

A Leninist Approach to the Inter-Imperialist Clash in Ukraine

- Nikos Mottas

“The working class”, V.I Lenin was stressing out, “in case it is conscious, will not support any group of imperialistic predators” (Lenin Collected Works, V.27, pp.335-336). More specifically, concerning the stance of the workers’ movement towards imperialists, he was using the following characteristic example:

“A country, let us say, possesses three-fourths of Africa, whereas another 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. [...] In reality, there can now be no talk of present-day democracy following in the wake of the reactionary imperialist bourgeoisie, no matter of what “shade” the latter may be” (V.I. Lenin. “Under a False Flag”, Lenin Collected Works, Volume 21, pages 135-157).

The Leninist legacy on the stance of the working class in an imperialist war was and remains extremely relevant. Especially in our days, when the drums of war are beating in Ukraine louder and louder. It’s been proven that war is the continuation



of politics by other, violent, military means and is prepared through the fierce clash of competing interests of the bourgeois class and the governments that serve them.

On the basis of this position, Lenin rejected “the ignorant man-in-the-street conception of war as being a thing apart from the policies of the governments and classes concerned, as being a simple attack that disturbs the peace, and is then followed by restoration of the peace thus disturbed, as much as to say: “They had a fight, then they made up!”. And he was stressing out that “War is a continuation of policy by other means. All wars are inseparable from the political systems that engender them. The policy which a given state, a given class within that state, pursued for a long time before the war is inevitably continued by that same class during the war, the form of action alone being changed” (V.I. Lenin, “War and Revolution”, Lenin Collected Works, Volume 24, pages 398-421).

But why do we mention all the above? On the occasion of the rapid intensification of the inter-imperialist rivalry between the Euro-Atlantic forces (USA, NATO, EU) and Russia in Ukraine, a number of misleading, fallacious ideologies come to the fore that call the working people to make a choice and support the one or the other side. In Greece, for example, a member-state of the EU and NATO, the dominant perception in bourgeois media highlights the need to support the “democratic” Euro-Atlantic forces against Putin’s “authoritarianism”, also betting on the systematic cultivation of anti-Russian propaganda. On the other hand, the supporters of the pro-Russian narrative, try to present Putin’s capitalist Russia as an “anti-imperialist” power and a stronghold of “anti-fascism” against the Euro-Atlantic alliance and Kiev’s fascists.

Both views which call for the support of one side or the other are misleading and, above all, dangerous for the working class and the people. In a few words, they call the people to choose an imperialist, on the grounds of who is more, or less, evil. But, is there good and good imperialist? What interest does the working class have to be dragged under the false flags of one or another imperialist?

It is necessary to understand that, in the last two decades, the uneven growth of capitalism has led to the emergence and rapid strengthening of new world economic powers, such as China and Russia, which claim an increasing share of the international market. The economic rise of these powers is inevitably accompanied by the upgrading of their political and military force, thus leading to rearrangements in the imperialist “chessboard” as well as to the sharpening of competitions with the powers which were indisputably dominant, such as the USA and EU. This sharpening of imperialist competitions is being manifested today in Ukraine and Eastern Europe.

In Ukraine and in the broader region of Eastern Europe the awe-inspiring opponent to the warmongering Euro-Atlantic powers (USA, NATO and EU) is capitalist Russia. We must always have in mind that it is not the Soviet Union, but a country with a completely different social and class content. The perception that Russia is not an imperialist power but just a capitalist country in the “periphery” of the imperialist system which, alongside “socialist China” (sic), bear a positive effect in international politics is totally wrong. Such an approach is in direct opposition to the Leninist concept of imperialism as long as it detaches politics from economy.

Similarly, those who try to “dress” today’s capitalist Russia with elements that characterized the Soviet Union (anti-fascist, anti-imperialist, progressive) contribute to the disorientation and manipulation of the workers’ movement, especially in periods of intensification of inter-imperialist competitions. Unless they want to convince us that President Putin is a kind of “Stalin” of the 21st Century who, alongside Shoygu in the role of “Zhukov” and Lavrov as “Molotov, are trying to save humanity from the modern Nazis...

It must be understood that in the age of imperialism, there can be no peaceful capitalist states. And if at the beginning of a war the difference between the attacking and the defending bourgeois state is perhaps relative, the important question in any war is one: Which class conducts the war, for what purpose and at what stage of historical development.

In his work “Socialism and War” Lenin was writing:

“Picture to yourselves a slave-owner who owned 100 slaves warring against a slave-owner who owned 200 slaves for a more “just” distribution of slaves. Clearly, the application of the term “defensive” war, or war “for the defense of the fatherland” in such a case would be historically false, and in practice would be sheer deception of the common people, of philistines, of ignorant people, by the astute slave-owners. Precisely in this way are the present-day imperialist bourgeoisie deceiving the peoples by means of “national ideology and the term “defense of the fatherland” in the present war between slave-owners for fortifying and strengthening slavery” (V.I. Lenin, ‘Socialism and War’, Chapter One). The above example can serve as a picture for today’s inter-imperialist conflict between US-NATO-EU and Russia in Ukraine.

The communist and workers movement must have a relentless, firm front against the criminal imperialist plans of the Euro-Atlantic powers (USA, NATO and EU). Nonetheless, at the same time, it must not side with any other capitalist state (Russia) or imperialist alliance (China-Russia) by choosing flags that are foreign to its interests. The working people should not shed their blood for the interests of any imperialist (more or less powerful, American or Russian, European or Chinese).

On the contrary, the workers-popular movement in Greece and in any other country must draw an independent line, in a path of clash and rupture with the bourgeois and imperialist interests, having as its sole criterion the interests of the working class and popular strata. In the age of imperialism the only justified war is the class-based, revolutionary war, for the conquest of power by the proletariat and its allies.

Today, Lenin's words are more relevant than ever: "Only a proletarian communist revolution can lead humanity out of the deadlock created by imperialism and imperialist wars. No matter what difficulties the revolution may have to encounter and in spite of temporary failure of waves of counter-revolution the final victory of the proletariat is inevitable" (Political Program of the CPSU, March 22, 1919 at the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party).

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