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Russia's Invasion of Ukraine, the Maneuvers of the U.S. Ruling Class, and Some Key Tasks for U.S. Communists

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has significant ramifications across the globe, and Communists will need to take stock of these ongoing developments. In the current situation of economic instability, which is teetering on the edge of a major economic crisis, competition between these powers is intensifying, and the people, especially those in contested countries like Ukraine, are caught in the cross-fire.

The Russian invasion is the latest and most severe episode in a series of struggles that have played out over the past few decades over which imperialist power will have dominant control of the population and resources of Ukraine, with the U.S., NATO, and the EU on one side and Russia, partially supported by China, on the other. This is the latest iteration of the "Great Game" in which the big bullies of the world fight for global supremacy, and use the small and oppressed countries as their battlegrounds, with the potential of a catastrophic world war lurking in the background. On the one hand, Russia's in-

vasion marks how much the U.S.'s position has declined in Eastern Europe and globally of late, a positive development. However, the relative rise of another imperialist power and bloc and related aggressive expansion is no cause for rejoicing. Furthermore, in its anger, the US camp is dangerously provoking the Russians ever-more at present, threatening to further expand the conflict beyond Ukraine's borders. Despite the dangerous if not dire global situation, in the face of growing inter-imperialist competition, new openings for growth of the revolutionary camp in the U.S. and internationally must be seized on.

The situation is still developing rapidly, both in terms of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and economic and political retaliation from the U.S. and its allies. There is also a major intensification of war propaganda in the U.S. right now, as well as significant support for a U.S. military intervention among the U.S. masses broadly.¹ Related demands are being raised in the media and in the political

¹For example, just prior to the Russian invasion, polls showed (<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/majority-in-us-oppose-major-role-in-russia-ukraine-conflict-says-ap-norc-poll>) that 74% of Americans opposed the U.S. playing a major role in the war. However, another poll (<https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/28/politics/cnn-poll-russia-ukraine-us-aid/index.html>) taken just after the invasion showed 42% of Americans in favor of the U.S. using military action to stop Russia's invasion should sanctions fail to do so. While it is still a minority who support military action, and this poll phrased support for war with Russia as contingent on sanctions failing to change Russia's approach, the war drums are beating loudly and many in the U.S. may change their views in the coming weeks and months in face of increasingly bellicose calls from the ruling class. A more recent poll (<https://www.axios.com/pew-survey-us-military-action-ukraine-d9f87814-36c7-4181-9cd9-a90837cbf8ed.html>) showed that 35% of Americans favor the U.S. taking military action in Ukraine, *even if it risks sparking a nuclear conflict*.

That said, there have also been some countervailing tendencies, including many libertarians calling for the U.S. to leave NATO and for Biden to promise not to fight a war with Russia or get involved in Ukraine. DSA also issued a statement condemning the Russian invasion while also criticizing U.S. aggression and calling for people to oppose "all violent escalations" in the conflict. <https://www.dsausa.org/statements/on-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/>

On the other hand, other prominent social democrats and liberals in the U.S., including popular Youtuber Vaush and The Young Turks talking head Cenk Uygur, have been parroting U.S. state talking points and pushing for further escalation.

²See <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/28/google-facebook-battle-to-stop-spread-of-russian-disinformation.html>. Not only are Russian news sources being banned, those who don't support the U.S. state narrative promoting Russia as the primary evil in the world at present are being called traitors. C.f. <https://greenwald.substack.com/p/>

sphere for further crackdowns on dissent and democratic rights.² In this document we lay out some provisional analysis of these trends and their implications, acknowl-

edging that the present situation is unstable and developing quickly.

We Must Condemn Not Only Russia’s Invasion, But Also, and Principally, U.S. Imperialism

Generally among the masses in the U.S. there is outrage against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. This reaction has a divided nature. On the one hand, it is positive that people are disturbed by the invasion of a sovereign country and by the brutality of an aggressive war. On the other hand, when the U.S. was the invader in Iraq and Afghanistan, or the architect of the assault on Libya, many of these same people were in support. Overall, outrage about the war is being funneled into support for the U.S. ruling class to a large degree. This is in part due to the fact that the vast majority of people in the U.S. are ignorant of the machinations of U.S. imperialism in Ukraine and other countries, and thus are blind to the ways in which the U.S.’s own aggressive expansion in the region precipitated the present crisis and served to provoke Russia into invading Ukraine.

This does not justify Russia’s invasion, which is a blatant act of aggressive expansion and is already bringing new forms of misery and suffering to the Ukrainian people. However, within the framework of inter-imperialist competition, there are certain lines set by the imperialists that, if crossed, will likely trigger a military response. For example, the U.S. still basically follows the Monroe Doctrine, forbidding any other “Great” Power from stationing troops in the Western Hemisphere. If Russia had staged a coup in Mexico, began to rapidly arm the Mexican military with new weaponry, aided the government’s efforts to acquire nuclear weapons, and worked to expedite Mexico’s incorporation into the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)—a treaty organization which replaced the Warsaw Pact—then the U.S. would almost certainly respond with military means, including by invading Mexico.

However, given the beating of the war drums, and long-standing inculcation with U.S. chauvinist ideology, the parallels between this hypothetical scenario and U.S./NATO expansion in Eastern Europe are not commonly understood by the masses in the U.S. That being said, some within the U.S. state did see this clearly, and

were worried that continued NATO expansion, especially in Ukraine, would cross the line for Russia. For example, former Secretary of Defense and former CIA director Robert Gates summed up the errors of U.S. policy towards Russia (in terms of the interests of the U.S. ruling class) in his memoir *Duty*:

When I reported to the president [George W. Bush] my take on the Munich conference [in 2007], I shared with him my belief that from 1993 onward, the West, and particularly the United States, had badly underestimated the magnitude of Russian humiliation in losing the Cold War and then in the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which amounted to the end of the centuries-old Russian Empire. The arrogance, after the collapse, of American government officials, academicians, businessmen, and politicians in telling the Russians how to conduct their domestic and international affairs (not to mention the internal psychological impact of their precipitous fall from superpower status) had led to deep and long-term resentment and bitterness.

What I didn’t tell the president was that I believed the relationship with Russia had been badly mismanaged after Bush 41 left office in 1993. Getting Gorbachev to acquiesce to a unified Germany as a member of NATO had been a huge accomplishment. But moving so quickly after the collapse of the Soviet Union to incorporate so many of its formerly subjugated states into NATO was a mistake. Including the Baltic states, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary quickly was the right thing to do, but I believe the process should then have slowed. U.S. agreements with the Romanian and Bulgarian governments to rotate troops through bases in those countries was a needless provocation (especially since we virtually never deployed the 5,000 troops to either country). The Russians had long historical ties to Serbia, which we largely ignored. Trying to bring Georgia and Ukraine into NATO was truly overreaching. The roots of the Russian Empire trace back to Kiev

romneys-treason-smear-of-tulsi-gabbard. We discuss this dynamic more below.

in the ninth century, so that was an especially monumental provocation. Were the Europeans, much less the Americans, willing to send their sons and daughters to defend Ukraine or Georgia? Hardly. So NATO expansion was a political act, not a carefully considered military commitment, thus undermining the purpose of the alliance and recklessly ignoring what the Russians considered their own vital national interests.³

Gates was far from alone in warning about how U.S. policy was provoking Russia and risked triggering a military conflict between the world's two largest nuclear powers.⁴ Over the past several decades, there has been a tug-of-war between the U.S./NATO and Russia over Ukraine. The Western-backed so-called "Orange Revolution" in 2004 replaced the pro-Russian president Leonid Kuchma with Viktor Yushchenko. He made some moves towards integration with the EU, and announced in 2008 that Ukraine would join NATO in the future. Yushchenko was in turn replaced by pro-Russian leader Viktor Yanukovich in 2010. Yanukovich, flagrantly and extravagantly corrupt, pursued stronger relations with Russia, controversially extending Russia's lease on naval facilities in Sevastopol in Crimea, and initially carried forward Ukraine's application for EU membership, before terminating it in 2013.

This led the U.S. and its assemblage of NGOs like George Soros' Open Society to help foment unrest in Ukraine. They drew on mass anger at outrages and oppression faced under Yanukovich, including fear among sections of the population of being annexed into the Rus-

sian sphere of influence. However, by channelling this outrage into the pro-EU Euromaidan protests in 2014,⁵ they were able to install Petro Poroshenko—a pro-EU and pro-NATO oligarch—as the ruler of Ukraine, thus pulling Ukraine back under their control. Russia saw Ukraine slipping out of its grasp, so it seized on the political crisis to sponsor anti-Euromaidan groups, leading to the Russian annexation of Crimea and the proclamation of the DPR and LPR,⁶ the separatist "People's Republics" in eastern Ukraine's Donbas region.

The Russian government's claim that it supported the DPR and LPR to protect Russian speakers there from oppression carries some elements of truth, especially in the context of regional cultural divides within the country set against the backdrop of the unrest fomented by U.S./NATO aligned interests. However, the recent invasion of Ukraine—which involves the bombardment of numerous Russian-speaking cities—is clearly not fundamentally about protecting Russian-speaking people. There are a large number of Russian speakers in Ukraine; accurate numbers are difficult to come by, but polls indicate that somewhere around 30% of the people in Ukraine use Russian as their main language, and in some parts of the country upwards of 90% of people speak Russian fluently. The Russian language in Ukraine stems from long-standing social, linguistic, and cultural links between Ukrainian and Russian people, which are the result of a series of complex historical processes, including the expansion of the Russian empire (and related policies of Russification), but also efforts in the USSR to promote greater fraternal ties

³Robert Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, p. 157-158. In 1999 the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland joined NATO. In 2004, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined. In 2009, Albania and Croatia became part of NATO. In 2017 Montenegro joined, as did North Macedonia in 2020. See also William Burns' (then ambassador to Russia, now current director of the CIA) warning in 2008 that U.S. machinations in Ukraine were seen in Russia as precipitating a civil war in Ukraine and as forcing Russia's hand to intervene despite the inclinations of the Russian state to maintain the status-quo: https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08MOSCOW265_a.html

⁴Since the Clinton administration, major figures ranging from George Kennan (<https://www.nytimes.com/1997/02/05/opinion/a-fateful-error.html>) in 1997, architect of the U.S. Cold War strategy of Containment, to Henry Kissinger in 2014 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/henry-kissinger-to-settle-the-ukraine-crisis-start-at-the-end/2014/03/05/46dad868-a496-11e3-8466-d34c451760b9_story.html) have been warning against Ukraine joining NATO. In his memoir *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink*, Clinton's Defense Secretary William Perry noted that he almost resigned in 1996 over the Clinton Administration's push to expand NATO eastward.

Then-ambassador to Russia (and current CIA director) Bill Burns in a 2009 memo warned then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that "Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all red lines for the Russian elite (not just Putin)," and that "In more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian players, from knuckle-draggers in the dark recesses of the Kremlin to Putin's sharpest liberal critics, I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests."

⁵A leaked 2014 discussion between then-Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and then-U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt gives a sense of just how involved the U.S. state was in supporting and directing the Ukrainian opposition leaders: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26079957>

⁶Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk / Luhansk People's Republic, respectively. They are also sometimes abbreviated DNR and LNR, from the Russian name for the separatist republics: *Donetskaya Narodnaya Respublika*/DNR (Донецкая Народная Республика/ДНР) and *Luganskaya Narodnaya Respublika*/LNR (Луганская Народная Республика/ЛНР).

between people of different nations and nationalities, as well as other factors. Since 2014, at the behest of the U.S. government, the Ukrainian government has undertaken a series of policies of Ukrainianization in the name of protecting Ukrainian sovereignty and national identity. Laws have aimed to restrict or eliminate use of the Russian language in education and other spheres.⁷

These imperialist maneuvers to try to gain control of Ukraine are driven by efforts to control markets, resources, and ultimately the lives of the Ukrainian people themselves, but there are also larger strategic and security concerns at play. For Russia, having Ukraine join NATO means the U.S. and NATO would have a major military staging ground right on its border. In that sense, part of the Russian calculation to invade Ukraine seems to have been that “it’s now or never,” as the U.S. and NATO have been steadily selling Ukraine more and more arms for the past few years, and the Ukrainian government recently announced plans to double the size of its armed forces. In the past year or so Ukrainian leaders have also announced their intentions to acquire nuclear weapons; given the presence of numerous nuclear reactors in Ukraine, this was not an idle threat.⁸ Even if not officially a NATO member, a heavily-armed Ukraine right on the border is still functionally a U.S./NATO outpost—not something the Russian ruling class is willing to tolerate. Many within the U.S. state were well aware of this, and went forward with their plans to arm the Ukrainians to the teeth anyways.

There is also a longstanding belief by the Russian ruling class that Ukraine is rightfully not only part of their sphere of influence but rightfully *part of Russia*. Putin emphasized this point of view last summer when he published a long essay arguing that Russians and Ukrainians were actually a single people and that, for that reason,

there was no basis for an independent Ukrainian state. A few days before launching the invasion, he argued in a speech that the Ukrainian state was formed only as a result of Lenin and the Bolsheviks’ nationality policy, which he described as driven by “utopian, odious, destructive fantasies.” He also claimed that “by giving any concessions to the nationalists inside the country, from the point of view of the historic destiny of Russia and its people, Lenin’s principles of building the state weren’t a mistake, they were much worse than a mere mistake.” In the same speech he argued that Ukraine is “fiction” and said, “you want de-communization? We are quite happy with that, but don’t stop halfway, we are ready to show you what actual de-communization for Ukraine is.”⁹ Such words were used by Putin to frame the Russian invasion, and shows that while Russia is concerned about NATO expansion to its border, there is also deep-seated Russian chauvinist and imperialist ideology being promoted to whip up popular sentiment for the invasion within Russia.¹⁰ This speaks to the larger designs behind this, which go beyond the official Russian state narrative that this is a “security operation” to demilitarize Ukraine.

Clarity on the actual ideological justifications of the Russian imperialists and their designs and interests in Ukraine is important to opposing Russian imperialism. But it can also play a role in defusing the present boom in U.S. chauvinism and related Russophobia by demonstrating the distinct interests and self-justifications of the Russian imperialists as opposed to the interests the entire Russian people.

Right now the U.S. ruling class is framing Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as in part the result of some supposed unchanging essence of the Russian people who are fundamentally “Eastern” and not “Western.”¹¹ Countering

⁷For instance, in January 2022 a law came in to effect requiring all print media in the country to be in Ukrainian, effectively banning Russian-language publications due to the difficulties of translating and providing both languages: <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-language-law-russian/31656441.html>. This followed a 2017 law which banned importing books from Russia, a move no doubt supported by Ukrainian publishers since Russian books accounted for 60% of the Ukrainian book market before the law took effect: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/feb/14/ukraine-publishers-speak-out-against-ban-on-russian-books>. A law with similar aims in the educational sphere was signed by former president Poroshenko in 2017 requiring some schools to educate in Ukrainian language, but has yet to be fully implemented: <https://www.unian.info/society/2159231-new-education-law-becomes-effective-in-ukraine.html>

⁸<https://www.dailysabah.com/world/europe/ukraine-mulls-nuclear-arms-if-nato-membership-not-impending-envoy>

⁹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1J16u13LqeQ&t=1457s>

¹⁰In the leadup to the invasion Russian state television also broadcast a map of Ukraine with different sections labelled after those responsible for, in the Great Russian worldview, ceding rightfully Russian territory to create the national borders of Ukraine. Crimea is labelled “gift of Khrushchev,” a reference to the 1954 transfer of the Crimean Oblast from the Russian SFSR to the Ukrainian SSR; Donetsk, Lugansk, and Kharkiv Oblasts are labelled “gifts of Lenin;” Western Ukraine is a “gift of Stalin;” and so on. <https://24hoursworlds.com/politics/104033/>

¹¹<https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/stephen-kotkin-putin-russia-ukraine-stalin>

these narratives and exposing the ways in which the U.S. ruling class have precipitated this crisis and the actual de- signs of the Russian imperialists is essential to developing anti-imperialist sentiment in the U.S.

Domestic Dynamics in the U.S. and Some New Openings

In the U.S. there has been mass outcry against the invasion, but generally muddled reactions beyond this. There has been widespread anger about this happening “on Biden’s watch,” signifying that a more capable U.S. executive-in-chief would have kept Putin “in check.”¹² Without much clear analysis of what such “checking” would consist of, it is likely that the state will corral such sentiment into support for hawkish policies abroad¹³ and more domestic controls at home. There are a few liberal views that have blamed NATO expansion particularly (and U.S. militarism generally) in part for the crisis.¹⁴ It is the responsibility of revolutionaries to clarify the need not just to restrain the appetite of U.S. imperialism, but to overthrow it. Without such clarity, it will be difficult to develop a revolutionary movement and to avoid ever greater horrors in the months and years ahead.

At present, there are new openings emerging to expose the rotten logic of capitalist-imperialism and to demonstrate the dirty game being played by the “Great Powers”

as they compete for global supremacy. As communists organizing within the U.S., the principal task is to expose the nature of the U.S. state’s maneuvers to the masses of this country, and show them that their interests ultimately lie in the revolutionary overthrow of the ruling class. In particular there is a need to clarify the dangers of a world war and the brinkmanship of the U.S. ruling class as they flirt with the idea of a direct military confrontation with Russia.¹⁵ While many in the U.S. are unaware of dangers of nuclear war, the present conflict provides ample room to expose this reality, and the fact that competition between these imperialist powers holds the whole world hostage to their deadly battle for global dominance.

The U.S. ruling class is working hard to feign outrage at Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the resulting civilian casualties, while also presenting themselves as humanitarians concerned with the wellbeing of the people of Ukraine and the world. It is quite audacious of them to try this stunt, given the long history of U.S. wars and slaughter

¹²<https://news.gallup.com/poll/390086/biden-ratings-economy-foreign-affairs-russia-near.aspx>

¹³For instance, a recent poll indicated that 74% of Americans supported the idea of the U.S. and NATO imposing a “no-fly zone” over Ukraine: <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/exclusive-americans-broadly-support-ukraine-no-fly-zone-russia-oil-ban-poll-2022-03-04/>. However, the poll did not explain to people that the enforcement of any no-fly zone would mean NATO shooting down Russian jets, which would almost certainly lead to open warfare between nuclear-armed countries. This reflects the increasingly bellicose rhetoric that many U.S. politicians and media figures have been spewing since the invasion, with calls for a “no-fly zone” being made by politicians (e.g. <https://twitter.com/AdamKinzinger/status/1497354030904975364>), military figures (e.g. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/27/breedlove-nato-commander-russia-ukraine-war/>), and from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (<https://www.reuters.com/world/ukraines-president-says-no-fly-zone-is-needed-avert-humanitarian-catastrophe-2022-03-09/>)

In our preliminary investigations and engagement with U.S. demonstration against the invasion of Ukraine, the main message of most large protests has been decrying Russia’s invasion and calling for NATO intervention, including a no-fly zone. There have been countervailing tendencies, and protests that call for de-escalation and oppose the maneuvers of the U.S. and NATO, but at present these are a much more marginal trend.

¹⁴For example, see <https://scheerpost.com/2022/02/24/hedges-the-chronicle-of-a-war-foretold/> and <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/why-john-mearsheimer-blames-the-us-for-the-crisis-in-ukraine>

¹⁵While starting World War III is still a minority view among the ruling class, there are some significant voices calling for it. For example, former Director of National Intelligence and current CNN commentator James Clapper recently reversed his earlier opposition to giving fighter jets to the Ukrainian government and said that “I think at some point, we are going to have a confrontation with the Russians. It is not a question of if.” https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2022/03/15/clapper_my_thinking_has_changed_we_should_consider_giving_ukrainians_fighter_jets.html Congressman Adam Kinzinger has been one of the most bellicose voices in the government, repeatedly calling for a no fly-zone over Ukraine, and recently suggesting that NATO attack Belarus if it gets directly involved in the Ukraine War, because “Belarus is not in a Warsaw Pact” and according to Kinzinger therefore “It’s a way to indirectly respond without directly attacking Russia.” It is unclear if Kinzinger is aware that the Warsaw Pact was dissolved in 1991, that Belarus was part of it before its dissolution, that it was replaced by the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) of which Belarus has been a member since 1993, and that Article 4 of the Collective Security Treaty establishes that an aggression against one signatory would be perceived as an aggression against all. <https://twitter.com/AdamKinzinger/status/1502442141787865093> Kinzinger is also a lieutenant colonel in the Air National Guard.

around the world. While many are marching to the beat of the war drums right now, others are more skeptical, and communists must work to provide repeated exposures of how the U.S. leveled whole cities in Iraq¹⁶ and Syria;¹⁷ how they have used cluster bombs, chemical weapons like white phosphorous, and depleted uranium shells in recent wars;¹⁸ how they have slaughtered millions in their wars in recent decades; how they have been working with the Saudis and UAE to starve Yemen for the past seven years; and other such atrocities. These are all clear examples of the true nature of the U.S. ruling class, which has no qualms about mass murder, civilian casualties, leveling whole cities, and reducing whole countries to rubble. Given the overall short attention span of Americans brought about in part by years of cable news soundbites and social media, many are quick to forget these realities, but not everyone. There is a small but significant minority within various circles—from libertarians and peace activists to college students, social democrats, and others—pointing out these basic facts. Uniting with their efforts and bringing together various forces across different sections of the society is key to building up a significant opposition to the designs of U.S. imperialism in Ukraine and beyond.

It is also necessary to expose the two-faced nature of the U.S. ruling class's feigned concern for the Ukrainian people. First and foremost is the fact that, while some in the U.S. state were pushing for Ukraine to join NATO, part of the calculus for doing so was that if Russia did invade before this happened then Ukraine could serve as a sacrificial pawn in the game to weaken Russia, slow its inroads into European markets, and to help rally a new "coalition of the willing" to isolate the country globally

(as the U.S. ruling class is attempting to do right now). In a recent MSNBC appearance, Hillary Clinton spoke fairly explicitly about U.S. plans to turn Ukraine into a military quagmire for the Russians, just as was done in Afghanistan in the 1980s.¹⁹ Comments like these provide a window into the logic of U.S. imperialism. The war in Ukraine has already created millions of refugees, seen cities bombarded in a brutal fashion, and now threatens global food production in ways that could well lead to numerous famines around the world. However, all of this is considered by some in the ruling class to be a small price to pay if it hurts their Russian rivals. In short, the U.S. ruling class is ready and willing to fight the Russians to the last Ukrainian.

There is a related need to expose the fact that the U.S. imperialists' plans for Ukraine, even had Russia not invaded, were not ultimately in the interests of the Ukrainian people. While the U.S. media has largely framed this conflict in Ukraine in terms of "standing up for democracy" the reality is that Ukraine was far from even bourgeois ideals of democracy. In 2015, Ukraine was labeled as "the most corrupt country in Europe"²⁰ and in 2017 Ernst & Young found it to be the 7th most corrupt country in the world.²¹ The Hunter Biden Burisma scandal is emblematic of the way in which the U.S. ruling class contributed to this corruption, with the son of the then-U.S. Vice President being installed on the board of one of the biggest gas companies in Ukraine and paid \$50,000 a month despite no prior experience in the industry and a recent discharge from the U.S. Navy related to abusing hard drugs. When Hunter Biden came under investigation for corruption (including currying favor with his father for various wealthy people around the world, including some in Rus-

¹⁶For example, it is estimated that the U.S. led coalition killed 40,000 civilians in the siege of Mosul alone: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/mosul-latest-iraqi-government-forces-recapture-city-heaviest-defeat-a7832186.html> and <https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/07/20/the-massacre-of-mosul-more-than-40000-civilians-feared-dead/>

¹⁷<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/14/staggering-civilian-deaths-from-us-led-airstrikes-in-raqqa-says-un>

¹⁸<https://www.counterpunch.org/2012/04/25/the-children-of-fallujah/>

¹⁹<https://twitter.com/MSNBC/status/1498490752065757184>. See also, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/19/us/politics/us-ukraine-russia-escalation.html>, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-03-22/niall-ferguson-putin-and-biden-misunderstand-history-in-ukraine-war>, <https://news.yahoo.com/exclusive-secret-cia-training-program-in-ukraine-helped-kyiv-prepare-for-russian-invasion-090052743.html>, and <https://news.yahoo.com/cia-trained-ukrainian-paramilitaries-may-take-central-role-if-russia-invades-185258008.html>

²⁰<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/feb/04/welcome-to-the-most-corrupt-nation-in-europe-ukraine>

²¹<https://web.archive.org/web/20181107104015/https://fraudsurveys.ey.com/ey-global-fraud-survey-2018/detailed-results/>

²²While this story was initially panned during the 2020 presidential elections as "Russian disinformation," its credibility has since been acknowledged by major U.S. media outlets like the New York Times: <https://greenwald.substack.com/p/the-nyt-now-admits->

sia and China), Joe Biden used his influence to pressure the Ukrainian government to fire the officials investigating this corruption.²²

More broadly, integration into the EU and NATO for poor Eastern European countries has historically come with a series of structural adjustments that have opened them up in new ways to plunder by major U.S. and EU corporations. EU membership for poor countries has historically led to an exodus of working age people, many of whom become migrant workers throughout the EU, as the capitalists in the wealthy EU countries eagerly work to exploit the new labor pool they have access to. For example, after Poland joined the EU in 2004, millions of people left the country each year.²³ The conditions for these migrant laborers are often brutal. A 2016 Al Jazeera investigation found that many Romanian and other Eastern European migrant workers in the UK—at that point still part of the EU—worked in conditions akin to a form of “modern slavery.”²⁴ The report also documented how huge numbers of young women from Eastern European EU member states were forced into sex slavery in the wealthy EU countries. This investigation was just one of dozens of reports documenting similar conditions.²⁵

So the future in store for the Ukrainian people, had they joined the EU and NATO, would have been far from rosy. Furthermore, in recent years the U.S. state has been

arming, training, and supporting far-right and Neo-Nazi groups in Ukraine, such as the Azov Battalion.²⁶ These groups have committed a number of documented atrocities against Ukrainian people. Support for these far-right forces is not an aberration or isolated episode, but rather was part and parcel of the U.S. strategy for ruling Ukraine. Policies of banning Russian language and books were only the tip of the iceberg. For example, earlier this year the Ukrainian government created a series of new censorship laws which made spreading ill-defined “disinformation” punishable by a \$195,000 fine for an initial offense—a huge sum for a country with a per-capita GDP of \$3,727—and imprisonment of up to five years for “repeat offenders.”²⁷

By exposing the designs and maneuvers of the U.S. ruling class it is possible to show the masses of people in this country that the former are not champions of freedom and democracy, and that behind their “support” for the Ukrainian people is little more than the cynical calculus that these people can be sacrificed to slow down Russia’s military, economic, and political expansion in Eastern Europe and beyond. These sort of exposures are key to raising the consciousness of the masses, showing them that it doesn’t make sense to march in line to the beating of the war drums, and ultimately clarifying to them that their interests lie in overthrowing U.S. imperialism, not aligning with it.

Russophobia, Accusations of Treason, and Other Repressive Measures

Exposures of the U.S. state’s maneuvers abroad have to be coupled with struggle against new forms of domestic repression. We have seen the rise of Russophobia in recent years to new and dangerous heights, which has been used to garner mass support for new repressive measures across the board, especially censorship.

This was already gaining momentum for years, especially since the 2016 election. After the defeat of Hillary

Clinton there was a large scale coordinated effort by the Democratic Party, associated media outlets, and sections of the intelligence agencies to blame Hillary’s loss on Russian state interference in the U.S. election process. While the Russian government doubtless works to meddle in U.S. affairs in various ways, this greatly exaggerated story about Russian interference served mainly to distract liberal supporters of the Democratic Party from the fact

the-biden-laptop

²³https://stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/L_Szacunek_emigracji_z_Polski_lata_2004-2012_XI_2012.pdf

²⁴<https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2016/uk-slavery-sex-slave-smuggling-investigation/index.html>

²⁵For example see, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/mar/12/slavery-sicily-farming-raped-beaten-exploited-romanian-women>, <https://cleanclothes.org/file-repository/resources-recommended-reading-labour-on-a-shoestring/view>, https://migrationonline.cz/romania_country_report.pdf, and <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-39196056>

²⁶<https://jacobinmag.com/2022/01/cia-neo-nazi-training-ukraine-russia-putin-biden-nato/> and <https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/congress-has-removed-a-ban-on-funding-neo-nazis-from-its-year-end-spending-bill/>

²⁷<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/ukraines-new-media-laws-fighting-disinformation-or-targeting-freedom-speech>

that the main reason Hillary lost the election was because of widespread disillusionment and frustration with the Democrats after eight years of the Obama administration.

Blaming Russia also provided convenient cover for new levels of coordination on censorship between the U.S. state, media outlets, tech companies, and social media platforms. For example, the Trusted News Initiative was created by the BBC in conjunction with Reuters, Google, Facebook, Microsoft, and numerous others after the 2016 election to “combat Russian disinformation” and quickly grew to coordinate more broadly to promote censorship.²⁸

The claims that Russian interference in the U.S. election propelled Trump to victory were coupled with the Russiagate story, claiming that Trump and his allies had colluded with Putin and the Russian government in various ways. Despite a lack of any real evidence beyond the Steele Dossier—of which it has since been revealed that Hillary Clinton’s campaign played a significant role in drafting and disseminating—many liberal news outlets ran non-stop stories for several years about how Putin was really running the U.S. by blackmailing Trump using lewd video tapes of him and other such nonsense. This helped to build popular support for Russophobia and even future military confrontations with Russia.

Now, in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, these repressive measures have intensified to new heights. A large number of news outlets associated with Russia have been banned on major social media platforms around the world. The popular fervor for censorship has provided cover for far wider sweeping measures, targeting many individuals on social media who are critical of the U.S. and NATO, claiming that they are spreading “Russian disin-

formation.” This trend is likely to intensify in the future.

The ruling class has also been promoting various forms of Russophobia, Cold War mentality, and even tacitly supporting calls for violence against Russian people. For example, Meta changed their rules to allow for users of Facebook and Instagram in some countries to call for violence against Russians.²⁹ There have been numerous calls for Russian athletes to denounce Putin or be barred from competing in international events; in many cases they are already not allowed to play under Russia’s flag, but instead must “compete as individuals.”³⁰ EA Sports and other video game companies have likewise removed Russian teams from their games.³¹ Many bars have changed the name of the drink the Moscow Mule,³² and restaurants in the U.S. and around the world have ceased to serve Russian dishes.³³ In this climate there has been a sharp uptick in harassment, threats, and vandalism against Russians and Russian small businesses in the U.S.³⁴ In the fervor, many Ukrainian Americans and Ukrainian small businesses are also being targeted, as they are mistakenly identified as Russian by some Americans.³⁵

What’s more, even basic criticism of U.S. policy by ruling class politicians is being labeled as treason. For example, Senator Mitt Romney labelled Tulsi Gabbard a traitor for suggesting that the U.S. and Russia should collaborate to ensure that biological laboratories in Ukraine—many of which were funded by the U.S. and were conducting research on dangerous pathogens—are not caught in the crossfire of the war, leading to the possible release of deadly pathogens. Ana Navarro—host of the daytime TV show *The View*—also called for Gabbard and Fox News host Tucker Carlson to be criminally investigated by the De-

²⁸<https://www.bbc.com/beyondfakenews/trusted-news-initiative/about-us/>

²⁹<https://ottawasun.com/news/world/facebook-instagram-to-temporarily-allow-calls-for-violence-against-russians/wcm/6bab9dee-5fde-4d8c-882f-5d738e4d03e7> This policy change was not just for Ukraine, but also for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Slovakia.

³⁰<https://www.tennis365.com/grand-slam/wimbledon/wimbledon-news-denounce-vladimir-putin-dangerous-families-pay-price/>

³¹<https://www.axios.com/ea-sports-russian-fifa-video-games-b4a310c6-4d83-409d-89fe-c922806fb98e.html>

³²<https://news.yahoo.com/russia-invasion-bars-rename-moscow-073139434.html>

³³Just a few examples: <https://aw-journal.com/bar-da-dona-onca-removes-stroganoff-from-the-menu-in-protest-against-the-war-in-ukraine-03-08-2022-restaurants-2/>, <https://www.news18.com/news/buzz/kerala-eatery-junking-russian-salad-off-menu-in-solidarity-with-ukraine-divides-twitter-4844831.html>, <https://www.dallasnews.com/food/restaurant-news/2022/03/07/north-texas-restaurants-and-bars-are-severing-russian-ties/>, and <https://www.wjbf.com/news/u-s-world-news/restaurant-takes-poutine-off-menu-because-it-sounds-like-putin/>

³⁴<https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2022/0310/Russian-Americans-face-misdirected-blame-for-war-in-Ukraine>, <https://www.wfaa.com/article/news/local/arlinton-restaurant-blacks-out-russian-on-sign-after-receiving-threats/287-1d3ee121-1838-40db-8636-8d4f612aa636>, and <https://jacobinmag.com/2022/03/russophobia-putin-russia-ukraine-war-discrimination-harassment>

³⁵https://www.santafenewmexican.com/business/some-russian-businesses-facing-u-s-backlash-arent-even-russian/article_babbb798-943f-568f-aa47-dd4fdda3b1ec.html

partment of Justice for expressing views critical of U.S. policy. This reflects a broader push by a part of the ruling class to suppress dissent across the board. When members of the U.S. ruling class are being targeted with this sort of

animus for expressing dissent against the dominant view of the elite, it signals that the masses who stand against the designs of U.S. imperialism will likely face far greater repression in the near future.

Basic Steps Forward to Build an Anti-Imperialist United Front

In this situation there is an urgent need for communists in the U.S. to build up a united front against the present machinations of U.S. imperialism. This is no easy task as there is not a significant anti-war movement in this country, and as a result it will have to be built up from scratch. While there are some liberal anti-war activists, many have been swallowed whole by NGOism and related bourgeois ideology which puts forward appealing to supposed allies in Congress as the only way forward for “peace,” despite years of such efforts leading nowhere. Therefore, there is a need to identify those within anti-war circles, where they exist to any significant degree, who are not consolidated to this approach and are looking for a new way forward. Likewise, bringing together libertarians, progressive college students, social democrats who are not cheering on the war machine, and other recalcitrant elements in the society is key at present.

This is no easy task, especially when a significant portion of the Democratic Party base—which initially stood more strongly against the Iraq War during the Bush years—is now rabidly chomping at the bit to support the updated designs of U.S. imperialism after being inundated

with Russiagate and related conspiracy theories for five years. Many within the Republican base are also likewise supportive of escalation. However, there are other trends within the society, including some of those listed above that can be united with and brought together in various ways. It is also important to take stock of the lessons of the successes and failures of past anti-war movements in this country, in particular during the Vietnam War and the Iraq War. The failures in the latter to properly oppose electoralism and the related widespread hope that Obama would “end the wars” stand out as two major lessons, but a deeper analysis and study is needed.

At present, communist forces are marginal in the U.S. but with the intensification of inter-imperialist competition globally and the economic downturn (which sanctions on Russia will likely exacerbate and intensify) there are new openings emerging to advance on the revolutionary road. The present crisis provides ample opportunities to expose the rotten nature of U.S. imperialism, build a united front, and strengthen basic forms of pre-party organizing that have developed in the past few years.

A Critical Evaluation of Gonzaloism

In recent years, struggle between different trends within the International Communist Movement (ICM) has intensified. In particular, the debate on Gonzaloism has taken something of a center stage as numerous parties and organizations have put out statements with a variety of different evaluations of Gonzalo and his theoretical contributions to Marxism. In previous issues of *Red Pages*, we discussed some of these matters, including a comprehensive breakdown of why Protracted People's War is not a universal strategy for revolution,¹ and commentary on the debate between the Communist Party of Brazil – Red Fraction² (CPB-RF) and the Communist (Maoist) Party of Afghanistan (C(M)PA) on the evaluation of Gonzaloism.³

Recently, the CPB and the Communist Party of Peru (PCP) have published a joint statement summing up what they see as Gonzalo's major contributions to Marxism.⁴ These groups and others have also recently formed a new international communist organization, the International Communist League (ICL), which is composed mostly—but not exclusively—of Gonzaloite organizations. In their founding statement, the ICL upholds many central tenets

of Gonzaloism, including the so-called “universality of People's War.”⁵ They also claim that Gonzalo “defined Maoism in a complete and scientific way.” The ICL is now presenting itself as the center of the ICM and aims to unify all Maoist parties and organizations under its banner and program, while demanding that those who join submit to democratic centralist control by the ICL. The basis of unity of this organization follows the theoretical outlines of Gonzaloism, a doctrine that leading Maoist parties internationally do not uphold.⁶ In this article, we break down and critique the main features of Gonzaloism theoretically and historically in order to advance clarity on the question. We hope that this analysis will help to expose the deceitful maneuver the ICL is attempting, distorting the proud example of Maoist revolutionary struggle past and present and covering over the substance of our movement with crude slogans and half-truths.

The CPB—one of the leading organizations in the ICL—claims that those who do not uphold Gonzalo Thought (what they call Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, *principally* Maoism aka “MLM-pM”) are revisionists. For example, in their document *Lenin and the Militarized*

¹See *Protracted People's War is Not a Universal Strategy for Revolution* in *Red Pages* issue no. 1, available online here: <http://www.bannedthought.net/USA/MCU/RedPages/RedPages-01-Jan2021-rev3.pdf>

²Now known as simply the Communist Party of Brazil (CPB).

³The debate between these two parties covered a number of important topics, including the question of militarization of the party and the idea of *jefatura*. We generally agreed with the C(M)PA's criticisms of the CPB's Gonzaloist views. However, as we noted at the time, the Afghan Party also remained under the influence of Gonzaloism to some degree, and upholds the universality of Protracted People's War. For more on this topic see *The Debate on Gonzaloism in the International Communist Movement: On the Recent Exchange Between the C(M)PA and the CPB(RF)* in *Red Pages* issue no. 1

⁴<https://ci-ic.org/blog/2022/09/27/eternal-glory-to-chairman-gonzalo-4/>

⁵<https://ci-ic.org/blog/2022/12/26/historical-news-of-the-successful-holding-of-the-unified-maoist-international-conference-the-international-communist-league-was-founded/>, <https://bannedthought.net/International/ICL/MajorDocs/HistoricNews-ICL-Founded-2022-Eng.pdf>

⁶The recent founding statement of the ICL does differ in some respects from Gonzaloism. For example, it does not explicitly promote Gonzalo Thought, and they use the term “interrelated construction” with reference to Party building, avoiding the term “concentric construction” which is used by the PCP and is discussed below. For more on this, see this recent statement by the Revolusjonære Kommuniste organization in Norway: <https://www.maoisme.no/2023/01/notes-on-the-founding-declaration-of-the-international-communist-league-icl/>

⁷<https://www.demvolkedienen.org/index.php/en/12-dokumente/2791-second-issue-of-el-maoista-released-spanish-and-in-english>: <https://ci-ic.org/blog/2019/06/14/el-maoista-lenin-and-the-militarized-communist-party/>

Communist Party,⁷ the CPB makes the following claim:

The essence of the new revisionism in the question of the Party and the line of construction consists in the denial of the necessity of militarization of the communist parties and the concentric construction of the three instruments. By denying the concentric character of its construction, one denies the absolute leadership of the Communist party over the two other fundamental instruments of the revolution, turning into bourgeois military line [sic], and consequently denying the construction of the New Power through the People's War, as well as denying imperative need of the dictatorship of the proletariat, concealed in their formulas of "solid nuclei with much elasticity" and "multi-party competition".

In the processes of constitution and reconstitution of communist parties in the world, the militarization and concentric construction of the three instruments is a determining factor that sets the basis for the great leap of Initiating the People's War, a matter of great importance in the experience of the World Proletarian Revolution.

While they correctly identify Avakianism ("solid nuclei with much elasticity") and Prachanda-path ("multi-party competition") as forms of revisionism,⁸ the rest of this articulation indicates that the Gonzaloists believe that *every party which does not uphold* the "militarization of communist parties"⁹ and "concentric construction¹⁰ of the three instruments"¹¹ is, in fact, promoting a new form of revisionism. As if this were not enough, they make it clear these two approaches are "*the determining factor* [sic]" which "sets the basis" for starting a people's war and even forming a communist party in the first place. All of this is confusing, even downright absurd, as the two parties leading the biggest people's wars in the

world at present—the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the Communist Party of India (Maoist) (CPI (Maoist))—do not uphold the lines of concentric circles of party building and militarizing the Party.

So, from the CPB's formulation it follows that:

- A) These parties are not Maoist but actually revisionist.
- B) These parties are not actually waging people's wars as they did not do the basic things needed to "set the basis" for launching a people's war (that is to say, they did not militarize their parties, nor do they practice the "concentric construction of the three instruments").
- C) It is only when these Parties uphold "the necessity of militarization of the communist parties and the concentric construction of the three instruments" that they will stop being revisionist and constitute (or reconstitute?) genuine communist parties.

The CPB and associated Gonzaloite parties have put out various solidarity statements and efforts for the CPP and CPI (Maoist), and yet, at the same time their analysis of what revisionism is implies that these two leading parties are, in fact, revisionist. Though the CPB stops short of stating this directly, it is the logical implication of their political line. This is concerning, particularly at a time when they are positioning themselves as something of an international center within their recently formed ICL. While things have not yet come to a head, there is a need for comrades in the U.S. and internationally to take stock of these developments and learn from this important debate.

Given that a constellation of organizations have unified under one banner and are arguing that it was Gonzalo and the PCP who "defined Maoism in a complete and scientific way," there is an urgent need for a sober evaluation

⁸For more on Avakian and Prachanda's revisionism see Ajith, "Against Avakianism," *Naxalbari: Theoretical Journal of CPI (M-L) Naxalbari*, Issue 4, July 2013, p. 6-82 and "On The Line and Tactics of the UCPN (Maoist)," *Naxalbari: Theoretical Journal of CPI (M-L) Naxalbari*, Issue 3, December 2010, p. 6-44.

⁹As we analyze below, militarization of the Party, as articulated by Gonzalo and the PCP, is not reducible to waging armed struggle or developing a military force. Gonzalo and the PCP were quite clear that, in order for a Party to be militarized, its primary form of activity must at all times be "military-type actions" of which they list four "guerrilla actions, sabotages, selective annihilation, propaganda and armed agitation." We breakdown the issues with such an approach in greater detail below.

¹⁰As with militarization, concentric construction has a particular meaning under Gonzaloite doctrine, one which is opposed to the mass-line method of MLM organizational development. This also will be detailed below.

¹¹By this they mean the Communist Party, the People's Army, and the United Front.

¹²Jose Maria Sison gave a number of interviews and wrote a number of important articles on this topic in the past few years before his passing. These are worth reading closely as they contain many important remarks on the strengths and weaknesses of Gonzalo, the PCP, and contemporary Gonzaloites. For example, in critiquing contemporary Gonzaloites' claims that Gonzalo synthesized Maoism, he noted:

of Gonzalo and the PCP's theoretical and practical contributions to the ICM.¹² This is especially important because many positions put forward by Gonzalo and the PCP are in direct opposition to those promoted by Marx, Lenin, and Mao.

The ICL is wrong to claim that Gonzalo “defined Maoism in a complete and scientific way.” In fact, despite struggling against forms of revisionism in Peru and internationally, Gonzalo also “revised” (and therefore negated) key lessons of MLM, in the name of supposedly “synthesizing” Maoism. In order to see this clearly one must understand basic lessons of MLM, in particular the history of the Russian and Chinese revolutions; generally the Gonzaloites today are deeply ignorant and confused on these matters. What little they understand is often regurgitated in an extremely formulaic fashion, mechanically grafted onto a different situation or selectively quoted to justify a fundamentally different (Gonzaloite) conclusion than the lessons of the class struggle summed up by Marx, Engels,

Lenin, Stalin, and Mao. So, when they claim that Gonzalo played a key role in creating what they often refer to as “MLM, principally Maoism” (whether they use the word “synthesized” or “defined”), they only reveal their own disagreements with the basic principles of MLM.

Here we aim to provide an overview and critique of the central tenets of Gonzaloism as an ideology, in the form that it was promoted by the PCP after 1988, and explain how these related to a series of significant mistakes made by the PCP during the course of the People's War. In particular, we analyze the PCP's 1988 *General Political Line* to show how, at least by that time, Gonzalo and the PCP had abandoned MLM in favor of a form of revisionist politics, with a distinct similarity to Lin Biaoism. This is part of the larger necessary effort in the ICM to sum up the successes and failures of the PCP and the theoretical contributions *and* mistakes of Gonzalo. We hope that this effort enriches the present debate within the ICM over these important questions.

A Few Introductory Remarks

This document is not, and cannot be, a comprehensive summation of the successes and failures of the PCP. We are aware of some efforts to take steps in this direction; doubtless there are others of which we are unaware. We look forward to reading and critically engaging with these as they are published.

At present, however, some of the most prominent voices from Peru in the ICM promote an extremely reductive and dogmatic analysis of the history of the PCP.¹³ These accounts generally refuse to critically assess the leadership of Gonzalo and tend to echo various mechanical (and even quasi-religious) slogans from the PCP in the pe-

riod from 1980 to 1992 to justify such an approach. The extreme belligerence with which such forces treat any critical reflection on the history of the PCP and Gonzalo's leadership constitutes a significant barrier to clarity within the ICM on the real history of the class struggle in Peru.

What's more, this narrow and vociferous dogmatism—which, at times goes so far as to insist that not only did the PCP never make any mistakes but also that they represent the apex of revolutionary theory and practice—plays into the hands of various anti-communist forces who seek to whole-sale discredit the heroic struggles of the Peruvian people under the leadership of the

“As I have earlier pointed out, Mao himself constituted in his own lifetime Mao Zedong Thought or Maoism by making great contributions to the development of Marxism-Leninism in philosophy, political economy, party building (especially the rectification movement), the people's war and the proletarian cultural revolution in socialist society. Mao Zedong Thought has gained universal significance long before Gonzalo called it Maoism. The universal significance of Mao Zedong Thought or Maoism does not depend in any way on Gonzalo who has not really summed up all the great achievements of the great Mao. (...) Before, during and after the founding of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), the foregoing six components of Mao Zedong Thought or Maoism were already acknowledged and propagated in CPP publications and grasped by CPP cadres and members. What the Gonzaloites are doing is to tear apart Mao Zedong Thought or Maoism and exaggerate protracted people's war as prescription for all countries under all circumstances and require militarization of the party as the principal or essential elements of Maoism. This is not Maoism but a grotesque Gonzaloite distortion of Maoism.”

Questions on Mao Zedong Thought/Maoism, available online at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20201120215529/https://ndfp.org/questions-on-mao-zedong-thought-maoism/>

For a detailed breakdown of Sison's debate with a Gonzaloite on the question of the supposed universality of Protracted People's War see, Andy Belisario, *On the so-called universality of protracted people's war*. Available online: <https://www.josemariasison.eu/on-the-so-called-universality-of-protracted-peoples-war/>

¹³For example, see the works published at: <http://www.solrojo.org/>

PCP during the people's war. When various bourgeois and anti-communist commentators are the only ones critiquing various shortcomings of the PCP—albeit often in an exaggerated fashion aimed at entirely discrediting the revolutionary struggle—a significant portion of people will be at least partially convinced by these narratives. This will be the case also as long as genuine Communist forces are unable to provide a sufficiently clear and objective materialist analysis of the revolutionary struggles in Peru under Gonzalo's leadership. Our hope is that, despite our own limitations, we can contribute in a modest way to this effort of providing an objective and materialist analysis.

This task is not easy, and it is made harder by the extreme dearth of publicly available documents from the PCP during the people's war. For example, the three volumes of the *Collected Works of the Communist Party of Peru* which span the years 1968-1992 are missing numerous documents from this crucial period. Even some documents written by Gonzalo and the PCP which were published in the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement's (RIM) publication *A World to Win* are not included in these "Collected Works." Since *A World to Win* is publicly available online, examining these documents is not a problem. However, we have been unable to find copies of numerous other documents that we know were written. For example, the *Collected Works* does not contain a single document from the years 1983 or 1984, two key years in the armed struggle; it is also missing all the documents from the Party's pivotal Second National Conference in 1982. Numerous other important documents such as Gonzalo's *Military Thought of the Party* and *Great Plan: To Conquer Bases* are also not included, and we have been unable to find copies of them elsewhere. Likewise, we found no copies (electronic or physical) of the PCP's theoretical journal *Nueva Democracia*.

Lack of access to key documents necessarily makes it impossible for us to provide an overall analysis of the successes and failures of the PCP during this period, or a comprehensive analysis of the development of their political line. Despite these difficulties, in this document we aim to critically analyze some of the main tenets of Gonzaloism (especially as synthesized in the PCP's 1988 First Party Congress and published in their *General Political Line* from that year), demonstrate conclusively that they are in contradiction to lessons of the Chinese and Russian Revolutions (as well the lessons of the Paris Commune and

Revolutions of 1848), and thereby show that concerning the PCP's "synthesis," what was good was not new and what was new was not good. Although the lack of access to key materials means there will doubtless be shortcomings in our analysis, we nevertheless must make an effort to analyze and criticize the key tenets of Gonzaloism given the negative role that the Gonzaloites play at present in the ICM today.

All of this being said, it is important to note that the leaders of the PCP did not start off promoting revisionist and eclectic ideas. In the 1960s and 1970s, Gonzalo and others waged a successful struggle to break from revisionism in the old PCP and set out on a new and revolutionary path. They were inspired by the Chinese Revolution and the Cultural Revolution in particular, as well as the work of José Carlos Mariátegui, the founder of the PCP in 1928,¹⁴ who took important first steps in applying Marxism to Peruvian conditions. They worked to launch the armed struggle, and broke from various incorrect ideas and trends that existed in the communist movement in Peru at the time.

This was a heroic and revolutionary effort, and at this point the PCP was a genuine Marxist organization with some significant, but secondary, confusions and shortcomings. That a Marxist Party or organization would have such confusions and shortcomings at this stage of development is not surprising or unique. For example, in the 1960s in India, Charu Majumdar led the efforts to break from the revisionist Communist Party of India (Marxist) and set out on the revolutionary path. This led to the Naxalbari Revolt in 1967 and subsequent uprisings in thousands of villages across India in the next few years. Charu and his comrades were real Marxist revolutionaries, but also had some key confusions. In his famous *Eight Documents*, Charu promoted a number of incorrect lines, including opposing the need for mass organizations, promoting the slogan "Chairman Mao is our Chairman," and arguing that "he who has not dipped his hands in the blood of the class enemies can hardly be called a communist."

Every party needs its own chairperson, the chair of the Party in China could not be the chair of an Indian Party. Likewise, not all struggle is violent in nature, and many communists are not directly involved in revolutionary violence, even though such violence is necessary to overthrow the ruling class. Likewise, in order to lead a successful revolution, communist parties must create and support the

¹⁴When he founded the Party in 1928 it was known as the Peruvian Socialist Party, and was renamed to the Peruvian Communist Party after his death in 1930.

development of various mass organizations, which while under the ideological leadership of the Party are independent organizations with their own internal democracy. Difficulties that flowed from these mistaken lines led to serious setbacks in the movement in India. However, the comrades in India were able to sum up these mistakes, engage in serious self-criticism over them, and chart a new course forward. This allowed the Naxalites to stay on the revolutionary road, overcome these setbacks, and eventually form the Communist Party of India (Maoist) in 2004.

Revolutionary organizations are divided by the two-line struggle, and thus alongside the possibility of rectifying errors there is the possibility for a genuine Communist Party to consolidate around negative ideas and conclusions. Unfortunately, in Peru, the PCP was unable to sum up their mistakes, or even recognize many of them as mistakes. Throughout the course of the armed struggle, they doubled down on many of their incorrect positions. By at least 1988, these incorrect ideas had become dominant in the Party; they were synthesized in the PCP's *General Political Line* and explicitly promoted as Gonzalo Thought. This no doubt contributed to the Party's setbacks, including the capture of Gonzalo and much of the Central Committee in 1992, and the defeats the revolutionary movement suffered over the next few years.

Contemporary Gonzaloite groups, especially the CPB and many of their allied parties in the ICL, promote Gonzaloism as Maoism. Therefore, it is necessary to deal specifically with the politics eventually promoted by the PCP itself, and expose in detail how the views they promoted in the *General Political Line* are fundamentally revisions of the essential lessons and verdicts of MLM, which amount to a significant "left" deviation in line with many of Lin Biao's views. These views include a commandist approach to leadership which is incompatible with democratic centralism (despite the PCP's claims to uphold democratic centralism); a form of religious *a priori*-ism based around the claim that Gonzalo personally guaranteed the victory of the revolution and would guide the people all the way to Communism; a promotion of a bourgeois view of socialism in line with Trotsky's fantasies

of militarizing society, and more. At the same time, it would be incorrect to deny the successes of the PCP or their contributions to the ICM.¹⁵ However, a sober analysis is needed to properly sum up the theory of Gonzalo Thought and its differences with MLM, especially at a time when Gonzaloite Parties and organizations are claiming that only those who uphold their warped interpretation of Maoism are free from revisionism.

In this document, we will go through a number of the revisionist and "left" deviationist views promoted by the PCP in their *General Political Line* and contrast those with the lessons of MLM.¹⁶ We also include various examples of mistakes made by the PCP, and provide some analysis of how these mistakes relate to some of the central revisionist tenets of Gonzaloism. We begin with a brief overview of some of the shortcomings of the PCP's class analysis of Peru, in particular their limited analysis of the various contradictory class forces among the peasantry and their related ultra-left approach to intermediate forces. These shortcomings contributed to their eventual defeat.

From there we dive into more of the central theoretical tenets of Gonzaloism, beginning with the "concentric circles" approach to Party building. We contrast this with the approach taken in China and Russia, explain how the Gonzaloist view is tied to the idealist policy of *jefatura* and the supposed "absolute leadership of the Party over the United Front," and show how these views led to setbacks in Peru. In particular, we show how their articulations of absolute leadership reflect an idealist fantasy of eliminating class contradictions in the United Front because of the supposed correctness of leadership. We also explain how this idealism pushed middle forces into the arms of reaction. In this section we also discuss the idealist *a priori*isms promoted by the PCP including the absurd claim that Gonzalo personally guaranteed not only the victory of the revolution in Peru but also would carry them all the way to Communism. We note the parallels between such grandiose proclamations and Lin Biao's reactionary "Genius Theory" as well as Dühring's idealism.

We then analyze the three main justifications the

¹⁵These contributions include providing revolutionary leadership to the people's struggles in Peru against U.S. imperialism, domestic compradors, and semi-feudal forces, and developing these struggles into a people's war. The PCP also defended the Four, the GPCR, and Mao's legacy after the coup in 1976, and they worked to expose Deng Xiaoping and the revisionists in the CCP internationally. They also played a positive role in RIM, despite also promoting various dogmatic ideas there as well. These are significant contributions.

¹⁶We had originally planned to include a criticism of the PCP's urban strategy in this document. It is important to take stock of the mistakes the PCP made in urban areas in the late 1980s and early 1990s as these mistakes were central to the defeat of the revolution in Peru. Moreover, this urban strategy also has particular relevance internationally as some Gonzaloites claim that the PCP's urban strategy should be the cornerstone, or at least starting place, of the strategy for carrying out a PPW in imperialist countries. We will provide analysis and criticism on this topic in a future article.

PCP provides in their *General Political Line* for why all Communist Parties must militarize (and what exactly they meant by militarization of the Party), justifications which reveal the PCP's deep infatuation with violence as the key link at all times, a sentiment typical among petty-bourgeois revolutionary romantics but antithetical to MLM. We show, in detail, how their emphasis on the Party being militarized under socialism—supposedly because this is the only way to prevent counter-revolution—is based on the absurd idea that the principal task of the Party under socialism is to carry out “military-type actions” and the related delusion that violence is the key for eliminating the vestiges of exploitation which remain under socialism. We contrast this with the approach taken in the USSR and China during the socialist periods. We also note the parallels between the Gonzaloist dreams of a “global people’s war” and Trotsky’s “permanent revolution.” The Trotskyism of the PCP does not end there. We also demonstrate how their views of socialism as a militarized society and their promotion of the policy of War

Communism are basically a replica of the positions which Trotsky (and Bukharin) promoted at the end of the Russian Civil War, and which were strongly opposed by Lenin and Stalin.

The core of what is promoted as the PCP's and Gonzalo's synthesis of Maoism in their 1988 *General Political Line* reflects a profound lack of historical knowledge about the basic practices and lessons of the Chinese and Russian Revolutions, as well as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.¹⁷ All of this is a tremendous step backwards compared to the clarity achieved in China and in the leading revolutionary movements in the contemporary era. To this day, Gonzaloite ideology continues to exert a negative influence on the ICM, and now Gonzaloites are working overtime to claim the mantle of Maoism and form a new Communist International, the ICL. Therefore, it is time for genuine Maoist forces to struggle against this malformed ideology, and to expose the rotten bourgeois core that is contained in many of their positions.

A Few Notes on the PCP's Class Analysis and their Underestimation of the Enemy

The PCP's *General Political Line* suffers from a number of glaring issues. While claiming to uphold Maoism, and while offering some correct criticism of the Soviet and Chinese revisionists, the document is not a work of Maoism. Instead, it synthesizes various Lin Biaoist and Trotskyist positions into a “left” deviation. This is perhaps

most evident in the reductive class analysis of Peruvian society put forward in it. While there are some basic and correct conclusions about Peruvian society's class character (e.g. that it is semi-feudal and semi-colonial), this is not the same as a comprehensive class analysis.¹⁸

The limitations of the PCP's basic understanding of

¹⁷Actually, it may be more accurate to state that these revisionist formulations in the *General Political Line* were not so much due to ignorance as a conscious rejection of the lessons of MLM. The PCP's documents from the 1960s and 70s contain significant analysis of the lessons of the Chinese Revolution and GPCR that was more in line with Mao's line. But, by the mid-1980s at least, they had largely abandoned such analysis in favor of strange and dogmatic formulations.

¹⁸The PCP was originally inspired by Mao's *Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society* and *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan* as well as the related MLM understanding of semi-feudal and semi-colonial countries. However, other than in provisional way, they failed to really apply this type of analysis of Peruvian conditions. In Jan Myrdal's book *India Waits*, he meets and discusses with a number of Naxalites about the need for a thorough and comprehensive class analysis of Indian society:

“We had no Mao in the twenties and thirties,” said Suraj [A Naxalite who participated in the uprising in Srikakulam]. “There was no communist or peasant leader capable of making an analysis the way Mao did of the Hunan peasant movement, where he united the cultural demands with the social, and identified the forces which could liberate China. Nor has anyone been able to produce a similar summary of that which is historically predetermined and inevitable in India. We have been content to spread Mao's thought and Mao's analysis of Hunan, which does serve some purpose, since similarities do exist between China and India. But the differences are so great that one cannot use Mao's description of Hunan as a guide to Andhra Pradesh or Bihar.” p. 64

Since this point CPI (Maoist) has carried out a comprehensive analysis of classes in India society and just recently published an important analysis on the relations of production in India: <https://bannedthought.net/India/CPI-Maoist-Docs/Books/ChangesInRelationsOfProduction-2021-Eng-View-OCR.pdf>. In contrast, the PCP never really went beyond a surface level analysis of the class relations in Peru.

Peruvian society can be seen, for example, in the fact that they do not distinguish between different strata of the peasantry beyond poor, middle, and rich. In fact, the middle peasants are only mentioned twice in the *General Political Line*, and agricultural laborers are not mentioned at all,¹⁹ limitations which are typical of the document as a whole. Especially in a country in which the majority of the population is living in the countryside, understanding the complexities of class contradictions, and various levels of stratification between different sections of the peasantry (including how these vary in different locations), is of central importance in developing a correct political line. The PCP completely failed to do this.

Overall, the PCP's class analysis amounted to ignorance of the basic class realities in the countryside and in Peruvian society at large. In order to develop a correct line, a Party must have an objective analysis of the fundamental class dynamics in the country. This requires more than just simply noting the existence of various classes. Instead, the Party must make a detailed analysis of the complex and contradictory class forces at play and how they vary regionally. In practice, the PCP's reductive class analysis led to various difficulties, for example their failure to win over the middle peasantry to consistently support the revolution due to their ultra-"left" focus on the poor peasants.²⁰ It's not that the poor peasants aren't a key force in the revolution, they are, but that the question of how to unite them with other progressive classes is key to developing a correct line and charting a course forward for the revolution. The PCP failed to address this task in their *General Political Line*.²¹

In his *Critique of Soviet Economics*, Mao noted that in

¹⁹Agricultural laborers were a significant portion of the population in Peru, especially because during the "land reform" carried out by the military dictatorship, various forms of corporate agriculture had been set up which displaced and dispossessed many peasants.

²⁰The PCP repeatedly emphasized the need to focus principally on the poor-peasantry, for example stating "the Party broadly developed its mass work in the zones of the Sierra, linking itself with the peasants, primarily the poor peasants." *General Political Line*, p. 94. The PCP repeats similar formulations throughout this document, always emphasizing the need to principally rely on the poor peasantry. This line was also evident in the fact that the PCP's main peasant organization was the "Poor Peasant Movement" (MCP).

While the poor peasants are key force in the revolution, the PCP's articulation reflects a lack of clarity on the complexity of the task of uniting the poor peasantry with the middle peasants, especially the lower-middle peasants. In practice, this can easily lead to an ultra-"left" line of neglecting the middle peasants' interests or even relying on only the poor peasants. When taken to this extreme, setbacks for the revolution abound. During the Chinese Revolution, Liu Shaoqi at one point promoted just such a "poor peasant only" line, which threatened to lead to disasters; thankfully, Mao was able to lead the struggle against this line and overcome it. For more on this, see William Hinton, *Through a Glass Darkly*, p. 61-69.

²¹Actually, the PCP's *General Political Line* was a tremendous step backwards from the relative clarity of the earlier works of some Party members. For example, Antonio Díaz Martínez (a PCP member and faculty at la Universidad Nacional de San Cristóbal de Huamanga with Gonzalo, who was captured in 1983 and killed in the infamous 1986 prison massacre) in 1978 wrote the book *China: La Revolución Agraria*, in which he provides a detailed account of the political line of the Chinese Revolution, including the focus on winning over the middle, and especially lower-middle peasantry.

²²Mao, *A Critique of Soviet Economics*, Monthly Review Press, 1977, p. 45. Available online at: <http://www.marx2mao.com/Mao/CSE58.html>

the USSR, there were various confusions on the nature of the middle peasantry and various types of stratification in this class. He also spelled out the issues that inevitably arise from an oversimplified understanding of the middle peasants:

The book [1961-1962 edition of the Soviet Text *Political Economy*] makes no analysis of the middle peasant. We distinguish between upper and lower middle peasants and further between old and new within those categories, regarding the new as slightly preferable. Experience in campaign after campaign has shown that the poor peasant, the new lower middle peasant, and the old lower middle peasant have a comparatively good political attitude. They are the ones who embrace the people's communes. Among the upper middle peasants and the prosperous middle peasants there is a group that supports the communes as well as one that opposes them. According to materials from Hopei province the total number of production teams there comes to more than forty thousand, 50 percent of which embrace the communes without reservation, 35 percent of which basically accept them but with objections or doubts on particular questions, 15 percent of which oppose or have serious reservations about the communes. The opposition of this last group is due to the fact that the leadership of the teams fell to prosperous middle peasants or even undesirable elements. During this process of education in the struggle between the two roads, if the debate is to develop among these teams, their leadership will have to change. Clearly, then, the analysis of the middle peasant must be pursued. For the matter of whose hands

hold rural leadership has tremendous bearing on the direction of developments there.²²

Mao's comments are instructive, and they also help to clarify a distinct weakness in the PCP's political line as it was synthesized in 1988. Without a clear class analysis of various contradictions among the peasantry, and in particular within the middle peasantry, it is impossible to maintain rural leadership and continue a revolutionary direction of development.²³ This confusion on basic aspects of Peruvian society—a result, in part, of ignorance of or disagreement with the basic approach to class analysis promoted by Mao—clearly contributed to the eventual setbacks the PCP faced in many rural areas in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which in turn led them to “retreat forward” to the cities.²⁴

During this period a significant section of the peasantry, in particular the middle peasantry, in the Party's guerrilla zones and support bases began to rally behind the landlords, rich peasantry, and state-sponsored efforts to oppose the PCP.²⁵ *Rondas campesinas*, armed peasant patrols sponsored by the military and under the leadership of the landlords and rich peasantry,²⁶ proliferated across the countryside and closely collaborated with the armed forces in the fight against the PCP. By 1990, *rondas* had been formed in over 3,500 villages in the departments²⁷ of Ayacucho, Apurímac, Huancavelica, and Junín, including in many in areas that had formerly been strongholds of the PCP.²⁸ The fact that a section of the peasantry would col-

laborate with the state and armed forces is not a surprise, nor is it necessarily an indication of mistakes on the Party's part. However, the rapid proliferation of the *rondas* in the late 1980s and early 1990s—especially in areas where the Party had been organizing for years—indicated that serious errors had been made on the PCP's part. By 1990, thousands of villages in these departments had formed *rondas* which put the PCP on the back-foot in rural areas and forced them to retreat from their former strongholds.

While coercion was used by the ruling class in the formation of some of these *rondas*, there was also clearly a real base of support for them among the peasantry. The PCP's inability to defeat this campaign of mobilizing the *rondas* should be contrasted with the success of CPI (Maoist) in defeating the state-sponsored Salwa Judum campaign, where numerous Adivasis were conscripted as Special Police Officers (SPOs). While some declassed and lumpen elements did readily cooperate with the paramilitary forces, the state was not able to cultivate a mass base to oppose the revolutionary struggle, and in a few short years the Party was able to defeat Salwa Judum.

Part of the reason for the PCP's inability to overcome this campaign was that they fundamentally misunderstood the basic strategy employed by the ruling class during this period, and therefore strategically underestimated the forces of reaction. For example, Gonzalo and the PCP repeatedly refer to the armed forces as “experts at defeat,” noting the inability of the armed forces to crush

²³In many respects, the PCP's “principally poor peasantry” line actually bears a distinct similarity to an ultra-“left” “poor peasantry” line promoted by Liu Shaoqi at one point during the Chinese Revolution.

²⁴We are presently working on a more comprehensive analysis and critique of the PCP's urban strategy. In this document we will provide a more detailed analysis of the PCP's shift of focus to the urban areas and their related incorrect conclusion that they had reached a stage of strategic equilibrium in their people's war. For now, it is sufficient to note that their incorrect political line led to significant setbacks and difficulties in the countryside in the late 1980s. Instead of summing up these mistakes and rectifying them, the PCP “retreated forward” to the urban areas while their mass base eroded in the countryside.

²⁵Repeatedly, throughout the course of the Chinese Revolution, Mao warned against the dangers of the CCP falling into a similar trap. For example, in 1933 he warned that “the tendency to encroach upon the middle peasants is the most serious danger,” and emphasized that if the Party hurt the interests of the middle peasantry, they would not support the revolutionary struggle. Mao Zedong, *Preliminary Conclusions of the Land Investigation Campaign*, 1933. Available online here: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-6/mswv6_16.htm

²⁶The fact that the rich peasantry went over to counter-revolution in such large numbers in Peru was due, in part, to the heavy-handed approach the PCP took to them, especially confiscating their land. Mao and the CCP advocated that lands of rich peasantry should only be confiscated if they went over to direct counter-revolutionary activity. In contrast, in the PCP's *General Political Line*, they state “The lands of the rich peasants are not touched unless such land is needed, but conditions are imposed on them.” (p. 48) Gonzalo similarly noted in his 1988 interview with *El Diaro* that “On the condition that there is some land left, or if it is judged to be correct, land can be given to the rich peasants, and likewise, if it is correct or necessary, we can take land from them if there is not enough land to go around.” “Interview with Chairman Gonzalo,” *Collected Works of the Communist Party of Peru: Volume 2 — 1988-1990*, p. 236.

²⁷At the time Peru was divided into twenty-four administrative departments. These are further subdivided into provinces and districts. In 2002 the system was slightly reorganized, and the departments became reclassified as regions.

²⁸Orin Starn, “Villagers at Arms: War and Counter-Revolution in the Central-South Andes,” *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru (1980-1995)*, p. 225. This article (and others in the book) present a reactionary and anti-communist history of the PCP. Nonetheless they provide some important statistics and insight into the defeat of the PCP, from a ruling class perspective.

the revolution during its 1983-1984 offensive. During this offensive by the ruling classes, despite making various mistakes, the PCP had been able to beat back the armed forces and withstand the unprecedented repression they faced. In the context of the military's wholesale slaughter and repression of the masses, the PCP was able to win over many middle of the road forces. However, they made a serious error in assuming that the armed forces and the ruling class more broadly would not learn from their mistakes and adjust the strategy and tactics of their counter-revolutionary offensives.

These assumptions were related to various idealist formulations promoted by the Party, including that they were "condemned to win." For example, they stated "but hasn't our Party taught us that we are condemned to win? A beautiful verdict. This is more valid today than yesterday, and tomorrow it will be even more so."²⁹ The idea that forces of reaction were incapable of learning from their mistakes and formulating new strategies to defeat the People's War was codified in the PCP's *General Political Line*: "The reactionaries dream about elaborating 'superior strategies' to people's war, but are condemned to failure since they are against history. Our People's War after nearly eight years blazes victoriously, demonstrating the invincibility of people's war."³⁰ The idea that the reactionaries could not defeat the people's war because "they are against history" is an idealist distortion of basic reality. Various people's wars around the world were defeated in the 20th century.

To argue that an abstract force of history guarantees the victory of a given revolutionary struggle is an abandonment of materialist principles. It is an idealist fantasy of an external force supposedly determining the course of events. The correctness of the political line of the communist party leading a given revolution is the only thing that can "guarantee" its victory. There must always be two-line struggle internal to the Party to that it stays on the revolutionary road and that its line does not degenerate into opportunism and adventurism or even revisionism. These sort of idealist formulations are commonplace in the PCP's documents, and by at least 1988 they were not a secondary trend, but the cornerstone of the PCP's

line. We analyze some of the fundamentally idealist tenets at the heart of Gonzaloism in the second and third sections of this document.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the reactionary armed forces, while continuing to carry out various massacres and brutal oppression, changed their general strategy for counter-revolution. They abandoned the prior policy of blanket repression of the masses and large-scale forced relocations of the peasantry into concentration camps, and instead focused on cultivating the *rondas* and other counter-revolutionary forces at the village level, working in close collaboration with the rich peasantry, landlords, and other local reactionary elements.³¹ They focused on the various grievances the peasantry had with mistakes the PCP had made, in particular the ways in which various ultra-"left" policies (including cutting off the peasants from rural markets, which we discuss more below) had hurt the middle peasantry. This strategy allowed the forces of reaction to rally the middle peasants—and even some of the poor peasants—under the leadership of the rich peasantry. Thus, the armed forces not only had taken stock of some of the reason why they failed in the 1983-84 campaign, but also had an understanding of some of the PCP's mistakes and shortcomings. In particular, they were aware of the ways in which PCP's faulty class analysis of Peruvian society had led them to alienate significant sections of the peasants.

The PCP failed to take stock of this changed strategy of the armed forces, and continue to insist that the army was pursuing a policy of "steal everything, burn everything and kill everybody."³² This quote is a reference by the PCP to the policy of "Burn All, Kill All, and Loot All" eventually adopted by the Japanese fascists during their invasion and occupation of China. While there were some similarities between this policy and that of the Peruvian Armed Forces in this period, the truth is that the basic strategy the military pursued was quite different. However, the idealist beliefs of the PCP prevented them from taking stock of this and realizing the success the ruling class was having in eroding their mass base. For example, as late as 1990, the PCP insisted that the armed forces were pursuing the same strategy as in the past:

²⁹PCP, "III Plenum: Meeting With the Northern Regional Committee," *Collected Works of the PCP: Volume 3 1991 — 1992*, p. 545

³⁰*General Political Line*, p. 71

³¹Carlos Iván Degregori, "Harvesting Storms: Peasant *Rondas* and the Defeat of Sendero Luminoso in Ayacucho," *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru (1980-1995)*, p. 148-150.

³²CC of PCP, "May Directives for Metropolitan Lima," May 1991, *Collected Works of the PCP: Volume 3 — 1991-1992*, p. 345. Available online at: http://www.redsun.org/pcp_doc/pcp_0591.htm.

³³This refers to the setting up of coordination between various villages to carry out the *rondas*.

Again today, they resurrect the same treacherous lie trying to undermine the People's War and cover up the forceful nucleation³³ they inflict upon the peasantry, to create *mesnadas*³⁴ (paramilitary peasants), repeating obsolete molds previously smashed by the convergence of the enslaved masses themselves and by guerrilla actions. It is evident that with the increasing [revival]³⁵ of *mesnadas* created by the armed forces, which we saw more frequently these past few months, their aim is to reenact the genocidal blood bath of the years 83 and 84.³⁶

This and other statements by the PCP indicate that the Party's evaluation was that the *rondas* were largely being defeated and that the army would soon be forced to return to more extreme forms of overt repression and wholesale slaughter.³⁷ Only in 1991 did the PCP begin to realize the scope and scale of the success the ruling classes

were having in mobilizing the peasantry against the revolution.³⁸

The ability of the ruling classes to carry out such a large-scale counter-revolutionary mobilization of the peasants, under the leadership of the landlords and rich peasantry, speaks to the significance and scope of the mistakes the PCP was making at the time. Relations between the Party and the peasantry had been damaged to such a degree that a significant portion of the middle peasants—and even poor peasants and agricultural laborers—rallied behind the leadership of the landlords and rich peasantry against the Party. These mistakes included the large-scale closing of rural markets and fairs, part of efforts by the PCP to cut off the supply of goods from the countryside to the city.³⁹ The Party hoped that this policy would help to exacerbate the growing crisis in the cities, deprive them of food and other necessary agricultural products, and thereby prepare more favorable circumstances of seiz-

³⁴The PCP generally referred to the *rondas* as *mesnadas*, a term meant to highlight their historical parallels with the armed retinues of the feudal landlords which were used to put down peasant rebellions and generally enforce the power of the feudal and semi-feudal forces. While there is some truth to this parallel, it also served to cover over the important novel features of the situation, in particular that the peasants joining the *rondas* were, in numerous cases, doing so because of mistakes and excesses committed by the PCP.

³⁵The official English translation of this sentence is wrong. "*Reedición de mesnadas*" is incorrectly translated as "surrender of mesnadas." It is possible that the translators misread *reedición* as *rendición*, the latter of which means surrender.

³⁶CC of PCP, "Elections, No! People's War, Yes!", *Collected Works of the PCP: Volume 2 — 1988-1990*, p. 392.

³⁷See, for example, the claim in late 1991 in the PCP aligned-magazine, *El Diario*, that "only five percent maintained themselves continuously since they were created by the Marines or the Army. The rest have been recomposed many times and lately dozens have been vacillating without direction, between dissolving and lining up against their mentors." c.f. "Mejores condiciones para Gran Salto en Equilibrio Estratégico. 1991 inició la Década del Triunfo," *El Diario*, December 2-4, cited in Carlos Iván Degregori, "Harvesting Storms: Peasant *Rondas* and the Defeat of Sendero Luminoso in Ayacucho," *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru (1980-1995)*, p. 149.

³⁸For example, in May 1991 Gonzalo noted that "It is necessary to reanalyze the mesnadas because the reimpulse that since last year is seen in the countryside, extends as an impulse in the cities." PCP, "Concerning the Two Hills," *Collected Works of the PCP: Volume 3 — 1991-1992*, p. 98. During the 3rd Plenum of the CC in 1992, they acknowledge that they were losing ground in some locations, in part due to the *rondas* and that there was a need to win over the section of the masses who had joined the *rondas*. They noted, "The problem is that they express an inflection; this is the problem...they have occupied some points and displaced us. So they have subjected the masses...with threats even of death, and now they are masses pressured by the enemy. So our problem here, what is it? It is that we are restricted in our infiltration work among the mesnadas and this we must correct in order to penetrate them, unmask them, undermine them, until we make them explode." *III Pleno del Comité Central del PCP*, cited in Carlos Iván Degregori, "Harvesting Storms: Peasant *Rondas* and the Defeat of Sendero Luminoso in Ayacucho," *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru (1980-1995)*, p. 149. Even here, they principally still saw the issues with the masses joining the *rondas* as one of coercion by the reactionary forces. The PCP failed to grasp how their own mistakes were contributing to this issue and eroding their mass base.

³⁹The PCP seems to have first practiced this on a large scale in Ayacucho during the 1983-1984 offensive by the military. Later on, it became more of a regular and widespread practice throughout the PCP's guerrilla zones and base areas. c.f. Gustavo Gorriti, *Shining Path: A History of Millenarian Warfare in Peru*, ch 20. See also Ponciano del Pino H., "Family, Culture, and 'Revolution': Everyday Life with Sendero Luminoso," *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru (1980-1995)*, p. 171 and Orin Starn, "Villagers at Arms: War and Counter-Revolution in the Central-South Andes," *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru (1980-1995)*, p. 236.

⁴⁰It should be noted that while widespread, the PCP's policy of suppressing markets was not applied ubiquitously. For example, in the summer of 1991, *El Diario* reported on a trip they made to the Upper Huallaga River in the department of Huánuco. They noted that, at least in those guerrilla zones and base areas, there was trade with various merchants for products like fertilizer, and that the Party limited the profits such small merchants could make off of these deals.

"The PGA: Backbone of the New State," *El Diario Internacional*, August-September 1991, p. 8-9. Available online at: <https://michaelharrison.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/El-Diario-Internacional-No-8-English.pdf>

It is unclear how widely these policies were pursued in this period, and if this was an effort to adjust and rectify earlier mistakes. Given the dearth of documents from this period that are available, this is a topic that requires further research and investigation. Regardless of the scale of efforts to address these mistakes, it is clear that the PCP was not able to overcome various setbacks they were facing in the countryside due

ing control of the cities and combatting the government's counter-revolutionary offensive.⁴⁰ the Party's former General Secretary Ganapathy noted,

However, this approach reflected deep confusions about basic political economy and revolutionary strategy. The peasantry are highly dependent on the flow of finished goods from the cities to meet their basic economic needs. Without tools, clothes, medicine, and other essentials, the peasants will experience a precipitous drop in their standard of living, as well as their level of production. This is what happened in many villages in Peru, and it severely damaged relations between the Party and the masses.⁴¹ The PCP understood clearly that the peasants' demand for land was central to the revolutionary struggle, but they struggled to continue the revolutionary transformation of the relations of production beyond smashing the semi-feudal ownership of large-scale landholders and some related successes bringing cattle rustlers and other lumpen elements to justice. They did carry out some forms of collective and cooperative agriculture, but failed to grasp basic elements of political economy, in particular the key role of rural markets in allowing the peasants to sell surplus agricultural products and purchase key finished goods. Their approach of stopping the peasants from selling their surplus in the markets also alienated elements of the national bourgeoisie and is part of the reason that the PCP was unable, even in the midst of a major revolutionary crisis, to win the support of any significant section of this class.⁴²

In contrast to this approach, the CPI (Maoist) has fought against efforts by the Indian state to close various fairs and markets in their guerrilla zones and base areas. As to these and other errors.

⁴¹Orin Starn, "Senderos inesperados: Las rondas campesinas de la sierra sur central," *Las Rondas Campesinas y la Derrota de Sendero Luminoso*, p. 243 and Nelson Manrique, "La década de la violencia", *Márgenes*, 3 (5-6): 137-182. Available online here: <https://vsip.info/la-decada-de-la-violencia-nelson-manrique-parcial-pdf-free.html>. See especially p. 14-15 of the pdf provide a clear description of how popular outrage at these policies frayed relations between the PCP and the peasantry.

⁴²They note this fact in their *General Political Line*:

"From all this he derives that the New State that we are forming in the democratic revolution shall be a joint dictatorship, an alliance of four classes led by the proletariat through its Party, the Communist Party: A dictatorship of workers, peasants, the petty bourgeoisie and under certain conditions the national or middle bourgeoisie; a dictatorship that today is of three classes, since the middle bourgeoisie do not participate in the revolution, but their interest are respected." p. 86.

Even in 1991 and 1992 when the PCP claimed they had reached the strategic stalemate, they note in numerous documents that they still remained unable to win the support of the national bourgeoisie in the United Front. C.f. PCP, "May the Strategic Stalemate Shake the Country More!," *Collected Works of the Communist Party of Peru — Volume 3: 1991-1992*, p. 383-384 and p. 506. and PCP, "III Plenum: Meeting With the Northern Regional Committee," *Collected Works of the Communist Party of Peru — Volume 3: 1991-1992*, p. 550.

⁴³Jan Myrdal, "In Conversation with Ganapathy, General Secretary of CPI (Maoist)," *Red Star Over India*, p. Available online at: <http://redstaroverindia.se/pdf/1-In%20Conversation%20with%20Ganapathy.pdf>

⁴⁴Ganapathy, "The Dandakaranya Janathana Circars of today are the basis for the Indian People's Democratic Federal Republic of tomorrow," in *Red Star Over India*, p. Available online at: <http://redstaroverindia.se/pdf/3-The%20Dandakaranya%20Janathana%20Circars.pdf>

We give scope to small and medium bourgeoisie to grow with some restrictions so that they may not become anti-people, and black marketing, stock piling and speculating can be controlled. We only restrict big capital; the Comprador Bureaucratic Bourgeoisie and foreign. For instance in 1998-99 the government had stopped small traders to deal in forest products, so as the *Kbirjas* (local traders) protested we fought for them in a movement, though we stopped usury and have controlled indiscriminate exploitation, we are not stopping products from outside to come in. This is capitalist development of one kind, but we are controlling it. It is needed to develop the people's economy. If traders did not cooperate, how would we have survived? Under the Janatana Sarkar [Revolutionary People's Government], the trade and industry department is handling the small traders so that the bourgeois outside cannot take advantage.⁴³

And:

If we can completely and correctly utilize the situation where people are taking their destiny into their own hands and can formulate and implement, even if at a basic level at present, a plan which coordinates needs, production, consumption, market and capital, then we will be able to take a leap in the economic sphere. This leap would definitely consolidate the people's political power. For area wise seizure of power and for carrying on people's war, such efforts in the economic sphere

are very much necessary. Mobilizing people politically into the economic affairs and enhancing their participation and active role would be decisive.⁴⁴

These remarks help to clarify the basics of a Maoist line on the matter in question. They reflect an understanding of the lessons of the Chinese Revolution—where the CCP fought hard against Chiang Kai-shek’s economic blockade of their base areas. Ganapathy’s comments highlight the complex and interrelated tasks facing a revolutionary Party in the economic sphere during a PPW. These tasks are not reducible to smashing semi-feudal property relations. These mistakes were not properly analyzed and corrected, and instead the Party doubled down on them. This line was years in the making, but it was eventually systematized in the PCP’s 1988 *General Political Line*. And it is this and other backward lines the PCP promoted—and contemporary Gonzaloites continue to promote—as both a synthesis of Maoism and its extension and application to Peru, termed Gonzalo Thought.

The PCP’s extremely limited class analysis of the peasantry is not unique, but typical of their overall surface level understanding of Peruvian Society. In *General Political Line* and other documents from this period, there is no analysis of the lumpen-proletariat, despite the significant presence of nacro-traffickers in many regions in which the PCP was active and the huge urban slums around Lima and other cities.⁴⁵ While these slums contained many members of the working-class, there was also a signifi-

cant presence of declassed and anti-social elements, but the Party failed to provide any analysis of these forces in the *General Political Line*.

Likewise, there is no discussion of the various indigenous groups in Peru. In the 1960s, the PCP drew on Mariátegui’s analysis of the “Indian Question” from the 1920s but did not further expand upon it or take stock of various developments since that time. In their *General Political Line*, the only mention of this question is the statement that the People’s War “is the solution to the land question, the national question, and the question of the destruction of the landlord bureaucratic state and the reactionary armed forces.” Of course, a thoroughgoing social and political revolution under proletarian leadership is the only true solution to the myriad of issues the masses face under the present system. However, as they say, the devil is in the details; without a correct political line on how to handle various contradictions (including the national question), it is impossible to lead a successful revolution.

These are just a few further examples of the flawed class analysis put forward by the PCP in their *General Political Line*. There are many others. These mistaken understandings of the basic class realities in Peru had significant practical consequences and contributed to the defeat of the revolution. The class analysis put forward by the PCP in this document is no model to follow; it should be a teacher only by negative example. It was ultimately a dogmatic caricature of a Maoist class analysis.

Heads Spinning in Concentric Circles

As we noted above, the Gonzaloites today, following in the footsteps of the PCP (and perhaps in their minds “improving upon” or even “synthesizing” Gonzaloism) put forward a series of articulations about the construction of the Party and the supposed need to militarize communist parties. Given that the CPB and others insist that these questions form the dividing line between Maoism and revisionism, these formulations provide a good start-

ing point for an examination of the basic politics of Gonzaloism, as synthesized in the *General Political Line*,⁴⁶ and how it differs from Maoism. The logic behind their assertions is quite circular. But first, we will follow them around in circles to see that, in fact, this approach to politics goes nowhere.

Concentric circles are circles inside of one another (as opposed to, say, a Venn diagram of partially overlapping

⁴⁵There is no class analysis of the slums in the PCP’s *General Political Line* or in any of other documents in their *Collected Works*. Instead, the PCP simply emphasizes the importance of working with “the poor masses of the slums.” This is undoubtedly important, but without differentiating between different sections of the poor masses—including poor members of the lumpen-proletariat in the slums—it will be impossible to formulate a correct political line to handle key class contradictions. We will analyze the various mistakes made in the PCP’s urban strategy in our forthcoming document on the topic.

⁴⁶The PCP adopted the strategy of militarization of the Party before launching their armed struggle, but provided a more comprehensive justification for this practice in 1988. While the initial practice of militarizing the Party was a mistake and led to various other mistakes, in this document we focus primarily on the concentrated expression and theoretical justification for this mistaken practice, as expressed in the PCP’s *General Political Line*.

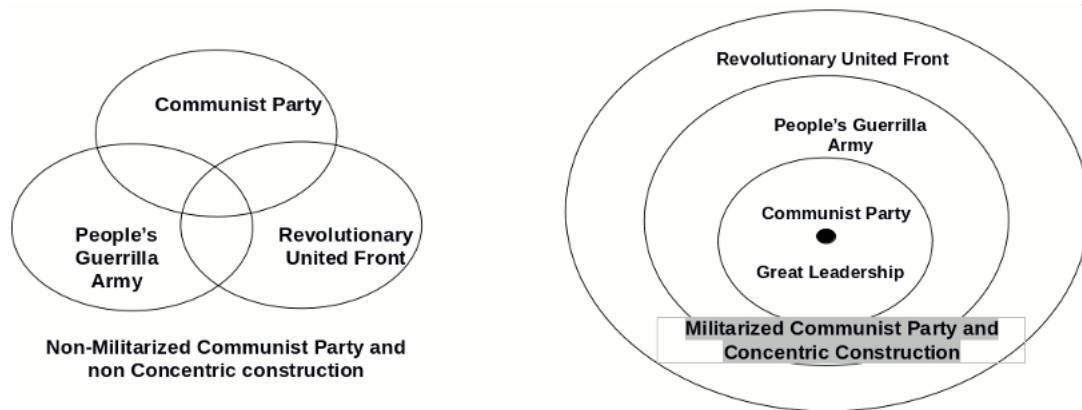


Figure 2.1: Concentric vs. non-concentric Party construction, from https://ci-ic.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/concentric_construction.gif.

circles). In the PCP’s view, this is the model: “Great Leadership” aka *jefatura* at the center of everything. The Party is then the central circle; around it is the army (with every member of the Party also being part of the army), and then the United Front. The CPB provides contrasting images in their document, *Lenin and the Militarized Communist Party* which are illustrative. It should be noted that the CCP’s approach (apparently revisionist!) was in line with the image on the left in Figure 2.1, as was the Bolsheviks.

The basic idea inherent to this Gonzaloist approach to Party building is that the Party has “absolute leadership” over everything. This is supposedly secured by having every Party member be part of the army⁴⁷ and by an (undefined) “great leadership. Below, we will examine the concrete content of this idea of *jefatura* and explain, first and foremost, why it is pure subjective fantasy to believe that the Party can have absolute leadership over the United Front, and second, why this is a revisionist fantasy born of petty-bourgeois impetuosity, which significantly contributed to the liquidation of proletarian politics in Peru.

Before getting into the specifics of these points, it is important to note (and this should be obvious to anyone familiar with Maoism and the history of the Chinese Revolution) that the idea of a militarized party and “concentric circles” of the Party, People’s Army, and United Front are not in line with the basic strategy advocated by Mao,



nor with the practice of the CCP and People’s Liberation Army in China. This should, at the very least, give the Gonzaloites pause in declaring themselves Maoists, but these and other contradictions are instead dismissed with various forms of handwaving, logical leaps, wordplay, and ritual incantations. After all, according to our Gonzaloites, Mao did not “synthesize Maoism”⁴⁸ so he could not really have grasped the supposed universality of the “military strategy of the proletariat” (aka PPW) nor the “Maoist” approach to Party building...We needed to wait for Gonzalo to accomplish this glorious task...If these mental gymnastics have the reader’s head spinning, we must apologize. In order to understand the basic politics put forward by the CPB and other Gonzaloites, we will have to travel deep into the maze of their circular logic, a task which can be dizzying, but is necessary to expose the revisionist essence of their basic views.

It is absurd to argue that, in order to be a Maoist, one must abandon the basic principles of revolutionary struggle promoted by Marx, Lenin, and Mao. Of course, the particularities of different countries requires that tactics and strategy vary accordingly, but adjusting tactics and strategy in line with particular conditions is different than adopting a *fundamentally different approach to basic organizational questions and principles*, especially those concerning the organization of a Party of professional revolu-

⁴⁷This is also a key component of the militarization of the Party. For now, it is sufficient to note that in the PCP’s view this meant that all members of the Party should be members of the people’s army, and that the principal form of action of the Party should be “military-type actions.” They argued that militarization was not reducible to preparing for war, but had to be carried through by these types of actions, and that the Party should be structured as a military organization and subject to military discipline.

⁴⁸c.f. <https://www.demvolkedienen.org/index.php/en/t-dokumente-en/3501-debate-on-people-s-war> and <https://www.demvolkedienen.org/index.php/en/t-dokumente-en/6261-chronicle-of-the-ii-congress-of-the-maoist-communist-party>. These are just two examples of the insistence of contemporary Gonzaloites that Gonzalo “synthesized Maoism.” For a good rebuttal of this absurd view, see: <https://bannedthought.net/Sweden/MF/2019/PoorMaoZedongWhoWasn'tEvenAMaoist-Turesson-2019-OCR.pdf>

tionaries. All of this also pertains to the questions of party discipline, the mass line method of leadership, the contradiction between leadership and the led, and much more. As we will see, by advocating for the absolute leadership of the Party—built around the supposed “great leadership” of one person—over the United Front, the Gonzaloites are promoting a form of one-man leadership which is quite different than the *political and ideological centralization* which is central to MLM.⁴⁹ This amounts to advocating for a negation of hard-won lessons of the class struggle which were synthesized by Marx, Lenin, and Mao.

Absolute Leadership, Idealism, and Class Contradictions

As we noted, the theory of “concentric circles” is inextricably tied up with the PCP’s insistence on the “absolute leadership” of the Party over the United Front. In the first issue of *Red Pages* we criticized this Gonzaloite idea, which was put forward in a May Day statement by the CPB and others. As we noted at the time:

⁴⁹In effect, this one-man leadership is a form of organization where various administrative and bureaucratic methods are used to ensure that the orders and directives of leadership are followed absent of mass initiative or application of the mass line. While, at times, various forms of bureaucratic methods are needed (such as the temporary adoption of one-man management in production after the Russian Revolution), these methods can stifle mass initiative, and in themselves are not a proletarian form of organization. In contrast, political and ideological centralization carried out through the method of democratic centralism allows for growth of proletarian organization and politics. It is based on a unity of correct ideas, which spurs mass initiative and makes the proletarian politics into a weapon to be wielded by the masses to understand and transform reality, instead of reducing it to a series of orders to follow.

Mao emphasized this point when discussing democratic centralism:

“Without democracy there cannot be any correct centralism because people’s ideas differ, and if their understanding of things lacks unity then centralism cannot be established. What is centralism? First of all it is a centralization of correct ideas, on the basis of which unity of understanding, policy, planning, command and action are achieved. This is called centralized unification. If people still do not understand problems, if they have ideas but have not expressed them, or are angry but still have not vented their anger, how can centralized unification be established? If there is no democracy we cannot possibly summarize experience correctly. If there is no democracy, if ideas are not coming from the masses, it is impossible to establish a good line, good general and specific policies and methods. Our leading organs merely play the role of a processing plant in the establishment of a good line and good general and specific policies and methods. [...] I am told that the situation exists within some provincial Party committees, district Party committees and county Party committees, whereby in all matters whatever the first secretary says goes. This is quite wrong. It is nonsense if whatever one person says goes. I am referring to important matters, not to the routine work which comes in the wake of decisions. All important matters must be discussed collectively, different opinions must be listened to seriously, and the complexities of the situation and partial opinions must be analysed. Account must be taken of various possibilities and estimates made of the various aspects of a situation: which are good, which bad, which easy, which difficult, which possible and which impossible. Every effort must be made to be both cautious and thorough. Otherwise you have one-man tyranny. Such first secretaries should be called tyrants and not ‘squad leaders’ of democratic centralism.”

Mao, *Talk At An Enlarged Working Conference Convened By The Central Committee Of The Communist Party Of China*, January, 1962. Available online at: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_62.htm

In this case, Mao was discussing a tendency of some party members leading various local committees to act in a warlord-like manner and thus violate the principles of democratic centralism. But these remarks still show how the idea that what one person says goes is antithetical to the principles of democratic centralism. Although Lin Biao and Chen Boda tried to promote a similar approach in the CCP as a whole through their “genius theory,” their line was defeated.

⁵⁰To get a basic sense of the glaring differences in fundamental principles one only needs to compare and contrast two documents the PCP’s 1988 *General Political Line* and the CCP’s 1974 *A Basic Understanding of the Communist Party of China*. We include some in depth analysis of these documents below.

This is really what is at stake in the debate around Gonzaloism: What are the fundamental principles of Maoism? Because the claims of the Gonzaloites are so surreal and absurd, it’s worth reiterating that according to their parties and organizations, the fundamental principles of Maoism with respect to Party organization (and basically everything else) are not those spelled out and summed up by Mao, but instead Maoism is actually composed of completely different principles (many of which directly contradict Mao and the CCP’s views) summed up by Gonzalo and the PCP in the 1980s.⁵⁰

The all-country united front is a broad organization of all classes which have an interest in the revolution. In semi-feudal countries this includes the rich, middle, and poor peasantry, the working class, the petty-bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie. In the country-wide united front, it is impossible for a Communist Party to exercise absolute leadership. Nor is it

possible to organize a united front with military discipline. Instead, the Party must struggle with a variety of class forces to promote proletarian leadership within the united front.

This is why, in describing the united front, Lenin wrote that “Only those who are not sure of themselves can fear to enter into temporary alliances even with unreliable people; not a single political party could exist without such alliances.” In this case, Lenin was referring to the alliance of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party made with the Russian so-called “Legal Marxists,” who were really bourgeois democrats that used Marxist terminology. This particular united front effort helped to popularize Marxist literature in Russia and was crucial to exposing the Narodniks—a petty-bourgeois “left”-adventurist tendency in Russia. This was important as it helped to clarify the significance and importance of Marxism to the masses of people, and the role that Marxism could play in guiding the Russian revolutionary movement.

During this temporary alliance, the Party did not occupy a position of absolute leadership. Therefore, as the situation shifted, the Tsarist censor began to ban Marxist literature, and the “Legal Marxists” adopted a more conciliatory approach to the Tsar. This temporary alliance was dissolved. Based on Lenin’s analysis of the situation in Russia, he and others were aware that a temporary alliance with bourgeois democrats was possible and advantageous for the Party’s work at that time. However, had they tried to impose the Party’s absolute leadership over the “Legal Marxists” such an alliance would not have been possible in the first place! This united front was a struggle front in which the Party had to fight to ensure that revolutionary politics stayed in command, and when that was no longer the case, they broke off their alliance with the “Legal Marxists.”

Another historical example of importance is the Second United Front between the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese Nationalists. This united front was only possible in the first place because Mao and the

CCP were able to split the Nationalist camp, including through convincing Nationalist General Zhang Xueliang to help them kidnap Chiang Kai-shek during the Xi’an Incident in December 1936. Even after this, the CCP made a whole series of concessions to preserve the United Front, including renaming the Red Army and nominally subordinating themselves to the leadership of the Guomindang. Even these measures did not prevent the Nationalist troops from attacking the CCP at Chiang’s directive during the 1941 New Fourth Army Incident. Despite this attack and other aggression from the Nationalists, the CCP was able to preserve the united front and avoid fighting both the Nationalists and the Japanese at the same time. This would have been impossible if they had held illusions about the need for the Party to exercise “absolute leadership” over the united front.

However, the authors of the May Day Statement—and the adherents of Gonzalo Thought more broadly—struggle to grasp this essential lesson. Instead, based on a reductive understandings of leadership—in particular an exaggeration of the role of individual leaders—they promote the revisionist notion that from the supposed absolute correctness of the individual leader follows the absolute leadership of the Party over the united front. This ultimately leads to the Party abandoning the need to concentrate and synthesize the correct ideas of the masses.⁵¹

By arguing for the absolute leadership of the Party over the United Front,⁵² the PCP not only contradicts the lessons of Maoism—and promotes a commandist approach to mass organization in which the role of the masses is principally to “listen up” to the supposedly correct leadership—but also reveals a deep commitment to an idealist understanding of class contradictions. No Party can eliminate the existence of class contradictions (and therefore contending class forces) in the United Front—not to mention the army and even the Party itself. These class contradictions will not disappear until the arrival of communism. The question is how to correctly handle them. No amount of hand waving can do away with this

⁵¹From “The Debate on Gonzaloism in the International Communist Movement:

On the Recent Exchange Between the C(M)PA and the CPB(RF)” in *Red Pages* issue no. 1. Available online here: <http://www.bannedthought.net/USA/MCU/RedPages/RedPages-01-Jan2021-rev3.pdf>

⁵²For example, see Gonzalo’s remarks, quoted in the *General Political Line*, “The Party is the axis of everything, it leads the three instruments in an all-round way, its own construction, it absolutely leads the army and the new State as a joint dictatorship aiming toward the dictatorship of the proletariat.” p. 76. The PCP used the term “New State” interchangeably with United Front, often referring to them as the “United Front-New State.” c.f. “III Plenum: Meeting of the Central Leadership With the Northern Regional Committee,” *Collected Works of the Communist Party of Peru: Volume 3 — 1991-1992*, p. 553. We discuss the implications of this confusion more below.

basic objective reality which is a result of the class society in which we live. A basic lesson of Maoism is that even after a successful revolution, the existence of class contradictions and class struggle will continue to exert a powerful influence in society. In order to overcome these contradictions and continue on to communism, parties must analyze them and work out a line to resolve them. Fantasies of “absolute” leadership negate materialist analysis of class society and replace it with a form of magical thinking, expressing an underlying belief that class contradictions can be eliminated immediately. Unfortunately, by the time of the publication of their *General Political Line*, the PCP had consolidated around idealist views on these topics and made these views a centerpiece of their practical efforts.

In practice, the “concentric circles” approach to Party building, and related idealist fantasies of absolute leadership over the United Front, led to significant problems in the PCP’s United Front work, especially ultra-“left” and commandist tendencies. Early on, the Party had some significant success uniting with broad popular opposition to new repressive government measures, despite various shortcomings in the PCP’s line. For example in 1981, shortly after the launch of the PPW, the Belaúnde government passed a new “Anti-Terrorism” Law, known as Legislative Decree 046⁵³ which gave broad sweeping powers to the government to crack down on popular struggles, including the ability to imprison people and journalists for up to five years if they “publicly defend an act of terrorism.” Broad sections of the people, including the peasantry, progressive intellectuals, trade union leaders, Catholic priests, and even revisionist parties mobilized against this law, worried that it was a step back towards the military dictatorship which had officially ended in 1980.

The PCP did not create this broad popular opposition, but it was able to engage with the movement to oppose the law, help win freedom for some political prisoners, and garner support for the armed struggle—which was still at a low level at this time. They were helped in their efforts by the fact that most of the electoral left parties and progressive intellectuals thought that the PCP’s

attacks on power stations, electrical towers, and other such infrastructure were actually being carried out by right-wing paramilitary forces as a “false flag operation” to justify new repressive laws.⁵⁴ Thus, while the PCP was able to take advantage of this relatively favorable situation, it was not predominately because of popular support for their sabotage efforts.⁵⁵

One example of the PCP’s early successes in united front efforts can be seen with campaign to free Edmundo Cox Beuzeville, a cadre in the Party who was captured by police in the Cusco Department on May 26, 1981. After being severely tortured, he admitted to being a PCP member and revealed the location of a cache of dynamite. A video of his confession was leaked to the press and aired on TV in Lima; his appearance revealed clear signs of extreme torture. This elicited a large popular outcry, and even the Catholic Church’s Episcopal Commission of Social Action released a statement in his defense, demanding that the government “guarantee the physical and moral integrity of the individuals detained.”⁵⁶ Due to this and other related efforts, Cox was eventually released, and later went on to play a major role in the Party’s Metropolitan Committee, which led their activities in Lima.

Similar efforts were made to free PCP cadre and supporters who were arrested in this period all around the country. In April 1981 three people accused of belonging to the PCP and dynamiting a TV transmitter were arrested in the remote Department of Puno. Various religious leaders (many of whom were sympathetic to liberation theology), as well as trade unions and the parliamentary left (which had significant leadership over the peasant organizations there and had recently won mayorship of the province) mobilized for the release of those imprisoned and were able get two of the three people freed.

These early successes working with other organizations in a broad United Front show the relative clarity that the PCP had at the time. They were able to take advantage of available openings to free cadre, engage with popular opposition to new repressive laws, and more. However, by 1988, the PCP had consolidated to the view that

⁵³<https://img.lpderecho.pe/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/DECRETO-LEGISLATIVO-N-046-LP-1pderecho.pdf>

⁵⁴For example, in 1981 Javier Diez Canseco, then a Senator for the Socialist Party of Peru, speaking of the wave of dynamite attacks on infrastructure and power stations, stated that “One has to be blind not to see that the right carries out much more complex actions. This latest wave has the right’s unmistakable fingerprint.” *Caretas*, no. 668, October 12, 1981. For more on the response to the attacks from various parliamentary left parties and unions see Gustavo Gorriti, *The Shining Path: A History of the Millenarian War in Peru*, p. 123-124 and 139-140.

⁵⁵The PCP was convinced that sabotaging major electrical towers and causing long blackouts in cities (as well as similar forms of sabotage) were central components of PPW, and that these actions would help the masses to grasp the antagonistic contradiction that they have with the Peruvian state. However, in reality, such actions aroused a good deal of popular anger, as these forms of sabotage damaged and destroyed key infrastructure that the people relied on daily.

⁵⁶Gustavo Gorriti, *The Shining Path: A History of Millenarian War in Peru*, p. 145.

the Party had to have absolute leadership over the United Front, and explicitly identified the United Front with the construction of the new state. In fact, in Section 5 of the *General Political Line*, titled “Line of Construction of the Three Instruments,” the United Front is no longer mentioned as one of these instruments. Instead, it is replaced by the new state, showing how the PCP directly equated the two.

The view that the United Front is reducible to the new state that the PCP was building in its base areas is in direct contradiction with the experiences and lessons of the Chinese Revolution. For example, during the Second United Front with the Guomindang (GMD), Mao and the CCP entered into a tactical United Front with the Chinese Nationalists and led the country-wide movement to resist the Japanese invasion—that is, they were tactically united in the need to resist the Japanese invasion, but strategically the CCP and GMD had very different objectives and goals for the future of China. While the CCP was building a new state power in the countryside, they did not limit the United Front to these efforts alone. And, after the defeat of the Japanese fascist forces, it became necessary to fight a civil war against the GMD and renew the agrarian revolution. However, in this period they were able to—in part because of their tactical United Front—build and lead a countrywide strategic United Front for the New Democratic revolution.

This sophisticated and subtle approach to the United Front was based on a materialist analysis of the class contradictions in Chinese society and an understanding of the need to unite with a variety of unreliable and unstable allies. This was not limited to the GMD, but also included a whole series of different forces including intellectuals, reformists, bourgeois democrats, and patriotic landlords. The Party was willing to work with them even if they were not under the Party’s direct leadership, and even if they were not part of the new state that the CCP was building in the countryside. This is in direct contradiction to the PCP’s approach. If the CCP had argued that the United Front was reducible to “the new state” their tactical alliance with the GMD against the Japanese invaders would never have been possible. Instead, they would have been forced to fight against both reactionary forces at the same time, and the victory of the revolution would have been jeopardized.

To better understand the Maoist approach to the United Front it can be helpful to refer to Ganapathy’s remarks on the topic:

For broadest possible unity, we cannot have sectarian approach towards friends of the New Democratic Revolution. At present several forces are lined up against the enemy. We have to let them develop too. In the united front on some issues, there would also be representatives of oppressive classes. We cannot expect them to join our ranks, which is a long way ahead. Right now we need to firmly stick to our strategic goal, and for that tactically we need to remain flexible.

More clearly, there are two different kinds of United Fronts. One, between people, and the other between people and enemy (a section/group/ persons from enemy classes) using the contradictions among the enemy. The Party has to do that. This scope is there to some extent on some issues. We call it the indirect reserves of the revolution which can be used carefully. If we have clear understanding that they are not our class allies, then we would not have right opportunist deviations. We need united fronts of this kind for the success of the revolution. The Indian Left largely, like the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party Marxist had trailed behind the bourgeoisie and degenerated.

Last aspect is that each class has a separate class interest and a world view. The united front in this sense is also a struggle front. But overall if the struggle is against the main enemy, then this struggle [internal to the united front] becomes secondary, while unity becomes primary. The real issue is how this struggle and unity can be balanced and used effectively. The enemy classes will never side with the people. Even after the seizure of power, struggle will continue within the society for a long time. So, united front and class struggle should continue simultaneously. For that it is an utmost important task to concentrate on the ideological and political education of the masses. If we can do this successfully, then we can win-over those sections too and allow them to join our ranks. These parties also have people under a corrupt leadership. If we can win-over the people through political and ideological struggle, we can win over large number of their primary membership. The Revolutionary breakthrough is linked to this process. The Chinese and Nepalese Party have developed through leaps and bounds by doing the same. Both the cadre force as well as the army can expand through this politically and ideologically also. If this dialectical relationship between the united front and the political and ideological struggle can be handled care-

fully, we will succeed in forming a strong united front and isolate the main enemy.⁵⁷

Early on, the PCP adopted something fairly similar to this approach; however, by 1988 they had a narrow and sectarian understanding of the United Front, reflecting their fantasies of absolute leadership. Some practical examples can help to clarify this point.

In 1987 in Puno—where six years earlier the PCP successfully helped forge a broad united front against new repressive laws—the Party began to carry out “selective annihilations” (assassinations) of many of the parliamentary left leaders in the region, and even went so far as to assassinate numerous peasant and teachers’ union leaders. For example, in April 1987, they entered the town of San Juan de Salinas, captured the parliamentary-left Mayor Zenobio Huarsaya, and put him on trial. Despite popular opposition to killing him, the PCP went forward with his execution anyways based on the justification that he was an enemy of the people because he was an elected official in the reactionary state.⁵⁸ This was part of the PCP’s strategy to create a “power vacuum” by assassinating various mayors and elected officials; to justify these attacks they argued that “hitting or beheading State authorities or bureaucrats of whatever level hampers the running of the State and even more generates a Power vacuum.”⁵⁹ In justifying such assassination against Huarsaya and other members of the parliamentary left, the PCP argued that, “although having the complexion and appearance of humble peasants, served and serve the exploiters and betray

their class; they did it in the times of the Conquest and they do it now in the Republic.”⁶⁰

Huarsaya was part of a petty-bourgeois pseudo-Marxist Party, the Partido Unificado Mariateguista (PUM); however, just a few years earlier he had been sympathetic to the PCP, and involved in a number of campaigns to support the release of captured cadres and supporters. The assassination of Huarsaya and others, as well as attacks on the PUM’s reformist agricultural initiatives, created a good deal of popular outrage in Puno and around the country against the PCP. This was exacerbated by the PCP blowing up various PUM and church-run buildings used by peasant organizations in Puno for their meetings. Many members of the masses who had formerly been sympathetic to the revolution became outraged.⁶¹

In Puno, the PUM was not a marginal organization. Under their previous name, Vanguardia Revolucionaria (VR), they had been a major component of the Confederación Campesina del Perú, a peasant organization which led land seizures in the 1970s in Puno and elsewhere and which had around 250,000 members by 1978. They had also led Department-wide general strikes under the military dictatorship and afterwards. The PUM was also one of the leading forces in the Federación de Campesinos del Puno (FDCP) which led a massive seizure of 340,000 hectares of land from the state-sponsored semi-feudal “co-operative” farms (which were largely a reorganization of the old feudal estates along semi-capitalist lines).⁶² They enjoyed significant support from progressive intellectuals

⁵⁷Jan Myrdal, “In Conversation with Ganapathy, General Secretary of CPI (Maoist),” *Red Star Over India*, p. Available online at: <http://redstaroverindia.se/pdf/1-In%20Conversation%20with%20Ganapathy.pdf>

⁵⁸José Luis Rénique, *La Voluntad Encarcelada: Las ‘Luminosas Trincheras de Combate’ de Sendero Luminoso del Perú*, p. 85-86

⁵⁹PCP, “Elections, no! People’s war, yes!”, *Collected Works of the PCP: Volume 2 — 1988-1990*, p. 288-289.

⁶⁰*Causa Proletaria*, No. 5, Gorriti Archive. Cited in José Luis Rénique, “Apogee and Crisis of a ‘Third Path’: Mariateguismo, ‘People’s War,’ and Counterinsurgency in Puno, 1987-1994,” *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru (1980-1995)*, p. 320

⁶¹This outrage was inflamed by Gonzalo’s dismissal of criticisms of the PCP’s assassinations of these leaders. He waved away this criticism by stating that it was just the “old tales and closed defense of rotten leaders on whom people’s justice fell.” PCP, “Concerning the Two Hills,” *Collected Works of the PCP: Volume 3 — 1991-1992*, p. 185

⁶²Gonzalo absurdly claimed that “any advance (if any) in recovering some land [by the PUM], in this case is a by-product of the People’s War.” PCP, “Concerning the Two Hills,” *Collected Works of the PCP: Volume 3 — 1991-1992*, p. 185. Of course the people’s war no doubt had an ideological and political impact on the peasantry and aided in the creation of various openings for mass struggles. However, this is quite different than being the by-product of the people’s war. The peasants’ confidence in the PUM’s leadership was reinforced by their ability to lead these peasant struggles to victory (even if it was a reformist victory which could not be secured in the long-term without the revolutionary overthrow of the state). In order to show the limitations of the PUM’s leadership, the PCP could not simply claim that the former’s victories were simply due to the people’s war. This sort of reductive thinking only reinforced the PCP’s incorrect views that they could simply assassinate PUM leaders and take over the struggles which they were leading.

⁶³For more on the conflict between the PCP and PUM in Puno see, Lewis Taylor, “Agrarian Unrest and Political Conflict in Puno, 1985-1987,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1987), pp. 135-162 and José Luis Rénique, “Apogee and Crisis of a ‘Third Path’: Mariateguismo, ‘People’s War,’ and Counterinsurgency in Puno: 1987-1994,” *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru (1980-1995)*, p. 307-338.

Unfortunately, the PCP generally did not differentiate between the liberation theology inclined progressive members of the Catholic Church, and those more reactionary forces. In contrast to this approach the Communist Party of the Philippines has been able to develop a

and from the liberation theology inclined priests and bishops in the region.⁶³

Actually, the PUM as whole was somewhat sympathetic to the PCP. They had formed as a new Party in 1984, and argued that there was a need to “[unleash] a war” after constructing a series of mass organizations; they rejected the approaches of other parties in the parliamentary left who had given up on the need for armed struggle. Overall, they had something of a petty-bourgeois radical approach, and were not consolidated to parliamentary cretinism. That being said, given the PUM’s politics, they were not able to win lasting victories for the masses, as their efforts constantly floundered on reformist and liberal illusions about the state. However, they enjoyed significant mass support among the peasantry, working class, and petty-bourgeoisie in the region. It was not easy to quickly change this and reveal to the masses the limitations of PUM’s political orientation.

What’s more, given the sharp conflict between PUM and the central government, it may have been possible for the PCP to engage in a tactical united front with them, and work together to oppose the central government’s refusal to fulfill its promises to distribute land to the peasantry. This, in turn, could have helped to win PUM’s continued opposition to the deployment of the military to Puno against the PCP. In such a United Front, the PCP would have been able to struggle with the PUM for leadership of the peasant organizations and other mass organizations as well. Or, if this was not possible, the PCP could have, at the very least, exploited the contradictions between PUM and the central government. Either way, as Ganapathy notes in the above quote, it is necessary to win over the masses who are following the backwards leadership of various corrupt and opportunist Parties.

However, after being unable to quickly wrest leadership of the peasant struggle from PUM (despite PUM’s numerous limitations and backwards politics), the PCP resorted to selective annihilations of PUM politicians and leaders, as well as leaders of mass organizations aligned with PUM. This approach not only foreclosed on any sort of United Front with PUM, it also isolated the PCP from significant sections of the masses, especially the peasantry in Puno. It reflected an extreme impetuosity, seeking to

short-circuit the necessary struggles to demonstrate to the masses, *in practice*, the limitations of PUM and other revisionist parties. In short, the PCP’s narrow understanding of the United Front, and their fantasies of absolute leadership led them to liquidate organizing efforts, push PUM closer to the central government, and alienate themselves from large sections of the peasantry and progressive petty-bourgeoisie.

The extremely backwards approach the PCP took in this situation can be further elucidated by examining the contradictions internal to the PUM at the time, which was divided between two major factors, the *libios* and the *zorros*. The former, representing the majority of the Party, was fairly sympathetic to the PCP and argued that the PUM should take up the armed struggle in the short term. The latter was more conservative and argued that the PCP was a “regressive force.”⁶⁴ In their Second National Congress in July 1988, the *libios* won the majority in the Party, the *zorros* split and left, and the PUM began preparations to start their own armed struggle, which they would abortively try to launch first in 1989 and then again in 1990. Both efforts failed to get off the ground. However, by 1991 the PCP’s continued assassinations of PUM members and various leaders of their associated mass organizations led to another split in the Party, this time between those who wanted to solely rely on the *rondas* to oppose the PCP and those who wanted to also collaborate with the military. By that point, the PUM had consolidated to strongly opposing to the PCP, the question was just over how best to do so.

The point of this exposition is not to claim that the PUM was a thoroughly revolutionary force—they clearly were not. But they can be understood as something vaguely akin to the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) in Russia. There were serious divisions between the right and left wings of the Party, and the left wing was fairly sympathetic to the PCP. Had the PCP not pursued such a narrow and sectarian approach to the United Front, it would have been possible to win over significant sections of the PUM to support the people’s war, and to wrest from them the leadership of various mass struggles, much like the Bolshevik’s did with the Socialist Revolutionaries. However, Gonzalo had declared the PUM to be “enemies of the rev-

broad United Front that includes Catholic Priests and various progressive religious forces, including the group Christians for National Liberation.

⁶⁴“II Congreso Nacional del Partido (Informes y Resoluciones).” *El Mariateguista* No. 17 (August), p. 84. Cited in José Luis Rénique, “Apogee and Crisis of a ‘Third Path’: *Mariateguismo*, ‘People’s War,’ and Counterinsurgency in Puno: 1987-1994,” *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru (1980-1995)*, p. 321.

⁶⁵*Interview with El Diario*, Section III: ‘People’s War,’ found on p. 208 in *The Collected Works of the Communist Party of Peru*.

olution”⁶⁵ and did not differentiate between different contradictory tendencies internal to the organization.

To clarify the extremely backwards nature of the PCP’s approach, it can be helpful to contrast it with the policy pursued by the Bolsheviks to expose the limitations of the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary leadership after the February Revolution. In June 1917, when the First All-Russia Congress of the Soviets was held, the Bolsheviks were a relatively small minority: only 105 of the 1,090 delegates were Bolsheviks. But by the time of the Second All-Russia Congress of the Soviets in October, the Bolsheviks had a majority. They did not accomplish this by assassinating Menshevik and SR leaders, or deputies and soviet delegates (often trade union and peasant leaders) who sided with these other parties. Instead, the Bolsheviks organized tirelessly in the factory committees, among the soldiers, and with the peasants to expose the bankruptcy of these petty-bourgeois parties, including especially their willingness to resume Russia’s participation in the imperialist war. Thus, without carrying out

any “selective annihilations” of these opportunists and revisionists in this period, the Bolsheviks were able to lead a successful revolution. What’s more, they were able to split the left SRs off from their Party and win their support at a crucial moment in the revolution.

In contrast, the PCP’s actions led to their rapid isolation from a significant section of the masses. Support for forming *rondas* to drive out the PCP grew among the peasantry, and likewise among the PUM and various liberal forces in the church. By the time of Fujimori’s coup in 1992, the parliamentary left in Puno had grown so antagonistic to the PCP that they did not even issue a statement of opposition to the coup. On the one hand, this shows the political bankruptcy and feebleness of these parliamentary forces at this time. However, it also shows the way in which the PCP’s line of absolute leadership of the United Front pushed wavering forces into the arms of reaction. Ultimately the PCP was unable to utilize the basic contradictions between different sections of the ruling class, the petty-bourgeoisie, and electoral parties and use these contradictions to form different united fronts.⁶⁶

Jefatura, Metaphysical Guarantees, and Idealist a Priorism

In Peru, these idealist fantasies of “absolute leadership” were tied to extremely backwards ideas, like that Gonzalo was “the guarantee of the triumph of the revolution who will carry us to Communism,”⁶⁷ the promotion of Party members swearing loyalty oaths to Gonzalo, and articulations of the Central Committee’s “conscious and unconditional subjection to the sole leadership of Chairman Gonzalo.”⁶⁸

Such articulations go beyond reductive class analysis and idealist fantasies; they veer into the territory of religious thinking. This sort of thinking, unfortunately, is the heart and soul of *jefatura* and the “concentric circles” approach to Party building.

The idea that Gonzalo’s *jefatura* was the guarantor of

victory is a form of idealist *a priorism*, which the Party took up in the place of revolutionary Marxism. Enshrining these *a priorisms* in the Party’s *General Political Line* speaks to how the Party had consolidated to revisionist ideas by 1988. No individual’s leadership can guarantee the victory of a revolution. To assert otherwise is Dühring-esque; it is akin to Dühring’s self-aggrandizing proclamations of his individual genius being free from any “subjectively limited conception of the world” and his related claims of having discovered “a final and ultimate truth.” The parallels are further elucidated by the PCP’s messianic claims that not only does Gonzalo guarantee the victory of the revolution, but that he will also “carry us to Communism.” This is a negation of the dialectical materialist

⁶⁶For a recent example in contrast to the PCP’s infantile fantasies of “absolute leadership” of the United Front, it can be helpful to refer to the successes that CPI (Maoist) had in Nandigram and Lalgarh, where they were able to form a tactical united front with the Trinamool Congress and even the BJP (among other forces) against the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) and drive CPM from office. For more on these struggles, see Ganapathy’s interview with Open Magazine, “We Shall Certainly Defeat the Government,” available online here: <https://www.bannedthought.net/India/CPI-Maoist-Docs/Interviews/GanapathyInterview-091017.pdf>, as well as other documents on the struggle at Lalgarh: <https://bannedthought.net/India/Lalgarh/index.htm>

⁶⁷GPL, p. 75. This was far from the only time they referred to Gonzalo as the guarantee of victory. For example, see “Nothing and Nobody Can Defeat Us,” *Collected Works of the PCP: Volume 1 (1968-1987)*, p. 385. This document was written by a member of the People’s Guerrilla Army and published by the Central Committee. In it, the cadre repeats the Party’s slogan “Long live Chairman Gonzalo, guarantee of victory!” This is but one of countless examples.

⁶⁸http://www.redsun.org/pcp_doc/pcp_1292.htm

theory of knowledge, substituting for it a form of deeply religious idealism that disarms the masses of people.

Practical experience has shown the incorrectness of this line, but it was clear before Gonzalo's capture that these assertions contradicted foundational principles of dialectical materialism. Promoting these formulations contributed to the growth of various non-proletarian class tendencies in the Party and in the revolutionary movement, especially bourgeois commandism. These issues were particularly evident in the way in which, after Gonzalo's capture in 1992, the revolution went into an acute retreat and was largely defeated by 2000, if not before.⁶⁹

In *On Practice*, Mao emphasizes the central role of social practice in verifying the correctness of knowledge:

Marxists hold that man's social practice alone is the criterion of the truth of his knowledge of the external world. What actually happens is that man's knowledge is verified only when he achieves the anticipated results in the process of social practice (material production, class struggle or scientific experiment). If a man wants to succeed in his work, that is, to achieve the anticipated results, he must bring his ideas into correspondence with the laws of the objective external world; if they do not correspond, he will fail in his practice. After he fails, he draws his lessons, corrects his ideas to make them correspond to the laws of the external world, and can thus turn failure into success; this is what is meant

by "failure is the mother of success" and "a fall into the pit, a gain in your wit."⁷⁰

The PCP's sloganeering about Gonzalo guaranteeing their victory negates the Marxist theory of knowledge. Even before the setbacks in Peru, it should have been clear that claiming that an individual would guarantee victory was deeply backwards. Such claims are not only extremely individualistic but also reek of formalism and a petty-bourgeois desire for "guarantees" of correctness or victory. They also put a major damper on internal line struggle.⁷¹ Such sloganeering is antithetical to MLM and stands in sharp contrast to the approach promoted by Mao and the CCP. Instead of religious proclamations about the metaphysical power of a leader "guaranteeing victory," the CCP relied on a clear understanding of the relationship between democratic centralism and collective leadership. This was spelled out in *A Basic Understanding of the Communist Party of China*:

The strengthening of collective leadership is an important precondition for the implementation of democratic centralism in the Party; an important guarantee for the establishment of the Party's centralised leadership. The Party committees at all levels are bodies which exercise centralised leadership. However, Party leadership is a collective leadership and does not come from the arbitrary decisions of particular individuals.

⁶⁹At this moment, instead of critically summing up some of their mistakes and trying to chart a new course forward, the PCP reaffirmed these idealist tendencies. For example, shortly after Gonzalo was arrested the Central Committee released a document which opens with the following statement: "The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Peru fervently greets our beloved, heroic and magisterial leader, Chairman Gonzalo; the greatest living Marxist-Leninist-Maoist, great political and military strategist, philosopher, teacher of communists, center of party unification, who creatively applying Marxism-Leninism-Maoism to the concrete conditions of the Peruvian revolution has generated Gonzalo Thought, guarantee of the revolutions [sic] triumph." *Resolution of the Central Committee*, December, 1992, available online: http://www.redsun.org/pcp_doc/pcp_1292.htm

⁷⁰Mao, *On Practice*, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_16.htm

⁷¹In 2009, CPI (Maoist) sent a letter to the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), in which they detailed numerous criticisms of the ways in which the Nepalese movement had deviated from MLM. In these remarks they noted that the errors of "Prachanda Path" were part of a larger trend in the ICM of promoting leaders as supposedly infallible and declaring their works to represent a new "path" or "thought." These remarks provide some helpful insight into the issues brought about by this same approach in Peru:

"'Fight against dogmatism' has become a fashionable phrase among many Maoist revolutionaries. They talk of discarding 'outdated' principles of Lenin and Mao and to develop MLM in the 'new conditions' that are said to have emerged in the world of the 21st century. Some of them describe their endeavour to 'enrich and develop' MLM as a new path or thought, and though this is initially described as something confined to revolution in their concerned country, it inexorably assumes a 'universal character' or 'universal significance' in no time. And in this exercise individual leaders are glorified and even deified to the extent that they appear infallible. Such glorification does not help in collective functioning of Party committees and the Party as a whole and questions on line are hardly ever raised as they stem from an infallible individual leader. In such a situation it is extremely difficult on the part of the CC, not to speak of the cadres, to fight against a serious deviation in the ideological-political line, or in the basic strategy and tactics even when it is quite clear that it goes against the interests of revolution. The 'cult of the individual' promoted in the name of path and thought provides a certain degree of immunity [from criticism] to the deviation in line if it emanates from that individual leader."

CPI (Maoist), *Open Letter to Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) From the Communist Party of India (Maoist)*, July 20, 2009. Available online: <https://bannedthought.net/India/CPI-Maoist-Docs/Nepal/OpenLetterToCPNM-090720.pdf>

It is only by conscientiously implementing the system of collective leadership that we can correctly practise democratic centralism in the Party, and that the committees of the Party can fully play their role as nuclei of leadership in correctly carrying out all tasks. In general, there is a limit to how well a single individual can think about a question and analyse it, so that when decisions on important questions are made by one individual, it is difficult for him not to be subjective and one-sided. Only if we practise collective leadership, if the members of the Party committee reflect the opinions of the Party members and the masses in all their aspects, if they study and discuss questions from every point of view and in depth, will we be able to concentrate the wisdom of the masses to arrive at correct ideas, make decisions that conform to objective reality and avoid or diminish the risk of error. At the same time, this enables the leading members of the Party organisations to learn from each other and to move forward together.⁷²

The idea that Gonzalo personally guaranteed victory undermined the system of collective leadership in the PCP. It promoted subjectivism in their ranks and inhibited proper functioning of democratic centralism. What sort of inner-Party democracy can exist if a leader is declared to be absolutely correct and to be the individual who personally guarantees not only the victory of the revolution, but the transformation of all human society to Communism? This view is idealism, pure and simple.

Each individual has subjective limitations; we all have

a mix of correct and incorrect ideas. In *Anti-Dühring*, Engels ridiculed Dühring for the claim that his philosophy was free from any “subjectively limited conception of the world.”⁷³ Yet with Gonzalo and the PCP, we find that they have discarded Engels and taken up Dühring. True, this form of *a priorism* is cloaked in a new garb and prettified with new phrases, but its idealist essence is one and the same as the pitiful philosophy of Herr Dühring.⁷⁴ It has just as little value for the proletarian cause.

This religious form of devotion to Gonzalo which the PCP promoted was extremely detrimental to the struggle. In the wake of Gonzalo’s capture, the CC doubled down on this devotional tendency, stating “The Central Committee of the PCP reaffirms itself in its plain, conscious and unconditional subjection to the sole leadership of Chairman Gonzalo and to the entire system of party leadership.”⁷⁵ No Party member should place themselves under the “unconditional subjection” of any person, nor should any organ of the Party. Following the leadership of any individual and the Party is conditional, namely on whether or not they are promoting a proletarian line on a given topic and overall. If a key leader in a Party does adopt a non-proletarian line, then this must be struggled against! If the Party overall takes up such a stand, this must be opposed.

If there is still a practice of democratic centralism in the Party in question, then it can be possible for those holding minority opinions to do so within the Party, even as it maintains unity of action. Then, the correctness or incorrectness of a given approach gain be clarified through

⁷²*A Basic Understanding of the Communist Party of China*, p. 88 See also Mao’s remarks about the importance of collective leadership and even publishing works collectively as the Central Committee of the Party during the GPCR: *Chairman Mao’s Talk with Members of the Politburo Who Were in Beijing*, especially p. 7-8. Available online at: <http://bannedthought.net/China/Individuals/MaoZedong/Mao'sCommentaries/Mao'sTalkWithMembersOfThePolitburo-1975-May3-EnglishWithNotes.pdf>

⁷³<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch00.htm>

⁷⁴The PCP’s documents abound with Dühring-esque statements about Gonzalo. For example, in *Bases of Discussion of General Political Line: Military Line* they state “[Gonzalo] departs from Chairman Mao’s thesis that the task of strategy as a science is to study the laws of leading military operations that influence the situation of the war in its entirety [...] Taking up Stalin, he links strategy with tactics and establishes the strategic-operational Plans that are the concrete way that strategy is linked to tactical operations. As a result, each Committee must elaborate its strategic-operational plans within the strategic-operational Plan common to the entire Party. The correct disposition emanates from the just decision of the commander.”

In the first issue of *Red Pages* we criticized this articulation, noting “Here the PCP claims that through correct leadership one can overcome the objective contradiction between strategy and tactics. While this contradiction can certainly be handled correctly or incorrectly, to claim that correct leadership is able to overcome this contradiction is subjective-idealism. A correct line does not negate the existence of an objective contradiction, rather it works out a means by which to resolve this and other contradictions. In practice, *jefatura* leads to a commandist approach to politics that stifles the creativity of the masses in the name of following the line set out by leadership. In this regard, it is not surprising that the PCP claims that Gonzalo “departs from Mao” and “takes up Stalin.” Under this approach to politics, which was most expressed in the cult of personality under Stalin, the masses are not free to criticize incorrect ideas from the center, and the contradiction between democracy and centralism is handled in a manner that, if left unchecked, will sow the seeds for revisionism and the defeat of the revolution.” “The Debate on Gonzaloism in the International Communist Movement: On the Recent Exchange Between the C(M)PA and the CPB(RF)” in *Red Pages*, Issue 1, p. 38-39. Available online here: <http://www.bannedthought.net/USA/MCU/RedPages/RedPages-01-Jan2021-rev3.pdf>

⁷⁵*Resolution of the Central Committee*, December, 1992, available online: http://www.redsun.org/pcp_doc/pcp_1292.htm

struggle and practice over time. Likewise, if a key Party leader is making some key but secondary mistakes (and this is not uncommon), then this can be struggled against in the spirit of unity-struggle-unity.⁷⁶ If Gonzalo guaranteed the Party's victory, how could (and why should) any Party member oppose anything he put forward? Doing so would, according to this view, be opposing the guarantee that the revolution is bound to succeed, and may as well be opposing the revolution itself.

In contrast to this approach, it can be helpful to refer to Mao's views on democratic centralism in the Party:

Without democracy there cannot be any correct centralism because people's ideas differ, and if their understanding of things lacks unity then centralism cannot be established. What is centralism? First of all it is a centralization of correct ideas, on the basis of which unity of understanding, policy, planning, command and action are achieved. This is called centralized unification. If people still do not understand problems, if they have ideas but have not expressed them, or are angry but still have not vented their anger, how can centralized unification be established? If there is no democracy we cannot possibly summarize experience correctly. If there is no democracy, if ideas are not coming from the masses, it is impossible to establish a good line, good general and specific policies and methods. Our leading organs merely play the role of a processing plant in the establishment of a good line and good general and specific policies and methods. Everyone

knows that if a factory has no raw material it cannot do any processing. If the raw material is not adequate in quantity and quality it cannot produce good finished products. Without democracy, you have no understanding of what is happening down below; the situation will be unclear; you will be unable to collect sufficient opinions from all sides; there can be no communication between top and bottom; top-level organs of leadership will depend on one-sided and incorrect material to decide issues, thus you will find it difficult to avoid being subjectivist; it will be impossible to achieve unity of understanding and unity of action, and impossible to achieve true centralism. Is not the main item for discussion at this session of our conference opposition to dispersionism and the strengthening of centralized unification? If we fail to promote democracy in full measure, then will this centralism and this unification be true or false? Will it be real or empty? Will it be correct or incorrect? Of course it must be false, empty and incorrect.

Our centralism is built on democratic foundations; proletarian centralism is based on broad democratic foundations. The Party committee at various levels is the organ which implements centralized leadership. But the leadership of the Party committees is a collective leadership; matters cannot be decided arbitrarily by the first secretary alone. Within Party committees democratic centralism should be the sole mode of operation. The relationship between the first secretary and the other secretaries and committee members is

⁷⁶In *A Basic Understanding of the Communist Party of China*, the authors repeatedly emphasize the centrality of the two-line struggle in maintaining the Party's proletarian character. Here are two of numerous examples:

"Marxism considers the struggles inside the Party as the reflection of the class struggles in the society. We should look at the struggle between the two lines in the Party from the Marxist standpoint of class struggle, making use of the method of class analysis. As long as there are class struggles in society, there can be no let-up in the two-line struggle in the Party. We should always look at our struggle against the revisionist elements in the Party in class terms. In order to camouflage their criminal aim of practising revisionism, Lin Piao and his acolytes used every means to distort the class nature of the two-line struggle in the Party, invented so-called contradictions between the "higher and lower levels" and between "these forces and those forces" and tried to pass off the struggle in the Party as a personal power struggle. All of this was completely absurd and poisonous." p. 60

and

"For a communist, the most important thing in the struggle to preserve the proletarian character of the Party is to strengthen his proletarian Party spirit. We must understand that the building of a Marxist-Leninist political Party and the upholding of its proletarian character is the task of each one of its members. The Party is like a living organism, and its large number of members are like so many cells, each being part of the organism. The stronger the Party spirit is in each member, the higher his consciousness of class struggle and of the two-line struggle, the better he will be able to fulfill his exemplary role, and the better the proletarian character of the Party will be preserved. To strengthen his proletarian Party spirit, a communist must assiduously read and study and strive to grasp the Marxist position, point of view and method. He must be able to link theory and practice, distinguish correct from incorrect lines, and strengthen his capacity to separate true Marxism from sham. He must always keep in mind the basic line of the Party and the principle of "the three do's and the three don'ts," and he must also dare to wage a merciless struggle against erroneous lines and tendencies" (p. 25)

one of the minority obeying the majority. For example, in the Standing Committee and the Political Bureau situations like this often arise: when I say something, no matter whether it is correct or incorrect, provided that everyone disagrees with me, I will accede to their point of view because they are the majority. I am told that the situation exists within some provincial Party committees, district Party committees and county Party committees, whereby in all matters whatever the first secretary says goes. This is quite wrong. It is nonsense if whatever one person says goes. I am referring to important matters, not to the routine work which comes in the wake of decisions. All important matters must be discussed collectively, different opinions must be listened to seriously, and the complexities of the situation and partial opinions must be analysed. Account must be taken of various possibilities and estimates made of the various aspects of a situation: which are good, which bad, which easy, which

difficult, which possible and which impossible. Every effort must be made to be both cautious and thorough. Otherwise you have one-man tyranny. Such first secretaries should be called tyrants and not ‘squad leaders’ of democratic centralism.⁷⁷

In contrast to the PCP’s idealist fantasy that Gonzalo’s leadership was an *a priori* guarantee of victory, Mao emphasized the importance of democratic centralism in the Party. He noted that he regularly acceded to the majority view while in the minority, and contrasted this with the situation in some Party committees where “whatever the first secretary says goes.” He described the latter situation as “quite wrong” and noted that it was “nonsense if whatever one person says goes.” And yet, this was ultimately the view that the PCP enshrined in their *General Political Line*. By promoting these sorts of idealist fantasies about Gonzalo, the PCP ended up practicing a form of one-man leadership, somewhat akin to Lin Biao’s “genius theory,” instead of democratic centralism.

Mao’s Self-Evaluation and the PCP’s Lin Biaoism

The PCP’s grandiose proclamations about Gonzalo—which were endorsed and promoted by Gonzalo himself—should be contrasted with Mao’s humble and dialectical analysis of his own strengths and weaknesses. One of the best examples of this is in his July, 1966 letter to Jiang Qing at the start of the GPCR. In this letter, he offers many poignant remarks, including spelling out his concerns about Lin Biao’s promotion of idealist views about Mao. Although it is cumbersome to include such a long quote, it is necessary to quote extensively from this document.

I have never believed that those booklets [*Quotations from Chairman Mao*] of mine have that sort of mag-

ical power. Now if he praises to the sky, the whole Party and country do so too.⁷⁸ It is like Wang Po selling melons, selling them and praising them.⁷⁹ I have been forced by them to ascend Liang Mountain.⁸⁰ It seems it won’t do to disagree with them.

To agree with others on big questions despite my inclinations—this is the first time in my life [I have done so]. This is what is called something that is not determined by human will.

Ruan Ji⁸¹ of the Jin Dynasty objected to Liu Bang.⁸² He [Ruan] went from Luoyang to Chenggong, and proclaimed “The lack of heroes in the world allows those without ability to gain fame.” Lu Xun once said

⁷⁷Mao, *Talk At An Enlarged Working Conference Convened By The Central Committee Of The Communist Party Of China*. Available online: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_62.htm

⁷⁸[This and all other footnotes from the quote are taken from the translation] For examples of Mao’s many repudiations of this practice, see the translation of “A Few Opinions of Mine” on Bannedthought.net regarding Mao’s criticisms of Chen Boda and Lin Biao’s “genius theory.” See also “Central Committee Document Series 67, Number 219, July 5, 1967” on Bannedthought.net regarding the attempts of Chairman Mao and the Central Committee to restrain the mass production of statues and other symbols of Chairman Mao during the GPCR.

⁷⁹An allegory expressing the idea of “tooting one’s own horn.”

⁸⁰A reference to the righteous outlaws who dwell in Liang Mountain, from the Chinese classic, *Water Margin* (Shui Hu Zhuan 水浒传).

⁸¹A famed scholar of the Jin Dynasty (265-419 AD).

⁸²Liu Bang was the first emperor of the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD), and folk-hero.

⁸³Lu Xun referenced this line in the afterword to his work *Let’s Speak of the Wind and Moon* 准风月谈 (准风月谈) when discussing the acclaim generated by his writings: “Time passes one day after another, and big and small things also pass alongside. Before long, they disappear from our memory. What’s more, such things are all scattered, hence from my own perspective I really don’t know how many things I have not perceived, and not known. And yet about such matters I wrote down ten or so essays, added some parallels, and also made use of

the same thing about his own essays.⁸³ I am of the same mind as Lu Xun. I like that sort of frankness of his. He said he would dissect⁸⁴ himself more severely than when dissecting others. After having taken several spills, I also tend to do as he did. But comrades generally don't believe [in doing so]. I am confident, but also have a certain lack of confidence.

In my youth I once said that I believed I would live 200 years, and ride the waves for 3,000 li.⁸⁵ I seemed to be quite arrogant. But I doubt myself, and overall believe that like in a mountain without tigers, the monkey is called a king, and I also became this sort of king. But this [contradictory assessment] is not [a form of] eclecticism.⁸⁶ I have something of a tiger's nature, this is primary, I also have something of a monkey's nature, second in importance to that. I once brought forward the several lines Li Gu of the late Han Dynasty [(221–206 BC)] wrote to Huang Qiong, "What is tall is easily broken, what is pure is easily stained. Those who are able to perform the "White Snow in Spring"⁸⁷ are quite few in number. When one is famous, it is difficult to match one's reputation." The last two phrases really refer to me.

I once read these lines at one of the meetings of the standing committee of the Politburo. It is important to know oneself. In April of this year at the Hangzhou Conference, I expressed my difference with that sort of

pronouncement [of Lin Biao's].⁸⁸ But what was the use? When he went to Beijing, at the May conference [of 1966], he still spoke that way, and the press even more fiercely so, simply exaggerating to the point of fantasy. As such, I could only ascend Liang Mountain.⁸⁹ I guess their real intention is to use a Zhong Kui⁹⁰ to attack ghosts, I truly have served as the Communist Party's Zhong Kui in the 60's of the 20th century.⁹¹

Objects all must go towards [their] opposite side. The more the praise, the heavier the fall. I am preparing to fall and be broken to pieces. That is no worry. Matter cannot be destroyed, but it is shattered into pieces. The whole world has over 100 [communist] parties. Most of the parties don't believe in Marxism-Leninism. [These] people have also beaten Marx and Lenin into pieces, so what of us?⁹² I urge you to pay attention to this question. Do not become dizzy in your head from victory. Frequently think of your weaknesses, shortcomings, and mistakes.

I have talked with you about this question so many times that I don't know the count. You do still remember, that in April, in Shanghai this was discussed as well.

The above writing, often has what approaches black words. Do not some anti-Party elements speak in just this sort of way? But they want to completely defeat our Party and myself. I am but speaking in regard to my

an "afterword" in order to patch up the resulting clashes. At the same time, when projected onto current affairs, the patterns of the events observed were minimal. So should an impression or two also be described? Furthermore, now there are very few authors who dare to lower themselves enough to gaze on the respected faces of Shakespeare and Tolstoy, to look into the shadows and write a few lines. As a result I want more-so to preserve my mixed feelings and in doing so allow them to exist to a greater extent. Although the result is I receive more disdain from people, under siege more growth is achieved. Alas, 'the lack of heroes in the world allows those without ability to gain fame,' this is something I and China's literary works should be indignant about."

⁸⁴Jiepou (解剖), i.e. to analyze

⁸⁵A reference to the philosopher Zhuangzi's tale of a mythical kun fish, that desired to see the world, and transformed into the mythical peng bird, who saw distant seas. Li is a form of Chinese measurement, equivalent to about 0.5 kilometers. Mao wrote this line in a 7-character poetic fragment in 1916

⁸⁶This relates to Chairman Mao's dialectic of "one divides into two" as opposed to revisionist eclecticism of two divides into one [sic]. The critique of Liu Shaoqi and Yang Xianzhen's "two divides into one" [sic] theory was an important achievement of the GPCR. [MCU: Here it seems the translator mistakenly wrote "two divides into one" instead of "two fuse into one."]

⁸⁷Yangchun baixue 阳春白雪, a notoriously difficult song to perform from the state of Chu.

⁸⁸This refers to Lin's actions, including his promotion of the *Quotations of Chairman Mao Tsetung* (known in the west as the Little Red Book), and Lin's "Genius Theory" in which he referred to Mao as a genius that only comes around every few thousand years.

⁸⁹Ascending to Liang Mountain refers to the classic work *Water Margin*, in which the only recourse of the tale's outlaws is to join a rebel army on Liang Mountain.

⁹⁰Zhong Kui (钟馗) is a figure in Chinese mythology and folk religion who vanquishes ghosts. His face is often painted on gates and doors to prevent evil spirits from passing through, much like a scarecrow, but for ghosts.

⁹¹In Lin Biao's counter-revolutionary "Project 571 Outline," for his coup attempt, Lin talked about the counter-revolutionary strategy "Defeating the forces of B-52 under the banner of B-52," (B-52 is what Lin's son, Lin Liguang used to disparagingly refer to Chairman Mao). We see here an example of the way the revisionists tried to make use of the theme of Zhong Kui in their plots.

⁹²i.e. forget about what will happen to us, look what they have done already, even to Marx and Lenin!

⁹³This refers to formulations related to the practice of "praising to the sky," described earlier in this letter.

own role—about which I think there are a few formulations that are not reasonable.⁹³ This is the difference between me and the black gang.

This matter can not be made public at present. The entire left and the broad masses all are speaking in this way.⁹⁴ Making it public would pour cold water on them, and help the right. And the present task is for the entire Party and country to achieve a general defeat (it can not be a complete one) of the right, and then in seven or eight years to have another movement for sweeping away the monsters and demons, and after there will for more sweeping. Therefore, these nearly black words of mine cannot be made public now.⁹⁵

Mao's insightful analysis of the political situation in 1966 and his own strengths and weaknesses is of great importance. Of particular relevance is the way in which he opposed the religious idolization of him promoted by Lin Biao. While it was necessary to work closely with Lin Biao in the early GPCR to topple the Liu-Deng clique and ensure the support of the PLA for the GPCR, Mao had deep reservations about Lin's approach. Mao was concerned by promoting the cult around him, Lin was actually maneuvering politically for his own gain (a fear which would prove well founded based on Lin eventual coup attempt). Mao was also worried about the impact that such idolization had on the Party and the masses. In contrast to Mao's concerns about Lin, Gonzalo and the PCP had no such scruples about adopting Lin Biaoist practices.

We can see this, for example, in their repeated promotion of Gonzalo as the "greatest living Marxist-Leninist-Maoist." This was not just a phrase that they used after his capture, but was codified in their *General Political Line* in 1988.⁹⁶ In their 1991 document *Concerning the Two Hills*, they go so far as to explicitly attribute all of the achievements of the Party to Gonzalo and Gonzalo alone. Gone are the masses who make history, and in their place we find

jefatura, which is really just another "Great Man" theory of history:

Who has developed Marxism, raising it to levels that you cannot even imagine how much it contributes to the revolutions in the world today? Who has established all those laws of society, of the State, of the Party, of the revolution, of the People's War, of the army and of the New Power? Everything has been done by Chairman Gonzalo, the greatest living Marxist-Leninist-Maoist on the face of the Earth today, can anyone prove otherwise?⁹⁷

This is Lin Biaoism, not Maoism. Mao himself repeatedly opposed Lin and others promoting such hagiography.⁹⁸ The PCP seems to largely model itself off of Lin's promotion of the cult of personality around Mao in the early GPCR. Their confusion on this topic does not just stem from a lack of historical knowledge of this period, but also reflects various non-proletarian understandings of leadership in the PCP.

In the early months of the GPCR, Mao and the left were forced to be less public with their critiques of Lin's absurd formulations, so as to not pour cold water on the emerging mass enthusiasm. However, after the defeat of the Liu-Deng clique, it was possible to wage a more resolute struggle against the cult of personality promoted by Lin and related forms of feudal and bourgeois devotion to Mao's image. While Lin was promoting these practices to further his own agenda, their widespread adoption related to various backwards trends that still existed in Chinese society, including significant vestiges of Confucianism and feudal thinking. As Mao put it when speaking with Edgar Snow in 1971, "It was hard... for people to overcome the habits of 3,000 years of emperor-worshipping tradition."⁹⁹ The struggle against these ideas in the back of people's minds was a central part of the GPCR, which aimed to overcome the "Four Alls."¹⁰⁰ This is why, after Lin's failed

⁹⁴Including the promotion of the use of the *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*.

⁹⁵<http://www.bannedthought.net/China/Individuals/MaoZedong/Letters/Mao'sLetterToJiangQing-660708-Alt2.pdf>

⁹⁶c.f. *GLP*, p. 75, 77. There they state: "The Peruvian proletariat in the midst of the class struggle has generated the leadership of the revolution and its highest expression: The Great Leadership of Chairman Gonzalo who handles revolutionary theory and has a knowledge of history and a profound understanding of the practical movement; who through hard two-line struggle has defeated revisionism, the right and left liquidationism, the right opportunist line and rightism. He has reconstituted the Party, leads it in the People's War and has become the greatest living Marxist-Leninist-Maoist, a great political and military strategist, a philosopher, a teacher of Communists, and the center of Party unity."

⁹⁷PCP, "Concerning Two Hills," *Collected Works of the Communist Party of Peru: Volume 3 (1991-1992)*, p. 183.

⁹⁸See, for example, his critiques of Chen Boda in *A Few Opinions of Mine*, available online: https://www.bannedthought.net/USA/MCU/RedPages/issue_two/a-few-opinions-of-mine/

⁹⁹<https://www.bannedthought.net/Journalists/Snow-Edgar/EdgarSnow-Life-1971-April30.pdf>

¹⁰⁰The Dictionary of Revolutionary Marxism has a helpful entry on the topic:

coup attempt, Mao and others on the left launched the “Criticize Lin Biao; Criticize Confucius” campaign.

Gonzalo and the PCP not only failed to take stock of the important lessons of this struggle in China, they in fact promoted many of the same practices that were struggled against! It is one thing for a Party to make some mistakes; this is inevitable to one degree or another. However, it is another thing entirely for a Party to codify these mistakes as the cornerstone of their practice and insist that they have universal validity! And, now the contemporary Gonzaloites absurdly insist that only those who uphold these Lin Biao-esque formulations are free from revisionism. According to the CPB and others, one must follow Lin Biao’s approach (and ignore Mao) in order to be a Maoist today!¹⁰¹ What an absolute mess of infantile rubbish.

A Chinese Maoist group recently published an excellent document, *History Project of the Republic: The history and logic of revolution and restoration*, which provides some important insight into Mao’s views on formulations such as claims that he was “the greatest living Marxist-Leninist of his time.”

In early April 1970, Mao Zedong reviewed the draft of an article written by the editorial board of the two newspapers and one journal of the Central Committee to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Lenin’s birth and wrote a large paragraph of criticism: “Regarding my words, I have deleted several paragraphs, which were useless and offensive to others. I have said this a hundred times, but no one listens to me, I

don’t know why, please ask the comrades of the Central Committee to look into it.”¹⁰² He deleted from the draft: “Chairman Mao is the greatest Marxist-Leninist of our time”, “raised Marxism-Leninism to a brand new stage”, “Mao Zedong Thought is the Marxism-Leninism of the era when imperialism is heading for total collapse and socialism is heading for worldwide victory”, “Comrade Mao Zedong is the contemporary Lenin”, etc.

Before the Cultural Revolution began, Mao accepted Lin Biao’s cult of the individual “against his will” so as not to dampen the enthusiasm of the revolutionary masses, but now it was time for the cult of the individual to recede. Many people say that Mao’s cult of the individual was totally unhistorical, but in fact it was Mao who was correcting the cult of the individual. The cult of the individual actually came from two sources: on the one hand, it is the social change that makes people feel that Mao Zedong is great, but the petty bourgeoisie deified this greatness; on the other hand, it came from Lin Biao’s misleading of the revolutionary masses.¹⁰³

Mao was clearly opposed to labeling him the “greatest Marxist-Leninist of our time,” precisely the way official PCP documents describe Gonzalo. Mao viewed such statements as “useless and offensive to others,” and yet the PCP promoted them. They likely based themselves on the Communiqué of the 11th Plenary Session of the 8th Central Committee and other texts which repeat such slogans. But they did not understand (or did not care to understand) that these articulations were promoted by Lin Biao

This is the name given by the Chinese during the Mao era to the following four points which concisely and powerfully sum up the essence and meaning of communist revolution:

- 1) The abolition of class distinctions generally.
- 2) The abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest.
- 3) The abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production.
- 4) The revolutionizing of all the ideas that result from these social relations.

These four points are taken verbatim from a passage in Marx’s pamphlet, “The Class Struggles in France” (1850), MECW 10:127.

https://massline.org/Dictionary/F0.htm#Four_Alls

¹⁰¹It is worth reading Mao’s 1970 critique of Chen Boda (who was working closely with Lin Biao at the time) for promoting the “genius theory.” In this text, *A Few Opinions of Mine*, Mao breaks down the idealist premises of such theories. Many of Mao’s critiques are equally applicable to Gonzaloites today. The text is available online at: <https://bannedthought.net/China/MaoEra/GPCR/Chinese/AFewOpinionsOfMine-1970-English.pdf>

¹⁰²The original text, in Chinese, can be found here: <https://bannedthought.net/China/Individuals/MaoZedong/Other/PersonalityCult/i-File-1970-NotesOnEssayLeninismOrSocial-Imperialism.pdf> Other relevant documents are also available here: full list of relevant documents here <https://bannedthought.net/China/Individuals/MaoZedong/Other/Mao-NotesOnCultOfPersonality.htm>

¹⁰³*History Project of the Republic: The history and logic of revolution and restoration*, p. 182-183. Available online at: <https://bannedthought.net/China/Maoism/2022/ChinaRevolutionAndRestoration-English-2022.pdf>

¹⁰⁴It is important to grasp the class basis for Lin Biao’s anti-Party clique, and to understand the underlying class position that gave rise to

and his clique.¹⁰⁴ They clearly remain ignorant of the crucial lessons of the GPCR, in particular from the “Criticize Lin Biao; Criticize Confucius” campaign.¹⁰⁵ While there was a great deal of confusion in the ICM post-1976 on the lessons of the GPCR—and therefore various misun-

derstandings were not uncommon in Parties around the world—the depth of the PCP’s confusion on democratic centralism and their deep commitment to a Lin Biaoist politics go far beyond basic misunderstandings, and reveal a serious deviation in their approach.

A Militarized “New Synthesis”?

In their *General Political Line*, the Central Committee of the PCP outlined twelve basic principles of their program. Number 7 is “militarization of the Party and concentric construction of the three instruments of the revolution.” This is no accident, these are inseparably tied together in their line, as we have mentioned above. The idea of militarization of the Party, as outlined by the PCP, is not reducible to the fact that the Party must prepare for warfare and revolution. It is specifically an articulation of how to organize and structure the Party, namely, as a mil-

itary organization.

This is spelled out quite clearly in the *GPL* and is in line with the basic understanding of what it means to militarize an organization. For example, they state, “the militarization of the Party can only be carried forward through concrete actions of the class struggle, concrete military-type actions” and that “we must carry out mainly these forms so as to provide incentive and development to the class struggle, teaching with deeds, with these types of actions as the principal form of struggle in the People’s

such tendencies in Chinese society. It is no coincidence that the PCP not only promoted Lin Biaoist ideas, but also failed to grapple with the key lessons of Maoism surrounding the class struggle under socialism. We elaborate this topic further below. For more, see Yao Wenyuan’s article *On the Social Basis of the Lin Piao Anti-Party Clique*, available online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/yao-wenyuan/1975/0001.htm>

¹⁰⁵One of the central lessons from this campaign was the need to struggle against the various backwards and oppressive ideas in the back of the masses’ minds, and the ways in which the right tries to take advantage of these to derail the revolution. The struggle against Lin Biao’s genius theory was more than just a struggle against a small clique in the leadership of the CCP which eventually tried to stage a coup; it was also about transforming the ideas inherited from the old society. Jan Myrdal saw this firsthand in China in 1975:

“The great theoretical campaigns in China, for instance the campaign against Lin Piao and Confucius, have never really been abstract. The question of whether certain people are born geniuses and therefore understand everything better than others, whether such geniuses should lead and others content themselves to listen and follow—this is not an abstract question. It really concerns each of us, in our own countries as well as in China. It is easier for us to discuss and decide on a matter once we rid ourselves of the notion of geniuses and elites and we instead assume responsibility for our own decisions.

“And as far as women are concerned, it has always been said that they were intended for nothing other than looking after the home. And, therefore, they should always agree with those who understand the major issues better. It has also been said that they should not only respect their elders, but also obey them. And all of this, said day after day for thousands of years, leaves an impression in the back of our minds.

“It is not just that the people are oppressed; they are also given thoughts and notions about their own worthlessness and inferiority which oppresses them. To settle accounts with that inner oppression is important. This contributes to the liberation of an enormous creative force, rich initiative and the capacity to work together for a common goal. For thousands of years, these qualities had been suppressed by longstanding prejudices about inferiority, obedience, geniuses and the people’s backwardness.

“If one views these campaigns from the watch towers of the Pekingologists and China-Watchers, they become obscure and strange, ingeniously distorted. But if one looks at them from below, they become simple and clearly necessary. And if one does an experiment, substituting other personages for Lin Piao and Confucius, and if one looks at what is really happening in Bridgeport or Kansas, then it is not too difficult to realize that notions about geniuses and the people’s ignorance and about women’s peculiarity, ideas which keep mankind shackled, exist much closer to home than in China.

“The feet of girls in Liu Lin [village] were once bound so tightly that as adults they became cripples who could only stump forward. That custom was eliminated. It was not too difficult. That kind of liberation was easy to carry out once the old society had been overthrown. But liberating oneself from stunting notions takes a longer time and does not occur automatically. It is not accomplished in a day or through one discussion.”

Jan Myrdal, “Daycare Centers in Liu Lin,” *China Notebook: 1975-1978*, p. 12-13.

¹⁰⁶*GPL*, p. 76

War.”¹⁰⁶ They likewise note “The mass work of the Party is done through the People’s Army and the masses are mobilized, politicized, organized and armed as the new Power in the countryside and in the People’s Defense Revolutionary Movement (MRDP) in the cities.”¹⁰⁷

In contrast to this “propaganda of the deed” approach to revolution, CPI (Maoist) cadre have noted that actually—and here they are following the footsteps of Mao and the Chinese Revolution—around 80% of the work done by the Party and the Peoples Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) is non-military. These including the PLGA engaging in productive activity (e.g. helping to reclaim wasteland, harvesting forest produce, etc.) as well as mobilizing the masses, doing educational work, distributing goods to the masses displaced by the counter-revolution, and more. During their trip to Dandakaranya, Gautam Navlakha and Jan Myrdal were told that without these activities, military action would cease to carry much weight or be able to sustain popular support.¹⁰⁸ Mao, speaking of the Chinese Revolution, likewise noted that “While the Party did play a leading role, it was against doing everything itself and thus substituting for the masses. Indeed, its concrete practice was to ‘pay call on the poor to learn of their grievances,’ to identify activist elements, to strike roots and pull things together, to consolidate nuclei, to promote the voicing of grievances, and to organize the class ranks — all for the purpose of unfolding the class struggle.”¹⁰⁹

This is a lesson that the PCP did not heed; their confusion on this topic reflected their naive understanding of the strategy of Protracted People’s War, and was tied to their focus on “military-type actions” as the key form of activity at all times. The line of “militarizing the Party” in Peru resulted from related confusions and in turn deepened them. In practice, this meant not only overemphasizing the importance of military actions and underemphasizing non-military ones, but also replacing Party discipline with military discipline.

Maoists Parties must have Party discipline, but this is significantly different from the military discipline of a revolutionary army. And while the PCP claimed to uphold democratic centralism even while militarizing, in fact the

democratic centralism advocated by Mao was quite different than what was preached by the PCP. Both used the same term, but meant very different things, as the PCP’s promotion of *jefatura* related idealistic notions about Gonzalo clearly demonstrate. This is something of a pattern with the Gonzaloites, who use various Marxist terms and concepts, but have a fundamentally different understanding of them.

For the Gonzaloites, the methods of Mao and the CCP are outdated, because a new synthesis of Maoism was made by Gonzalo.

In their *General Political Line*, the PCP at least has the honesty to admit that this approach of militarizing the Party is quite different than what was practiced in Russia and China:

The militarization of the Party has its antecedents in Lenin and Chairman Mao, but it is a new problem developed by Chairman Gonzalo taking into account the new circumstance of the class struggle and we must see that new problems will arise which will be resolved through experience. These will necessarily imply a process of struggle between the old and the new that will develop it further, with war being the highest form of resolving contradictions, of empowering the faculties people have to find solutions. It is the militarization of the Party which has enabled us to initiate and develop the People’s War. We consider that this experience has universal validity, and for that reason it is a requirement and necessary for the Communist Parties of the world to militarize themselves.¹¹⁰

According to the PCP, the militarization of the Party is needed is because of the supposedly “new circumstance of the class struggle.” A key element of this supposedly new circumstance is that they were “entering into the times of war, so that all forces should be militarized.” However, the CCP and the Bolsheviks both dealt with revolutionary struggles during wartime without militarizing the Party. This factor alone is not sufficient to explain why militarization (which constitutes, as the PCP openly acknowledges, a different approach to Party organization than that advocated by Lenin and Mao) is needed, in Peru

¹⁰⁷ *GPL*, p. 76. The PCP also notes, “In the leadership of the People’s War there was a great leap in the mass work of the Party, a qualitative leap, which shaped the principal form of struggle—the People’s War, and the principal form of organization—The People’s Guerrilla Army. This highest task was carried forward through the militarization of the Party, and with respect to the mass work this means that all the mass work is done through the People’s Guerrilla Army.” *GPL*, p. 94.

¹⁰⁸ Gautam Navlakha, *Days and Nights in the Heartland of Rebellion*, p. 142.

¹⁰⁹ Mao, *A Critique of Soviet Economics*, Monthly Review Press, 1977, p. 45. Available online at: <http://www.marx2mao.com/Mao/CSE58.html>

¹¹⁰ *GPL*, p. 76

or elsewhere. And the PCP had no qualms about claiming that militarization of the Party is “a requirement and necessary” not only in their own circumstances, but for all “the Communist Parties of the world.”

One of the PCP’s main justifications for militarization is that “it is the militarization of the Party which enabled us to initiate and develop the People’s War.” This claim is dubious. Was militarization actually the key link in launching the People’s War? Or was it the relative political clarity of the Party at the time and the very favorable objective circumstances in Peru?¹¹¹ Even if one does believe that militarization was the key link, it is quite something to jump from this to the conclusion that this “experience has universal validity” and relatedly that “it is a requirement and necessary for the Communist Parties of the world to militarize themselves.”

This is not a scientific analysis or approach to summing up experiences. To conclude that the approach of militarization of the Party is universal based on the experiences of Peru alone is not the problem, since experiences from one country can have universal validity. But concluding this requires careful consideration and analysis to differentiate between particular and universal.¹¹² The problem is concluding that the organizational principle of militarization of the Party is universally applicable *and necessary to initiate a people’s war*, in spite of the fact that it was not applied by the Bolsheviks (who did not fight a protracted people’s war but did lead a successful revolution) or the CCP. Nor was it applied by numerous other parties have which successfully launched people’s wars, including the CPP, CPI (Maoist), the Vietnamese Communist Party, the TKP/ML, the Nepalese Party, and others.

The claim that militarization of the Party is needed to start a PPW also flies in the face of basic factual evidence; it smacks of dogmatism and empiricism. Mao noted that “Dogmatism is divorced from concrete practice, while

empiricism mistakes fragmentary experience for universal truth.”¹¹³ Clearly, both apply here to the PCP’s 1988 document and the CPB’s contemporary utterances. It is the height of dogmatism to assert—in the face of basic and obvious practical evidence to the contrary—that militarization is a necessary prerequisite for initiating a people’s war. At the same time, it is also extremely empiricist to argue based on a one-sided appraisal of the PCP’s own experience that the militarization of the Party, “concentric circles,” and the strategy of PPW are universal truths. The presence of both these deviations in the PCP’s basic approach is in line with Lenin’s point that dogmatism and empiricism (much like economism and adventurism) are two sides of the same coin.

As we noted above, the contemporary adherents of Gonzaloism take all of this a step further, and argue that opposing the supposed need to militarize and “concentric circles” is the “essence of new revisionism.” In reality, Maoist forces who refuse to uphold the Gonzaloites’ absurd approach are not revising MLM, but rather opposing Gonzaloism, which is itself a revision of the basic lessons of MLM.

Before breaking down in detail the three other main reasons that the PCP provides for the supposed necessity for Communist Parties to militarize, it is important to analyze one other issue in the above quoted paragraph; namely, the PCP’s claim that “war is the highest form of resolving contradictions, of empowering the faculties people have to find solutions.”

This is not a Maoist line, though it seems to be cherry-picked from a quote from Mao (to give the PCP’s dogmatism the form of appearance of Maoism). In *Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War*, Mao wrote that “War is the highest form of struggle for resolving contradictions, **when they have developed to a certain stage, between classes, nations, states, or political groups,**

¹¹¹The objective and subjective conditions in Peru at the time were extremely favorable for launching a revolution. Large-scale unemployment and a larger economic crisis rocked the country, and there had been a series of significant successful struggles against the military dictatorship, which had brought it to an end by 1980. What’s more, there was broad popular interest in and support for Maoism, which was due in part to the hard work of the PCP. For example, roughly one quarter of all the faculty at Universidad Nacional de San Cristóbal de Huamanga (UNSCH) where Gonzalo taught, traveled to China during the GPCR where they saw first hand how the Chinese Revolution had changed the country. They in turn taught classes on the subject and worked closely with the peasantry and working class to show them that the new democratic revolution would provide a solution to the fundamental issues that they faced. For more on this see, Matthew Rothwell, “Forging the Fourth Sword of Marxism,” *Transpacific Revolutionaries*, p. 59-60.

¹¹²For example, Lenin was cautious about claiming universal validity of all the Bolshevik experiences, repeatedly emphasizing that many aspects of how they organized were particular to the conditions in Russia. Likewise Mao repeatedly cautioned against other Parties, even those in semi-feudal and semi-colonial countries, mechanically applying the strategy used in China to their own countries.

¹¹³Mao, *On Coalition Government*. Available online: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_25.htm

¹¹⁴Mao, *Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War*, emphasis ours. Available online: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_12.htm

and it has existed ever since the emergence of private property and of classes.”¹⁴ Here Mao is not arguing that war is the highest form of struggle for resolving all contradictions (a fact which is obvious even to a toddler), but that this is the case *for a certain specific set of contradictions*, and even then only once these contradictions have developed to a certain stage.

This is exceedingly basic and speaks to the existence of deep-seated confusions in the PCP. Is war the highest form of struggle for resolving the contradiction between the Party and the masses? What about the contradiction between the lack of gasoline in a car and the need to drive to work? What about the contradiction between the relations of production and the productive forces under socialism? The class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie reached its hitherto highest form in the GPCR.¹⁵ While there were episodes of violence during this period, it was generally the right which provoked them. The left, in contrast, advocated that the masses “use reason, not violence” in the struggle against the capitalist roaders.¹⁶ Different types of contradictions require different methods for resolving them.

In *On Contradiction*, Mao emphasized that a key feature of dogmatism was the inability to grasp this basic point:

The principle of using different methods to resolve different contradictions is one which Marxist-Leninists must strictly observe. The dogmatists do not observe this principle; they do not understand that conditions

differ in different kinds of revolution and so do not understand that different methods should be used to resolve different contradictions; on the contrary, they invariably adopt what they imagine to be an unalterable formula and arbitrarily apply it everywhere, which only causes setbacks to the revolution or makes a sorry mess of what was originally well done.”¹⁷

Given the PCP’s argument that war is “the highest form of resolving contradictions” it’s clear why they argue that the Party should principally carry out “military-type actions” — if all other means of resolving contradictions are lower and less-effective then the Party shouldn’t waste its time with them. This is an extremely narrow and dogmatic understanding of revolutionary struggle. At any given moment, the Party will have a series of different principal tasks in different situations. For example, it could be the case that in one Party committee, some serious study is needed to deepen their theoretical grasp of MLM. Elsewhere, in a village, it could be the case that production is lagging behind because of the prevalence of various feudal superstitions, and so the principal task is to wage a mass educational campaign. And so on. This is all exceedingly basic, provided one has even an elementary grasp of dialectics. However, our Gonzaloites, in a typical petty-bourgeois “radical” fashion, look for sweeping “one size fits all” solutions to complex problems. Their impetuosity harkens back to those in the Chinese Revolution who put forward all sorts of fantastical theories.¹⁸ Such an approach promotes reductive thinking about how to handle

¹⁴This relates to Lenin’s point that the resistance of the bourgeoisie is intensified a thousand-fold after their overthrow.

¹⁶Actually, as we will see below, the PCP did put forward that the key to resolving contradictions under socialism was violent “military-type actions.” They generally failed to grasp that while revolutionary violence is an absolute necessity to overthrow the old ruling class and needed in various degrees under socialism (i.e. it is needed for opposing imperialist aggression and, at times, for the suppression of counter-revolutionaries, although in the later case mass supervision can also be used in many circumstances) it is not and cannot be *the main method* to resolve all contradictions under socialism. We discuss this, and the GPCR, in further detail below.

¹⁷Mao, *On Contradiction*, available online here: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_17.htm

¹⁸Two relevant quotes:

“We are also opposed to “Left” phrase-mongering. The thinking of “Leftists” outstrips a given stage of development of the objective process; some regard their fantasies as truth, while others strain to realize in the present an ideal which can only be realized in the future. They alienate themselves from the current practice of the majority of the people and from the realities of the day, and show themselves adventurist in their actions.”

-Mao, *On Practice*

“Our dogmatists are lazy-bones. They refuse to undertake any painstaking study of concrete things, they regard general truths as emerging out of the void, they turn them into purely abstract unfathomable formulas, and thereby completely deny and reverse the normal sequence by which man comes to know truth. Nor do they understand the interconnection of the two processes in cognition-- from the particular to the general and then from the general to the particular. They understand nothing of the Marxist theory of knowledge.”

-Mao, *On Contradiction*

all the different complex contradictions Communist Parties are bound to face in the course of revolutionary struggles. Instead, they claim that “military-type actions” are the key link and the guarantee against revisionism.¹¹⁹ This is little more than a fantasy.

We shall return to this topic later in the document. For now, it should suffice to say that clearly war is not the highest form of resolving all types of contradictions.

The belief that “war solves everything” is a “magic bullet” approach to politics typical of revisionist groups.

Subjective Fantasies and Fortune-Telling or Concrete Analysis of Concrete Situations?

We now come to the meat of the PCP’s explanation and justification for why all Communist Parties must militarize themselves. In *The General Political Line of the Communist Party of Peru* and elsewhere the PCP repeatedly asserted that their experiences of militarizing had universal validity and that other Parties must therefore follow them. As we have already stated the CPB and other Gonzaloites today argue that those Parties which do not agree are revisionists. A basic analysis of the PCP’s rationale shows that it was based on an incorrect appraisal of the objective situation internationally as well as the lessons of MLM and the history of the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, and the GPCR. To have some confusions is one thing, but to build a political line on the foundation of these incorrect conclusions cannot but lead to opportunism and ultimately revisionism. All of this raises some serious questions for those who—like the CPB—claim that Parties *not upholding* the PCP’s general line are the “new revisionists.”

In *The General Political Line of the Communist Party of Peru*, the PCP provides three main reasons for the militarization of the Party and the related “concentric circles” approach to Party building: 1) The “strategic offensive of the world revolution” is at hand; 2) Preventing capitalist restoration is principally a military matter; and 3) Socialist society is a militarized society. We will deal with each one individually.

First, they note:

Chairman Gonzalo expounded the thesis that the

It is in line with a petty-bourgeois infatuation with violence and impetuosity which does not have the patience for details but instead seeks out simplified formulas and slogans. This is, unfortunately, a consistent thread that runs through Gonzaloism; by 1988 it had become an official cornerstone of the PCP’s practice. This is the Gonzaloite “New Synthesis” which has little in common with Maoism beyond some proper names but does share certain clear parallels with Lin Biaoism.

Communist Parties of the world should militarize themselves for three reasons:

First, because we are in the strategic offensive of the world revolution, we live during the sweeping away of imperialism and reaction from the face of the Earth within the next 50 to 100 years, a time marked by violence in which all kinds of wars take place. We see how reaction is militarizing itself more and more, militarizing the old States, their economies, developing wars of aggression, trafficking with the struggles of the peoples and aiming toward a world war, but since *revolution is the principal tendency in the world* [emphasis ours], the task of the Communist Parties is to uphold revolution shaping the principal form of struggle: People’s war to oppose the world counterrevolutionary war with world revolutionary war.

This document was hardly the only time that the PCP made this claim. Similar articulations were made in Gonzalo’s 1980 speech *We are the Initiators*, at the start of the armed struggle, and were repeated throughout the PCP’s existence. For example, in their 1985 statement in the third issue of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement’s (RIM) magazine *A World to Win*, the CC of the PCP stated: “The world situation increasingly reveals the existence of an unevenly developing revolutionary situation” and that “the main trend is revolution, because only revolution can resolve the basic problems of the world today.”¹²⁰ This last statement is particularly absurd because the fact that revolution is the only way to solve the basic

¹¹⁹As was noted above, the PCP did play an important role in opposing both Soviet Revisionism and Dengist revisionism. They also struggled against various forms of social democracy in Peru. These were important efforts. But by focusing on violence as the key link, they left themselves blind to other deviations.

¹²⁰Central Committee of the Communist Party of Peru, “The PCP Salutes the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement,” *A World to Win*, Issue 3, May 1, 1985, p. 30-31. Available online at: <https://bannedthought.net/International/RIM/AWTW/1985-3/AWTW-03-PCP-SalutesRIM.pdf>

problems of the world today in no way proves or even implies that revolution is the main trend in the world at this moment.

The PCP's fantasies about this supposed strategic offensive seem to be based on Mao's 1966 assessment that, at that time, revolution was the main trend in the world, and that the situation was quite favorable for revolutionary advances in China and internationally. This was the case in 1966, but it was pure subjective fantasy to argue in 1988 that there was a "strategic offensive of the world revolution." As early as 1971 the situation had changed markedly, driving the rationale for China "opening to the West" in order to buy some breathing room, in particular from Soviet Imperialist aggression.¹²¹ Later, post-1976, there was a major downturn in revolutionary struggles around the globe after the coup in China and capitulation of many Parties internationally.

By 1988, it was clear that the revolutionary forces globally were quite weak. Especially in the U.S. and other imperialist countries, reaction was quite strong and there was nothing remotely close to a revolutionary situation. In fact, after the major upsurges in the 1960s and early 1970s, the situation had stabilized and the movements receded in most countries around the world.¹²² It was hardly the case that "those on the bottom refuse to go on living in the old way and those on the top can no longer rule in the old way"¹²³ in most countries, despite the PCP's claim to the contrary.

In Peru, revolutionary forces were fairly strong, and in Nepal important advances were being made. But in Turkey the movement was divided. In India, the Maoist Communist Center of India and People's War Group—

which would later merge to form CPI (Maoist) in 2004—were literally fighting each other. In the Philippines, the CPP was pursuing a policy of premature regularization of their forces which led to major setbacks.¹²⁴ The RCP in the U.S. had degenerated into a revisionist organization, and so on. We dealt with this view of "the strategic offensive of world revolution" in our document on the debate between the Brazilian Gonzaloist Party and the Afghan Maoist Party. In it we noted,

The PCP claimed that "In the next 50 to 100 years, the domination of imperialism and all exploiters will be swept away," which was based on their view that "History cannot go backwards." This mechanical conception of history moving in a linear fashion led them to conclude that world revolutionary struggles were at a high tide, when, objectively, the year 1980 was a low-point in world revolutionary struggles. Recent years had seen, among other events, the 1976 counter-revolution in China, the further consolidation of the Vietnamese communists to the Soviet-revisionist line, the objective and subjective weakness in India following the setbacks in 1972.¹²⁵

In short, the PCP substituted their subjective fantasies for reality. In place of concrete investigations of concrete situations, they upheld one quote by Mao, failed to consider that it was a situation specific analysis—and not a religious revelation—and blindly repeated it without taking into account the larger objective reality. In its most extreme forms, this sort of dogmatism manifested in seemingly arbitrary predictions of the future date of global proletarian victory. For example, they "calculated" that "it

¹²¹This excellent document on foreign policy in the late GPCR provides some helpful analysis of this: <https://bannedthought.net/USA/MassProletariat/FriendsDocs/TheLateCulturalRevolution-161213.pdf>

¹²²In his 1988 interview with *El Diario*, when asked about international politics, Gonzalo stated "We start from the understanding that revolution is the main trend, and this continues to be so, this trend put forward by Mao continues to develop. In our view, there has been no stability since World War II, not even relative stability." PCP, "Interview with Chairman Gonzalo," *Collected Works of the Communist Party of Peru: Volume 2 — 1988-1990*, p. 241.

This is dogmatism plain and simple. Not only does Gonzalo assume that the situation in 1988 is the same as 1966, but his conclusion that there has not even been relative stability globally since WWII is absurd and un-dialectical. While there were many significant revolutionary upheavals post-WWII, the global situation was not defined by absolute instability. In fact, the U.S. was able to consolidate its position as the dominant imperialist power on the globe, establish the Bretton Woods System, and seize control of numerous neocolonies. So there were clearly periods of relative stability, even if the upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s did shake the U.S. and others countries' control domestically and internationally.

¹²³Lenin laid out these criteria for a revolutionary situation in *The Collapse of the Second International*, available online here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/csi/ii.htm#v21pp74h-212>

¹²⁴For more on this topic, see Jose Maria Sison, *Specific Characteristics of the People's War in the Philippines*, p. 1-2. Available online at: <https://bannedthought.net/Philippines/ CPP/Sison/2021/Sison-SpecificCharacteristicsOfPeoplesWarInPhilippines-2021-06-27.pdf>

¹²⁵From "The Debate on Gonzaloism in the International Communist Movement: On the Recent Exchange Between the C(M)PA and the CPB(RF)" in *Red Pages*, Issue 1. Available online here: <http://www.bannedthought.net/USA/MCU/RedPages/RedPages-01-Jan2021-rev3.pdf>

will take 200 years to consolidate the proletariat's dictatorship, counting from 1871 when the proletariat first took power in the Paris Commune."¹²⁶ Of course, they never shared the math behind such "calculations." These sorts of prophetic predictions were repeatedly put forward by

the PCP as a justification for their views on the "strategic offensive" of the world revolution, despite clear evidence contradicting this thesis. They seem to have forgotten the basic point that Marxists are not fortune tellers.

The Strategic Offensive as Abstract Generality

Leaving aside the issues with the PCP's analysis of the global situation, it is unclear—even if it was the case that there was a "strategic offensive" of the world revolution—why this would indicate that militarization of Parties was necessary. As such, the PCP's argument that being in the "strategic offensive" dictates that communist parties must militarize amounts to a flat assertion without justification or evidence.

In a typical fashion, the PCP and their contemporary disciples turn the specific concept of the three stages of PPW¹²⁷ into an abstract generality and then apply that to the global situation. In *On Protracted War*, Mao explains these three stages in terms of a literal war, the Sino-Japanese War. The essential content of this concept is inseparable from the fact that it applies to a specific war, not to a general evaluation of the balance of forces globally between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.¹²⁸

In a revolutionary war, various classes are engaged in an armed conflict with each other. While it is possible to speak, in a vague and analogical sense, of the world situation in this way, it confuses more than it clarifies, and in no way is it justified to claim that the general laws of revolutionary warfare apply to the global situation—especially at a time when the proletariat and bourgeoisie are not engaged in a global war! The PCP's insistence on characterizing the global situation this way—a practice frenetically mimicked by CPB and other contemporary

Gonzaloites—is tied to their infatuation with violence and their flat analysis that the highest form of resolving all contradictions is warfare. Given these non-proletarian tendencies, they cannot but see every situation in military terms.

The reality is that the bourgeoisie globally is divided into different countries and blocs. And, as Marx and Engels put it in *The Communist Manifesto*, "the proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie." Even after a successful revolution in one country, it is entirely possible that a socialist country could be at war with one bourgeois bloc internationally while simultaneously at peace or even in a tactical alliance with another section—for example, the USSR fought on the same side as various imperialist powers in WWII. Likewise, while the proletarian forces of one country can be fighting a war against an imperialist aggressor, another can conclude a tactical agreement with that same imperialist power, such as was done by China with the U.S. at the same time that the Vietnamese people were fighting their war of liberation against U.S. imperialism and its domestic reactionary allies. This tactical agreement did not stop China from continuing to support the Vietnamese Revolution. This is all in line with the basic internationalist policy of a socialist state that Mao and others in the CCP outline in their polemics against Khrushchev and the Soviet Revisionists.¹²⁹

¹²⁶"Five Years of People's War," *A World to Win*, Issue 6, August, 1986, p. 76. Available online at: <https://bannedthought.net/International/RIM/AWTW/1986-6/AWTW-06.pdf>

¹²⁷For some discussion of these stages see "Protracted People's War is Not a Universal Strategy for Revolution" in *Red Pages*, Issue 1. Available online here: <http://www.bannedthought.net/USA/MCU/RedPages/RedPages-01-Jan2021-rev3.pdf>

¹²⁸"Since the Sino-Japanese war is a protracted one and final victory will belong to China, it can reasonably be assumed that this protracted war will pass through three stages. The first stage covers the period of the enemy's strategic offensive and our strategic defensive. The second stage will be the period of the enemy's strategic consolidation and our preparation for the counter-offensive. The third stage will be the period of our strategic counter-offensive and the enemy's strategic retreat. It is impossible to predict the concrete situation in the three stages, but certain main trends in the war may be pointed out in the light of present conditions. The objective course of events will be exceedingly rich and varied, with many twists and turns, and nobody can cast a horoscope for the Sino-Japanese war; nevertheless it is necessary for the strategic direction of the war to make a rough sketch of its trends. Although our sketch may not be in full accord with the subsequent facts and will be amended by them, it is still necessary to make it in order to give firm and purposeful strategic direction to the protracted war." From *On Protracted War*, quoted from the section "The Three Stages of the Protracted War" online here: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_09.htm

¹²⁹c.f. <https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/polemic/peaceful.htm>

All of this speaks to the need to be rigorous and scientific with concepts. Concepts have both general and particular content, but they are also only applicable within certain bounds. To insist on sloppiness with such details as a hallmark of political practice leads to all sorts of confusion. For example, Marx made extensive use of biological analogies in *Capital*; he spoke of metabolism, fermentation, etc. These analogies are helpful; they clarify many concepts to the reader. But Marx was always clear these were analogies. He never once tried to argue that, based on his use of these analogies, we should apply biological methods to understand political economy.

To double-think around the basic evidence that the proletarian forces are, in fact, very weak globally right now relative to the bourgeoisie, the CPB claims that we are in the “defensive phase” of the strategic offensive! We leave it as an exercise for the reader to figure out what could possibly be meant by this genius turn of phrase.

This sloppiness—which conflates analogies with concepts—and the PCP’s related dogmatism is tied up with their claim in the *General Political Line* that there is a need to develop a “world revolutionary war” to counter the forces of reaction and developments towards World War 3. This is another version of the “worldwide people’s war” which the PCP also promoted, and which we also criticized in our above-mentioned document on the debate between the Afghan and Brazilian parties.¹³⁰

To jump from this analogy to the idea of a global people’s war is a major leap. It is not a Maoist position but a Trotskyist one. It resembles Trotsky’s idea of “permanent revolution” and his insistence that, after the October Revolution, the Red Army should have invaded Germany to “export the revolution.” The PCP’s “worldwide people’s war” thesis negates the need for socialism in one country and the central importance of the class struggle under socialism, replacing it with a “quick victory” through military action, largely in line with Trotsky’s views. Today the

CPB—largely following in the footsteps of Trotsky and Gonzalo—claims that various people’s wars will fuse together and be “transformed into world people’s war.”¹³¹ The belief that complex and varied contradictions can all be solved with warfare is a running theme in the PCP’s and CPB’s documents. As we will see below, their views on socialism being a “militarized society” and related musing on “war communism” are also deeply Trotskyist.

Before moving on, let us circle back to one last part of the PCP’s first reason for militarizing the Party. They state:

We see how reaction is militarizing itself more and more, militarizing the old States, their economies, developing wars of aggression, trafficking with the struggles of the peoples and aiming toward a world war, but since *revolution is the principal tendency in the world* [emphasis ours], the task of the Communist Parties is to uphold revolution shaping the principal form of struggle: People’s war to oppose the world counterrevolutionary war with world revolutionary war.

However, it does not follow that because the reactionary forces of the world are increasing their military expenditure that Communist Parties must, in turn, militarize. Historically, Communist Parties fought huge reactionary militaries without militarizing themselves. The CCP fought very powerful forces (the Japanese fascists, the Nationalists, and the U.S. military in Korea). The Bolsheviks faced a joint-invasion of numerous imperialist powers in the wake of WWI. Neither Party was militarized. They did not militarize because they understood that the Party must command the gun,¹³² and that becoming a military organization would jeopardize this, as well as weaken the Party’s ability to handle various contradictions correctly (i.e. with non-military means). The ruling class needs to be overthrown by force; however, if the

¹³⁰From “The Debate on Gonzaloism in the International Communist Movement: On the Recent Exchange Between the C(M)PA and the CPB(RF)”, *Red Pages*, Issue 1, p. 39. Available online here: <http://www.bannedthought.net/USA/MCU/RedPages/RedPages-01-Jan2021-rev3.pdf>

¹³¹<https://ci-ic.org/blog/2022/09/27/eternal-glory-to-chairman-gonzalo-4/> A world war “along class lines” could be possible if there is a socialist bloc of countries in the world and the imperialists tried to launch a war to destroy them, but that scenario was not on the table in the 1980’s when there were no longer any socialist countries in the world. Moreover, the wars that were going on were generally proxy wars like the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, U.S. intervention into Lebanon, etc. Likewise, during a World War, it is possible that revolutionary forces link up and join together in various way. This happened to some extent during World War II where the partisan movements in Europe worked with the Red Army to liberate their countries. However, the subordination of many of these movements to the foreign policy interests of the USSR created real problems and stifled the initiative of many parties. Therefore, it is important to take stock of the lessons from these mistakes and not simply promote reductive ideas of “global people’s war” which covers over important differences in the particularities of various countries.

¹³²While the PCP often repeats this slogan in their documents, the gun commanding the Party is something of an inevitable outcome when the Party makes the main form of its activity “military-type actions” and insists that “war is the highest form of resolving contradictions.”

Party transforms into a military organization and makes its principal form of activity “military-type actions,” then it will not be able to carry out the complex and multi-faceted tasks necessary to lead a successful revolution.

What’s more, as the recent defeat of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan shows, the massive expansion of military expenditure on the part of the imperialists does not necessarily correlate to their combat capabilities. In fact, increased spending can produce a form of decadence and create favorable conditions for revolution (e.g. huge portions of state budgets being spent on the military often leads to

serious disinvestment elsewhere). And even when the reactionary forces are exceedingly well armed and trained, this does not in any way imply that the primary form of a Party’s activity must be “military-type actions.” The PCP’s view that Parties need to militarize because of increased military expenditure by reactionary forces is based on exceedingly mechanical views and clarifies nothing, except that they understood neither the contradictory nature of the present reality, nor the lessons of past revolutions. In short, they were revising the lessons of history and Marxism to justify militarizing the Party.

Political Line, Violence Under Socialism, and the PCP’s “One Size Fits All” Approach

According to the PCP, militarization of the Party isn’t just needed to successfully overthrow the bourgeoisie of any and all countries. They also see a militarized Party as the key for the whole socialist period, until communism. Indeed, as we will discuss later, they see socialist society itself as a *militarized society*. On this question, they once again fundamentally revise the lessons and basic principles of MLM.

So why is a militarized Party key for socialism according to the PCP? Let’s now examine the second point used to justify militarizing communist parties:

Second, because capitalist restoration must be prevented. When the bourgeoisie loses Power, it introduces itself inside the Party, uses the army and seeks to usurp Power and destroy the dictatorship of the proletariat to restore capitalism. Therefore, the Communist Parties must militarize themselves and exercise the all-round dictatorship of the three instruments, forging themselves in people’s war and empower the armed organization of the masses, the people’s militia, so as to engulf the army. For this reason, Chairman Gonzalo tells us to “forge all militants as Communists, first and foremost, as fighters and as administrators”; for that reason every militant is forged in the People’s War and remains alert against any attempt at capitalist restoration.

Here the PCP incorrectly frames preventing the restoration of capitalism as *principally* a matter of military combat against *the old defeated bourgeoisie* which—according to the PCP—infiltrates the Party and the army

to become the red bourgeoisie. This is a basic distortion of Marxism and the lessons of the GPCR. This is a fundamentally incorrect understanding of the basic class contradictions under socialism. It is not the case that the old bourgeoisie “introduces itself inside the Party,” but rather that a new bourgeoisie arises within the Party itself!¹³³ Confusion on this topic reflects the PCP’s lack of serious study of class struggle under socialism, and represents a step backwards compared to the relative clarity expressed on this topic in some of their earlier documents in the 1960s and 70s.

In fact, in the entirety of the *General Political Line*, the PCP put forward no real analysis of the successes and mistakes of the GPCR, just an idea that more military actions and a greater awareness of the threat of capitalist restoration will prevent future restorations. While there was some confusion in China at the end of GPCR about the imminent dangers of capitalist restoration, the fact that Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping were able to mobilize a significant section of the masses against the Four by framing this campaign as “opposing the bourgeois reactionary life of the Gang of Four” shows that the Chinese people were overall not unaware of the threat of capitalist restoration, but that many of the masses were confused on how to identify capitalist roaders.

In fact, millions of members of the masses were part of people’s militias in China at this time. However, many were effectively neutralized because of this confusion on how to identify capitalist-roaders, not because of a lack of guns or awareness of the threat of capitalist restoration. The people’s militias are an essential element in guarding

¹³³For more this topic, including a clear summary of Mao’s views on the matter, see *A Summary of Views on the Problem of the Inner-Party Bourgeoisie*, available online here: <https://www.bannedthought.net/China/MaoEra/GPCR/SummaryOfViewsOnTheInner-PartyBourgeoisie-English-Partial-OCR.pdf>

against capitalist restoration, but they are a form of mass organization, not a part of the “militarized Party model” which the Gonzaloites promote. Their approach, built around “unconditional subjection” to leadership, cannot but lead to more centralized military control, which is one of the most parts of the socialist state most vulnerable to becoming a counter-revolutionary headquarters.

What’s more, it is absurd to argue that the militarization of the Party could have prevented the restoration of capitalism. The PCP does not deal with any of the concrete reasons for the defeat in China. It was not principally military matters which decided the victory of the bourgeois line in the GPCR, but rather the overall balance of forces in the class struggle and various errors in the political line of the left in the Party. The GPCR was not a military struggle until the coup in 1976. Even then, the left had been working hard to prepare for such a coup and had extensive military forces at their disposal, but they had made key political (not principally military) mistakes—especially difficulties in uniting the middle section of the Party to oppose the right—and therefore were vulnerable and somewhat isolated at the end of the GPCR. Mao was aware of some of these mistakes and had tried to warn the Four against making them. The recently translated documents from the late GPCR which we wrote about in the second issue of *Red Pages* provide some great clarity on these matters as well.¹³⁴

It was simply not the case that the right had superior military forces and that this factor was the key link that won the day, but rather that the left was not able to unite all who could be united to prevent the right from launching a coup, and therefore the right had superior military forces at their command at the decisive moment.¹³⁵ At the risk of being repetitive, it is important to reiterate that the military weakness of the Left at the time of the coup was a result of issues in their political line, and not the other way around. This is because as Mao put it, political line decides everything, including the military forces the Party has at its disposal. A Party’s political line is not reducible to abstract principles, but is a concrete thing, based on the situation specific understanding of how to advance the proletarian cause. It is the political line which determines the strength of the proletarian forces, including under so-

cialism.

The PCP’s prattling about militarization of the Party under socialism—and their ignorance of the fact that a new bourgeoisie arises within the Party during this period—is tied to the fact that the PCP never dealt with the question of class struggle under socialism in a systematic way. They did not have a clear understanding of restricting bourgeois right under socialism; they did not grasp how it was that a new bourgeoisie could arise within the Party itself; and, perhaps most importantly, they did not grasp how putting the Party under a system of military discipline would reinforce bourgeois relations in its ranks and contradict the principles of democratic centralism. They not only remained blind to this process unfolding in their own ranks, but actually advocated that this mistaken approach should be adopted by all other Parties.

But the passage quoted above does not just negate the basic lessons of the GPCR. Nor is it simply yet another demonstration of the PCP’s basic lack of familiarity with the history of capitalist restoration in China. In reality, it expresses, in the most concise and concentrated form, the PCP’s supposed solution to counter-revolution under socialism. Therefore, it is important to examine in great detail their views on this topic, as they provide insight into the PCP’s understanding of the nature of class struggle under socialism and how this relates to the militarization of the Party.

As we have discussed earlier, for the PCP militarization of Party means the Party is primarily carrying out “military-type actions.” They say that there are four types of such action which are: “guerrilla actions, sabotages, selective annihilation, propaganda and armed agitation.” Putting aside for a moment the senselessness of saying that the primary activity of the Party should always be to carry out military action, it does at least make sense for a Party to carry out some of these types of actions during Protracted People’s War. But clearly—although perhaps not to the PCP and their contemporary disciples—sabotage, guerrilla actions, and selective annihilation of class enemies are generally not necessary under socialism (and decisions by people’s courts to execute some counter-revolutionaries are not the same as “selective annihilations”). One could argue that various forms of action by a People’s Army un-

¹³⁴See issue no. 2 of *Red Pages*, online here: <http://www.bannedthought.net/USA/MCU/RedPages/RedPages-02-Jan2022-r2.pdf>

¹³⁵Actually, the defeat of Lin Biao’s coup attempt in 1971 shows that, given a correct political line, it is possible in many cases to isolate the right in such a way as to prevent them from mobilizing a coup in the first place. The Lin Biao Affair is not the only instance of this in China. Isolating Peng Dehuai at the 1959 Lushan Conference and stopping rightist efforts to provoke all-around civil war during the July 20th 1967 Incident in Wuhan are but two of many other examples.

der socialism amount to forms of armed propaganda, but this is not new or different than anything that was done in China and the USSR during the socialist period (e.g. military parades, the army helping train militias, etc.).

So, what sort of concrete military actions is the PCP proposing to maintain the “militarization of the Party” under socialism? And how will these supposedly prevent the restoration of capitalism? Earlier in the document, the PCP spelled out their views on the matter:

Democratic revolutions are carried out with revolutionary violence, socialist revolutions are carried out with revolutionary violence and, in the face of restorations, we shall recover power through revolutionary violence. We shall maintain the continuation of the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat with revolutionary violence through cultural revolutions and we will only reach Communism through revolutionary violence. As long as there is a place on Earth in which exploitation exists, we shall finish it off through revolutionary violence.¹³⁶

and

Cultural revolutions, which are made to continue the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The latter is to subject¹³⁷ and eliminate any regeneration of capitalism and to wage armed combat against attempts at capitalist restoration, and which also serves to strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat and the march towards Communism.¹³⁸

From these quotes, it is clear that the PCP sees armed combat and revolutionary violence as central to the class struggle under socialism. And so, given that they repeatedly emphasize that the militarization of the Party can “only be carried forward” through concrete “military-type actions,” it is clear that they view these forms of struggle as the key link under socialism, they view armed actions as the way to prevent capitalist restoration, and they view revolutionary violence as *the main means* by which to carry out the socialist revolution (in Peru after the New Democratic Revolution) and the cultural revolutions under socialism.¹³⁹ This is a direct departure from the lessons of the GPCR.

First, there are different types of contradictions in the socialist period and these must be handled through various methods. The existence of exploitation cannot be eliminated through violence alone. For example, the rich and even middle peasants engage in some form of exploitation, but this contradiction is not handled through vio-

¹³⁶GPL, p. 23-24

¹³⁷*Someter* in the Spanish original, more accurately translated as “subdue.” This is one of a series of strange translations in the English version of the text.

¹³⁸GPL, p. 23

¹³⁹This line is very similar to Lin Biao’s articulations before his coup attempts, when he argued that all the rightist elements in society had been caught, and therefore the main tasks after the 9th Party Congress was to develop production (and therefore not focus on class struggle). This actually bears a distinct similarity to Liu Shaoqi’s earlier line as well:

“After our country achieved the basic socialist transformation of the ownership of the means of production, Liu Shaoqi tried his best to promote the theory of the extinction of class struggle, and together with Chen Boda picked up Voznesensky’s black goods, advocating that the main contradiction in our society was between the “advanced socialist system and the backward social productive forces”. During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Lin Biao spread the fallacy that traitors, spies, and capitalist roaders had all been caught, and that the main task after the Ninth National Congress would be to develop production. On a surface level, the methods and language of such capitalist-roaders in the party appear to differ. However, a black thread runs between them all, that of the theory of the extinction of class struggle and productive forces determinism.”

Translated from Chinese:

在我国基本上实现生产资料所有制的社会主义改造以后，刘少奇就竭力宣扬阶级斗争熄灭论，并且伙同陈伯达从沃兹涅斯基那里捡来黑货，鼓吹我国社会的主要矛盾是什么“先进的社会主义制度同落后的社会生产力之间的矛盾。”

“*The Bourgeoisie Within the Communist Party in the Socialist Period*”: *Discussing the Inner Party Bourgeoisie*, by Qin Zhengxian, the writing group of the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. This was a 48 page pamphlet finished near the end of September 1976. Prior to the appearance of this pamphlet a large number of seminars on “bourgeois legal rights”, “capitalist roaders” and the “bourgeoisie within the party” were held all over China. Some important arguments (but not all) from these seminars have been compiled into this pamphlet. It should be noted that in some seminars some speakers even mentioned that after the capitalist roaders came to power, China might become a social-imperialist country; this was not the mainstream argument that “capitalist roaders surrendered to the foreign bourgeoisie and betrayed the country.” This pamphlet was once broadcast on the radio, but before the series was finished the capitalist roaders launched a counter-revolutionary coup. Available online (in Chinese): <https://ww.bannedthought.net/China/MaoEra/GPCR/TheBourgeoisieWithinTheCommunistPartyInTheSocialistPeriod-Shanghai-1976-Chinese.pdf>

lence, but through discussion, debate, land redistribution, and the development of socialist agriculture.¹⁴⁰ This is because this is a contradiction among the people, despite the existence of some forms of exploitation of the poor peasants and agricultural laborers by other sections of the peasantry. And while these struggles happen in the larger context of the New Democratic Revolution and the Socialist Revolution, they are not forms of revolutionary violence. In short, we find here that the PCP is revising Maoism, yet again.

It is not even true that revolutionary violence is the only means to eliminate all forms of capitalist exploitation. This is a fact that was proven in the Russian and Chinese Revolutions through practice. Although the violent expropriation of the bourgeoisie in control of large industries was central to the revolutions in Russia and China, a policy of buying out was used in the case of some small and medium capitalists. In fact, in his text “*Left-Wing*” *Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality*, Lenin drew on Marx and emphasized the possibility, in certain condi-

¹⁴⁰As part of the process of land reform violence did occur, but it was far from the main method of struggling against or suppressing the feudal elite, and was definitely not the correct approach to dealing with the forms of exploitation practices by the middle and rich peasants. In fact, when and where Party cadres relied excessively on violence to accomplish land reform and redistribution they ran into numerous political problems. On the one hand, certain members of the masses were repulsed by unproductive violence and, on the other hand, reliance on use of violence disarmed the masses, failed to mobilize them to criticize and speak out politically, and allowed some cadre and militia members with a tendency towards self-advancement and corruption to separate themselves from the masses and begin to lord it over them. William Hinton writes extensively of struggles over these methods in the course of land reform in *Fanshen*. On the former point:

“The peasants supported violence in smashing the old regime. But violence for loot alone, violence that was basically punitive, violence that turned on those who practiced it, turned out to be stark, senseless, repellent. Though no one in the village put it thus in so many words, such thoughts undoubtedly lurked in the recesses of their minds and made them draw back. Yet as more people drew back from active participation in new campaigns, the leaders began to push harder; and so a crack appeared between the dedicated revolutionaries and many rank-and-file peasants who had supported them whole-heartedly up until that time.” (p. 224)

and on the latter:

“The militia, on whom the main burden of each campaign fell, were quick to slide into certain habits well known to traditional upholders of ‘law and order.’ They developed among themselves a battlefield psychology that served as justification for everything they were tempted to do. Since they spearheaded every drive, led in beating the ‘struggle objects,’ poured out their sweat to dig up the *k’angs*, courtyards and tombs of the ‘old money bags,’ and above all, risked their lives through the long cold nights as they stood guard against counter-attack, they felt entitled to special privileges. Many of them thought it unfair to receive no return for service to the people beyond the *fanshen* in which all shared. Among them were some who also thought it unfair to be judged by ordinary standards of morality. As heroes of the hour, these began in small ways to help themselves. When some article among the hundreds confiscated from the gentry caught their fancy, they took it when nobody was looking. If some comely woman aroused their passion, they seduced her if she was willing. If she were a ‘struggle object,’ they took her whether she was willing or not. When asked to do their share of labor service, these men began by thinking up all kinds of excuses and ended up with outright refusals. They even shirked work for soldiers’ families and prevailed upon their neighbors to go in their stead.” (page 226).

For these reasons over-reliance on violence during land reform was considered a mistake. The whole text of *Fanshen* is well worth reading to get a sense of the degree of struggle, self-criticism, and transformation that was actually involved in eventually carrying out successful political campaigns in the countryside. In contrast, a “violence is the answer” one-size-fits-all solution appears childishly simplistic. Of course, in instances where the masses demanded execution of various counter-revolutionaries guilty of blood crimes, the Party did agree, though their general approach was to try to find ways for counter-revolutionaries to rectify and transform where possible.

¹⁴¹Lenin, “‘Left-Wing’ Childishness and the Petty Bourgeois Mentality,” *Lenin Collected Works: Volume 27*. Available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/may/09.htm>

tions, to engage in a “specific type of ‘buying out’ which the workers must offer to the most cultured, the most skilled, the most capable organisers among the capitalists who are ready to enter the service of Soviet power and to help honestly in organising ‘state’ production on the largest possible scale.”¹⁴¹ This was the basic policy adopted by the Bolsheviks, with significant success.

Likewise, in *The Shanghai Textbook* this point was emphasized and elaborated in detail:

After the proletariat seizes political power, confiscates big capital, and establishes a socialist economic foundation, it is possible to gradually subject medium and small capital to socialist transformation through the policy of buying out this capital and to transform the capitalist system ownership of the means of production into a socialist system of ownership by the whole people. The class nature of medium and small capital is the same as that of big capital. They are all enmeshed in the capitalist exploitation of the laboring people; they have interests contrary to those of the laboring

masses and are the objects of socialist revolution. However, there are some differences between them. While medium and small capital often have the strong desire to develop capitalism, they can, at the same time, also be compelled into accepting compensation for their assets by the proletariat under certain conditions. Marxism believes that “under certain conditions the workers would certainly not refuse to buy out the bourgeoisie.” Once the proletariat has seized political power and secured control over the lifeblood of the national economy, it will be advantageous to the proletariat if these capitalists can be compelled to accept a policy of being bought out by the proletariat and transform their capitalist enterprises into socialist enterprises.¹⁴²

The subtle and nuanced proletarian understanding of how to handle the socialist revolution expressed in this text stands in sharp contrast to the PCP’s prattling about the centrality of violence as “the highest form of resolving contradictions.”

From all of this we can see that violence is not, at all times, the key link to eliminating exploitation. Revolutionary violence is needed to overthrow the ruling class, to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat (or the people’s joint democratic dictatorship), to seize many of the means of production (especially large-scale industry), and to repel attempts at external invasion or internal sabotage. It is necessary to conquer political power. However, this rev-

olutionary violence only *lays the foundation for the elimination of exploitation*. This is because various vestiges of exploitation and inequality linger after the overthrow of the ruling class. The Chinese communists *allowed the national bourgeoisie to continue exploitation during the New Democratic period*, and the elimination of that exploitation was mainly carried out via buyouts along with other measures which did not involve violence.

To assert that violence is the key link here, reflects the PCP’s failure to grasp the lessons of MLM learned through the experiences of the Russian and Chinese Revolutions.¹⁴³ This confusion is tied to their “listen up” approach to politics and related fantasies of having absolute militarized leadership over the United Front, in which all mass work is done by the army and other military organizations. This approach negates the basis for patriotic members of exploiting classes to support and be partners in the New Democratic Revolution.

At the risk of being redundant, it must be emphasized again that for different contradictions (and different contradictions exist even with exploitation), different methods of resolving them are needed. This is true not only in the elimination of exploitation in the course of the Socialist Revolution, but also in the various cultural revolutions needed under socialism. Instead of a patient and clear historical analysis, the PCP promotes cut-and-dried solutions, principally the call for more violence (their con-

¹⁴²*Maoist Economics and the Revolutionary Road to Communism: The Shanghai Textbook*, p. 43.

¹⁴³Even in the case of handling counter-revolutionaries, it was not the case that execution was always the solution. For example, in *On the Ten Major Relationships*, Mao notes that

“Counter-revolutionaries may be dealt with in these ways: execution, imprisonment, supervision and leaving at large. Execution — everybody knows what that means. By imprisonment we mean putting counter-revolutionaries in jail and reforming them through labour. By supervision we mean leaving them in society to be reformed under the supervision of the masses. By leaving at large we mean that generally no arrest is made in those cases where it is marginal whether to make an arrest, or that those arrested are set free for good behaviour. It is essential that different counter-revolutionaries should be dealt with differently on the merits of each case.”

And that, “Third, from now on there should be fewer arrests and executions in the suppression of counter-revolutionaries in society at large. They are the mortal and immediate enemies of the people and are deeply hated by them, and therefore a small number should be executed. But most of them should be handed over to the agricultural co-operatives and made to work under supervision and be reformed through labour. All the same, we cannot announce that there will be no more executions, and we must not abolish the death penalty.”

An extremely illuminating account of the way that China handled these and other cases can be found in the book *Prisoners of Liberation*, which shows how even an American spying for the U.S. in China was able to transform his outlook through the basic pro-people approach of criticism and self-criticism promoted in revolutionary China. The book shows that the actual policy of China was quite different than Gonzaloite fantasies of “military-type actions” being key to dealing with these cases under socialism.

¹⁴⁴<https://ci-ic.org/blog/2016/02/25/celebrate-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-great-proletarian-cultural-revolution-with-peoples-war-until-communism/> In this document the signatories—including the CPB—absurdly argue that the lessons of the GPCR show that there is a need for “people’s war until communism.” For example, they state:

“As long as there are classes, there will be class struggle, because that is how the law of contradiction specifies in the class society; the highest way of solving the contradictions in the class society is the war and, because of that, until the whole mankind enters to communism there will always be the need of the people’s war. Studying the GPCR, we understand more deeply the omnipotence of the revolutionary war, meaning the people’s war, Maoism and how to apply it. All of these are lessons of the class struggle in the GPCR.”

temporary adherents double-down on this trend, for example with their slogans of “People’s War Until Communism!”¹⁴⁴).

As we mentioned above, throughout the GPCR, there was an effort by both the right and the ultra-“left” forces in the Party to turn the struggle into a civil war and/or military conflict.¹⁴⁵ In contrast to this, as we noted above, the general slogan promoted by the Left during the GPCR was to “Use Reason, Not Violence.”¹⁴⁶ When Jiang Qing promoted the idea that the rebel masses should “attack with words, defend with weapons” she was criticized by Mao and others for this articulation, which was used by various factional and ultra-“left” forces to justify their efforts to transform the GPCR into a military conflict. Mao and other leaders in the Left criticized various Red Guard groups who pushed things in this direction as well.¹⁴⁷

The focus on revolutionary violence and the related idea of militarizing the Party as the key way to prevent capitalist restoration fails to grasp the contradiction, in a cultural revolution, between the principal task and the goal. In a typical petty-bourgeois fashion, the PCP equates the question of preventing capitalist restoration with suppressing and eliminating class enemies with violence. In doing so, they not only fail to grapple with the need to mobilize the masses to struggle (not principally in a military fashion) against the capitalist-roaders, but also fail to understand the class relations under socialism which *in-*

evitably give rise to a new bourgeoisie within the Party itself. Given this ignorance, they cannot grasp how the struggle of the masses in various fields to restrict bourgeois right and break with old ideas is central to eliminating the basis for revisionism.¹⁴⁸ Contrary to the PCP’s assertions, the inner-party bourgeoisie is not a secret faction of rightists who sneak into the Party. Rather, it develops as a result of the class contradictions under socialism, with rightists primarily generated from within the Party rather than sneaking into it. Mao emphasized that without a dialectical view on these matters, it was easy to misunderstand the aims of the GPCR:

To struggle against power holders who take the capitalist road is the main task, but it is by no means the goal. The goal is to solve the problem of world outlook: it is the question of eradicating the roots of revisionism. [...] If the world outlook is not transformed, how can the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution be called a victory? If the world outlook is not transformed, then although there are 2,000 power holders taking the capitalist road in this Great Cultural Revolution, there may be 4,000 next time.¹⁴⁹

From this it should be clear that, once again, the PCP’s basic approach on a fundamental question of Maoism—namely, the goals and methods of cultural revolutions under socialism—is a direct departure from, and revision of,

¹⁴⁵For example, see the discussion of the role of the May 16th Group in William Hinton’s book *The Hundred Day War*. For more on how various capitalist-roaders and factional forces tried to turn the GPCR into a “total civil war” see Chapter 2 Section 3.1 (From the “February Counter-current” to the “Total Civil War”) of *History Project of the Republic: The History and Logic of Revolution and Restoration*, p. 166-179. Available online at: <https://bannedthought.net/China/Maoism/2022/ChinaRevolutionAndRestoration-English-2022.pdf>

¹⁴⁶This was in line with Mao’s point that “Once a head is chopped off, history shows it can’t be restored, nor can it grow again as chives do, after being cut. If you cut off a head by mistake, there is no way to rectify the mistake, even if you want to.” Mao, *On the Ten Major Relationships*, available online: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_51.htm

¹⁴⁷For example, see Mao’s discussion with Kuai Dafu and other Red Guard leaders: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_81.htm and William Hinton’s book *Hundred Day War* which deals with this question in detail and also details how various forces in the Party (including Lin Biao and the May 16th Group) helped to foment such ultra-“left” tendencies.

¹⁴⁸In one of their earliest documents—the 1977 document *To Be a Marxist is to Adhere to MLMZT*—the PCP did briefly discuss bourgeois right and other important questions of the GPCR, but only in an extremely provisional fashion and largely by quoting documents from the GPCR but without providing much of their own analysis. Later on, they instead focused *almost exclusively* on the need for violence and militarization of the Party to prevent counter-revolution while nominally upholding the need for cultural revolutions under socialism. Based on these articulations it is clear that when they do speak of cultural revolutions they have something pretty different in mind than what occurred in China between 1966-1976. PCP, “To Be a Marxist is to Adhere to MLMZT,” *Collected Works of the Communist Party of Peru: Volume 1—1968-1987*, p. 206-219.

¹⁴⁹Mao, *Speech To The Albanian Military Delegation*, available online at: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_74.htm. See also Charles Bettelheim’s point from *Class Struggles in the USSR: First Period (1917-1923)*: “The Soviet experience confirms that what is hardest is not the overthrow of the former dominant classes: the hardest task is, first, to destroy the former social relations—upon which a system of exploitation similar to the one supposed to have been overthrown for good can be reconstituted—and then to prevent these relations from being reconstituted on the basis of those elements of the old that still remain present for a long time in the new social relations.” p. 18

the practices advocated by Mao. By promoting militarization of the Party and revolutionary violence as the “solutions” to preventing capitalist restoration in socialist society, they make it clear that they see the class struggle under socialism as principally a thing to be overseen via military and administrative means devoid of mass initiative. This is a view of socialism that does not acknowledge the revolutionary breakthrough achieved during the GPCR or the key verdicts on the question of the inner-party bourgeoisie advanced by Mao during this time. The PCP puts forward no clear analysis of how to grasp revolution and

promote production, nothing about how to overcome the contradictions among the people, and remains silent on how to overcome various backwards ideas that the masses have internalized. They reject the need to methodically and patiently overcome the “Four Alls” via various forms of struggle, a striking abandonment of Marxism. As we can see, not only is the militarization of the Party not justified by the danger of capitalist restoration (as it is no solution to the problem), but the PCP’s views on socialism and cultural revolutions are fundamentally at odds with the basic lessons of MLM.

Trotskyism, War Communism, and “the Militarization of Society”

This brings us to the third and final argument the PCP advances for why Communist Parties must militarize:

Third, because we march toward a militarized society. By militarizing the Party, we complete a step toward the militarization of society which is the strategic perspective to guarantee the dictatorship of the proletariat. The militarized society is the sea of armed masses which Marx and Engels spoke of, that guards the conquest of power and defends it once conquered. We take the experience of the Chinese Revolution, of the anti-Japanese base at Yen-an, which was a militarized society *where everything grew out of the barrels of guns* [emphasis ours]: Party, Army, State, new politics, new economics, new culture. And in that way we develop war communism.¹⁵⁰

This point is just as muddled as the previous two. Under socialist society, it’s true that the masses will be highly armed. But this does not make it a militarized society so to speak; people having arms and being organized into militias does not mean that they are “militarized.” The PCP and contemporary Gonzaloites like the CPB have repeatedly emphasized that militarizing the Party does not just mean fighting a people’s war or arming the Party. Instead, they emphasize that militarization of the Party means that the principal form of activity of the Party is “military-type actions.” So, the militarization of society should be understood along similar lines, unless they are completely eclectic, and words mean nothing to them. And to the PCP’s credit, they are remarkably consistent on this topic. So it is clear that when they speak of war as “the highest form of

resolving contradictions,” and socialism as a “militarized society” in which “everything grows out of the barrel of guns” they mean that, under socialism, the principal form of activity of the people should be “military-type actions” and organization of socialist society is *principally military*.

In this regard, the PCP’s reference to War Communism—a specific policy pursued during the Russian Civil War by the Bolsheviks with a misleading name—is quite telling. Actually, their promotion of “War Communism” as a goal and their related views on socialism being a “militarized society” are largely in line with the policies promoted by Trotsky at the end of the Russian Civil War. Lenin argued that Trotsky’s policies were a political mistake, which, if not corrected, would lead “to the collapse of the dictatorship of the proletariat.”¹⁵¹

During the Russian Civil War, the Bolsheviks were in a very dire situation. Attacked by numerous imperialist powers as well as the forces of domestic reaction, with the economy in ruin, and famine and disease rampaging throughout the country, they were forced to adopt extraordinary and exceptional measures to ensure victory in the Civil War. To illustrate the difficulties they faced, it is helpful to elaborate on the circumstances at the time. In 1918, many peasants began to keep for themselves large portions of their grain surplus (which was needed at the front for the war effort and to feed the cities), large-scale absenteeism was developing in industry, and workers in some industries were selling off stocks of goods and spare parts on their own in the black market so that they could afford basic goods (which were rapidly rising in price). These actions amounted to rampant individualism which,

¹⁵⁰ *GPL*, p. 75.

¹⁵¹ Lenin, “Once Again On The Trade Unions, The Current Situation and the Mistakes of Trotsky and Bukharin,” *LCW: Volume 32*. Available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/jan/25.htm>

if left unchecked, would doom the dictatorship of the proletariat.

While the Party was able to promote some forms of Communist spirit and political discipline among the advanced section of the working-class and some of the peasantry (for example with the Communist *Subbotniks*), they were not able to do this on a broad enough scale to prevent many of these issues. Therefore, in a situation where the political consciousness of the masses was not sufficiently developed the Bolsheviks were backed into a corner and forced to use a form of administrative centralization and discipline¹⁵² to ensure that the economy did not collapse and that the Civil War was won. In short, they had to use state power to coerce a section of the peasantry and working class into maintaining the economy so that the war effort could proceed. Lenin and the Central Committee repeatedly emphasized that these measures were temporary and only adopted because of the extremely dire situation in which the Party found itself.

In the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik)*, Stalin spells out some of the measures that were taken in this period:

The Soviet Government introduced *War Communism*. It took under its control the middle-sized and small industries,¹⁵³ in addition to large-scale industry,

so as to accumulate goods for the supply of the army and the agricultural population. It introduced a state monopoly of the grain trade, prohibited private trading in grain and established the surplus-appropriation system, under which all surplus produce in the hands of the peasants was to be registered and acquired by the state at fixed prices, so as to accumulate stores of grain for the provisioning of the army and the workers. Lastly, it introduced universal labour service for all classes.¹⁵⁴

In addition, a system of militarization of labor was introduced. This included a system of coercion and labor discipline where workers would be sent to penal labor camps for labor desertion and shirking. It also entailed the organization of all workers into labor units which were run with the same strictness “as was and is being shown towards officers in relation to the army’s needs.”¹⁵⁵ Likewise the Party adopted policies of requisitioning grain from the peasantry (e.g. non-voluntary collections of surplus grain, at times even without proper compensation) and a “governmentalizing” of the trade unions, which significantly limited the internal democracy of these mass organizations and placed them under the direct administrative control of the *Narkomtrud*, the Commissariat for Labour.¹⁵⁶

These measures were necessary given the exceedingly

¹⁵²This stands in contrast to the form of *political centralization* that was developed in China, especially during the GPCR. As noted above, for more on this topic see Charles Bettelheim’s book *Cultural Revolution and Industrial Organization in China: Changes in Management and the Division of Labor*, especially p. 48-55.

¹⁵³Under the New Economic Policy, the Party ended this monopoly and adopted an approach of allowing some greater degree of freedom for small enterprises and trades to operate, within limits. The experiences of this policy (both positive and negative) would later serve as the basis for the policy of nationalization of small and medium enterprises in China post-1949 through the creation of mixed enterprises (partially state-owned and partially privately owned), and the subsequent transformation of these into wholly state-owned enterprises in which the capitalists retained, for a period, a higher salary and managerial functions—as well as receiving some interest during this transitional period—on the capital they had formerly owned. For more details, see *The Shanghai Textbook*.

¹⁵⁴<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1939/x01/ch08.htm>

¹⁵⁵*The Immediate Tasks of Economic Construction*, report from 9th Party Congress *K.P.S.S. v rezolyutsiyakh*, vol. 1, p. 477–490.

¹⁵⁶The divided character of this measure—as with all others adopted during the War Communism period—must be acknowledged. On the one hand, this change helped the trade unions strengthen labor discipline and reduce desertion from key industries and thereby bolstered the war effort. However, it also led to significant popular discontent in the trade unions. This opposition to these measures also had a divided character. Charles Bettelheim provides some insightful analysis of the dynamics at play:

“The resistance of the old trade-union leaders to the line laid down by this resolution was clearly inspired by a variety of motives. For some (in particular, the Mensheviks) it was a question of sabotaging the war effort; for others, what mattered was to resist measures that developed in a one-sided way the administrative and disciplinary role of the trade-union organizations. This resistance was all the greater because parts of the congress resolution on ‘The Immediate Tasks of Economic Construction’ were not easily acceptable to a large section of the workers.

“These resolutions (which the trade unions had the task of implementing) aimed at introducing a series of measures of a coercive character: compulsory labor, militarization of the economy, obligation of party and trade-union organizations to register all skilled workers (so as to assign them to production with the same strictness ‘as was and is being shown towards officers in relation to the army’s needs’), mobilization of the workers as a whole, including the unskilled, in labor units, with a staff of ‘technically competent instructors,’ and establishment of a system of ‘scientific organization of production.’”

difficult situation faced by the Party and the people as a result of the Civil War and famine as well as the lack of discipline and proletarian class consciousness among a significant section of the workers and peasantry.¹⁵⁷ However, these policies, given their necessary reliance on the administrative and bureaucratic methods, sharpened various class contradictions at the time. For example, state departments like *Glavpolitput* (the Chief Political Department of the People's Commissariat for Communication, which worked to rehabilitate the railways) and *Tsektran* (the Central Committee of the Joint Trade Union of Rail and Water Transport Workers, placed under state control) were given extraordinary powers during this period. These

powers, on the one hand, enabled them to rehabilitate the railroads and the economy, but, on the other hand, bred various bureaucratic, undemocratic, and bourgeois administrative practices which caused the state organs and "governmentalized" trade unions to start to lose touch with the masses. Similar dynamics arose with the requisitioning of all surplus grain from the peasantry.

Lenin summed up the successes and failures of the "War Communism" period with a number of insightful remarks. First, he noted that the policy was forced on them by the circumstances, but that it was, in the main, a correct policy despite various mistakes and excesses:

The harmonious system¹⁵⁸ that has been created was

¹⁵⁷While these measures were not ideal, many opponents of socialism—past and present—have tried to disparage the Bolsheviks and the October Revolution because of their use of coercion (which was secondary to the overwhelming support shown by the broad masses of people for the revolution and the leadership of the Bolshevik Party). Charles Bettelheim provides a detailed explanation of the situation and the class relations at the time:

"The victories won by the Soviet power over the bourgeoisie, the landlords, and world imperialism were possible only because it was then a proletarian power concentrating the will of the masses. If this is not seen, it is impossible to understand the outcome of the battles waged by the Soviet army, badly equipped and supplied, against the White armies backed by the imperialist great powers, to understand how and why Soviet Russia got the better of its powerful enemies although it was gripped by famine and disease. Apart from any abstract considerations, the actual course of events showed in practice the existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the realization of the fundamental unity of the masses, guided by the Bolshevik Party and revolutionary Marxism.

"This proletarian dictatorship, like every historical reality, was complex and contradictory. Through the work of the Bolshevik Party, through the fact that this party was deeply rooted in the working class and that it applied Marxism, which enabled it to carry out at every stage essential revolutionary tasks, the proletarian dictatorship realized the fighting unity of the proletariat and the peasantry. At the same time, for lack of a long ideological and political struggle waged on a large scale before the establishment of the proletarian power, and for lack of previous experience, the unity of the masses thus realized was not completely adequate to the tasks that had to be accomplished. A part of the peasantry and even of the working class continued to be strongly influenced by bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideas and practices, and so gave precedence to personal interests over the interests of the revolution and allowed itself temporarily to be influenced by ideological tendencies that weakened the revolutionary unity of the masses—the SRs, the Mensheviks, and various forms of anarchism. This was only a secondary aspect of the situation, for these trends never succeeded in wielding more than a limited and unstable influence, and as a rule they did not even operate openly. This secondary aspect of the situation explains some particular features of the dictatorship of the proletariat during these years—the low level of activity of some of the mass organizations (the local soviets and, up to a point, the trade unions) and the relatively large proportion of acts of indiscipline which—in a situation of extreme tension—compelled the Soviet power to use coercion against unstable elements.

"In these circumstances, the proletarian character of the ruling power was essentially determined by the bonds uniting the Bolshevik Party with the revolutionary masses, by its practice of a mass line of revolutionary Marxism, and by the merging of this party, the vanguard of the proletariat, with the most militant section of the working class.

"Whatever may have been the role played by coercion of part of the workers—a coercion that was often exercised, moreover, by workers' detachments and not by a specialized body—power was wielded at that time above all by virtue of the confidence placed in the Bolshevik Party by the broadest masses. The latter saw in the party the victorious leader of the October Revolution, the party that had identified itself with their own desire to get out of the imperialist war, with the peasants' desire to become masters of their own land, and that had shown itself able to unite them to fight the enemies of the revolution. Furthermore, this confidence was based not only on the party's capacity to respond to fundamental popular aspirations and adopt the appropriate decisions, but also on the carrying out of the mass line, for this is essential for consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Charles Bettelheim, *Class Struggles in the USSR, First Period: 1917-1923*, p. 190-191.

¹⁵⁸Lenin is being sarcastic here to criticize the idea—put forward by Milyutin, Trotsky, and others—that War Communism was a harmonious economic system and could allow for a direct transition to communist relations of production, given the central role of the state in distribution and the apparent elimination of money and commodity exchange. In reality, money and commodity exchange (along with other related capitalist relations of production) were not eliminated in this period, given the existence of an extensive black market. For example, the official state distribution of food covered only around 25-40% of the inhabitants of the towns. The rest was purchased by them on the black markets at very high prices. For more on this see E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution: Volume 2*, p. 242-243.

dictated by war and not by economic requirements, considerations or conditions. There was no other way out in the conditions of the unexampled ruin in which we found ourselves, when after a big war we were obliged to endure a number of civil wars. We must state quite definitely that in pursuing our policy, we may have made mistakes and gone to extremes in a number of cases. But in the war-time conditions then prevailing, the policy was in the main, a correct one. We had no alternative but to resort to wholesale and instant monopoly, including the confiscation of all surplus stocks, even without compensation. That was not a harmonious economic system; it was not a measure called forth by economic conditions, but one largely dictated to us by war conditions.¹⁵⁹

He also noted that—despite it being a necessary and largely correct policy in a time of Civil War—War Communism was not a policy capable of transforming the relations of production from the old society into socialist relations of production and thus unleashing a corresponding development of the productive forces:

It was the war and the ruin that forced us into War Communism. It was not, and could not be, a policy that corresponded to the economic tasks of the proletariat. It was a makeshift. The correct policy of the proletariat exercising its dictatorship in a small-peasant country is to obtain grain in exchange for the manufactured goods the peasant needs. That is the only kind of food policy that corresponds to the tasks of the proletariat, and can strengthen the foundations of socialism and lead to its complete victory.¹⁶⁰

All of this should make it clear that it is extremely strange that the PCP promotes the idea that socialism is a “militarized society,” one in which “everything grows out of the barrel of the gun,” and claims that “in that way we develop War Communism.” As the above quotes show, War Communism was a temporary measure, one which Lenin described as “makeshift” and which he noted “could not be a policy that corresponded to the economic tasks of the proletariat.” The PCP disagrees with Lenin’s analysis of this period, and instead sees it as a model for socialism. A militarized society, with labor organized along military lines, and with a militarized Party which, in order

to “carry forward” its militarization, principally performs “military-type actions.” Military, military, military!

What a mess this all is! What a garbled distortion of the lessons of MLM! All of it justified by the supposedly “new circumstance of the class struggle” and the idea that this will prevent capitalist restoration. What typical petty-bourgeois impetuosity and infatuation with violence!

What the PCP reveals here is that their supposed “new synthesis” of MLM is based either on a profound lack of knowledge of the basic writings of Marx, Lenin, and Mao (and a related basic lack of familiarity with the lessons of the Russian and Chinese Revolutions) or a profound and conscious distortion of these lessons to elevate Gonzalo as the supposed “Fourth Sword” of Marxism, after Marx, Lenin, and Mao.

In fact, what Gonzalo and the PCP put forward about socialism, with their talk of War Communism and a “militarized society,” is nothing new, but is largely a rehashing of the position put forward by Trotsky at the end of the Russian Civil War, the very position which Lenin noted risked destroying the dictatorship of the proletariat. Let’s examine this more closely.

As the Russian Civil War was drawing to a close, the Bolshevik Party was preparing to enter into a new phase of the revolution. In the extremely difficult years of the Civil War, they had only been able to take some provisional steps to overcome capitalist and pre-capitalist relations of production and social relations. But having largely defeated the counter-revolution and foreign invasion by late 1920, a series of questions confronted the Bolsheviks. In effect, they were at a crossroads: they could continue the revolutionary transformation of society, or preserve, in various forms, the existing capitalist and pre-capitalist social relations and relations of production. Part of this question pertained to the methods used during War Communism, which tended to strengthen bureaucratic and bourgeois tendencies in the state organs—especially those in charge of various sectors of production—and in the Party as well. It was in this context that the Party Crisis arose, with Lenin and Stalin on one side and Trotsky and Bukharin on the other.

In late 1920, the Bolshevik Party concluded that there was a need to move away from the policies of War Communism, to evaluate the successes and failures of these experiences, and to focus on the key tasks at hand of de-

¹⁵⁹Lenin, “Report On The Substitution Of A Tax In Kind For The Surplus Grain Appropriation System,” *LCW: Volume 32*, p. 233–234. Available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/10thcong/ch03.htm>

¹⁶⁰Lenin, “The Tax in Kind, (The Significance Of The New Policy And Its Conditions)” *LCW: Volume 32*, p. 343. Available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/apr/21.htm>

veloping socialist relations of production. Trotsky and Bukharin, however, were unsatisfied with this approach. Earlier in the year, their line had been defeated at the 9th Party Congress. There Trotsky and Bukharin had advocated that the militarization of labor and the trade unions (and the related system of one-man management) was required for the entire period of transition from capitalism to socialism and beyond. This was justified by a form of productive forces determinism. For example, in a pamphlet prepared for the Congress, Trotsky advocated “planned, systematic, persistent and stern struggle be waged against desertion from labour, in particular by the publication of black lists of labour-deserters, the formation of penal battalions made up of these deserters, and, finally, their confinement in concentration camps.”¹⁶¹

At the Congress itself Trotsky put forward his theses on the need for a militarization of labor. First, he insisted that “the mass of the workers must be bound to their jobs, made liable to transfer, told what to do, ordered about.” He also insisted that, “before it disappears, state compulsion will, in the period of transition, reach its highest degree of intensity in the organisation of labour.” He explained all of this in terms of the need to militarize the working class throughout the whole period of transition from capitalism to socialism.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹Trotsky, *Sochineniya*, vol. 15, pp. 126, 132, 138.

¹⁶²It should be remembered that, for Trotsky, socialism in one country was impossible. Therefore, his proposal was for this regime of a militarized working class and society to last through the “permanent revolution” until there had been revolutions in every country, including through “exporting the revolution” by means of the Red Army invading other countries. This bears a striking similarity to the Gonzaloist slogan “People’s War Until Communism!” and related articulations by Gonzalo and his contemporary adherents of the need for a “global people’s war,” especially in light of their articulations around the militarization of society under socialism, and their promotion of “war communism.”

¹⁶³Report of the Ninth Party Congress, 1934 ed., p. 101; quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, pp. 214–215.

¹⁶⁴During this period, Trotsky justified this position—which included expanding the use of coercion on the working class by the state apparatus and widening the scope of compulsory labor—by referring to, of all things, the productivity of slavery, claiming it was a “progressive phenomenon”! He stated: “the militarisation of labour... is; the indispensable basic method for the organisation of our labour forces... Is it true that compulsory labour is always unproductive?... This is the most wretched and miserable liberal prejudice: chattel slavery too was productive... Compulsory slave labour... was in its time a progressive phenomenon.”

Congress report, published in Moscow in 1920, pp. 84–97; quoted in Brinton, *The Bolsheviks & Workers’ Control*, p. 63.

¹⁶⁵Much like Trotsky, Bukharin argued for the militarization of the working class, stating that:

“under the rule of the proletariat, too, the element of coercion and repression has a major role, which is greater, the higher is the percentage of purely non-proletarian elements on the one hand and unconscious or half-conscious elements within the proletariat itself on the other. In this case, the ‘militarization’ of the population—above all in the army—is a method of self-organization of the working class and organization of the peasantry. So long as the workers’ dictatorship and its classical paradigm the soviet state system is in a critical situation, quite clearly it must assume the character of a proletarian military dictatorship”

Nikolai Bukharin, *The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period*, p. 142.

He also argued that this and other similar forms of coercion of the peasantry and working class would be needed for the entirety of the transition from capitalism to communism:

“in so far as the peasant is a worker, an opponent of capitalism, and not an exploiter, coercion represents his unity and labour organization, his education and involvement in the building of communism. Finally, with respect to the proletariat itself, coercion is a method of organization, established by the working class itself, i.e. a method of compulsory, accelerated self-organization. From a wider point of

Militarisation [of labor] is unthinkable without the militarisation of the trade unions as such, without the establishment of a regime in which every worker feels himself a soldier of labour who cannot dispose of himself freely; if the order is given to transfer him, he must carry it out; if he does not carry it out he will be a deserter who is punished. Who looks after this? The trade union. It creates the new regime. This is the militarisation of the working class.¹⁶³

Trotsky’s position—largely in line with the PCP’s emphasis on socialism as a militarized society—is that trade unions and other mass organizations should be subordinated to the Party and the state under a form of military control.¹⁶⁴ This is in line with the Gonzaloist view of the “concentric circles” of Party building, and the need for absolute leadership by the Party of the United Front (and therefore the trade unions, which are mass organizations within the United Front). This, in effect, reduces the role of trade unions to enforcing military discipline in production, a form of extreme administrative centralization which chokes mass initiative.

Trotsky’s views were rejected at the 9th Congress and the temporary and exceptional nature of the measures adopted during the period of War Communism was re-asserted. This was Lenin and Stalin’s line, which won

out over Trotsky and Bukharin.¹⁶⁵ However, in late 1920, when the Party began to move away from many of the temporary measures of War Communism, Trotsky and Bukharin kicked up a storm, creating what Lenin referred to as “the Party Crisis.” On November 3rd, at the Fifth All-Russia Trade Union Conference, Trotsky argued that the Party had to “tighten the screws of War Communism” and advocated a “shakeup” of the trade unions; namely, removing from above any trade union leaders who disagreed with the continued militarization of labor and methods of coercion, or who criticized the bureaucratic tendencies then developing in a section of the Party and state machinery. Lenin, criticizing Trotsky, noted that the disagreement was about a fundamentally “different *approach* to the mass, the way of winning it over, and *keeping in touch* with it.”¹⁶⁶

In short, Trotsky’s approach—which was again defeated at the 10th Party Congress—advocated a fundamentally different relationship between the Party and the masses than did Lenin’s. Lenin opposed the militarization of society and the trade unions; he argued that a trade union “is not a state organisation; nor is it one designed for coercion, but for education.”¹⁶⁷ What’s more, he warned that Trotsky’s approach—including his insistence of the absolute leadership of the Party over the trade unions and the Party’s related ability to “shake up” the leadership of the unions at any time—would lead to “the collapse of the dictatorship of the proletariat.”¹⁶⁸ This mistake, common to both Trotsky and Bukharin’s platforms at the time, was reproduced by the PCP and is also promoted by Gonzaloites today. Common to these erroneous positions is an assumption that the proletarian character of the Party is

view, i.e. on a longer historical perspective, proletarian coercion in all its forms, from executions to labour service, is, however paradoxical this may sound, a method of creating communist mankind from the human material of the capitalist epoch.” *ibid*, p. 165

While coercion against counter-revolutionaries and reactionary classes is needed throughout the entire period of transition from socialism to communism, it is clear that Bukharin saw coercion and even militarization of the society as a necessity to deal with “non-proletarian elements” (including the peasantry) as well as “half-conscious elements within the proletariat itself.” In short he saw coercion and militarization of society as *the means* of dealing with contradictions among the people under socialism.

All of this stands in sharp contrast to Mao’s views, expressed in *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, that “all attempts to use administrative orders or coercive measures to settle ideological questions or questions of right and wrong are not only ineffective but harmful. We cannot abolish religion by administrative order or force people not to believe in it. We cannot compel people to give up idealism, any more than we can force them to embrace Marxism. The only way to settle questions of an ideological nature or controversial issues among the people is by the democratic method, the method of discussion, criticism, persuasion and education, and not by the method of coercion or repression.” https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_58.htm

¹⁶⁶Lenin, *The Trade Unions, The Present Situation And Trotsky’s Mistakes*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/dec/30.htm>

¹⁶⁷*ibid*

¹⁶⁸<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/jan/25.htm>

¹⁶⁹Actually, insofar as the PCP repeatedly asserted that Gonzalo was the personal guarantor of the victory of the revolution and would carry them all the way to communism, the PCP actually took this form of idealism even further than did Trotsky.

¹⁷⁰Lenin, *The Trade Unions, The Present Situation And Trotsky’s Mistakes*

guaranteed, and thus, quite naturally, the Party’s absolute authority over the United Front, mass organizations, and the masses broadly guarantees the victory of the revolution and socialism.¹⁶⁹ This is clearly a revision of the basic lessons of Leninism, which were clarified in stark terms in this struggle against Trotsky and Bukharin.

Lenin’s line ultimately won the day, and the Central Committee published a statement condemning “the degeneration of centralisation and the militarising of labour into bureaucracy, arrogance, petty functionarism and pestering interference in the trade unions.” The CC also reaffirmed the need to move away from the militarization of labor and the other measures of War Communism, as the Civil War had largely been won by that point, and these measures had given rise to a series of new problems.

Lenin also noted that trade unions and other mass organizations were essential under socialism, and had to have sufficient independence from the Party and the state so that they could protect the masses from various bureaucratic and bourgeois tendencies that arose in socialist society. He highlighted that this independence would, in turn, help protect the DoP: “we, for our part, must use these workers’ organisations to protect the workers from their state, and to get them to protect our state.”¹⁷⁰

From all this it is clear that the PCP’s line on socialism is, in fact, deeply revisionist. In fact, by promoting the idea of socialism as a “militarized society” and claiming that the goal is to develop “war communism,” the PCP and its contemporary adherents are *discarding Lenin* and instead taking up Trotsky and Bukharin. This is revisionism through and through. It demonstrates a profound lack of historical knowledge, deep-seated bourgeois

ideas of leadership, a fundamental difference with MLM in how the Party should relate to the masses under socialism, and a typically petty-bourgeois infatuation with violence and militarism. In short, a stinking heap of revisionist garbage. But again, for the PCP—and especially for contemporary Gonzaloites—historical details and the

immensely important lessons of the ICM are too much to bother with. When one gleefully proclaims that “warfare is the highest form of resolving contradictions” what else is needed? The lessons of the class struggle are reduced to trivial details in their millenarian fantasies.

Conclusion

The PCP fundamentally revised key lessons of MLM. In instances detailed above, rather than integrating the key lessons of Mao and the GPCR they oriented towards Lin Biao’s analysis. In other cases, they put forward Dühring-like views of an all-knowing genius; on questions of socialism and an evaluation of War Communism they discarded Lenin and took up Trotsky’s position. At the same time, despite their shortcomings, their achievements must be recognized: they initiated a people’s war, maintained that the dictatorship of the proletariat is the prerequisite for the liberation of the masses, and that this must be achieved by violent revolution.

In contrast to the grandiose claims that Gonzalo “synthesized/defined Maoism,” the truth is that when it comes to Gonzalo’s theoretical contributions, what is good is not new and what is new is not good. While the PCP led the revolutionary movement in Peru, their leadership ultimately was unable to work out a correct line to guide the movement and squandered a revolutionary situation in Peru, eventually adopting a “left” deviationist line. This

was not inevitable. The PCP, despite some initial mistakes, could have corrected various errors and summed up their successes and failures in a dialectical materialist manner. They did not do this; instead, they enshrined numerous mistaken ideas and wrong tendencies as the foundation of their politics in their *General Political Line*, and insisted these mistaken ideas had universal validity. The consequences of this no doubt contributed to the defeat of the revolution in Peru, which unfortunately has still not been able to regroup, even after three decades.

Now, various Gonzaloite groups have created their new international organization. They are promoting various revisionist theories inspired by Gonzalo and the PCP, and calling this MLM. There has been a dearth of struggle in the ICM over the question of Gonzalo and the PCP’s theoretical views and their contribution to Maoist theory. Our hope is that this document can spark some further debate and necessary struggle. We also hope that comrades can point out and elaborate on our shortcomings and mistakes in this analysis.

Notes from a Conversation Among Comrades on the George Floyd Protests: Lessons for Ourselves and Beyond

Cash cash cash cash cash, I don't care about your fucking politics.
Cash cash cash cash cash, Open up your mother fucking wallet, bitch.

Reactionary Chant at George Floyd Protest, Summer 2020

The protests really shook people in different ways. They thought they had to put everything on the line all of a sudden. Everything we've been talking about that "was just talk" is now actually real. Kind of silly. But I think also there is still, among some people, the idea that that was the high point, that it is not until we have these giant street protests—and of course we want big protests—that we'll be in a good spot again, and that idea lingers in a few people at least. And what should be clear in talking through this today is we weren't in a good spot with these protests. The protests themselves were not good despite some positive aspects. And if you're talking about what's needed for a revolution, there needs to be a lot better than what we saw there, and that can't happen magically. That foundation has to be built through a lot of struggles, through a lot of efforts, because the protests were quite easy to dissipate both through repression and direct co-optation. And those go hand and hand for the ruling class.

In the larger society there were some significant changes coming out of these protests. For instance a decision of a big section of the ruling class to embrace openly post-modern identity politics and to embrace [it] at all levels in the curriculum. I think a bunch of liberals are now intense believers in this sort of stuff. I think before they had some of these ideas but had more classical liberal/neoliberal views. Now it's very intense to disagree with those views, it's not considered acceptable to disagree with those views in institutes of higher learning and even in some corporate boardrooms. And there's something of a growing backlash against that.

Activist Interviewed for Red Pages

Two years have passed since the George Floyd protests were set off by the police murder of George Floyd, choked to death by police officer Derek Chauvin after being stopped for using counterfeit money at a convenience store. The murder of Floyd, recorded by witnesses, sparked mass anger about racially targeted brutality by the police, igniting protests in Minneapolis and soon after in many cities across America and the wider world. Quotes from the transcript below illustrate the difficult reality faced by those attempting to intervene in the situation; similar difficulties will likely continue to exist in engaging with similar protests in the future and in other locations. During the protests and in their aftermath, there was a significant hope internationally that the protests represented a political breakthrough. While there certainly were positive aspects to the large scale out-pouring during

the protests, understanding the difficulties MLM organizers faced in engaging with the mobilizations may contribute to a more objective understanding of the situation. As in all matters we must “Cast Aside Illusions and Prepare to Struggle.”

In particular, organizers dealt with both significant challenges among the broader public involved in the struggles, as well as confusion among their own ranks. Protests overall were rapidly co-opted with the messaging of the U.S. ruling elite. Overall, the protests resulted in few sustained gains. However, through positive collective functioning, comrades were able to bring new activists into ongoing political work, and sharpen their own political understanding. Relatedly, in addition to the larger difficulties presented by the objective situation, comrades identified a lack of internal clarity about the wider situation among a few comrades as a key internal barrier, including a bias towards tailing spontaneity or harboring the illusion

that the protests signified that the U.S. was fast approaching a revolutionary situation.

Certainly, the reflections in the transcript that follows these background remarks present a limited window into the upheavals that swelled throughout almost every American city and town during this period. However, they do represent something of a valuable perspective from organizers located in several major cities, several of whom traveled between sites during this time, including to cities of various sizes. In addition to the large protests and occupations covered in these accounts, there were myriad other mobilizations during this time, including more overtly Democratic Party run vigils and forums, although these are not delved into in this report. The barriers faced across locations were of a similar enough nature throughout as to indicate that there was a degree of political consistency at these protests across the country despite the particular variations in places and locales.

Background on the Outrage

While many in the U.S. and abroad were encouraged by the massive display of outrage, including by the fact that this was, numerically speaking, the largest protest movement in U.S. history, the movement had deep limitations which resulted in a major impasse for the movement, followed by a series of severe setbacks.

Causes

There have been ongoing protests for decades opposing the racist police brutality directed against African Americans and Latinos. Overall, the rate of fatalities from police violence among Blacks was 3.5 times higher than non-Latino whites from 1980-2009.¹ Since the late 1990s, the rate of police fatalities has generally increased across the board for all racial groups. The rate of police fatalities among Blacks declined from 1980-1990 before starting to rise again, while that among whites has increased steadily since 1980, though it remains less than 50% of the rate among African Americans.

Overall, a legacy of racism dating back to the period of slavery in America remains part of the system of class rule in the United States and plays out in many interactions with the police, both those that result in fatal violence and those that do not. In addition, the underlying

economy has had a steadily increasing percentage of the population excluded from the workforce (not counted in official unemployment statistics which only count those who are actively filing for unemployment benefits from the government). Combined with the rising narcotization of the society, both through medically prescribed opioids and anti-depressants as well as the tolerance, tacit or explicit, by the state of non-regulated “illegal” drugs, a growing section of the population has been rendered essentially “non-persons” in the eyes of the state, and is treated by the police with contempt and as essentially expendable. This section of the population includes large numbers of African Americans, but it has also expanded to all sectors of the population.

While the number of fatalities from the police have not increased dramatically since the 1980s, the increased availability of recording devices on cell phones have made police crimes against the people more visible and contributed to the rise of mass protests against such incidents.

The same factors that led to the rapid increase in the movement—including spontaneous tailing of social media trends—contributed to its rapid collapse, as focus coalesced around a few social media accounts which promoted the idea that political change will fundamentally

¹From *The Lancet* [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)01609-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)01609-3/fulltext). From 1980-2009 deaths among males from police brutality was over 21 times greater than females.

stem from spontaneously occurring mass events, a sentiment expressed by the phrase/website “it’s going down”. This [wrongly] implies that there is no need to organize among the masses, one should just show up when people turn out, and “it” will happen “organically.”

The Floyd protests spread to many American cities and small towns where there had been little to no mobilization in many years. On one hand, the right wing spread conspiracies that “antifa” organizers were being paid by George Soros and fellow “globalists.” On the other hand, the Democratic party initially blamed the protests on Russian intervention or on “white anarchist outsiders,” before deciding to co-opt the movement with “left” (liberal) notions of “proper allyship” i.e. the concept that only the most oppressed identities should speak or act. This quickly resulted in the most backwards forms of “leadership” taking command, i.e. the agenda of the powers that be represented by a token representative of an oppressed group.

Beyond such dynamics were larger trends—a population overall frustrated with the continuing downward trends in the U.S. economy, exacerbated by the massive unemployment that occurred in the first year of the COVID pandemic, though also buffered from severe economic hardships by the small but not insignificant government handouts during this period. This included a few direct cash payments, but also policies like cities waving parking ticket practices, the government suspending student debt payments, etc. Initially Americans were split on support for the protests, but within a few weeks, a solid majority of Americans began to support the protests² in-

cluding a fair number of those on the right as well the larger majority on the left.

Politicians on both sides of the aisle maneuvered to voice support for the aims to “reform” the police. Behind the scenes, their basic concern was to quell and subvert the mass outrage of the protests. One way to do this was to articulate support for “defunding the police.” In an occupation in one area, certain individuals promoted legislation to defund the police. From the start the “defund” measures were revealed to be largely a smoke and mirrors tactic, making use of existing COVID related budget cuts and reallocating funds without actually decreasing the police budget, and claiming that this amounted to “defunding.” Within a year, it was revealed funding for the police only increased during this time.

Overall in the country, the protests shifted the situation in a matter of days from little to no public acceptance of public organizing or demonstrations (as a result of COVID lockdowns) to participation in numbers exceeding anything in recent history. As a result, it was clear there was a need to get involved, but activists in different locations had different assessments about how to effectively do so. In particular, in locations where there was a degree of ongoing mass work, the thought was to engage in protests enough to clarify basic politics and get others involved in collective organizing among the masses, rather than to try to play too much of a leading role in the protests given the scale of the outpouring of people. In contrast, in locations without more developed work, comrades in several instances tried to more directly organize the outpourings, with mixed results.

Interview

Based on the trajectory of comrades’ previous politicization in past upheavals, there was enthusiasm to engage, despite the barriers in scale and dominant liberal politics:

Rhea: In the build up to the protests with all the COVID restrictions and extreme articulations from the [liberals] that if you go outside you’re gonna kill someone, it was difficult to have events. We had a few zoom calls, so it was a difficult environment. There were some events, but a lot of the established left was not doing much. We were trying some independent initiatives. But outdoor events were considered too risky [by many in the public].

So when the protests started there was a quick shift, with people having outside meetings. And in our view that seemed quite promising. In our area we overestimated the significance and strength of the protests, thinking that overall there was sharper political consciousness there.

I kind of got politicized by the 2013/14 mobilizations against police brutality around Eric Garner and Michael Brown. I wasn’t aware of broader lessons of revolutionary history then; I just went out and participated in them. So while [the Floyd protests] were militant, there was a lot of liberal stuff coming out, so we didn’t want to totally get

²<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/republicans-and-democrats-increasingly-agree-on-the-protests-but-not-why-people-are-protesting/>

swept up in them, but find some things to interact with them. It was a tight situation with the COVID stuff before that, and then all of a sudden it seemed people were pretty open to organizing. And then of course the reality was a bit different. When you talked to people about politics they often were pretty closed off, but it seemed like a pretty big opening in some sense to seize on so we [thought we] should do that.

Initially, the protests were disparate, but offered numerous places to intervene. Despite an overall endorsement of a form of militancy among the public engaged in the protests, the same individuals' overall political consciousness and framework often was very low:

Antoine: The first few protests in our area were largely directionless. People were wandering, and there were a lot of standoffs with the police, [and] people taking down the American flag by the police station. The established leftist groups, and non-profits/Democratic Party affiliates weren't there. Now, there were a lot of problems with the protests, [such as] weakness, identity politics as others [in this conversation] alluded to, but there was a certain openness to try to identify stuff and not just follow the leader in the first week or so.

Lily: They [the protests] were pretty massive...[but we had problems thinking through] how to talk with people. We produced a banner, a flier, brought speakers. We formed a contingent within these marches, but they were very massive, and were awash with these different trends, the NGO trends, left adventurist trends. The basic trend was the unwillingness of people to have basic conversations, which I think was caused by the basic situation of people largely following [social media] hash-tags.

Antoine: There were some debates going on though, in particular one comrade who thought we should go "whole hog" into this because he saw it as representing [that] we were fast approaching a revolutionary situation. But, there were other shades of opinion. Generally the [dominant] view was that [this] was not the case, and we should engage with the protests, but we should work on and develop our existing work in relationship with the protests but not drop the ball on what we were [already] doing.

A number of comrades didn't have experience in those bigger protests. Not that we had had resounding success [in prior efforts to engage with large-scale protests]. But we had some success before working together in bigger protests; last time there were successes in big protests against police brutality, fliering, and getting people's contact info in a coordinated fashion...but some people who

had not been to such protests felt overwhelmed, despite the plans, to go in with a pamphlet, and to invite people to follow up things if we had good conversations. In the actual dynamics of the protests, especially with the police firing tear gas, people got tense or nervous, which makes some sense given the circumstances. But [some comrades] had difficulty following through, even when not facing tear gas, [resulting in] not following through, in not being coordinated, in [not] working together well in trying to talk with people and finding people to work with. So even when having something of a plan, our difficulties and shortcomings stood out a good deal in carrying that through.

Then there was also the challenges just of the conversations we were having with people, given the extreme identity politics. People didn't want to talk often or they were emphasizing hashtags in conversations. It was difficult going from hashtags to substantive conversations to follow up and working together. And just to emphasize, that was tied up with not just the disorganized character of the protest but also a much deeper-seated trend we're coming up against in the U.S. left, of really American pragmatism and tailing spontaneity, of "hey it's working now we've got a big protest [what else is there to talk about]."

I think we had a few efforts to get beyond that, but we didn't see that squarely as a group: what those things were about, and the obstacles in working with people in the protests.

At first, things were generally disorganized, with inspiring mobilizations followed up quickly by political missteps and fumbles. But the positive side was that, despite the confusion, the protests gathered so quickly that it was too fast for the established Democratic Party network and related NGO apparatuses [to strangle] what was there [initially]. In fact, in the initial weeks, the Democratic Party opposed the protests publicly. But even before they switched to support the protests, there was a deep reception of ideas that echoed that of the ruling class among protesters.

Logan: One of the demands was the defund the police campaign, which looked very uncritically at the nature of the police; slash the budget a bit and we'd supposedly resolve the whole issue of Black people being shot. But people really bought into that from the start and that was a challenge.

Antoine: We faced a fairly different situation in in our area where some of our initial hesitancy, given the dynamics in in our area, things fairly quickly became Democratic Party dominant with people who were running for office

and related non profits leading the major protests by about a week in, which meant that the room in which to maneuver, to try to work with others, to get something basic moving, was pretty limited. Sometimes we could talk and have basic conversations with others and other groups about how backwards some of the articulations around just “get out the vote”³ were, but beyond that, we weren’t so successful in working with other trends even around getting something like a general assembly going. Now, in part that relates to [the fact that] other than ourselves there were only a couple groups intervening and organizing in an organized fashion, and we had past experience with them, and were not able to cooperate on a basic level.

Rhea: There were a lot of NGO groups. I think this happened in other areas too where a lot of them were undercover a bit. They came up with a new name, and they got a few high schoolers from some of their youth programs and press-ganged them together, and said ok...that seemed to happen pretty quickly in in our area, maybe two weeks.

Antoine: A week and a half into the protests, a prominent politician tweeted out, “this is the revolution and it is being televised,” which if she is saying that, shows how confident the Democrats were that they largely had the situation under control in our area, which was not the case in every other city. Despite all the shortcomings, there was generally a longer period before things were co-opted and turned into NGO soup.

In some areas though, there was more of a mass presence that defied rapid corralling by the powers that be.

Mel: The situation by us was you had all these marches going in circles; what made the occupation somewhat different was you had people [initially] sitting down having some time to talk with one another—allowing, in theory, for [...] some exchange of ideas, beyond just marching before their feet began to bleed. [This led to some larger organizing, including a brief General Assembly, and various organizing efforts.]

Logan: The limited amount of headway that you were able to make in that occupation with some people, was far more than what was achieved in the one we were involved in. I don’t think people were thinking much about what should happen with this occupation beyond what was already going on, other than we should sustain the mutual aid efforts, sustain the food that was being supplied, keep things very horizontal, no leadership at all. There were some power squabbles that happened, but

they were not so overt. One group came to the mic that said “we were at the front lines of the struggles, so you all should bow down, but we are all anonymous so we’re not going to tell you our names.” But it was a “people’s mic” so they got on and said these things, so it rotated to the next person, and was kind of forgotten.

But there was a bit of power that did exist, that did exist in different hands. Not among those people talking on the mic, but among people who were in contact with the police chief, [they] got on the mic at one point to say “the police chief doesn’t want us to go into the precinct and they don’t want us to fuck anything up, so guys don’t go in, if we want to keep this occupation, don’t touch it,” (*laughing*) exposing very clearly the fact that the police were working with people in the occupation in order to quell anymore attempts to gain any more footage of the area, to expand this occupation, or to do anything more than what was being done—which was already pretty limited mutual aid efforts and the police precinct being attacked.

Lily: The situation in our area was similar to yours. There was an effort to co-opt the demonstration through these different NGO efforts. More often than not it was an effort to co-opt this ultra-left language that some of the anarchists would make around horizontalism, so a group of kids would show up behind a giant Penske rental truck, loaded with speakers, and say “we are not from an organization, we are just people from the community, we don’t trust leaders.” And we’d see time and time again that who’s on [their] program as speakers would be the heads of prominent NGOs. And the crowd was just expected to believe that a bunch of 14 year-olds just managed to gather enough money to rent Penske trucks. So this happened a lot quicker than we realized. I think we expected things would be co-opted, but it was quickly co-opted, and so it tightened itself, and so the demonstrations tended to slow off in a lot of ways, and became smaller. And so our position was we should use our contacts with people we were working with to create our own demonstrations, but I think we weren’t able to work so much in that environment. We didn’t clarify how we would put forward a protest that was different...that was going to be clarifying. We put forward a protest that didn’t break away from a lot of the more vague aspects of the George Floyd protest lingo, demonstrations that were critical of the government’s handling of the pandemic, and statements condemning the violence of the police, statements with revo-

³A typical Democratic Party slogan.

lutionary remarks. [Still], we were able to do one protest on our own; [it] was a high point at that time.

Interviewer: What were the negative and positive aspects of dealing with the more spontaneous elements of the struggle?

Antoine: People were mobilized, talking about political questions, both people at the protest and beyond, I got in touch with people I knew from middle school and high school [who were all of a sudden very interested in politics], so these were mixed in with political notions...but the spontaneity of it all really limited things. I think there was a shift within a few weeks from the Democrats saying “this is [the doing] of Russian agents or white anarchists from other states” to saying that “we support these protests.”

And I think around that shift... A) people were more comfortable going to these protests, but B) were ever more quick to parrot the official state narrative. And that was an incredible weakness, [...] even some of the people who were at the protests saw their messages change, even the protests not so led by the Dems or affiliated organizations. But people tailed the larger dynamics of what the bourgeoisie was putting forward [in terms of ideas, acceptable messages, slogans, etc].

Mel: This relates to the struggle with comrades, another person thought it's really happening! Basically the idea was people were up [for] talking, in theory [...] let's work together let's get organized. We had a group interested in that, but one of the self-appointed leaders of the group shut it down by saying “if it's not just saying ‘BLM’ there's no point in talking about anything.” He became a key contact with the police, there was a lot of social media of him hugging the police, he was trying to create a fashion brand around himself, which is pathetic, but not so pathetic that he was about to short-circuit something else.

There was overall this idea [that] we're here because everyone else is here, [and] not too much interest in breaking from that.

Antoine: We also had the other pamphlet against the idea that defunding would end police brutality. Often there was not just opposition but real hostility to talking about these questions. Which was quite striking because people didn't want to talk about larger issues but [just] repeat slogans, and if you wanted to talk about wider issues there were often ways, particularly revolving around identity politics, to silence that. Some of the people doing that were probably really into bourgeois politics, say of working with an NGO. But it was broader than just those people, it was a real disinterest in theory, in analysis, in under-

standing.

Rhea: The idea of [the] “listen to Black leadership” line, that was put out to say “the people on the car right now that are saying ‘go here, vote for these people just do whatever they say,’ listen to them.” I do recall we had our speaker, not even leading new chants, but just raising chants in a section that was under-resourced in terms of speakers. People were like “what are you doing?” People wanted to take the mic away from us because we weren't Black, so we wouldn't lead any chants.

So if the ideology that's going around is [that] basic participation in the protest in the normal terms of what it means to do so is very questionable, so you have to be very careful [that] you don't become a racist, [then] making a pamphlet and even discussing it is even more [questionable].

At several of the protests we gave out a lot of those fliers without much to show for it, without most people coming out to anything or wanting to talk about anything, which is sad.

Logan: Along with the uncritical thinking around the protests, there also was uncritical thinking around racism, and so that led to thinking racism only exists in our heads. And because it only exists in our heads, we could read these “anti-racist” books that came out in the literal dozens or hundreds and resolve these things in our heads and, you know, the good apple cops could stay and the bad apple cops could go, and if then some of the bad apple cops could turn into good apple cops and if we could shift these things that are going on in our heads about our racist ideas then we could resolve this thing about racism entirely. So I think this was a major conception among people or at least was taken up, like buying the merch [merchandise] was a signal to people that you were an anti-racist. If you had a sign on your lawn, if you had it on your shirt, on your instagram bio, on your mask, on your face literally, “you were an anti-racist, you were solving the problem, were part of the solution.” This was a negative trend that was going on and stifled people's ability to think critically [...] about why Black people were being shot, what was the result of racism in the society, etc.

Rafi: I think that was a trend, though I think perhaps stronger than “we could all be anti-racist if we read the right thing and wear the right signals,” stronger than that, was that some people could not be anti-racist if they were white, that identity politics kind of stuff. These two things in some sense contradict each other, [and yet the idea] that the white people's role is to be the supporters that are never perfect, that will always be kind of racist, and

to have different kinds of [ritualistic] hand gestures, some of them were kind of like the Nazi salute, the white people were supposed to put their hands on the arms of people of color, but to do so symbolically so their hands were supposed to be turned down [resembling a Nazi salute] (*laughing*).

Logan: Or “buy Black” [buy goods from Black-owned businesses].

Mel: On the subject of spontaneity, one of thing we were trying to do was to have people we met at the protests come to [a notable politician’s office to join the protests] which we were protesting before, but the people who were doing that before liquidated that. They said “we can’t do anything that doesn’t say Black Lives Matter front and center [now].” And our thinking was if we could have some sort of outlet for all these tens of thousands of people to say not only down with [the politician] who was front and center not only in terms of police brutality, but also corrupt about COVID, resulting in ICE detentions...that could be a positive way forward. But unfortunately, without [large crowds of people], people’s idea was “I’m gonna go to whatever random march passes by me, until it stops, and until then there’s nothing to be done.” So that was a low blow actually for us trying to keep it going. We struggled to keep it going for 5 or 6 weeks and managed to have some of the smallest turn outs in all the George Floyd Protests. We did get it on social media, there were these few instagram accounts that we had postings on even after the George Floyd protests, but a few people would show up and seeing that there was not a thousand people there would just go away. Some people were more interested but conflicted and did stay around, but it was difficult given the climate.

Antoine: Just one thing to emphasize about the spontaneity and the dynamics more broadly about the movement, around this time we had some success in making some basic inroads in working with a few tenants in the housing developments in the surrounding areas where the protests were called in our area. And the mass base of the protests were all petty bourgeois college educated people. None of the people who we had talked to in the projects had gone out to the protests period, to any of the protests. A few of the people we talked to in the projects or related housing development went out with us, but they said this was the first time they had gone to any of them. I think it speaks to some of these issues that most of the people at these protests were used to campus politics, NGO politics, social media activism, and had no connection with the larger working class, and especially with the Black work-

ing class which was the base of the tenants we were working with at the time.

Rhea: Well a good deal of high schoolers too, and a few in our area, but then, at least in our area, the kind of after school program NGO set up thing was about to really corral them into stuff that wasn’t gonna do anything.

I remember that one time in a transit hub by us, there were six or something—fully decked [out] like in football gear with helmets—riot police guys up against a wall, and then there were 50-60 mostly high school kids who had put them there by making a human chain. And [the students were] saying “you’re not going to knock us so we’re gonna hold you against the wall and make some demands.” Then they made speeches about how we need to get out the vote, or local politics is where it’s at, whatever their really reactionary civics teacher had said (i.e. from their charter school).

Mel: When we started to do the housing organizing [in largely Black communities] one person said at a mass meeting, “hey, you know the BLM people, right (because we looked comparatively petty-bourgeois, and were white)? Well get them [the BLM protesters] out over here!” There was such a distinction from Black residents in the housing struggle [and the protests].

Antoine: I was in some conversations with some of the somewhat better people from the protests where you [Mel] were about going to organize in public housing, and some of them were vehemently opposed to going and tabling and talking to people—that “wasn’t our place,” it would be racist to do so. It was the most thinly veiled justification for staying with the most narrow circle of petty-bourgeois so-called activists who were mostly on social media. But it was really striking those views were somewhat prominent. And it was not just these protests. I remember coming out of earlier ones too a number of years ago, with Eric Garner and Michael Brown. There was this constant articulation that “white people or non-Black people, your job is to talk with your racist family members, you should not go out of your economic zone or even outside of your familial relations really”, and those ideas were quite prominent in the George Floyd protests too, the idea of going among the people was strongly opposed in most of the protests.

Logan: On the other hand it was pretty [strongly] promoted to have white people be the ones to explain what’s going on with racism, and don’t ask a [Black] person, because that’s labor [to explain]...“figure it out yourselves white people.”

Lily: Also on the other side there was ultra-left ori-

entation in different cities around property destruction and rioting, the idea that voting is not gonna work, going among the people is not gonna work, destroying things is gonna work, we're not gonna participate in local politics, but instead in mutual aid, and maybe working with this staffer from local politics, "that could be kind of cool." Really revealing that that ultra-left stuff was not far removed from the right opportunism. Also this phenomenon of the nine hour public comment over zoom [on local governmental sessions about the police] which was a very interesting tool that local communities deployed in mass all over the country, and people lined up in mass for 9 hour public comment. All over the country people were going to these demonstrations and then pretending they were gonna do something by being on zoom.

Antoine: Something that came up in the housing projects when talking with people was some opposition to the protests by saying "why are they smashing windows and what not?" And people I think rightfully saw "what does that have to do with anything?" Something we did was saying, partly correctly, that it was in part the police doing it [doing the property destruction]. There were some prominent videos of police doing this. On the other hand, there was a significant section of the protests, maybe more where Lily was than in our area, but it was still there, who saw this was "our chance to smash a Starbucks window, this is our chance to throw a Molotov cocktail," though I don't think any of those got thrown in our area—people did talk about wanting to do it, and talked about "fucking shit up" in a vague sense, which did nothing to help anything, [followed by] the other side of it, them doing basic liberal reformist organizing.

Rafi: And in addition to smash Starbucks there was some sort of Lumpen stuff, of people smashing a jewelry store to get jewelry, and people saying "if this is about fighting for justice, why do that? [They're] just taking a fancy watch."

Antoine: I think we sometimes weren't so clear on that stuff in that moment. I think it was important to expose some of the police's role in that stuff, but sometimes we overemphasized that, and didn't admit that the criticism was correct. And sometimes we were wrong. For instance, if you see the full video, some people smashed a police windshield, and the police came and smashed what was left to see through the windshield. [It would have been good not to be] caught up in this on Twitter and in the frenzy, [we were not] not pausing to analyze things so clearly or carefully.

Mel: There was a question of how to break through

the parochialism and localism and get more of a national (and international) perspective. One of things we tried to do was publish fliers about an online event about the history of the Naxalbari struggle, in India, and some people took the flier. One of the people that saw it was one of the most opportunist people who had an NGO there just to get money, and had a tent for his group to get money; I think they got a lot of money. He said, "you're Maoists, those are my people." He had nothing to do with Maoism, he just saw it as another label he could use when going around. He was not trying to win anyone over to [MLM] politics, he was trying to get people to spend money on his little tent. Not so different, I think, from people who saw the protest as an excuse to get some jewelry. What you could get from a jewelry store, why not get from some liberal activists? The same mentality, essentially.

Antoine: There was an over-focus on the narrative emerging on social media at times. We tried to put a few things out, but we didn't try to put much out on social media. We put out a few statements that we worked on together with something of a national analysis, but there were a few people that wanted to go all out on social media and spend all our time on that. [But the people who were most enthusiastic about social media were the least organized about following up on it]...It's possible with a better and more coordinated network we could have made a better impact.

Mel: On the subject of an international perspective, you had so many people coming together, albeit as was said, a lot of them with a petty bourgeois background, but so when we had the GA [general assembly] come together we were able to put forward, "what is our stand on U.S. imperialism, what is our stand on U.S. bases abroad, should we incorporate related demands, should we discuss this?" And initially there was a lot of enthusiasm in this, it was something of a breaking point. But the individual I mentioned, who called himself a Maoist, and us as his people, at a certain point maneuvered to shut the whole thing down, by saying before we make any demand, "I want us to talk about every single thing, what's my place, etc." And immediately, rather than staying to "talk about everything" he created a whole lot of confusion and immediately proceeded to walk away. At that point any opportunists who were waiting were able to shut things down by using that moment to say "who are so and so [to help coordinate this at all]" and it collapsed pretty early.

But the positive thing to me was there was general interest in talking about such things, but the dominant signal was "don't." And when it came to a person of author-

ity saying “this isn’t your place” people pretty much gave it up. Very much in the occupation there was the idea in the encampment where we were that “if we lose this, we’ll lose everything.” And then “if we’re gonna lose this thing, we just should find the next ‘squat.’” And my friend has this space, etc. And it became literally like Abbie Hoffman’s favorite movie *Wild in the Streets*, like, the younger you were, the cooler you were. If you were trying to talk about planning it was like “ughhh” if you were older you were not to be trusted. I was in my 30s, people who were 15 were like “my friend has a cool basement, let’s go there,” and at that point, there literally were 2 people about who were [cool enough] able to have a discussion, so there was not much hope there. There were some younger people, well not literally young, but who were new to stuff, and interested in stuff, but once things fell apart they went right for the Dems or for official NGO organizations that were waiting to scoop things up. There was the line too that if you were trying to say anything at a rally “you were an informant” because “it’s only informants that try to say anything at a rally, they are called swoopers, they ‘swoop in’ and have people follow their mics,” so “don’t say anything” that’s our answer, which of course is not so good from a political perspective. So that’s pretty bad.

Antoine: There was also the line [when visiting the occupation] that anyone taking photographs should be attacked physically, so a few reporters who showed up were attacked, because supposedly any photograph would just be used by the cops, which was surreal because the cops were all around [the occupation], there’s cameras everywhere, they could record. Getting some basic positive journalist coverage is essential, and if you really needed to be secretive about your identity, why are you playing candy crush on your phone in the middle of this protest? Give me a break.

But on the point about the international [military] bases, I remember we had a study on the Panthers then. This was something of a breakthrough then. 30 people or so came around, and then by using the Panthers’ [...] sharp analysis of things, we were able to put larger things on the table, and avoid the whole of “who are you to say this” sort of thing, because it was the Panthers. I remember the question of the revisionist Soviet Union came up and the restoration of capitalism, and I said, “well look, the Panthers made this argument, I agree with it, but they were one of the groups putting this forward at the time.” And that disarmed people who would say “who are you to say this,” because “I’m just someone who is quoting the Panthers.” It’s something of a concession to liberalism to

not put it directly on the table to say “this is what I think,” but it was helpful to get a few more points out there without the discussion just being shut down on the basis of identity as so many conversations were during this period.

Interviewer: It may be good to circle back to the lasting effects on other comrades.

Lily: Well, in our area there are very few comrades from before the George Floyd protests who are still around.

Mel: I know a few got involved through the George Floyd protests. It’s interesting that so many who were involved before stopped being involved after. People who were confused politically before seemed to get more confused.

Antoine: The protests really shook people in different ways. They thought they had to put everything on the line all of a sudden. Everything we’ve been talking about that “was just talk” is now actually real. Kind of silly. But I think also there is still, among some people, the idea that that was the high point, that it is not until we have these giant street protests—and of course we want big protests—that we’ll be in a good spot again. And that idea lingers in a few people at least. And what should be clear in talking though this today is we weren’t in a good spot with these protests. The protests themselves were not good despite some positive aspects. And if you’re talking about what’s needed for a revolution, there needs to be a lot better than what we saw there, and that can’t happen magically. That foundation has to be built through a lot of struggles, through a lot of efforts, because the protests were quite easy to dissipate both through repression and direct co-optation, and those go hand and hand for the ruling class.

Lily: We didn’t understand how we needed to speak clearly and articulate our differences from the major trends in these protests, but it would have really clarified with new people coming to the fore. I don’t think we would have been able to radically change the situation differently.

Antoine: I think in our area pretty quickly after the first protest or so [it would have been good to try] to get together a big meeting or a big discussion or even a potential protest speak-out followed by a kind of larger GA type-forum, to have some way to try to engage. We didn’t try to lead any protests during this period, and we didn’t generally mass flier, at least in the initial period, to try to invite people out. But [it would have been good] to do something to get people involved in our efforts, to deal with all the nonsense and backlash we’d face from that, but I think

we shied away from that mistakenly. It probably would have blown up, but so what, we've been yelled at before.

Mel: There was a few months where it seemed we achieved a lot in our area with getting a few people involved in the politics, but it eventually blew up. But it didn't have to blow up, so I think there was some success despite the situation being quite difficult, but it does take a toll. But there is a lesson: there are people who think there needs to be a high point to come forward. At the same time there were people who, when things got more in-

involved, they got freaked out, it's two sides of the same coin. People always have to be ready to adjust to the situation, and not have a preset idea, "only now does it make sense to do something." I still think we're dealing with a general yielding to spontaneity in different forms; when the moment is right you do something, when not you go to sleep. That's a larger challenge in the culture we're dealing with, and internationally, you saw internationally, there was interest in George Floyd protests as representing a pole of revolution, which I think was incorrect.

Lenin's Five Point Definition of the Economic Aspects of Capitalist Imperialism and its Relevance Today

It is of central importance for Maoists to understand the nature of capitalist imperialism. While there have been older types of imperialism (e.g. the Roman Empire was a slave-holding empire and the Mughal Empire a feudal one), at present we live within a capitalist imperialist world system. This is a result of the development of the contradictions of the capitalist system, as it spread across the globe and as the various colonial territories were grabbed by the big powers for loot and plunder. By the turn of the twentieth century, things had developed in such a way that capitalism had reached a new stage in which huge monopolistic corporations, cartels, and trusts of various advanced capitalist countries had divided the whole world up between themselves according to their relative might.

In order to grasp the basic nature of imperialism it is helpful to review Lenin's "Five Point Definition" from *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. This definition is often cited without reading the surrounding context, including Lenin's crucial remarks on the limitation of definitions and the specifically economic focus of this particular definition. Ignoring Lenin's important words of caution about this definition lay the ground for dogmatic and even revisionist understandings of imperialism. So let's look at what Lenin says:

If it were necessary to give the briefest possible definition of imperialism we should have to say that imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism. Such a definition would include what is most important, for, on the one hand, finance capital is the bank capital of a few very big monopolist banks, merged with the capital of the monopolist associations of industrialists; and, on the other hand, the division of the world is the transition from a colonial policy which has extended without hindrance to territories unseized by any capitalist

power, to a colonial policy of monopolist possession of the territory of the world, which has been completely divided up.

But very brief definitions, although convenient, for they sum up the main points, are nevertheless inadequate, since we have to deduce from them some especially important features of the phenomenon that has to be defined. And so, without forgetting the conditional and relative value of all definitions in general, which can never embrace all the concatenations of a phenomenon in its full development, we must give a definition of imperialism that will include the following five of its basic features:

- (1) the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life;
- (2) the merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this "finance capital", of a financial oligarchy;
- (3) the export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance;
- (4) the formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves, and
- (5) the territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed. Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.

We shall see later that imperialism can and must be defined differently if we bear in mind not only the basic,

purely economic concepts—to which the above definition is limited—but also the historical place of this stage of capitalism in relation to capitalism in general, or the relation between imperialism and the two main trends in the working-class movement. The thing to be noted at this point is that imperialism, as interpreted above, undoubtedly represents a special stage in the de-

velopment of capitalism.

Lenin specifically emphasizes “the conditional and relative value of all definitions in general” and also notes that this definition involves “purely economic concepts.” Despite such limitations, a solid understanding of these five points is essential to grasping the nature of capitalist imperialism.

The Concentration of Production and Capital

The nature of capitalist development is such that it inevitably tends towards the concentration of more and more capital in a smaller and smaller number of hands. As Lenin showed, this process proceeds particularly rapidly during periods of crisis, in which many companies go out of business and are gobbled up by larger firms. During the major economic crises of the late 19th century, the concentration of capital greatly accelerated, creating huge corporations which largely (but not absolutely) monopolized production in various spheres. With the creation of these monopolies, this process of the concentration of capital intensified to new degrees. In *Imperialism*, Lenin provides the example of the German electric industry, which had already been reduced to a handful of companies by 1900, and saw even more rapid consolidation after this point: “As a result, after 1900, concentration in Germany progressed with giant strides. Up to 1900 there had been seven or eight ‘groups’ in the electrical industry. Each consisted of several companies (altogether there were 28) and each was backed by from 2 to 11 banks. Between 1908 and

1912 all these groups were merged into two, or one.” Similar trends played out in the major capitalist powers around the world.¹

Since this point, these monopolies (and oligopolies, more on these later) have played what Lenin calls “the decisive role in economic life” around the world—with the exception of when socialist countries existed in the 20th century. This does not mean that these monopolies exercise absolute control, but rather that the dominant way in which production is carried out around the world is to serve their interests and designs.² What people eat, where/if they work, how and where infrastructure is built, and much more is all largely carried out according to the interests of these monopolies. Relations of production, including mutual relations between people in productive processes, are structured to serve the interests of the very small handful of monopoly capitalists in the world.

It’s also important to note that while imperialism is the monopoly capitalist stage of the capitalist mode of production (as opposed to the earlier stage of “free” competi-

¹This process continues today. In recent years, we have seen the consolidation of the big banks in the US and elsewhere. For example in the 2008 financial crisis, when J.P. Morgan took over Bear Sterns (with the aid of the Federal Reserve), Merrill Lynch was merged into Bank of America, Lehman Brothers was allowed to fail and then gobbled up by Nomura and Barclays, etc.

²Actually, since Lenin’s time, this has developed in new ways. In *The Fundamentals of Political Economy*, it is noted that there has been an increasing diversification of monopoly organizations:

“In the past, many companies produced only one or two products. But by the end of the 1960s, their operations extended to many areas. For example, the United States International Telephone and Telegraph Company was established in 1920. During the first forty years, its primary business was to manufacture telephone communications equipment. But during the last decade, it has purchased 50 companies unrelated to telecommunications equipment. Its operations have extended to bread, artificial fibers, construction, hotels, and insurance. It controls 150 companies all over the world, and its distribution networks have spread over more than 100 countries and regions.” p. 159.

This trend has continued and intensified to this day. In addition to companies like Proctor & Gamble which produce a wide range of consumer goods, companies like Amazon are involved in all sort of capitalist industries, from web hosting services, to producing sneakers, to selling e-books.

³In this earlier stage, competition was dominant over monopoly. However, there were still relative monopolies that formed at times in some locations. That being said, the main form of existence of capitalism was relatively free competition—free in the sense that no one capitalist or bloc of capitalists was able to establish a lasting monopoly in any given field, and therefore a) capitalists were generally unable to use a relative monopoly position to extract monopoly profits from competitors and b) they could not consolidate what temporary and relative monopolies that did form to determine the overall direction of development of economic life, but had to outcompete their rivals by other

tion),³ this does not mean that competition between capitalists disappears. Actually the dominance of monopoly over competition creates new and more intense forms of competition the likes of which had never before been seen in human history. These forms of competition include large-scale economic competition like Saudi Arabia and Russia collaborating to drive down oil prices globally at

the start of the pandemic to bankrupt the US shale industry, and thus destroy some of their key competition. World War I was another example of the unprecedented competition created by capitalist imperialism, in which competing blocs of monopoly capitalists launched a “war to end all wars” in their struggle to redivide the world.

Finance Capital: The Merger of Banking and Industrial Capital

Today in the US it is common to refer to the big banks and see, to one extent or another, how they control large portions of the economy. However, multinational financial institutions such as these are a relatively new development in the history of capitalism. Prior to the rise of capitalist imperialism, capital was generally divided into three relatively distinct sectors: industrial, banking, and commercial capital.

Industrial capital carried out the production of both means of production and means of consumption, and the vast majority of the surplus value produced in the society was generated there. Banking capital received a portion of this surplus value through extending loans to other capitalists, allowing them to expand production beyond the limits of the immediate capital at their disposal. Commercial capital generally purchased the various means of consumption from the industrial capitalists below their values—thereby allowing the industrial capitalists to turn over the capital quicker and not have to invest in commercial enterprises—and thus appropriated a portion of the

surplus value produced in the industrial productive process (in addition to generating some in certain aspects of commercial enterprises as well).⁴

However, with the development of monopoly capitalism and the concentration of capital into an extremely small number of hands (presently represented in the US as various multinational corporations with significant overlap in large shareholders and boards of directors, etc.) the nature of both industrial and banking capital is changed (and even commercial capital⁵ as we can see with corporations like Amazon engaged in all three sectors). These previously distinct forms of capital have largely fused, forming finance capital, in which the major banks no longer merely advance loans to the industrial sector, but instead are fused at the hip with it. Lenin notes the implications of this: “Finance capital, concentrated in a few hands and exercising a virtual monopoly, exacts enormous and ever-increasing profits from the floating of companies, issue of stock, state loans, etc., strengthens the domination of the financial oligarchy and levies tribute upon the whole of so-

means, such as developing various technology innovations which temporarily allowed them to produce commodities for less than the average socially necessary labor time.

⁴For more on the interrelation between these three sectors in a capitalist economy see chapter 7 of *The Fundamental of Political Economy*, and ch. 16-18 of *Capital: Volume III*.

⁵From the *Fundamentals of Political Economy*:

“The commercial capitalist does not engage in commodity production; he merely advances capital to buy commodities in bulk from the industrial capitalist and sells them to help the industrial capitalist in realizing surplus value. This surplus value obtained by the commercial capitalist is called commercial profit. Why does the industrial capitalist need the commercial capitalists to sell commodities for him, and why is he willing to share a part of the surplus value extracted with the commercial capitalist? Because with the development of capitalism, the volume of commodities produced by the industrial capitalist steadily increases, and the market for commodities steadily expands. If the industrial capitalist has to handle the business of commodity sales, he must establish a large commercial organization and hire a large number of shop assistants. This is not profitable for the industrial capitalist because a large amount of capital would have to be tied down to the exchange process, thus adversely affecting his scale of production and competitive power. If the sale of commodities is delegated to the commercial capitalist specializing in commodity transactions, he can benefit from the advantages of specialization in commodity transaction and save on exchange expenses. In addition, because of the existence of the independent activities of commercial capital, the industrial capitalist can sell his commodities to the commercial capitalist in bulk and more quickly complete the transformation from commodity capital to money capital. Consequently, his capital can be active in the production sphere and play the role of productive capital longer for the extraction of more surplus value. Thus, though a part of the surplus value has to be transferred to the commercial capitalist, it is still to the advantage of the industrial capitalist after all.”

ciety for the benefit of monopolists.”

In order to grasp how finance capital achieves such immense profits it is important to note that, under capitalism, an average rate of profit forms. While there are variations between different industries—and such variations determine to a significant extent cross-sector investment in expanded reproduction by the capitalists—the formation of the average rate of profit nonetheless is an essential feature of the overall capitalist economy. However, under capitalist imperialism, finance capital is able to use its monopoly position to consistently obtain above-average rates of profit, known as monopoly profits. These are only obtainable only insofar as others (small capital and the

petty-bourgeoisie) obtain a below average rate of profit, insofar as the people have to pay monopoly prices for commodities, insofar as the monopoly capitalists can plunder the oppressed countries via unequal exchanges, insofar as they have a monopoly on key technology and heavy industry, and more.⁶

Monopoly capitalists are able to use their monopoly position to extract tribute in various forms, and they become a financial oligarchy, “clipping coupons” as Lenin describes it. This stands in contrast to the earlier period of free competition in which various industrialist played the leading role in directing the overall direction of capitalist development.

The Export of Capital

From the early stages of development of capitalism, the formation of a world market was essential. However, with the rise of the monopoly stage, the export of capital, as opposed to the export of commodities, acquires a decisive importance. In the earlier stage of free competition, Britain, for example, had tremendous influence globally as “the workshop of the world” and opposed the protectionist measures of other European powers in its efforts to gain various footholds in commercial markets to which it exported industrially produced goods. However, over time, these powers developed into capitalist countries in their own right, thus increasing competition with Britain,

and a surplus of capital developed simultaneously in these countries.

This was not an absolute surplus (in the sense that it could still be productively invested at home), but a relative surplus. Given the growing organic composition of capital in these countries the rate of profit on investing in domestic industry had significantly fallen. What’s more, the rise of the labor movement and, in particular the revolutionary working class movement, wrested from the capitalists a series of concessions, such as limiting the hours of the work day,⁷ the banning of child labor, and passage of various safety regulations. These new rules and regula-

⁶In *The Fundamentals of Political Economy*, the authors describe in detail the formation of monopoly profits:

“High monopoly profit is profit well in excess of average profit which is obtained by the monopoly capitalist through his monopoly position. Where does high monopoly profit come from? It still comes from the surplus value created by the worker in the monopoly enterprise. The monopoly organization adopts various blood and sweat labor systems to increase labor intensity and exploit the worker. In addition, the monopoly capitalist also transfers part of the income of the worker and other people into his own hands by raising prices of consumer goods. Taking advantage of his monopoly position, the capitalist depresses the purchasing price of agricultural produce and raises the selling price of manufactured products to extract part of the value created by the peasant. Through monopoly pricing, he grabs part of the profit of the capitalists outside the monopoly organization. By nonequivalent exchanges, the monopoly capitalist plunders the peoples of colonies, satellites, and other countries. This shows that what the monopoly organization gains in the form of high monopoly profit is exactly what the worker, the small producer, and the people of the colonies and satellites lose. A small part is extracted from non-monopoly medium and small capitalist. From the viewpoint of the capitalist world as a whole, therefore, monopoly pricing has not changed the sum of the value nor the surplus value created in the capitalist world. In other words, monopoly pricing has operated with the sphere of the law of value; it has merely changed the form in which the law manifests itself. Similarly, the law of surplus value, the fundamental economic law of capitalism, is still functioning in the monopoly stage; only its effects and forms have changed. Prior to the monopoly stage, it was manifested through average profit; in the monopoly stage, it is manifested through high profit. The rising monopoly profit implies that the working class and laboring people are subject to increasingly heavier exploitation and that the exploitative measures of the monopoly capitalists have become more ruthless than ever before.” p. 160

⁷In Chapter 10 of *Capital: Volume 1* Marx shows, via the reports of the British Factory Inspectors, how in the mid-19th Century in England, there were struggles to reduce the working day to eighteen hours! c.f Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, p. 353-354.

⁸Actually this had already begun to some extent after the defeat of the British in the American Revolutionary War, as the British ruling class realized that their policy of suppressing the development of all domestic industries in the colonies had played a major role in spurring the

tions helped to spur the various capitalists to shift some of their production abroad.⁸

In exporting capital to the colonies and semi-colonies the capitalists were able to set up production to achieve higher rates of profits, and even super-profits (profit far in excess of the average rate of profit). These were obtained by a series of means, including monopoly pricing, super-exploitation of labor (paying workers in these countries far less than the socially necessary labor time to reproduce their labor power), use of child and semi-slave labor, and more.⁹ The warped development of these colonies and semi-colonies by imperialism also has created massive surplus populations from displacing the peasantry on huge scales, and this in turn intensifies competition between workings for jobs, thus further depressing the price of labor power.

The central importance of the export of capital under

monopoly capitalism greatly intensifies the contradiction between the imperialist powers and oppressed countries, as the colonies, semi-colonies, and neocolonies become a central source (but by no means the only source) of the surplus value generated by multinational corporations. As Marx noted, “capital is dead labor, which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks.”¹⁰ Therefore, it must be kept in mind that the massive export of capital by the monopoly capitalists is not just about “making money” but actually allows them control the lives of billions of people and the overall direction of the economic development of whole countries. In this sense, it is clear that the struggle for the true liberation of the colonies, semi-colonies, and neocolonies from imperialist predation is inextricably wrapped up in struggle for the emancipation of labor from capital.

Territorial Division of the World

In the earlier period of colonialism, the various colonial and rising capitalist powers were able to expand and conquer new colonies without generally having to seize them from rival capitalist powers. However, by the turn of the 20th century, especially after the “Race for Africa,” all of the territory in the globe was seized by one power or another. From that point on, any future territorial gain (or related gain of market share) by one power had to come at the expense of another. This leads to a series of significant changes in the colonial policies of these powers.

As Lenin notes in *Imperialism*:

Even the capitalist colonial policy of *previous* stages of capitalism is essentially different from the colonial policy of finance capital.

The principal feature of the latest stage of capitalism is the domination of monopolist associations of big employers. These monopolies are most firmly established when *all* the sources of raw materials are captured by one group, and we have seen with what zeal the international capitalist associations exert every effort to deprive their rivals of all opportunity of com-

peting, to buy up, for example, ironfields, oilfields, etc. Colonial possession alone gives the monopolies complete guarantee against all contingencies in the struggle against competitors, including the case of the adversary wanting to be protected by a law establishing a state monopoly. The more capitalism is developed, the more strongly the shortage of raw materials is felt, the more intense the competition and the hunt for sources of raw materials throughout the whole world, the more desperate the struggle for the acquisition of colonies.¹¹

And so we can see that the territorial division of the world is not only a result of the continuation of colonial expansion from the earlier stage of capitalism, but also an objective requirement for monopoly capitalists, who, in order to maintain the monopoly position, must do all they can to secure control, not only of cheap labor in the colonies and neocolonies, but also access to the various raw materials. And by securing access, they not only preserve and expand their own monopoly position, but prevent rivals from gaining control of these raw materials. In the present system of neocolonialism, territorial control—during periods of relative peace between

American Revolution. c.f. *Lenin's Notebooks on Imperialism, LCW: Vol 39*, p. 103-104.

⁹As Lenin notes, “The interests pursued in exporting capital also give an impetus to the conquest of colonies, for in the colonial market it is easier to employ monopoly methods (and sometimes they are the only methods that can be employed) to eliminate competition, to ensure supplies, to secure the necessary ‘connections,’ etc.”

¹⁰Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, p. 342.

¹¹*Imperialism*, ch. 6.

imperialist powers—is somewhat less important than in the old-style colonialism where each colony was the exclusive domain of one imperialist power. However, as inter-

imperialist competition intensifies the question of territorial control becomes increasingly important, as we are seeing, for example, in the Ukraine War.

From Division to Redivision

Under capitalist imperialism the division of the world is decided according to relations of might and force; it is determined principally by the relative military and economic strength of the various imperialist powers. Control of colonies, neocolonies, and sphere of influence, however, does not change in accordance with every shift in the relative might of these empires. As part of the overall uneven development of capitalism, different powers will develop their productive forces and accumulate capital at different rates.¹² These varied rates of development and accumulation are related to the decadence of declining imperial powers (including but not limited to a significant portion of overall economic investment being shifted away from productive enterprises and towards various forms of speculative ventures), the higher organic composition of capital in the older imperialist powers, and a myriad of other factors. We can see these dynamics at play today with the relatively higher rate of economic growth and capital accumulation in China compared to the US, EU, and Japan.

As the relative economic, political, and military might of various powers change, the declining imperialist powers resist efforts by the rising ones to redivide the world.

¹²As Lenin noted “Finance capital and the trusts do not diminish but increase the differences in the rate of growth of the various parts of the world economy.”

¹³There was a military coup in Myanmar on February 1st, 2021. A month prior, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met in Myanmar with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who seized power in the coup. In the wake of coup, China helped the military dictatorship set up a major internet firewall and continued to provide various forms of assistance and arms sales to help the military crackdown on protests and stabilize the situation in the country in the wake of the coup. While the coup was tied to internal power struggles in Myanmar, it was also supported by the Chinese ruling class as a way to outmaneuver growing US influence in the country. Post-coup, Chinese Belt and Road projects continued and even expanded, a series of new projects and investments were announced, and China was able to secure largely exclusive control of the rare earth mineral resources in the country. The latter in particular was key to inter-imperialist competition with the U.S., as China has important leverage given its extensive control of the supply of rare earth minerals, and ensuring that U.S. companies do not have access to rare earth minerals in Myanmar helps to consolidate a partial Chinese monopoly on these resources.

- <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3122077/what-does-china-say-claims-it-played-role-myanmars-military>
- <https://apnews.com/article/technology-forests-myanmar-75df22e8d7431a6757ea4a426fbde94c>
- <https://thediplomat.com/2021/09/business-as-usual-chinese-investments-after-the-myanmar-coup/>
- <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/growing-chinese-investments-in-myanmar-post-coup/>

¹⁴Ukraine has long been a site of intense inter-imperialist competition between Russian imperialism and the US, EU, and NATO on the other. For more on this situation, see our recent document: *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine, the Maneuvers of the U.S. Ruling Class, and Some Key Tasks for U.S. Communists*. Available online at: <https://bannedthought.net/USA/MCU/statements/mcu-russian-invasion-ukraine-statement.pdf>

lated efforts by the US state to get US capitalists to shift their production out of China. In reference to the similar situation that existed prior to WWI (with the rise of German imperialism and its rapid growth compared to the old colonial powers), Lenin asked “what means other than war could there be *under capitalism* to overcome the disparity between the development of productive forces and the accumulation of capital on the one side, and the division of colonies and spheres of influence for finance capital on the other?”¹⁵

Since this time, it has become clear that the collapse of one imperialist power is also a possibility, as happened with the social-imperialist USSR between 1989-1991.¹⁶ However, before this collapse, there were a series of very intense proxy wars and conflicts between the US (and its allies) and the USSR which killed tens of millions of people (e.g. Afghanistan, Angola, etc.). A New Cold War has effectively begun between the US, EU, Japan, and other US allies on the one hand, and Russia, China, and their allies on the other. We are already seeing the beginnings of various military conflicts to redivide the world according to the new balance of economic and military might. Such “peaceful” competition between monopoly capitalists is itself quite brutal.¹⁷ However, when things escalate to significant proxy wars and even world wars, the horrors of the capitalist imperialism system are unleashed

on a different scale entirely.

An exceedingly small number of monopoly capitalists¹⁸—in cooperation and competition with each other and organized into blocs along national lines—dominantly control the direction of development of human society and do so to further enrich and empower themselves. The natural development of this system is towards brutal imperialist wars to redivide the world between the various blocs, and to sacrifice tens of millions of the working class and peasant masses to do so. Framed in this way, the barbarism of the present mode of production comes into clear focus. It is both the duty and obligation of communists everywhere to resolutely struggle against imperialism; however, in order to do so consistently and effectively one must have a clear grasp of the capitalist imperialist world system. Given the dominant global position of US imperialism, it is of particular importance for communists in the US to gain and promote clarity on imperialism generally and US imperialism specifically (including through pointing out both its strengths and weaknesses globally), so as to aid in the struggle to overcome it.

Our hope is that this brief analysis of Lenin’s five point definition of capitalist imperialism can help to clarify key aspects of this system and encourage comrades in the US and internationally to take up further study of capitalist imperialism.

¹⁵*Imperialism*, ch. 7.

¹⁶This collapse related, in part, to the unwillingness of the imperialists to start WW3, given the likelihood of it ending in the thermonuclear annihilation of all human life.

¹⁷For example, the competition between imperialist powers over Africa in recent years has led to famines, coups, mass displacement, civil wars, and more.

¹⁸For example, a few years ago, a study found that the richest eight people in the world have as much wealth as the poorest 50% combined: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/16/world/eight-richest-wealth-oxfam.html>