of a world revolution against imperialism. That perspective animated the early CPC led by Chen Duxiu. The manifesto adopted at the party's second congress in 1922 called for “the achievement of a genuine democratic republic by the liberation of Mongolia, Tibet, and Sinkiang [Xinjiang]” and their free federation with China (quoted in *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism* [Harvard University Press, 1966]). These and other democratic demands, it declared, “are all in the interests of the workers, peasants, and petty bourgeoisie and are prerequisites for their liberation from their present oppression.”

The CPC was put to the test when Soviet troops entered Mongolia in 1921 in pursuit of a counterrevolutionary White army that had fled there. The Red Army teamed up with the nationalist Mongolian People's Party and routed

the Whites, resulting in Mongolia's national independence. The CPC supported the Soviet intervention and Mongolia's separation from Chinese rule, against Sun Yat-sen's firm opposition. The Guomindang would go on to charge the CPC with treason for supporting Mongolian independence.

The CPC retained the call for self-determination up to the mid 1930s. This was in the aftermath of the bloody crushing of the Second Chinese Revolution in 1927 by Chiang Kai-shek's forces, a tragedy prepared by the Communists' liquidation into the bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang. After that historic defeat, the CPC was transformed into a peasant-based guerrilla army, winning control of a slice of territory called the Jiangxi Soviet. But things changed radically again with the onset of the Stalinist Comintern's popular-front policy in 1935. Communist parties were now directed to seek political alliances with "progressive" bourgeois parties that would supposedly be friendly toward the Soviet Union. In China, the CPC dutifully sought an alliance with Chiang to resist the Japanese occupation.

It was indeed necessary for Communists to build a united front against the occupation and to win leadership of the national liberation struggle away from the Guomindang. But the policy of the CPC under Mao Zedong was the negation of such an anti-imperialist united front. To draw in the "national bourgeoisie," the party exempted "patriotic" landlords from expropriation, a betrayal of its peasant base. It likewise cast off its former advocacy of self-determination, which had become a weight around its neck.

Despite occasional rhetoric to the contrary, Chinese Communists now joined Guomindang nationalists in opposing any separation from China. Mao made this clear in "On Coalition Government" (April 1945), which listed among its programmatic demands: "Give the minority nationalities in China better treatment and grant them autonomous rights." As one authority put it, for Mao as for Sun and Chiang, "the principle of self-determination applied only to the evolutionarily fit and historically dynamic Han majority" (James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and Its Indigenes Became Chinese* [Palgrave Macmillan, 2007]).

Revolution and Oppression in Xinjiang

Chiang, however, was far more interested in fighting the Communists than in going up against the Japanese occupiers, and civil war resumed following Japan's defeat in World War II. The result was the utter collapse of the Guomindang as it fled to Taiwan. Yet the CPC stuck to its chauvinist position when it took power in 1949 and ushered in the rule of a Stalinist bureaucracy committed to "socialism" in its own, and only its own, country.

The following anecdote, recounted in Adeeb Khalid's *Central Asia* (Princeton University Press, 2021), says it all. The scene is a meeting between Mao and Stalin's envoy Anastas Mikoyan at the field headquarters of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) just prior to its final victory. Quoting from Mikoyan's own memorandum, Khalid writes:

"Mikoyan suggested that the CCP should not 'go overboard in the national question by means of providing independence to national minorities and thereby reducing the territory of the Chinese state.' He was passing along Stalin's preference that resolving the 'national question' be subservient to broader political goals. Mao did not need to be told this. 'Mao Zedong was glad to hear this advice,' Mikoyan noted,

'but you could tell by his face that he had no intention of giving independence to anybody whatsoever'."

Within a year after marching into Beijing, the PLA had seized control of both Xinjiang and Tibet. This laid the basis for great revolutionary change, but within the strict confines of Stalinist nationalism. The social gains for Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Tibetans and others were immense, from mass literacy and medical care to agrarian revolution. The CPC encouraged publishing and education in minority languages, many of which were written down for the first time. Yet all these advances were overseen by party secretaries, hand-picked by the central government, who put down any independent expression of the will of the masses.

The new regime also encouraged mass Han migration to Xinjiang to reduce the preponderance of national minorities. This population transfer mainly came via the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, a paramilitary organization directly answering to the central government. Initially composed of demobilized PLA troops, the Corps, which accounts for a fifth of Xinjiang's GDP, remains overwhelmingly Han in composition.

The constitution adopted for the People's Republic in 1954 codified the subordinate status of national minorities. It decreed that Inner Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang were autonomous regions, not federated republics as prescribed in the USSR. While the constitution banned discrimination against minorities and declared that they were free to use their languages and preserve their customs, it flat-out stated: "All the national autonomous areas are inseparable parts of the People's Republic of China."

As a cover for its Han chauvinism, the government listed 56 national and ethnic groups (*minzu*) as constituting China's population. It might seem ecumenical of the Stalinists to put every minority they could find (or invent) on the same level as the Han. In reality, this was a justification for opposing self-determination. The *minzu* label was slapped onto everyone from mountain ethnicities which had been under Chinese rule for millennia to the peoples of Xinjiang,



Bettmann

Mao Zedong with Chiang Kai-shek, January 1946. Seeking alliance with "national bourgeoisie," CPC opposed self-determination for national minorities and enforced that position after taking power in 1949.



Andy Wong/AP



Kyodo

Who do you believe, CPC or your lying eyes? Left: Minority delegates outside 2023 National People's Congress, Beijing. Right: Uyghurs confront police in Ürümqi, July 2009. National oppression divides Han and minority masses, undermines defense of workers state.

Inner Mongolia and Tibet, which had developed their own cultures and socio-political systems, i.e., the basis for their self-determination. But as *minzu*, the only “right” they were given was to join in a long march toward assimilation into one, Han-dominated Chinese nation.

The CPC appeals to deep-seated sensitivity among the masses that any form of separatism would undo the 1949 Revolution's historic achievement of national unification and open the door to the imperialist enemy. But it's the Stalinists' program that divides the masses, weakens their capacity to fight against imperialism and constantly threatens to tear the country apart. This is precisely what has played out in Xinjiang.

Packing the Powder Keg

Since 1949, autonomy for national minorities has proved to be phony and the bureaucratic fist all too real. This was especially the case during the Cultural Revolution, when Maoist cadres cast their attempts to sinicize minority populations as a way to destroy “feudalist” obstacles. That campaign threw back economic and cultural development immeasurably.

After the Cultural Revolution subsided and Mao died, Deng Xiaoping eased up on minority peoples in order to entice them to embrace market reforms. But this was just a phase in Beijing's bonapartist rule. The underlying tensions remained, threatening to burst open at the next turn of events.

That came with the collapse of the USSR. CPC leaders determined that they could avoid the fate of their Soviet counterparts by keeping an iron political grip on the masses and pacifying them by raising living standards as China opened up to globalization. Over the next three decades, China did indeed experience explosive growth. But this development also intensified social problems. In Xinjiang, economic advances failed to redress either the segregation of the indigenous population from Han residents or the ingrained poverty of the province's southern, overwhelmingly Muslim section. As China's coastal areas boomed, migrant workers from poorer areas were denied residential permits (*hukou*) and the social benefits that came with them.

The September 11, 2001 terror attacks marked a major turning point. Having served the imperialists by support-

ing the Afghan *mujahedin* against the Soviet Army in the 1980s, Beijing now joined the “global war on terror,” throwing a net of repression over Xinjiang. Cycles of crackdown and blowback ensued. While small numbers of Uyghurs joined armed Islamist formations in the Middle East, thousands fled for their lives to Europe, Türkiye and the U.S. Among them was Rebiya Kadeer, a wealthy Uyghur businesswoman who went on to head the CIA-backed World Uyghur Congress.

In that period, Xinjiang experienced multiple attacks on police outposts and other instruments of central government control. Chinese authorities mainly blamed the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, a shadowy group reputedly linked to either Al-Qaeda or the Taliban. Sean Roberts gives ample evidence that the attacks were uncoordinated in his *The War on the Uyghurs* (Manchester University Press, 2020). Whatever the case, as usual in such situations some attacks were indiscriminately aimed at working people from the oppressor nationality. A major atrocity was a March 2014 attack by knife-wielding Uyghurs at a train station in the southern city of Kunming in which some 30 people were killed.

The way to liberate the Uyghurs is not to attack the institutions of the workers state. Nor is it to carry out indiscriminate terror against Han people. The task is to unite the Uyghurs' just cause with the struggles of China's working masses against the Stalinist bureaucracy. Attacks such as the Kunming incident keep the oppressed at each other's throats, strengthening the hand of the CPC regime.

In fact, smashing the Islamic “enemy within” became the main rationale offered by Xi Jinping to justify mass internment in Xinjiang. Xi got the ball rolling after becoming president when, in 2014, he traveled to Xinjiang and announced a crackdown that would show “absolutely no mercy” to “terrorists.” Stability in Xinjiang was of paramount importance for the regime. While relatively sparsely populated, the province makes up one-sixth of China's landmass and is a big oil, petrochemical and agricultural center. Above all, Xinjiang was slated to be a key logistics hub for Xi's signature One Belt, One Road program.

The response to the “anti-terror” campaign was anything but submissive. Yet more attacks led to more countermeasures,

resulting in scores more deaths by the end of 2014. In 2017, the CPC unleashed its ultimate effort to suppress Muslim minorities. Its centerpiece was the herding of more than a million Uyghurs, Kazakhs and others into the internment camps. This was coupled with the imprisonment of untold numbers of “extremists” and even people like Rahile Dawut, a CPC member and anthropologist renowned for her research into Xinjiang’s cultural history. Dawut is currently serving a life sentence for “splittism.”

For National Liberation and Socialism!

Everyone knows how Western propaganda mills screamed about “genocide” in Xinjiang. To this day, the pro-CPC left denounces any such talk as lies feeding the imperialists’ anti-China campaign. It’s not a question of semantics. Of course, the capitalist powers lie through their teeth to advance their agenda. But mass internment was Chinese government policy. What the CPC’s apologists deny is the very purpose of this effort: *to eradicate the Uyghurs’ national identity*.

And it’s not just the Uyghurs. As in Xinjiang, the CPC regime has made Mandarin the language for elementary education in Tibet, and the Mongolian language is also under attack. Thousands of children have been forced into distant boarding schools where they don’t hear their parents’ language. Even the Hui Muslims are under attack, as mosques are closed or forced to replace domes and minarets with a more “Chinese” look.

At the same time, there are billboards, banners and museum exhibits all over China celebrating eons of interethnic harmony, as well as tourist traps where you can choose to watch people in colorful native attire dance and sing. The Friends of Socialist China crowd actually points to such displays to

**Rahile Dawut,
anthropologist and CPC
member serving life
sentence for “splittism.”**



Lisa Ross

claim that the country is on the road to becoming a prosperous and harmonious society, just as Xi Jinping says. In fact, this is all a flimsy cover for what’s really happening: forced assimilation, at a forced-march pace.

Even the regime’s more benign policies deepen divisions in China. Take the way minorities are awarded extra points on the *gaokao* exam, which helps determine who gets into what university. Some point to this as proof that Uyghurs and Tibetans are not oppressed. Actually, this policy serves the same purpose as the internment camps, since the CPC sees the universities as a means of assimilation into the Han nation. Nonetheless, it has created enormous resentment among Han youth. With China’s economic slowdown creating a mass of unemployed graduates, a degree from a top-flight university is the best bet for a good job. So, Uyghurs and Tibetans have become scapegoats for the scarcity of resources when the main culprits are government bureaucrats and profiteers.

The Stalinists think that their crackdown in Xinjiang has given them the currency to buy social peace. But what they got is fool’s gold. As Trotsky noted of Stalin’s regime, it “defends the proletarian dictatorship with its own methods; but these methods are such as facilitate the victory of the enemy *tomorrow*” (“The Class Nature of the Soviet State,” October 1933). He explained:

“Social antagonisms instead of being overcome politically are suppressed administratively. These collect under pressure to the same extent that the political resources disappear for solving them normally. The first social shock, external or internal, may throw the atomized Soviet society into civil war.”

There are many potential sources for such shocks. The intractable crisis in China’s housing market, the increasingly unstable world situation and the U.S. trade war all threaten the economic growth the CPC counts on to keep the population in line. On top of that is the rise in military pressure exerted by the U.S.-led imperialists.

The Stalinists’ response is not a revolutionary call to arms but a doubling down on enforcing “stability” at home and wooing trade partners abroad. This can only sow more seeds of crisis, including over national grievances currently suppressed by the CPC’s draconian measures. The



UlyssePixel; Ignacio Martinez

Grande Mosque of Shadian, Yunnan Province, one of hundreds shut down or forced to redesign in CPC drive for “sinicization” of Islam.



Reuters



Thomas Peter/Reuters

November 2022: Residents of Ürümqi take to streets (left) after fire killed ten people due to Covid restrictions. Regime ended lockdowns after protests spread to Beijing (right) and other cities.

revolutionary answer is to mobilize the proletariat through a program that fuses defense of national minorities with demands speaking to the needs of China's workers and peasants, from jobs for youth to decent, affordable housing and good social benefits.

This is no pipe dream. Workers' own experience shows that the repression meted out to minorities redounds against them as well. As the pandemic brought home, the surveillance of citizens' every move, which was pioneered in Tibet and Xinjiang, now haunts the population as a whole. How that situation can turn against the bureaucracy was seen when protests against lockdowns swept China in November 2022. They began in Xinjiang's capital, Ürümqi, after an apartment building fire killed ten people due to strict Covid-19 lockdown measures. Protesters in Ürümqi were mainly Han, since Uyghurs were too cowed by repression to take to the streets. But had the protests continued, they could have easily united both populations against the bureaucracy.

Faced with the CPC's drive to wipe out the Uyghurs' national identity, simply upholding their *right* to self-determination—i.e., the right to a separate state—is insufficient. We demand an *independent socialist Xinjiang* as part of a transitional program that can unite toilers of all ethnicities in a fight for political revolution. Here are elements of such a program:

- Free Rahile Dawut and all others charged with “splittism”!
- Rip out the surveillance cameras!
- Restore the right to education in local languages!
- No prosecution for religious practice!
- Full residency rights for migrant workers!
Down with the discriminatory *hukou*!
- For integrated workers and neighborhood councils and militias under their control!
- For workers control of production, from the factories and oil fields to the tomato and cotton farms!
- Defend nationalized property! Expropriate the bourgeoisie, in Hong Kong and on the mainland!
Defend China against imperialism and counterrevolution!

- Independence for socialist Xinjiang! For a China run by workers and peasants councils, not CPC parasites! For communist unity against imperialism!

Defend China, Oppose CPC Rule!

A revolutionary program for Xinjiang must be premised on defense of the gains of the 1949 Revolution and opposition to all independence forces seeking to smash the workers state. The bulk of the international Marxist left utterly fails this test, capitulating to liberal imperialist ideology that China is a capitalist and imperialist power. (For a full treatment of this question, see “Not Imperialist, Not Capitalist: The Class Nature of China,” *Spartacist* No. 69, August 2024.)

Some leftists, like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (Britain's “Foreign Office socialists”), champion “democratic” imperialism as the answer to the oppression of Uyghurs and Tibetans. The triumph of this program would do nothing to eliminate their oppression but would cause a social disaster, undoing decades of material progress, unleashing bloody interethnic warfare and carving up China for pillage by foreign powers.

Somewhat more nuanced are the SWP and the International Marxist Tendency, now the Revolutionary Communist International (RCI). Both organizations wrote articles at the height of the crackdown in Xinjiang that warned against U.S. machinations, opposed anti-China sanctions and called on Han workers to defend and unite with national minorities against the CPC (“China, the Uyghurs and the Left,” *International Socialism*, posted 23 October 2021; “Uyghurs in Xinjiang: National Oppression and Imperialist Hypocrisy,” *In Defence of Marxism*, 20 October 2020).

These are necessary tasks. But the SWP, RCI, ISA et al. denounce China as imperialist, oppose its defense against the real imperialists, siding with “democracy” movements aiming to overturn the workers state. They thus betray the only basis for uniting Han and minority working people around their common interest, which is the need to defend and extend the gains of the 1949 Revolution against imperialism and counterrevolution.

The other pole on the left are political descendants of the “friends of the Soviet Union” pilloried by Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed*. Their answer to imperialist machinations against China is to put a minus where the social democrats put a plus, and vice versa. The Workers World Party is exceptionally shameless, hailing the CPC’s “vocational training centers” and concluding that “political and religious violence in Xinjiang has now been nearly eliminated, and Xinjiang is well on its way to being economically caught up with the rest of the country” (*Workers World*, 16 January 2024).

Singing the same sick tune, but a bit *sotto voce*, is the League for the Fourth International (LFI). Its one substantive statement on the Uyghurs trumpets how “official measures were taken in response to a number of murderous attacks...by Islamist forces associated with the East Turkestan Islamic Movement,” which “even the E.U., the U.N. and the U.S. have designated a terrorist organization” (“U.S. Anti-China War Provocations over Taiwan,” *The Internationalist*, September 2022). The LFI graciously admits that Han chauvinism “has had expressions” in Xinjiang but thunders that “the lie of ‘Uighur genocide’” is just an imperialist battle cry and a “pretext for fomenting separatism in Xinjiang and inflicting economic harm to the region.”

It would be easy to denounce the LFI for sticking its head in Xinjiang’s sands, but that would miss its real crime. From the Covid lockdowns to the military buildup against China, the LFI pushes reliance on the Stalinists to defend the workers state and resist imperialism, as opposed to mobilizing the proletariat independently to carry out these tasks. This is what explains the LFI’s love for China’s lockdowns and its failure to champion self-determination for Uyghurs and Tibetans, or anything else that would threaten “national unity” under the CPC.

Such “friends of China” reinforce the consciousness instilled by the Stalinist regime that independence for Xinjiang could only serve the imperialists who long to rip China apart. It’s safe to assume that this belief is shared by the mass of workers in China, who despise the bureaucracy but think that it’s the only thing standing in the way of counterrevolution and chaos. Trotsky provided the solution to this problem in advocating an independent Soviet Ukraine:

“But wouldn’t this mean the military weakening of the USSR?—the ‘friends’ of the Kremlin will howl in horror. We reply that the weakening of the USSR is caused by those ever-growing centrifugal tendencies generated by the Bonapartist dictatorship. In the event of war the hatred of the masses for the ruling clique can lead to the collapse of all the social conquests of October. The source of defeatist moods is in the Kremlin. An independent Soviet Ukraine, on the other hand, would become, if only by virtue of its own interests, a mighty southwestern bulwark of the USSR. The sooner the present Bonapartist caste is undermined, upset, crushed, and swept away, the firmer the defense of the Soviet Republic will become and the more certain its socialist future.”

—“The Ukrainian Question” (April 1939)

A Marxist Framework for Tibet

This programmatic approach is as vitally necessary for Tibet as it is for Xinjiang, even given their vastly different histories and social structures. Like the Muslims of Xinjiang, Tibetans experienced historic advances as part of the People’s Republic. This is despite the fact that the CPC kept in place the essentially feudal lamaocracy for nine years following the PLA’s entry into Tibet. It was the introduction

of extremely modest reforms that helped touch off a reactionary rebellion in 1959. Largely organized by the American CIA, the uprising was defeated, sending the Dalai Lama and his clique fleeing to India. The CPC regime then abolished his administration, as well as local slavery and the taxes Tibetans had been forced to pay to the monasteries.

Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier in this article, Tibetans as well as Xinjiang’s Muslims suffered from the Han supremacy imposed by the CPC. As in regard to Xinjiang, the CPC categorically opposes any separation of Tibet from the PRC, reinforcing prejudices that national minorities are simply too backward to advance socially outside the PRC’s realm.

This is a crystalline expression of the CPC’s anti-internationalism. No one in their right mind would think that Tibet would have any kind of progressive future in isolation from more advanced economies. But denying the Tibetans’ national rights only serves to poison relations with the Han masses of China and to let the imperialists win “hearts and minds” in their campaigns against the PRC. The answer is to fight for an independent socialist Tibet in an anti-imperialist alliance with the Chinese workers state. This demand must be part of a revolutionary program for China today.

There are other aspects of the national question in China that need to be taken up. One concerns the Mongols. While making up only one-sixth of the population of Inner Mongolia, in recent years they have waged determined protests demanding the right to education in their language. Besides defending such rights, there is the question of Mongolia’s division into two states. Trotskyists should offer the prospect of the reunification of Mongolia through political revolution in China and social revolution in Outer Mongolia. This question surely requires more discussion. What is essential is to apply a Marxist programmatic framework to all such problems.

The Internationalist Banner

China is at a critical juncture. Trying to maintain its caste rule and privileges as the world lurches from crisis to crisis, the CPC seeks to enforce the discipline of national unity while appealing for “win-win” cooperation with global finance capital and relying on fickle bourgeois allies in the Global South. That strategy threatens the death of the workers state.

Championing the struggle for self-determination against the CPC’s Han chauvinism is but one step toward cohering a Trotskyist cadre that can provide a revolutionary alternative to Stalinist misrule. What we offer is continuity with the early Comintern, with the first Chinese Communists, and with the Bolshevik cadres who established the Turkistan Bureau in Tashkent to extend the October Revolution to the East.

The emergence of a Leninist vanguard that mobilizes the proletariat of China on behalf of the Tibetan, Uyghur and Mongol masses would have an enormous impact on Nepal and the rest of the Indian subcontinent; on the former Soviet Central Asian states; on Mongolia and onward into Russian Siberia. To polarize anti-imperialist fighters against the CPC’s defeatist program of nationalism and global class collaboration, we counterpose a Trotskyist perspective: For a belt of workers states on the road to a socialist Eurasia! The ICL invites all working-class revolutionaries to join us on this march. ■

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NATIONAL OPPRESSION IN XI'S CHINA:



A Trotskyist Answer For an Independent Socialist Xinjiang! Unite Against Imperialism—Defend China!

by Ray Bishop

Not so long ago, the U.S. and its allies were in full propaganda mode, charging the Communist Party of China (CPC) with genocide due to the mass internment of Uyghurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang. Hitting back, the Xi Jinping regime defended the crackdown, in which people could run afoul of the authorities for the lengths of their beards or for praying too fervently, as necessary for China's unity and defense against separatist "extremists."

Since then, the imperialists have somewhat dimmed the spotlight on Xinjiang. Instead, they are concentrating their anti-China efforts on military buildup and the trade war launched by the Trump White House. For their part, the Chinese Stalinists have declared victory against "splittism." The internment camps, which they passed off as "re-education" and "training" centers, are closed. Calm has seemingly descended

Ürümqi, May 2014: Paramilitary force mobilized in "no mercy" crackdown against Uyghurs. Xi Jinping (inset) greeted at 2017 CPC Congress as regime carries out mass internment in Xinjiang.

Ng Han Guan/AP (inset), Zhang Hao/China Photo

on Xinjiang, and the government is even encouraging tourists to visit the province. The China of workers and peasants born of the 1949 Revolution is safe, the CPC declares, and the way clear for achieving "common prosperity."

This "Chinese dream" is a complete illusion. The regime's measures in Xinjiang, expanding on earlier policies in Tibet, are part of an entire program of *forcible sinicization*. This is a deadly danger not only to China's minorities but to the People's Republic (PRC) itself. From the internment camps to the schools, where education in minority languages is being eliminated, the CPC leadership has created a powder keg of resentment and hatred among peoples who will never accept their oppression. This is a

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