

In RW No. 115, we reprinted excerpts from the booklet "Sooner or Later" by the Communist Unity Organization and called upon our readers to respond to it. This call was made to encourage readers to correspond on the most decisive political questions of our time, in particular how to respond to a situation in which very real preparations are being made for a world war between rival blocs of imperialists led by the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The cutting edge question is whether to take a position of revolutionary defeatism toward one's "own" imperialist rulers, or to adopt some form of alliance with one or another bloc as a "lesser evil" against a "main enemy." This question involves both analysis of the present world situation and of history, including the positive and negative experience of the international communist movement during this whole century. The following are letters in reply to our call. We welcome these contributions and also wish to point out that they certainly do not exhaust the subject and we encourage further correspondence of any sort.

I'd like to enter the debate on "the cutting edge question of whether to take a position of revolutionary defeatism toward one's 'own' imperialist ruling class or to adopt some form of alliance with one or another bloc as a 'lesser evil' against a 'main enemy'". The *Sooner or Later* booklet, judged by the excerpts printed, takes as its starting point the analysis that there's a "lesser" evil, U.S. imperialism, battling an aggressive and war-mongering "main enemy" of the world's peace, the Soviet Union. The replies already printed (*RW*, 8/21/81) go a long way toward exposing how, in fact, what's shaping up is an inter-imperialist war—both imperialist blocs are responsible and both are the just target of the masses' revolutionary struggle. The replies also point out how the *Sooner or Later* position is merely a not very slick excuse to capitulate to the U.S. imperialist bourgeoisie.

A key question that still needs to be dealt with, however, is the *Sooner or Later* statement that "the prospects for the revolutionary movement in the U.S. would be better after a war if the Soviet Union loses." There are a few things wrong with this analysis. First, and extremely revealing of the political line of the Communist Unity Organization, is the naked national chauvinism of judging the tasks of revolutionaries in the U.S. by the effects on the "vital interests of the American masses" rather than by the (real and not narrow) interests of the world proletariat. This is absolutely fundamental and has been the subject of much struggle within the International Communist Movement, leading to advances in internationalism like those concentrated in the *New Programme and Constitution of the RCP*. Second, the CUO completely writes off the possibility of making revolution in the U.S. prior to the outbreak (even the conclusion?) of world war. This subject deserves a polemic in its own right, and perhaps it will be the subject of another letter. But the main thing I want to discuss is the fact that revolution (in the U.S. or in any imperialist country) would be more likely with *defeats*, not victories. This is the essence of Lenin's policy of revolutionary defeatism.

I think there's been some confusion in our own ranks about what exactly is meant by "welcoming" and "desiring" the defeats of "our" bourgeoisie and even "working for those defeats"—and related to that what Lenin meant when he said, "revolutionary action during the war is impossible unless 'one's own' government is threatened with defeat." ("Proposals Submitted by the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P. to the Second Socialist Conference", Vol. 22, p. 177). It takes some study to get to the heart of the matter. The image that was conjured up for me by limiting my understanding to only a few "revolutionary" catch-phrases is of a junior league cheering section for U.S. imperialist setbacks, a cheering section breathlessly awaiting some development in the objective situation to spontaneously win the (hopelessly) patriotic masses to our banner; this perhaps in

"Sooner or Later" Debate

WAR, REVOLUTIONARY DEFEATISM

some combination with second string saboteurs stopping the flow of men and materials and thus "aiding" the defeat of "our own" bourgeoisie, which will, again spontaneously, wrench the masses away from patriotism and into revolutionary motion. This is a completely mistaken view of the crucial question of revolutionary defeatism, but it isn't simply an individual problem. It's intimately connected to the 40 years of revisionism we're struggling to break with. Burying Lenin's theories of imperialist war and revolutionary defeatism has been central to revisionism's ability to sow bourgeois-democratic illusions and line people up behind the national flag. An excerpt from the "For Decades to Come—On A World Scale" Central Committee report written by Chairman Bob Avakian, called "Outline of Views on the Historical Experience of the International Communist Movement and the Lessons for Today" and re-printed in the June, 1981 *Revolution* magazine, notes that it's at the point when the danger and opportunities for the revolutionary movement are developing, that the defensive tendency will depart "from Leninism, especially from the Leninist emphasis on historic conjuncture and from the whole thrust embodied in *What Is to Be Done?*" (This particular passage describes the "left" [economist] phase of the Comintern's line [1928-33] which was the precursor of the unfolding relationship between economism and capitulation during wartime.)

These errors are also very closely related to other remnants of revisionism with respect to our central task of Create Public Opinion, Seize Power, views that basically say that there's nothing revolutionary going on out in the world, and our job is to "make it happen" (or more likely, "wait for it to happen"); rather than recognizing the depths of the imperialist crisis, how it's throwing people into political motion and the dynamic role of man's conscious activity within that movement—and thus understanding our job in relation to striving to raise and unleash that conscious activism.

The pamphlet *Basic Principles for the Unity of Marxist-Leninists and for the Line of the International Communist Movement* is very helpful in cutting through this confusion. It says, "of decisive importance in the present situation, is the *exposure* of the moves of the imperialists toward world war. This is essential in laying the basis for the party itself to maintain, and for its struggle to win the masses to, a firm policy of revolutionary defeatism with regard to their 'own' bourgeoisie in such a war. The proletariat must be taught to welcome and *more than that to take advantage* of every difficulty and defeat experienced by the imperialist ruling class in such a war." (Paragraph 202, emphasis added) This pamphlet goes on to explain what this "taking advantage" consists in: "...concretely demonstrating to the proletariat and broad masses what the actual class interests are in such a war and ruthlessly exposing and combatting the calls to 'defend the fatherland', the hypocritical cries that 'the other side started it,' is the 'aggressor,' etc.... All this is essential in not only propagating but actually preparing for and working to realize the line of turning the imperialist war into a civil war." (203-204).

The way I read this is that revolutionary defeatism during imperialist war isn't our central task—that is, and

will remain, Create Public Opinion, Seize Power—and the main activity of communists prior to the seizure of power is agitation and propaganda to prepare for the armed insurrection. Nor is revolutionary defeatism our new overall strategy—that's the United Front and it's not going to change either. What does *develop* during imperialist war is the communist policy of revolutionary defeatism in which the *content* of the agitation and propaganda is sharply focused around the slogan "Turn the imperialist war into a civil war" which concentrates the line of revolutionary defeatism. I say "develops" because in a sense we're already carrying out the embryonic (under conditions that aren't full-scale inter-imperialist war) policy of revolutionary defeatism: we're doing the kind of agitation and propaganda that's preparing the masses to turn the imperialist war into a civil war. This is exactly what's being accomplished by the recent *RW* articles on Libya, exposing the "who fired the first shot" scam that the U.S. imperialists are trying to run. (This same work of creating public opinion is also preparing the masses to seize power prior to the outbreak of war. Such a revolutionary overthrow of imperialism in "large and/or strategic parts of the world" as the *New Programme* says could well prevent the outbreak of World War III.) In other words, the policy of revolutionary defeatism isn't some completely different and (mystically) new kind of work with which we're not familiar. I don't want to imply that there's no qualitative leap from our work in a pre-war situation to during the war itself. Lenin emphasized the enormous tasks confronting the parties of the 2nd International in rejecting the defense of the fatherland slogan: "realizing that *all propaganda, agitation, organization*, in short, the sum total of party activity must be radically changed, 'regenerated'... and adapted to the *supreme* revolutionary tasks." ("Principles Involved in the War Issue," Vol. 23, p. 152). Lenin was speaking to parties that had already degenerated. What we're doing today is exactly *preparing* to make that leap, and using the lessons of the International Communist Movement, positive and negative, to aid us. In this sense, we stand on Lenin's shoulders, and are that much ahead. Chairman Bob Avakian speaks very powerfully to the necessity of training *today* for the tasks of the future: "...the working class has to be trained *concretely* as well as theoretically in proletarian internationalism, and unless it is, it will never be able to act in a class conscious internationalist way when the decisive time comes—such as the actual outbreak of world war. It will never be able to play a class conscious role and most of all never be able to uphold a revolutionary defeatist stand and not only welcome the setbacks suffered by its own ruling class but actually work to take advantage of them to turn the imperialist war into a civil war to overthrow the imperialist system unless it is trained in a thousand concrete instances both before and during that war." (*Coming From Behind to Make Revolution*, p. 15)

When Lenin says that "revolutionary action during the war is impossible unless 'one's own' government is threatened with defeat," he means that the fully realized revolutionary situation won't happen without the threats (note that he says "threats" and not the necessity for the actual defeats themselves) of defeat—he's not saying

that communists shouldn't do the work that will lead to the proletariat being triumphant in that situation: in other words, don't just say there's nothing to do because the U.S. isn't (sufficiently) getting its ass kicked. Of course, the question of military defeats for the U.S. in the course of WW III is going to be in a far more intense context than in previous wars. Even if the U.S. is *winning* WW III (not at all a certainty in the upcoming conflict), the horrors and defeats suffered even in "victory" will be on a scale unseen in this country and perhaps in the world. This is the reason for Chairman Avakian's citing of the U.S. military commanders' worry that soldiers' morale will quickly evaporate "when they see that, win or lose, they have little chance of surviving." ("Crowns Will Roll," *RW* 115). Remember, Russia was on the "winning side" in WW I, yet that wasn't the key question in the developing mood of the masses. Under current conditions, we're also likely to face a war in which victories and defeats go back and forth and we're going to have to persevere in the face of very contradictory circumstances.

The military defeats, and threats of defeats, that "our own" bourgeoisie and its army suffers at the hands of its so-called enemies facilitates and is necessary for the conversion of the imperialist war into a civil war. The bourgeoisie is weakened militarily, which means that not only are its "enemies" in a better position to deal it some blows (we fervently work for the defeats of its imperialist enemies, and aid every manifestation of their defeats, too), but obviously more significantly the proletariat is in a better position to strike blows. The bourgeoisie is in much less of a position to suppress the masses. Military defeats are an important aspect of "being stretched to the limit", and the question of *not having* the troops to send in to quell a rebellion in, say, Detroit, is related to the U.S. suffering some defeats. (Also, we aren't merely interested in the defeats suffered by the U.S. so that we can make revolution, but the world revolution will be aided as each imperialist government is hammered at.) Military defeats also weaken the bourgeoisie politically. Lenin says that wars have the virtue in that they "ruthlessly reveal, unmask and destroy much that is corrupt, outworn and dead in human institutions." ("Collapse of the Second International") This is all the more so as the rulers scramble and squabble among themselves, attempting to shift the blame for defeats and losses and revealing to the masses much of what class interests are really at stake. Finally, military defeats raise feelings of hatred among the masses for "one's own" bourgeoisie, and they raise the possibility among the masses that things "don't have to be this way." Lenin speaks of how war, and defeats, affect the mood of the masses:

"...and the question *now* is not whether to continue to live in tranquility and tolerable conditions, or plunge into some reckless adventure. On the contrary, the question is whether to continue to suffer hardship and be thrown into the holocaust to fight for *alien interests*, or to make great sacrifices for socialism, for the interests of nine-tenths of mankind." ("Principles Involved in the War Issue," Vol. 23, p. 157)

But military defeats by themselves are no guarantee of any revolutionary activity, much less a revolutionary

Continued on page 14

Sooner or Later

Continued from page 9

situation, developing spontaneously. We have only to recall Germany in the last throes of WW II to realize that defeats can also lead to demoralization, frantic patriotic activity, feelings of pacifism, etc., if there is no class conscious leadership. Lenin ties the necessity for military defeats to the subjective class conscious aspect:

"The conversion of the imperialist war into a civil war cannot be 'made', any more than a revolution can be 'made.' It develops out of a number of diverse phenomena, aspects, features, characteristics and consequences of the imperialist war. That development is impossible without a series of military reverses and defeats of governments that receive blows from their own oppressed classes." ("The Defeat of One's Own Government in the Imperialist War," Vol. 21, p. 278)

The form that these blows against the government by the oppressed classes takes is not, as Lenin says, "blowing up bridges", organizing unsuccessful strikes in the war industries, and in general helping the government defeat the revolutionaries." (Ibid., p. 275). No, these blows are struck by the class conscious forces recognizing the "very obvious fact of the inseparable link between revolutionary agitation against the government and helping bring about its defeat." (Ibid., p. 277, emphasis added). The communist policy of revolutionary defeatism is mainly a question of greatly expanding the exposure of this decadent system and the possibilities for carrying out the historic mission of the proletariat. This exposure will be carried out in a thousand ways, but what I want to emphasize is that it's not only based on the defeats "our" bourgeoisie suffers, it contributes to those defeats, to the disintegration of U.S. imperialism. The masses, as they become more and more conscious of the fact that this particular war (along with wars in general) is the "continuation of politics by other, violent, means" will be considerably less enthusiastic to shed their blood for their masters and will instead take up the call for revolution. The bottom line for revolutionary defeatism is succinctly summed up by Lenin in these few sentences:

"A revolution in wartime means civil war; the conversion of a war between governments into a civil war is, on the one hand, facilitated by military reverses ('defeats') of governments; on the other hand, one cannot actually strive for such a conversion without thereby facilitating defeat.

"The reason the chauvinists... repudiate the defeat slogan is that this slogan alone implies a consistent call for revolutionary action against one's own government in wartime. Without such action, millions of ultra-revolutionary phrases such as war against 'the war and the conditions, etc.' are not worth a brass farthing. (Ibid., p. 276)

Very briefly I'd like to outline some of the main areas of exposure that would constitute the Party's work in turning the imperialist war into a civil war:

1) The key exposure, from every possible angle, is that World War III will be an imperialist war for plunder on both sides, and most certainly not a question of "communism vs. freedom," or "who fired the first shot" or any other such imperialist bullshit. Obviously, much of our work is already in this direction and it must and will escalate. Chairman Avakian emphasized this in an article in the *RW* of 2/8/80:

"Points like that cannot be stated too many times. If we had a box in the *RW* every week that said 'Remember' and rammed this point home again and again, I wouldn't consider it to be overdone: war is an outgrowth of imperialist politics and economics. Obviously it would be a little ineffectual after a while and a little bit mechanical, but every week from a different angle we should always get to the same basic point."

Exposures that today are "classics" were written in their own time as power-

ful weapons in turning the masses' hatred against their "own" bourgeoisie. *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* was "written with an eye to the tsarist censorship" exactly because Lenin and the Tsar both knew that a soldier influenced by *Imperialism* was not willing cannonfodder for the imperialists.

2) Every example of proletarian internationalism (resolutions, demonstrations, aid, fraternization, etc.) by soldiers and masses among the allies—but especially among the "enemy"—must be popularized broadly to give the masses the understanding that we are, in fact, part of an international class with one historic mission, and the confidence that there is an active movement building for such a future. Again, such exposures are not only born amidst the defeats suffered by the bourgeoisies and their armies, they in turn accelerate those defeats and strengthen the proletariat. A crucial aspect of building proletarian internationalism is exposing the relation between imperialism and the anti-imperialist democratic revolutions in dependent countries which are a tremendous force for the worldwide proletarian socialist revolution today and will be even more so as the crisis deepens and in time of war. As the *New Programme* says:

"Especially in an imperialist country such as the U.S. it is extremely important to recognize that imperialism has produced a major division in the world between a handful of advanced capitalist countries and a greater number of oppressed nations comprising a large part of the world's territory and population, which are parasitically pillaged by the imperialists and maintained in an enforced state of subordination and dependence. The end result of this is the development of an immense force against imperialism and for the international proletarian revolution." (pp. 22-23)

3) Fraternization between "enemies", especially, must be popularized, as Lenin emphasizes not as the future itself or the way to end the war (as the pacifists would have it), but as the path to the future which runs against the bourgeois governments and wrecks the discipline imposed by them: "...fraternization is the revolutionary initiative of the masses, it is the awakening of the conscience, the mind, the courage of the oppressed classes; in other words, it is a rung in the ladder leading up to the socialist proletarian revolution... But it is not enough. The soldiers must now pass to a form of fraternization in which a clear political programme is discussed. We are not anarchists. We do not think that the war can be ended by a simple 'refusal'... We are for the war being ended, as it will be, by a revolution in a number of countries." ("The Significance of Fraternization," Vol. 24, pp. 318-319).

4) Every example of bourgeois corruption, incompetence, profiteering, decadence, etc. must be exposed to rouse the hatred of the masses against their "own" bourgeoisie and reveal the real class interests involved.

5) Full support, again mainly through exposure, must be given to all rebellions of the oppressed nationalities against their oppression. Especially in imperialist countries like the U.S., rebellions of the oppressed nationalities will be one of the most potent factors for revolution. Particular attention must be given to the international significance of such actions which will: a) expose the oppressive nature of this system that we're supposed to defend; b) weaken the bourgeois hold on the oppressed nationalities in the army and thus seriously undermine it; and c) reach the oppressed throughout the world, and inspire them to struggle. One only need think of the international ramifications of the Miami Rebellion, the effects it had (and still has) on Black GI's, and remember the powerful demonstration of solidarity in Tehran (and the effects that had in Iran and again back here) to get an inkling of what power a revolutionary defeatist line has, taken exactly among the sector of the masses where it can sink the deepest roots.

6) There must be ruthless polemics against all attempts of opportunists of every stripe to attempt to conciliate

with and support imperialism in the name of socialism. Nothing can do us more harm than to budge one iota from our revolutionary defeatist position even in the face of the sharpest attacks. Stalin's comments, though one-sided, paint a graphic picture of what's at stake:

"The agitation against the war that we conducted among the workers and soldiers at the beginning of 1917, under Kerensky, undoubtedly resulted in a tactical setback, for the masses dragged our speakers off the platforms, beat them up, and sometimes tore them limb from limb; instead of the masses being drawn into the Party, they drew away from it. But in spite of the tactical setback, this agitation brought nearer a big strategic success, for the masses soon realized that we were right in agitating against the war, and later this hastened and facilitated their going over to the side of the Party." ("The Political Strategy and Tactics of the Russian Communists," Vol. 5, p. 66)

I feel like I've just scratched the surface on a few questions and not even addressed others but I'd like to close with this: Lenin's policy of revolutionary defeatism was absolutely key in making revolution in Russia in 1917, during World War I. The policy of revolutionary defeatism will be even more important in making revolution in the imperialist countries in World War III. Since 1917 the contradictions of capitalism have intensified through several spirals. An example of this is that today there are more and more proletarians at one pole relative to fewer imperialists at the other pole. The world is more integrated into a single process through worldwide imperialist socialization. This objective development highlights the increasingly dynamic role that the subjective forces can play in accelerating the pace of revolution when armed with a correct line. Revolutionary defeatism, the battering of all remnants of patriotism and bourgeois-democratic illusions, will decide the question of revolution in the imperialist countries, and the ability of a section of the proletariat in a particular country to influence events worldwide is tremendous.

MBS

One has to agree with the general summation of the *Revolutionary Worker* when it identified the position of "Sooner or Later" as counter-revolutionary. When reading the article, the first thing that struck the reader was how utterly ridiculous this argument appeared to be, but this is a position that is being put out all around us by basically pretty honest people. When out talking to the people, day to day, the question about what will the people in this country do if it comes down to World War Three with the Soviet Union people have, from all ranks, summed this up with, "Well, we had better line up with the U.S. I mean like it has got to be worse in Russia than it is here..." And why is this? What is it about the way people are looking at the world that they are coming up with this conclusion?

Firstly, this has been the position of the U.S. bourgeoisie for quite some time and they have been able to carry out a pretty effective propaganda campaign against their imperialist rivals, the Soviet Union. Secondly, this position can be analyzed in terms of the contradictions that exist and how must the masses face these contradictions and reconcile them in their own interests. The position taken in "Sooner or Later" has been strongly influenced by both bourgeois propaganda and the authors' inability to identify the main contradiction that faces the working masses.

In "Sooner or Later", the authors argue that the main contradiction that is faced by the world today is the aggression of the Soviet Union, and they see this as a threat to world peace. They cite Soviet expansionism in Western Europe and in other areas of the world to illustrate their point. Russia is getting stronger. In juxtaposition, the United States is faltering and they paint a picture of a weakened U.S. imperialism and its decline since its emergence as the Top Dog of world imperialism after the

end of World War II. To elucidate their position, they cite the U.S.'s "loss" of China, the Korean War and the Cuban Revolution as examples of the crumbly nature of U.S. imperialism. In addition to this, they also hold out the loss of Iran and Nicaragua as evidence of the weakening of world imperialism. However, rather than look at this weakening of the bulwark of world imperialism with glee, they shudder at the prospect of world domination by the Soviet Union. Rather than smash the system which drives humanity to the depths of destruction, we are called upon to unite with our oppressors for the sake of postponing the inevitable calamity of nuclear holocaust because we, masses of people, are unable to rise up and fight our oppression. We are only capable to fight for our masters, to once again be used as pawns in a game which we will never win. Their position is against revolution. It is against the masses of people all over the world. This is the position of the imperialist government of the United States and just in case you don't get the full meaning of their prospects for our future, they leave little to the imagination.

They see for us the possibility of linking up with the other third world countries with the third world offering political leadership and the U.S. supplying the bombs as we continue to prepare for the inevitable showdown between the two superpowers with the masses facing the Soviet Union, saying, "If there is a war, YOU won't win." Not exactly an inspiring call to action. And what exactly is the purpose of this article and how can this sort of thinking hurt us in the future?

Already we have seen what is the end product of this sort of analysis, that is, lining up with our own bourgeoisie during a time of crises. But we are told this is the right thing to do, that times have changed since Lenin's discussion on revolutionary defeatism, and so have other things. It is time to reevaluate some of the "traditional" positions that have been broadly held by progressive movements. As a matter of speaking, "It is imperative that progressive thought reverse itself on questions like the 'progressive' nature of the Soviet Union today, that serious reconsideration be given to the defense budget, NATO, draft registration, civil defense and other issues, that the New International Economic Order be promoted." In other words, communists and sympathizers should line up behind the platform of the Republican Party.

These analytical mistakes are rooted in the misconception that fascism is the principal enemy of the people of the world and the masses are incapable of making revolution for their own benefit. It is on this premise that they conclude the revolutionary movement should again deviate itself in service of the U.S. imperialists. And it is in this vein that they use their counter-revolutionary ideology to distort the truth of Marxism-Leninism, but simultaneously use its name to serve our oppressors. How disgusting!!!

Now they have linked the revolutionary movement with their united front against fascism, as the "lesser" of two evils, U.S. imperialism, supplies the third world nations with arms to confront their Soviet rivals. And those of us who line up with the international communist movement are called to join the American army, staff its imperialist factories and, heavens yes, pray for peace. But let's not forget those bomb shelters this time for "this is an elementary vital interest of the American People." All of this and more if you join the camp of reaction and counter-revolution.

The tactical implications of this is that once again the revolutionary working class will be dragged down the road of imperialist capitulation in exchange for the so-called democratic rights of the bourgeoisie and continued maintenance of the status quo. And after the imperialists have nuked the world, then what? Well, we can be satisfied knowing that we exposed the Soviets for being fake communists and then we can continue our ideological debates within the safe confines of our American-made bomb shelters. Just a little more crust from the American Pie.

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