

The Imperialist Treachery and the First Imperialist War

History is a witness to the fact that 1914-18 First World War (FWW) was a predatory War. It was fought by the two imperialist groups – one headed by the British and French imperialists and other by the German imperialists. As Lenin said in 1915, “neither group of belligerent imperialists was less inferior to the other in spoliation, atrocities and the boundless brutality of war.” “Seizure of territory and subjugation of other nations, ruining of competing nations and the plunder of their wealth, distracting the attention of working masses from the internal political crisis in Russia, Germany, Britain and other countries, disuniting and national stultification of the workers, and the extermination of their vanguard so as to weaken the revolutionary movement of the proletariat – these comprise the sole actual content, importance and significance of the (First World)War.”

The bourgeoisie had hoodwinked the working class and other toiling people of their countries by painting their predatory war in attractive colors of patriotism, nationalism and called it as a war in defense of father land, freedom and civilization, etc. Both the belligerent imperialist groups used the human and material resources of the Countries they were ruling as well as their colonies as cannon fodder in their war.

The First World War ended with the defeat and surrender of Germany on November 11, 1918.

It was a bloodiest War in human history till then. It was participated by 65 million soldiers. 1,115,471 soldiers were either killed or missing, 13 millions civilians lost their lives. 21 million soldiers were wounded in the War.

The British colonial rulers had drawn lakhs of Indian people into their armed forces. They used them as mercenary forces to crush the Indian people as well as colonise the people of other countries. More importantly, they had sent 1,100,00 Indian soldiers to fight the FWW in various battles in other countries. About 75000 Indian soldiers had lost their lives in this War. Here the British Colonialists had used the Indian people to subjugate and enlarge colonies in other Countries. They saw the Indian people as the cannon fodder to realize their colonial ambitions through an oppressive war.

The ‘victor powers’, mainly the imperialist rulers of Britain, France, US and Italy went all out to reap the fruits of their victory in the war. They held a so-called peace conference in the beginning of 1919 and worked out a so called Treaty of Versailles dictating the terms for surrender to the defeated Germany. This Treaty asked Germany to surrender large areas of German territories, huge fleet, merchant ships, lease out rich coal belts, pay huge sums or reparations as war damages to the victor powers. It asked to dissolve and not to have military. It allowed the victor powers to keep the left bank of the Rhine river for 15 years as a guarantee for the payment of reparations to the victors.

Indeed, it was a most ruinous and humiliating treaty. It inflicted deep wounds on the body and mind of Germany. But just in a decades’ time, Hitler used it as a fertile ground to transform the hurt and pain into an irrepressible anger, revenge and resolve among the German ruling classes to regain a lost dream of world hegemony through an aggressive, more ferocious global war.

The FWW had pushed the German people into worst economic crisis and untold miseries. The people of the so called victor countries too had gained nothing as this war had nothing to do with the interests of the people. The imperialist powers used the war and victories to consolidate, strengthen and enlarge their hold in their countries as well as in colonies. They had further intensified their plunder by shifting the burdens of their war on the people.

Except in Russia, in almost all the European Countries, the leaderships of Social – Democratic Parties had succumbed to the bourgeois national chauvinist slogan of “defense of father land” and tailed behind their ruling classes. So, they could not utilize the imperialist crisis and war to advance the revolutionary movements to overthrow the bourgeoisie in their own Countries. The Proletariat in Russia, guided and led by Lenin had successfully led the Socialist Revolution by turning the imperialist war into a revolutionary civil War. They overthrew the tsarist autocracy which was tied the warring imperialist group of Britain, France and US.

India was a British Colony at the time of FWW. They were in the struggle against feudalism and the colonial rule. The working class movement was in a nascent stage and the party of proletariat was not yet in existence. The bourgeois political leadership which had come up on the blessings of the colonial rulers had no agenda of ending the colonial rule in the Country. The leadership, including Gandhi had extended their support to the colonial rulers in their War. It enabled the British imperialists to freely mobilize the human and material resources of our Country for their War.

The FWW remains a night-marish memory for our people. Best of our sons lost their lives in an imperialist war. True, the Indian soldiers had defied death and exhibited a great valor in this war. But their role in the war was nothing but one of mercenaries. They died in the service of their oppressors. This was most saddening part, main content and bitter truth of First World War.

But, after 100 years, the British imperialists now are busy in carrying out a massive project to commemorate the “India and the Great War Centenary.”

They have planned various programmes like,

—Collect the British India Army’s uniforms, medals and objects, etc. from India (they include the Khanji (knife) of Tippu Sultan of 1799 and 1840 paintings of Skinner’s horse regiment) and other countries from the earliest beginnings in the 18th century till 1947. These collections would be exhibited over the couple of years.

—Organise a range of activities across the four years of Centenary period, primarily aimed at exploring India’s engagement in War efforts; to highlight the numerous fields of battle Indian troupes served in including Belgium, France, Gallipoli Persia, Russia and China.

—publish material relating to India during the FWW. This will include booklets, coffee table books, battle-field guides, etc.

—put up the collections, one at the Indian Army Museum in Sanhurts and other at the National Army Museum gallery in London.

There are many other programmes spread over the period of centenary commemoration.

The National Army Museum Director Brig. Maciejewski said: “The FWW was a moment of shared history where the British Army and the British Indian Army fought together.” “Indian soldiers under the British Indian Army played a decisive role in several battles in many theatres across the globe.”

It is to be noted that a Memorial dedicated to the fallen Indian Soldiers of the FWW is already in place at the India Gate in New Delhi, inscribed with over 72,000 names.

The Indian Ministry of External Affairs is in collaboration with the Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research – the organizer of the Centenary Commemoration Project.

The centenary celebrations would be concluded on November 11th, 2018. An Armistice Day will be observed as a Day of Remembrance to mark the ‘sacrifices’ of the ‘Great War.’ At the global level, candles will be lit at the military cemeteries and Memorials across Artois on the night of 10 November 2018 in a mass act of remembrance for all those who did not live to see the Armistice ending the FWW. More than 270 sites will be illuminated for the Great Vigil in a region which suffered some heaviest fighting in 1914-18.

Here, the imperialists are seeking to glorify an out and out imperialist war under the cover of commemorating the centenary of “India and the Great War”. Their eulogizing the deaths of Indian people in this war as “sacrifices” is like the cries of worshippers who decorate and parade the goat to the place of “sacrifice.” This war had nothing to do with the wishes or interests of Indian people. As we have already said, this war had set the oppressed people of some countries against the oppressed people of other countries. Here, two groups of biggest robbers, oppressors and predators used the oppressed people as cannon fodder to settle the question among the imperialist powers who should rule or dominate the world. Most shameless fact is the collaboration of Indian rulers in this imperialist project to commemorate the First Imperialist War. This is nothing but subservience- pure and simple. All freedom loving people, one voice, condemn this treacherous act.

We must have all the sympathy for the Indian people who joined the colonial armed forces (British India Army) just to eke their lives and unconsciously and helplessly died in the FWW and in the service of imperialist powers. We must transform our sympathy and pain for our dead sons and their deceased families into a staunchest and loudest declaration of our resolve : We refuse to die for the imperialists and the exploiting ruling classes; The oppressed Indian people must never agree to serve as the tools to subjugate and oppress other people; Our people would take inspiration from all those in India and the world who died in the struggle against feudalism, colonialism, imperialism and to wipe out the exploitation, oppression, inequality and war once for ever from the face of the earth and march in their foot- steps to advance the struggle to free our country from the clutches of feudalism, imperialism and set it on the road of New Democracy and Socialism.
