

THE DANGER OF WAR AND COMMUNIST POLICY (1928-1935)

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I. Introduction

With the end of the period of relative capitalist stabilization, which has been looked at in an earlier report from the economic standpoint, came the prospect of further intensification of military conflicts and the danger of a second world war. During these years the Comintern and the CPSU pursued peace policies which matured in the familiar "Grand Alliance" of World War II. Few would doubt that during the war some communist parties pursued policies which could hardly be called Marxist. Perhaps the most striking example and definitely the one closest to home is that of the CPUSA under the leadership of Earl Browder, with its "Communism is twentieth century Americanism," its embracement of FDR, its no-strike policy, etc. The question is raised, did this "Grand Opportunism", Browderism, spring full-blown from the forehead of Earl Browder, which is the impression you get from reading the cursory mentions of Browderism in the newspapers and journals of the "new anti-revisionist communist movement"? Or, if not, what were the historic roots of Browderism? Was Browderism only one manifestation of a malaise which infected significant sections of the international communist movement in the 1940's and 1930's? More specifically, did the decisions of the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935, which represented a fundamental turn in Communist policy on a number of critical issues, including the war issue, give an impetus for or nurture such Right opportunist deviations as Browderism?

That considerable opportunism in the international Marxist movement should reveal itself in the second world war is not surprising. First, war lays bare contradictions, both objective ones and subjective ones. With the sudden changes in the situation that war brings, deviations are very likely to crop up in communist parties, as some comrades fail to perceive the import of the changes and lag behind while others believe things have changed more than they really have and so propose adventurist, "Left" policies (as Mao has pointed out on several occasions). Second, the example of the first world war is striking. For it was only this major international conflagration which brought to the surface the rottenness in the Second International. Only a few leaders in a few parties adopted positions against "defense of the fatherland" in an imperialist war at the outset of the conflict (about 1914) and it was some time before they had much influence. The great majority of Marxists of the time considered the policy of Lenin, Luxemburg and others to be dogmatic, adventurist, isolating, "Leftist". But Lenin and others persisted, the Bolshevik party took up the position of attacking the social-chauvinism of the majority of leaders of the parties in the Second International, and eventually millions of workers and peasants were organizationally won to the new position, to the "purification" of Marxism on this question and others, as the Third International came into existence.

Although Lenin died in 1924, well before the war preparations for World War II had really gotten under way, his views on war will be looked at as perhaps the best single source for the Marxist attitude towards war. That will make up the first section of the report. Following that there will be a brief look at some of the wars that were taking place or in the preparatory stages. The last section of the report will look at specific questions of Comintern and CPSU policies: Was it correct to define some capitalist countries as aggressors and others not? Should the USSR have joined the League of Nations? Were the

mutual assistance pacts of 1935 between the USSR and France and Czechoslovakia principled? In what ways did the views of the VII Congress of the CI on the war question alter those of the VI Congress?

II. Lenin on War

In his approach to the war that was developing in the early years of the century, Lenin stressed that Marxists had to examine each war separately, in its own conditions, to make a judgment about whether to support a particular side in it or no side. Marxists could not oppose all wars, because some wars have been or are still today historically progressive, for example the wars of the bourgeoisie against feudalism in the 18th and 19th centuries and wars of national liberation in the 20th century. Although Marxists want to end war, this can not be brought about right away. Pacifism must be rejected as a-historical and utopian.

Besides wars for national liberation waged by colonial or oppressed peoples, there were other wars which Marxists could not oppose and must in fact support. One of these was "civil war", for if one was against it or forgot about it, Lenin says, one was also giving up the idea of socialist revolution, which, in general, can only take place by one side (the proletariat and its allies) rising up and smashing the bourgeois state, and this is bound to give rise to opposition on the part of the bourgeoisie and its allies. A third kind of war the Marxists must not oppose is a war waged by "victorious socialism" which has triumphed in one country, against the attacks of the bourgeois states that will surround it.

These are three kinds or types of war that Lenin says the proletariat must not oppose in his 1916 article, "The Military Programme of Proletarian Revolution" (V. I. Lenin Collected Works, volume 23, p. 77): a war of national liberation, a civil war (for socialism), a war of "defence" (Engels) by "victorious socialism".

There is one type of war the proletariat must oppose in this era: imperialist war, which Lenin defined as "war between reactionary-bourgeois and historically outmoded governments, waged for the purpose of oppressing other nations." (LCW 21.305) Lenin concluded that the war that was shaping up, World War I, was an imperialist war, so that Marxists in all capitalist countries without exception (I base this on many references in Lenin's works on war, mainly in volume 21 of the collected works) should not support their own bourgeoisie in case of war, should not support the slogan "defense of the fatherland", which he considered social-chauvinism, and should raise the slogan, "turn the imperialist war into civil war." This was the "Leftist" policy earlier referred to: a policy attacked both by overt social-chauvinists and by covert ones ("Centrists") like Kautsky and Trotsky.

It might be thought there is another type of war, a colonial war, but this is merely a term that "we Europeans, the imperialist oppressors of the majority of the world's peoples, with our habitual, despicable European chauvinism" use to describe a war of national liberation.

There are then four kinds of war, for Lenin: imperialist, national-liberation, civil, and "defense" by a socialist state. It should be added that Lenin does not exclude the possibility that a given military conflagration

(say a war in Europe) might include several of the above kinds (for example, a war of national liberation taking place alongside an inter-imperialist war).

To those who argued that Lenin's policy of turning imperialist war into civil war was "not practical", Lenin replied that there were no guarantees of the success of such a policy, but that it was the only principled policy. Whether one succeeded or not was not the point. "The point is to work on those lines." (LCW 35.172) Elsewhere Lenin noted that it was incredibly difficult to pursue such a policy when much of the nation may be taken in by the bourgeoisie's call to the nation to take up arms to defend "the national honor", etc., but that the future of socialism rested on the shoulders of those Marxists who did and on their shoulders alone.

Lenin died before World War II, before the 1935 Congress of the Comintern, and before fascism had had time to unfold itself fully, but nonetheless it is useful--I would say necessary--to examine what Lenin had to say on the war issues of the day to see if they cast light on the problems that arose in connection with World War II.

In seeking "advice" from Lenin, one can find support for those who say that the Comintern pursued class-collaborationist, social-chauvinist tactics on the war issue. This is the position of PLP, the Communist Workers Group (M-L), and a number of overt Trotskyite groups. Consider the following from the same 1916 article:

The bourgeoisie of all the imperialist Great Powers--England, France, Germany, Austria, Russia, Italy, Japan, the United States--has become so reactionary and so intent on world domination, that any war waged by the bourgeoisie of those countries is bound to be reactionary. The proletariat must not only oppose all such wars, but must also wish for the defeat of its 'own' government in such wars and utilise its defeat for revolutionary insurrection, if an insurrection to prevent the war proves unsuccessful. (LCW 23.85)

This is put forward as a hypothetical plank in a "programme of reforms directed also against the opportunists" "if the worst comes to the worst--of mankind going through a second imperialist war, if revolution does not come out of the present war, in spite of the numerous outbursts of mass unrest and mass discontent and in spite of our efforts." (LCW 23.84)

As Stalin used to say, "Clear, one would think."

But: 1) again, Lenin had not seen fascism in its developed form, and 2) Lenin and the Bolsheviks were among the most persistent and consistent fighters against national oppression in all its forms. This, among other things, led Lenin to look at the case of Belgium, a small imperialist power¹ under threat of invasion or annexation:

. . .hardly anybody would risk denying that annexed Belgium, Serbia, Galicia and Armenia would call their 'revolt' against those who annexed them 'defense of the fatherland' and would do so in all justice. It looks as if the Polish comrades are against this type of revolt on the grounds that there is also a bourgeoisie in these annexed countries which also oppresses foreign peoples or, more exactly, could oppress them, since the

question is one of the 'right to oppress'. Consequently, the given war or revolt is not assessed on the strength of its real social content (the struggle of an oppressed nation for its liberation from the oppressor nation) but the possible exercise of the 'right to oppress' by a bourgeoisie which is at present itself oppressed. If Belgium, let us say, is annexed by Germany in 1917, and in 1918 revolts to secure her liberation, the Polish comrades will be against her revolt on the grounds that the Belgian bourgeoisie possess the 'right to oppress foreign peoples'!
(LCW 22.332 (1916))

Lenin is saying, at the least, that a small imperialist country can be engaged in a progressive war, a war of national liberation against a larger imperialist power.

Whether Lenin would have said that France or Britain, in the late 1930's, could also have been engaged in a progressive war, a war to repulse German invaders, is unknown. But we believe he would have.

The distinction--between imperialist war and national liberation war--is crucial. As Lenin says: "Recognition that a war is being fought for national liberation implies one set of tactics; its recognition as an imperialist war, another." ("Opportunism and the Collapse of the Second International," 1916)

III. Preparations for War, Outbreaks of War, and the Drift of CI Policy on War

In this section of the report I'll outline some of the main events that led to modification of Comintern policy.²

In this period (1928-1935) three of the most significant developments in terms of the outbreak of war were Japan's invasion of Manchuria in September 1931, the accession to power in Germany of the Nazis in January 1933, and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935. But even prior to Japan's 1931 invasion, the first major aggression by a fascist country,³ the Comintern was aware of the danger of a "new round of wars". This awareness went back principally to 1928 when the end of capitalist stabilization was diagnosed at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern. Out of the VI Congress came the resolution on "The Struggle Against Imperialist War and the Tasks of Communists."

At the end of this period, 1935, came the resolution on the war danger by the Seventh Congress of the Comintern. These two resolutions, the 1928 and the 1935, are convenient and important touchstones, bracketing this period, presenting the considered view of the world communist movement on one of the most important questions, and definitely contrasting in approach and emphasis.

The CI documents on war in and between the years 1928 and 1935 show a shift in the attitude of the CI towards various imperialist powers, reflecting major political developments in the world situation. In 1928 and for a few more years, the contradiction between American and British imperialism is seen as the chief inter-imperialist contradiction, one greatly "fraught" with the danger of war. As was mentioned in an earlier report, this contradiction was given first place in Comintern writings on the war danger. Then there were a few years, about 1931 to 1933, when a campaign was launched against France, which was seen as the chief organizer of an imperialist war of intervention against the USSR. At the same time Japan was seen as the chief instigator of

a new world war by its invasion of Manchuria in September 1931. France was plotting, Japan had acted. Sometimes the two were linked, Japan said to be attacking in the East, France preparing the attack in the West. In this period began the tremendous attention to the need to defend the Soviet state against attack by the imperialists. Other tasks were not neglected (e.g., support for wars of national liberation), but this particular task was given extremely high priority. Then, after the Nazis gained power in Germany early in 1933 and brutally consolidated their power in a short time, the main focus of attention as far as the outbreak of a new world war was concerned shifted from Asia to Europe. The Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 no doubt reinforced Comintern awareness of the rapacity of European fascism, though no major statements by the Comintern seem to have been issued immediately in the wake of that attack.

During the course of these seven years, there was a definite modulation of Comintern policy on the question of war. The 1928 CI resolution stands strongly against imperialist war, for converting imperialist war into civil war, for supporting wars of national liberation in the colonies, and for opposition to imperialist war against the USSR. All major imperialist powers are considered the enemy; differences between major imperialist powers are not dwelt on, rather their similarity is; all major imperialist powers are condemned, regardless of which might happen to be the aggressor in a war; differences between bourgeois democracies and fascist states are not considered significant in relation to the war issue. By contrast, the 1935 CI resolution stands strongly against imperialist war and for peace, for opposition to war against the USSR, for support for wars of national liberation, for mobilization of a broad united front against the fascist aggressor states. Differences between the major imperialist powers are gone into; the aggressor fascist states are vehemently attacked, other imperialist states like the U.S. and Britain are judged to be interested in maintaining the status quo, in avoiding war.

The differences in approach and emphasis of the two resolutions, and of Comintern policy in the respective years, reflect a growing awareness of the nature and danger of fascism and the profound changes in communist strategy and tactics that its development called for, at least in the eyes of the Seventh Congress.

In the rest of this section I'll outline some of the major outbreaks of war and related developments, including Comintern resolutions.

1928 July-September VI Congress CI: "Resolution on The Struggle Against Imperialist War and the Tasks of Communists."

1929 Several statements by the Comintern on the war danger. In May, a statement by the W. European Bureau of the ECCI on the conference of European Communist Parties in preparation for an international anti-war day. (Degras, vol. 3, p. 26) A May Day manifesto by the ECCI:

The world is now entering upon the stage of colonial revolutions which, combined with the proletarian revolutionary movement of the West, will undermine the foundations of capitalist society. Although the new high tide is only beginning, in contradistinction to the revolutionary movements of the past, it is not merely of a European character, its tendency

is to become a world movement. Ever-growing human reserves are being involved in the conflict on an ever wider international front. The next sharp crisis in the world economy may create a direct revolutionary situation in the immediate future in a number of advanced capitalist countries. (Degras 3.25)

Also in 1929, a resolution of the Tenth Plenum of the ECCI on "The International Day of Struggle Against Imperialist War". Rallies were held in a number of countries on August 1, 1929. Based on Degras, it seems these rallies were not generally successful; they didn't mobilize sufficient numbers of people.

1930 The tempo of national liberation quickened in this year as major revolts occurred in India, Indochina, Burma, the Philippines, and other countries. The Soviet revisionists' Outline History of the Communist International describes some of the developments:

India had embarked on a campaign of civil disobedience to the colonial authorities. Mass participation of the workers, peasants and city poor gave this campaign a militant character. In 1930 an anti-imperialist revolt broke out in Chittagong and Peshawar; the workers of the big industrial centre of Sholapur rose to the struggle; they drove the representatives of the British authorities and the local police out of the city, set up organs of revolutionary self-government and fought sanguinary battles with the troops which lasted several days; the popular uprising against the colonialists spread to the North-West Frontier Province. The liberation struggle of the Indian people was met with mass repressions by the colonialists. Over 60,000 patriots were arrested in 1930, including the leaders of the national-reformist party--the Indian National Congress--with Gandhi at their head. The majority of the NC leadership, frightened by the magnitude and character of the mass movement and interested in securing certain concessions from the British authorities, made a deal with the colonialists. The more consistent champions of India's independence--the Communists--came out strongly against the reformists' deal with the colonial authorities. . . The anti-imperialist movement became more active in Indochina too. In 1930 the Vietnam garrison at Fort Ienbai (North Vietnam) and several other local military units rose against the French colonialists. The latter succeeded in quelling these sporadic outbreaks. Presently, the peasants in a number of districts in Central Vietnam, under the leadership of the Communists, took the power into their hands, set up Soviets and confiscated the landed estates. The rule of the people here lasted three months. The colonialists employed the most brutal means of suppression against the peasant insurgents, including the bombing of the rebel villages. The authorities succeed in arresting the leadership of the Communist Party of Indochina. In the period 1930-1931 Burma was shaken by an anti-feudal and anti-imperialist peasant war. During this period the demonstration of the working people of Egypt against the British colonialists twice developed into armed uprisings. The peasants of the Philippines rose in arms to free their country from American imperialism. In 1933 unrest occurred among the Indonesian sailors in the ships of the Dutch Navy. (Outline History, pp. 300-301)

1931 April. Resolution by the XI Plenum of the ECCI on the danger of a

war of intervention against the USSR. The French bourgeoisie is considered "the chief organizers of the anti-Soviet war".

September. Japan invaded Manchuria.

In 1932 the war danger was aggravated by Japan. Perceiving that, owing to the economic crisis, the European powers and the USA were wholly engrossed in their domestic affairs, the Japanese imperialists decided to seize the opportunity and bring pressure to bear on poorly defended China, in an attempt to subjugate her and to lord it over the country. Unscrupulously exploiting 'local incidents' they themselves had provoked, the Japanese imperialists, like robbers, without declaring war on China, marched their troops into Manchuria. The Japanese soldiery seized the whole of Manchuria, thereby preparing a convenient place d'armes for the conquest of North China and for an attack on the USSR. Japan withdrew from the League of Nations in order to leave her hands free, and began to arm at a feverish pace. . . Thus, in the Far East, thanks to the Japanese fascist imperialists, there arose the first seat of war. (History of the CPSU (B), p. 301)

November. ECCI Manifesto on the 14th anniversary of the Russian revolution:

The imperialists are bent on finding a way out of the crisis at the expense of the Soviet Union. The military and political preparations for intervention against the Soviet Union, which do not cease for a single day, have now been supplemented by a financial blockade. The organization of the anti-Soviet front on the broadest possible basis is the subject of all the secret conversations in Paris, London, and New York. The war which has begun in China is a further step in the direction of war against the Soviet Union.

Working people of the world!

Defend with your life the Soviet Union, the only fatherland of the workers of all countries. Use every means at your command to protect the victorious construction of socialism . . .

Capitalist or revolutionary way out of the crisis. These are the only alternatives placed before you by history. (Degras 3.180)

1932 September. Resolution by the XII Plenum of the ECCI on the war in the Far East and the tasks of communists in the struggle against imperialist war and military intervention against the USSR:

1. The period of relative stability in international relations has ended. The attack of Japanese imperialism on China which is taking place with the full and open support of France and with the secret support of England, marks the beginning of a new imperialist war. The struggle for the re-division of the world, sharpened as the result of the world economic crisis, is expressed by the intensification of all the contradictions within the imperialist system. The intensification of the main contradiction(s) in the camp of imperialism--the contradiction between the USA and Great Britain, the sharpening of the conflict between the USA and Japan, the extreme intensification of the struggle around the Versailles system between France and Germany, and between Poland and Germany around the questions of Danzig, the Polish corridor, and the question of East Prussia, the sharpening of the struggle between French and Italian im-

perialism and in connection with all these facts the regroupings of imperialist powers which is taking place--all these are leading to the outbreak of new military conflicts. The attitude of the League of Nations towards the Japanese attack on China once again plainly shows that the League of Nations serves as an instrument of war and intervention in the hands of French and British imperialism. In opposing the occupation of Manchuria, the USA is pursuing its own imperialist aims of securing a 'fair redistribution of spheres of influence' in the Far East . . .

2. The intensification of the imperialist antagonisms is increasing the tendency in the camp of imperialism to settle these antagonisms at the expense of the USSR . . .

3. . . . The sharpening of all forms of bourgeois dictatorship, the strengthening of reaction, the growth of fascism, the persecution of the revolutionary movement, shootings and hangings, are already the preparation of the rear for an imperialist war and military intervention against the USSR.

The twelfth Plenum of the ECCI is of the opinion that the main task of all communist parties is to organize and lead the struggle of the workers, peasants and all the toilers for the defence of China and the Chinese revolution, for the defence of the fatherland of the workers of all countries, the USSR, against the closely approaching intervention and for the defence of the toilers of capitalist countries against a new imperialist war. (Degras 3.240-241)

1933 January. Nazis win power in Germany.

June. European Anti-Fascist Workers Congress held in Paris.

December. XIII Plenum of the ECCI theses on "Fascism, the War Danger, the the Tasks of Communist Parties." It was here that the 'classic' definition of fascism was put forward: "Fascism is the open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist elements of finance capital."

The growth of fascism and its coming into power in Germany and in a number of other capitalist countries means:

(a) that the revolutionary crisis and the indignation of the broad masses against the rule of capital is growing;

(b) that the capitalists are no longer able to maintain their dictatorship by the old methods of parliamentarism and of bourgeois democracy in general;

(c) that, moreover, the methods of parliamentarism and bourgeois democracy in general are becoming a hindrance to the capitalists both in their internal politics (the struggle against the proletariat) and in their foreign politics (war for the imperialist redistribution of the world);

(d) that in view of this, capital is compelled to pass to open terrorist dictatorship within the country and to unrestrained chauvinism in foreign politics, which represents direct preparation for imperialist wars.

(Degras 3.296-297)

In section II of the theses, the ECCI speaks of the "flames of a new world war" flaring up in the Pacific; the trouble provoked by "the fascist government of Germany" in Europe, which has become "a powder-magazine"; the uncompromising support of social-democracy for "the imperialist interests of

its own bourgeoisie"; and the tasks of the communist parties. These are: "A. The Fight Against Fascist Ideology," "B. The Fight Against the Fascization of the Bourgeois Governments and Against War," "C. Against Social-Democracy and For a United Front from Below," "D. The Tasks of Mass Work and the Strengthening of the Communist Parties," and "E. For a Revolutionary Way Out of the Crisis--For a Soviet Government." Specifically in reference to 'B.," "In fighting against war, the communists must prepare even now for the transformation of the imperialist war into civil war, and concentrate their forces in each country at the vital parts of the war machine of imperialism." In reference to section 'E.,' "It is necessary with all insistence to raise the question of power in the mass work of the communist parties. The chief slogan of the Communist International is: Soviet power." (Degras 3.301-306)

1934 Austria. Degras summarizes the events as follows:

The Austrian Government, attempting to maintain itself against the growth of the Austrian Nazi movement, and unwilling to offend its right-wing supporters by conciliating the social-democrats, was coming to rely more and more on the para-military right-wing Heimwehr. On 11 February 1934 the socialist mayor of Vienna was forced to hand over his powers for maintenance of security in the capital to a Public Safety Commissioner; on the 12th the socialists in Linz resisted the Heimwehr auxiliary police who attempted to search their premises and fighting broke out, and on the following day the socialists in Vienna called a general strike. This was followed by severe fighting between the social-democrats entrenched in the municipal apartment houses and regular army and police forces, as well as the Heimwehr. Fighting in Vienna, Linz, Graz, and elsewhere lasted until the evening of the 15th. Government figures gave the casualties as 102 killed on the government side, and 193 among the socialists. The socialist party put their losses in killed alone at 1,500, and this figure is generally taken as nearer the truth. The government's charge that the socialist Schutzbund had been preparing to revolt was not substantiated. The socialist party and trade unions were prohibited (the Austrian CP had been declared illegal earlier); eight socialists were executed, and about 2,000 arrested. The Vienna municipal Council, with its overwhelming socialist majority, was dissolved. (Degras 3.306)

After these events social-democrats elsewhere tried to honor the socialists who had died in the fighting, while communists refused to take this position. Communists in New York "broke up a socialist meeting called in honour of the Austrian socialists who had died in the fighting." (Degras 3.307) The CI journal wrote that Vienna had never been socialist because the social-democrats had pursued a bourgeois policy.

April. The ECCI May Day Manifesto still sees the tasks as: "To fend off fascism, to overthrow the fascist dictatorship, you ("the working masses") must break with social-democracy, unite under the fighting banner of the Communist International for the revolutionary struggle for working-class power, for a Soviet Government." (Degras 3.328)

September. The Long March began in China.

1935 August. Seventh Congress of the Comintern: "Resolution on the

Danger of a New World War." Section I, "The Preparation of War for a New Repartition of the World," outlines the military activities of Japanese imperialism, the German fascists, its ally "fascist Poland," and Italian imperialism, all of whom are the instigators of a new world war. Curiously enough, the CI still refers to "the main contradiction in the camp of the imperialists" as being "the Anglo-American antagonism which exerts its influence on all the contradictions in world politics." (Degras 3.373)
The differences between groups of imperialists states are summed up as follows:

At a time when particularly the fascist states--Germany, Poland, Hungary, Italy--are openly striving for a new repartition of the world and a change in the frontiers of Europe, there is a tendency among a number of other countries to maintain the status quo. At the present time this tendency is represented on a world scale by the United States; in Europe, primarily by France; the efforts of these two leading imperialist powers to maintain the status quo are supported by several smaller countries (the Little Balkan Ententes, some of the Baltic states), whose independence is threatened by a new imperialist war. (Degras 3.373)

The Little Entente consisted of Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Rumania. In 1934 Greece, Rumania, Turkey, and Yugoslavia signed a pact guaranteeing the security of their frontiers. This was the Balkan Entente. Albania and Bulgaria did not sign the pact. The Baltic states alluded to are probably Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania.

In the second section of the resolution, "The Role of the Soviet Union in the Struggle for Peace," the Soviet policy is described as follows:

The peace policy of the USSR has not only upset the plans of the imperialists to isolate the Soviet Union, but has laid the basis for its cooperation in the cause of the preservation of peace with the small states to whom war represents a special danger, by placing their independence in jeopardy, as well as with those governments which at the present moment are interested in the preservation of peace. (Degras 3.374)

In the third section, "The Tasks of the Communist International in the Struggle for Peace and Against Imperialist War," the main tasks of "the communist parties, the revolutionary workers, toilers, peasants and oppressed peoples of the whole world" are "1. The struggle for peace and for the defence of the USSR," "2. The United people's front in the struggle for peace and against the instigators of war," "3. The combination of the struggle against imperialist war with the struggle against fascism," "4. The struggle against militarism and armaments," "5. The Struggle against chauvinism," and "6. The national liberation struggle and the support of wars of national liberation."

After outlining the struggle against "the bestial chauvinism of the national-socialist parties and all other fascist parties," the CI goes on to say (under point 5 above):

At the same time the communists must show that the working class carries on a consistent struggle in defence of the national freedom and independence of all the people against any oppression or exploitation, because only the communist policy defends to the very end the national freedom and

independence of the people of one's country.

Point 6 reads:

If any weak state is attacked by one or more big imperialist powers which want to destroy its national independence and national unity or to dismember it, as in the historic instance of the partition of Poland, a war conducted by the national bourgeoisie of such a country to repel this attack may assume the character of a war of liberation, in which the working class and the communists of that country cannot abstain from intervening. It is the task of the communists of such a country, while carrying on an irreconcilable struggle to safeguard the economic and political positions of the workers, toiling peasants and national minorities, to be, at the same time, in the front ranks of the fighters for national independence and to fight the war of liberation to a finish, without allowing 'their' bourgeoisie to strike a bargain with the attacking powers to the prejudice of the interests of their country. (Degras 3,377)

The fourth section of the resolution, "From the Struggle for Peace to the Struggle for Revolution," remarks:

The Seventh World Congress of the Communist International most determinedly repudiates the slanderous contention that communists desire war, expecting it to bring revolution . . .

The communists, while fighting also against the illusion that war can be eliminated while the capitalist system still exists, are exerting and will exert every effort to prevent war. Should a new imperialist world war break out, despite all efforts of the working class to prevent it, the communists will strive to lead the opponents of war, organized in the struggle for peace, to the struggle for the transformation of the imperialist war into civil war against the fascist instigators of war, against the bourgeoisie, for the overthrow of capitalism . . .

At the present historical juncture, when on one-sixth part of the globe the Soviet Union defends socialism and peace for all humanity, the most vital interests of the workers and toilers of all countries demand that in pursuing the policy of the working class, in waging the struggle for peace, the struggle against imperialist war before and after the outbreak of hostilities, the defence of the Soviet Union must be considered paramount. (Degras 3,377-378)

October. Italy invaded Ethiopia.

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The above selection does not present a complete, rounded view of CI views during this period. It does identify some of the main outbreaks of war and preparations for war, and it points to the main Comintern statements, including some of the views which represent a departure from the Comintern statements of 1928.

IV. Some Problems of Comintern and CPSU Policy on War

A. The Nature of the developing worldwide war

As mentioned earlier, Lenin analyzed the several kinds of war that were possible in the period of imperialism and gave guidelines for the attitude of Marxism towards each kind. In this period (1928-1935), both the VI Congress of the Comintern and the VII Congress gave their views of how war was developing throughout the world. The respective resolutions of these Congresses, the earlier in 1928 and the later in 1935, represent the most authoritative statements on the war issue by the highest body of the world communist movement, the World Congress. They present the Congress' analysis of the situation and outline the tasks ahead, in the perspective from which the problems are to be attacked. The two resolutions show quite different outlooks on the world situation and how the communist movement should meet the threat of war.

The resolution of the VI Congress leaves no doubt that it is an imperialist war that is developing and that this war does not differ in principle from World War I. The title of the first section, for example, is "The Menace of Imperialist War." The war preparations of the bourgeoisie of both fascist and non-fascist states are pointed out, with no particular attempt to single out the German or Japanese bourgeoisies as an enemy any worse than the bourgeoisies of the other large imperialist states. The slogan from World War I, "transform the imperialist war into civil war" is discussed in the context of work by the proletariat "in all the belligerent countries." ("The Struggle Against Imperialist War and the Tasks of Communists," 1928, MLOC reprint, p. 20) Since a socialist state has come into existence, the 1928 CI resolution devotes a section to "The Proletariat Defends the Soviet Union Against the Imperialists." It recognizes the possibility--more accurately, the likelihood--of a war against the Soviet Union by the imperialist states; that is, another of the kinds of war Lenin identified, a war in defense of "victorious socialism". In view of the existence of this new factor since World War I (the existence of a socialist state) and given a situation before imperialist war had broken out, the CI held that "the principal and central agitational slogans must be: 'Defense of the Soviet Union,' 'Support the revolutionary struggle in colonial and subject countries,' 'Fight against imperialist war.'" ("The Struggle," p.61) Those slogans indicate that the VI Congress saw the importance of the revolutionary movement in the colonies. The resolution contains a section on these struggles, "The Proletariat Supports and Conducts Wars of Oppressed Peoples Against Imperialism." That is, the resolution recognizes the importance in the period of the fourth kind of war Lenin discussed, wars of national liberation.

Overall, the resolution takes up the four kinds of war, views them as developing in the current world situation, and shows the relations among the different kinds. Imperialist war is first gone into, including the fight against it before its outbreak and its transformation into civil war after its outbreak. Then war in defense of the socialist state and wars of national liberation are analyzed. No one of these kinds is stressed in relation to the others. The three kinds of war the proletariat supports are seen as component parts of the struggle waged by the working class on the outbreak of imperialist war. In regard to peace, it is mentioned that communists don't desire war but that they believe it is inevitable as long as capitalism exists. Nonetheless, prior to war, the communists "wage a persistent fight against imperialist war and strive to prevent imperialist war by proletarian revolution."

("The Struggle," p. 12) There is a section toward the end of the resolution titled "The Proletariat's Attitude Towards the Question of Disarmament and the Fight Against Pacifism." This is indicative of the tone of the resolution as a whole: the possibility of continuing "peace" when imperialist powers still exist is treated realistically; it is not inflated.

The resolution of the VII Congress is titled "The Tasks of the Communist International in Connection with the Preparations of the Imperialists for a New World War." (VII Congress of the Communist International, Abridged Stenographic Report of Proceedings, p. 587) In the first section ("The Preparation of War for a New Partition of the World"), Japan, Italy, and Germany are described as the chief instigators of a new war, which the resolution calls "a new imperialist war." (Proceedings, p. 589) Here, by contrast with the 1928 resolution, while other bourgeoisies are attacked (the British, the Polish), there is great emphasis on certain countries--the future Axis powers.

Immediately, in the second section, we find the resolution's stress on "peace" and its prolongation. In this section the topic is not a war of defense of the Soviet Union, which might be expected in this place, but "The Role of the Soviet Union in the Struggle for Peace." The thrust of these paragraphs is that because of the might of the Soviet state the bourgeoisie has been somewhat restrained; the USSR has begun to play a different role, one in particular that "means the defence of the national independence of small nations," among other roles. This refers to the series of defense pacts that the USSR worked out with various small states in the 1920s and 1930s.⁴ The next two sections of the resolution also make a point of accenting the "struggle for peace" and overall give the impression that the Congress overestimated the role that the USSR and communists in capitalist countries could play in the maintenance of the "status quo." At the same time, the defense of the Soviet Union is gone into and in fact is elevated, along with the "struggle for peace", to the position of being the first of the "main tasks" of the Communist parties, "the revolutionary workers, the labouring people, peasants and oppressed nations of the whole world." (Proceedings, p. 591)

So far the Congress has recognized two kinds of war, imperialist and in defense of the Soviet Union, but while these stand forth clearly in the 1928 resolution they are somewhat clouded by a miasma of peace in the 1935 resolution.

Wars of national liberation are also taken up as the last point in section III, "The Tasks of the Communist International in the Struggle for Peace and Against Imperialist War." The first case dealt with is that of "any weak state" "attacked by one or more big imperialist powers which want to destroy its national independence." As an example Poland is cited. A second paragraph takes up specifically "the national liberation struggle of the oppressed peoples of the colonial and semi-colonial countries." (Proceedings, p. 593) The order is perhaps not significant but nonetheless the contrast with the 1928 resolution is evident. The 1935 resolution opens the possibility of whole states in Europe being threatened with "dismemberment." There is no doubt that this was a real possibility, as the German invasions in a few years proved.

The 1928 resolution, after first discussing the national liberation struggle in China and other colonial or semi-colonial countries, also turns to

Europe, but it considers that the national liberation struggles that will develop there will not be of countries like Poland, Czechoslovakia, Spain, etc. Rather:

In view of the numerous oppressed nationalities and national minorities existing in a number of states in Europe, set up by the Versailles Treaty, the question of national revolutionary war will come up prominently, also in Europe, particularly in relation to the task of transforming imperialist war into civil war. Poland and Roumania cruelly oppress with a bloody hand the White Russian, Ukrainian and Bessarabian populations in their territories, who look longingly towards their Soviet fatherland. In Czechoslovakia and in the Balkan countries, in Italy, in France, Spain, Belgium, and Great Britain (Ireland), there are also oppressed nationalities. The Communist Parties must support the liberation movement of the oppressed nations and the national minorities in all these countries, lead them in the revolutionary struggle against imperialism and unreservedly champion their right to self-determination, which must include the right to complete separation. In the event of an imperialist war, or an anti-Soviet war being declared, the Communists, in the course of carrying out this policy, must prepare themselves, and the nationally oppressed masses, for national revolutionary rebellions, or wars, against the imperialist bourgeoisie. ("The Struggle," pp. 33-34)

Given the threat of German and Italian fascism, the VII Congress has moved the focus of national liberation to a larger geo-political canvas: defending "weak states" against the strong German and Italian "aggressor" states. In the process, both the conversion of imperialist war into civil war in these "weak states" and the national liberation movement within those states, which the 1928 resolution links, are placed in the background.

Usage in the 1928 resolution contradicts the general understanding in the present Marxist-Leninist movement in the U.S. on the application of the right to self-determination. Apparently without making detailed analyses in all the countries the resolution mentions (which would have been quite a task), the Comintern stands for the right to self-determination for "oppressed nations and the national minorities in all these countries." Yet Lenin and Stalin made great efforts to working out the theoretical differences between nations and national minorities and, in my understanding, applied the right to self-determination only to nations, not to national minorities (most especially "fiction(s) bereft of a territory"--Stalin). Trotsky, hardly ever a reliable source, maintained in a conversation in English in the 1930's that the Bolsheviks had always championed the right of self-determination for nations and national minorities.⁵ The Bay Area Communist Union has lately championed the breaking down of the distinction, citing alleged "nation building" practiced by the CPSU under socialist construction. This would seem to be a clear distortion of the facts by the glib BACU theorists.⁶ It's my view that the 1928 resolution is incorrect to call for the right to self-determination for national minorities, which muddles the issue, but is correct to call for the struggle of these national minorities against the particular oppression they suffer at the hands of "their" bourgeoisies as a part of the struggle of the proletariat in the country to overthrow that bourgeoisie. Even where overthrow of the bourgeoisie is not an immediate prospect, the proletariat must support the struggle of oppressed nationalities for democratic rights in these countries.

On the larger question of whether the VII Congress was correct to broaden the canvas, I believe this was essential, but in doing so the VII Congress made grave errors. This will be gone into in later reports.

What follows is an exploration of some of the particular questions that arose in the context of the developing worldwide war.

B. Was it correct for the CPSU and Comintern to define some imperialist countries as "the aggressors"?

One of the criticisms of the CPSU and CI that has been made, by Trotskyites and others, is that it was incorrect to define some imperialist powers as aggressors and others not. The criticism is based on the Bolshevik policy during World War I, when it was argued that it was wrong to define aggressor and non-aggressor states among the imperialist countries. The question in imperialist war, it was held, was not who attacked first, but what was the social content of the war:

For example, if tomorrow, Morocco were to declare war on France, or India on Britain, or Persia or China on Russia, and so on, these would be 'just' and 'defensive' wars, irrespective of who would be the first to attack; any socialist would wish the oppressed, dependent and unequal states victory over the oppressor, slave-holding and predatory 'Great' Powers. (LCW 21.300-301, 1915)

This refers to attacks by non-imperialist states, but the reasoning, insofar as an aggressor was concerned, held in inter-imperialist conflicts. In wars between the large imperialist powers, it was to be a "plague on both your houses."

The 1928 resolution cited above takes a position consistent with the early Bolshevik view:

Mere formal taken, e.g. offensive or defensive war, cannot serve as a substitute for a concrete test of the character of a given war. In an imperialist war like that of 1914 this criterion is generally senseless, and serves only to deceive the masses. However, in wars waged by imperialists against revolutionary powers, it is necessary to view this criterion not in the strategical, but rather in the historico-political sense. The question primarily, is not, who is the aggressor, who is waging an unjust war, but, who represents reaction, the counter-revolution and exploitation; who is on the imperialist side, and against the national proletarian revolution? An example of the wrong application of the argument of the offensive war was furnished by the French Socialists in 1925 when they supported the French war against the insurgents of Morocco, because the latter was (sic) supposed to have 'started first'. A similar attitude was taken by the labor imperialists in England in regard to intervention in China in 1927 ('protection of British life and property'). ("The Struggle," p. 11)

By July of 1933, though, the USSR, as part of its plan to restrain the German and Italian fascists and their allies, signed a "Convention for the Definition of Aggression" alongside a number of states bordering it and through which Germany and Italy might push in an attack on the Soviet Union.

These were Rumania, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Turkey, Persia, and Afghanistan. Article 2 of the Convention defines an aggressor state in conventional terms: that state which first declares war upon another state, invades with its armed forces, sets up a naval blockade, etc. (The Soviet Union and the Path to Peace, p. 186)

This use of the term was not confined to diplomatic maneuvering by the Soviet representatives but instead became an integral part of Comintern leadership thinking and writing. The fascist states were repeatedly called the aggressor states; the non-fascist, or bourgeois democratic, ones were not so branded. After the Seventh Congress of the CI, Dimitrov defended the position that had been arrived at on this question and was put forward at the Congress:

It is really ridiculous when 'Left' phrasemongers of various kinds oppose these tactics, adopting the pose of irreconcilable revolutionaries. If we are to believe them, all governments are aggressors. They even quote Lenin, who, during the imperialist war of 1914-18, correctly rejected the argument of the social chauvinists that 'we were attacked and we are defending ourselves.' But the world at that time was divided into two military-imperialist coalitions which were equally striving to establish their world hegemony, and which had equally prepared and provoked the imperialist war. At that time there were neither countries where the proletariat was in power nor countries with a fascist dictatorship. But now the situation is different. Now we have: 1) a proletarian state which is the greatest bulwark of peace; 2) definite fascist aggressors; 3) a number of countries which are in direct danger of attack by fascist aggressors and in danger of losing their state and national independence; 4) other capitalist governments which are interested at the present moment in the preservation of peace. It is therefore, completely wrong now to depict all countries as aggressors. Only people who are trying to conceal the real aggressors can distort the facts in such a manner."

(Georgi Dimitrov, For a United and Popular Front, Sofia, p. 238. The article from which the quote was taken was published in May 1936.)

The RCP, one of the few groups on the Left to even begin to deal with the issues raised by the VII Congress--something they should have done before they formed their 'party'--criticizes this view in the article mentioned earlier. They say:

The speech (Stalin's at the 18th Party Congress in 1939) continued the Soviet tendency, also current in the Comintern, to portray the imperialist powers as falling into two categories, 'aggressor states' and 'non-aggressor democratic states.' This summed up certain characteristics but tended to raise them as absolutes, without sufficiently identifying both types as imperialist and inevitably bound to defend and expand their interests by means of war when they could no longer do so by peaceful forms of politics. (The Communist, Vol. 2, number 1, pp. 44-45, published by the Revolutionary Communist Party)

And also:

Two closely related errors were made despite some cautions raised at the (VII) Congress (of the Comintern). The contradictions in the imperialist camp which gave rise to two distinct groups of powers were lifted out of

the arena of classes; instead they came to be defined simply as 'aggressor' and 'non-aggressor' states, which tended to cover the thoroughly imperialist--moribund, vicious, exploitative, predatory--nature of the 'non-aggressors'. (same issue, p. 67)

Evaluation. There are two related subjects here: Soviet diplomacy and Marxist (communist) analysis of conditions. The two overlap, but each has its own sphere. Diplomacy between a socialist state and the capitalist world and the Marxist analysis of what is going on "below" the diplomacy cannot, or should not, be identical. Otherwise, communist strategy and tactics disappear. Early Bolshevik foreign policy in the post-1917 period was based on the viewpoint that the Soviet Union would have to 'say one thing and mean another' equivocate, sometimes lie outright in order to further the interests of the proletariat on the world 'stage'--just as the imperialist countries routinely do for the interests of the old ruling classes.

It seems to me it was legitimate of the Soviet diplomats, on behalf of the Soviet state, to enter into the Convention for the Definition of Aggression. This was part of a plan to help the USSR secure its frontiers against imperialist invasion, insofar as they could be secured through treaties. Treaties are only paper, but still the utilization of them was proper and a necessity for the USSR in the pre-World War II period. Only by such maneuvering, with small states (as in the Convention) and large ones was the Soviet Union able to postpone the imperialist attack that eventually did take place on it, giving it valuable time to increase its strength and preparedness (though some criticisms of Stalin's policy in this area have also been raised, by Mao among others). Given the fact that there were rabidly expansionist states in Europe and the independence of small (and large) nations was threatened, the utilization of the concept of the aggressor in a diplomatic pact designed to resist this expansionism and threat to national independence seems correct.

The other related area is the actual Marxist analysis of conditions and the conclusions about strategy and tactics drawn from the analysis. It is clear that the distinction between aggressor and non-aggressor states permeated the thinking of the leadership of the Comintern from at least 1934. The distinction, in fact, became the basis of their tactical and strategic approach to the tasks of the Communist parties in the developing worldwide war. Is this approach, the one Dimitrov put forward at the Congress and defended in the 1936 article cited above, a Leninist position?

There is no doubt Dimitrov and the other Comintern leaders wanted to be consistent with Lenin's policy during World War I. Dimitrov cites Lenin, claiming that conditions have changed radically. The changes include the existence of a proletarian state, fascist aggressors as compared with "other capitalist governments" interests for the present "in the preservation of peace", and the existence of a "number of countries" "in danger of losing their state and national independence".

The existence of a socialist state is certainly a new factor and it modifies the tasks of the proletariat both within the socialist state and within the capitalist countries. For now the task is not simply the conversion of imperialist war into civil war in all the belligerent countries. The proletariat and its allies in the one socialist state must go all out to defend the nation,

and the proletariat and its allies in the capitalist countries must give all aid and support they can muster for the defense of the socialist state. In this context, certain countries might, and did, present a greater threat to the territory of the socialist state. Germany, not the USA, was a distinct and severe threat to the several republics of the USSR and the USSR as a whole. Here was one instance in which the distinction between aggressor and non-aggressor states did correspond to the material conditions, and it was obligatory to point this out.

Another new factor cited by Dimitrov is the existence of a number of countries vulnerable to occupation (conquest) by the "fascist aggressors." This will be looked at in the next question, on "defense of the fatherland." Here it will just be pointed out that in the context of World War I the Bolsheviks were strongly attacking the opportunist use of the idea of "defense of the fatherland" and saw no applicability of the other side of the contradiction: whether certain states were aggressors. In the context of pre-World War II Europe (and elsewhere), the Bolshevik leadership brought to the forefront the necessity of defense of the fatherland, both in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, and accordingly made use of the concept of the aggressor, believing it reflected material reality.

The third factor--actually two factors as presented by Dimitrov--involves the distinction between certain imperialist states, the "fascist aggressors" and those seemingly more interested for a time in the preservation of the status quo. It is here that Dimitrov and the VII Congress seem to be on the shakiest ground. The distinction opens the way to a further differentiation between the two groups of countries or blocs. As Dimitrov said, "Any attempt to gloss over the differences between fascist and non-fascist countries must be exposed." (the same article from May 1936) Dimitrov can certainly not be accused of doing that. In fact, Dimitrov and the others did broaden the distinction in their development of the new "tactical" orientation--the Popular Front. There will be a separate report on strategy and tactics in relation to the Third Period (1928-1933) and the turn at the VII Congress (1935). Here I want to explore a few aspects of the basis of the new so-called "tactical" orientation.

In relation to the defense of the Soviet Union, it is implicit in the distinction between aggressors and non-aggressors that the Soviet Union may and should enter into tactical alliances not only with small states that may become the victims of fascist aggression but with large capitalist states which are not practicing the same expansionist policy. This possibility was fully realized in the USSR's alliance with several bourgeois-democratic 'Great' Powers in World War II.

Also in relation to the defense of the Soviet Union, but "peripherally," within the capitalist countries, the distinction between aggressor and non-aggressor states has definite implications. For now the question was raised, doesn't "our" country have a role to play in the defense of the Soviet Union, in resistance to fascist aggression, and as the CI harped on, in defense of "peace"? If so, what is our attitude towards "our" bourgeoisie--in France, Belgium, Norway, Holland, etc. This in itself brought some confusion, and opportunist conclusions were often drawn.

Additionally, implicit in the distinction--staring one in the face--was

the perspective that there was some fundamental difference between the rule of the bourgeoisie in the fascist states and in the bourgeois-democratic states. Not only were the fascist countries aggressors, they were presented as "bestial," lacking all civilization, etc., while those countries which had preserved bourgeois-democratic forms, however restricted, were viewed in a favorable light. "Democracy" was contrasted to "fascism," the fight to retain democratic rights that had been won in the bourgeois democracies was emphasized, and finally defense of bourgeois democracy itself was put on the agenda. That is, a two-stage revolution in imperialist countries was written into the strategic approach of the communist parties. Here, too, in other words, opportunist conclusions were drawn from a legitimate distinction.

C. "Defense of the nation"

While Lenin argued against "defense of the fatherland" in the imperialist war of 1914-1918, he did not hold that defense of the nation in all circumstances was incorrect:

To accept 'defence of the fatherland' in the present war is no more nor less than to accept it as a 'just' war, a war in the interests of the proletariat--no more nor less, we repeat, because invasions may occur in any war. It would be sheer folly to repudiate 'defence of the fatherland' on the part of oppressed nations in their wars against the imperialist Great Powers, or on the part of a victorious proletariat in its war against some Galliffet of a bourgeois state." (LCW 23.80, 1916)

These views of Lenin on two kinds of "defence of the fatherland" were upheld by the Comintern up to 1928, up to 1935, and later--throughout its existence. Wars of oppressed nations against large imperialist powers and war in defense of the Soviet Union were not at the heart of the controversy.

Difficulties develop in relation to countries which were not oppressed nations, were themselves oppressor nations, and in the developing war might become invaded and occupied. That is, small and large European imperialist countries: Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland; France, Britain.

Lenin's views on two aspects of the question will be briefly explored here. One has to do with "defense of the nation" in a capitalist country in the light of the policy leading up to the war and the consequent nature of the war. The other concerns the attitude of Marxism towards democracy under imperialism.

Lenin had respect for Clausewitz, the bourgeois writer on military affairs who said that war was the continuation of policy by other means. In this vein Lenin wrote:

How, then, can we disclose and define the 'substance' of a war? War is the continuation of policy. Consequently, we must examine the policy pursued prior to the war, the policy that led to and brought about the war. If it was an imperialist policy, i.e., one designed to safeguard the interests of finance capital and rob and oppress colonies and foreign countries, then the war stemming from that policy is imperialist. If it was a national liberation policy, i.e., one expressive of the mass movement against national oppression, then the war stemming from that policy

is a war of national liberation. (LCW 23.23)

Lenin held that in the pre-world war I period an examination of the policy of Switzerland and Belgium, two small capitalist, imperialist countries, showed there were absolutely no grounds for viewing the policy of those bourgeoisies as one "expressive of the mass movement against national oppression." On the contrary, both oppressed other nations, either directly through colonies in the case of Belgium, or indirectly through ties with finance capital in other countries, as in the case of Switzerland. This is the main thrust of Lenin's position at the time: that even in small capitalist countries we should not raise defense of the fatherland because these small countries are tied in with one bloc or another of the imperialist Great Powers, and defense of them would be defense of the interests of one or another large imperialist bloc.

In this respect the earlier treatment of Lenin's views on Belgium is not representative (page of this report). While Lenin did write that defense of the fatherland would be a legitimate possibility for Belgium (and other national entities), this contradicts his treatment of Belgium elsewhere and the main thrust of his argument in relation to imperialist war.⁷ Nonetheless, the quote is clear enough on its face in seeing the validity of defense of the fatherland in a small imperialist country under certain conditions, specifically, invasion by Germany.

However, another treatment of Belgium,⁸ argues in the other direction:

The favourite plea of the social-chauvinists of the Triple (now Quadruple) Entente (in Russia, Plekhanov and Co.) is the case of Belgium. This instance, however, speaks against them. The German imperialists have brazenly violated the neutrality of Belgium, as belligerent states have done always and everywhere, trampling upon all treaties and obligations if necessary. Let us suppose that all states interested in the observance of international treaties should declare war on Germany with the demand that Belgium be liberated and indemnified. In that case, the sympathies of socialists would, of course, be with Germany's enemies. But the whole point is that the triple (and Quadruple) Entente is waging war, not over Belgium: this is common knowledge and only hypocrites will disguise the fact. Britain is grabbing at Germany's colonies and Turkey; Russia is grabbing at Galicia and Turkey, France wants Alsace-Lorraine and even the left bank of the Rhine; a treaty has been concluded with Italy for the division of the spoils (Albania and Asia Minor); bargaining is going on with Bulgaria and Rumania, also for the division of the spoils. In the present war waged by the governments of today, it is impossible to help Belgium otherwise than by helping to throttle Austria or Turkey, etc.! Where does 'defence of the fatherland' come in here?

Still, that is not the end of the matter. In the same article from volume 23 cited above, "A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism," Lenin writes:

The philistine does not realise that war is 'the continuation of policy,' and consequently limits himself to the formula that 'the enemy has attacked us', 'the enemy has invaded my country', without stopping to think what issues are at stake in the war, which classes are waging it, and with what political objects. Kievsky stoops right down to the level of such a

philistine when he declares that Belgium has been occupied by the Germans, and hence, from the point of view of self-determination, the 'Belgian social-patriots are right', or: the Germans have occupied part of France, hence, 'Guesde can be satisfied', for 'what is involved is territory populated by his nation' (and not by an alien nation).

For the philistine the important thing is where the armies stand, who is winning at the moment. For the Marxist the important thing is what issues are at stake in this war, during which first one, then the other army may be on top.

What is the present war being fought over? The answer is given in our resolution (based on the policy the belligerent powers pursued for decades prior to the war). England, France and Russia are fighting to keep the colonies they have seized, to be able to rob Turkey, etc. Germany is fighting to take over these colonies and to be able herself to rob Turkey, etc. Let us suppose even that the Germans take Paris or St. Petersburg. Would that change the nature of the present war? Not at all. The Germans' purpose--and more important, the policy that would bring it to realisation if they were to win--is to seize the colonies, establish domination over Turkey, annex areas populated by other nations, for instance, Poland, etc. It is definitely not to bring the French or the Russians under foreign domination. The real essence of the present war is not national but imperialist. In other words, it is not being fought to enable one side to overthrow national oppression, which the other side is trying to maintain. It is a war between two groups of oppressors, between two freebooters over the division of their booty, over who shall rob Turkey and the colonies. (LCW 23,33-34)

It is undeniable that in the pre-World War II situation there were contending imperialist powers, whether fascist, aggressor, or not, which had all been pursuing policies designed to strengthen their economic and political control over vast regions of the world. Britain, France, the U.S., Germany, Italy, Japan--all had been pursuing imperialist policies for decades. However, it is true that the latter three had been far more actively preparing for imperialist war, for the launching of the war through expansionist military adventures. That is a point Dimitrov makes in his argument cited earlier. Also, it seems clear that the "Germans' purpose" was no longer what Lenin perceived it to be in World War I. Now Germany had the definite intent to subjugate, rule, dismember where appropriate "Paris and St. Petersburg." The aim of the Nazis was not only to gain control of the colonies and semi-colonies of countries like France and Russia, but was first to re-mould those countries to serve the German heartland through forcible lasting occupation. It was not to defeat those countries, gain control of the colonies, then back off and let the French or Russian bourgeoisie gain any real measure of control over "its own" state. The totally subsidiary comprador role was probably the most that was envisaged for subject national capital.

If this last line of reasoning is accepted, then "defense of the nation" in a small imperialist country or even a large one (France) becomes possible. It seems to me this argument must be looked at in conjunction with the forms of bourgeois rule under imperialism, specifically the content of democracy under imperialism. This was the second aspect of Lenin's view I wanted to look at briefly.

It should be remembered that Lenin died before fascism came to power in

Germany and when it had only gotten started in Italy. He was unable to observe its full manifestation in Nazism. But Lenin did devote a lot of attention to the question of democracy, democratic rights, and the fight for reforms under imperialism. In the context of the development of World War I, Lenin took as his main tack the outmodedness of "democracy"—bourgeois democratic government—in the period of imperialism, the eve of social revolution. He had to fight the social-chauvinist "defense of the nation" by the socialists of the bourgeois democracies, which was rooted in the decades of relatively "peaceful" struggle waged by the Second International in the years before 1914. This was the primary target. On the other hand some of his writings from the same period attack those who dismiss the possibility of struggle for democratic rights under imperialism. This was his view as against Rosa Luxemburg on the question of the right of nations to self-determination, which Lenin viewed as a legitimate question of the democratic rights of a nation. Similarly, Lenin polemicized against Kievsky (Y. Pyatakov) for his "imperialist economism," which denied the possibility of meaningful struggle for democratic rights under imperialism.⁹

As one example of Lenin's views on these questions, in the same article in which he shows the necessity of struggling for democratic rights, including those of nations, under imperialism ("A Caricature of Marxism," Volume 23), he also distinguishes among "three different types of countries" in relation to self-determination:

First type: the advanced countries of Western Europe (and America), where the national movement is a thing of the past. Second type: Eastern Europe, where it is a thing of the present. Third type: semi-colonies and colonies, where it is largely a thing of the future. (LCW 23.38)

He considers the issue of the fatherland "a dead letter" in Western Europe, and "not yet quite a dead letter" in Eastern Europe:

There (Eastern Europe) the 'defence of the fatherland' can still be defence of democracy, of one's native language, of political liberty against oppressor nations, against medievalism, whereas the English, French, Germans and Italians lie when they speak of defending their fatherland in the present war, because actually what they are defending is not their native language, not their right to national development, but their rights as slave-holders, their colonies, the foreign 'spheres of influence' of their finance capital, etc.

As discussed earlier, the 1928 Congress of the Comintern took up the cause of "oppressed nations and the national minorities" in many European countries. The 1928 Resolution did not agree with Lenin in characterizing the national movement as a "dead letter" in Western Europe, as it cites France, Italy, Spain, Britain, etc. as countries oppressing nationalities within them. Of course, Lenin was referring to the accomplished states and their ruling bourgeoisies; still, it is a curious omission for him in the context of his discussion. For example, Lenin elsewhere supported independence for Ireland, one of the examples cited in the 1928 resolution. He also seemed to be of the opinion that "the Negroes in America" constituted a dependent nation.

I have also briefly taken up the treatment of national liberation struggles by the VII Congress and here want only to introduce some supple-

mentary material from the Proceedings. The report on "The Preparations for Imperialist War and the Tasks of the Communist International" was given by Ercoli, the name Togliatti used at the time.

It seems to me Togliatti is eclectic here. He stands for mutually contradictory things, not for an integral policy. He calls for "waging an irreconcilable struggle against the imperialism of our 'own' countries" (p. 405), without specifying the form. But "irreconcilable" implies: they go or we go, and the Congress resolution does once mention the need to convert imperialist war into civil war. On the other hand, on the same page (!) Togliatti argues that "the defence of democratic liberties is the central point of our united front and People's Front policy." How this is reconcilable with "irreconcilable" struggle against 'our' bourgeoisie is hard to see. In fact, Togliatti means the sacrifice of the latter for the former. Defense of democratic liberties (and bourgeois democracy) was thrust to the forefront, not as a temporary tactic but as a very long-range perspective which modulated into the "historic compromise" of the Italian CP in later years.

On national struggle in Europe, Togliatti says:

Can one not foresee what a victorious war waged by German fascism would hold in store for Europe? Such a war would mean the end of national independence for the Czechs, the Lithuanians and other small nationalities in the Baltic states, as well as for the Poles, Dutch and Belgians. All the peoples of Europe understand this. (Proceedings, p. 405)

As in the 1935 resolution, the national interests of "whole" states, rather than oppressed groups within them, are focussed on, because of the menace of National-Socialism. As I said earlier, on this point I think there is some validity to what Dimitrov and Togliatti are saying: the question of national independence of at least small capitalist states is legitimately raised.

D. Should the USSR have joined the League of Nations?

The League was founded in 1919 and from its inception the Soviet Union opposed it, just as the League opposed--tried to strangle--the first socialist state. The League was also a sham, even from the capitalists' point of view:

. . . a "great united league" of all the foremost nations of the world. Unity of this kind is a sheer fiction, a sheer fraud, a sheer lie. And we have seen--and this was a great example--that this notorious League of Nations, which attempted to hand out mandates for the government of states, to divide up the world--that this notorious alliance proved to be a soap-bubble which at once burst, because it was an alliance founded on capitalist property. (LCW 30.447)

To a proposal of the British Foreign Secretary on behalf of the League, Lenin remarked:

To this proposal we replied that we recognised no League of Nations, since we had seen its insignificance and the disregard that even its members had for its decisions. (LCW 31.323)

Lenin's vitriolic view of the League of Nations is reflected in the 1928 Comintern resolution on war, which states:

The League of Nations, founded nine years ago as an imperialist alliance in defense of the robber 'peace' of Versailles, and for the suppression of the revolutionary movement of the world, is itself more and more becoming a direct instrument for the preparation and carrying through of war against the Soviet Union. The alliances and pacts created under the protectorate of the League of Nations are direct means for camouflaging war preparations, and are themselves instruments for the preparations of war, especially war against the Soviet Union. ("The Struggle," p.6)

In the 1930's the view of the CPSU and Comintern leadership toward the League of Nations changed. In a December 1933 interview with a New York Times correspondent, Stalin replied to a question as follows:

Duranty: Is your attitude towards the League of Nations always exclusively negative?

Stalin: No, not always and not under all circumstances. You perhaps do not fully understand our point of view. In spite of Germany's and Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations—or possibly just because of it—the League may become a certain factor in retarding the outbreak of hostilities or in preventing them altogether. (!) If that is so, if the League can prove to be something of an obstacle that would make war at least somewhat more difficult and peace to some extent easier, then we shall not be against the League. Yes, if such is the course of historical events, the possibility is not excluded that we shall support the League of Nations despite its colossal shortcomings. (Stalin, Works, 13.286)

In Stalin's report to the 18th Party Congress in 1939 he put the matter this way:

In order to strengthen its international position, the Soviet Union decided to take certain other steps. At the end of 1934 our country joined the League of Nations, considering that despite its weakness the League might nevertheless serve as a place where aggressors could be exposed, and as a certain instrument of peace, however feeble, that might hinder the outbreak of war. The Soviet Union considers that in alarming times like these even so weak an international organization as the League of Nations should not be ignored. (Stalin, Problems of Leninism, Peking ed., p. 888)

Molotov discussed the issue in terms similar to Stalin's in his report at the Seventh Congress of Soviets, January 1935. (The Soviet Union and the Path to Peace, pp. 23-24) He noted that "Inasmuch as the League of Nations may now play a certain favourable part in maintaining peace, the Soviet Union could not but admit the expediency of collaborating with the League of Nations in this matter, although we are not prone to overestimate the importance of such organizations."

At the VII Congress, Togliatti (Ercoli) defended the entry of the USSR into the League, to counter "those who have expressed astonishment at the change in the Soviet Union's attitude toward the League of Nations" (Proceedings, p. 423):

The most aggressive countries have left the League of Nations: Japan in 1932, Germany in 1934; and the League of Nations, without formally amending its organization and statutes, nevertheless offers a certain obstacle to the realization of the plans of these powers and can be utilized to postpone the outbreak of war. In view of the new situation that had arisen the Soviet Union changed its attitude toward the League of Nations. The entry of the Soviet Union into the League of Nations showed the masses that the leaders of the Soviet Union are not doctrinaires, but Marxists, who correctly appraise the relation of forces existing in the capitalist world and who know how to make use of even the slightest possibility to extend their efforts in defence of peace and in the interests of the revolution.

Entering the League of Nations has received sharp criticism in recent times, too, for example, from "Left" groups in the U.S. like PL and the Communist Workers Group (M-L). CWG takes this view:

. . . Litvinov(,) took the USSR into the League of Nations. . . for the purpose, not of exposing the rotten foundations of the League, not to show that despite all their fine talk within the League the capitalist governments had no other intention than to expand their imperialist interests, not to show that imperialism inevitably leads to war, but to make the League work, to bring about a 'peaceful' solution to imperialist rivalry, to ally all the 'peace-loving nations' in collective security against the 'aggressors,' i.e. against the imperialist powers that were short-changed during WWI. That this was Litvinov's aim is fully confirmed by positions taken by him within the League and by the mutual assistance treaties. There can be no objection to a socialist state using an international body as a forum for the exposure of imperialism, to demonstrate to the workers of all countries the underlying motives behind the screen of bourgeois diplomacy . . . There is nothing at all objectionable in that. There is also nothing wrong with signing trade agreements with imperialist powers, or in concluding terms for peaceful coexistence and non-aggression treaties. These measures are essential for securing socialist construction, for safeguarding a socialist state from the efforts of imperialism to create an economic and political blockade against it, to assert the neutrality of a socialist state in relation to imperialist competition, and to propagandize the whys and wherefores of conditions that lead to imperialist war. But it is a direct violation of the interests of the world proletariat, a direct violation of Marxism-Leninism, to bind a socialist state to the defense of imperialism, to follow the Litvinov policy of accepting wholesale the terms of bourgeois diplomacy and side with one or another imperialist bloc. (CWG, "Introduction to Social-Chauvinism" (rough draft), pp. 14-15)

One of the few other comments from the U.S. Left--one by RCP--is supportive of the USSR's action:

The Soviet Union, fully aware of the difficulties, correctly chose to enter the League of Nations in 1934, summing up that the new situation required an effort to make the League as much of a force for peace as possible by struggling to apply its antiwar and anti-aggression clauses. Even the Soviet Union's best efforts would finally prove insufficient to give the League any substantial value in the fight to restrict aggression

and delay the onset of war. (The Communist, Volume 2, number 1, p. 15)

Brief evaluation. The dispute is not really about joining the League of Nations but about joining for what purpose. Even the CWG accepts that under certain conditions a socialist state should join such a body. The CWG charges that the USSR joined "to make the League work, to bring about a 'peaceful' solution to imperialist rivalry, to ally all the 'peace-loving nations' in collective security against the 'aggressors'." As is evident just from the statements cited, Stalin and other leaders did not expect "a 'peaceful' solution to imperialist rivalry." I suspect that Stalin's remark to Duranty that hostilities might be prevented altogether was a part of his 'artful diplomacy'. The USSR did not have the illusion that the League could work, that is, maintain peace indefinitely, an ostensible aim of that body. But it did try to make the League "work" to prevent the immediate outbreak of war, so as to gain time to strengthen the Soviet Union and brace it for the inevitable attack. This seems entirely correct, and I think the RCP is on target here.

As to allying "peace-loving nations" against the aggressors, there are two points to be made. First, the differences between the two groups of imperialist powers were real enough, and it was correct to try to divide them so that their full military power would not be focussed on the one socialist state. In these conditions this was an essential part of making use of contradictions among the enemy. But, second, it was opportunist to call one group of capitalist countries "peace-loving" and to put undue stress on the possibilities of continued "peace", both of which were done by Russian communist leaders, in and out of the League of Nations.

E. Were the Soviet-Czech and Soviet-French Mutual Assistance Pacts of 1935 principled?

The mutual assistance pacts of May 1935 pledged the USSR and a capitalist country (France, Czechoslovakia) to "immediately render . . . assistance and support" to each other if they became "the object of an unprovoked attack from some other European state." (The Soviet Union and the Path to Peace, p. 189, 191)

In related "Conversations" with Laval, the French foreign minister, "J.V. Stalin, in particular, expressed full understanding and approval of the policy of national defence carried out by France with the object of maintaining her armed forces on the level corresponding to the needs of her security." This is from the Statement issued after the conversations, approved by the Russian delegation and the French. (The Soviet Union and the Path to Peace, p. 194)

At the time these pacts raised criticisms and confusion in the PCF (French Communist Party) and other sections of the international. Here is a recent criticism from the U.S., the view of the CWG.

Beginning with the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance of 1935, which required military assistance should either of the signatories be invaded by a third party, the USSR was officially set on a course of direct aid to and collaboration with imperialism in the event of an imperialist war. While the various non-aggression pacts established by Litvinov and

Molotov were necessary and proper instruments of Soviet foreign policy, the mutual assistance treaties signed with France and Czechoslovakia were direct violations of Marxist-Leninist principles on Soviet state-to-state relations. Such mutual defense pacts are the norm for the creation of imperialist blocs who share like interests in relation to imperialist war, who wish to defend their imperialist interests and rally their own proletariat for that purpose. But to put a Soviet state, a state that is opposed to all imperialism, a state whose purpose is to defend the interests of the proletariat world-wide against imperialism, to put a Soviet state in a position where it may be called upon to intervene militarily on behalf of a particular imperialist power, to defend the imperialist interests of that power, is nothing short of treason to the working class. With the mutual defense treaties, the foreign policy of the USSR became a bourgeois-nationalist policy, a policy guaranteed to entangle a Soviet state in an imperialist war regardless of whether or not it had been attacked." (CWG, "Introduction to Social Chauvinism" (rough draft), p. 14)

The RCP, in its recent analysis of the events and this particular question, comes to no firm conclusion. It points out both the dangers inherent in the policy of "collective security" and also the "dangers of isolation." The mutual assistance pacts are looked at in this light, neither severely criticized nor endorsed. Really the most help it gives is in digging up some directly relevant advice on a matter of principle from Lenin:

Lenin had addressed this problem in May, 1918, when he wrote of a proposal by the Allies that the Soviets reenter the war against Germany, 'Although we do not in general reject military agreements with one of the imperialist coalitions against the other in those cases in which such an agreement could, without undermining the basis of Soviet power, strengthen its position and paralyze the attacks of any imperialist power, we cannot at the present moment enter into a military agreement with the Anglo-French coalition.'" (The Communist, Volume 2, number 1, p. 16. The Lenin quote is from LCW 27.361)

This citation from Lenin was also used by Ercoli in his report to the VII Congress of the CI, where he defends the mutual assistance pacts and even expresses "surprise" that anyone could find "strange" Stalin's declaration to Laval in support of France's policy of national defense. (Proceedings, p. 425) But neither here nor elsewhere in his report does Ercoli directly take up the criticism of pledging the socialist state to come to the defense of a beleaguered bourgeoisie in a capitalist state under attack.

Stalin also does not reply specifically to this point in his published writings to date, as far as I have been able to tell.¹⁰

Brief evaluation. Signing a mutual assistance pact with a capitalist country does, it seems to me, raise some difficult problems. It is a step beyond a non-aggression treaty in shifting the focus from defense of a socialist state to support for the defense of both a socialist and a capitalist state. The pacts that were signed probably did play a positive role in the protracted struggle to prevent the invasion of the Soviet Union, an invasion which nonetheless did finally occur in 1941. This must be recognized. But in signing the pacts, and particularly so "early," in 1935, the CPSU and the CI were in effect putting defense of the socialist state at the top of the agenda, giving

it a higher priority than the task of overthrowing the capitalist bourgeoisies with whom the treaties were made. There is little doubt that this is how the treaties were understood by the branch parties, with the encouragement of CI leadership. To a degree, of course, this policy was based on the assumption that the Soviet Union would be attacked and must be ready for the defense; implicit, but not explicitly stated, was the view that the world communist movement too was going on the defensive. The specific implication of the pacts was that in 1935 there was a greater expectation of help in the near future from the French and Czech capitalist military forces in the face of fascist expansionism than there was from the working class and its allies in overthrowing the French or Czech ruling class and turning proletarian armies against the fascists. This view may well have stemmed from a realistic estimate of the situation facing the European communist movement--and it is very difficult to make a precise estimate of this situation forty years later--but I raise as a possibility that these pacts, while not impermissible in theory (note the absolutist way CWG views this point), may have been premature and further, because of the way they were taken up and applied, did retard the development of the class struggle in Europe.

V. Footnotes

1. Lenin links Belgium with Holland in State and Revolution, both being described as small states with colonies.
2. The main source will be Jane Degras, The Communist International: 1919-1943, volume 3.
3. The Comintern recognized the importance of the invasion but did not consider Japan to be fascist, as was indicated in the report, The Bourgeois State in Crisis: Fascism.
4. World War II has been recently treated in three articles in The Communist, the theoretical journal of the RCP-USA. An article by John B. Tyler in Volume 2, number 1 attempts to outline the Soviet tactics on this point. The title is "On the Origins of World War 2".
5. "Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination," Merit Publishers, p. 19.
6. See their pamphlet, "Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-Tung Thought". BACU stands for Bay Area Communist Union.
7. It should be noted that this statement occurs in a discussion of the right of nations to self-determination, not in a discussion of imperialist war.
8. LCW 21.305.
9. I will not quote extensively here. A few places where Lenin discusses democracy under imperialism are LCW 21.35-41, 21.173f, 23.23-40, 23.254.
10. He discusses the subject of the mutual assistance treaties briefly at the 18th Party Congress. See Problems of Leninism, Peking ed., p. 888.

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