

BOLSHEVISM AND WAR

“War is, in the well-known words of Clausewitz, the continuation of politics through violent means; it is the *ultima ratio*, the last degree of reason, the inseparable corollary of capitalist, and any class, society; it is the outburst of the historical contradictions which have sharpened to such an extent that they cannot be settled through any other means. That basically says it all, war has nothing to do with morals and laws.”

Franz Mehring

“During a reactionary war a revolutionary class cannot but desire the defeat of its government. This is axiomatic, and disputed only by conscious partisans or helpless satellites of the social-chauvinists.”

Lenin

In the editorial of the previous issue of *Línea Proletaria* we said that our firm commitment **to the slogan of revolutionary defeatism** in the face of the war between imperialists unleashed in Ukraine **was not something already given**, that could have emerged *spontaneously* in the face of the succession of events or derived from the mere *common* sense within the vanguard. This is so for two reasons. The first one is that decades of revisionist hegemony in the vanguard have erased, pushed aside and deformed the *old certainties* of the revolutionary proletariat by replacing them and molding them to the interests of other classes, such as the petty bourgeoisie and the labor aristocracy. The second, and more important, reason is that, precisely due to the end of the Cycle of revolutions that opened in October, Marxism is no longer that vanguard theory capable of initiating new revolutionary processes, and this requires the proletariat to critically reexamine even those old certainties. As the Reconstitution Line (RL) has always insisted, in this counterrevolutionary era, the vanguard is characterized, first of all, by questioning itself, the ideology it carries and the need for the Marxism that October bequeaths to us to apply Marxism itself to it, its theoretical updating based on the historical development of the class struggle and how it suppresses, expands or qualifies the political theses of Marxism and contrasts its own results with the *responses* given by other classes that fight for —and currently hold— hegemony within the working class.

This means that the proletariat that seriously questions and struggles for the relaunch of the World Proletarian Revolution (WPR)

cannot be satisfied with the *happy* and *carefree* repetition of platitudes and reformist demands that are the norm among the vanguard as far as their communiqués and statements regarding the war. If all those positions have something in common, in addition to caving to the *national* framework imposed by the bourgeoisie—whether in its openly chauvinist aspect and in favor of some of the combatants in the fray or in its covert, pacifist form, the *stop the war* type and of course all possible intermediate combinations—is their inability to minimally link the war with the tasks necessary for the revolution, for the simple reason that *they simply lack* any form of revolutionary tactics-as-plan. But from the perspective of revolutionary Marxism, that of the ideological and political reconstitution of communism, it does not serve us to settle for being mere passive spectators, who simply *condemn the war*, but rather it compels us to interweave each specific position with the tasks that the Reconstitution Plan outlines in order to once again make the revolutionary proletariat—the Communist Party—a real contender in the great class struggle and the only historical subject capable of waging *war against war*. Linking the position of revolutionary defeatism with the need to reconstitute the ideology that our class lacks today, involves first of all understanding this phenomenon in depth, both in the most direct sense of singling out and pointing out what *lessons* the proletariat can learn from the current war in Ukraine¹, as well as to penetrate deeply into the theoretical nature of the military phenomenon, the relationship it has with the General Line of the Revolution and what place the politics of revolutionary defeatism have as a mediation between the two. A serious and rigorous theoretical task without which the whole vanguard could not train itself for larger undertakings. This requires that vanguard, as a first *basic* step, to **become familiar with the notion of revolutionary defeatism**, its characteristics and internal logic, and its historical emergence at the hands of the Bolshevik Party.

This article is a contribution in this regard, which, although it cannot replace the individual intellectual effort of each proletarian to internalize and apprehend these issues, we do intend that it help combat the *amnesia* (both *honest* and self-serving) that seems to afflict the entire theoretical vanguard today regarding key issues of communist analysis and politics. Given the efforts of contemporary revisionism, even that which calls itself Leninist, to *obscure* both the letter and the spirit of revolutionary Marxism, we hope that readers will understand the

1 For example, in the field of military knowledge, we recommend the reader pp. 7–9 or 30–32 of LÍNEA PROLETARIA, #7, December 2022.

relevance of our having brought up such numerous and extensive quotations throughout the document. And in turn, these passages from our classics that we have seen fit to recover do demand, in order for them to make sense from the perspective of the current class struggle, that they be *contextualized* historically, that the Marxist demand of studying any phenomenon in its development and historical evolution be met. Only from this broad perspective, which is provided by the history of class struggle, and which is that of the Summation of the October Cycle, can we illuminate in our time both the genuine class analysis and a political line that lives up to the demands to relaunch the communist revolution.

1. The formulation of the question in Marx and Engels

For the materialist conception of history, war, the systematic organization of violence, is nothing more than the expression of a certain degree of development of social relations engendered by economic contradictions and it is inherent to class societies.

“More graphically than anything else the history of the army demonstrates the rightness of **our views** as to the **connection** between the **productive forces and social relations**. Altogether, the army is of importance in economic development. E.g. it was in the army of Antiquity that the *saltaire* was first fully developed. . . . All this, moreover, a very striking epitome of the whole history of civil societies.”²

War and its organization are part of those classist social relations, to the point that it “became a regular profession”³ with the appearance of the first civilizations. And as every worker who has begun to investigate the rudiments of Marxism knows, *politics is the most concentrated expression of economics*⁴. That is why Marx and Engels fully endorse Clausewitz’s famous maxim that *war is the continuation of politics by different means*, a formula that allows us to understand both the economic basis of this

² *Marx to Engels, 25 September 1857*; in MARX, K.; ENGELS, F. *Collected Works. Volume 40*. International Publishers. New York, 1983, p. 186. [All the bold used in the quotes in this document is always our own – *Editor’s Note*.]

³ ENGELS, F., *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*; in MARX, K.; ENGELS, F. *Selected Works in three volumes. Volume 3*. Progress Publishers. Moscow, 1976, p. 571.

⁴ LENIN, V.I., *Once Again on the Trade Unions*; in *Collected Works. Volume 32*. Progress Publishers. Moscow, 1973, p. 32.

phenomenon and clarify the purpose pursued by a certain politic even when it makes the jump to its armed form. Therefore, war is above any ethical or legal consideration, since it is a phenomenon subject to the laws of class struggle and only from there can it be fully judged from the point of view of Marxism. And since modern capitalist society is divided into politically opposing social classes, from the strictly Marxist point of view, war is only “unjust” or “reactionary” when it is a continuation of the policy of domination and exploitation of the dominant classes, when it reinforces and maintains the dominance of reaction and the old society over the revolutionary class and the new social relations it embodies. **The essence** of the phenomenon does not **rest** on the forms it necessarily takes—the suppression of all rights except those granted *by force*, the violent elimination of enemies or the degree of *cruelty* used to achieve the desired objectives, to list some of them—but in **determining what policy all this violence is a continuation of**, what class interests it serves. Hence, precisely, war can be “just” or “progressive” if it is an expression and continuation of the politics of the oppressed classes in pursuit of their liberation, if what it is shaking is the yoke of domination—political in the case of bourgeois revolutions and wars, social for those of the proletariat. In this regard, it is enough to remember the words of Engels:

“That force, however, plays yet another role in history, a revolutionary role; that, in the words of Marx, it is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one, that it is the instrument with the aid of which social movement forces its way through and shatters the dead, fossilised political forms—of this there is not a word in Herr Dühring. It is only with sighs and groans that he admits the possibility that force will perhaps be necessary for the overthrow of an economic system of exploitation—unfortunately, because all use of force demoralises the person who uses it. And this in spite of the immense moral and spiritual impetus which has been given by every victorious revolution! And this in Germany, where a violent collision—which may, after all, be forced on the people—would at least have the advantage of wiping out the servility which has penetrated the nation’s mentality following the humiliation of the Thirty Years’ War. And this parson’s mode of thought—dull, insipid and

impotent—presumes to impose itself on the most revolutionary party that history has known!”⁵

Our interest in drawing the reader’s attention to this quote lies in the fact that several issues are concentrated in it. The most obvious is the total incompatibility of combining pacifism with the positions of the revolutionary proletariat, since **the war against the oppressors**—and that is what the revolution is, a *prolonged civil war*—**is not only just but desirable**, and in that spirit its party—today the vanguard—has to be educated. The second issue is that, as the RL has been insisting in the pages of *Línea Proletaria*⁶, the systematic exercise of violence by the proletariat is not a mere *instrumental* necessity, result of the sole fact that *there is no other way* to snatch power from the parasitic classes and remain in power, but, to the extent that the use of this violence **is an unavoidable part of its process of emancipation**, of negation as a submissive and oppressed class and conversion into a dominant class, which must go through the process to *educate* itself in the management and stewardship of its own war of liberation, since the very fact of waging it *eradicates* its “servility” and brings with it a “moral and spiritual impetus.”⁷ But we also find this quote interesting because Engels’ mention of Germany and “the nation’s mentality” serves to place us temporarily in the very specific framework of that 19th century politically conditioned by two events. The first is that the revolutionary struggle of the bourgeoisie against the remnants of feudalism has not yet been exhausted, a struggle that, both in its form and in content, is *national*, since even in cases where it is not directly fighting for national independence, the bourgeoisie, in its fight against the aristocracy and the medieval remainders, what it is trying to consolidate is nothing other than its own market, its nation-state. And the second event that marks that 19th century is that the proletariat begins its journey as an independent class that, even with little experience and

5 ENGELS, F., *Herr Eugen Dühring’s Revolution in Science*; in MARX, K.; ENGELS, F. *Collected Works. Volume 25*. International Publishers. New York, 1986, p. 171.

6 *Había que tomar las armas: sobre los fundamentos materiales de Octubre* [Arms Had to Be Taken Up: On the Material Foundations of October]; in LÍNEA PROLETARIA, #2, December 2017, p. 54.

7 “[T]he revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.” MARX, K.; ENGELS, F. *The German Ideology*; in *Collected Works. Volume 5*. International Publishers, New York, 1975, p. 53.

occasionally politically allied with the progressive bourgeoisie against the feudal reaction, begins to have a greater awareness of its particular interests and begins to organize accordingly. It still moves within the framework of *class in itself*, aware of its immediate interests, but not of its historical objectives for emancipation.

This necessarily has a number of very practical consequences for how Marx and Engels dealt with the question of war in their time. Since the proletariat is not yet capable of acting in a revolutionary manner, the work of the founders of scientific communism will be limited to trying to elucidate in each war—or in the face of the possibility of one—which side most benefits and extends the bourgeois revolution and therefore leaves the ground clearer for the proletariat to wage its class struggle. That is why Marx and Engels, although tirelessly studious and connoisseurs of the history and state of military science of their time and granting war and revolutionary violence an integral part in the conception of the world that they began to cement, could not articulate a systematic and coherent treatment in the face of the question of national war, between capitalist countries, since the very framework of action of the proletariat had not yet been *cleared* for the modern class struggle (to the extent that there was a feudal world to liquidate, nations were still divided into reactionary, like the autocratic tsarist Russia, and revolutionary, like France, the first to *go to the barricades*, to cite the most characteristic examples) nor was it capable, due to the lack of its own practical background, to give Marxism an appropriate *social ground* from which to apply what was previously achieved by the vanguard theory. It is not until the proletariat has matured enough to constitute itself as a Communist Party, that it has the capacity to incorporate the question of war as an integral part of its revolutionary strategy⁸. That is to say, historically it is not until the proletariat has organized itself around the social revolution as its immediate reference, that it has been able to systematically deal with this question.

Therefore, as with the national question and the specific cases of Ireland and Poland, Marx and Engels, in their propaganda work in the IWA and the Second International, focused especially on pointing out *examples* and concrete cases that would be beneficial for the development of the proletariat, for example, by supporting the wars derived from the German and Italian unification processes, to the extent that this would consolidate two new national states in Europe and weaken the international forces of

⁸ To delve deeper into this issue, but in the case of the handling of the national question, see *¡Abajo el chovinismo español de gran nación!* [Down with Spanish Great-Nation Chauvinism!]; in LÍNEA PROLETARIA, #1, July 2017, pp. 16–17.

absolutist reaction. Naturally, the fact that the working class could not have a real influence in supporting or opposing the contenders in the war does not mean that, even at this early stage in which the proletariat is still struggling to form and extend its lowest and primitive organization as trade union, Marx and Engels pointed out that:

“[T]he working classes [have] **the duty to master themselves the mysteries of international politics**; to watch the diplomatic acts of their respective Governments; to counteract them, if necessary, by all means in their power . . .”⁹

And this is given that a class that aspires to establish its own revolutionary dictatorship must educate itself in the broader questions and fields of knowledge, and especially all those that have to do with the question of **power**, to know how to take advantage of these “international politics” at all times for the benefit of their own cause:

“The fight for such a [consequently democratic and internationalist] foreign policy forms part of the general struggle for the emancipation of the working classes.”¹⁰

And this question of ensuring the most rapid extension and development of the democratic movement, a movement initiated and at whose head, although increasingly more reticent, was still the bourgeoisie, will be the constant *leitmotif* of the work of Marx and Engels when it comes to determining the progressive or reactionary character of the war. This is how Lenin summarized the approach of the two revolutionaries:

“. . . Marx was guided, in his ‘appraisal’ of international conflicts springing from bourgeois national and liberation movements, by considerations as to whose success was more capable of contributing to the ‘development’ . . . of national and, in general, popular democratic movements. That means that, during military conflicts stemming from the bourgeoisie’s rise to power within the various nationalities, Marx was, as in 1848, most of all concerned with extending the scope of the bourgeois-democratic movement and bringing it to a head through the participation of broader and

9 MARX, K., *Inaugural Address of the Working Men’s International Association*; in MARX, K.; ENGELS, F. *Collected Works. Volume 20*. International Publishers, New York, 1985, p. 13.

10 *Ibidem*.

more 'plebeian' masses, the petty bourgeoisie in general, the peasantry in particular, and finally of the poor classes as a whole. .

..

In the first epoch, the objective and historical task was to ascertain how, in its struggle against the chief representatives of a dying feudalism, the progressive bourgeoisie should 'utilise' international conflicts so as to bring the greatest possible advantage to the entire democratic bourgeoisie of the world. In the first epoch, over half a century ago, it was natural and inevitable that the bourgeoisie, enslaved by feudalism, should wish the defeat of its 'own' feudal oppressor . . ."¹¹

Let us pause for a brief moment on one of these episodes analyzed by Marx, the Franco-Prussian War, since it condenses several lessons that are still interesting for the proletariat of today. When this conflict breaks out, the IWA, with Marx at the head, declares that from the French point of view it is a reactionary war, it is a continuation of the backward policy of Napoleon III to remain in power and, as such, the workers and consistent democrats should not support it. For Germany, on the other hand, the *defensive* war is justified, since fighting the imperial armies facilitated the defeat of the reaction in France, since this defensive war was a continuation of the democratic policy of its national unification process, and therefore *just* from the point of view that it helped consolidate the modern bourgeois state and put an end to the medieval remnants. Even so, it is emphasized that, although the German proletariat could still support the national cause to the extent that this enterprise was incomplete, it should not do so with the Bismarck government, as guilty as the French for the outbreak of the war, precisely because it was politically and economically linked to it, and had to categorically reject any attempt to annex or plunder French territory itself.

That this policy was just would be confirmed by the proletariat by following it during the development of events. The French socialists opposed the war from the get-go, forcing a desperate Napoleon III to order mass imprisonment, bringing with it a growth in the prestige of the International and its ideas among new layers of the proletariat. In Germany, the socialists led by Bebel and W. Liebknecht begin a campaign

11 LENIN, V.I., *Under a False Flag*; in *Collected Works. Volume 21*. Progress Publishers. Moscow, 1974, pp. 148-149. Note that not only is internationalism a concept that the proletariat picks up and elevates from the revolutionary youth of the bourgeoisie, but also its consistent application in the case of war, revolutionary defeatism, has its roots in the precedents of the revolutionary past of this class.

against the war as soon as the German armies try to annex Alsace and Lorraine, an action for which they are *naturally* also imprisoned but which reinforces the proletarian cause in both countries. This *prestige* of proletarian internationalism, added to the military defeats of France, caused the fall of the Empire, and quickly after it, the republic that succeeded it, facilitating the proclamation of the Paris Commune. With the Commune, the war of national defense of France quickly transformed into a civil war as soon as the Parisian masses decided to fight for their own interests, and with it they led the proletariat to exercise its first revolutionary dictatorship. This feat, which marks the entire conquest of “a new point of departure of world-historic importance” in the words of Marx, represents, in the field that concerns us in this document, not only further proof of the deep connection that exists between military defeat and the revolution¹², but of **the historical expiration of the *national war* in the face of the emergence of the proletarian revolution:**

“That after the most tremendous war of modern times, the conquering and the conquered hosts should fraternize for the common massacre of the proletariat —this unparalleled event does indicate, not, as Bismarck thinks, the final repression of a new society upheaving, but the crumbling into dust of bourgeois society. The highest heroic effort of which old society is still

12 We will delve a little more into this question in future pages. For now it is worth remembering that revolutionary criticism was already very clear about this link between war (even world war) and revolution as early as 1848. Marx said this as a way to reverse the revolutionary decline that was already occurring by the end of that historic year: “The liberation of Europe, whether brought about by the struggle of the oppressed nationalities for their independence or by overthrowing feudal absolutism, depends therefore on the successful uprising of the French working class. Every social upheaval in France, however, is bound to be thwarted by the English bourgeoisie, by Great Britain’s industrial and commercial domination of the world. Every partial social reform in France or on the European continent as a whole, if designed to be lasting, is merely a pious wish. And only a *world war* can overthrow the old England, as only this can provide the Chartists, the party of the organised English workers, with the conditions for a successful rising against their gigantic oppressors. Only when the Chartists head the English Government will the social revolution pass from the sphere of utopia to that of reality. But any *European war* in which England is involved is a world war, waged in Canada as in Italy, in East Indies as in Prussia, in Africa as on the Danube. A European war will be the first result of a successful workers’ revolution in France. England will head the counter-revolutionary armies, just as it did during the Napoleonic period, but through the war itself it will be thrown to the head of the revolutionary movement and it will repay the debt it owes in regard to the revolution of the eighteenth century.

The table of contents for 1849 reads: *Revolutionary rising of the French working class, world war.* MARX, K., *The Revolutionary Movement*; in MARX, K.; ENGELS, F. *Collected Works. Volume 8.* International Publishers, New York, 1977, p. 215.

capable is **national war**; and this is now proved to be a **mere governmental humbug**, intended to defer the struggle of classes, and to be thrown aside as soon as that class struggle bursts out into civil war. **Class rule is no longer able to disguise itself in a national uniform; the national Governments are one as against the proletariat!**"¹³

2. The Bolshevik reception of revolutionary defeatism

The great codifier and transmitter of the theoretical work of Marx and Engels will be the Second International. An organization that shows in all its Congresses a very great concern about the possibility of war, and will play an enormous role in the transmission of Marxist ideas among the proletariat, educating it on the class nature of war and in that "only the creation of a socialist order, putting an end to the exploitation of man by man, will put an end to militarism and assure permanent peace."¹⁴ But as the RL has insisted numerous times in the past, the Second International embodies in the history of the development of our class the period of development of the proletariat as a class *in itself*, of self-affirmation as a particular class *within* the capitalist framework. This maturing period, inevitable and historically progressive, also imposes a series of historical limitations with their necessary ideological and political consequences. And the Second International was born and developed in the middle of the transition, as Lenin would later characterize it, between the *ascending* epoch of the bourgeoisie, the "epoch of bourgeois-democratic movements" and of "bourgeois-national movements," and the transition to another, *descending*, epoch, one of "full domination and decline of the bourgeoisie, one of transition from its progressive character towards reactionary and even ultra-reactionary finance capital."¹⁵ This has the consequence in the field at hand, war and proletarian revolution, that the responses of the previous era, of the *democratic* era of the bourgeoisie, in which "defencism" was justified in the event of external aggression or facing a more reactionary country. Along with maintaining these theses,

13 MARX, K., *The Civil War in France*; in MARX, K.; ENGELS, F. *Collected Works. Volume 22*. International Publishers, New York, 1986, pp. 353–354.

14 Resolution of the Second Congress of the Socialist International, which can be consulted in TABER, M. (ed.), *Under the Socialist Banner. Resolutions of the Second International, 1889–1912*. Haymarket Books. Chicago, 2021, p. 35.

15 *Under a False Flag*; in LENIN, *Op. cit.*, p. 146.

the Second International, whose base parties had been born and were growing at an overwhelming pace within that relatively “peaceful” —at least in Europe—capitalist social framework of the last decades of the 19th century, and which had allowed notable political and social successes, knows perfectly well that a war between the main powers would ruin everything, the *calm evolution* and the arrival of the socialist victory that the *normal* and spontaneous functioning of capitalism seemed to bring with it in those last decades of the 19th century. Engels himself recognized that:

“This much is certain: A war would above all retard our movement all over Europe, completely disrupt it in many countries, stir up chauvinism and xenophobia and leave us with the *certain* prospect, amongst many other uncertain ones, of having to begin all over again after the war . . .”¹⁶

This meant that the debates and resolutions adopted by the International in its first six congresses (1889-1904) were essentially **limited** to guiding **social-democratic politics to fight** to avoid the outbreak of war *at all costs* and *defend peace*. To such an extent that the Second International maintained in all its resolutions —with little success— the creation of *international organizations for peace* that would guarantee *arbitration* between nations in the event of conflict. The approach, therefore, although in a pacifist way, is strictly national, to guarantee that each country is not shaken by the disasters of war, since within the paradigm of the Second International, *national prosperity* and the *socialist* development of the working class seemed to go hand in hand. Only with the Stuttgart Congress of 1907, and as a result of the pressure and debates maintained by the Bolsheviks, did the resulting resolution link the war with

¹⁶ Engels to August Bebel, 13–14 September 1866; in MARX, K.; ENGELS, F. *Collected Works. Volume 47*. International Publishers. New York, 1995, p. 487. Although Engels, unlike the pacifist deviation within the Second International later, was never deterred by this possibility: “That is the prospect for the moment [the world war and the massacre of millions on the battlefields] when the systematic development of mutual oneupmanship in armaments reaches its climax and finally brings forth its inevitable fruits. This is the pass, my worthy princes and statesmen, to which you in your wisdom have brought our ancient Europe. And when no alternative is left to you but to strike up the last dance of war—that will be no skin off our noses. The war may push us into the background for a while, it may wrest many a conquered base from our hands. But once you have unleashed the forces you will be unable to restrain, things can take their course: by the end of the tragedy you will be ruined and the victory of the proletariat will either have already been achieved or else inevitable.” MARX, K.; ENGELS, F. *Collected Works. Volume 26*. International Publishers, New York, 1990, p. 451.

revolutionary action¹⁷ against one's *own* bourgeoisie for the first time. What is it that happened to bring about this change at the request of the Russian revolutionaries?

By 1907 the Marxist vanguard in Russia had been fulfilling a series of key phases and requirements in its process of party constitution. More than a decade prior it had abandoned its phase of “embryonic stage of development” from without the labor movement, simply assimilating social-democratic Marxism as a doctrine and contrasting it against populism, which it defeated. The hegemony of Marxism among the vanguard in a country with a pending bourgeois-democratic revolution like Russia, where the proletariat is imposed the novel task of solving problems of the *previous* class, opened the possibility that this situation could be used as a *springboard* that facilitated the proletariat access to political power. That will be the firm decision of what will end up being Bolshevism, which, precisely, establishes the tactics-as-plan to organize all the vanguard and its links with the masses into a whole, a unique system of organizations that allows for the elevation and organization of the proletariat not *from below*, based on its spontaneous interests, but **based on the socialist revolution as the ultimate reference**¹⁸. So much so that, significantly, the program of the RSDLP includes the express objective of the dictatorship of the proletariat since 1903, something that will never expressly appear in the program of the flagship party of social-democratic Marxism, the SPD.

It is because Bolshevism was established from ideology, which is what informs at all times the objectives and goals of the revolutionary process, that in the Russian case, with this intertwining between the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions, from the beginning the epicenter of the debates and concerns of revolutionaries is the question of power, and enables revolutionary social-democrats to link and subordinate historical problems and each event of the class struggle to this goal. Thus, when the Russo-Japanese War broke out in 1904, the position that the Bolsheviks quickly adopted was to actively link the war with the opening of a

17 This is the amendment that was eventually added which Bolshevism strove to get included: “In case war should break out notwithstanding, they shall be bound to intervene for its speedy termination, and to employ all their forces to utilize the economic and political crisis created by the war in order to rouse the masses of the people and thereby hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule.” Quoted according to TABER, M. (ed.), *Op. cit.*, p. 138.

18 To delve deeper into these issues, we recommend *Camino a Octubre* [Road to October] in LA FORJA, #8, November 1995 and *Había que tomar las armas: sobre los fundamentos materiales de Octubre* [Arms Had to Be Taken Up: On the Material Foundations of October]; in LÍNEA PROLETARIA, #2, December 2017.

revolutionary crisis, thus connecting, directly, with the positions that revolutionary criticism had conquered decades prior:

“Wars today are fought by peoples; this now brings out more strikingly than ever a great attribute of war, namely, that it opens the eyes of millions to the disparity between the people and the government, which heretofore was evident only to a small class-conscious minority. The criticism of the autocracy by all progressive Russians, by the Russian Social-Democrats, by the Russian proletariat, has now been confirmed in the criticism by Japanese arms, confirmed in such wise that the impossibility of living under the autocracy *is felt* more and more even by those who do not know what autocracy means, even by those who do know, but yet would maintain it with all their soul.”¹⁹

This quote from Lenin correctly identifies that the war *of the autocracy* is nothing more than a continuation on a higher level of the politics of oppression and exploitation of that same autocracy, so that every military defeat implies the open unmasking of the miseries and failures of said politics²⁰ and therefore direct propaganda of revolutionary criticism and positions. A few months later, in 1905, the tsarist military defeats were such that popular discontent had exploded into a true revolution, which caught the Bolsheviks insufficiently prepared. Even so, from the first moment the vanguard tries to put itself at its head and direct the action of the masses towards revolutionary objectives. What we are interested in highlighting here about this period is Lenin’s understanding that the **failure of tsarist military politics has led to a crisis that allows proletarian politics to rise to a struggle for power**, which is now resolved in the *pure* form of armed confrontations of tsarism against the workers and peasants. What

19 LENIN, V. I., *The Fall of Port Arthur*; in *Collected Works. Volume 8*. Progress Publishers. Moscow, 1977, p. 50.

20 Thus ended the Bolsheviks’ first proclamation on the Russo-Japanese War, indelibly linking the fate of the autocracy to the fate of their military adventure: “In the event of defeat, the war will lead above all to the collapse of the entire government system based on popular ignorance and deprivation, on oppression and violence.

They who sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind!

Long live the fraternal union of the proletarians of all countries fighting for complete liberation from the yoke of international capital! Long live Japanese Social-Democracy protesting against the war! Down with the ignominious and predatory tsarist autocracy!” LENIN, V. I., *To the Russian Proletariat. Volume 41*. Progress Publishers. Moscow, 1977, p. 113.

is now imposed on the revolutionary proletariat is this leap *to politics waged by other means*, the leap from revolutionary politics to *revolutionary war*:

“The proletariat will learn from these military lessons afforded by the government. For one thing, it will learn the art of civil war, now that it has started the revolution. Revolution is war. Of all the wars known in history it is the only lawful, rightful, just, and truly great war.”²¹

“The revolutionary army is needed for military struggle and for military leadership of the masses against the remnants of the military forces of the autocracy. The revolutionary army is needed because great historical issues can be resolved only *by force*, and, in modern struggle, the *organisation of force* means military organisation.”²²

What the revolution of 1905 puts in the spotlight of the Russian vanguard is the question of the **Military Line of the Revolution**, and how to systematize its rudiments in the face of the new forms of struggle that the war between classes had taken in Russia. And in the debates on the insurrection, Bolshevism once again stands out, not only as the most intransigent wing and supporter of the armed actions of the masses, something that, although reluctantly, was accepted by Menshevism as a form of external pressure on the liberal bourgeoisie, but also being the greatest defender of the need to theoretically pose the question, to rationalize it in order to give it a projection in the form of military politics that would sustain revolutionary action over time, give real opportunities to defeat reaction and could be incorporated into the heritage of the revolutionary doctrine:

“To take the military aspect. No Social-Democrat at all familiar with history, who has studied Engels, the great expert on this subject, has ever doubted the tremendous importance of military knowledge, of military technique, and of military organisation as an instrument which the masses of the people, and classes of the people, use in resolving great historical conflicts. Social-Democracy never stooped to playing at military conspiracies; it never gave prominence to military questions until the actual

²¹ *Revolutionary Days*, in LENIN, *Op. cit.*, vol. 8, p. 107.

²² *The Revolutionary Army and the Revolutionary Proletariat*; in LENIN, *Ibidem*, p. 563.

conditions of civil war had arisen. But *now* all Social-Democrats have advanced the **military questions**, if not to the first place, at least to one of the first places, and they are **putting great stress on studying these questions and bringing them to the knowledge of the masses**. The revolutionary army must apply the military knowledge and the military means on the practical plane for the determination of the further destiny of the Russian people, for the determination of the most vital and pressing question—the question of **freedom**.²³

From this moment on, the Bolsheviks link the question of the military line and their education in it to the masses as a key element to be able to provide the proletariat with *freedom*, with real independence in its class struggle with respect to the bourgeoisie. The question of the proletarian military line will become one of the main elements of demarcation²⁴ against the opportunist wing of the party and the object of the summation of the 1905 revolution that will allow the Bolsheviks to successfully carry out the process of reconstitution of the RSDLP (1908–1914). Since 1912, Bolshevism managed to organize itself as a political body independent of opportunism, and by that time it already had principles, a political line and a program that allowed it to merge with the practical vanguard of the labor movement²⁵, being in a position of strength with respect to the rest of the old workers' parties when the world war broke out.

They treasure this experience and they begin to synthesize it by the time of the Stuttgart Congress of 1907, which is why the Bolsheviks will be inflexible in this regard and will have enough strength to be able to modify the resolutions of the old International on the war and strengthen the entire international social-democratic left. Only because they had achieved this fusion of scientific socialism with the labor movement during the revolutionary experience of 1905 were they able to highlight the real connection between the failure of the military politics of the dominant

23 *Ibid.*, p. 565.

24 "Any infatuation with quasi-constitutionalism, any exaggeration of the 'positive' role of the Duma by anybody, any appeals of the extreme Right Social-Democrats for moderation and sobriety—we have in our possession a most powerful weapon against them. This weapon is Clause 1 of the Congress resolution on insurrection." LENIN, V.I., *Report on the Unity Congress of the R.S.D.L.P.*; in *Collected Works. Volume 10*. Progress Publishers. Moscow, 1978, p. 381.

25 Regarding the process of reconstitution of the Bolshevik RSDLP, see *Entre dos orillas* (Between Two Sides); in LA FORJA, #16, February 1998.

classes and the opening of the possibility that this represents for the proletariat so it can begin to carry out and be educated in its own military politics. The Bolshevik Party has prepared to begin to offer that systematic response to what the internationalist treatment of the proletariat should be like in the face of the phenomenon of war, which would be synthesized in 1914 under the mandate to *transform the imperialist war into a revolutionary civil war*.

3. The imperialist war

This Bolshevik position of independence with respect to the immediate environment because the Party is constituted from the needs of the revolution and not from the *immediate* problems of the masses, is what places it in a privileged point of view for a greater and broader understanding of the phenomenon of imperialism and military conflicts. This means resuming and being able to comply on a higher, social level, being already a Communist Party, with the Marxian mandate that workers master themselves *the mysteries of international politics*, having that Clausewitzian politics-war connection as the axis of analysis:

“From the point of view of Marxism, that is, of modern scientific socialism, the main issue in any discussion by socialists on how to assess the war and what attitude to adopt towards it is this: what is the war being waged for, and what classes staged and directed it. . . .

If we did not do this we should not only be neglecting an essential requirement of scientific socialism and of all social science in general, but we should be unable to understand anything whatever about the present war. . . . We say: if you have not studied the policies of both belligerent groups over a period of decades—so as to avoid accidental factors and the quoting of random examples—if you have not shown what bearing this war has on preceding policies, then you don’t understand what this war is all about.”²⁶

This zeal for theory—so far removed from the simple formulaic repetition with which the bulk of the International Communist Movement (ICM) dispatches any important issue regarding the war in Ukraine and which believes that with a simple allusion to the imperialist nature of the conflict,

26 LENIN, V.I., *War and Revolution*; in *Collected Works. Volume 24*. Progress Publishers. Moscow, 1974, pp. 398, 402.

the oppressor-oppressed countries contradiction or the current crisis of capitalism, it is really explaining something²⁷— is what allows the Bolsheviks to determine the changes taking place in capitalism. From the era of competitive capitalism, where the bourgeoisie tried to consolidate, above all, its own national framework, the transition to the dominance of financial capital and the appearance of monopolies does lead the bourgeoisie to constant and fierce competition for the markets, including the colonial ones.

“‘[F]inance capital strives for domination, not freedom’. Political reaction *all along* the line is a characteristic feature of imperialism.”²⁸

Which means that the war emanating from such politics can no longer be anything other than reactionary and completely antagonistic to the interests of the proletariat. *National* war disappears from the international stage except for the liberation struggles of oppressed and colonial nations.

“[W]e must examine the policy pursued prior to the war, the policy that led to and brought about the war. If it was an imperialist policy, i.e., one designed to safeguard the interests of finance capital and rob and oppress colonies and foreign countries, then the war stemming from that policy is imperialist. If it was a national liberation policy, i.e., one expressive of the mass movement against national oppression, then the war stemming from that policy is a war of national liberation.”²⁹

And the fact is that, although at a formal level, the phenomenon is apparently the same as in the time of the *old* national wars (for example, the fight between two states with professional armies and general mobilization of the masses of the population), which the bourgeoisie will always take advantage of to justify calling its war *just*, its essence (the class

27 For a systematic and in-depth study of the politics that led to the current war in Ukraine see Dr. Strangelove in *Kyiv: prospects of the imperialist war in Ukraine*, available at: https://reconstitucion.net/Documentos/UKR/Folleto/Kyiv_guerra_imperialista_Ucrania_ENG.html

28 LENIN, V. I., *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*; in *Collected Works. Volume 23*. Progress Publishers. Moscow, 1974, p. 106.

29 *A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism*; in LENIN, V. I., *Ibidem*, p. 33.

relations of which said conflict is an expression) has changed³⁰. And this transformation, and this is important to highlight, means that the criteria with which we must evaluate said politics, those class relations, are no longer the same as in the *youthful* era of the bourgeoisie:

“Let us suppose that two countries are at war in the epoch of bourgeois, national-liberation movements. Which country should we wish success to from the standpoint of present-day democracy? Obviously, to that country whose success will give a greater impetus to the bourgeoisie’s liberation movement, make its development more speedy, and undermine feudalism the more decisively. Let us further suppose that the *determining* feature of the objective historical situation has changed, and that the place of capital striving for national liberation has been taken by international, reactionary and imperialist finance capital. The former country, let us say, possesses three-fourths of Africa, whereas the latter possesses one-fourth. A repartition of Africa is the objective content of their war. To which side should we wish success? It would be absurd to state the problem in its previous form, **since we do not possess the old criteria of appraisal**: there is neither a bourgeois liberation movement running into decades, nor a long process of the decay of feudalism. It is not the business of present-day democracy either to help the former country to assert its ‘right’ to three-fourths of Africa, or to help the latter country (even if it is developing economically more rapidly than the former) to take over those three-fourths. Present-day democracy will remain true to itself only if it joins neither one nor the other imperialist bourgeoisie, only if it says that the two sides are equally bad, and if it wishes the defeat of the imperialist bourgeoisie in every country. Any other decision will, in reality, be national-liberal and have nothing in common with genuine internationalism.”³¹

From here we already see that very concrete practical consequences are inferred, because if “the two sides are equally bad” that means that

30 “The international conflicts in the third epoch [the imperialist one] have, in *form*, remained the same kind of international conflicts as those of the first epoch [Marx’s epoch], but their social and class *content* has changed radically. The objective historical situation has grown quite different.” *Under a False Flag*; in LENIN, *Op. cit.*, vol. 21, pp. 148–149.

31 *Ibidem*, pp. 143–144.

between imperialist countries there are no longer fights for the “defense of the homeland” and questions such as whether war is offensive or defensive, who attacked whom first, have no historical importance from the point of view of the proletariat³² and should only matter to the bourgeoisie. The degree of interconnection and economic-political interweaving that comes with imperialism means that there is no longer the possibility of genuinely neutral countries among developed countries:

“The urgent task of all socialist parties is to intensify agitation among the masses, unmask the diplomats of all countries at their tricks and bring out all the facts for the people to see—the facts revealing the infamous role of *all the allied powers* without exception—both as direct performers of the functions of the gendarme, and **as his abettors, friends and financiers.**”³³

The definitive step of the bourgeoisie to reaction with imperialism makes the different modalities adopted by the dictatorship of the capitalists irrelevant, having exhausted the bourgeois struggle for democracy on a historical level:

“Imperialist war may be said to be a **triple negation of democracy** (*a.* every war replaces ‘rights’ by violence; *b.* imperialism as such is the negation of democracy; *c.* **imperialist war fully equates the republic with the monarchy**) . . .”³⁴

It is no coincidence that this Leninist thesis of equalization of the state forms adopted by the bourgeois dictatorship is precisely one of the most conveniently forgotten by revisionism. And *bourgeois* anti-imperialism is always willing to show its *support* for any group of imperialist bandits in

³² “It is obvious that on this question (just as in discussing ‘patriotism’) **it is not the defensive or offensive character of the war, but the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat**, or to put it better—the interests of the international movement of the proletariat—that represent the sole criterion for considering and deciding the attitude of the Social-Democrats to any particular event in international relations.” LENIN, V. I., *Bellicose Militarism and the Anti-Militarist Tactics of Social-Democracy*; in *Collected Works. Volume 15*. Progress Publishers. Moscow, 1977, p. 199.

³³ *Events in the Balkans and in Persia*; in LENIN, V. I., *Ibidem*, p. 227.

³⁴ *Reply to P. Kievsky (Y. Pyatakov)*; in LENIN, *Op. cit.*, vol. 23, p. 25. Which does not mean, contrary to any simplistic imperialist economist interpretation, that it is not possible for certain sectors of the bourgeoisie to play a *progressive* role in the underdeveloped countries oppressed by imperialism.

their fight against their enemies, only because it thinks of the latter as *worse*, as if the separation between progressive nations and reactionary nations were still in force today. And that is when it is not directly willing to support its own bourgeoisie, as is the case of Reconstrucción Comunista–Frente Obrero, which in its alignment with the *Africanist* sectors of Spanish imperialism describes Morocco as a “reactionary Islamist dictatorship”³⁵ as if the supposedly more reactionary character of the Rabat regime compared to that of Madrid could justify by itself the participation and collusion of the proletariat in any “national” policy. But let us leave today’s opportunists aside, and return to their historical origins with the advent of the imperialist phase of capitalism.

Imperialism tends towards “reaction all along the line” and the “negation of democracy” precisely because the enormous concentration of monopolistic wealth based on international exploitation allows the bourgeoisie to carry out a politic that, through the corporatization of interests, immediate economic benefits of a broad social strata, serves as support and transmission belt for their class dictatorship:

“On the economic basis referred to above, the political institutions of modern capitalism —press, parliament, associations, congresses, etc.— have created *political* privileges and sops for the respectful, meek, reformist and patriotic office employees and workers, corresponding to the economic privileges and sops. Lucrative and soft jobs in the government or on the war industries committees, in parliament and on diverse committees, on the editorial staffs of ‘respectable’, legally published newspapers or on the management councils of no less respectable and ‘bourgeois law-abiding’ trade unions—this is the bait by which the imperialist bourgeoisie attracts and rewards the representatives and supporters of the ‘bourgeois labour parties’.

The mechanics of political democracy works in the same direction. Nothing in our times can be done without elections; nothing can be done without the masses. And in this era of printing and parliamentarism it is *impossible* to gain the following of the masses without a widely ramified, systematically managed, well-equipped system of flattery, lies, fraud, juggling with fashionable and popular catchwords, and promising all manner of reforms and blessings to the workers right and left —as long as

35 See for example its *Movilización contra el gobierno de Marruecos* [Mobilization Against the Government of Morocco], available here: <https://frenteobrero.es/mobilacion-contra-el-gobierno-de-marruecos/>

they renounce the revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie.”³⁶

It is this bourgeois politic based on imperialist economic transformations that favors the appearance and establishment of the opportunist sector of the proletariat, its most bourgeois layer, the labor aristocracy. The inter-imperialist war of 1914, by *accelerating* the politics of the previous decades, finished the consolidation, in just a few days, of this interclass alliance in the form of a *sacred union* between the bourgeoisie and opportunism. From this historical moment this new social layer whose natural representatives are the opportunists is definitively integrated into the apparatus of the bourgeois state and becomes a partner in exercising its class dictatorship against the rest of the exploited:

“Opportunism was engendered in the course of decades by the special features in the period of the development of capitalism, when the comparatively peaceful and cultured life of a stratum of privileged workingmen ‘bourgeoisified’ them, gave them crumbs from the table of their national capitalists, and isolated them from the suffering, misery and revolutionary temper of the impoverished and ruined masses. The imperialist war is the direct continuation and culmination of this state of affairs, because this is a war for the *privileges* of the Great-Power nations, for the repartition of colonies, and domination over other nations. **To defend and strengthen their privileged position as a petty-bourgeois ‘upper stratum’ or aristocracy (and bureaucracy) of the working class—such is the natural wartime continuation of petty-bourgeois opportunist hopes and the corresponding tactics, such is the economic foundation of present-day social-imperialism.**”³⁷

That is why the great majority of the Second International, which before the outbreak of the war, with the exception of a small minority—coherent at least with its class interests—of the extreme right, in words, in its speeches and agreements, was *firmly for peace* and proclaimed their desire to declare *a war against war*, quickly went on to ruthlessly support the policy of national alliance and extermination of millions of proletarians on the battlefields. There is a famous quote by Bebel, representative of that

³⁶ *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*; in LENIN, *Op. cit.*, p. 117.

³⁷ *The Collapse of the Second International*; in LENIN, *Op. cit.*, vol. 21, pp. 242–243.

orthodoxy of the Second International, which claims that the political success of social democracy was due to the fact that “the heart of the people turns towards us because we take up the cause of their daily needs.”³⁸ Precisely the *daily needs* of that layer of qualified and privileged workers, the objective social base of the old socialist parties, which had flourished with the *peaceful* development of capitalism and which, with imperialism and its tendency towards corporatism, saw their reformist desires fulfilled, begin to—and they continue to—, when the imperialist war breaks out, actively defend their imperialist older brothers and their interests, since *they are also theirs*. That is why opportunism, even the most Marxist in word, is massively transformed into blatant social-chauvinism and social-imperialism with war, because it is the adaptation of bourgeois worker politics to the conditions in which the bourgeoisie is settling its policy in the terrain of military actions. This sector, which has become a “commanding, parasitic *stratum* in the working-class movement” offers the bourgeoisie all kinds of arguments with which to try to lead the broad masses, from the attempts to hide the imperialist nature of the war and present it as national, to a whole *Marxist* rhetoric of why their participation is positive for the cause of the proletariat:

“There is another ‘Marxist’ theory of social-chauvinism, which runs as follows: socialism is based on the rapid development of capitalism; the development of capitalism in my country, and consequently the advent of socialism there will be speeded up by her victory; my country’s defeat will retard her economic development and consequently the advent of socialism. . . . this Struivist theory has been developed by . . . [taking] from Marxism all that is acceptable to the liberal bourgeoisie, including the struggle for reforms, the class struggle (without the proletarian dictatorship), the ‘general’ recognition of ‘socialist ideals’ and the substitution of a ‘new order’ for capitalism; they cast aside ‘only’ the living soul of Marxism, ‘only’ its revolutionary content.”³⁹

This way of reasoning, which today is part of *common sense* within the vanguard, was accompanied—as it usually is today— by paternalistic appeals to the masses and their supposed interests. In this way all the socialists justified their betrayal. The case of the worker deputy Dittman

38 JOLL, J. *The Second International, 1889-1914*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson. London, 1968, p. 144.

39 *The Collapse...*; in LENIN, *Op. cit.*, pp. 221–222.

and his argument in favor of the SPD's support for the vote on war credits and the *burgfriedenspolitik* serves as a paradigmatic example here:

“The Party could not act otherwise. It would rouse a storm of indignation among men at the front and people at home against the Social Democratic Party if it did. The Socialist organization would be swept clean away by popular resentment.”⁴⁰

And this way of reasoning is congenial to the model of the old workers' party, which is precisely built on the representation of the interests and will of the working class with consciousness in itself, and which inevitably leads to opportunism, always ready to kowtow to whatever spontaneously mobilizes the masses. Fighting against this whole way of thinking, which we could summarize in the famous phrase of the opportunist Victor Adler that “it is better to be wrong with the working class than to be right against them,”⁴¹ is precisely how Bolshevism had been forged, which carried since the time of legal Marxism and economism struggling against all attempts to adapt the struggle of the revolutionary proletariat to the level of consciousness of the average worker and to lower the level of consciousness of the vanguard to that of the masses. *Daring to go against the tide* is the congenial trait that the Bolshevik Party champions practically alone⁴² during the war at an international level against all opportunists:

“The fact is that ‘bourgeois labour parties’, as a political phenomenon, have already been formed in *all* the foremost capitalist countries, and that unless a determined and relentless struggle is waged all along the line against these parties—or groups, trends, etc., it is all the same—there can be no question of a struggle against imperialism, or of Marxism, or of a socialist labour movement.”⁴³

40 JOLL, J., *Op. cit.*, p. 176.

41 *Ibidem*, p. 163.

42 With the honorable exception of Serbian social-democracy, which flatly refused to vote for war credits and opposed the policy of its own government.

43 *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*; in LENIN, *Op. cit.*, vol. 23, p. 118.

A position sustained precisely by its previous conquests, such as the fact that in Russia it was not the transformations resulting from imperialism and its defense by the opportunist wing that split the labor movement into two irreconcilable wings, but the “determined and relentless” ideological and political struggle against the Mensheviks and for constituting a revolutionary party that upholds the revolutionary left in its two-line struggle, which provoked that political shift that marked the appearance of the Bolshevik Party and its organizational break with opportunism, at least since 1912. And it is based on this universal lesson about the need for the total independence of the proletariat from its bourgeois wing that the Bolsheviks make an international call for the left and all proletarian elements to break head-on with opportunism, now that it had completed its historical maturing period with the war:

“[T]he struggle against imperialism without breaking with and combatting opportunism is deception.”⁴⁴

“We believe that a break with the social-chauvinists is historically inevitable and necessary if the proletariat’s revolutionary struggle for socialism is to be sincere, and not confined merely to verbal protests.”⁴⁵

This systematization of its own path is perceived even more clearly in Lenin’s recommendations for those organizations where the two wings still had poorly defined positions and features:

“[It is positive that] both *trends* will everywhere come out with their own independent views and policies, will **fight each other on matters of principle, allowing the mass** of party comrades, and not merely the ‘leaders’, **to settle fundamental issues**—such a struggle is both necessary and useful, for **it trains in the masses** independence and **ability to carry out their** epoch-making revolutionary **mission**.”⁴⁶

44 LENIN, V. I., *Notebooks on Imperialism*; in *Collected Works. Volume 39*. Progress Publishers. Moscow, 1974, p. 241.

45 LENIN, V. I., *Greetings to the Italian Socialist Party Congress*; in *Collected Works. Volume 23*. Progress Publishers. Moscow, 1974, p. 90.

46 *Principled Involved in War Issue*; in LENIN, *Ibidem*, p. 160.

The only politic consistent with the revolutionary class interests of the proletariat, that serves to give continuity and direction to the class struggle, sharply demarcate all forms of opportunism and continue educating the masses in the fight for their emancipation⁴⁷ is **revolutionary defeatism**. In other words, revolutionary defeatism is the continuation and adaptation of the proletarian class struggle to the times and conditions in which the imperialist bourgeoisie is settling its policy on the military level.

4. Revolutionary defeatism

This Marxist understanding of the phenomenon of the imperialist war and the break with the old social-democratic party model⁴⁸ allows for the proposal of proletarian politics with full maturity: the *active* pursuit of the defeat of one's own state.

“In each country, the struggle against a government that is waging an imperialist war should not falter at the possibility of that country's defeat as a result of revolutionary propaganda. The defeat of the government's army weakens the government, promotes the liberation of the nationalities it oppresses, and facilitates civil war against the ruling classes.”⁴⁹

“A ‘revolutionary struggle against the war’ is merely an empty and meaningless exclamation, something at which the heroes of the Second International excel, *unless* it means revolutionary action

47 “The only Marxist line in the world labour movement is to explain to the masses the inevitability and necessity of breaking with opportunism, to educate them for revolution by waging a relentless struggle against opportunism, to utilise the experiences of the war to expose, not conceal, the utter vileness of national-liberal labour politics.” *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*; in LENIN, *Ibid.*, p. 120.

48 “Typical of the socialist parties of the epoch of the Second International was one that tolerated in its midst an opportunism built up in decades of the ‘peaceful’ period, an opportunism that kept itself secret, adapting itself to the revolutionary workers, *borrowing* their Marxist terminology, and evading any clear cleavage of principles. This type has outlived itself. If the war ends in 1915, will any thinking socialist be found willing to begin, in 1916, restoring the workers’ parties *together* with the opportunists, *knowing from experience* that in any new crisis all of them *to a man* (plus many other spineless and muddle-headed people) will be for the bourgeoisie, who will of course find a pretext to ban any talk of class hatred and the class struggle?” *What Next?*; in LENIN, *Op. cit.*, vol. 21, p. 110.

49 *The Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. Abroad*; in LENIN, *Ibidem*, p. 163.

against *one's own government* even in wartime. One has only to do some thinking in order to understand this. Wartime revolutionary action against one's own government indubitably means, **not only desiring its defeat, but really facilitating such a defeat.** ('Discerning reader': note that this does not mean 'blowing up bridges', organising unsuccessful strikes in the war industries, and in general helping the government defeat the revolutionaries.)"⁵⁰

From these essential definitions of revolutionary defeatism there are several matters to highlight. Bolshevism clearly and unambiguously stipulates, unlike the Second International, what the task and duty of every proletarian detachment is. But at the same time it does this without mechanically imposing the same actions on everyone, as for example advocated by anarchist tendencies such as Hervéism⁵¹ in the Second International, which *simply* proposed that in the event of war the proletariat of all the countries involved proclaim a general strike, regardless of the real degree that the fusion between scientific socialism and the working class had reached. On the contrary, revolutionary defeatism is revolutionary precisely because, among other things, it is capable of linking the fundamental principles of internationalism with the degree of real formation of each detachment of the proletariat, since **Bolshevism places the key of the matter in the vanguard**, the only agent with the sufficient perspective to establish ideological mediations, first, and political and organizational mediations later, that politically enable the working class to convert military setbacks and the political crisis created by the war into revolutionary mass actions. That is why Lenin only pointed out a series of *minimum* requirements as "first steps towards converting the present imperialist war into a civil war" whose fundamental axes were the total refusal to support war in any of its forms, and the guarantee of proletarian independence through a clandestine apparatus that would allow revolutionary propaganda to be carried out that would educate and organize the masses in the fight against their own bourgeoisie⁵².

50 *The Defeat of One's Own Government in the Imperialist War*; in LENIN, *Ibid.*, p. 275.

51 Its main instigator, Gustave Hervé, would end up, after savoring *the sweetness* of chauvinism and the opportunist panic caused by the proletarian revolution, founding the fascist *Parti Socialiste National* in 1919.

52 *The Conference...*; in LENIN, *Op. cit.*, p. 161.

Only through revolutionary defeatism is the unity and indivisibility required by the principle of proletarian internationalism achieved in times of reactionary war. This requires breaking with the deepest national prejudices that the bourgeoisie has instilled in the vanguard and the masses, since it means being willing not only to not support one's own country but to betray it⁵³. This betrayal of the bourgeoisie and its fatherland is at the same time the only act that guarantees loyalty to proletarian internationalism, since it promotes internationalist trust with the proletariat of the "enemy" countries, it is a sign of commitment to the right of self-determination and that there is no type of respect for the current state frontiers⁵⁴ and in contexts in which the proletariat lacks its revolutionary organization at the international level (as it was during the war of 1914–1918 or today, in which not even its prerequisite, the reconstituted Communist Party, exists) is the premise to enable its future (re)constitution:

"The question of the fatherland —we shall reply to the opportunists— cannot be posed without due consideration of the concrete historical nature of the present war. This is an imperialist war, i.e., it is being waged at a time of the highest development of capitalism, a time of its approaching end. The working class must first 'constitute itself within the nation', the *Communist Manifesto* declares, emphasising the *limits and conditions* of our recognition of nationality and fatherland as essential forms of the bourgeois system, and, consequently, of the bourgeois fatherland. The opportunists distort that truth by extending to the period of the end of capitalism that which was true of the period of its rise. With reference to the former period and to the tasks of the proletariat in its struggle to destroy, not feudalism but capitalism, the *Communist Manifesto* gives a clear and precise formula: 'The

53 ". . . class struggle is impossible without dealing blows at one's 'own' bourgeoisie, one's 'own' government, whereas dealing a blow at one's own government in wartime is (for Bukvojed's information) **high treason**, means contributing to the defeat of one's own country. . . . A proletarian *cannot* deal a class blow at his government or hold out (in fact) a hand to his brother, the proletarian of the 'foreign country' which is at war with 'our side', *without committing* 'high treason', *without contributing* to the defeat, to the *disintegration* of his 'own', imperialist 'Great' Power." *The Defeat...*; in LENIN, *Ibid.*, p. 278–279.

54 "Not forgetting the words of Marx that 'the working men have no country', the proletariat should take part, not in defending the old framework of the bourgeois states, but in creating a new framework for socialist republics." *Speech at G. V. Plekhanov's Lecture*; in LENIN, *Op. cit.*, vol. 36, p. 295.

workingmen have no country.' One can well understand why the opportunists are so afraid to accept this socialist proposition, afraid even, in most cases, openly to reckon with it. The socialist movement cannot triumph within the old framework of the fatherland. It creates new and superior forms of human society, in which the legitimate needs and progressive aspirations of the working masses of each nationality will, for the first time, be met through international unity, provided existing national partitions are removed. To the present-day bourgeoisie's attempts to divide and disunite them by means of hypocritical appeals for the 'defence of the fatherland' the **class-conscious workers will reply** with ever new and persevering **efforts to unite the workers of various nations in the struggle to overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie of all nations.**"⁵⁵

For this very reason, revolutionary defeatism is not a tactical, possibilist measure that must be applied *only if* the war spontaneously generates that political and social crisis, as opportunism likes to interpret. It is an element that is directly linked to the premises on which the very possibility of the communist revolution rests, the international and internationalist character that scientific socialism confers on the revolutionary struggle, and which was confirmed by past revolutionary practice, including the opening of the October Cycle itself, as the Bolshevik experience itself in 1917 attests, makes defeatism have a strategic importance, of the defense of the principles of Marxism, its General Line, in the context of the war juncture. The call for the defeat of one's own government does not depend on a narrow political calculation, in which there are guarantees that it will actually be able to culminate with the outbreak of the revolutionary civil war, but is the prolongation of the Marxist politics of the proletariat (being for its class struggle and the establishment of its dictatorship) from *peaceful* times to the war juncture imposed by the bourgeoisie. It is the only way to continue educating it in the revolutionary principles, and therefore the way in which the proletariat emerges from the war with its positions reinforced:

"The proletarian banner of civil war will rally together, not only hundreds of thousands of class-conscious workers but millions of semi-proletarians and petty bourgeois, now deceived by chauvinism, but whom the horrors of war will not only intimidate and

55 *The Position and Tasks of the Socialist International*; in LENIN, *Op. cit.*, vol. 21, pp. 38–39.

depress, but also **enlighten, teach**, arouse, organise, steel and **prepare for the war against the bourgeoisie** of their 'own' country and 'foreign' countries. And this will take place, if not today, then tomorrow, if not during the war, then after it, if not in this war then in the next one."⁵⁶

That is why any attempt to claim that one is against the bourgeoisie, and even *deep inside* for defeat and civil war, but that it is *still* not convenient to make propaganda about it with the excuse that it would frighten the masses or that they would not understand it, is a trait of opportunism (historically of centrist positions, such as those defended by the rest of the social-democratic left at the Zimmerwald conference) that renounces principles based on *tactical political convenience* and implies the refusal to generate, starting today, the bases of revolutionary development⁵⁷, which is equivalent to their betrayal and resignation:

"It is not enough to hint at revolution, as the Zimmerwald Manifesto does, by saying that the workers must make sacrifices for their own and not for someone else's cause. The masses must be shown their road clearly and definitely. They must know where to go and why. That mass revolutionary actions during the war, if successfully developed, can lead only to the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war for socialism is obvious, and it is harmful to conceal this from the masses. On the contrary, **this aim must be indicated** clearly, no matter how difficult its attainment

56 *Ibidem*, p. 40. In the same vein: "There can be no talk in this connection about 'illusions' or their repudiation, since no socialist has ever guaranteed that this war (and not the next one), that today's revolutionary situation (and not tomorrow's) will produce a revolution. What we are discussing is **the indisputable and fundamental duty of all socialists** —that of revealing to the masses the existence of a revolutionary situation, explaining its scope and depth, **arousing the proletariat's revolutionary consciousness** and revolutionary determination, helping it to go over to revolutionary action, and forming, for that purpose, organisations suited to the revolutionary situation." *The Collapse...*; in LENIN, *Ibid.*, pp. 216–217.

57 "As for declaring propaganda of revolution 'inopportune', this objection rests on a confusion of concepts usual among socialists in the Romance countries: they confuse the beginning of a revolution with open and direct propaganda for revolution. In Russia, nobody places the beginning of the 1905 Revolution before January 9, 1905, whereas revolutionary propaganda, in the very narrow sense of the word, the propaganda and the preparation of mass action, demonstrations, strikes, barricades, had been conducted *for years* prior to that. The old *Iskra*, for instance, began to propagandise the matter at the end of 1900, as Marx did in 1847, when nobody thought as yet of the *beginning of a revolution in Europe*." *Revolutionary Marxists at the International Socialist Conference, September 5–8, 1915*; in LENIN, *Ibid.*, p. 392.

may appear now, **while we are still at the beginning of the road.**"⁵⁸

This *centrist rhetoric*, which has no problems in recognizing the reactionary nature of the war and talking about revolution, while at the same time denying and hiding from its propaganda the means to achieve it (the revolutionary civil war) is usually historically linked, with some more or less veiled form of **bourgeois pacifism**. And the fact is that the denunciation of the harmful effects of war or the measures to try to stop the war effort that are not oriented towards preparation and explicit education around civil war are nothing more than another refined form of class-collaboration, of educating the masses in passivity and maintaining a position that is perfectly acceptable to the interests of certain layers of the bourgeoisie—since not all of them benefit from the war equally:

“Refusal to serve with the forces, anti-war strikes, etc., are sheer nonsense [and they have so much in common with today’s “no to NATO, out with the bases”, “stop arms shipments” or “reduction of military budgets”], the miserable and cowardly dream of an unarmed struggle against the armed bourgeoisie, vain yearning for the destruction of capitalism without a desperate civil war or a series of wars. . . .

Down with mawkishly sanctimonious and fatuous appeals for ‘peace at any price’! Let us raise high the banner of civil war!”⁵⁹

It is a position that, in addition to not breaking completely with national prejudices, above all, what it establishes—regardless of what is in the *well-intentioned heads* of this form of opportunism—is a simple measure of pressure on the government to save that same imperialist state from the *bad consequences* of the war in which it itself has gotten involved. This is what is expressed in the slogans that centrism has historically raised about “immediate peace without annexations”, “neither victory nor defeat” and other phrases of that nature, which in Lenin’s words are nothing more than:

“. . . a paraphrase of the ‘defence of the fatherland’ slogan. It means shifting the issue to the level of a war between governments

58 LENIN, V.I., *Proposals Submitted by the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P. to the Second Socialist Conference*; in *Collected Works. Volume 22*. Progress Publishers. Moscow, 1974, pp. 176–177.

59 *The Position...*; in LENIN, *Op. cit.*, vol. 21, pp. 40.

(who, according to the content of this slogan, are to keep to their old stand, 'retain their positions'), and not to the level of the struggle of the oppressed classes against their governments!"⁶⁰

And if for those countries in which imperialist relations already prevail it is no longer possible to carry out *national*—or “just”—wars, the possibility of a just or democratic peace has also been historically refused for those bourgeoisies:

“War is the continuation, by violent means, of the politics pursued by the ruling classes of the belligerent powers long before the outbreak of war. **Peace is a continuation of the very same politics**, with a *record* of the changes brought about in the relation of the rival forces by the military operations. War does not alter the direction of pre-war policies, but only *accelerates* their development. *At that time* [1789–1871], the programme of a democratic (bourgeois) peace had an *objective* historical basis. *Now*, there is *no* such basis, and all phrases about a democratic peace are a bourgeois lie, the objective purpose of which is to divert the workers from the revolutionary struggle for socialism!”⁶¹

A *real* peace, which does not contribute to fomenting and preparing for the next war, demands in the age of imperialism that it be a *break* with the previous politics that engendered and sustained the war. Break that requires a whole series of immediate *renunciations* (of annexations, of continuing to retain nations oppressed by their state, of secret treaties and military alliances, of recognition of debts contracted, etc., etc.) so that this peace would be sustained on genuinely democratic bases and would itself be an act of internationalist propaganda, by weakening the chauvinists and militarists of other powers and serving as a living example to the masses of the “enemy side.” Naturally, a peace of these characteristics, which from the point of view of bourgeois reasoning is clearly harmful to *the nation and its future prosperity*, can only be achieved by the

⁶⁰ *The Defeat...*; in LENIN, *Ibidem*, p. 278.

⁶¹ *The Peace Program*; in LENIN, *Op. cit.*, vol. 22, p. 163. Another sample: “Actually, talking peace to *bourgeois* governments turns out to be *deception of the people*. The groups of capitalists who have drenched the world in blood for the sake of dividing territories, markets and concessions *cannot* conclude an ‘honourable’ peace. They can conclude only a *shameful* peace, a peace based on *the division of the spoils, on the partition of Turkey and the colonies.*” *Letters from Afar. Fourth Letter*; in LENIN, *Op. cit.*, vol. 23, p. 336.

revolutionary proletariat in power⁶², the only class interested in establishing bases of support for the World Proletarian Revolution above and beyond where the old national frontiers had been.

Which inevitably leads us back to the problem of converting the proletariat into the dominant class and the need for its education to wage its own military struggle. After several years of fighting against the *industrial slaughter* that is the modern imperialist war and studying military doctrine, Lenin picks up his reflections, from a higher plane, of 1905 and the mediations between capitalist war and civil war. The previous Russo-Japanese war had served to consolidate the link that existed between war and revolution—as long as the revolutionary proletariat was willing to take advantage of it—and how this led to the leap to higher forms of proletarian struggle (which at that time of historical development meant the replacement of the general strike by insurrection and guerrilla warfare) and, from this, the need for the proletariat to create its own revolutionary army and be instructed in the military art. Now, Lenin places emphasis on the internal political element, which allows harmonizing the relationship between the ends informed by the principles of scientific socialism and the means to achieve them:

“Socialism leads to the withering away of *every* state, consequently also of every democracy, but socialism can be implemented only **through the dictatorship of the proletariat**, which **combines violence against the bourgeoisie**, i.e., the minority of the population, **with full development of democracy**, i.e., the genuinely equal and genuinely universal **participation** of the *entire*

62 And this does not mean, as social-chauvinism of the economist-imperialist type maintains, that the right of nations to self-determination is only achievable by the proletariat in power. As a democratic measure that it is, it can perfectly be carried out, in certain circumstances, by the bourgeoisie, even in the imperialist era, just like other measures listed by Lenin, such as the renunciation of annexations. What would *never* be carried out by the bourgeoisie, and which is what is being talked about here, is the renunciation with immediate effect of all those measures without which we cannot speak of a democratic and consistent peace. Peace of this type, which is what the proletariat, in its first experience in power after October, carried out and demonstrated that it was indeed a *vanguard fighter for democracy* of a greater significance than the bourgeoisie had ever been in its revolutionary youth. Naturally, the fact that this peace is based on these firmer conditions has nothing to do with *clerical* and utopian ideas of *perpetual peace* or *peace at all costs*, because as long as bourgeois power and the bases for said power survive, the proletariat will be threatened by the danger of war, as confirmed by the historical experience with the imperialist intervention in the Land of the Soviets a few months after the signing of peace in 1918.

mass of the population in all *state affairs* and in all the complex problems of **abolishing capitalism.**"⁶³

This eminently political approach of Lenin—who is in the process of maturing the positions that he will expose more systematically in *The State and Revolution*—is consistent with what the RL has been insisting in light of the results of the Summation, given that it is this axis, that of politics, the only one through which Bolshevism could break with the common social-democratic substratum in the historical conditions of the beginning of the 20th century, since it was from the question of power, of the state as an entity in which the great class struggle is settled, how the working class could be transformed into a dominant class, a step that historically precedes its conversion into a revolutionary class⁶⁴. And although the form of this break would bring with it a whole series of historical limitations, the subsequent development of the Cycle demonstrates that it was more than fruitful. And its depth is attested to by the field of the **proletarian military line:**

“The slogan of *civil war* for socialism indicates the quickest way out of the imperialist war and *links* our struggle against the war with our struggle against opportunism. It is the only slogan that correctly takes into account both war-time peculiarities . . . and the general character of our activities as distinct from opportunism with its pacifism, legalism and adaptation to one’s ‘own’ bourgeoisie. In addition, civil war against the bourgeoisie is a *democratically* organised and *democratically* conducted war of the propertyless mass against the propertied minority. But **civil war**, like every other, must inevitably replace rights by **violence**. However, violence in the name of the interests and rights of the majority is of a different nature: it tramples on the ‘rights’ of the exploiters, the bourgeoisie, **it is unachievable without demo-**

63 Reply to P. Kievsky...; in LENIN, V.I., *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

64 “In any case, if we consider the emergence of the proletariat as a revolutionary class, its formation as a subject, as a universal historical process, the necessity clearly appears, precisely by relying in the first place on the basic and elemental domain of the political structure, for the proletariat to appear first, on a large operational scale, as a dominant class rather than as a revolutionary class. This, as the RL has already pointed out previously, has its expression on the ideological level in the necessity for the theory and practice of the dictatorship of the proletariat to precede the theory and practice of the party of a new type.” *Había que tomar las armas: sobre los fundamentos materiales de Octubre* [Arms Had to Be Taken Up: On the Material Foundations of October]; en LÍNEA PROLETARIA, #2, p. 55.

cratic organisation of the army and the ‘rear’. Civil war forcibly expropriates, immediately and first of all, the banks, factories, railways, the big estates, etc. But *in order* to expropriate all this, we shall have to introduce election of all officials and officers by the people, **completely merge the army** conducting the war against the bourgeoisie **with the mass of the population, completely democratise** administration of the food supply, the production and distribution of food, etc. The object of civil war is to seize the banks, factories, etc., destroy all possibility of resistance by the bourgeoisie, destroy *its* armed forces. But that **aim cannot be achieved** *either* in its purely military, *or* economic, *or* political aspects, **unless** we, during the war, **simultaneously introduce and extend democracy** among *our* armed forces and in *our* ‘rear’.”⁶⁵

In this quote and the previous one, we see that Lenin gives the revolutionary army itself the main features of the dictatorship of the proletariat: that combined use of violence plus democracy as broad participation of the masses in all facets of the state apparatus (in full accordance with historical materialism, for which the army is the backbone of every state) since it must adopt new radically democratic forms (that *fusion* between the army and the masses) in order to incorporate the entire proletariat in the exercise of its own power. That is to say, the *proletarian way of waging war* necessarily differs from the bourgeois way, to the extent that, to achieve its military, economic and political objectives, it has the *extension of democracy* as a prerequisite. In other words, that *democracy* to which Lenin refers is nothing more than the form adopted by the proletarian army, and its way of conducting war can only be based on the broad masses and their stage of consciousness. It is the way to establish more direct and *unobstructed* links between the crisis of *normalcy* and the violent shaking of the established social relations and institutions that war brings with it, and the incorporation of mass sectors to which the terrain of politics in its highest form is opened for the first time, as an exercise of its own dictatorship in defense of its interests and in contrast and in direct combat against that of the bourgeoisie.

Lenin is beginning to outline, sporadically and more like first drafts—in which the key entity in this entire process, the Communist Party, has not yet appeared—the problem of how the military needs of the

65 Reply to P. Kievsky...; in LENIN, V. I., *Op. cit.*, p. 26–27.

revolution can help the revolutionization of more and more sectors of the masses, something that the revolutionary proletariat will later satisfactorily resolve with the practice and theory of **the People's War**, but which as a problem inherent to the Proletarian Revolution has already begun to be posed since October. And, as the RL has already pointed out in the past, throughout the Russian revolution and the civil war we found in a germinal way many of the characteristics of the future People's War⁶⁶, which, far from the reductionist vision to which revisionism subjects it as a kind of military *technique* only applicable in peasant conditions, it is the way that the conscious proletariat has found so that this *revolutionary law* that informs of the ineluctability of civil war to overthrow the dominant classes, becomes another moment of revolutionary development and expansion. Although, due to the material development of the revolutionary subject and the historical conditions, in the end, the Russian civil war could not take this form, as the RL itself has also been careful to point out⁶⁷. It is enough, in the present work, to note that this problem, the relationship that the first proletarian revolutions have with the way in which they necessarily had to conduct their civil wars with the emergence of the People's War as the universal military strategy of the proletariat and the Communist Party, as the highest authority and governing body of the entire process, clearly seems to be a more than fertile field for the Summation. What there is no possible doubt about is that, without the revolutionary defeatism championed by the Party of a New Type in Russia, the Bolshevik Party could never have educated the working class to end up taking power in October, nor have laid the foundations for a shift in the international correlation of forces of the vanguard that allowed the constitution of the Communist International and from it to the rest of the proletarian revolutions of the Cycle. Revolutionary defeatism is at the very basis of all the work of October, playing a key role in its process of the break of the Bolsheviks with their social democratic *infancy*, and its formulation is a feature in itself of political maturity in which the proletariat has entered since its historical split into two wings.

66 In this regard, see *Octubre: lo viejo y lo nuevo* [October: Old and New]; in EL MARTINETE #2, September 2007.

67 LÍNEA PROLETARIA, #2, *Op. cit.*, pp. 55–56.

5. Revolutionary defeatism today

As we have explained throughout this document, the slogan of **revolutionary defeatism**, the call to act in pursuit of the defeat of one's own government in the reactionary and imperialist war, is the only position that, due to its content, meets the scientific and revolutionary requirements at the level of the historical mission of the proletariat. Scientific because it adapts to the understanding of historical materialism of phenomena such as war, peace and imperialism, and impels the proletariat to study and delve theoretically into these issues, since, if it did not do so, it would not be able to sustain genuinely vanguard politics. Revolutionary because, supported by the **General Line** of the Revolution, this policy is the consistent expression of proletarian **internationalism** in the face of a certain conflict and its adaptation to the framework in which each detachment is located, that is, it is the **Political Line**, which arranges and guides the proletarian forces in pursuit of combating all forms of opportunism while creating the conditions (which currently depend on the degree of development in which the process of reconstitution finds itself) so that, through the use of their **military line**, they destroy the old bourgeois power.

These three moments are fully identifiable with the phases of the process of reconstitution of communism and the beginning of the revolution—ideological reconstitution, political fusion with the advanced masses of the labor movement and the beginning of the People's War—this is the path that the Bolshevik Party opened. In the last decades of the 19th century, the vanguard in Russia went through a first fundamental moment, in which it was won over by Marxism, and whose main task was to learn and assume its theory, which from the problem that concerns us here about war fundamentally implies the apprehension of the undeniable internationalist character that for scientific socialism every project of proletarian social emancipation must have and of the materialist understanding of the military phenomenon. Armed with that vanguard theory that they took finished via the Second International, the vanguard can outline the strategy of the Russian revolution and outline its own tactics-as-plan to constitute a Party that co-opts more and more sectors of the working class for the revolution. This implies greater weight and development of the Bolshevik political line, now that its capacity for social impact is greater, it is now moving outside the reduced first environment of the vanguard, and the *social dialectic* of the class struggle takes precedence. What stands out in this aspect is the uncompromising defense of the right to self-determination (without which there is no internationalism and there would be no way to combat the tendency to

negate democracy that imperialism entails) and revolutionary defeatism. The latter highlights and helps the understanding of the proletariat, from its vanguard to the broad masses mobilized by the imperialist war, to understand the connection and the leap that exists between its political struggle against its “own” bourgeoisie and the step to the field of military combat. This is exactly what would happen during the First World War, when the Bolshevik Party completed its process of reconstitution, that is, its fusion with the most combative and advanced elements of the working class, its practical vanguard, and made possible the transformation of the policy of opposition to the war of the imperialists into the *revolutionary civil war* waged by workers and peasants, which will be the form that the class struggle takes at the end of 1917 and in the subsequent civil war.

This brief review of the history of Bolshevism informs us of the content and nature of revolutionary activity in each phase of the process of reconstitution of the Party of a New Type and, after its constitution, the subsequent beginning of the People’s War. Naturally, the fact that theory, politics or the military fundamentally predominate in each period does not mean that the other two elements are not present and have a necessary role—such as the permanent need for the self-defense of the vanguard at all times. However, this provision establishes a correct hierarchy in the tasks that the vanguard has at hand in each phase, while warning about the main dangers of that junction. The Bolshevik experience teaches us about the general importance that ideology maintains at all times as the guiding principle of the revolution, and how theoretical strength, which is what gives, in the first place, the vanguard character to the most advanced sectors of the proletariat, is the premise for the entire subsequent revolutionary project.

But it also warns us *negatively* about this matter, the exhaustion of the past Cycle of revolutions means that the proletariat, today, lacks a vanguard theory to which it would simply be enough to adhere to and learn, undertaking that, in itself, costed the Russian vanguard several decades since its first breaks with populism. Precisely the revolutionary impotence in which the proletariat has been mired for decades is the expression of the exhaustion of a whole series of theoretical and historical premises that in their day made the beginning of the WPR possible, and that today require the proletariat to settle accounts with them, synthesis and future projection of the revolutionary class struggle deployed during the last century and adaptation to the current development of the sciences. In other words, the task of the ideological reconstitution of communism as a preliminary step and without which there is no reconstitution of the Communist Party, a task that is historical and affects

the entire international proletariat. That is why **the line of separation between reaction and revolution, today, cannot be**, as Bolshevism proposed in its revolutionary youth, **in the simple terrain of politics**, in that recognition of the extension of the proletarian class struggle to the need for its dictatorship or the *21 conditions* of the Communist International, but **is situated instead in a terrain that precedes it, that of ideology**, which is precisely what informs the historical problems that the WPR and the instruments and phases in which the proletariat—today its vanguard—must be forged for its relaunch.

That is why today it is not enough to raise the slogan of revolutionary defeatism. Its consistent and complete defense—and not one of its mutilated versions that abound within the current ICM—can serve to position itself in the internationalist and anti-imperialist camp, but it is not enough to sustain a genuinely revolutionary position. And, without linking it to the needs for ideological and political reconstitution that communism is going through today, advocating for revolutionary defeatism *in the abstract*, separated from the real conditions of the class struggle and the correlation of forces that it occupies in the Marxism itself is condemning oneself to a position of powerlessness. For this reason, from the pages of *Línea Proletaria*, we have taken care, in our analyzes and positions on the war in Ukraine, to link this slogan with the work of reconstitution that the entire theoretical vanguard currently has to carry out. For this reason, in the editorial of the previous issue, we pointed out to **the entire vanguard**, and not as a task that can be limited to certain acronyms, that the consistent defense of revolutionary defeatism in the present war can—and must—be linked to the task of the Summation, allowing a greater scientific understanding of the proletarian experience of the past Cycle, the only way to counteract the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie and its spokespersons within the communist movement. Only by linking revolutionary defeatism with the current needs of the vanguard, which require, above all, putting their own theoretical and cultural training first to contribute to the process of reworking Marxism as a proletarian conception of the world, in struggle against all forms of bourgeois ideology, is how it can be stopped from remaining a mere sterile call and can serve to influence the current stage of the vanguard, even if it is on the small scale on which revolutionary communism moves today, and prepare the conditions to make the revolutionary civil war again a real possibility.

We know perfectly well that, for the opportunists of all stripes, accustomed as they are to reasoning within the limited range of the **immediate possibilities** that bourgeois politics places before them and

closed to understanding that the key lies in creating the conditions that progressively enable the emergence of **new politics**, this call we are making will be anything but *practical*. But given that *going against the tide* is one of the characteristics of Marxism-Leninism, it is not particularly surprising that its enemies—whose absolute reason to be is, precisely, their adaptation to the *direction of the tide*—always consider it *hardly achievable*. And the development of **Leninist politics** and their ability to penetrate into the very essence of things are not an *instant* continuation of class politics and their struggles in their *spontaneous* procession within the framework of bourgeois civilization, but are the **mediated result** of the **conquests that the class struggle** has theoretically synthesized on a **historical scale**, of Marxism as a **revolutionary worldview**. That is why we would like to end this article with the following quote from Lenin, which well condenses that spirit of rebellion against all the narrow-mindedness of opportunism and which, read from the current conditions of 2023, forces all the conscious proletarians to question themselves about what it means to raise, in a “practical” way, the issue from the point of view of “socialism and class struggle” today:

“‘There is only one practical issue—victory or defeat for one’s country,’ Kautsky, lackey of the opportunists, has written, in concord with Guesde, Plekhanov and Co. Indeed, if one were to forget socialism and the class struggle, that would be the truth. **However, if one does not lose sight of socialism**, that is untrue. **Then there is another practical issue**: should we perish as blind and helpless slaves, in a war between slave-holders, or should we fall in ‘attempts at fraternisation’ between the slaves, with the aim of casting off slavery? Such, *in reality*, is the ‘practical’ issue.”⁶⁸

**Committee for Reconstitution
(Spanish State)
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⁶⁸ *The Slogan of Civil War Illustrated*; in LENIN, *Op. cit.*, vol. 21, p. 182.