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# On US Aggression in Ukraine and Korea

Jose Maria Sison<sup>1</sup>

Dear Comrades and Friends,

Let me discuss the serious concern that US imperialism and its allies are the factors and promoters of aggression in the Ukraine and South Korea and that the proletariat and people of the world must do what they can in order to prevent imperialist war. It is in the nature of imperialist powers to be aggressive in order to redivide the world that had already been divided in a previous balance of power.

Since its advent in several countries in the early 20th century, monopoly capitalism has caused the most destructive world wars due to its relentless drive for expansion. Between wars, imperialist powers have stepped up military production to earn profits from the potential sale and lend-lease of weapons and widen the prospects of expanding economic territory to counter the ever pressing crisis of overproduction, over-accumulation of capital and the falling rate of profits.

Imperialist powers are prone to become fascist when they are unable to solve the crisis and rule in the old way. For an extended period, such as that after the Soviet Union broke the US nuclear monopoly in 1949, the imperialist powers have been able to avoid direct wars among themselves involving the use of the most powerful weapons that they have, namely the nuclear weapons, because of the fear of mutually assured destruction.

1 **Jose Maria Sison** is Chairperson Emeritus, International League of Peoples' Struggle. He led the reestablishment of the Communist Party of the Philippines in 1968 as well as the founding of the New People's Army in 1969 and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines in 1973. He is now among the world's most outstanding theoreticians in Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. He continues to do research and write on Philippine and global issues as a public intellectual.

Thus, for 73 years already, the imperialist powers have avoided nuclear war and concentrated on how to oppress and exploit the people and nations in the third world and how to carry out wars of aggression against them or even engage in proxy inter-imperialist wars without the use of nuclear weapons. But today the crisis of the world capitalism system has become so grave that US imperialism has engaged in provocations and counter-provocations that easily lead to the implied or explicit threats and counter-threats of nuclear war.

### **Aggression and Counter-Aggression in Ukraine**

The world has become more dangerous and challenging to the proletariat and the people since the betrayal of socialism and capitalist restoration in the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and finally in China. Particularly since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, US imperialism has become more arrogant and aggressive with the notion of being forever the sole superpower in charge of the new world order and with the license to use the full-spectrum of its power and the NATO to dominate Europe and the whole world.

The US has violated the Minsk Agreement of 1991 in which assurances were made against the expansion of the NATO in exchange for the reunification of Germany, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the dismantling of the Warsaw Pact. Within the 1990s, the US and NATO waged a war of aggression against Yugoslavia and destroyed it and proceeded to expand the NATO, its military bases and missile deployment to the borders of Russia. They also extended their wars of aggression to Central Asia, West Asia and Africa.

In 2008 the US and NATO started to subvert Ukraine and other former Soviet republics. By 2013 they could carry out the Maidan protest movement and overthrow the legally elected government of Ukraine in order to set up a Russophobic and fascist regime in Kyiv in 2014 and subsequently for more than 8 years prohibit the use of the Russian language among Russian Ukrainians in the cities and the Russian communities in the Donbas region, unleashed the massacre of 14,000 Russian Ukrainians and forced the exile of 3.7 million of them.

What Putin has called a “special military operation” against the Ukrainian fascists, with some wrong and inappropriate comments against Lenin and Stalin on the question of state sovereignty and the right of national minorities to self-determination, is actually an operation of counter-aggression against the

prior aggression of the US, NATO and the Ukrainian fascist puppets against the Russian nationality in Ukraine, even as there is a certain measure of contradictions among the Russian oligarchs and Ukrainian oligarchs who have become US and NATO puppets.

The armed conflict that has already developed between Russia and Ukraine since February 24 can be solved by the protagonists themselves through peace negotiations if they cut off the interventions, interferences and military supplies of the US and NATO to their Ukrainian puppets.

In this regard, the Ukrainian fascists should stop to pipe dream that they can and must die for the US and NATO to the last Ukrainian.

In the course of the previous rounds of peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, the people of the world have come to know that such proposals as the following are on the table: that Ukraine must become neutral and does not persist as a proxy for aggression by the US and NATO, that the democratic rights of Russophone Ukrainians must be respected and that the Russian nationality in the Donbas region (Donetsk and Lugansk) must exercise the right of self-determination up to secession in the way Ukraine could peaceably separate from the Soviet Union.

There are those who demand in the name of revolutionary principle that Russia must unilaterally cease and desist from waging war against Ukraine. How can it do so, in compliance with its own previous assertion that it has no intention of occupying and taking over Ukraine, in the face of the fact that the US and the Zelensky regime keep on boasting about escalating military supplies from the US and NATO and receiving USD 300 million and then another USD 33 billion worth of US military supplies in order to prolong the Russia-Ukraine conflict and to weaken and degrade Russia?

The US is deliberately trying to prolong the Ukraine-Russian armed conflict not only to weaken and degrade Russia but also to expand and consolidate its control over the European Union and Eastern Europe. At the same time, it is unwittingly driving Russia and China to strengthen their back-to-back alliance, such strategic projects as the Eurasian Economic Union and the Belt and Road Initiative and further alliances as the BRICs and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The anti-war movement of the proletariat and people must work harder to stop the aggressions of the US and NATO before the anti-war movement

within Russia and Ukraine can persuade effectively the former to stop its military operations against the latter because it has already degraded the military capabilities of Ukraine and is already attacking the new military supplies from the US and NATO.

### **US threats of aggression in Korea**

It is pertinent to discuss the case of South Korea, in which US imperialism also stands as a foreign master of the puppet state and which actively prevents the peaceful reunification of the entire Korean nation governed by the Republic of Korea in the South and Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the North. It has taken such a long time that US imperialism has unjustly prevented the reunification of the Korean nation and unleashed all kinds of embargoes and military provocations against the North since the Armistice in 1953.

War has so far been averted because the governments of the South and North have taken initiatives to negotiate and make certain incremental agreements with each other. But of course US imperialist control of the South Korean puppet republic is still very much manifest in so many ways, including the persistence of US military forces in South Korea and the military exercises aimed at intimidating the DPRK.

The US harbors the illusion that it can use a combination of hard and soft tactics, including economic sanctions and baits, joint US-ROK military exercises and intermittent peace negotiations, to hold the DPRK at bay and eventually entice it to reunify with the South under the terms of capitalism and subordination to the US and the south Korean puppets. Because the US has long become aware that it cannot conquer the DPRK, it dreams of being able to persuade the DPRK to follow the US-ROK terms of reunifying Korea.

But the DPRK has been guided by its principles of *juche* and *songun*. It has stood for full national independence and socialism and has strong national defense, including nuclear weapons and missiles. By itself, the DPRK has nuclear weapons to neutralize and put in a stalemate the nuclear weapons of the US and its traditional imperialist allies. Moreover, the traditional imperialist powers cannot wage a nuclear war against DPRK without destroying South Korea and substantial parts of the new imperialist powers, Russia and China.

The balance among the nuclear powers of East Asia is such that not a single one can afford to be reckless or give itself small margins of safety. The inability of the US to use the nuclear weapons against DPRK and China have long



been proven since 1949 when the Soviet Union broke the nuclear monopoly of the US and in the course of the US war of aggression against Korea when US President Truman and the strategic advisers rebuffed the recommendation of General Douglas MacArthur to use the nuclear weapons.

Nevertheless the US set up the THAAD missile system in South Korea, which currently hosts over 28,000 US troops, in order to threaten both DPRK and China. And yet it is the one relentlessly using propaganda to misrepresent the DPRK and China as being aggressive and reckless in East Asia. It plays up the missile tests of the DPRK to exaggerate its nuclear capabilities.

And since its strategic pivot to the East Asia region in 2012 during the time of Obama, it has fretted over and tried to cut down and undermine China's economic and military rise. In this regard, it has taken advantage of the baseless claims of China over 90 per cent of the South China Sea and the border disputes with India to show that China is aggressive. Since the time of the Trump regime, it has carried out a trade war against China, going to the extent of drastically cutting imports from China and shifting investments from China to India and elsewhere.

China pleads to the US to retain it as a neoliberal capitalist partner but the US has decided to undermine and cut it down for being the No. 1 economic competitor and political rival. China has brought discredit to itself by claiming more than 90 percent of the South China Sea and has provoked a strong reaction from the Western powers by proclaiming that its Belt and Road Initiative is meant to displace their maritime superiority since the 16th century.

The US and corporate press play up China as threatening to “invade” Taiwan. And they go to the extent of depicting the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) of the US, Japan, Australia and India as the NATO equivalent in Asia and Taiwan as the Ukraine of Asia under the threat of China as a giant aggressor. But in the case of Taiwan, the US has long conceded in the Shanghai Communique that Taiwan is part of China. The US and corporate press play up China as threatening to “invade” Taiwan. And they go to the extent of depicting the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) of the US, Japan, Australia and India as the NATO equivalent in Asia and Taiwan as the Ukraine of Asia under the threat of China as a giant aggressor. But in the case of Taiwan, the US has long conceded in the Shanghai Communique that Taiwan is part of China.

In the months and years to come, we expect tensions to arise and re-arise in the East Asia-Pacific region down to the Indian Ocean in the Indo-Pacific route, with US imperialism trying in the name of freedom of navigation to counter Chinese imperialist expansionism in the Pacific region. At the same time, the US is continuing efforts to cut down the trade surpluses of China and the amount of surplus capital that it can use in order to undermine the debt-burdened Chinese economy and its Belt Road Initiative.

It is not only in Europe and in the East Asia-Pacific regions where tensions and the danger of inter-imperialist war looms. US imperialism is trying in vain to stop its strategic decline. It has lost its status as the sole superpower in an increasingly multipolar world since the 2008 financial crash developed into a global economic depression.

The US will continue to stir up tensions, trouble spots, proxy wars and calculated incidents of direct inter-imperialist encounters in Central Asia, West Asia, South Asia, North Africa, southern Africa and Latin America. The inter-imperialist contradictions are coming to the surface and to the fore in many regions and areas.

The point has been reached that the imperialist powers themselves are seeing more frequently their direct collisions because the neoliberal policy of imperialist globalization and taking superprofits from extractive enterprises and arms sales; and the neoconservative policy of promoting state terrorism, fascism and wars of aggression mainly at the expense of the oppressed peoples and nations are unravelling.

The intensifying inter-imperialist contradictions are also inflaming and generating the contradictions between monopoly capital and labor in the imperialist countries, between the imperialist powers and the oppressed peoples and nations and between the imperialist powers and states that are independent, democratic and have socialist programs and aspirations. On the basis of these intensifying contradictions, various types of anti-imperialist, anti-fascist and anti-war forces and alliances can be built and strengthened in order to avert and counter imperialist domination, fascism and wars of aggression.

The tendency of the traditional imperialist powers headed by the US and the new imperialist powers like China and Russia to aggravate the crisis of the world capitalist system and threaten the proletariat and people of the world with the rise of fascism and wars of aggression can be countered by

the anti-imperialist, anti-fascist and anti-war movements of the proletariat and people within the imperialist countries themselves and by the assertion and realization of national and social liberation by the oppressed peoples and nations in the underdeveloped countries and by the states that are anti-imperialist and democratic and have socialist programs and aspirations.



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# Key Considerations in Discussing the Current International Situation

Antonio Tujan Jr.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

As the multiple crises of monopoly capitalism reach existential proportions for humanity and the planet, it becomes more important for everyone to have a heightened sense of global citizenship and understanding of the global current situation and affairs. We cannot be philistine in our attitude specially in these challenging times of pestilence, war and threat of nuclear Armageddon, climate change and global warming.

Activists should study Marxist-Leninist theory and apply it to the current situation for the purpose of mass education, agitation and mobilization. More activist educators should combine the study of the international situation with the study of the conditions in each country and apply this study to strengthen mass work and political struggles.

There are many references from Marxist political literature that can be used. Mass educators should ensure that these are grounded in Marxist political economy integrated in such political literature. That way discussing avoid situational or 'conjunctural' analysis that oftentimes are either ungrounded on political economy or on historical materialism. That way we avoid phenomenal empiricist conclusions, and even worse to dabble in idealist notions.

There is no one kind of seminar on the international situation since such discussion is defined by the objective of the discussion or seminar. Some discussions may focus on geopolitics and international relations, but some may focus on international economy and international development concerns,

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or aspects of it like production, service, finance, or trade. It can focus on other aspects of development like environment and nature, human development and welfare.

Regular discussions guided by articles like anniversary statements and sections of education courses become the basis for regular updating of the international situation that is coupled with the discussion of the national situation of class struggle and the program to advance social change.

Institutes or programs like PRISMM and IPE or IBON and networks like IPRN can assist in providing resources for the study of the international situation.

### **Background in twentieth century**

The twentieth century is the era of imperialism and foreseen by Marx in last writings. It was Lenin who provided the definitive political economic critique of imperialism at the turn of the 19th century, characterizing it as the moribund stage of capitalism. Any discussion of the international situation in this century and the new one is by necessity framed in the era of imperialism.

Recent detractors try to deny this critique of imperialism and all its worst unspeakable features against humanity and the planet. Others speak of capitalism but deny Lenin's critique and all his theory especially about the state and revolution. But more important theoretical opposition is the ideological triumphalism of monopoly capitalist sponsored postmodern theories in the twentyfirst century.

1. As the main victor and beneficiary of the Second World War, the United States consolidated its hegemony of the so-called Free World by propping up the erstwhile West imperialist powers, subduing and co-opting the Axis enemies, and cementing its military, financial, economic and geopolitical hegemony in the world. The US achieved economic boom within thirty years of postwar peace under its hegemonic power.

2. As the US consolidated its hold on the 'free world' it also immediately started its strategic comprehensive offensive on the new socialist world led by the Soviet Union that was its WWII co-victor. The strategic threat posed by socialism which was further inflamed by with the advance of socialist victories

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in China, Korea and Vietnam heralded a Cold War between two superpowers where a third of humanity lived in the socialist camp and the rest is controlled by Western imperialism.

3. Human development and economic development became secondary to the superpower contention in military-industrial complexes, armaments build up and production of weapons of mass destruction and costly unwinnable wars under US peacetime ceaseless war policy. These militarist components were the final undoing for the Soviet Union and the strategic decline of the US. But the latter withstood the strategic conflict of the cold war, as it remained propped by the dollar (its global dollar peg allows the massive printing of dollar).

4. The post-war boom of thirty years was mainly characterized by monopoly capitalist peace-time overproduction combined with overspending for the military-industrial complex that fuelled ceaseless wars and Cold War arms race. The stagflation bust of the late 70's was followed with intermittent recessions and crashes in financial markets.

5. Neoliberal strategies like monetarism and privatization like Reaganomics and Thatcherism in the 80s replaced Keynesian development policy that included the structural adjustment policies implemented by banks and IMF. Such liberalization pushed financial-trade integration across economies. Called globalization by bourgeois economies it featured labor flexibilization, cross-border production and service sub-contracting and other forms of mechanisms to reduce costs and increase profits at the expense of labor worldwide and the people in semicolonial economies.

6. The digital-electronic industrial revolution exploded with the advent of supercomputers at the turn of the century. It created new technologies (like robotics, biotechnology and AI) and production processes that had a thoroughgoing impact on most economies especially of the industrialized countries and globally. It calls attention to the absolutist role of the imperialist states and the imperialist corporations versus the interests of the people and the planet, and creates more urgent challenges for the proletariat to lead social change.

7. Global macroeconomic data is important only to illustrate the scale crisis and more to show the impact for workers, rural sector, services, national industry and agriculture. Thus there should be focus

on extraction of superprofit either through corporate and/or development finance bank profit. Financial markets and oligarchic individual holdings is less important though the temptation is to use these as indicators. It can reduce the effectiveness for popular education or dress rather focus on the main analysis and conclusions.

### **End of Cold War and 21st century decline of the US hegemon**

The collapse of the Soviet Union in early 1990's not only spelled the end of the Cold War but also assured the sole hegemonic role of the US. US imperialist global hegemony already spans some seventy years from the end of the WWII in 1946 up to the advent of the multipolar geopolitics in 2013.

Thus we count 1947-1975 as the post-war boom, 1975-1991 overproduction economic crisis, 1993-2008 as the second boom and 2009-2013 and onwards especially 2020-2021 as current crisis and emergence of multipolar geopolitics.

US has started its decline though it remains the main hegemonic power counting on its Western allies to prevent its further decline through contention against Russia and China as the main threats of its imperialist power.

1. Revisionism was not checked as petty-bourgeois thinking and bureaucratism ravaged in socialist states of the 'East Bloc'. The arms race distorted the development of socialist construction in the Soviet Union paving the way for the economic collapse and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, capitalist restoration was also on the process of revival despite the cultural revolution and after the death of Chairman Mao. The eventual Dengist coup d'état sealed the state capitalist system with the declaration that China is 'socialist with Chinese characteristics'.

2. Imperialist triumphalism was ideological – the 'end of history' mantra and dominance of postmodernist thinking; political – the all sided colonization of former East Bloc and Soviet republics by US and EC; military – diminution of Soviet military might and military blockade by US-NATO; diplomatic – consolidation of UN and other intergovernmental organizations to G7 leadership, isolating and conducting aggression on so-called 'rogue states' and eventually the declaration on a 'war on terror' ostensibly on Islamist armed groups but targeting all liberation movements and insurgents.

3. The post-Cold War boom soon turned to bust in the 2009 crisis in spite of and because of neoliberal globalization policies and measures. Advance of



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the digital-electronic revolution in all sectors of the economy was fraught with massive speculation, profiteering and inequality whether for economic development, benefits of society and wealth for everyone. The crisis was extended by the Covid pandemic restrictions from 2020 to current.

4. With the weak or lack of recovery from the depression in 2009 to the Covid pandemic, the suffering of the people intensified from unemployment and loss of income, from poverty to death, from hunger to psychosocial impacts of the lockdowns and other restrictions, the miserable conditions for the workers and other working people

5. The semi colonies of imperialism which have already been bearing the brunt of imperialist oppression and monopoly capitalist exploitation have no recourse in the face of further imperialist profit taking under new SAP and other neoliberal impositions. The neo colonies further stagnation which quickly deteriorated since 2020 resulting in massive debt overhang and further critical public services collapse. Massive poverty and misery translated to new conflicts and political and economic instability.

6. Rapid global warming and climate change is the result of monopoly capitalist intensified accumulation for super-profits – evidenced by over-development in industrialized countries and natural resources overexploitation destroying the global environment. Impacts of climate change are highlighted by the calamities, deaths and displacement of communities. Climate imperialism does not recognizing the responsibility for reparation for historical colonial invasion plus colonial rape by natural resources exploitation. But to add insult to injury, imperialists push further corporate solutions both in reduction and mitigation including obscene geoengineering.

7. Neoliberalism has long served the interest of monopoly capitalism to stave off economic collapse at the end of the 20th century. Amidst severe economic crisis, it still wrings more superprofits from the semicolonies and further intensify exploitation of workers everywhere through flexibilization and wage suppression including destruction of social protection and migrant labor oppression. Outsourcing made possible under neoliberal policies are policy adopted by all governments heralded as global integration and globalization.

It is wrong to assume that neoliberal globalization has ended just because Trump has declared a trade war and imperialist countries resort to military keynesianism. All capitalist countries use neoliberal policies as it suits them whether in the context of external competition or address internal economic

problems, or use neo-Keynesian policies. But the main imperialist policy upholds neoliberalism whether in overall economic policy or in part in finance, public finance, trade or production. International institutions such as the UN, the WTO, IMF, MDB or international bank remain hopelessly neoliberal, antidevelopment, pro-corporate and antipeople.

### **Rise of China and emergenc of multipolarity in geopolitics**

While the US remains the main hegemonic power in the world today, the rise of China as the biggest economy in the world in terms of PPP and in international politics has ushered a new geopolitical multipolar situation. The independent power of Russia as well as emerging independent course of the alliance dubbed as G77 + China and the reconfigurations in the Western imperialist alliance led by the US developed a multipolar political period in the world.

1. China's success in socialist construction provided the foundation for a growth strategy that included opening China to private investment for export-led growth, accession to the WTO and massive state investment in infrastructure to service the demand of foreign investment. By becoming the factory of the world China's growth strategy hinged on eventually developing independent massive production power, utilizing transfer of technology and rapid technological development, besides financial growth from export earnings and reinvestment.

2. Competition from US/Japan pushed China to take an independent economic policy to protect and promote the yuan along with the development of financial institutions for development financing of the semicolonies. Before long the 'G77 plus China' alignment in the UN was formed under Chinese leadership in world diplomacy to cement its sphere of influence in political economic terms. This is resulting in a Western imperialist strategy that treats China as the main adversary in economic and political terms. Thus China tread gingerly to prevent Western imperialist alarm while developing strategic alliances with Russia under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. But China, India and other BRICS countries take a careful position diplomatically especially on security and military matters.

3. The consolidation of the G7 under US hegemony faced a number of challenges as EU sought to consolidate in the face of Brexit. The rapprochement to Russia and China was short-lived as Russia sought to protect its influence on the former Soviet republics against Western imperialist colonization of

Eastern Europe and former republics. On the other hand, Western imperialist powers treating China as a dependent, demanding Chinese acquiesce to their rules and demands with nothing in return.

4. Western imperialist powers created the G20, not as a new coalition of new imperialists since most to the BRICS are not imperialist at all, and not all the rest of other G20 countries, but as a geoeconomic-political measure to rope in these key countries (in economic-demographic-politicalmilitary importance) to Western imperialist domination in political-economy and military-political geopolitics.

5. The Western imperialist alliance that include US, Canada, Japan, Germany, Italy, France and United Kingdom of the G7 has specific geopolitical history and does not preclude other imperialist countries Netherlands and Australia in analysis. But at the same time, it is important to conduct a thorough study of the features of each imperialist power and its relationship with the US, taking into account effective analysis of combines (TNCs and MNCs) under financial globalization.

6. An analysis of the G20 new powers should also be subjected to a Leninist critique of the political economy to end simplistic conclusion that these big countries with big economic, political and military power and excising big brother chauvinism or even occupation over their neighbours. As the main hegemon, US uses strategic alliances and connections to ensure the dependence of other imperialist countries to act as subaltern imperialists. But South Korea and Taiwan remain neocolonial.

### **US agenda to recover from decline**

The main features of US hegemony include 1. Invincibility of the dollar peg as the main currency for global finance, and along with the global institutions of finance and mechanisms 2. The resulting strategic advantage for investment to US, 3. Power of its finance oligarchy built over the years, 4. Its militaryindustrial complex that backs up its military infrastructure as globocop and feeds off from its ceaseless war policy, 5. Its political-economic hegemonic power behind its geopolitical hegemony, 6. Its policy and institutions for Western imperialist alliance driven by and supporting such hegemony.

1. The US under Trump and Biden has to respond to the dismal industrial performance and lack of innovation in technology. The current administration has to develop multitrillion dollar programs in infrastructure and industrial

development (over social protection) which is the main concern of the oligarchy. The so-called trade war launched by Trump on China responds to the effort to reduce dependence on Chinese imports coupled by domestic support for investment in heavy industries and manufacture.

2. The geopolitical shift in security, economy and diplomacy is directed principally at China perceived to the main threat of US hegemony. This meant the strategic shift – the pivot to Asia – principally politicalmilitary but including political economy. This requires a US balancing act with Europe and West Asia which remain key in all areas.

3. This includes a mix of bilateralism besides multilateralism under Western (read US) dominance. For example, the US created multiple financial and economic institutions focused on Asia but with support of the QUAD. This duplicates but enhances its role further beyond the ADB which is under the chairmanship of Japan, its imperialist subaltern. It has developed the AUKUS security- military alliance which enhances its strategic military alliance with Australia in the Indo-Pacific. But it is the core of the rebuilding of the former SEATO to include Thailand, Philippines and other allies besides the neocolonies South Korea and Taiwan. Such is the case with the NATO in combination with key bilateral partners Turkey and Israel (the US neocolony), or Germany for Eastern Europe along with other configurations.

4. The military-industrial complex combined with a strategic military presence (bases, aircraft carriers, large overseas standing army, satellite network, etc) is a strategic foundation of its hegemony both in economic and political-military terms. Maintaining globocop is not only costly but also feeds the economy – but a ceaseless war policy is essential to maintain its *raison d'être*. From the Cold War, to the triumphalist 'rouge states' policy, to the 'war on terror' - this ceaseless war policy has now shifted according to a new Pentagon strategy of shifting to 'sovereign war'.

5. The call to fight US-led war is essentially the fight the US ceaseless war policy. The current form this takes is in the proxy war in Ukraine and some. The US-NATO aggression on Russia is a component of the Western imperialist agenda to gobble up the remnants of the Soviet Union, including the Russian Federation which was invited to the G7 for strategic (military, nuclear, energy) reasons. But it was too much for the Western imperialist alliance to swallow Putin's Russia and a constriction strategy on Russia was implemented. Having engineered a coup in Ukraine the US made it easy for a neocolonial fascist government of Zelensky become a weapon in a proxy

war where Russia is portrayed as the aggressor when in fact it is recovering historically lost territory, subject to Ukrainian provocations and fighting a defensive war against US-NATO military constriction.

6. East Asia is major front of engagement which is hinged on breaking up China starting with Taiwan. But the US cannot take China head on, besides the fact that Taiwan is internationally recognized as a province of China. Intensifying aggression in the Korean peninsula requires a fascist neo-colonial government in South Korea to entice the socialist DPRK to be embroiled in war or to attack. But US military forces and bases stationed in south of Korea changes the complexion of war in the peninsula where the US is the protagonist but the nuclear weapons of DPRK is a fundamental deterrent. This holds true for Taiwan. But China and DPRK are astute governments that will not easily fall for any ruse nor be push-overs when attacked.

7. Besides proxy wars, US imperialism continues to use 'Islamist militants' as stooges to create a new Africa Command, set up clandestine bases and create and fight secret wars in the continent. In West Asia US relies on its alliance with Turkey and panders to Erdogans expand its influence in Kurdish territory and the Balkans and the Zionist Israel subaltern for its security and military interests even beyond the region. And relies on Saudi Arabia to destabilize the Peninsula and sell reproachment with Israel to other Arab governments. Latin America and the Caribbean remain the strategic sphere of influence for US imperialism which plies multiple strategies to fit specific countries and situations including subversion and aggression on Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua and more.

## **Prospects**

The multiple crises of the world present dire prospects for the humanity and the planet. The threat of a world war and even more so a nuclear war is considered imminent by doomsayers. Severe economic crisis, political instability and conflict are affecting weak semicolonial and other economies but the conditions do not necessary point to an urgency of world war for many reasons – international mechanisms for resolving conflict still operate and measure for deterrence are still workable.

The US is the main source for war but uses the war to strengthen itself and wear down its opponent's military, politically and economically. It seeks the opportunity to initiate aggression on a world scale. But conditions can ripen for an imperialist offensive as a world war on what it will portray as the

coalition rouge states. But the proletariat and rest of the people will have the opportunity to assert a revolutionary alternative.

It is the responsibility of the people and all antiimperialists to create a popular front against US imperialists and allies try to portray themselves as democrats, peace-loving and saviors of the people when they are simply the worst form of fascist terrorists exemplified by the Israeli Zionists.

These may happen in the medium term in the next decades to come, but in the meantime the severe crises and political instability created by political and economic crises and imperialist aggression on the countries of the periphery provides conditions for the peoples advance for social change. The current flashpoints of militant struggle of the peoples of the Philippines, Palestine, India, Turkey/Kurdistan, Myanmar and some are just the tip of the iceberg for more conflagration and liberation in the Global South and East.

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# On the Building of the IPF as a Broad Anti-Imperialist United Front

Victor Garces

## Introduction

The call to build an international united front is a responsibility and aspiration of all antiimperialist organizations. As the call reiterates:

“Humanity and the planet suffer from the scourge of imperialism – imperialist powers of the monopoly big bourgeoisie and their corporations exploit the working people to severe impoverishment, arrogate the resources of the earth, create wars of competition and aggression, create pestilence, and destroy the wellbeing of the planet.

“The Ukraine war and saber-rattling in the Korean peninsula and Taiwan/southeast Asia are symptomatic of imperialist war conflicts (and a ceaseless US war policy) adding to the severe economic depressionary crisis, pestilence, and climate change that scourge humanity and the planet. These are all the products of imperialism.

“The US hegemon controls the military security and financial infrastructure of the world and dominates the economy and diplomacy through its imperialist alliances. But to stave off its decline it has engineered proxy wars against Russia and ultimately faces the strategic threat of China as an emerging counterhegemon.

“Fascism is the other face of imperialism as it and its lackeys repress people’s democratic rights to ensure that people remain oppressed and ripe for their and the planet’s exploitation.

“Almost all countries face economic depressionary crises, political instability, and fascism, and the ruling reactionary classes intensify the exploitation of

the workers and other working masses. The bourgeois governments practice different forms of fascist oppression of the masses. Workers' strikes and peoples protests are met with severe repression and in many cases with massacres and assassination of their leaders and activists.

“People are rising up in all continents. People are anxious and eager to organize and have their voices heard.

“It is even more urgent now for people to come together in a united front organized at the international level to mobilize organizations and individuals from the local, to national and up to international levels to coordinate, cooperate, assist and together fight imperialism and its agents in all its forms.”

There have been efforts to bring people and their organizations to wield a common strength to fight imperialism, all throughout modern history under imperialism, and even more now. Currently there are many forms and initiatives to build an international antiimperialist united front. Our initiatives have been intersecting or coordinated, or autonomous and independent. These reflect different strands of thinking, circumstances, perspectives from the ground – and all are valid and laudable.

As we develop alliances and coordination in an international united front we face many challenges and issues. As we build the IPF as another iteration of the international united front, we discuss the different considerations and intentions toward such further linking of organizations in an international united front.

### **Role and achievements of the International League of Peoples Struggles**

ILPS is a multiparty cooperative effort to build an international antiimperialist united front. It was the response to the conditions of imperialist triumphalism when the US became the sole hegemon in 1990-2000s with the collapse of the Soviet Union. In its aftermath, Western imperialist powers under the sole leadership of the US focused on invading so-called rogue states and soon after declared a “war on ‘terrorism’” against remaining non-state enemies.

ILPS now the largest militant antiimperialist democratic international formation addressing major and prominent issues and struggles in countries around the world. In its establishment a number of issues had to be hurdled such as limiting ILPS from membership by political parties which



addressed several concerns such as the different circumstances and capacity of political parties. (Some parties are now subjected repression or worse targeted by imperialists as so-called terrorists while others are underground and conducting peoples war.) Further, the involvement of political parties as members may reduce ILPS into a forum for theoretical debate, and prevent the broadening of participation of broad sections of progressive organizations into the international united front.

Promoting and assisting peoples struggles at the national level, and coordinating these struggles at the international level are some of the practical value of antiimperialist united front formations.

These are most productive and advantageous to peoples movements as international solidarity contributions to the class struggles on going at national/local level. On other hand, this also provides the opportunity to national organizations to participate and contribute to the antiimperialist cause in various ways.

This is what differentiates ILPS from some movement formations that focus on seeking to disrupt global capitals around a number of issues to create an international level condition of unrest. ILPS is focused on supporting national struggles and developing international solidarity support through various forms of coordination.

But ILPS also recognizes the responsibility to expose and oppose imperialism and their reactionary lackeys through flashpoint struggles along with internationally coordinated struggles. Certain occasions like high level meetings of imperialist governments or corporations provide opportunities to expose and oppose these institutions and meetings through militant actions. These marches and rallies can be in reaction to periods of flash points of severe oppression or using occasions during imperialist meetings and forums as opportunities for targeting imperialist governments and their lackeys.

### **The building of an anti-imperialist united front**

In every society and country, people cooperate, organize and empower themselves to advance their condition. Among peoples organizations, a proletarian party is distinct in terms of its advanced analysis and political program which draws other sectors and organizations of society to its call. In their country this party has the supreme responsibility to win their revolutionary struggle to defeat the monopoly bourgeoisie and their lackeys – it is their main

contribution for proletarian international solidarity. For example, the Filipino people are conducting a people's war in a life and death struggle against the puppet state of the US imperialist Marcos Duterte dictatorship engaged in a short-term war path against all opposition.

On the other hand different political and social movements besides other political forces seek and develop an international antiimperialist united front which can take many forms and aspects in political action, cooperation and system of organization. These initiatives individually and together strengthen international solidarity, and become more effective and productive especially if it is directed at imperialism which presents the main and the source of the scourge for humanity and the planet.

An IAIUF is basically expressed in the international physical coordination of different organizations from many countries such as through discussion gatherings like meetings, conferences, for a and symposia or seminars to seek common analysis and positions/programs of action, and coordinated mass struggle gatherings across countries. These physical gatherings are facilitated by communication media including social media. It is also facilitated by various forms of premeetings.

Globally coordinated mass actions at local and national level can be combined with these gatherings in specific locations on the occasion to direct people's action on meetings of governments and corporations. Such gatherings become international in composition through solidarity participation by delegations from overseas such as in an international conference or festival/forum, or in an international mass mobilization such as the WTO 'Battle for Beattle', HK or Bali Bubarkan WTO; Paris climate change and other gatherings.

The COVID pandemic shifted mass mobilizations and gatherings from a principally physical format to the virtual platforms such as webinars and meetings that expanded coverage through webstreaming. As the pandemic wears down, national activities and mobilizations, as well as the international coordination activities of the iauf are starting to shift to the 'blended' form, hopefully to engage in class struggle principally physically for structural change.

ILPS as a formation of international antiimperialist united front fulfils a number of advantages and purposes for its members: it develops common positions and actions against imperialism and its lackeys at global and regional level; it provides a space for voice and participation by local and

national organizations to international campaigns; it provides a venue for political coordination and cooperation for mass struggles and consolidation at national and subnational level. As such ILPS is a multilateral formation of peoples organizations for common action against international and national targets and to express reciprocal solidarity. Public statements and other forms of propaganda play an essential role for a united front for people's militant struggle.

While ILPS has distinguished itself for militant antiimperialist campaigning by mass organizations and other peoples organizations, there are many more organizations of the international antiimperialist united front concerned less with campaigning than with other aspects of political action, lobby and alliance – whether involving different kinds of political parties and governments. [note IPA, Progressive International, or Solidnet]

Before the founding of ILPS other multilateral formations and associations like ASA and APRN started the work of reciprocal solidarity and political campaigning against monopoly capitalism such as the success of the Seattle 1998 which involved the newly established APRN and Philippine diaspora/Bayan. Since then other multilateral formations besides ILPS soon followed like PCFS 2004, APC 2004, IWA 2006, IMA 2008 and IMPSDL 2015 addressing reciprocal solidarity and common antiimperialist issues among sectors of the people

Political consolidation of the campaign initiatives have been made by creating spaces for struggle such the highly successful struggles led by HK Peoples Assembly with ILPS during the WTO in 2012 or the Bali Peoples Assembly with ILPS during the WTO in 2014 or the Mumbai Resistance organized by ILPS against the World Bank/IMF outside of the WSF in 2006.

The occasion of the 4th and the 5th assemblies of ILPS provided opportunities to create spaces for the organizing of the International Festival for Peoples Rights and Struggles (IFPRIS) – envisioned as a forum to draw the participation of organizations and individual who do not belong to ILPS but are otherwise not necessary attending the assembly. More than a thousand attended the first IFPRIS held in several venues of University of the Philippines in Diliman Quezon City. IWA and IMA held their assemblies within the IFPRIS with scores of meetings, foras and other activities were convened.

After the 4th assembly a large international demonstration was led by ILPS against APEC and targeting US imperialism with Trump in attendance.

Leaders of ILPS were since blacklisted from returning to the Philippines. The second IFPRIS attracted as many participants while the 5th assembly drew even more with 400 participants. Its main theme was fighting imperialist neoliberal globalization exemplified by the APEC soon to hold its Leaders Meeting. After the 5th assembly in 2015 ILPS broadened campaigns by creating outreach platforms like People Over Profit and Resist US led War in 2016.

The building of a broader international antiimperialist united front is realized in a dialectical process that requires flexibility and innovativeness. It is not limited to a single formation and not limited to a single feature(s). Building the international antiimperialist united can take on multi-faceted and multi-pronged initiatives that harnesses the initiative of the masses . Thus we have created various multilateral formations as well as united front initiatives whether onetime projects or running for some time. In the end the intention is to draw the masses towards asserting their aspirations for change, raise their consciousness and capacity/commitment to fight by providing various venues, organizations as they mature in their Marxist proletarian thinking.

Though ILPS is the most consolidated aiuf formation in analysis and organization, we think that a multiplicity of AIUF formations for different concerns whether common concerns like peace or economic exploitation or concerns of groups or divisions like women, trade unions or homeless peoples. These reach out to more progressive people's organizations that are even vaguely antiimperialist.

ILPS also promotes the creation of and supports the struggles of peoples mass organizations, and with it the promotion of all forms of organizations whether international, national or local. It is not the objective of ILPS to create new political parties of the proletariat everywhere in each country, but ILPS activities provide the space for budding revolutionaries to take forward their struggles towards building political parties. It is desirable for these organizations to join ILPS where they enjoy better coordination, continue to reach out for recruitment other organizations and individuals.

### **Realizing the coordination of parties and the "AIUF"**

Building a formal organization of coordination of parties is completely different from the international antiimperialist united front. Both are international responsibilities of a proletarian party and are an expression of proletarian internationalist duty of each party. However both responsibilities,

while linked, are quite different and should not be mixed up or confused with one another.

Such formal organization covers ideological, political and organization dimensions and responsibilities. It is not timely because of the current ideological and organization disarray of proletarian parties. Coordination and cooperation among parties to conduct more study and discussion on different issues that face the proletariat, learn more on Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao, strengthen political struggles and reach out each other does not require a formal organization of the level of the Third International.

Such formal organization can only be built if internal requirements are fulfilled and political conditions are met for such opportunity. Such meetings and fora to strengthen ideological and political unanimity and develop practical cooperation should be promoted but avoid being hobbled by considerations of convening a formal organization. Such multilateral activities develops through practice assuring independence and mutual cooperation, equality as peers, self-reliance and autonomy among parties and allows flexibility and exercise of independence and initiative by each party.

Parties also strive to develop bilateral relations which can be even more productive in developing mutually beneficial cooperation. Bilateral ideological/theoretical exchanges are made and proposals for organizational and political cooperation can be negotiated.

Organizations of the AIUF are not appropriate venues for ideological and theoretical debate nor for organizational coordination. It is not appropriate for formally constituted parties to be part of ILPS nor conduct ideological debate within the bounds of ILPS. But it is essential to promote Marxism-LeninismMaoism within the webinars and activities of ILPS to strengthen the ideological development of its members. Parties are enjoined to participate in these activities of the aiuf formations like ILPS, Resist, POP etc.

On the other hand, proletarian parties may organize or participate in forums and conferences for such discussion and debate to develop better understanding and positioning on political issues of practical value for struggle. PRISMM which is an ILPS member includes in its program the assistance to budding proletarian parties, promotion of Marxist, Leninist and Maoist theoretical study, and even theoretical debate.

The “AIUF” as a formal organization of the AIUF was launched as a joint initiative between ICOR and ILPS to address the need to develop the united front of antiimperialist forces. The “AIUF” was terminated in June 2022 upon the request of ILPS when it became clear that the nature of a formally developed organization of the united front needed to be reviewed.

The different partners interested in building such initiative saw the urgent need to set up a united front of the people fighting imperialism. Conceptualizing such required a comprehensive understanding of the different forces and components for such front as well as the different aspects in developing such formation. The years 2018-2020 involved the negotiations with a draft call and organizational rules of membership and participation and with the acceptance of the call for a practically flat organizational concept in the 6th assembly resolution of ILPS in 2019. But the rules of operation needed to be refined with the pandemic adding further complications. The aiuf consultative committee was convened and operated in just a few months in 2021 but it was terminated when it obvious that creating a front with such organizational rules and internal objectives was not operable.

### **IPF as a loose political platform of the AIUF**

As previously mentioned, the ILPS and its associated international networks initiated IFPRIS as a space for antiimperialist organizations and individuals. But IFPRIS conceptualized as an occasional forum/festival but did not have a permanent character needed to issue timely calls and statements. But to remedy this, different international anti-imperialist peoples organizations cooperated under the name of International Coordinating Network (ICN) to advance anti-imperialist and anti-fascist campaigns. (<https://www.internationalsolidarity.org>)

The experience of the ICN underscores the urgency of mass struggles and sets aside the burdens of institutionalization of an organization. This provides the basis for ILPS to call for an International Peoples Front after the termination of the agreement for an ‘AIUF’. Beyond the militant campaign coordination and on this foundation, the IPF can consciously seek out to build the antiimperialist international united front of the peoples organizations including mass movements and political formations.

But what about political parties, especially those parties and the governments they lead fighting imperialism?

ILPS is a formation of the aiuf thus it cannot include parties in membership but welcomes their participation in activities. The IPF is a looser formation of the aiuf and thus it does not have institutionalized organizational membership. The IPF as a unity of purpose and action aspires to draw in mass movements or peoples' organizations, and democratic anti-imperialist political organizations into peoples united front at the national level. It can also other political organizations distinct from peoples organizations like political parties, quasiparties and liberation movements.

As an international formation the IPF fulfils the objective of political unification, alliance and coordination by different organizations from local to global. At the national level this can mean organizations linking up at the international/regional and national level. Depending on circumstances, local and national organizations can coordinate at the national as it befits their interest.

Parties seeking formal coordination of proletarian parties and governments (which already exist in various persuasions) may find value in IPF but need to be reminded that the IPF does not fulfil that objective. IPF should also to avoid the efforts of some seeking international formal coordination of parties to use the aiuf under these circumstances.

Thus an International Coordinating Body is needed to mediate these matters, act on proposals and resolve issues. Since it does not centralize campaigns which are already conducted by ILPS and other aiuf formations, the IPF and its ICB does require a large operation, and can do a lot of its work through lines of communication and media. Members can conduct sharing experiences and brainstorming on different matters. There should minimal representation work by individuals since it is a loose united front formation.

The nature of the united front is quite open to any antiimperialist, "Anyone who ascribes to the objectives of the IPF and signs on to a statement that will be published in the website and social media pages of IPF members can be considered a member.

"Any member can participate in activities of the front. Although regular participation in IPF planning and activities is encouraged, there is no mandatory participation in meetings/assemblies. Individuals, groups, organizations, and other entities can join only certain actions if desired and disassociate and/or reassociate at any time."

The IPF is a crystallization of the aspirations of the a people united in will and action to defeat imperialism at the international level. It creates a common front of coordinated actions against imperialism – concerns like common statements, communication and propaganda, international coordination solidarity actions and the like.

Local and national organizations who have joined IPF are not expected to coordinate at national level. Each autonomous member who join the IPF are exercising their independence and initiative in the united front whether national or international level. Many of them have already joined an aiuf formation like ILPS, IWA etc which have also joined IPF. It is completely within the bounds of their decision whether they coordinate at national level in any of the aiuf formations including the IPF.

It is not the objective of IPF or any aiuf formation to define the struggle at national level, nor provide leadership at that level. As local and national organizations link up to the IPF or any of international formations in IPF, it is feasible to address the matter of national coordination of members of different aiuf formations depending on the national circumstances. Different national/local members of different aiuf members can create national coordination hubs or formations as they wish according to their national circumstances and objectives.

The urgency of global analysis and response to different crises facing the planet demands effective communication platforms and media, effective utilization of spaces and opportunities for strengthening international solidarity expression and action up to managing physical gatherings like festivals/conferences/forums/youth camps.



# 'Democracy as a Means Relies on Dictatorship': Commemorating the 200th Birthday of Frederick Engels

Fred Engst<sup>1</sup>

*(This article was translated from Chinese.)*

Engels' thoughts on democracy in his later years are worthy of our study in connection with the history of the past 100 plus years. I find that there are at least two kinds people that talk about democracy: one kind talks about "what it is," and the other talks about "what it should be." The difference between these two kinds of people is like that between a photographer and a painter. Those who talk about "what it should be" are like painters, they like to talk about democracy based on their desires. I don't have such a developed imagination. I am more like a photographer, and pay more attention to what democracy is in reality.

## 1) The condition of democracy

Plainly speaking, democracy on political grounds depends on dictatorship. Dictatorship of a class can exist without democracy, but democracy cannot exist without dictatorship.

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I guess many would find this argument strange, because they often conflate class dictatorship with authoritarianism and dictators.<sup>2</sup> They do not realize that authoritarianism or the rule by a dictator is merely one specific form of class dictatorship, and ignore that a class's dictatorship is a necessary condition, a premise, or the most fundamental guarantee for the democracy of a class. The substantive content of class dictatorship is an inalienable right to defend the ownership relations of property through state violence. This defends either the private ownership of the means of production by bourgeois individuals, such as land and corporations, i.e. their power to coordinate, the power to distribute products, and the power of the bourgeoisie to have the ultimate say—or the ownership by the proletariat of those powers, and the ultimate say belonging to the proletariat. This belief in inalienable rights to the means of production dictates that the class dictatorship's strict prohibition of alteration in the ownership relationship is beyond all challenges, even through the most democratic means possible.

There is no democracy without dictatorship. According to my observation, the meaning of this preposition is twofold:

1. Dictatorship regulates the scope of democracy.
2. Dictatorship guarantees the operation of democracy.

For example, without the dictatorship of the proletariat, peasants in the Mao era would not have been able to elect leaders of village collectives, and the 18 households of Xiaogang Village would not have been able to so frequently changing the leaders of their production team every few days.

Without the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (from here on "GPCR") would not have been possible, it would not have come round for rebels to post Big Character Posters criticizing leaders of all ranks, and it would have been even less possible for two factions of the masses to intensely struggle against each other inside their factories. However intense the factional struggle in the GPCR was—even to the point of armed combats—the workers were always paid their usual salaries. Without the dictatorship of the proletariat, this would not be allowed politically, nor could it be sustained economically. If the workers who engaged in factional struggles on both sides had lost their pay, they certainly would have been "well behaved". Therefore, without the dictatorship of the proletariat, proletarian democracy

2 In the Chinese version, the author used the word "dictator" in parenthesis here for the Chinese word for dictatorship/autocracy.

could not exist, as the core mission of the dictatorship of the proletariat is in fact to defend the system of public ownership by the whole people<sup>3</sup> — which is in fact the defense of the masses’ right to manage the country.

In the same way, without the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, that is, without the defense of the system of private enterprise by the military, the police, and the courts, the bourgeoisie would not politically be able to limit democracy to the scope of what is allowed by the system of private enterprise, or to prevent the people from interfering with the internal operations of mega corporations, or to prevent people from attempting to “communalize” wealth and property through democratic means. Without the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, the heads of financial conglomerates would not be able to willfully shower cash on political candidates to realize a plutocracy in which the votes received correspond to the money spent. The bourgeoisie approves of a democracy in which money buys power, thus conceiving the political right to spend money at will to be their “human right.”

## 2) The idea of democracy

Therefore, any discussion of democracy cannot be separated from an understanding of its premise – the system of ownership. Under different systems of ownership, the form of democracy must also be different.

The fundamental idea of a bourgeois view of democracy is that of checks and balances. Therefore, the bourgeoisie spend a large amount of energy on designing a legal system loaded with trivial details. That’s because in a capitalist

3 *Translators’ note:* The socialist ownership by the entire people forms a political imperative and economic foundation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The goal of the dictatorship of the proletariat is the negation of all exploitative social relationships through the systematic and methodical limitation of bourgeois right, through carrying on the struggle within the socialist society after the proletariat violently overthrows the bourgeoisie and becomes the society’s ruling class (see *Fundamentals of Political Economy* published by Shanghai People’s Press 1974, translated and edited by George C. Wang, pp. 283, the book is available at: <http://www.bannedthought.net/China/MaoEra/PoliticalEcon-omy/FundamentalsOfPoliticalEconomy-Shanghai-1974-English-OCR-SinglePage.pdf>). Socialist ownership by the entire people is not to be confused with the sort of “public ownership,” that exists under capitalism. In contrast, socialist ownership by the entire people is preconditioned on the socialist public ownership system in which the state owns the means of production and the proletariat and laboring masses firmly control the lifelines of the national economy (e.g., agriculture, mining, energy, postage, and transportation) through their state apparatus, the proletarian state. After the proletariat’s seizure of political power, the proletariat continues to carry on the struggle against bourgeois right (Lenin Collected Works, Vol.29, pp 495), to advance socialist transformation in the transition between capitalism and communism. In the experience of the Chinese Revolution, after the proletariat seized power under the leadership of its own party, the Chinese Communist Party, and established the People’s Republic of China, the realization of the socialist public ownership system was carried out through the confiscation of big industrial capital by the proletarian state and the gradual socialist transformation of medium and small enterprises through political mobilization and redemption (buy-outs by the state). In rural areas, collective ownership by production teams and other local units was developed as a step towards higher-level agricultural cooperation and socialist public ownership (*Fundamentals of Political Economy*, pp. 254-259, 271).

society, one of the most fundamental contradictions within the ruling class is how to guarantee orderly economic competition among the bourgeoisie. In the political sphere, their multi-party parliamentary system and separation of power into three branches serve this end. Although every capitalist wants himself to have the final say, and become a power-monopolizing dictator, he is nevertheless more afraid of others becoming dictators and sabotaging the “equal” competition among capitalists. In order to guard against the emergence of authoritarianism or dictators, checks and balances through a multi-party parliamentary system and separation of the three branches of powers are choices that are least bad. Capitalists use their money to promote politicians’ electoral campaigns to determine how to manage a capitalist state.

But mutual checks and balances in the political sphere are incompatible with the mutual coordination necessary in a process of socialized production. That’s why in a capitalist society, democracy must be limited to the political sphere, and there is no democracy to speak of in the economic sphere. It is there that the bourgeoisie most fully endorses the system of “one-dollar one-vote” shareholding in which shares received corresponds to the money spent. For example, within a capitalist conglomerate, the open and smoldering struggles among factions can be extremely intense, but parliamentary checks and balances do not exist.

Nor does a separation of powers into three branches exist, and other institutionalized forms of checks and balances do not easily emerge. There, contradictions between leadership and the led are generally impossible to handle through democratic means. Despite implementing a democratic system in the political sphere, the bourgeoisie still carries out an arbitrary dictatorship in the productive sphere. What the employed proletarians experience in their everyday life is not democracy, but their despotic bosses.

The fundamental idea of a proletarian view of democracy is to convince people with reason. Hence it emphasizes the need to “let a hundred flowers bloom, and let a hundred schools of thought contend.”

Through the free airing of ideas by presenting facts and reasoning things out, it allows for a more complete unity between thought and action. In the system of public ownership by the whole people under the dictatorship of the proletariat, production still must be carried out efficiently, and at the same time the masses must conduct criticism and exert supervision over their leaders. Therefore, under the dictatorship of the proletariat, democracy is not limited to the political sphere but also emanates within all the respective

spheres of the economy. On the one hand, there is a need to obey those who coordinate the effective operation of all respective areas rather than being in a state of “each man for himself;” on the other hand, the masses need to be able to criticize, supervise, and even recall the coordinators of these areas. The question of how to achieve this from the perspective of socialized mass production forms the core content of democracy under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus, under the system of public ownership by the whole people, there is a need to consider how to use the democratic means of convincing people through reason to handle contradictions between leaders and the led. This is much more complicated than the democracy of ‘checks and balances’ under capitalism, and more difficult when democratic practices previously unexplored are extended to the area of socialized mass production.

The biggest contradiction among the people under the dictatorship of the proletariat — that between the vanguard leadership among the proletariat and mass supervision, i.e., the contradiction between democracy and centralism— cannot be resolved by abolishing either side of the equation. Without vanguard leadership, the scattered proletariat would not be able to hold on to power (as evident in the prolonged factional clashes and violent armed struggles during the GPCR). However, a dictatorship without mass supervision is not a dictatorship of the proletariat. The proletariat must explore how to deal with the relationship between these two aspects step by step through practice.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution constitutes the greatest practice in exploring democracy under the dictatorship of the proletariat. It provides a big step forward in handling the contradiction between the party’s leadership and mass supervision, providing valuable experiences and lessons for people afterwards. Those who deny the democratic practices during the GPCR do not genuinely understand the essential content of democracy under the public ownership by the whole people. Their hope—that proletarian democracy can simply copy the bourgeois system of checks and balances—cannot work, as such a system is designed to manage and coordinate power struggles of mutually independent capitalist conglomerates. This is of no avail to resolving the question of how to use the democratic practice, of convincing by reason in areas of large scale socialized production under the dictatorship of the proletariat’s system of public ownership by the whole people. Within the proletariat, only those who are deeply influenced by bourgeois ideas would form a diametrically opposing group, endorse a bourgeois system of checks and balances, and substitute the interest of the class with factional interests, and then from there threaten the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e. the public ownership by the whole people.

### 3) The means of democracy

Every class has at least two types of methods for resolving its own internal contradictions: One is authoritarianism by a minority within the class, the method of dictatorship, another type is the democratic method.

To implement democracy within a class, the majority must respect the opinion of the minority, and the minority must submit to the decision of the majority. Such democracy settled by these two aspects is only appropriate in resolving non-antagonistic contradictions. Faced with antagonistic contradictions, democracy cannot be sustained.

Here's a small example. Let's say in a WeChat group, if there were not any basic rules of conduct agreed upon by all, and people with different views or positions promote mutual insults and attacks.

Then such a group certainly will be torn apart. In the end, either one side of the argument will exit the group, or one side will kick out the opposing party. There cannot be peaceful existence by both sides. A bigger example, for instance, is the American Civil War. At a time when there was no grounds for compromise then, the dispute could not but be resolved without violence. This is the inevitable conclusion of two opposing interests in a class society. Opposing class interests are impossible to peacefully coexist for long, nor can they be dissolved through democracy, and consequently democracy in the political sphere is but a mechanism for reconciling the contradictions within the ruling class under the precondition of a class dictatorship. In contrast, the question of who is right and wrong in matters of science cannot be answered through the means of democracy nor through means of violence. Instead, only the results of experiments can serve as proof, and people can only be convinced by reason. Hence we can see that the pursuit of democracy is driven by interests; without differing interests, then there is no need for democracy.

In fact, in modern class society, the democratic rights that people can enjoy are proportional to their identification with the social system. The greater the democratic rights of the common people, the more universally the people identify with the current system. For example, the status enjoyed by the common people during the GPCR as the masters of their own destiny was one extreme; the rights enjoyed by the Labour Party in the UK is another extreme. The more consolidated a class's rule is, the more likely it uses means of democracy to deal with all sorts of contradictions internal or external to that class.

If the working masses want to “enjoy” the democracy of the bourgeoisie, the overwhelming majority of them then must identify with capitalism, to see it as “natural,” just like the ideas that “those with greatest abilities accrue the most,” “all debts must be repaid,” and “property should be inherited” are seen as natural. The more complete the working masses’ identification with capitalism, the more assured the bourgeoisie feels about them (like with the Labour Party in the UK), and the more abundantly can they “enjoy” bourgeois democracy, with some of them possibly becoming members of a ruling party, like the Labour Party in the UK. Therefore, as long as the majority of the masses have not seen through the true nature of bourgeois democracy—that it is an effective mechanism to reconcile contradictions within the bourgeoisie—then the bourgeoisie’s “democratic” rule in form seems to resemble “the people’s political power.”

As soon as class contradictions sharpen, and the masses’ democratic demands exceed what private enterprise system can tolerate, the bourgeoisie will use direct violence to defend its political power and the true nature of “people’s political power” will come to light, as in the Paris Commune, Spain in the 1930s, and Chile in the 1970s. During those times, the bourgeoisie did not bother to moderately handle these contradictions. Instead, it worries about, first of all, the threat to the capitalist system, and thus in order to maintain its own rule they had to use the force of arms to suppress the challenges from the working class.

#### **4) The exercise of democracy**

In a period in which the bourgeoisie can still use democratic methods to resolve all sorts of its internal contradictions, the working class must use this sort of period to strengthen its ability to organize and raise the masses’ democratic consciousness, for example, through democratic elections in unions, etc., to better resolve the working class’s own internal contradictions, to increase unity, and advance a realistic struggle for more rights.

In over a hundred years, the working class in advanced capitalist countries, taking advantage of bourgeois democracy, has obtained various rights, such as the eight-hour workday, the rights to unionize and strike, social security, and medical care. Black people and other non-white people in the United States have raised their political and economic status through prolonged struggles, making it increasingly difficult for the ruling class to transfer the class contradiction into a racial contradiction.

These struggles have to greater or lesser extents been absorbed into the overall interest of the bourgeoisie. That is to say their gains have not violated the overall interest of the bourgeoisie. They are nonetheless fruitful in raising the class consciousness of the working class and its ability to organize. As democracy becomes deeply rooted in people's minds, racism, xenophobia, and sexism within the working class becomes increasingly difficult to sustain, and capitalism becomes increasingly pure. Racial, gender, and other non-class relations are substituted by increasingly exposed class oppression; the space in which the bourgeoisie can domestically transfer crises thus become increasingly small.

The working class's democratic demand to oppose racial, gender, and class oppression is in fact the instinctual demand of the masses desiring mastery of their own destiny. It is in fact a demand for attempting to transform the system of ownership. This is the reason that the bourgeoisie strongly condemns the so-called "tyranny of the majority." Unlike Russian populism over 100 years ago, which carried a tinge of the doctrine of "returning to the ancients," a big component of today's so-called "populism" are those democratic demands that do not respect private enterprise rights, raised by the masses in capitalist society. For example, the Greek sovereign debt bailout referendum—strongly condemned by the Western powers—violated the principle that "debts must be repaid." The other examples include "the 1% versus the 99%" Occupy Wall Street Movement. The bourgeoisie instinctively tosses all those sorts of democratic demands by the masses that endanger the system of private enterprise into a bucket called "populism," going so far as to also toss racism, xenophobia and other reactionary trends into the same bucket in order to stigmatize demands that endanger the system of private enterprise. Therefore, populism in today's context is essentially a form of resistance by the lower classes of the common people against the existing system of ownership.

In the process of struggling for democracy and liberation, the working class must also consciously overcome the tyrannical way the bourgeoisie has contaminated it, and learn how to use democratic methods to overcome internal differences. It must elevate its struggle from one of "resisting oppression" to one of "eliminating oppression," that is, from a motivation of merely "changing the dynasty" to the aim of "liberating mankind." Thus, a democratic immersion is vital for the maturation and unity of the working class. In contrast, the rampant factional skirmishes and violent armed struggles during the GPCR reflected the working class's immaturity. They are the consequence of the lack of long-term democratic training. In the advanced capitalist countries, within the working classes that have had a long democratic immersion, internal



armed struggle might existed, but it is rarely seen. Internal fighting among the organized workers is nearly impossible. “Workers don’t fight workers” is the most basic form of class consciousness among hardscrabble workers.

## **5) The function of democracy**

Then can the masses’ demand to attempt the transformation of the system of ownership be realized through democracy?

Some think that the working class can only acquire liberation after it acquires democracy, totally ignoring the fact that in India, the self-proclaimed largest democracy in the world, the liberation of the working class is not in the foreseeable future. They do not admit that the working class can only acquire democracy that allows it to control its own destiny after it overthrows capitalism, not the reverse. They fantasize that the working class can gradually raise its status until it becomes the ruling class through democratic means. Cruel facts of history, however, prove that changes in the system of ownership so far have never been realized through democratic means. Instead, they have only been realized through violence or coup d’état. That is because the transformation of a system of ownership is an antagonistic conflict; and trying to transform a system of ownership through democratic means is like forcing something to do what it is not meant to do, like trying to cook rice with a washing machine. It is beyond the functional boundaries of democracy.

Those scholars within China who have never experienced the actual operation of bourgeois democracy or joined themselves in this democratic process often have all sorts of unrealistic fantasies about democracy in the Western developed countries, (allow me to make a vulgar metaphor) like virgins excitedly discussing sex life.

They do not realize that implementing universal suffrage under capitalism requires two necessary conditions. First, as mentioned above, the overwhelming majority of the working class must still identify with the system of private enterprise, and consequently would not raise democratic demands to transform this system of ownership. Second, the degree of capitalist monopolization has not reached its highest form, state-monopolized capitalism, therefore power struggles within the bourgeoisie have to be realized through universal suffrage, or otherwise there would be civil war.

They think that the lack of democracy is a result of persistent feudal forces, but cannot see that, except in a few backward countries, in the emerging

industrialized countries there are few feudal remnants. The lack of democracy in these countries, generally speaking, is not a result of persistent feudal forces, but a manifestation of the increasingly sharp conflicts between capital and labor during rapid industrialization. This is a result of the bourgeoisie's inability to defend capitalism with democratic means, and its inability to easily transfer crises to ease the domestic class contradictions as the great powers do. The greater the dearth of democratic rights among the masses more or less indicates the degree to which the lower classes cannot accept the inequality in the current system, and consequently a democratic system poses an increasing threat to the ruling class in power.

The masses' democratic movements in regions that lack democracy therefore have a naturally revolutionary character. However, the proletariat must not renounce its political aim for the sake of acquiring democracy of the sort recognized by the bourgeoisie, for getting more votes, like the Communist Party of Nepal did, abandoning its decade-long armed struggle after obtaining the initial victory of a bourgeois revolution. In contrast, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) has consistently united the armed struggle in the countryside with the parliamentary struggles in the cities for over half a century. During the decade-long dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, the CPP tenaciously led the people in the struggle for democracy and against autocracy. After Marcos' rule was overthrown, the CPP energetically participated in the parliamentary struggle as well as led the increasingly robust armed struggle. If the CPP abandoned armed struggle, its ballot share in parliament would temporarily increase. But it did not abandon armed struggle just for votes. That is because they understand that the parliament is only one of the battlefields in which the masses are resisting the bourgeois regime, and that it is not the most important one. How to combine the struggle for democracy and the anti-capitalist struggle tests the members of revolutionary parties in all of these kinds of countries.

Some would certainly refute these observations of mine, or complain that my snapshot is not complete. Maybe they are painters, and do not like the content of my photography. From an aesthetic perspective, my photo of democracy is indeed not as beautiful as their paintings of democracy. That's alright, I rather enjoy some of their paintings. Wouldn't it be a joy if reality were like the beauty that they paint?

*Notes:*

*2020.11.21 First draft at the meeting commemorating the 200th birthday of Frederick Engels.*

*2020.12.8 Final draft. I am deeply grateful for the valuable comments a few scholars and friends have made on the first draft.*

