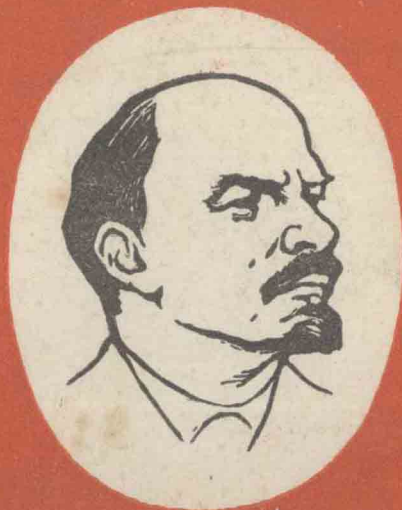


1870



1960

IN COMMEMORATION OF  
THE 90TH ANNIVERSARY OF  
THE BIRTH OF LENIN

LENIN  
ON  
WAR AND PEACE

**LENIN**  
**ON**  
**WAR AND PEACE**

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**WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!**

## CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| I. HOW MARXISTS LOOK AT WAR  | 1  |
| Unswervingly Denouncing Wars, Communists Know That Wars Are Inevitable as Long as Classes Exist    | 1  |
| War Is Politics Continued by Other Means   | 2  |
| Do Not Be Unqualified Opponents of All War; the Fundamental Question Is the Class Character of War | 7  |
| The Crime of Imperialist War Is Bound to Promote the Revolutionization of the Masses               | 14 |
| Victory or Defeat in War Is Conditioned in the Final Analysis by the Will of the Masses            | 18 |
| II. MODERN WAR IS BORN OF IMPERIALISM  | 24 |
| War Is an Inevitable Product of Capitalism   | 24 |
| Imperialist Peace Is the Continuation of the Imperialist Politics of War                           | 29 |
| Kautsky Covered Up the Class Character of War and Peace and Joined the Bourgeoisie                 | 34 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| III. THE SOCIALIST COUNTRIES CONSISTENTLY<br>STAND FOR PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE   | 37 |
| The Socialist Countries Systematically Carry On<br>a Policy of Peace  | 37 |
| To Forbid Making Any Peace at All with Im-<br>perialists Is an Unsound View   | 45 |
| The Capitalists Will Seek Pretexts for Making War<br>and We Must Be Prepared for Any Eventuality                                | 50 |
| IV. PEACE CAN BE WON ONLY BY STRUGGLE   | 53 |
| Whoever Thinks That the Bourgeoisie Would Bring<br>Peace to Us on a Platter Is a Completely Naive<br>Person                     | 53 |
| Obstacles to Peace Are on the Side of Imperialism   | 54 |
| When You Beat the Enemy He Wants to Come<br>to Terms  | 55 |
| The Struggle for Peace Must Be Linked with the<br>Revolutionary Struggle  | 58 |
| V. THE NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT<br>IS AN ACTIVE FACTOR IN THE STRUGGLE<br>FOR PEACE AND FOR THE OVERTHROW OF<br>IMPERIALISM | 63 |
| VI. SOCIALIST SOCIETY ALONE WILL SAVE<br>MANKIND FROM WARS  | 67 |

## I. HOW MARXISTS LOOK AT WAR

**UNSWERVINGLY DENOUNCING WARS, COMMUNISTS  
KNOW THAT WARS ARE INEVITABLE  
AS LONG AS CLASSES EXIST**

Social-Democracy has never regarded and does not regard war from a sentimental point of view. Unswervingly denouncing wars as a brutal method of deciding the disputes of mankind, Social-Democracy knows that wars are inevitable as long as society is divided into classes, as long as the exploitation of man by man exists. And in eliminating this exploitation we will not be able to get by without wars which the exploiting, dominating and oppressing classes always and everywhere begin themselves.

From "The Revolutionary Army and the Revolutionary Government" (published in *Proletarii*, No. 7, July 10, 1905).

The Socialists have always condemned wars between peoples as barbarous and bestial. Our attitude towards war, however, differs in principle from that of the bourgeois pacifists and Anarchists. We differ from the first in that we understand the inseparable connection between wars on the one hand and class struggles inside of a country on the other, we understand the impossibility of eliminating wars without eliminating classes and creating Socialism, and in that we fully recognize the justice, the progressivism and the necessity of civil wars, i.e., wars of an oppressed class against the oppressor, of slaves against the slave-holders, of serfs against the landowners, of wage-workers against the bourgeoisie. We Marxists differ both from pacifists and Anarchists in that we recognize the necessity of an historical study of each war individually, from the point of view of Marx's dialectical materialism.

From "Socialism and War"  
(July-August 1915).

#### **WAR IS POLITICS CONTINUED BY OTHER MEANS**

"War is politics continued by other (i.e., forcible) means."



This famous dictum belongs to one of the profoundest writers on military questions, Clausewitz. Rightly, the Marxists have always considered this axiom as the theoretical foundation for their understanding of the meaning of every war. It is from this very standpoint that Marx and Engels regarded wars.

Apply this idea to the present war. You will find that for decades, for almost half a century, the governments and the ruling classes of England, France, Germany, Italy, Austria and Russia, conducted a policy of colonial robbery, of suppressing labour movements, of oppressing foreign nations. Such a policy, and no other one, is being pursued also in the present war. Notably in Austria and in Russia the policy of both peace and war times consists in the enslavement of nations, not in their liberation. On the contrary, in China, Persia, India and other dependent nations we note in the last decades a policy of national awakening, tens and hundreds of millions of people striving to liberate themselves from under the yoke of the reactionary "great" nations. War growing out of this historic basis, even at the present time, can be of a bourgeois progressive nature, a war for national liberation.

Ibid.

It has already been said that war is the continuation of politics. We have experienced this in our own war. Imperialist war, which was the continuation of the politics of the imperialists, the ruling classes, the landlords and capitalists, aroused hostility among the popular masses and was the best means of revolutionizing these masses. Here with us in Russia it made easier the overthrow of the monarchy, and the overthrow of landlord landownership and the bourgeoisie, which took place with unheard-of ease only because the imperialist war was the continuation, the intensification, the insolent exposure of imperialist politics. And our war was the continuation of our communist politics, the politics of the proletariat. Up to now we read among the Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries and hear from non-party and wavering elements: "You promised peace, but gave war; you deceived the toiling masses." But we say that the toiling masses, although they did not study Marxism, nevertheless, because of their class instinct as oppressed people, people who have for decades felt on their own backs what is a landlord and a capitalist, have excellently mastered the difference between an imperialist and civil war. This dif-

ference between wars is understandable to all those who have experienced decades of years of oppression on their own backs. Imperialist war was the continuation of imperialist politics. It set the masses against their rulers. Civil war on the other hand against the landlords and capitalists was the continuation of the politics of overthrowing these landlords and capitalists, and with each month the development of this war strengthened the ties of the toiling masses with the proletariat which is leading this war.

From "The Political Report of the Central Committee to the Eighth All-Russian Conference of the R.C.P. (B.)" (December 2, 1919).

How, then, can the "real nature" of a war be ascertained; how can it be determined? War is the continuation of politics. We must study the politics that preceded the war, the politics that led to and brought about the war. If the politics were imperialist politics, i.e., politics in the interests of finance capital, of the robbery and oppression of colonies and foreign countries, then the war that emerged from these politics is an imperialistic war. If the politics were national-liberation politics, i.e.,

the expression of a mass movement against national oppression, then the war that emerged from these politics is a war for national liberation.

The philistine does not understand that war is a "continuation of politics," and therefore limits himself to saying, "the enemy is attacking," "the enemy is invading my country," without trying to understand *why*, by *which* class, and for *what* political object the war is being conducted.

From "A Caricature of Marxism and 'Imperialist Economism'" (August-October 1916).

The position, however, is that to understand the present war we must first take a general view of the policies of the European powers as a whole. We have not to take individual examples, or individual cases, which can always be easily torn out of the context of social phenomena and are valueless because an opposite example can also be easily cited. No, we have to take the entire policy of the entire system of European states in their economic and political interrelation, if we are to understand how this system steadily and inevitably gave rise to the present war.

From "War and Revolution"  
(May 14, 1917).

**DO NOT BE UNQUALIFIED OPPONENTS OF ALL WAR;  
THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION IS THE  
CLASS CHARACTER OF WAR**

From the viewpoint of Marxism, i.e., contemporary scientific Socialism, the main question, when Socialists discuss how to assess a war and what attitude to adopt towards it, is what the war is being waged for, what classes prepared it and shaped its course. We Marxists do not belong to the category of unqualified opponents of all war. We say: our aim is to achieve the socialist system of society, which, by eliminating the division of mankind into classes, by eliminating all exploitation of man by man, and of one nation by other nations, will inevitably eliminate every possibility of war whatsoever. But in the war for this socialist system of society we shall inevitably come up against conditions under which the class struggle within each separate nation may interweave with a war fought between different nations that is engendered by this very class struggle. Hence, we cannot rule out the possibility of revolutionary wars, i.e., wars resulting from the class struggle, waged by revolutionary classes, and of direct and immediate revolutionary

significance. Still less can we rule this out when we remember that though the history of European revolutions during the last century, during, say, 125 to 135 years, includes wars of which the majority have been reactionary, it also includes revolutionary wars, such as the war of the French revolutionary masses against united monarchist, backward, feudal and semi-feudal Europe. At the present time, also, no deception of the masses is more widespread in Western Europe, and latterly here in Russia, too, than that of referring to the example of revolutionary wars. There are wars and wars. We have to be clear as to what historical conditions gave rise to the present war, what classes are waging it, and for what ends.

Ibid.

Socialists cannot, without ceasing to be Socialists, be opposed to all war.

In the first place, Socialists have never been, nor can they be, opposed to revolutionary wars. The bourgeoisie of the imperialist "Great" Powers has become thoroughly reactionary, and we regard the war which *this* bourgeoisie is now waging as a reactionary slave-owners' and criminal war. But what

about a war *against* this bourgeoisie? What about a war for liberation waged by colonial peoples, for instance, who are oppressed by and dependent upon this bourgeoisie? In the theses of the "International" group, §5, we read: "In the era of this unbridled imperialism there can be no more national wars of any kind." This is obviously wrong.

The history of the twentieth century, this century of "unbridled imperialism," is replete with colonial wars. But what we Europeans, the imperialist oppressors of the majority of the peoples of the world, with our habitual, despicable European chauvinism, call "colonial wars" are often national wars, or national rebellions of those oppressed peoples. One of the main qualities of imperialism is that it hastens the development of capitalism in the most backward countries, and thereby extends and intensifies the struggle against national oppression. That is a fact. It inevitably follows from this that imperialism must often give rise to national wars.

. . . . .

Secondly, civil wars are also wars. Anyone who recognizes the class struggle cannot fail to recognize civil wars, which in every class society are the natural, and under certain conditions, inevitable

continuation, development and intensification of the class struggle. All the great revolutions prove this. To repudiate civil war, or to forget about it, means sinking into extreme opportunism and renouncing the socialist revolution.

Thirdly, the victory of Socialism in one country does not at one stroke eliminate all war in general. On the contrary, it presupposes such wars. The development of capitalism proceeds very unevenly in the various countries. It cannot be otherwise under the commodity production system. From this it inevitably follows that Socialism cannot be victorious simultaneously *in all* countries. It will be victorious first in one, or several countries, while the others will for some time remain bourgeois or pre-bourgeois. This must not only create friction, but a direct striving on the part of the bourgeoisie of other countries to crush the victorious proletariat of the socialist country. If we waged war under such circumstances, it would be a legitimate and just war. It would be a war for Socialism, for the liberation of other nations from the bourgeoisie.

From "The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution" (September 1916).



Socialism is opposed to violence against nations. That is indisputable. But Socialism is opposed to violence against men in general. Apart from Christian-Anarchists and Tolstoyans, however, no one has yet drawn the conclusion from this that Socialism is opposed to *revolutionary* violence. Hence, to talk about "violence" in general, without examining the conditions which distinguish reactionary from revolutionary violence, means being a petty bourgeois who renounces revolution, or else it means simply deceiving oneself and others by sophistry.

The same holds good about violence against nations. Every war is the exercise of violence against nations, but that does not prevent Socialists from being in *favour* of a revolutionary war. The class character of the war—that is the fundamental question which confronts a Socialist (if he is not a renegade). The imperialist war of 1914-18 is a war between two coalitions of the imperialist bourgeoisie for the partition of the world, for the division of the booty, and for the plunder and strangulation of small and weak nations. This was the appraisal of the war given in the Basle Manifesto in 1912, and since then it has been confirmed by facts.