

Imperialism, the world war and social democracy - Herman Gorter



German left communist Herman Gorter on war, imperialism and the nationalist degeneration of the First International.

Author's Note

The first, third and last chapters of this book are composed for the most part of a speech the author intended to deliver at the international socialist congress at Basel. This speech was not delivered because of a congress ruling against debate. The first imperialist world war, which the author opposes, renders the publication of this speech, reinforced with a critique of the International's stance on imperialism and the world war, necessary.

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1. Imperialism

The International Workingmen's Association, which was founded by Marx in 1864, disappeared in 1872, and was resuscitated in 1889, is now a heap of ruins. On the first occasion when it was called upon to assert itself as an international, it went under. In the war between Germany and Austria, on the one side, and England, France, Russia, Serbia and Belgium, on the other, the workers parties of Germany, Austria, England, France and Belgium have lined up alongside the bourgeoisie of their countries and from both camps have launched the most violent accusations against the workers parties of the other side, as if they were enemies. One could almost say that the International has renounced its socialist ideals.

This catastrophe, this defeat of social democratic ideas and organizations, comprises the subject matter of this book, in which we shall discover the causes of this defeat. We shall explain the nature of the International, point out the cause of its downfall, elucidate the character of the changes which have taken place in it, and show the form we must assume and the struggle for which we must arm if we want to reach the goal of the International by other roads.

The enormous growth of capital, produced by the expansion of the forces of production during the 19th century, is the origin of imperialism, which is the aspiration of all powerful states to conquer new territories, especially in Asia and Africa.

Just as in the economic domain free competition was forced to give way to the monopoly of the trusts and cartels, so also in the political domain every powerful capitalist State aspires to monopolize the land and the exploitation of foreign countries.

The first stirring of the new imperialism, its moment of birth, was England's occupation of Egypt. Then came the Sino-Japanese War and the conquest of Korea, the Spanish-American War and the occupation of Cuba and the Philippines, the Boer War, the European expedition against China and the Russo-Japanese War.

But then the world was completely divided up. Hardly any free countries were left, even in Africa.

Then one crisis followed another. The various great powers ardently coveted one another's possessions.

The Moroccan Crisis threatened to shatter the peace of Europe on three separate occasions, and the Balkan Crisis did so twice. Then it was the turn of the Italo-Turkish War for Tripoli, and the Serbian, Bulgarian and Greek wars, which sought to strip Turkey of part of its territory.

In this way, tensions became increasingly more serious. The break-up of Turkey unleashed all the passions, the greed and the thirst for domination of all the great powers. Germany wanted to seize Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, the Belgian Congo, the French Congo, the Dutch East Indies, the Portuguese colonies—a unified African empire spanning the continent from east to west—Morocco, and probably also some of the English colonies. France wants to preserve the vast colonial empire it conquered during the last century and, if possible, enlarge it with Syria, part of Asia Minor and German territories in Africa.

Italy aspires to expand its territory in Africa and, if possible, in the Eastern Mediterranean as well. England wants to keep what it has and to make Africa an English continent. It wants a united Empire stretching from the Cape of Good Hope to Egypt, and via the Suez Canal, to Mesopotamia, Persia, Afghanistan and India.¹

Germany, France, Russia, England and Japan all aspire to seize China.

The Netherlands wants to keep the Dutch East Indies. Belgium and Portugal want the same with respect to the Congo and Portugal's African colonies.

All these small States want to increase and intensify the exploitation and enslavement of their colonies.

Austria-Hungary wants the east coast of the Adriatic, Serbia wants a piece of Macedonia and access to the Aegean Sea.

Russia wants the Balkans, Turkey, Asia Minor, Persia, Mongolia and perhaps also ports on the Atlantic Ocean.

All States seek markets for the sale of their products and high-return investments for their capital.

Imperialism seeks not just colonies but also spheres of influence for its trade and industrial and financial monopoly.

One must not think, however, that imperialism aspires only to an extension of its territories overseas, in the colonies; the conflict between Russia and Austria-Hungary, directly involving territories of each country within Europe, is proof of this.

If it should appear to be necessary in order to conquer and rule colonies, capital will seek to expand by conquering other countries in Europe and ruling them directly or, at least, reducing them to a state of dependency. Thus, Germany is presently trying to conquer Belgium, Poland, the Netherlands and, maybe later, Denmark, because, due to their locations and ports, it needs these countries for its world-wide expansion and for its fight against England. All the big States aspire to world domination, to rule over the seas, to a decisive monopoly position for its people.

To achieve these goals or at least some of them, and to prevent the other countries from achieving their goals, the great powers have made alliances with each other. Germany has formed an alliance with Austria-Hungary, and England has allied with France and Russia.

And to conduct this struggle, at least for the present, at least in its first phase, this war was started. The true cause, the trigger, the author of this war, is therefore not any particular State, but all the States that pursue an imperialist policy and seek to expand their territories: Germany, England, France, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Belgium and Japan; each one separately and all of them together are its cause.²

All the chatter of the bourgeois and socialist parties and their newspapers, according to which we are witnessing a war of national defense in which we are obliged to participate because we were attacked, all this chatter is nothing but a trick to dissimulate each country's culpability under a beautiful façade.

To say that Germany, Prussia or England is the cause of the war is as stupid and as false as to assert that the cracks which open up on a volcano are the cause of its eruption.

For many years, all the European States have been arming for this conflict. All of them want to satisfy their own rapacity and greed. All of them are equally guilty.

2. The World War

The cause of this first world war is therefore capitalism: world capitalism attempting to expand.

The course of capitalism's evolution is a unique blood-stained history of murder. Murder of competitors, of workers, of populations foreign and domestic.

In the history of capitalism, the pages soaked in blood are countless: since the era of its birth, and then its evolution with the struggle of the Portuguese and the Spanish for the conquest and possession of the Indies and America, then continuing with the struggle of the Spanish against the Dutch, the Dutch against the English, and the English against the French. These struggles continued on an ever-expanding scale, involving ever more powerful forces, until the English who, with their victory over Napoleon, conquered world domination. In the struggle for capitalist power in the European and American continents, numberless pages are drenched in blood. But none of these pages are as soaked in blood as that which is being written today.

The countries which are directly or indirectly participating in this war have a total surface area of half the world's land mass and a population of 900 million inhabitants. The armies which these countries can and will put into the field number in the tens of millions of men; the dead, the wounded and the disabled will number in the millions.

The earth is being nourished in this war with more corpses than it was ever supplied with in any previous war.

The responsibility for these facts falls solely upon capitalism and the capitalist classes, each and all.

For all of this is taking place only as a result of capital's thirst for profit.

All the capitalist classes propose, by means of this war, to spread capital throughout the whole world and to extract more and more profits, from this expansion and from all the peoples of the earth who they want to transform into their wage workers.

Profit for the ruling class, whose representatives are nothing but miserable puppets in the hands of global evolution; it is this profit that the emperors and kings are defending when they resort to all the blather about the Fatherland calling upon its sons, and of God being the witness of the noble purpose of his peoples and the justice of their cause, the God who will help them and bestow victory upon them. Miserable puppets in the history of human evolution, a history which is now so great and magnificent—since it is now preparing the world for socialism—and a history which constrains man to be so small.

It is profit for the capitalist class which is calling upon the bankers and industrialists, the capitalists of trade and transport and the landowners, inviting them to vote in favor of the war in parliament, to declare war.

It is profit, a small and miserable profit, which constrains the middle class, the peasantry and the tenant farmer to line up behind this war alongside big capital, even if they do so with fear and anxiety.

It is profit, the thirst for gold, which constrains the totality of science, art and religion to dirty their hands—together with the capitalist classes—with the blood of millions of men.

It is profit, abject material profit, which constrains all these classes to participate in the biggest and most widespread of lies, in the most extreme hypocrisy, because it contradicts the exceptionally clear reality of the current situation in the most obvious and striking way; this hypocrisy declares that its nation is making war for a just cause, that it is attempting to achieve the most noble and elevated goals, that it is serving the cause of civilization, that its nation is the depository of wisdom, of humanity and of culture. It is profit, abject material profit, which impels these classes to utter such lies and hypocrisy.

All of it is nothing but lies and deception. It is possible that some progress could issue from this war. But this was not the goal of the ruling classes, it would not be the result of their plans. What they want, to achieve their goal, is blood, human blood. The blood of their enemies who are men like themselves. And their only goal is profit.

Capital's profit. Surplus value sucked from the peoples of the weakest countries and from the workers.

Filthy, abject profit, not culture.

It is only for profit, and by profit, that the ruling classes are dragging the workers into this war.

The female worker whose husband, son or fiancé is at this moment dying in northern France, in Flanders or in Poland, can reflect: "My husband, my son, is now buried there because he had to fight for the profits which the capitalists can extract from the Congo, from China or from Asia Minor."

It is from this angle, and only this angle, that one must view the emperors and the kings, the ministers and the parliamentarians, the bankers and the industrialists, the professors, the priests and the artists who support this war.

Many socialists, especially in Germany, speak of the madness of armaments, the madness of imperialism.

But in regard to the capitalists it is a matter of something very different from madness; if a capitalist country wants colonies and a monopoly over certain territories, if this country arms itself sufficiently in order to pursue this end, and if it spends billions on armaments in the process, only a lack of arguments could cause one to speak of madness in this case. For enormous profits flow from the conquered territories, if they are rich, to the metropolis. If Germany could conquer part of China or the Dutch East Indies as a territory to exploit, then millions and billions would flow into German hands each year, just as millions and billions now flow from English colonies into English hands. The biggest German banks and the small group of big industrialists and trading houses which now rule Germany will make the whole German population pay for the necessary naval and military budgets; but the billions in profits they will keep for themselves.

They are therefore totally reasonable and, from their point of view, are acting with a very lucid perspicacity when they force the German people to arm and when they push Germany

into a war of imperialist expansion in order to seize colonies. And with perfectly good sense they attract the middle class to their side because, in the final accounting, it too stands to directly pocket some profits. Does this middle class not, for the most part, live off of big capital? No, it is not among the capitalists that we find madness, nor among the middle classes.

Behind all of these classes, behind the kings and emperors, behind the parliaments and all the armies, lie hidden, only to become visible under a penetrating and scientific scrutiny, the magnates of steel, iron and mining, high finance, the global cartels, the shipping trusts, the big commercial houses and monopolists. They are the ones who dominate large scale movements of capital and, consequently, society. They are few in number, but everyone obeys them. Invisible, inhuman, merciless, without compassion, they regulate the movements of capital with cold reason alone. The expansion of production has pushed them into this war so that capitalism, each one's national capitalism, can expand even more, so that it can become greater and more powerful. So that it can become the sole world power.

But capitalism and all the capitalist classes are responsible for this war. For they all follow big capital. Thanks to big capital, the capitalist classes have been transformed into one single entity, and they are responsible as one single entity for this wholesale massacre.

It is the nature of capital to produce surplus value. A constantly increasing mass of surplus value by means of improved instruments of labor. Its nature, its life, its activity, its growth, are always expanding over the entire world.

Capitalism, born of private ownership of the means of production, grows by means of conflict.

This world war was therefore born from the nature of capitalism. It is a necessity. It is fate, as they said in times gone by, or the will of God, as they said later. It is the necessary evolution, the springboard and the effect of modern capital, as we think today.

The capitalist class must still accomplish a great mission in the world: the spread of capital over the whole earth.

It still possesses an enormous power to achieve this goal.

The proletariat is still too weak; the part of the proletariat which is conscious of its goal and its ideal is still insignificant. The proletariat is still too weak to carry out its mission, which is the emancipation of the world from the claws of capitalism.

Imperialism and imperialist and colonialist foreign policies, that is, the expansion of capitalism, or the expansion of the most highly-developed methods of labor over the entire earth, this necessary phase in the evolution of capitalism, is in the end producing world socialism. But the way this evolution of capitalism is being carried out threatens the proletariat with ruin. And it is precisely the struggle against this mode of evolution which will make the proletariat strong again and will make it ripe for freedom.

3. The Proletariat

World Labor against World Capital

Thanks to imperialism, capital finds itself facing the proletariat under new conditions.

Thanks to imperialism, the proletariat finds itself facing the bourgeoisie under new conditions.

In general, imperialism is worsening the living conditions of the proletariat.

We must pause to consider these points in more detail.

If we want the proletariat to oppose imperialism with all its forces, then we must show that imperialism is harming the proletariat.

In general, colonialist policies provide the greatest advantages to capitalist society.

It was colonialism which, in the 16th and 17th centuries, flooded Europe with precious metals, thus creating modern capitalism in the Netherlands, England and France.

It was colonialism that gave birth to capitalist trade and capitalist industry; colonialism gave birth to the overseas market.

North and South America, Australia and Africa have become sources of agricultural products for Europe, thanks to colonialism.

Thanks to colonialism, the conditions arose for the first time which allowed the development of large-scale industry in England, and later in the other countries of Europe.

Thanks to colonialism, torrents of gold flooded Europe from California, Australia and the Transvaal, which reinvigorated capitalism by vastly increasing its mass.

Colonialism therefore contributes gold, creates new markets and brings ever-increasing amounts of raw materials and foodstuffs.

Since the 17th century, this creative power has irresistibly grown and exhibited an ever-increasing intensity.

Colonialism created capital, it created and continues to create industry, and therefore the proletariat as well.

It is therefore true that colonialism, and imperialism as well, can also bring advantages to the proletariat.

These advantages are based solely on the colonies. Some colonies remit profits exclusively to a small group of capitalists, while others produce profits for numerous capitalists, employees and functionaries; the proletariat, however, gets nothing or practically nothing. But there are other colonies which yield profits to a large part of the capitalist class and to part of the working class.

British India and the Dutch East Indies, with their enormous natural wealth and with youthful, numerous, industrious and educated populations, remit profits even to the working classes of England and the Netherlands in the form of wages and jobs. Other countries, China for example, have attracted the interest of capital.

If, let us say, capital is exported to the Dutch East Indies, the following is the result: "The export of articles of iron and steel, machinery, etc., which are produced in the Netherlands." Dutch capital, once in the colonies, for reasons of both price and quality, gives preference to the metropolis in making its purchases. This leads to a direct benefit for the Dutch worker.

Furthermore, production for export to the colonies, to countries within the exporting country's sphere of influence, and to weak countries, like China for example, employs many workers. This is the case in the Netherlands for numerous workers in the textile industry. In this respect, as well, the colonies, the spheres of influence, and the dominated territories, all other factors being equal, favor the metropolis.

Also, the means of transport to the colonies, the fleets for example, are largely built in the metropolis. This gives workers jobs and in turn influences other industries, too, such as mining, railroads, steel and coal, etc.

In addition, trade with the Dutch East and West Indies led to the emergence of many industries, such as milling rice, roasting coffee, processing cacao, etc.

Finally, part of the immense profits extracted from the Indies goes to the middle classes and the workers. There are cities and regions in the metropolis which exist in part thanks to these profits; and these profits support a part of the working class, such as the construction workers, for example, or those employed in the luxury industries, or service employees (various sorts of lackeys).

All of these workers taken together form an important mass in the Netherlands, and are even more notable in England.

And to all of those workers who think only about their direct advantage and who see the profit of the bourgeoisie as their own profit, colonialist policies seem advantageous.¹

And imperialism enormously increases these advantages, directly and indirectly.

Despite these direct and indirect advantages, revolutionary social democracy is opposed to capitalist colonial policy. Why?

Because colonialism is always conducted by means of robbery, pillage, murder and the most terrible exploitation.²

Revolutionary social democracy cannot give its consent, not only because of its highest principles and the ideals of humanity which it represents, but also in consideration of its own interest. The workers in the colonies are employed as competitors so that wages can be reduced. The small peasantry and the workers of the Indies and of the continents oppressed by the most powerful States are future socialists. The moment draws near when not only the Japanese and Chinese workers, but also the working populations of India and certain parts of

black Africa will participate in the workers movement. The proletariat must not separate itself from these workers and small peasants.

The proletariat must help them and give assistance in every way, since it must be helped by them in turn.

They must henceforth recognize that they stand beside the European, American and Australian proletariat.

Colonialism provokes animosities among the workers when workers of different nationalities participate in it. Colonialism awakens imperialism, nationalism and chauvinism among the workers, and therefore divides them.

Therefore, colonialism can, to a certain extent and momentarily, bring advantages to the proletariat; over the long term, however, and in relation to its final goals, it is ruinous for the working class.

Colonialism can, partially and on a small scale, be useful to a part of the working class (the workers in the mines, on the railroads, in the steel mills, and in the shipbuilding industry). Over the long term, however, it is disastrous for the class struggle.

Therefore, the proletariat cannot, for general reasons, support capitalist colonialist policy and for that reason finds itself in fierce opposition to capital.

If everything we have just said is characteristic of colonial policy in general, including that of antiquity, it is all the more characteristic of modern and capitalist colonialism.

First of all, modern imperialism imposes insupportable burdens on the workers during peacetime. Thanks to imperialism, militarism expands endlessly, social legislation comes to a halt, taxes and customs duties on imports rise, life becomes more and more expensive, wages fall, reaction gains ground.

Second, in times of war the proletariat is crushed by imperialism. Its organizations are destroyed, unlimited burdens are imposed upon it. It is subjected to hunger and poverty, to unemployment and death, to infinite sufferings, to the destruction of entire generations; progress comes to a halt for years; the peoples of the world are incited against each other and within the war the seeds of new wars are sown.

Third, after the war the chance for progress for the proletariat is very uncertain and could perhaps be nullified for many years. The States themselves, as a result of this long war, could end up so impoverished, so buried in debt, with such serious economic depressions and decreases in production, that if they should want to participate in an arms race with a view to new wars, it is possible that this will result in the economic ruin of the proletariat and therefore its demise as a fighting class.

Consequently, the proletariat cannot, now less than ever, associate itself with capitalist colonialism, that is, with imperialism.

For all these drawbacks are more important than the small advantages, direct or indirect, referred to above.³

For all these reasons, the proletariat finds itself, as a result of imperialism, in an even more hostile position vis-à-vis the possessing classes.

Fourth—and this is the principle change, the immeasurable intensification and exacerbation produced by imperialism in labor/capital relations—for the first time in world history the entire international proletariat is now united, thanks to imperialism, in times of peace as well as in times of war, it forms a whole in a fight which can only be waged against the entire international bourgeoisie.

This is what is new about imperialism.

This is the new reality which must be taken into account.

Only by understanding this reality can one understand these new times, this new stage which, thanks to imperialism, has been entered by the struggle between capital and labor.

Taking all of this into account, on the basis of this recognition, the new tactics to be implemented against imperialism must be established.

All modern States, without exception,⁴ continuously threaten the whole proletariat in times of peace and crush it in times of war.

In peacetime, the German bourgeoisie, government and capitalism, with their imperialism, threaten not only the German proletariat, but also the French, English, Austrian and Russian proletariats and impose unbearable burdens upon them. French, English and Russian capitalism do the same thing to the proletariat of all countries.

During wartime, German imperialism destroys not only the power of the German proletariat, but at the same time destroys that of the French, English, Russian and Austrian proletariat. Russian, French, English and Austrian imperialism, each on its own and all of them taken together, do the same thing to the proletariat of all countries.

And imperialism dominates the entire world.

It is arming everywhere.

Most of the world has enlisted in this war. Most of Europe, most of Asia, all of Australia, a large part of Africa—South Africa, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, all the French, English and German possessions—Canada and soon perhaps other powers.

Therefore, world capital, in its various parts and for the first time, as a result of the phenomenon of imperialism, veritably stands united against the world proletariat.

For the first time, the world proletariat must really deal with world capital.

Until now, in the struggle and practical policies of the socialists against the governments of the bourgeoisie, the proletariat of each country only faced their national bourgeoisie.

Similarly, in the trade union struggle, until now the national proletariat found itself facing national capital.

The international congresses of the socialist parties had the goal of formulating shared principles, but not that of establishing a joint plan of war.

The trade union congresses never ruled on anything beyond reciprocal aid, but rarely on cooperation, at most in certain special cases and even then involving no more than a small part of the workers against a small part of capital.

There was very little or no struggle at all on an international scale. It is true that the trusts and the international employers associations were moving towards an internationalization of the struggle. But imperialism managed to do what the trusts and employers associations still could not do, that is, it united the proletariat by means of a kind of pressure, a threat, a struggle, uniting it into a whole for taking action.

All the bourgeois parties in all countries are in favor of armaments and the war. Therefore, all of them threaten the entire international proletariat in times of peace and subject the entire international proletariat to destruction in times of war.

The first imperialist war conducted by the imperialist States, this war for which capital has been preparing since 1871 and which it now feels capable of declaring, this war is the culmination of the cycle of class struggles dating to the founding of the International. This war pits the International as a whole against international capitalism as a whole for the first time.

And imperialism is an enduring phenomenon.

Therefore, the bourgeoisie of just one country is not the only enemy of the worker. By means of the fragmentation which shatters the proletariat into millions of pieces, which renders the current exploitation in factories and offices possible, by means of the multiple divisions which make oppression possible in the national States, by all these means and more, imperialism pushes the working class into a united front against capital. And this is the first time this has ever happened in the history of the world.

Under threat from world capital, against world imperialism, the proletariat, after this war, will form a totality no longer against just one bourgeoisie but against the bourgeoisie of all States.⁵

The words of Marx in the Communist Manifesto, according to which the workers of all countries must rid themselves first of their own bourgeoisie, have been reduced to nothing. Imperialism has proven that they were erroneous.

4. The Nationalism of the Proletariat

For the first time since its founding in 1864, the International was offered the occasion to prove, not with words, but by means of a single test of all its member parties, that it was one united body.

For the first time, the strictly national dimension of each party could have disappeared and it could have become a real international. The international dimension, the dimension without fatherland—which, until then, was only a masquerade, a simulacrum, and was worn the way

one wears a nice flower or a collar—could have then, in the struggle against the arms race and the war caused by imperialism, come forward in all its strength and with all its power.

Who cannot see that the moment was right?

When all nations were preparing for war and to fight for the same goal: world rule.

What socialist has not always believed, has not always ardently hoped and desired, that there would be an action on the part of the bourgeois parties of all the bourgeois nations of international capital, against the whole world proletariat, against the working class of the entire world?

The onset of this war could be seen in advance for many years.

Numerous authors, among whom Kautsky stands in the first rank, have explained that the antagonisms between the great powers could lead, and most likely had to lead, to this horrible world war, and that the revolution could break out as a consequence of such a war.

In his book *Finance Capital*, which could be considered as the continuation of Marx's *Capital* and which deals with a later phase of capitalism than the one known by Marx, Hilferding has illustrated the causes that lead to imperialism.

The Congresses of Basel and Stuttgart have called upon the proletariat to prevent this war by any means, even the most extreme.

We were therefore prepared.

Were it not for the fact that the war is even more colossal than we had expected.

No one had foreseen that the capitalist States would so universally participate in this war.

But was it not obvious and clear that world capital in each one of its parts was fighting for itself and had therefore placed itself in opposition to the world proletariat?

From the point of view of socialist propaganda, what could have been more important than the fact that the whole world proletariat was dragged into this war?

Finally, today we are witnessing the clash between world labor and world capital, a battle brought about by capitalism itself as a result of its evolution, a battle the proletariat did not want.

On one side, the capitalism which, with its most modern and powerful manifestations—monopolies, trusts, concentrated finance capital—has provoked the war that is destroying workers and the earth; on the other side, the proletariat which did not want the war and which resolutely opposed it.

What magnificent progress since 1864, since 1871, the date of the last war in western Europe! During that era, a war between two capitalist nations was the cause of the consolidation of a people who wanted to become a State. Such small beginnings for what was

to become Germany. And at that time, consequently, only a few workers individually opposed the war.

Now we face a worldwide confrontation of the united and compact peoples of every country, except America, for world domination, so that capital can undertake its final triumphal march over the earth, and to facilitate the consolidation of world capital. And against these powerful forces, millions and millions of united workers have been compelled to defend themselves against the capital which has oppressed them for its own benefit with infinite burdens and which is now trying to use them as cannon fodder; against the capital which, by means of insane and savage armaments and a blind war with unimaginable consequences, exposes them now to new weapons, new wars, and threatens them with destruction.

What could be more simple and more clear than a unified protest action on the part of the workers of all States against this danger, an action which would not refuse to use any means to accomplish its end? An action involving each and every worker?

What could have been more simple? What action could have been more natural, what act could have been more splendid in its consequences for propaganda, the organization and the revolution, what action could have been more illuminating for the masses even in the most obscure and distant places, than a united struggle in all countries, carried out in the same way by all the members of the International against this war? How clear it would have been, how important and how attractive for the workers and even for part of the petit-bourgeoisie and the middle class, if the same words were spoken in every parliament and if the same actions were to have taken place in all countries!

And, once again: What could be more simple, more clear, and more consonant with the reality of the facts and the material conditions? The entirety of world labor against world capital for the first time.

This is what should have happened, we think.

But the actual course of events was totally different. Instead of the struggle against capital, there was submission to capital and cooperation with capital; instead of the unity of the workers, there was a division of the workers into as many parts as there are nations; instead of internationalism, there was nationalism and chauvinism.

Only the Serbian socialists voted against the war in their parliament, while the Russian socialists abstained and withdrew from the assembly.¹

In Germany, the socialists voted billions for the government, in Austria-Hungary they supported the war.

In France and Belgium they joined bourgeois war cabinets.

In England, the Labour Party has recommended that its members enlist in the army.

In Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland and the Netherlands, the socialists voted for war credits for mobilization, for preserving their neutrality, that is, war credits, for the imperialist war.²

In almost every country, then, the opposite of a struggle against the bourgeoisie, there was only cooperation with the bourgeoisie.

Someone who was well-acquainted with international social democracy, however, could have foreseen all of this a long time ago. The Stuttgart Congress was the last Congress to seriously take a position against imperialism. This attitude began to go into retreat at Copenhagen and was routed at Basel.

It was clear that social democracy became more fearful as imperialism became stronger, as the threat of war became more urgent and the war approached. In Basel, the Congress was still celebrated with pomp and ceremony; but in the empty phrases of Jaurès, in the hollow threats of Keir Hardie, in the abject whining of Victor Adler about the destruction of culture, in the pusillanimous and insignificant words of Haase, in the vain boasts of the Congress, one could already perceive the impotence of the Congress and its repugnance and aversion to any action.

Worse yet: even then, the intention of marching alongside the bourgeoisie was proclaimed.³

The bourgeoisie, which as a result of much practice amidst its own putrefaction has a good nose for sniffing out moral corruption, immediately registered the odor of corruption which emanated from this Congress and from the International. It understood that it had no reason to fear such a Congress. It put the Basel Cathedral at our disposal. And what place could have been more appropriate for the hypocrisy of social democracy and for a Congress that said one thing and thought another, than a church where, day after day for centuries, the Christian hypocrisy was proclaimed!

Now we are going to explain the reasons why this impotence and hypocrisy arose.

Before doing so, however, we would like to demonstrate in great detail, using the example of Germany, just how far the International has gone, how shameful and how harmful this development is for the International, how it led to internal splits, as a result of its failure to dare to take the final steps in the struggle against the imperialist war of world capitalism and due to its failure to present itself as one united proletariat in this struggle against the war.

And at the same time we shall take advantage of the occasion to refute the principle reasons it has given to explain its conduct.

5. The Example of Germany

Rationales for Proletarian Nationalism and their Refutation

Now for the example of Germany.

This war is Germany's war.

Not in the sense that the other great powers are less responsible. Not in the sense that any other great power played a lesser role in causing this war than Germany.

But in the sense that Germany has prepared for war better than any other country, it has mobilized the greatest resources, it has been driven forth by the greatest material and spiritual forces and proclaims the noblest goal. For these reasons it has to be the aggressor and—considered from the purely capitalist, technological and economic point of view, without taking any other factors into account—it deserves to win.

Thanks to its efforts, after 1870 Germany became the second greatest capitalist State in Europe.

But Germany is superior to England because of its organization of industry, trade, communications and finance. In these sectors it is clearly more powerful. Besides the United States of America, Germany is the only capitalist State organized in the modern manner. Its absolutism, its powerful class of junkers and, consequently, its bureaucracy and its army, in conjunction with its centralized banking system, its concentrated trade, its industry and transport, have made it a model imperialist State, the only perfect imperialist State in the world. Germany unites the powerful means of absolute monarchy with those of the bourgeoisie. Thanks to all these factors, its energies and its expansive power are stronger than those of an England deprived of its colonies.

But the chance for such a perfect course of expansion was foreclosed for Germany because it arrived too late among the ranks of the great powers. The world's wealthiest territories were already occupied by the other powers. And the latter had so arranged matters that Germany has little or nothing. All of Germany's attempts to obtain territories in keeping with its power have completely or almost completely failed. France seized Morocco, Belgium took the Congo and England most of the remaining parts of Africa; furthermore, Germany could not even obtain sole control over the rail line to Baghdad, as the satellite lines connecting with Germany's railroad on both sides fell into other hands. What Germany achieved in Asia is derisory and hardly anything was left to it in Africa. It was prohibited from reaping the vast profits which German capitalism would have been able to amass thanks to colonial monopolies and monopolistic spheres of influence.

Germany's capitalism thus assumed the characteristics of a steam boiler whose valves are all closed. Germany was unable to employ its capital as it wished. France, England and Russia had striven for years to block German expansion, to the benefit of their own respective capitalists.

Germany could not bear this much longer. And that is why it has been preparing for many years for this war to conquer the space it had been denied.

Towards this end it went billions into debt and created the Imperial Bank in 1903, the largest national bank in the world.

Now Germany wants to put an end to its confinement, it wants to break its chains. Now it wants Morocco, much of the rest of French Africa, the French possessions in East Asia, Siam and Cochin China. It wants the Belgian Congo. It wants English colonies; perhaps in southern Africa. It wants to take over the land route to India. It wants economic and political domination in a large part of China. To achieve these goals, Germany wants to conquer Belgium and the Netherlands, or at least reduce these countries to dependencies. Germany wants to attain all these objectives, and it wants to do so by way of this war. And in reality, from the capitalist and economic point of view, German capitalism has every right to do so.

In the capitalist world, the strongest deserves the largest share. Viewed from a purely capitalist point of view rather than from the point of view of the evolution of the proletariat and its struggle for power and unity, one could very well hope for the victory of German capitalism.¹

Germany, with its organizational acumen, its concentrated banking system, its centralized armaments industries, its trade and its industry, is capable of extracting much greater profits from these territories than are now being extracted by England, Belgium, the Netherlands, France and Portugal! It would make a much greater contribution to the evolution of world capitalism!

German capitalism is perfectly well aware that the moment of truth has arrived. In fact, with Turkey's decline, if Russia should take Rumania, France should take Syria and part of Asia Minor, and England the other part, Egypt and Arabia, and if England and Russia were to carve up Persia, then all of Germany's chances for conquering a major Asian enclave would evaporate. And if England also were to seize the route from Cairo to the Cape, and if China were to become powerful and independent, then—since it is difficult for the Europeans to take over South America—England would be the master of a large part of the world;² Russia, the United States and, later, China, would be its only competitors and Germany's chance to obtain a global empire will have definitively have passed.

In this first imperialist world war, Germany is therefore the driving force, above all by virtue of the expansionist tendencies which transcend the Empire's frontiers, secondly due to the form assumed by its imperialism, third, as a result of its action against the powerful States opposing its expansion from every side, and finally due to its supreme goal, which is also the supreme goal of every contemporary State.

Germany therefore must serve as the example we shall use to illustrate imperialist policy and its consequences, contrasting them to the position of the proletariat. On the other hand, Germany also has the strongest working class. Marx had already said that "the communists of all countries turn their gaze towards Germany". German capitalist development was forged under much more modern conditions and circumstances than those which attended the capitalist development of the other countries of Europe. As a result, the German proletariat is better trained and organized than any other proletariat and is less burdened by bourgeois traditions.

In Germany, then, more powerful and more organized capitalists confront more organized workers. The socialist party has more than one million members; in the elections it received more than four million votes; the trade unions have between two and three million members. A very large number of workers read socialist newspapers every day.

And just as capital in Germany is even more organized into trusts, cartels and centralized banks than capital in England, so too are its workers organizations more unified and powerfully centralized than the workers organizations in England.

All of these factors cause the antagonism between the capitalist classes and the working classes in Germany to be much more acute than it is in all the other States of western Europe. The absolutism of the junkers system and the burdens imposed by the military make this antagonism even more pronounced.

Thus, the most powerful and imperialist bourgeoisie faces the most socialist proletariat.

It is in Germany more than anywhere else that one can clearly recognize the antagonism between the imperialist capitalism that wants to subject and enslave all the earth's inhabitants, and the proletarian socialism that wants to emancipate them.

Yet it is precisely the German working class which, through its representatives in parliament, has provided the model of cooperation with imperialism. It is precisely Germany where the war budget was approved. It is precisely in Germany where the workers have gone to war not only without any notable resistance, but often with enthusiasm.

How could this have happened?³

What justifications were offered by the German workers?

Before examining this issue, we must, before proceeding one step further, say something concerning the war, something which until now we have only alluded to and which will reinforce the refutation of the reasons proffered by the socialists in general and the German socialists in particular to justify their participation in the war.

Should this first imperialist world war prove to be a long one—and, given the gigantic forces and the almost inexhaustible resources of England, Germany and Russia, it is likely to last a very long time—it is possible that we shall witness a collapse of European society.

To the hundreds of billions which, in such a case, the war will cost Europe for armaments and fielding armies, one must also add the destruction in cities, continents and oceans, as well as the destruction of the labor power of millions of mutilated or murdered workers and, finally, the value of the commodities which were not produced because of the war.

After the war, interest will have to be paid on the hundreds of billions in war debts.

But then it may be possible that the European countries will be so weakened that they will not be able to set their productive machinery in motion and buy the raw materials they need from other continents, except with the greatest difficulties.

Quite obviously, it is the proletariat that will suffer the most from this war. Then, after it is over, the proletariat will have to expect an enormous and prolonged crisis, accompanied by unemployment—perhaps after a partial, brief and only apparent phase of prosperity.

But this is still not the worst, since these problems could be smoothed out after a certain period of time.

There is yet another, much worse threat.

If you want to understand the consequences of this first imperialist world war, you have to try to imagine what will come after it.

Two conclusions are possible.

It is possible that one of the two sides will win.

None of the combatants, however, are capable of utterly destroying their adversaries. If Germany were to win, it may perhaps crush Belgium and France. It could not, however, destroy England's power. And it is even less possible for Germany to definitively destroy Russia.⁴

Thus, if Germany wins, Russia and England would immediately begin to rearm; and they would do so with an infinitely greater energy than before. And then another war would loom.

If, on the other hand, Russia, England and France win, they would not be capable of crushing Germany, which is too strong within its frontiers.⁵

Thus, if these countries win, Germany will once again begin to arm with even more energy than before, and another war would be imminent.

It is also possible that neither side can win and that all the combatants will be too weak to continue fighting and will therefore have to make peace.

But then, at the first opportunity, all of them will again begin to arm so as to go to war as soon as they are sufficiently reinforced.

It seems to us that these are the only two possible outcomes of this war.

Both cases, however, imply the crushing of the proletariat by imperialism.

If more taxes and customs duties are imposed to finance a new arms race that will lead to a new war, the proletariat, already exhausted by the long war and its consequences, and suffering from a long period of sustained unemployment, will not be able to bear this burden and will cease to exist as an organized and combative class.⁶

The severe material impoverishment caused by the war and the economic depression left in its wake will have spiritually exhausted the proletariat and will have reduced its power of resistance; a new imperialism, new armaments and a new war will annihilate its economic power.⁷

In this first world war, it is the very existence of the workers, their existence as a fighting class, which is at stake.

Given this possibility, the proletariat must vigorously fight against imperialism and the world war using every means at its disposal. It must do so to safeguard its future and for its own immediate safety.

Furthermore, as we have seen, after this war many other wars will threaten to break out, for the monopolistic possession of much of the world.

For this reason, as well, the proletariat must prepare to defend itself with all its forces.

We shall now examine the reasons presented by the German socialists—and with them, the French, Belgian, English, etc.—to justify their participation in the world war.

They said: "Before the outbreak of the war, we did everything we could to prevent it." This is false. The most effective means that can be used against imperialism, mass action, was not employed.

Neither during the prewar years, when the masses could have made the ruling classes tremble in fear of the power of the proletariat and could have made them fearfully recoil from the idea of war, nor afterwards, when the war began.

The other reasons invoked to defend voluntary collaboration in the war once it broke out, are of three kinds. They involve:

First, the nature of a war of national defense.

Second, the proletariat's interest in the victory of one side or another.

Third, the need to keep the enemy out of their country in order to defend the existence of their country, their nation. We shall examine these reasons in succession.

The German social democracy declares: Russia has attacked Germany, we have to defend ourselves.

We have seen above that this is nothing but a surface appearance.

German capitalism, by virtue of its imperialism, is just as aggressive as Russian capitalism.

Therefore, it is not true that the German social democracy is fighting a war of national defense.

But what about the interest of the international proletariat?

You say: Germany is seeking victory in Russia in the interest of the world proletariat; Russia is a despotic country where the workers do not have any rights.

For their part, the French, the Belgians and the English say: it would be advantageous for the world proletariat if France and England win because Germany is an absolutist State where the junkers rule and the constitution is still nothing but a piece of paper.

Which side is right?

We respond: neither of them is right. The situation in Europe is such that, in every country except Russia, the working class lives in conditions which are almost identical with respect to freedom and servitude. The disadvantages of one country are balanced by those of another. Even in Russia democracy is making progress thanks to the power of the workers.

And this leveling process affecting all the European working classes is most favorably and profoundly influenced by the industrialization of all the European States.

What does this mean?

This means that this war and all future imperialist world wars of the European States (and, we may add, North American and Australian States) will cause terrible damage to the proletariat if it accepts being mutually torn apart; it can only derive benefit if it carries out a united struggle against the war, as a totality, against the European bourgeoisie, against the world bourgeoisie.

But we must add one more thing.

You say: "We must defend ourselves from Russian imperialism." And to do this, you support Austro-Hungarian imperialism! You support Austrian imperialism, which is the enemy of the Serbian proletariat.

And to defend yourself from Russia, you must try to annihilate the French, Belgian and English proletariat.

To save yourself from the absolutism of Russia, you must abandon the French, Belgian and, if possible, the Dutch and Danish proletariat as well to the mercies of German absolutism.

Is this the correct proletarian tactic? Is this in the interest of the proletariat?

Not to mention the American, Asian and African proletariats you are fighting.

Your support for Austrian imperialism, your attempt to crush the French and English proletariats and much of the world proletariat, the mere fact that you, in order to repel Russian aggression, have to try to destroy these proletariats, these simple facts show that your tactic, the tactic of cooperation with a war of national defense—even were it really a war of national defense—is unjust and useless.⁸

And what goes for you, goes for all the other nations.

The fact that, by following this tactic, the proletariats of various countries are engaged in an orgy of mutual destruction shows the necessity of observing the whole question of the war against imperialism in a different way, from a higher point of view, no longer from the old national point of view, no longer from the point of view of a war of aggression or defense, but from the point of view of the struggle of the international proletariat united against international imperialism.

And one more thing must be mentioned.

By fighting Russian, French and English imperialism, you reinforce your own imperialism, German imperialism. You reinforce your own enemies, who are not the Russians, but your own ruling class.

If your government defeats Russia, England and France with your assistance, then you will have reinforced your own imperialism, its princes, its junkers and its capitalists. Then your yoke will have become heavier. Then you will have also cut down your own brothers in England, in France, in Russia and in every country you fought, and you will have defeated yourselves. Then, after a German victory, the non-German proletariats will be weakened, their governments will make life unbearable for them as a result of the new imperialist arms

race and your government will respond with ever larger military budgets, which will allow it to oppress you even more. You will therefore be yet more enslaved than before.

This is the change brought by imperialism.

All the great powers aspire to enlarge their territories. And this aspiration can only be realized by way of war. A proletariat gives its consent to the war and thus threatens and destroys the proletariat of another nationality. It thereby weakens its own brothers and reinvigorates imperialism in general, the imperialism of all States and, above all, the imperialism of its own ruling class. It therefore weakens itself as well as the proletariat as a whole.

The situation can be summarized as follows: a national proletariat, in alliance with its bourgeoisie, is no longer capable of invading or repelling the invasion of another nation without at the same time dragging itself and the other proletariats to destruction. This is the new situation created by imperialism.

You can choose: either with your government against the proletariat of another country, various countries, or even all the other countries, or with the proletariat of all countries against your government.

The era of nationalism, when the workers could live and act nationally while speaking internationally, has come to an end. The era of internationalist speeches and national practice has come to an end.

The German social democracy says: "It could very well be that Germany is to blame for its imperialism; but after we did everything we could to stop the war and after Russia attacked us, we had to defend ourselves."

This position may have been just in Marx's time; not any more. In those days it was about adapting to a new strategic enemy, who was not only the enemy of the bourgeoisie but of the workers as well. Now, however, the situation is different. Today, it is the proletariat that has been attacked. It is being attacked by its own bourgeoisie as much as by the foreign bourgeoisie. Of course the proletariat must defend itself from its enemy and must even overthrow it. But its enemy is no longer just one foreign country, but also imperialism, including that of its own bourgeoisie.

Russian imperialism is attacking German imperialism. German imperialism is attacking Russian imperialism. But Russian and German imperialism are both attacking the German proletariat, just as they are both attacking the Russian proletariat. And the same thing is happening everywhere. The imperialisms of all countries are simultaneously attacking the proletariats of all countries.

Times have changed. Capitalism has evolved in such a way that its continued evolution can only proceed by way of the massacre of the proletariat of all countries.

A world capitalism has been born and it has attacked the world proletariat.

It is therefore not true that the interests of the proletariat demand that it support the war once it has started.

We shall now address the argument of the defense of the workers, the nation and the nationality.

The German social democracy maintains that, once the war was declared, the proletariat must repel the enemy in order to escape the horrors of invasion, murder, pillage and arson; and that the workers must mount a defense out of love for country, class and nation.

This is their strongest argument.

We respond that, as a matter of principle, imperialism in general is incomparably more dangerous for the proletariat than war and invasion. For imperialism is a long-term threat to the European proletariat.

This is why, regardless of the price it must pay, even at the price of invasion, the proletariat must oppose imperialism and imperialist war.

For this assertion, as well, we shall offer a detailed proof.

Your say: "It is our instinct of self-preservation which impels us to defend our fatherland."

To this we respond: imperialism is more threatening to you as proletarians than as Germans. A series of imperialist wars for possession of the world, an increasingly more powerful imperialism threatens your class.

It is therefore your existence as proletarians that is at stake. You make a false, blind and unconscious use of your instinct of self-preservation, in the case of your patriotism. You should employ this instinct of self-preservation in a different way, consciously and appropriately; and instead of fighting alongside the Germans for German imperialism, you should be fighting alongside the proletarians of the whole world against imperialism.

You say: "If we rebel against German imperialism, we would fall by the tens of thousands because the government will attack us." We respond: "It is the war that will make you perish by the hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions."

You say: "In the event of a revolutionary struggle against German imperialism, our organizations, which are our only forces, will be destroyed."

We respond: "German imperialism is using this war to render your organizations impotent and will make them even more impotent after the war through a new arms race and new wars." We respond: "The organization is not an end-in-itself, but a means of struggle."⁹

You say: "But our cities, our land will be devastated by the enemy if we do not prevent it." We respond that, for the international proletariat, currently under the yoke of twentieth century imperialism, if a city or a region is destroyed, it does not matter whether it is German, Belgian, French or Russian.

We respond that you can choose one of two roads: either you support the war and the devastation of your country or some other country; or you join with the other proletariats in the collective resistance against the war.

We respond that imperialism has been threatening Europe, your country and the whole world with destruction, not just now, but for many years.

We respond that you must decide: either you want to be associated with the devastation of whole countries for years to come, or you want to begin, once and for all, to put an end to all devastations.

We respond that you must join the international proletariat to halt the devastation of the world.

We respond that today, under the rule of imperialism, internationalism comes before nationality.

But you say: "If we do not defend ourselves, the Russians will annihilate us workers as individuals and as a class. And we cannot tolerate that."

We respond: "Russian imperialism is not the only cause of this phenomenon. German imperialism is also responsible. Your German imperialism is murdering hundreds of thousands of the sons of your people."

And if you do not take care, if you make war as lackeys of imperialism, even after the war is over German imperialism will continue to crush you as a class. It will do so thanks to new armaments and a new war. You are only at the threshold. All of the preparation for the struggle of your class, of your German workers party, is threatened by world imperialism as well as by German imperialism.

We respond: "World imperialism threatens the working class of the entire world."

We respond that you must defend yourself to the bitter end, not alongside the German bourgeoisie against the annihilation of the German working class, but alongside the world proletariat against the annihilation of the world working class.

You say: "But our nation will be destroyed if we do not repel Russia. For Russia is a barbarous and despotic country, and its victory would mean the conquest and relapse of our country into barbarism."

We respond as we did before: "This reason only applied to Russia when it was an Asiatic country; today, it does not apply."

Today, thanks to the heroism of the Russian proletariat, Russia is no longer an Asiatic country, but is proceeding down the same road as western Europe.

It has a parliament. Its agriculture is developing under the influence of the effects of the revolution. The domestic market is undergoing a period of rapid development, it can be presumed that industry will bring prosperity and then Russia . . . will be just like Prussia.

It also has a proletariat which, from the political point of view, compensates for its numerical weakness due to its intelligence and the force of its will.

Before long, the Russian proletariat will succeed in making Russian conditions similar to those of western Europe.

You cannot, you must not fight another proletariat.

We respond: “For the big nations like Germany, Russia, England and France, there is no danger of the nation succumbing.”

Neither Russia, nor France, nor England will annex Germany, just as Germany will not annex them.¹⁰

For Russia, it is not Königsberg but Erzerum that is at stake; for Germany, the stakes are not Calais, Boulogne, Chemnitz or Ireland, but Mesopotamia and the Congo; as for France, its sights are not set on European territories, not even Alsatia, but especially Syria, African territories, Asian territories, etc.

We respond: “But even if this was the case, even if your nation, if your nationality, if a part of your country should be threatened, the continuous threat of your nation and of all imperialist nations with their wars is much worse due to their possible consequence: the destruction of the proletariat.”

It is precisely imperialism which is really threatening the happiness, the well-being and perhaps even the existence of the nation.

We respond: “It is your bourgeoisie that wants you to believe that this war, that all imperialist war, is war for the protection and defense of your country or your nation.”

They deceive you in order to have you as soldiers for the realization of their own goal, the real goal they do not want you to know, and in order to better convince you to allow them to lead you to the massacre.

This is why they tell you that the war, as was the case in past times, is a war for the fatherland, for the nation. In fact, their goal is the expansion of their possessions, especially in the colonies, enslaving the weakest peoples overseas and enslaving the proletariats of all countries.

You would be fighting for its world power and for its profits.

We respond that when you have augmented its power and its profits, you will be even more harshly oppressed, you and your foreign brothers.

Imperialism will yield profits for the ruling classes and terrible harm for you. It will suffocate you with taxes and it will obstruct all progress. It destroys the unity of the international proletariat, it murders you, it threatens you with destruction. It will continue to act this way. The more you strengthen imperialism, the more completely will such developments be realized. And this will go on for many years.

You say: “But some proletariats are stronger than others and as long as this is so, any simultaneous action against the world war is impossible. For the strongest proletariat would oppose its government with a greater force than the weaker proletariats, it would weaken the

army and the activities of its own nation more than the other proletariats; and then the enemy will be victorious.”

We respond, in accordance with what we said above about nationality, that under the rule of imperialism, it is of little account to the proletariat considered as a whole which side wins.¹¹

We respond that, for the proletariat as a whole, what is most important is that it fights as one against imperialism, that it builds its strength as one, and that it defends itself against capitalism, which seeks its destruction.

We respond that today, when world capital is preparing to conquer the earth and, for this purpose, has started the first imperialist world war, at the very moment when the struggle between capital and labor begins, and when world capital attacks the world proletariat with an unprecedented oppression, through war, devastation and death, we respond that in this new period the proletariat must rise up as a fighting class for freedom, unless it wants to succumb materially, spiritually and morally. We respond that the proletariat must make itself strong and must prevent its own destruction, which is sought by imperialism.

Once again we respond:

The imperialism of its own nation imperils the proletariat as much as the imperialism of other nations. For this reason, for the proletariat as a whole, it is necessary to combat both imperialisms, foreign and domestic, with the same determination.

German imperialism is just as dangerous to the German proletariat as are the French, English and Russian varieties; English imperialism is just as dangerous to the English proletariat as are the Russian, French and German kinds; French imperialism is just as dangerous to the French proletariat as are the English, German and Russian, etc.

We respond: “International imperialism is equally dangerous for each national proletariat, and therefore it is equally dangerous for the international proletariat.”

We respond: “Confronted with bourgeois imperialism, which threatens all the proletariats in the same way, the proletariat’s nationalism disappears.”

We respond: “Nationalism—in the sense of nourishing hostile feelings towards other nations—which is more or less always alive in the proletariat, is completely eliminated by imperialism from the moment that the proletariat understands and recognizes its nature.”

We respond: “Internationalism, the absence of fatherland—in the sense of rejecting the struggle against all other nations—is a feeling which is not yet very widespread among the proletariat; but, thanks to imperialism, it is becoming a sine qua non, a vital precondition for the revolutionary international proletariat.”

The joint international struggle against the imperialism of all nations is becoming a vital precondition for all national proletariats and for the world proletariat as a whole.

We respond: “The war threatens you with invasion. Your instinct tells you that you must repel the aggressor. If you do this spontaneously, you would strengthen imperialism.”

But imperialism threatens you with the danger of an arms race, oppression and destruction.

Your instinct must therefore tell you that if you do not want to be destroyed, you must not repel the invader but imperialism.

You must therefore choose: either spontaneous support for repelling aggression and thus strengthening imperialism; or, united with the proletariat of all countries, resistance to the end and refusal to take part in an imperialist war except against your own will and when forced to do so.

Now you can choose: either help your national bourgeoisie and its imperialism, or fight them.

Your choice resides in this alternative: either help the international bourgeoisie and its imperialism, or fight them.

For the world proletariat, now that imperialism has comprised a threat to the world proletariat for many years, the choice can be summarized as follows: either join with imperialism, and thus participate in the annihilation of the world proletariat, or fight world imperialism, and thus defeat the world bourgeoisie and consequently aid the proletariat in its struggle for victory.

We respond: “You must choose now, for or against the national bourgeoisie; for or against nationalism.”

Today you must make a choice for one of two things: for or against the imperialist world bourgeoisie; for or against international imperialism.

In short, you must choose between imperialism and socialism.

Naturally, it is very difficult for a class, even more so than for an individual, to change the instinct of self-preservation which acts unconsciously and to transform it into a conscious instinct, and to make the distinction between an impending danger and a much greater danger which is still distant.

But it is precisely the task of social democracy to transform the unconscious instinct of the workers into reason.

So it seems to us that we have also refuted the last argument, the danger of an invasion and, therefore, all the arguments of those who support participation in this war.

Consequently, imperialism, capitalism’s latest and highest stage, unites the proletariat of all countries in an international action for the first time ever.

Imperialism provides the setting where the proletariat of all countries unites for action.

This world war, this imperialist war, is the crucible within which the proletariat of all the countries of the world is becoming unified for the first time.

Imperialism enlightens the proletariat, impelling it, for the first time, but permanently, towards internationalism.

Therefore, imperialism is not, as Kautsky, the “radicals” and the revisionists and alleged Marxists of Germany and elsewhere believe, a secondary factor or a passing phenomenon. It is the axis around which the social evolution, the rise and the struggle of the proletariat, and finally the revolution itself revolve. Imperialism is the great issue of our day, and it is upon its theoretical study, as well as the means to combat it, that the whole future of the proletariat depends, for many years to come and perhaps even forever.

It is the nucleus upon which the entire development of the workers struggle depends.

The social revolution—which can only be international—depends upon the struggle against imperialism.

Not in the sense that this struggle will immediately bring us to socialism. But in the sense that, if it is carried out in a revolutionary manner, it will allow us to make an important stride forward on the road to socialism.

The struggle has always been waged in a revolutionary manner.

Nor has the German working class freed itself of this struggle. It has marched alongside imperialism. It has thus betrayed its own cause, which is the cause of the International and of the German working class itself.

We must still refute an argument adopted by a part of the German social democracy in order to explain its spontaneous collaboration in the war.

One part of the German workers party says: “Our objective in the struggle against Russia is the liberation of Finland and the Russian workers.”

Strange: the same struggle which must crush the English and French workers must free the Russian and Polish workers.

But you cannot free the Russian, Finnish and Polish workers because their liberation does not depend upon you.

Their liberation depends upon the Kaiser, your master, your junkers and your capitalists. They do not want to free the Russians, the Poles or the Finns.

Who is running this war, you or them? They have an enormous advantage over the Russian autocracy, which, in other respects, helps them . . . against you. They will never manage to crush or humiliate Russia.

All of them—and you, too—are waging war, above all, against France and England. It is an imperialist war. They want, above all, the Belgian and English colonies and to take possession of the land route to India.

You quote Marx and say that in his time he wanted to defeat Russia in order to emancipate the Russian workers.

These arguments reveal the miserable weakness of your policy.

Marx never wanted to fight a country where the workers were so powerful.

Marx never wanted a war that could give a new impetus to Czarism.

Marx never wanted to fight Russia by weakening the French and English workers.

But you thereby reveal the falsehood of your policy! In fact, German socialists, many of you understood your own imperialism perfectly well.

Many of you knew that your imperialism wanted and had to attack France and England (as well as Belgium and Portugal) for the sake of their colonies. Your newspapers said so hundreds of times.

The real reason so many of you participated in the war is not the struggle against Russia, but the desire to collaborate in colonialist policy and in imperialism¹² *together with the bourgeoisie*; and for some of you, the real reason is a lack of the courage required to oppose the war.

The same could be said of the other parties in the International. We shall return to this theme later.

You are doing exactly what you claim you did not want to do, you are humiliating France and England. And as for what you claimed that you wanted to do—humiliate Russia—you cannot do it.

This is sufficient proof of the miserable weakness of your policy.

You would have done better to leave capital with the exclusive and total responsibility for the blood shed in this war. You would have done better if you had not wanted to emancipate the Russian workers in this way!

The Russian workers can only be emancipated through their own efforts.

But, you say, what about culture!

You want to save German culture from the Russian barbarians!

Which culture are you talking about?

The culture of the past?

But you are therefore attacking English and French culture, which is by no means inferior to yours. In general, French and English culture are superior to yours because they admit of and recognize civil liberties, which is not the case with your culture;¹³ and your arts, your science and your philosophy reaped the magnificent fruits of their French and English counterparts.

The workers, however, do not participate in this culture.

Or maybe you are referring to the culture of the 19th century?

In the 19th century the English had the most sublime poetry, the French the most sublime prose, and you had, for your part, the most sublime music.

All of this was distributed fairly enough.

But all of these things are safe, they are dispersed throughout the world. You do not need to worry about them.

The workers, however, do not share in this culture, either. But perhaps you understand the term culture to mean contemporary culture, the culture of the imperialist era, the culture of the beginning of the 20th century?

Today, great art is dead. Today, the great poetry of all countries is dead. Great prose is dead, just as the impressionism, naturalism and realism of the bourgeoisie is also dead.

Great architecture is dead; what survives under the name of architecture is without heart, without love. Music is nothing but the shadow of its former self.

Great painting is dead. Philosophy is dead, the rise of the proletariat has killed it. Religion is in its death throes.

Art ranges from the hard, cruel capitalist sensations to the soft and maudlin petit bourgeois sensations, and to a cowardly mysticism. It no longer contains a single elevated or universal thought. In its desperation, in its individualism, it has gone to the extreme and has often deviated into madness.

Philosophy has fallen very far, to the level of Mach and Ostwald, who no longer know human society, and even to the level of the reactionary Bergson. Kant and Hegel haunt our world like ghosts.

Religion only lives in its death throes. And religion is only successful among the bourgeoisie, but no longer among the fighting proletariat.

But perhaps by culture you mean the sweetness and beauty of local customs? But imperialism, with its cruel and bloody oppression of the weakest peoples and with the stagnation of social legislation it brings in its wake, produces a general growth of vulgarity, brutality and savagery.

Any higher culture, ardor of the soul and the spirit, moral beauty, is suppressed to a very low level by imperialism.

This war proves it. There is no longer any high culture anywhere in the capitalist world.

Culture? But what does the culture of the imperialist era consist of?

Individuals and States are dragged as if by a tornado into a frantic hunt for money and power. The brutal power of money and violence steamrolls the weak. All the peoples of the world, all the individuals, all people and all races—yellow, black and brown—the savages and the civilized, are forced to submit to it. And most of them are being transformed into proletarians.

What does this mean? Man's happiness and independence are disappearing. His quite relative freedom is fading away. Men are being transformed into things. No longer men, but things which are subjects of capital. They are pulled and dragged by the furious omnipotence of capital and are transformed into the appendices of machines.

But even in the world of the capitalists the frantic greed for money, for power and for enjoyment increases. Corruption and boundless luxury are on the rise. Madness and nervous disorders become more common. The birthrate, on the other hand, declines and artificial birth control becomes widespread.

Among the working classes the intensity of labor increases. Alongside this increase in exploitation, female and child labor are also more and more common.

The violence of the struggle increases. And so does the power of the employers, the governments, the cartels and the monopolies.

Against all these powers, the power of the workers is diminished, the burdens which weigh them down get heavier and their lives become more fraught with hardship.

The trade union struggle is revealed to be more difficult, the parliamentary struggle becomes more problematic. Social legislation comes to an end.

Capitalists and workers, pushed by the power of capitalism, continue their race in a furious whirlwind. The capitalists seek money and power, they try to crush other men. They are themselves poor slaves: in effect—and this war offers yet another proof of this—they are not the masters of their destiny. They must do what they do not want to do and are afraid to do. The crushing power of capital, master of destiny, pushes them forward. Capital launches them, insane with rage, one against the other. Like beasts that do not know what they are doing they try to tear each other apart. Against their will, against their hopes, and against their profound desire to live. But they must act this way because capital, in its latest phase of its expansion, wants them to.

Is this state of affairs, and these spiritual conditions, what you call culture?

And the situation is the same everywhere. There are no longer any differences between Russian, German, French and English culture. The differences that once existed have been leveled by capital. And the same barbarism prevails everywhere.

The workers are also pushed into this current of insanity. They vainly attempt to resist. They join together and fight for their emancipation, in vain. They are dragged along with everyone else. They are, for the most part, weak, without intelligence, without clarity and without courage.

Capital is almighty. This war shows that the workers can no longer do anything and carry no weight. This is culture?

The capitalists and the workers are the puppets of material forces which are infinitely greater than themselves. The process of production—in this latest phase of capitalism, more powerful and more terrible than ever—dominates them entirely. The placid calm, the beautiful enjoyment of life, the moment of repose, the clear and open soul which sees everything and

observes with calm and which by observing beautifies, which rules over time, which it has overcome, the clear and open soul which respects the whole era, all of society, in spiritual beauty and the most elevated wisdom, all of these things can no longer exist. Neither for the rulers nor for the ruled. Everything is strange in this era.

You call this culture?

The savage, the barbarian, the craftsman, the freeholding peasant, were more free, more independent, than man under capitalism. If freedom is culture, they had more culture.

Or perhaps by culture you mean the trade unions and the political parties of the workers? Is this your culture, the culture you want to save?

When the trade unions and the workers political parties seek improvements, they are nothing but associations of slaves who want improvements in their servitude.

It is in association, in mutual aid, where one can find the origins of high culture; however, the fact that it is slaves and servants who associate and who engage in mutual aid enormously reduces the scope of the phenomenon.

There is no beauty or high culture where there is no freedom. Only social freedom is the bearer of beauty.

The solidarity of the slaves is a culture, with the sole stipulation that it is accompanied by increasingly conscious actions whose goal is the abolition of slavery.

Is this really the case with regard to today's workers associations?

Once again, this war has provided us with the answer.

How many workers are *really* fighting for their general emancipation? This war once again provides us with the answer. Few enough. Very few.

Culture among the workers, culture in the sense of the fight for freedom—and in the present time, no other culture exists—is a very rare, almost non-existent phenomenon.

Or perhaps by culture, you mean science?

It is true that science is international, it thrives everywhere; but only in order to make this capitalist and imperialist culture possible and to produce these abominable phenomena. Even when it does not do this, it remains aloof from society and is like a plant that can live without soil and water.

But the workers do not participate in scientific culture.

But this unculture, this savagery, drags all men into a storm of insanity; this unculture, driven by wild and licentious social forces, is today reaching its peak with this war. As the highest production of capitalism, as the sole means of its rejuvenation, of growth, of expansion and development, capitalist culture is today producing mass murder. The murder of millions of

men and women and, most especially, massive mechanical and industrial murder, the murder of peoples enlisted in huge armies.

As a logical consequence, as a conclusion of its mechanical existence, the culmination of its litany of exploits, of its existence which is based on the exploitation of the working masses through work which brings mutilations and massacres, capitalism now arrives at the murder of millions of men on battlefields throughout the entire world. This is the highest production of capitalism, its supreme perfection.

This is the only way that capitalism is still capable of instilling men with enthusiasm and bringing them together to fraternize in a community: in mass murder!

You call this culture? What a terrible spectacle! The capitalists are dragged into a war, an exercise of mass murder whose end cannot be foreseen.

Meanwhile, they hypocritically pretend to believe that this war is being fought out of love for civilization and humanity.

And the workers listen to their speeches, they march with them and allow themselves to be exploited and deceived by them. They obey the capitalists who give them the order to massacre each other and declare, in turn, that this whole war is a war fought for love of humanity.

For love of a state of barbarism which enslaves them!

For love of a civilization which does not exist!

Employers and workers, all slaves. Slaves, as they were for centuries. There is only one civilization. Proletarian civilization.

The civilization that wants to make property communist and labor socialist and thus to put an end to all conflict and murder. And all the deeds which are consciously undertaken for the realization of this goal.

This is the only civilization which still exists under imperialism.

The German working class, the German social democracy and their representatives could have preserved, spread, enriched and elevated this culture by opposing the war with all their forces and by refusing to vote for war credits.

The German social democracy has reinforced the capitalist and imperialist unculture. It has become an accomplice in all the consequences of this unculture and has abandoned its own culture.

The German social democracy then consented to the war once it started and did damage to our cause, such as was never inflicted before.

By giving its consent to the war, the German social democracy has destroyed any possibility that it could play a leading role in a revolution after the war ends.

How many times did Marx, Engels, Kautsky and so many others declare that war would be the most likely cause of the proletarian revolution?

And how often has this proven to be true?

Now, the German social democracy gives its approval to the most destructive, most uncertain war, the war that contains within itself an infinitude of new grievances, new arms races and more wars, a war that enslaves a large part of the proletariat, a war, finally, that divides, separates, weakens, uproots and perhaps is even destroying the proletariat.

Is it not possible that Germany, France, Russia and England, either several of them or one of them, could be so severely defeated that the working people would rebel? When the armies return home, perhaps there will be so much unemployment, such misery and such poverty that the people will take up arms and overthrow their governments and could install a new, more free form of government.

Or maybe the belligerent States are so powerful that neither side can destroy the other, they will drown in blood and will be forced to make peace, since none of them can win. Then the international proletariat could rebel, not in one country, but in many countries, and overthrow those responsible for this war.

The proletarians could assert socialist proposals and could try to establish a socialist community.

Such an outcome is still possible. The hope for such a conclusion to this war has not yet evaporated. We still cannot believe that the proletariat will endure all of this without reacting. We still nourish the hope that the peoples will rebel, or one people, anyway. But the German social democracy, by willingly cooperating in this war, has considerably reduced, or even destroyed, any chance of seeing such an uprising take shape.

For how could the German social democracy, which voted for the war credits, which cooperated in the decisions and in the conduct of the war, reverse its position and lead a revolution against the bourgeoisie, its ally? How could it lead the revolution?

If a revolution does break out, it will be without the cooperation of the social democracy and against its will, it will take a different path and will perhaps have a different goal than that pursued by the social democracy.

The conduct of the social democracy during this war has been a crime against its spirit and against the spirit of the International. It was the annihilation of its own nature.

We have provided a detailed refutation of the reasons offered by the German social democracy in its defense, because the cause we advance and defend is a new one; proletarian unity produced by imperialism. We have been so insistent because our point of view cannot be encompassed by a single slogan—such as the solidarity of the proletariat or the antagonism between capital and labor—and because a refutation of the reasons put forth by the German party is necessary, even in the finest detail, given the extreme importance of the problem.

But to conclude, we still must say:

There are moments in the class struggle when only the antagonism between capital and labor can be taken into consideration; then, whoever treats this antagonism as of secondary importance and, considering all the chances and difficulties, ends up abstaining from action and from the struggle, would betray the cause of the proletariat.

There are moments when defeat is preferable to avoiding danger.

There are moments when retreating from an imminent threat guarantees a future defeat, and there are moments when everything must be sacrificed to guarantee the future.

There are moments when one has to fight in spite of all difficulties.

And we are currently living through just such a moment. Capitalism is for the first time coming forward with all its forces, with its supreme force, to conquer the world, but also to murder hundreds of thousands of proletarians, to enslave the proletariat for years to come by means of its expansion over the earth and perhaps to subject it to economic destruction for many years.

For the first time, capital is trying to achieve this goal by way of a world war.

Here, it is a question of “*principiis obsta*”.¹⁴

This is the moment when the proletariat must show that it has recognized this necessity.

This is the moment to declare and to begin the struggle because once one has started to bow one's head, the struggle becomes infinitely more difficult.

The proletariat does not understand this. It bows its head for lack of sense, for lowly desires of small advantages which it will not be able to obtain, and for cowardice.

The proletariat has bowed its head like the slave that it is.

It has made no effort to fight for freedom.

It is weakening itself and the consequences will be long-lasting.

It will continue to be treated like a slave who does not want freedom and after the war an even heavier yoke will be imposed upon it.

We shall briefly summarize.

When the European proletariat was threatened with destruction by this war, the German social democracy did nothing to prevent it.¹⁵ To the contrary, through its representatives it has helped imperialism to prepare for the massacre, the weakening and perhaps even the destruction of the proletariat.

By giving its consent to the war, the social democracy has weakened the international proletariat and has made international capital a dominant force in the future as well.

The proletariat, especially the German proletariat, was imperialism's only enemy, the only one it had to fear. The proletariat has bowed its head, and imperialism is the undisputed master of the world from now on.

The German social democracy has renounced the only possible culture, it has taken upon itself joint responsibility for the mass murder, arson, looting, devastation and destruction of entire regions and old civilizations, all brought by the new capitalism, imperialism, which is its supreme manifestation and highest form.

The German social democracy has itself murdered the revolution.

But what we have said here about the German social democracy also applies, for the same reasons and to the same extent, to the French, Belgian, English parties and for the social democracies of every country where workers parties voted for arms budgets and for war mobilization.

The workers parties of Germany, France, England, Belgium, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and Sweden have done nothing, but have on the contrary aided European imperialism when the latter threatened the proletariat with destruction by this war—which contains the seeds of the new imperialist wars of the future.¹⁶ The international proletariat as a whole, by not offering resistance to this war, has torn itself apart, it has allowed the full unfolding of the forces of international capitalism and imperialism and has murdered the revolution.

6. The Origins of Nationalism in the Proletariat

a. Ignorance of Imperialism

b. Reformism

Until now we have been examining the reasons presented by the socialists themselves.

But what is the real cause of all this?

How can the proletariat renounce its own interests in such a fashion and put itself at the service of the bourgeoisie?

If we seek the reason for this, we find the following as the first cause:

The proletariat does not yet know how to mobilize as an international totality against the bourgeoisie.

The second cause is the following:

The proletariat does not yet know how to fight for long-range and elevated objectives, but only for petty and short-term objectives.

This is why, when it had to fight on an international scale for its long-term objectives, it was incapable of doing so.

The proletariat did not *know* what to do.

In a word: it did not know the international struggle for the supreme end which is socialism.

For the struggle against imperialism, which dominates the world, is the struggle against the expansion of capital, against the essence of capitalism, and the struggle for socialism.

So the reason why the international proletariat acted in such a way was ignorance. Above all, ignorance.

The working class as a whole and the individual worker, the international proletariat, need a high level of consciousness if they want to take action on an international scale.

The proletariat's nationalism is of a very different nature than that of the bourgeoisie. For the bourgeoisie the nation is the political-economic organization which, due to its unity and its power, makes it possible for the capital of the bourgeoisie to be productive both at home and abroad. In its interest the nation rules over the workers at home, and defends its interests with arms in hand and augments its power overseas.

This is the basis of bourgeois nationalism, which is active in the highest degree, just like the capital of the bourgeoisie.

The worker, on the other hand, has no capital, he only receives wages. The worker is nationalist in a passive way, just as he passively receives his wages.

But the workers, in their overwhelming majority, nevertheless make their living from national capital. National capital is indeed their enemy, but it is an enemy which feeds them. Thus, even though the worker is only passively nationalist, as long as he is not really a socialist *he is and must necessarily be . . . nationalist.*

Because the nation, national capital, is the foundation of his existence.

And therefore, as long as he is not a socialist, he must believe that the interest of national capital is his interest and that he must defend it against its enemies, since capital's well-being is his own well-being as well.

The worker's nationalism consists of a tangle of numerous feelings and instincts, for the most part of the lower sort, which are related to and structured around the instinct of self-preservation. It is composed, above all, of the instinct of preserving life by means of work and wages. And the feelings of homeland, of the hearth and home, of family, of tradition, of customs, of comradeship, of relationships, of people, of class, and of party are joined to this sense of self-preservation and are fused with it. In addition, these feelings refer directly to the ego and are strictly connected, therefore, to the instinct of self-preservation. In everyday life these instincts exist in a latent state and are more or less dormant, but manifest themselves with great force when danger threatens or seems to threaten—precisely as a result of this intimate connection with the instinct of self-preservation.

These instincts explode in a firestorm of passion and hatred for the enemy, of fanatical love for one's own country, when the drive for self-preservation is joined with the social instincts of community with one's compatriots, the class comrades of the same nationality. A high

level of consciousness is required so that, at any given moment, and in fact at every moment, this instinct and these feelings can be continuously overcome and so that the class struggle is not set aside in favor of war on behalf of the nation.

The worker must become aware of the fact that nationalism, under the rule of capitalism, is doing him much more harm than good. He must become aware of the harmful phenomena and the benefits involved, and he must place them on the scale. And this awareness and this knowledge must be of such a nature, and must have penetrated into his consciousness so completely, that he is capable of not merely overcoming, but also replacing nationalist instincts. This is an extraordinarily difficult task and requires much effort.

For the achievement of such a goal, it is indispensable for the working class and for each worker to have a high degree of understanding and knowledge of imperialism.

Capitalism confronts the worker in his factory, in the office and in the State. It is, therefore, a national phenomenon. Imperialism confronts the worker in the State's foreign policy, in high finance, in the capitalist trusts, in the global arms race and world politics.

A great deal of understanding is needed in order to discern the links between the questions concerning the struggle of the proletariat—political as well as trade union—and world politics and international imperialism.

The worker must therefore know that imperialism dominates all parties and must know how it does so. He must know that, by provoking wars ad infinitum, imperialism threatens the proletariat with fragmentation and ruin. He must know that, under imperialism, there can be no wars of national defense. Finally, and most importantly, he must know that imperialism (and in this respect it is so closely linked with nationalism as to be inextricably fused with it) unites all national capitals against the world proletariat, which must in turn be united against them. The worker must know, consequently, that the struggle against imperialism is the struggle for socialism.

The worker must know all of this. He must know it, not in the form of hollow words and phrases, with a shallow, superficial knowledge, but with a profound and complete knowledge; this conception must be instilled into his very bones.

This, too, is a time-consuming and difficult task. Knowledge of imperialism and the extirpation of nationalism are big steps forward, and constitute enormous progress in the advance of consciousness and in the evolution of the militant proletariat.

The new propaganda needed to reach such goals in this new phase of capitalism is one of the most sublime, most beautiful and most fruitful tasks which can be performed in the service of the proletariat.

Against imperialism, against nationalism and for socialism.

But the proletariat has never yet achieved any of these goals. It has always been solely national and has never fought internationally.

It has never fought against international imperialism.

Neither the national proletariat, nor therefore the international proletariat, has ever experienced the struggle against international imperialism.

There were, of course, among the workers of all countries, and especially in Germany, groups and individuals who, with knowledge and insight, have overcome nationalist instincts.

Social democracy, it is true, had succeeded in uprooting such instincts from the hearts of numerous workers. And these groups and individuals would have gladly carried out a spirited struggle against the war with all their might. It seems to us, however, that these groups and individuals comprised a very small number of people in Germany. In England, this tendency hardly existed.¹ The same could be said of France.

Furthermore, they were not on the right road for fighting against the war. And even those who knew how to fight against the war did not know how to put their knowledge into practice.

The only means which can be used against imperialist war, as we shall see below, is the proletariat's mass action on a national scale, implemented simultaneously by the entire international proletariat.

If these workers groups had known how to utilize this means, if they could have had it clearly placed before them, they would have chosen it; and they would have rallied the great masses of workers around them.

The reason why these groups did not know this road will be explained in the following pages.

For what was the previous history of the International?

It was at first a federation of trade unions and progressive and socialist groups which, especially in regard to foreign policy and European political questions, quite effectively expressed the thoughts and feelings of the most advanced working class groups, that is, the groups that were in the vanguard; it was a federation of trade unions and progressive and socialist groups which, for the first time in the history of the world, to the amazement of the workers and the terror of the bourgeoisie, assisted one another across international borders and forged close bonds between the proletarians of different countries; they publicly proclaimed communism as their goal and the International was a splendid beacon for the workers and the first serious challenge faced by the international bourgeoisie; thus were the seeds of future parties sown.

A genius walked before them as a sower through the countries of Europe and America.

They had *one* program and *one* executive which sent its messages—which issued from Marx's brain—to illuminate the future road like a blazing torch and served as their guide.

The only joint actions they engaged in, however, were demonstrations.

As a consequence of the International's internal splits, it was disbanded in 1872 long before it could have accomplished more as a unified group. It was still too weak for the practical and international struggle since the times were not yet ripe. The International had only sown seeds in various countries.

Slowly, the national parties and trade unions then began to grow.

Then a great era began for the workers.

In every country, groups of men and women, inspired by the ideas of Marx and the International, went forth among the workers to conduct propaganda for communism and socialism. They were the greatest minds, the most passionate and fervent hearts, the most elevated and noble characters. For the struggle was terrible and full of dangers. The resistance of the bourgeoisie was bloody. Material inducements were slight, when not entirely lacking.

And the workers who listened to them were the best. The most impetuous, the wisest and the bravest.

All were engaged in theory and practice at the same time.

The workers politics of that time was directed towards one great theoretical goal: revolution. This was the situation in numerous European countries, in Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain and Italy.

This period could be called the theoretical-practical-revolutionary period.

Its activists were still few in number. But it was during this period that the most results were obtained in most countries. Even in terms of reforms. The workers assault was so wild and furious, and the stupefaction and horror of the ruling classes so great, that the latter had to concede reforms. In many countries, crucial suffrage and social reforms date from this era.

But this International, these national parties, were only concerned with national problems and the short term interests of the working class.

All these national parties immersed themselves in problems of legislation, parliamentarism, elections. All the trade unions were focused on the question of wage hikes and the reduction of the length of the working day, social benefits for its membership, etc.

Of course they had a perfectly socialist program, still based on the genius of Marx.

But this program was only theory, internal propaganda, it was not action.

Nothing ever happened within the national parties to pose the question: capitalism or socialism, reform or revolution?

This state of affairs lasted many years.

So revolution became only theory, and reform became practice.

During this period nothing took place which might have forced the parties to become internationalist and to reject their nationalism in practice.

This was how, despite all the theory, despite the finest and most sincere propaganda, despite the fine words, the International became a coalition of parties which aspired to improve living conditions and only wanted to do so on a national scale.

The truth of a theory or a slogan, however, is only demonstrated in practice.

The great mass of the members of the international party was composed of men who yearned for improvements in their living conditions and the living conditions of their class comrades and fellow citizens. That is all they wanted. International socialism was only a grand slogan. Their internationalism *had no practical aspect*.

That is how it stood even during the great heroic era of the students of Marx and the old International; that theoretical-practical-revolutionary period which began with Lasalle and slowly declined until it ended in 1890. The International was a coalition of parties, each of which was preoccupied with its own affairs, and for that reason was not yet united even by means of any external bond.

This theoretical-practical-revolutionary period was followed by another period in the European countries which are of most concern to us here.

The working masses, thirsting for reforms, were attracted by the success of the workers parties. These masses were composed of the most passive, least radical and least daring workers; they were the masses, composed of average workers.

Under capitalism the masses are crushed by labor and mental development is impossible for them. These masses, or at least most of them, were not and could not have been concerned with anything but everyday affairs, work, food, etc. This is what the masses were like.

The struggle had also become easier. The workers parties had finally succeeded in getting recognition. Governments and capitalists made a certain number of concessions and negotiated with these workers parties.

The broad masses of the nation were eager for reforms.

But only for reforms. And these are the masses which have become decisive, who make their influence felt.

One can conquer power with such great numbers. With so many votes, seats in parliament can be won. Less importance was granted to the quality of the voters.

Among these masses, in the national trade unions and the national parties, reforms alone were fought for.

Improvement in the standard of living became the goal. Revolutionary theory and the revolutionary dimension were forgotten, and the entire International along with them. All the revolutionary and internationalist slogans were transformed into empty words and verbal formalities.

Revisionism came later, and theorized this practice. This was the origin of the theory which asserts: workers, workers of the nation, unite for reforms! The reform, the movement, is everything. And unite with the bourgeoisie, too, or with part of it, and you will attain even more reforms.

This doctrine took root in the minds of these masses, who were all the more amenable to such ideas as various phases of prosperity followed one after the other and a tidal wave of gold inundated Europe; after the waves from California and Australia, the Transvaal wave came. Revolutionary ideas quickly faded away in the minds of these workers and they no longer thought about anything but reforms. This is what became of the masses.

Then another kind of leader came to the fore.

At first, the leaders were men of principle. Men who were filled with enthusiasm for the idea of socialism, who put socialism ahead of everything and who expected everything from their propaganda work. They were men of the greatest courage, who had a truly revolutionary spirit and determination, as well as a truly powerful revolutionary drive. They were men who attempted, insofar as they were not workers, to destroy the bourgeois being within themselves and to completely identify with the working class. These men identified themselves, or tried to identify themselves, with the idea that they could get the working class to fight for its own emancipation. These men fitted all their words, all their deeds and all their proposals to this end.

With greater or lesser clarity, they proclaimed the revolution to the workers.

This was the time of Bebel, Guesde, Liebknecht, Plekhanov, Axelrod, Kautsky, Mehring, Labriola, Lafargue, Hyndman, Quelch, Domela Nieuwenhuis in his first period, and many others.

But with the growth of the movement, other leaders came along.

Philanthropists, moralists, highly cultivated, ambitious bourgeoisie, men unburdened by any conscience, con-men of the masses. Many of them were weak and well-intentioned at the same time, and knew nothing of socialism or its theory. People who deceived themselves, career politicians who turned socialism into a business, a profitable industry and a way to make a living.

They all accepted revisionism out of philanthropy or bourgeois morality, because of intelligence or ambition or stupidity, ignorance, lack of character and conscience or common sense. For all of them, the revolution is evil or impossible, or too distant. For them, reform is possible, within reach, good and advantageous. But the workers are so weak and ignorant, the number of their votes in parliamentary and municipal elections is increasing so slowly, that we have to make compromises with the bourgeoisie!

The old guard, the radicals, understood that the greatest revolutionary ideals were on the verge of disappearing. They voiced their opposition. But what good did it do?

The broad masses had everywhere become so reformist—reforms above all, and frequently even reforms alone—that they quickly followed the reformists and no longer paid any attention to the counsels of the radical idealists, who were unable to bring about the revolution.

This is how the revolution progressively became an abstract problem which, of course, the best elements still thought about, but only sporadically and as something beautiful and great; revolution was increasingly transformed into a purely sentimental question referring to a very

distant future. In practice, on the other hand, the struggle for reforms was made the norm and daily routine, the only object of the thoughts of the masses.

The trade union movement, which fights only for small gains, and which obtains no satisfaction except thanks to small concessions on the part of the employers and by means of contracts signed with the latter, considerably reinforced this process.

The trade union leadership was everywhere in the hands of reformists. The reformists were everywhere, in the party leadership, in the editorial offices of the newspapers, in the municipal councils and parliaments. They soon formed the majority everywhere and in most countries they constituted the sole leading force.

But in the trade union movement as well as the political parties, it was the leaders and deputies, and thus individuals, who gained the victories—even if it was a matter of merely apparent victories—in the parliaments and municipal councils against the other parties and in negotiations with the employers.

The center of gravity was therefore shifted from the masses to the leaders. A workers bureaucracy took shape.

And bureaucracy is by its very nature conservative.

The masses, completely ruled by the desire for immediate improvements and not by a desire for revolution, were encouraged to persist in this condition by their leaders. The masses abandoned everything into the hands of their leaders and became complacent and indolent. And as the masses became less active and less conscious of their goals, their leaders saw themselves as the real bearers of the movement. And these leaders began to believe that the proletarian action of the workers consisted primarily of tactics and compromises skillfully conducted by leaders, and that the workers must be satisfied with voting correctly, paying their dues to the trade union local, and now and then participating in a trade union struggle or a demonstration. These leaders became more and more convinced that the masses comprised a passive mass which had to be led and that they were themselves the active force.

This phase constituted the second phase of the socialist movement, which succeeded the first, the theoretical-practical-revolutionary phase. One could call this phase theoretically and practically reformist.²

This is what happened in England in the Labour Party. This is what happened in France and there it was even worse, since some socialists became ministers. In Belgium they managed to stifle the mass campaign for universal suffrage, in the Netherlands the workers movement was chained to liberalism and in Italy the socialists sold themselves to the radicals. In Germany a policy of moderation was pursued and the mass campaign for universal suffrage in Prussia was throttled. This is what happened in Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, and in all the other countries, with each case determined by each country's particular economic and political conditions, but everywhere with the same result: diversion of the proletariat onto the path of minor reforms, submission to leaders, renunciation of all mass action.

The workers parties of France, England, Germany, and of all countries became mass parties which were only interested in minor national trivialities. With the rise of militarism and

imperialism, which required all available money for their expansion, minor reforms themselves became impossible and only trivialities remained subject to debate.

The more reforms were promised by the reformists, the more demoralized the masses became. For nothing is more demoralizing and destructive than making false promises to the masses while nothing is achieved and the masses continue to credulously expect results.

But international imperialism was becoming increasingly more arrogant. And the powerful and comprehensive international perspective was becoming more necessary, instead of national preoccupations. This is why, more by instinct than by clear consciousness, even against their will, all of these parties corrupted by reformism founded the Second International, that hollow shell we know so well, which is today in ruins.

The reformists focused all the attention of this powerful world class—which shall someday subject all the forces of the earth, of nature and of society to its will—exclusively upon petty wage increases and infrequent social legislation, taking both of these as their only goals. They directed the attention of the workers—of that class which must defeat the greatest world power which has ever existed, capitalism and its manifestations, the capitalism of high finance, trusts and imperialism—towards the noble words with which their enemies conned these workers, and told them that they had to believe and form alliances with these people.

This mighty class was tamed by a few ambitious, ignorant or weak-minded leaders. It fell victim to its own lack of understanding and its servile mentality.

Something which has already happened a thousand times in the past happened again: the masses were fooled into doing the bidding of their rulers. It should not have succeeded, because this class must now really conquer undisputed, unqualified power.

Yet it did succeed again, the bourgeoisie was able to achieve it—by means of the reformists: by means of social democracy.

Some reformists went so far as to say they were in favor of capitalist expansion, in favor of colonies and spheres of interest, in a word, they became supporters of colonialism. They did not ask themselves if this was the way for the proletariat to become conscious of its class mission, ripe for revolution, if it was becoming personally and mentally revolutionary and socialist.

They only concerned themselves with temporary expedients . . . with capitalism.

Colonialist policies, nationalist colonialism and imperialism—and hence imperialist war—are capable, as we said above, by means of the capitalist expansion they make possible, of helping the nation and its bourgeoisie to reap enormous profits. Colonialist policies allow new outlets for capital, generate orders for industry and increase wealth. Trade and transport industries grow at an extraordinary rate and, in a word, so does the entire economic life of the nation. Of course, if the proletariat goes along with it, it also means a decline in the class consciousness of the masses and therefore, *over the long term*, the defeat of the proletariat. For it brings the proletariat serious oppression, taxes, militarism, war and discord. But all of this is of little importance to the reformists. So long as capital is growing and flourishing.

This is why numerous reformists, the big bourgeois reformists, become defenders of colonialism and thus of imperialism. Thus, for example, Schippel and Calwer in Germany, Vandervelde who approved of Belgium's annexation of the Congo, and Van Kol in the Netherlands, who accepted a post in the government and supported Dutch imperialism in the East Indies, etc.

Other reformists are in favor of colonialism because of the small immediate improvements which they can provide the proletariat, without asking themselves for even one second what the future consequences of this position could be.

We saw above that colonialist policies and therefore imperialism can provide small immediate benefits to small or even significant groups of workers; jobs and pay, for example. Crumbs from the table of colonial profits also fall to the petit bourgeoisie, small business owners and shopkeepers.

This is why the petit bourgeois German reformists—Bernstein, Noske, etc.—are in favor of colonialism. This is why the petit bourgeois reformists in the Netherlands, such as Troelstra, Vliegen, the parliamentary group, all the leaders and almost all the members of the social democratic workers party, are opposed to independence and unconditional freedom for the Dutch East Indies and support colonialism.

This is why, in every imperialist country which possesses colonies—England, Germany, the Netherlands, France and Belgium—and even in those countries which aspire to play a leading role in world trade and to obtain worldwide influence and to become a world power—Italy, America, Australia, etc.—many leaders and the majority of the working masses are in favor of colonialism, that is, imperialism.

Thus it was precisely colonialism which revisionism fostered.

And it promised the workers that it would provide them with significant benefits from colonialism.

The workers, preoccupied with their immediate interests, let themselves fall into the trap.

The workers became, like the reformists, supporters of the colonialism upon which imperialism is based and therefore became supporters of imperialism.

But imperialism means nationalism.

Imperialism was getting closer to home, and threatened the workers with war, death, destruction and discord, it was going to murder them as individuals and as a class and would later infinitely weaken and annihilate them. Imperialism, with its militarism and its probably endless train of wars, would put an end to reforms, now and for many years to come. This is the imperialism and the colonialism which were accepted by the workers from the hands of the reformists, from the social democrats, and therefore from the parties of the International.³

Thus, in the years preceding this war, the International accepted imperialism and its own destruction, for which it was itself as responsible as the bourgeoisie.

The workers, yearning only for immediate benefits, logically have to accept colonialism, that is, the imperialism and the nationalism which promise them precisely such immediate benefits.

Only those with more foresight note the fact that, in the long run, colonialism will bring more harm than good; and, above all, this can only be discerned by someone who sees that colonialism divides the proletariat and tears it apart. In short, only someone who thinks in a really revolutionary and socialist way can oppose nationalistic imperialism despite the advantages which it is momentarily capable of procuring.

And only those who penetrate still deeper are aware of the fact that imperialism unites all the capitalisms of the world against the proletariat, can completely extirpate nationalism from their hearts and join the world proletariat in a single fraternity and for a single revolutionary struggle against world capital.

But in the wake of waves of reformism and revisionism, all profound and clear theoretical insight has disappeared, along with all revolutionary and international sensibility.

Consequently, it is reformism that is responsible for the fact that the workers, who are already undoubtedly too concerned with minor issues, are becoming even more focused on trivia.

It was thus reformism, the pursuit of minor reforms, that caused the workers, already so nationalistic, to become even more nationalistic.

Reformism is responsible for the fact that the workers supported colonialism even as imperialism approached.

It is also the cause of the fact that, as imperialism drew ever nearer, the attention of the workers was diverted and the workers remained unaware of it.

It is thus reformism which is the cause of the fact that, in every country, the leaders of the workers International and the workers themselves—in spite of what they thought of themselves and in spite of their declarations—were in reality nationalist, imperialist and—when war loomed—chauvinists as well.

Together with the ignorance of the proletariat, it was the reformists and reformism which were responsible for the proletariat's embrace of the cause of imperialism and world war to its own ruination. It is their fault that the proletariat has not defended itself—and was not encouraged to defend itself—but was on the contrary jubilant and enthusiastic when it came face to face with its own nullification.

They went for reforms alone, and it was precisely because they no longer sought revolution that they brought weakness, downfall and division upon themselves.

They concerned themselves only with national issues, and it was precisely because of this that they became nationalists and imperialists.

They concerned themselves only with reform within the nation, and precisely because of this they were overtaken by the international violence of imperialism.

If one reflects upon the fact that these parties only acted within the national framework, and that the occasion for a joint, unified and international action against capital had never arisen; upon the fact that the struggle for national goals was only carried out within the cramped bounds of the nation; upon the fact that none of them rose to the concept of the struggle of the world proletariat as a whole against world capital as a whole; upon the fact that this struggle was the only real struggle; if one thus reflects upon all these topics, then it must certainly be admitted that the working class did not understand these issues and continued, as was its wont, to fight within its narrow little national framework, for momentary and selfish benefits at the same time that the great world clash between capital and labor slowly approached, that product of the imperialism which provoked this world conflict pitting the whole working class against world capital.

In Germany only a very few party publications taught the proletariat about the nature of imperialism.

Most of the German party's publications, among which even the main newspaper *Vorwärts* and the scientific journal *Die Neue Zeit* must be included, did everything possible to conceal the phenomenon of imperialism, that is, to prevent it from being understood as the axis around which politics revolves and to prevent it from becoming the focal point of the proletariat's concern and action. In every other country, with the exception of *De Tribune* in the Netherlands, there was no other publication, as far as we know, which did otherwise.

The revisionists—the Bernsteins, the Adlers, the Vanderveldes, the Jaurès's, the Legiens, the Brantings (to mention only the best of them)—attracted the proletariat's attention to trifles. The workers became preoccupied with trivia.

With more favorable taxation, with old age pensions for workers—often only the hope of them—with the possibility of an alliance with the liberals or the progressives or the radicals to obtain better electoral legislation. . . .

The workers turned their gaze towards their leaders, towards parliament, and remained totally passive themselves. Salvation would now only come from leaders and parliament.

Imperialism was meanwhile approaching, slowly but surely.

First Egypt was occupied, then the Transvaal and China. Germany, the homeland of capital, was encircled by hostile powers.

The workers did not notice anything.

Do you know, reader, what imperialism is? It is the highest form of the class struggle which has ever existed.

It is consequently also the most perfect and decisive refutation of revisionism; the knock-out punch.

Revisionist theory was never of any significance. Kautsky refuted it immediately and definitively. Nothing remains of revisionist theory, not the moderation of the class struggle, or gradualism, or the great hopes it based on the trusts, disarmament, the middle classes and neo-liberalism; none of this has come to pass. Their theory being without any foundation, the

revisionists took refuge in the domain of practice, in which they have confined the workers and poisoned them with their opium of vain hopes.

But this practice, the only one that remained to the revisionists, came up and seized them by the throats and struck them dead.

Consider, reader, how this came about.

The workers of every country were kept busy with the beautiful projects which the reformists had set so alluringly before their eyes. They were busy with workers insurance schemes, with the proposals for tax reform, electoral laws and pensions which they hoped to enact with the help of the liberals. What would they not have done for the sake of obtaining the least progress! In one place they become government ministers, in another they make pacts with the liberals, social democracy grovels in the dirt, elsewhere they humiliate themselves, they moderate their activities and even occasionally expel Marxists.

Everyone was preoccupied with activities of such restricted scope. Like tiny dwarves, the thousands of deputies were set to work and the millions among the masses to wait expectantly.

And what was approaching? Downfall and death.

For millions of workers, for their children, for their wives, for their fathers, for their mothers. Imperialism signifies the stagnation, regression and death of their organizations for many years to come.

The revisionists—the Troelstras, the Südekums, the Scheidemanns, the Anseeles, the Turatis, the Franks, the MacDonalds—appear in public with the bourgeoisie and promise to vote for everything—even for war budgets—they visit princes and generals; they promise the bourgeoisie their votes, and the workers mountains of gold, higher living standards, democracy, etc., as long as the workers elect them to the municipal councils, the chamber of deputies and the ministries and as long as they allow them to have a free hand. Throughout this period, the first great and truly worldwide imperialist war was slowly and stealthily approaching.

The revisionists promised reforms for the here and now. Reform came, in the form of death. The revisionists promised the workers democracy. Equality came, but with death. For capitalists and workers are truly equal in death. The revisionists promised universal suffrage, but only on the condition that the liberals should be trusted. The liberals have granted the workers the right to vote, but in death! Once they are dead, the workers in their thousands raise their voices in protest against having been killed.

The revisionists promised the reconciliation of the classes as long as their tactics are followed. War unites all classes in death.

The revisionists also promised the reconciliation of humanity, as well as disarmament! The peoples of the earth confront one another armed to the teeth and dripping with blood along fronts thousands of kilometers long.

The revisionists promised the moderation of the class struggle. World war and the imperialism of all nations represent an exacerbation of the class struggle such as society has never seen since the inception of capitalism.

The revisionists promised benefits from colonialism. But it is precisely colonialism which brought downfall. The revisionists promised reforms for the future. After this war, new wars loom, as well as new arms races. Consequently, the balance sheet shows nothing but deterioration and destruction and, evidently, no reforms.

A class which has been hearing for twenty years that the bourgeoisie must be trusted, can no longer fight the bourgeoisie.

The revisionists, together with the bourgeois parties, by promising the workers improvements in their living conditions, dazzled them with promises and set the stage for the destruction of the proletariat.

This is the culmination of the revisionist deceit and we must confront it directly.

But this culmination is also the downfall of revisionism and of the exclusive struggle for reforms.

It constitutes the downfall of this second stage of the workers struggle, the one we call reformist.

For the reformists do not merely share with the capitalists and with the workers' ignorance the blame for our present impotence, confusion, cowardice, for the proletariat's current nationalism, chauvinism and imperialism, for the present misery, fragmentation, and weakness; they also share the blame for and are complicit in everything that will happen after the war: the weakening of the proletariat for many years to come, the misery, the impossibility of all reform, the need to renew the struggle for the revolution with a very weakened and, perhaps, demoralized proletariat.

If only the waste and destruction and misery and all the consequences of this war meant that the working population would be purged of the reformists and all their kind!

For many years now, the author of this booklet and the party to which he belongs have been warning the proletariat of their country. He and the members of this party, through multiple campaigns, in numerous writings and newspaper articles on imperialism, asserted, right up to the outbreak of the war, that none of the beautiful promises of the bourgeoisie and the revisionists could be kept because militarism, colonialism and, in a word, imperialism, require all the capital for themselves, blocking any chance of progress, increasing tax burdens and, in all likelihood, preparing the way for a world war and even an era of world wars.

This is why we condemn collaboration with bourgeois parties, which serves no purpose.

This is why the revisionists expelled us from the Dutch social democracy and we had to found our own party.

We were expelled from the social democracy because of the imperialism we wanted to fight and they, on the contrary, wanted to support.

The workers can now see who was in the right.

7. Mass Action on a National Scale

Imperialism, however, cannot spread throughout the world without forcing the workers into a new large-scale conflict.

The revisionists, the deputies, the party and trade union leaders, in their narrow little cliques, were incapable of noticing the advent of imperialism; to the contrary, they attempted by all means to imprison the workers in their struggles for derisory goals. Capital itself, however, with its recent enormous expansion in every country, rendered their aspirations vain, or at least denied them.

Imperialism automatically brings in its wake enormous state expenditures, higher taxes and customs duties, shortages, a reduction in the real wage, the omnipotence of employers' associations, the decline of trade union power, the stagnation of social legislation and the decay of parliamentarism.

The reformists worked as much as possible with the bourgeoisie. They also tried to prostitute the working class as much as possible. Furthermore, the trade union leaders formed a bureaucracy which obstructs the workers' freedom of movement, diverts their class ethos towards a mean-spirited world-view, and finally enslaves and pulverizes their spirit. Capitalism's evolution into imperialism is felt all the more acutely.

Capital is not a paralyzed, dead or stagnant power, any more than it is a living source of abundant benefits. It is a force which ceaselessly evolves by engendering constant conflict.

And what characteristics, what new force, what new development does this new capitalist period of imperialism display? What new conflicts does imperialism engender?

What great transformations are now being brought about in the life of the workers by this imperialism?

What positive development is imperialism now bringing to the workers by attacking them?

What positive power is imperialism now conferring for the first time to the proletariat?

The really new positive factor is that the masses must begin to act for themselves.

In the pre-imperialist period—after the first era of workers association and their first theoretical-practical revolts against the bourgeoisie—activities were most often carried out by small groups and their leaders.

But against the trusts, the banks, and imperialist governments, against imperialism itself, small groups could accomplish little and their leaders even less, even with the most astute tactics.

What can the leadership of a trade union group do against a trust? What can a lone deputy, or even a parliamentary group, do against an imperialist parliament?

Anyone who understands the significance of the power a trust can bring to bear against a trade union, the power a bank has over the economy and over a country's policies in comparison with popular representation, and the power exercised by a pro-war imperialist government against a parliamentary party, will recognize that mass action is necessary alongside parliamentary representation and leaders.

The power confronting the workers is enormous. And it is immeasurably augmented by trusts and imperialism.

For the trusts, the employers' associations and the government to be compelled to move in a progressive direction, despite imperialism, the masses must fill the streets.

The masses, on a national scale.

For the proletariat there is no other way that leads to progress and reform.

For the proletariat, there is no other way that leads to the future, to the society of freedom, equality and unity.

A new stage is beginning.

The radical-theoretical stage was the first. It sowed the seeds of the future.

The reformist stage was next. It split into revolutionary-reformist and revisionist-reformist wings. It attained those reforms which were within reach.

Now we are in the third period. This period is allowing the masses to unify against bank capital, against the trusts and the imperialist governments.

The masses are beckoned.

The first stage invited the single individual to theoretical knowledge.

The second stage invited the masses to fight for reforms through their leaders.

The third stage invites the masses to revolutionary action.

With this stage we attain the highest degree of radicalism.¹

Do you understand, reader, what this means? The masses are appearing on the historical stage.

This means that the masses are finally awakening. This means that they are beginning to act without leaders, or at least without their leaders playing a significant role.

This means that we are taking a bigger step forward than the working class has ever taken before.

This means that we are very close to our final goal.

For the proletariat there is no other way to socialism.

Now the masses must begin to act for themselves, their time has come.

Capitalism, the evolution of which has produced the trusts, high finance, and an imperialist parliament and government, does not allow any other way.

Despite all the noble words, all the promises and all the pacts made with the bourgeoisie, despite all the tricks played on the workers and all the efforts of the permanent trade union officials and party deputies to monopolize all activity from the top down, the masses have taken up their mission.

In Sweden, Norway, Denmark, England, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Austria and Russia, the proletariat itself, by means of general strikes, protest strikes and demonstrations, by means of political and economic strikes, by means of strikes on the part of the whole working population, has shown that it has noticed the new evolution. With the aid of the general strike, it has helped the small sectors of the proletariat in their struggle against their capitalists, it has defeated large capitalist concerns, it has made cities and whole countries tremble; by means of the general strike, as a direct consequence of the imperialist war, the proletariat has carried out the first proletarian revolution.

In England, during the last few years, under the effects of imperialism, the proletariat has furiously thrown itself into strikes against the will of its leaders. And the demonstration movement of the German proletariat against the Prussian electoral law which took place a few years ago was an attempt to oppose the imperialist trend which was getting stronger every day.

In the United States, these last few years have witnessed the workers' frequent utilization of mass action in order to wrench reforms from the powerful trusts and to defend their right to organize.

For many years now the working class of Europe and America has been striving to break the power of imperialism, or at least to obtain, in the struggle with it, new forces and a more potent and compact unity.

Mass action has come . . . from the masses themselves.

Action against imperialism is a priori and by its very nature mass action.

Action against the imperialist war can only be international mass action. Only if the proletariat of each nation understands that foreign capitalism must be fought for the same reasons as its own national capital, will it then be capable of uniting with the international proletariat to reject and to put an end to the war.

But the mass action of the proletariat has until now been limited to small-scale operations, and has been without awareness of the great cause and the final goal. In short, it was still unorganized and . . . it was implemented nationally.

During this stage, concentrated capital, the trust, high finance, the empire of the rich and the imperialism of the powerful empires cannot be fought and defeated except in a conscious, organized and international manner.

8. The Causes of Nationalism among the Proletariat

c. The radicals and Kautsky

We still have not mentioned all the causes and adverse factors which have prevented the working class from abandoning the old nationalist road and committing to the high road of internationalism.

Against the new weapon of the workers—mass action—a new force makes its appearance, along with revisionism, to block the way.

This new opposition came in part from men whose past would not have allowed one to foresee such a development. It came from Marxists or radical workers and from the leaders of the socialist parties.

In the proletariat's obligatory passage from the old to the new tactics, a passage fought by its representatives and by small sections of the proletariat, a passage which even goes so far as mass action in general and the general strike in particular, and in the proletariat's passage from national to international action, the leaders and the supporters of the old tactics blocked the way; but these adversaries included not just revisionists, but also Marxists.

More precisely, these were the Marxists who had been workers' leaders in the first theoretical-practical revolutionary period, who, during the following period, that of revisionism, opposed the latter with a vigorous and magnificent resistance.

In this respect, as well, Germany offers the best example.

Although this phenomenon can be attested everywhere, in the Netherlands and in Belgium, in France and Italy, in Austria and England, it is manifested most clearly in Germany due to the magnitude of its struggles.

While the German revisionist leaders (and workers) did everything they could to divert the proletariat from extra-parliamentary mass actions, promising it minor benefits to be attained thanks to the help of the bourgeoisie in parliament or thanks to the day-to-day activities of the trade unions, the radical leaders tried to achieve the same end . . . the demoralization of the workers.

They imprisoned every anti-governmental mass action within the circle of the nation. While imperialism was growing ever more powerful, on the one side the reformists continued to promise more benefits thanks to collaboration with the parties engaged in managing imperialism and which, therefore, were hastening the onset of the war, and on the other side, the radical leaders were exhorting the masses to do nothing, to remain passive and inactive.

They did not, of course, explicitly recommend such a course, but they kept aloof from all mass action and even opposed it with all their might.

How could they have come to such a pass? How could these radicals have renounced the revolutionary tactics of the proletariat?

Most of these radicals, who were Marxists or who called themselves Marxists, were afraid of the proletariat's new means of struggle and for that reason wanted to restrict actions to exclusively electoral or trade union campaigns which would remain a monopoly of the leaders. The party's leading theoretician, Kautsky, was one of these radicals and even became their theoretician.

Kautsky has done everything possible to restrain the German proletariat and to prevent it from developing its own action.¹

In his debate with Rosa Luxemburg, Kautsky expressed his opposition to the use of the general strike in Germany. As if Germany was the exception to the rule in Europe.

Throughout this period, he directed the attention of the proletariat principally towards parliament. According to him, parliament was the new decisive arena. As if imperialism could have been defeated by means of parliament.

In this period, during which the workers were still capable of developing their own actions, he told them that the struggle relied upon the assistance which the middle class could provide and that it was necessary above all to have this class on their side. As if the middle class was not on the side of imperialism!

To keep the peace, he recommended the creation of a European League of Nations. As if the founding of such a League was in the hands of the workers, as if imperialism would peacefully wait for the workers to organize themselves, as if a League of Nations would not make imperialism even stronger. As if the bourgeoisie contains considerable anti-war forces; as if the workers did not stand alone.

In October 1911, Kautsky discouraged the masses of organized workers by telling them, in *Die Neue Zeit*, that they must not trust the unorganized masses. As if the unorganized masses were only capable of making their presence felt in the heat of the struggle.

In 1910, he insisted upon the possibility of bourgeois disarmament and during that period made disarmament the slogan of the proletariat. He thus diverted the attention of the German proletariat from the sole possible means which then existed to fight imperialism: mass action. As if in 1910, and today, under the rule of imperialism, disarmament could be possible.

The Copenhagen Congress followed suit by taking Kautsky's advice, with the help of all the revisionists and all the Marxists of his tendency. As if the bourgeoisie wanted disarmament, as if it could have wanted it.

In 1912, when imperialism was driving all the great powers toward war and this war was already imminent, Kautsky called for support for the liberals in the elections, for bourgeois groups which counted the most bloodthirsty proponents of imperialism among their supporters. As if these liberals, these ship-owners, these intellectuals, were not, more than any other party's members, the managers of imperialism.

This is how the workers were convinced that parliament and alliance with the liberals could lead to something besides the most grave oppression, war and destruction.

In his role as radical theoretician, Kautsky advised against mass action because it could be dangerous for the workers' organizations. As if the workers' organizations were the end, rather than the means, of the class struggle. As if imperialism is not an even more terrible threat to the workers' organizations.

As if the workers' organizations could not be reborn.

Kautsky has fought with all his power all those who tried to persuade the proletariat that it must now act for itself.

It is true that the struggle opposed by Kautsky and the radicals involved questions of national politics during peacetime, particularly the mass action for universal suffrage in Prussia. But it is evident that the masses, discouraged by his counsels, would never have dared to do anything against ascendant imperialism and the approaching world war.²

With this tactic, Kautsky wanted—as he himself said—to wear down the government and the ruling classes. Today, one can see quite well that the ruling classes have not been worn down, but instead it is the working class that has been bled to death.

At the Basel Congress, Kautsky, in agreement with the reformists and radical leaders, made it impossible to carry out any debate on joint international action by the proletariat. As if—precisely during this era—such an action was not the only possible one.

Now, in this period of capitalism's evolution when all the States are attacking each other and the proletariat, Kautsky tells the workers: you must fight for the fatherland if your fatherland is attacked.³ As if the moment had not arrived for the struggle against imperialism.

This characteristic of the actions of the German radicals also applies to all the countries of western Europe: they are against mass action by the proletariat. They are in favor of giving free rein to imperialism. They are resolute supporters of imperialism.⁴

The most powerful manifestation of the capitalist era, the decisive conquest of the entire world, at least of all that part which had not yet been conquered by capitalism, is taking giant steps forward and is today moving towards its conclusion.

The proletariat is threatened with a considerable prolongation of the duration of its slavery.

The proletariat is threatened by a period of regression, of weakness, and perhaps of destruction: the radicals of the Kautsky variety have nothing to oppose to this development. All they say is: attend your political and trade union assemblies, hold demonstrations every now and then, and elect your deputies to parliament on election day.

Even more: world capital, or in any case a very important part of it, for the first time in world history, is staging an extraordinary assault against the proletariat of all of Europe, a large part of America and Asia, part of Africa and all of Australia.

For the first time ever, the world proletariat as a whole finds itself in opposition to world capital. And the Marxist, the student of Marx, does not know what to say to the proletariat: each one of you must fight for your fatherland, you must obey the capitalist.

Since the struggle to defeat this kind of Marxism is a vital matter for the proletariat, for the same reason as the fight against revisionism, we would like to cite yet one more example:

Cunow (see *Parteizusammenbruch!*, pp. 13-21) says that one must not attempt to contain imperialism, that is, defeat it, because imperialism is an historically necessary evolutionary stage of capitalism, and because Europe and the world are not yet ripe for socialism. Like the struggle against machines, the struggle to destroy imperialism is stupid.

Cunow is, together with Kautsky, the classic example of the old Marxist. One believes that the workers cannot fight imperialism and that they must submit to it. The other says that imperialism must not be fought because it is historically necessary.

It is true that Kautsky declares that he wants to fight imperialism. But he rejects the only real weapon against imperialism—mass action.

Cunow also declares his desire to fight. He even accepts mass action. But⁵ . . . only in the future, in fact, in an unspecified, distant future epoch.

Thus, he does not want to use the only real weapon of the proletariat either. He rejects the fight.

Kautsky wants to turn the wheel of history backwards in time. Capitalism must return to its old forms from the pre-imperialist era: political alliances and trade agreements. Kautsky is even a utopian: imperialism must return to peaceful means such as arbitration tribunals and disarmament.

Kautsky does not want to hear about the final gigantic fight for the diffusion of capitalism throughout the world, from which socialism must emerge. The gargantuan combatants must come to an agreement instead of fighting.⁶

Kautsky desires an impotent and utopian resistance. In reality, Kautsky is the one who wants to replace the machine with the artisan.

Cunow, who upholds the necessity of imperialism and its international struggle, is right and Kautsky is wrong in this respect.

But what conclusions does Cunow derive from his analysis?

Cunow's analysis leads to the rejection of all resistance and to advising the European workers, and above all the German and English workers, not to put up a fight, and then even advises them to wait until Europe and the world are ripe for socialism. In short, he advises the workers to allow themselves to be murdered.

Kautsky's advice is the same, but for different reasons.

In fact, Kautsky and Cunow are very similar.

For both of them reject the proletariat's struggle against imperialism.

Before proceeding any further, we shall provide yet more extensive proofs that Cunow does not want to fight. In effect, these radicals of the Kautsky variety are accustomed to giving themselves airs of being supporters of the revolutionary struggle with the aid of phraseology from the pre-imperialist era. And just as the revisionists deceive the proletariat with false promises, the radicals deceive them with this appearance of revolutionary struggle.

So too, after this war is over, these radicals will try, with the help of their false appearances, to prevent the workers from fighting: we must therefore dissipate these false pretenses.

We shall explain how Cunow envisions this struggle, using his own words.

He writes (*Parteizusammenbruch!*, p. 18): "This does not mean that the working class must patiently and unresistingly endure the rule of imperialism. . . . The socialist workers party also has the task of defending them as effectively as possible from the harmful effects of imperialism and, indeed, of taking advantage, in the interests of the workers and without ruling out any means, of these new economic formations from which advantages can be derived for the workers and which can be used to enlarge their organization and, if necessary, to transform it in such a way as to adapt it to the new goals. . . . In a word, to keep the working class safe and healthy in this new period of capitalism." Furthermore, he demands the conquest and exploitation of political power, control over the State, State management of large-scale production. . . . Such is the struggle as proposed by Cunow.

What is the meaning of these words?

Compare them with the real class conditions created by imperialism and the war!

Now we shall show just what kind of struggle against imperialism that Cunow has in mind.

Cunow wants to defend the workers against the harmful consequences of imperialism. What are these harmful consequences? They are the war and millions of dead. They are the trillions in European debt and the billions in German debt. How can Cunow want to reject these consequences without mass action?

It was and still is impossible by using only the ballot and the parliamentary group.

Imperialism laughs at these methods.

Cunow wants to take advantage of the new economic formations. What does he mean by that? The powerful new banks which will be engendered from the world's indebtedness, and especially from Germany's indebtedness, will see their power multiplied ten and even one hundred times as a result of these debts. How can Cunow want to exploit these new economic formations in the interests of the workers . . . without mass action?

Cunow wants to enlarge the workers' organizations. How does he intend to do this if, after the war, the workers' organizations of England and Germany, but also of France, Russia, Italy and Belgium are powerless and, because of the war, lie crushed under the weight of public debt and taxes? If their treasuries are empty and their members jobless? How can this task be accomplished without mass action?

To recapitulate: Cunow wants to allow the working class to survive without problems in the new imperialist era. It is a little too late for Cunow to set himself this task. For the working class he wants to protect lies in a pool of its own blood in Europe, in Africa, in America, in Australia and Asia, it is mutilated, weakened, divided and disunited. The moment for rejecting all this misery has already passed. It has passed because Cunow and the radicals rejected mass action. How can he want to save the working class from such devastation without mass action?

It is ridiculous for a radical to say that he wants to keep the masses safe in this new imperialist stage, while rejecting the action of the masses themselves.

Let us continue with our examination of Cunow's program: state management and control over heavy industry. Is Cunow not aware of the fact that the power that controls and manages heavy industry, i.e., the big banks, will emerge from the war ten and one hundred times stronger than before the war? Does he not see that the workers' organization, on the other hand, will emerge from the war weaker than ever? Does he not see that now an institution which is growing increasingly more powerful will confront a remarkably weakened institution and that today the workers' only strength lies in their numbers?

How does he want to combat this power and replace it with the power of the people without mass action?

To conclude: Who will have to wrench political power from the hands of the ruling classes? Who will have to destroy imperialism, high finance and the imperialist State?

The answer: Undoubtedly, the devastated working class, the proletariat crushed by taxes, its organizations which have been destroyed, the working class enslaved by imperialism!

And this working class will have to do all of this while surrendering even more completely to imperialism and avoiding mass actions!

Cunow does not even mention mass action, the only means which can prevent war, take advantage of new economic forms, prevent the workers' organizations from being crushed, and, in a word, save the working class. He does not even mention it once as a means which must be employed immediately or, if this is not possible, right after the war ends. Mass action is the only way to defeat imperialism and the State and to conquer political power.

Cunow makes fun of the men who want to resort to mass action. He does not mention mass action except in the context of a distant future, not as a reality but as mere words.

Cunow's grandiloquent words about the struggle are only hollow verbiage. They are merely phrases from the pre-imperialist era.

With the help of such slogans from the pre-imperialist era, which are today nothing but empty words, he wants to convey the impression that he is eager for the fight. "Take advantage of the new economic forms without exception, transform the organizations and keep them safe and healthy for the new imperialist phase, the conquest of political power". . . but without mass action, the only means which could give force to these assertions and transform these words into deeds. Up against the enormity of imperialism, this whole discourse sounds like a baby's temper tantrum or the speech of a childish person.

When Cunow declares: "I do not want a struggle that would destroy imperialism because imperialism is necessary, but I want another kind of struggle," it must be understood that he wants no struggle at all.

Cunow's words are merely empty noise. His struggle is not a struggle at all.

And Cunow and the radicals are now trying to conceal their impotence and their frustration behind three arguments.

They say that imperialism is historically necessary. That capitalism cannot be destroyed yet. And that the world is not yet ripe for socialism.

Cunow's opinion, according to which imperialism is an historical necessity and the world is not yet ripe for socialism, has a Marxist semblance; it is also the principle justification for the operations of the reformists and the revisionists. This opinion, which gives itself such Marxist airs, is more capable than any other of deceiving the workers and perpetuating their erring ways. For all of these reasons, we shall go to great lengths to fight and refute this opinion.

Above all, in relation to the assertion that the world is not yet ripe for socialism, and that capitalism cannot be destroyed yet, we are of a different opinion altogether. We believe that the two most powerful States, England and Germany, are materially ripe for socialism.

These are the two countries where the largest industrial sectors—steel, coal, machine tools, textiles and, to some extent, food processing and transport—have been enormously centralized and have attained gigantic dimensions. In these countries there is a vast network of trusts and cartels, and it would be easy to centralize other sectors of production, as well. In these countries finance, centralized in the banks, totally dominates industry and transport. We consider these countries to be technologically and materially ripe for socialism.

The realization of socialism, especially in the two most powerful States, England and Germany, today depends solely upon mental factors, on the will, the consciousness and the courage of the proletariat.

Who can deny the fact that, if the proletariats of England and Germany were to be spiritually mature, and especially if they were to carry out a united struggle, standing together, the productive forces and the conditions of production would make them capable of impressive actions? They could begin the struggle for the realization of socialism and, by way of a series of great struggles, conquer political power and, with relative ease in regard to technology, transform society.

These assertions are, however, only assertions. We only wish to juxtapose them to Cunow's assertions so that the reader will immediately understand which thesis is better. Before plunging into the examination of these opposed assertions, we want to refute Cunow's opinion concerning the necessity of imperialism and the impossibility of fighting it.

We have seen that Cunow does not really want to fight.

A strange assertion, indeed: the proletariat must not fight against imperialism, it must not obstruct its progress because it is a necessary stage of development. A strange assertion, above all for a Marxist.

The most basic idea of Marxism is the idea of dialectical development, that is, development by way of struggle; the idea that two things can develop at the same time and that by means of the struggle between these two things gives rise to a new development, a new thing.

This is what is happening with the development of the capitalist class and the working class and its outcome in socialism.

The capitalist class develops by means of the capitalist forces of production. But by means of these same forces of production, the proletariat develops as well.

And with the development of the capitalist class on the one side, and that of the proletariat on the other, the struggle between the two classes also develops. And from this struggle something new arises: after capitalism, socialism.

Capitalism's development is necessary, the proletariat's development is necessary, the struggle between the two is necessary and it is only by way of this struggle that socialism will be born which becomes necessary as a result of this struggle.

How strange it is to hear it said that one must not combat imperialism because the development of capitalism is necessary.

Every stage of capitalism is necessary, and therefore so is imperialism.

How strange it is to hear it said that this is why one must not combat imperialism! But one cannot believe one's own ears when one is told that this statement was made by a Marxist.

This statement has never been true, theoretically or practically!

Have we ever refused to fight anything under the pretext that it was necessary?

In the past, we never wanted to replace something that was necessary with something else that was thought to be a step backwards.

And we still do not want to do that.

The comparison made by Cunow is false. In other times, the workers wanted to replace machines with reactionary artisanal production. We, however, want to replace imperialism with socialism, which represents a higher stage of development compared to imperialism.

Have we refused to combat the employers' organization under the pretext that it was a necessary development? It was indeed a necessary development, and we fought it nonetheless.

Have we not fought the trusts and cartels? They are necessary, and we fought them nonetheless.

Have we not fought militarism? It is a necessary development and we fight it. Have we not fought the State while it, too, is also necessary? Just as we have fought against the continuous increase in the power of the State despite the fact that this is just as necessary, etc., etc.

Capitalism, too, was until today a necessary stage of development. The workers, however, have not accepted it without a fight and have struggled against it. Even so, Cunow does not want to fight imperialism because it is necessary.

But at this point it is necessary to say one more thing which will determine whether or not this necessary imperialism must be fought.

It is precisely the struggle against each necessary stage of capitalism, and it alone, that makes us stronger.

Our great predecessors, leaders and masses, fought against each necessary stage of capitalism's development—and they did so with all their forces—and it was only by this means that they became stronger.

They fought the nobility and the bourgeoisie, the Church and the State, they never once wanted to back down the way Kautsky does today, and thanks to those struggles they won the right to vote, labor legislation and the right to organize. Thanks to those struggles they achieved, above all, unity, consciousness and greater power.

They knew that capitalism and their enemies were necessary; but they knew that they themselves and socialism were necessary. They knew that it was necessary to combat what was necessary, but also that the stronger party—now socialism—wins. And this is why they always fought for socialism with all their forces and to the end.

And now Cunow does not want the struggle because the adversary is necessary!

If our predecessors had done as Cunow advises, what would have happened? Let us investigate, and we shall immediately see the complete falsehood of Cunow's tactics.

They would have been defeated; instead of an army fighting for freedom with energy, perspicacity, unity, organization, love of freedom, and power, aspects which have allowed them to carry on the fight to replace capitalism with socialism, they would have become a mass of ignorant, abject and powerless slaves. It was only the merciless struggle against capitalism, despite capitalism's necessity, which prevented this from happening.

Thus, today we, too, want to fight with all our forces, with all the means at our disposal, against this necessary imperialism so we can become, not a mass of morally, materially and mentally degenerated coolies, but a powerful proletariat.

Here one can clearly discern the overall conceptual difference that sets us and the old Marxists against the Cunows and the Kautskys.

We would nonetheless like to make this difference yet more clear and decisive.

We would like to refute the thesis that the world is not yet ripe for socialism and that capitalism cannot yet be destroyed.

Cunow says: You are trying to obstruct the course of imperialism and destroy it. You want to destroy it by means of mass actions and general strikes. You want to replace it with socialism, but this attempt, both in terms of obstructing its course and destroying it, is illusory

because capitalism is still necessary and imperialism is still a progressive stage in its development; and therefore because socialism is still impossible.

We could object that every struggle launched by the socialists against capitalism, even the smallest trade union struggle, is a struggle for the destruction of capitalism.

We wish to object that, in every stage of capitalism, our great predecessors always conceived of their struggle as a struggle which must destroy capitalism. As a result of both their vigorous energy and passion, as well as their clear insight, they always conceived of every struggle as if it were capable of resulting in socialism. This vision not only instilled them with unprecedented courage and power, but also provided them, as we shall see below, with a superior theoretical concept of ultimate victory.

Let us nonetheless admit for a moment that Cunow's statement is correct. For it is the cardinal point, the nucleus, of all the disagreements between the old and the new Marxists and between supporters of the old and the new tactics.

The difference between the new stage and the old stage of capitalism, between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, is the following:

Capitalism has developed and continues to develop to such a degree that it has reached the highest point of its development.

There is nothing which surpasses the trust, the cartel or the monopoly.

This is certain in the economic domain. And the trust and the monopoly in the economic domain correspond to imperialism in the political domain.

Imperialism is the introduction and spread of capitalism throughout the planet, and this accomplished precisely by means of the trusts, cartels, banks and financial and industrial monopolies.

Imperialism is thus the extension of the power of high finance, the trusts, the cartels and monopolies over the whole earth.

There can be no development, however, beyond monopoly, since the latter allows capitalism to conquer the entire earth and it does not want to capitalize the stars. The whole earth is under the rule of the trusts and the organized monopolies; this is the culminating point of capitalist production.

And, therefore, with the ruin of free competition, with the founding of financial, industrial and transport monopolies and with an imperialism which extends their power over the whole surface of the earth, capitalism has reached its ultimate point of development.

We understand this quite well.

We know that this process is only in its beginnings. We know that it is still capable of further developments. Whole sectors of the system are still in their nascent stage.⁸ Gigantic corporations can grow even bigger and spread without restraint.

Nor is that all. The corporate monopolies can change, and not just quantitatively. In the future, they could form a gigantic alliance, almost a separate organism which could embrace the entire earth, and they could subsist alongside one another without competition. Imperialism itself, which is nothing but the rule of the world by the monopolies, could assume a peaceful nature and the States could form a world alliance⁹ or institutions which no longer make war but in which the united giant monopolies will exploit all the earth's inhabitants and seize all the profits.

We know all of this.

But this is what we want to say: This development, beyond which no one could imagine a higher capitalist stage, and which the socialists have always considered to be a basis for their own society, while only in its beginnings, has now begun.

The last stage of capitalism, in accordance with its nature, has now been attained although it could still develop further, spread, and even become peaceful. The basis of the new society now exists with the formation of imperialism.

This is the difference between Marx's time and ours, between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

What does all this imply for the struggle?

This means that:

First, the struggle must be waged with extraordinarily powerful means. With mass action, as we have explained. For today we face gigantic forces against which our old means are no longer sufficient.

Second, however, this means that the struggle against capitalism must now necessarily be—and is itself becoming—a struggle for the destruction of the adversary and for the victory of the proletariat.

These new entities characteristic of the latest stage of capitalism—the imperialist State, the trusts, the cartels and, we may add, the employers' associations since the latter are also a kind of cartel set up to wage the class struggle—so completely enfold and penetrate all of society and the whole national and international economy that a struggle against them shakes the whole world to its foundations and is a struggle against capitalist society itself.

Large scale concentrated finance capital flows, like blood through a body, throughout all of industry as well as transport and trade, in such a way that a powerful blow against any one of these sectors makes the whole body tremble.

The struggle against one sector of capital immediately sets the other sectors of society into motion and the political movement then attacks all of society, just like a big strike against the State.

Since the trusts and the monopolies, and therefore the imperialism which spreads the former all over the earth, are the highest forms of capitalism upon which all of society is today based, and since these institutions are the framework of all of society, the socialist the

struggle against these forms can at this time be nothing less than the struggle to destroy capitalism.

And this is why every struggle waged against the highest forms of capitalism, against the gigantic employers' federations, against the cartels and against imperialism, is necessary for the socialist and is in itself a battle for socialism.

To say at this time, as Cunow does, that one must not fight imperialism in order to destroy it, is only to say that one must renounce the struggle for the realization of socialism.

And since the struggle now consists in a series of such struggles, all of which attack capitalism and threaten it with destruction, the advice not to fight imperialism only means that none of these struggles should be waged.

For all of these struggles, against an individual enterprise, against a trust, against an employers' association, against an imperialist State, have all become struggles to destroy capitalism and to establish socialism, neither more nor less than the struggle against imperialism.

Whoever does not want to wage any one of these struggles, also advises against the others. Cunow's advice therefore only amounts to the renunciation of any struggle at all.

But the necessity of the struggle and the falsehood of Cunow's advice appear even more clearly when one considers the whole development of the struggle between the proletariat and capital as well as how this struggle will develop in the future so as to result in the certain victory of socialism.

The latest stage of development reached by capital today is the result of a decades-long process.

So, too, the struggle of the working class against these latest forms of capital—a struggle which has now begun—is a process which will take decades; it is a process of increasing the power of the working class.

But even the victory of socialism is a process that will take decades.

The victory of socialism is not an instant catastrophe.

Since the victory of socialism is a process composed of a long series of battles, no single struggle can completely and instantly defeat capitalism. No single struggle can instantly destroy it.¹⁰

Every struggle is nothing but an attempt to destroy capitalism and a contribution to bringing about the victory of socialism.

Henceforth, every victory won over the new forms of capitalism—a major bank, a trust, an employers' association, a cartel—or over the imperialist State, will be a victory of socialism, precisely because these forms are the latest and highest forms of capitalism. And in these struggles the working class will rise to the highest form of organization, the highest degree of class consciousness and the greatest self confidence.

A victory over the latest forms of capitalism is a partial destruction of capitalism and is for that reason a victory for socialism.¹¹

To make all of this more clear, we shall cite some typical examples.

Should the workers manage to concentrate in their hands and take power even over one industrial consortium, this would still not constitute the destruction of capitalism or the realization of socialism, but only one part of socialism's victory. Should the workers succeed in preventing an imperialist war with their mass actions, this would still not be the destruction of capitalism or the foundation of socialism, but only part of the victory of socialism, one part of its victory.

It would be an increase in the power of the working class which will one day conquer all power.

And the series of all these struggles and victories, becoming increasingly powerful, involving ever wider sectors of society, will comprise victory.

Whoever considers the matter in this way, that is, in its true light, and conceives of the struggle, the rise and the victory of socialism, as a process, sees what it means to not want to combat imperialism under the pretense that capitalism cannot yet be overthrown.

The struggle does not have to overthrow capitalism all at once, that is not possible. But it must weaken capitalism in such a way that it will one day collapse.

It is therefore clear that Cunow's position means not wanting to overthrow and defeat capitalism.

Imperialism is no more than one of the highest forms of capitalism's evolution, one among many others, and by fighting all of its forms one strikes a blow against capitalism, too; thus, not wanting to destroy and defeat imperialism means not wanting to defeat these capitalist forms in their totality.

If one does not want to defeat capitalism, that is, capitalism's highest forms and manifestations, then one absolutely renounces victory and lacks the will to win.

Since socialism's victory is a series of partial victories over capitalism's forms, not wanting to defeat imperialism means renouncing the victory of socialism.

So one can clearly see, finally, that Cunow's advice amounts to the renunciation of any struggle at all, during this stage of capitalism, against capitalism's highest forms and manifestations, since he demonstrates that he does not want to achieve victory over these forms and that he desires the proletariat's complete submission to them. Such, then, is Cunow's wish; he preaches submission.¹²

The two gigantic developmental processes of our era, capitalism and the workers movement, are fully mature.

Capitalism is entering a stage where it is massively reinforcing its strength by means of the monopolies, and through imperialism, which is spreading these monopolies over the entire earth. The basic foundations of socialism are present.

And it is precisely at this juncture that Cunow counsels the working class not to unleash the battle for the advent of socialism . . . he counsels that it not arm itself with the sole existing means capable of achieving this goal: the struggle.

The capitalists are augmenting their power. The workers must remain calm.

The capitalists of every country have hurled themselves upon the world proletariat. And it is just now that Cunow counsels the world proletariat not to unite across national borders for mass action, and he counsels each national proletariat to allow itself to be separately massacred for the benefit of their nations' capitalists.

To be massacred by the millions, to see their organizations reduced to ruins after the war, to be atomized in enemy camps, to face a situation of extraordinary unemployment and, finally, to be crushed under the weight of State indebtedness—such is Cunow's advice to the proletarians.

If the workers follow this advice, they will throw themselves into the abyss of intellectual, moral and material desolation.

If the proletariat submits to imperialism, then it submits to finance capital, to the trusts, to the consortia, to the employers' associations, to the imperialist governments, to absolutism, to war; it would then be hurled deep into slavery.

This is what Cunow recommends.

We, on the other hand, advise the proletariat to combat imperialism, and that their combat should be waged as an international proletariat.

Against the international capital which is fighting to spread itself over the face of the earth, we want to oppose the international proletariat.

We want the living productive forces, the workers, by means of their struggle against imperialism, by means of their struggle against this necessary stage of capitalist evolution, to travel the whole course of their necessary cycle: international unity for an International of action and struggle.

This is the only way the proletariat can win.

Cunow's advice thus amounts to this: he counsels the proletariat not to fight, not to make itself stronger by means of struggle, not to wage war against capitalism's most modern forms, that is, that it renounce socialism.

He counsels renunciation of all will to struggle and submission to capitalism in its highest stage.

This is what is behind Cunow's advice not to fight imperialism because imperialism is necessary.

And Cunow, like all these radicals, dresses up this advice with Marxist phrases, with slogans from a bygone era, under false pretenses.

Now we shall return to the starting point of our examination of Cunow's ideas. And in the light of the conceptions we have delineated—now that we have clarified the following concepts: the necessity of imperialism, the necessity of capitalism, the destruction of capitalism, the maturity and victory of socialism—we now proclaim to the workers this clear statement in opposition to Cunow's assertion:

The formation of consortia, trusts, cartels, and monopolies, and the imperialism which is spreading them over the whole planet, are so far advanced that the proletariat must initiate the struggle against them, that is, the struggle for socialism.

Only by means of this struggle can the proletariat make itself strong and mature for victory.

Especially in Germany and England, the organization of the productive forces, the rule of centralized finance capital over the largest sectors of production, is so pronounced that these States are ripe for socialism.

Of equal importance, the workers organizations are so powerful in these two countries that they could assume control over production.

Guided by these two proletariats, the proletariat of Europe and the rest of the world would be able to slowly overcome the highest forms of the manifestations of capital—the monopolies and imperialism—and finally establish socialism.

Consequently, the proletariat of Europe must accept the struggle against imperialism.

The proletariat of Europe has come to a fork in the road. It could choose to join the revisionists and the radicals, or join the revolutionaries.

After this examination of Cunow's ideas, we shall now turn to Kautsky.

The radicals, when brought face-to-face with the imperialist war, could not say anything but: do not reject it, it is inevitable.

They taught passivity. How is this possible, and what is the cause of this phenomenon?

Kautsky and the radicals were excellent guides and excellent fighters during the period when the conditions of capitalism were such as prevailed during the era of Marx and Engels; when it was a matter of fighting on a national scale for the establishment and growth of national parties in each country and the fight had to be carried out in a traditional manner, that is, in parliament and the trade unions.

They were good guides during that first stage when the struggle was still relatively easy, they brilliantly illuminated the movements of capital, the parties, the employers, the governments, and the class relations of that era of capitalism and encouraged the proletariat to take action.

But the struggle continues to evolve. Capital is assuming forms which were to some extent foreseen but not actually experienced by Marx. This is the era of the trusts and of imperialism, and high finance rules the world economy. The abundance and concentration of capital lead every State, in one single act of world conquest, to fight against the world proletariat; imperialism begins the first of a series of wars. Another kind of action is necessary, a kind of action unlike that of parliamentary activity carried out through representatives, or that of the trade unions, which mobilizes a part of the proletariat and its leaders. The masses must take the stage, both nationally and internationally; only the masses can stand in the way of the enormous new powers of the trusts and world capital. But that is when Kautsky, Bebel, Guesde, Hyndman and so many others with them run away in terror and do not know what to do. It is better to do nothing, to allow capitalist economic development and capitalism to run their course. . . . It would be better—since, in the midst of the battle, nonresistance means collaboration—to march to war with the imperialists.

During the previous era, whose theoretician Kautsky was, everything was simple and clear. In every country, the worker had to become “socialist” since it was clear that he should belong to his trade union and the party! His immediate interests demand it! As soon as the first struggles broke out, such exploits did not demand much insight or valor, even if, compared to the old servitude, they represented a great step forward.

During that era, economic conditions themselves easily and demonstratively showed the worker the way forward. Economic conditions were of pressing importance. The worker only had to allow himself to be led. Economic conditions are more powerful than man. During that era, Kautsky was the real theoretician and the centrist chiefs were the real leaders.

But then came imperialism with its attack on the world working class. Now it is no longer a matter of combat on a national scale, by means of the trade union. At the current time, it is no longer a matter of combat by way of representatives. Now, for all the proletarians, is the time for direct combat. For joint combat, not with words, not with noble phrases, but by means of action. Today, it is time to go to battle against the government. For the first time ever, imperialism has turned the struggle into a worldwide struggle. Today, it is time to renounce the fatherland, the enemy is no longer just German capitalism acting directly, but also Russian, French and English capitalism. The enemy, the real enemy, which is no longer theoretical but real and practical, from now on and until the advent of socialism, is world capital. Therefore, for the masses, it is time to go into battle directly against all governments.

What our time calls for, for the worker and for the masses, is that they become conscious of their own power.

These days, for the masses, it is a matter of becoming socialist. For the masses, it is time to really act in a socialist manner.

The masses must cease to be ignorant, cowardly, indifferent, passive or obtuse. They must no longer be mediocre or craven.

Now is the time for the masses to manifest a more powerful character than ever before.

The proletariat must advance from the passive struggle to the active struggle, from the undemanding struggle through representatives to the leaderless struggle, or a struggle whose leaders are in the background. It must take a large step towards decisive action against the

most powerful capitalism, against the most powerful social force which has ever existed: imperialist world capital.

From the struggle on a national scale waged by its representatives, the proletariat must advance, alone and trusting only in its own powers, to the great international struggle.

It is quite obvious that economic forces are today still the motor forces of this entire process. Just as, during the preceding period, the development of labor was determinant, today it is the development of labor, concentrated in the trade unions, which is leading the workers to this new idea and this new kind of action. But how superior are this action and this idea to those of the previous era! How much must the idea, the sentiment and the action of the proletariat be elevated for the purpose of beginning the struggle!

Kautsky, Guesde and the radicals of the old school can no longer keep the pace.¹³ They are left behind and think that a new struggle is no longer possible. They do not understand this new struggle. They do not understand that today mass action is necessary even to achieve reforms. They do not see that from now on only mass action is of any use against imperialism and war. They do not see that world imperialism is simultaneously turning against the world proletariat. They do not see that the interest of the proletariat no longer lies in fighting for the imperialist fatherland, but in a united struggle against the imperialism of all countries. They do not understand the new international and worldwide action of the proletariat against imperialism.

“Fight only for your fatherland! That is the only way!”

Finally, they do not understand that imperialism is for the first time uniting the proletarians of the whole world.

Marx thought, above all, that the communists must be in the front ranks and that they represented the future of the movement. Kautsky and the radicals are following the tail of the movement.

Marx was the founder of historical materialism. This means that he believed that the development of the productive forces led to the victory of one class and that the spirit of that class would overcome the difficulties it encountered. The problems which society, that is, man, poses for himself, can only be resolved by man himself.

Marx therefore taught, for anyone who understands him correctly, that the mind is the most powerful economic factor, even though it is not free, and that in the final accounting, in continuously changing conditions, it is the mind which forms and creates society.

Kautsky believes that economic conditions, such as today's capitalist imperialism, are more powerful than the working class which was created and developed by these same conditions. He believes that this working class cannot defeat these economic conditions. The workers organizations, despite their strength and vast size, must surrender without ever really having fought. This is why he declares: “You can do nothing but serve your fatherland so that it can achieve its imperialist goals. You can neither adopt other methods nor can you undertake new actions, you must capitulate.”

In his opinion, the working class of the future must yield before imperialism. It must fight for its country's imperialism, under the imperialism which makes all States aggressors, aggressors against the other States, aggressors against the colonies inhabited by weaker populations, and finally aggressors against the world proletariat. The class of the future must therefore, according to him, attack the inhabitants of these colonies and the world proletariat.

It must therefore attack itself.

It must, in alliance with imperialism and capitalism, infinitely weaken itself and the world proletariat; for the benefit of the imperialist fatherland, it must weaken itself unto ruination, perhaps for many years to come.

It must do this without utilizing the toughest means in its possession, a means which has already been tested and put into practice: mass action, pushed to its limits.

Thus, Kautsky, in his new version as the theoretician of radicalism, has for us ceased to be the theoretician of the practical struggle of the proletariat.¹⁴

The struggle recommended by Kautsky is no longer the class struggle and has nothing to do with revolutionary Marxism or historical materialism. It dissolves the class struggle in an economic and political fatalism.

And the German radicals, as well as a great number of workers who listened to Kautsky, speak, write and act just like him. And if it is like this in Germany, what is it like in the other countries which have not even attained the level of radicalism!

In France, where Marxism has not yet really sunk any roots, and in England, where the working class acts in an unprincipled manner in accordance with the chance outcomes of occasion and opportunity.

It is, then, the radicals and the pseudo-Marxists who have brought the proletariat to the state of weakness we see now.

More than the workers' ignorance and reformism, they are the effective cause which has led the workers to do nothing and to capitulate before imperialism.

They share responsibility for the nationalism and the patriotism of the masses.

And, consequently, they share responsibility for everything that is happening and everything that could happen after the war: the disunity of the proletariat, its weakening as a fighting class and its possible ruin for many years.¹⁵

Today, in the midst of war, and after the war when the most terrible misery will be inflicted on the proletariat, we exclaim and loudly call out to the revisionists of all countries: you are the cause of everything that is happening because you have deceived the workers concerning the nature of capitalism and the bourgeoisie. And to the radicals, especially to the German centrists, we shall say: you share the responsibility for all of this because you rejected mass action.

To summarize, then: we can say that reformism and radicalism, that is, the forms taken by the domestic politics of the socialist parties during the last few years, are responsible for the proletariat's powerlessness when confronted by the outbreak of the war.

The weakness of politics within a national framework versus the ruling classes is the cause of the International's weakness versus imperialism.

The proletariat has suffered the deleterious influence of various factors: the struggles for corporative and national reforms by means of trade unions and parties; the reformism which, while imperialism was approaching, promised reforms by means of an alliance with the bourgeois parties and wanted to cooperate with imperialist colonialism; the old radicalism which, despite the fact that the masses had unleashed mass actions on a national scale, detoured them by depriving them of a general understanding of imperialism and prevented them from attaining the understanding that the only defense against imperialism is international action, that no single national party can fight against world imperialism without the other national parties and that, therefore, international mass action is necessary. Under the influence of all these factors, the proletariat collaborated in the war effort and practically lost its sanity; it is not making use of its enormous and powerful organizations and bows to imperialism without resistance; it is divided into as many parties as there are nations and the International is torn apart and destroyed. Finally, social democracy has betrayed its own cause in the most miserable manner and has put itself at the mercy of a future containing the most serious dangers.¹⁶

Capital has spiritually developed much more rapidly than the proletariat.

The powerful bourgeoisie has done everything to ensure its own prosperity.

As always, the slaves have not noticed the increasing power of their masters. As always, they have not developed their own power to oppose the power of their masters.

9. The Revolutionary Marxist Tendency

Mass Action on a National and an International Scale

This is how the first imperialist world war started.

Now the proletariat can see, it can feel in its own body, it can understand in its mind, what imperialism is. If imperialism has developed too quickly for the proletariat's understanding, economic development is having the effect, as always, of getting the proletariat to finally begin to understand.

And now the proletariat is going to begin to judge which method of struggle and which tendency within the workers movement are correct.

So that the proletariat may have an opportunity to decide, we must yet speak of a tendency which we have until now passed over in silence because it has exercised no influence and has therefore made no contribution to determining the proletariat's attitude, its future and the future of the International.

Besides the radical and reformist tendencies, there is yet another tendency in the International: ours, the one we defend in this booklet, the revolutionary tendency. It was a tendency with very few supporters in the International.

After imperialism clearly revealed its goal and its character, we were convinced that the working class had to begin a revolutionary struggle against the capitalist class in Europe and America. Imperialism—with its concomitant manifestations such as trusts, consortia and powerful employers' associations—implied an ever more powerful militarism, and always higher taxes and greater oppression for the working class; it also brought hunger, the economic impotence of the working class, a halt to social legislation, and the war, with the threat of an even more powerful imperialism in the future. When we became aware of all these consequences and when it became evident that all the world's bourgeois parties supported imperialism, it seemed obvious to us that only one kind of struggle was possible: revolutionary political struggle.

As of that moment, it was necessary to denounce and reject all compromises and all alliances with bourgeois parties. It was necessary to reject all complacency, as well as to refuse any posts in the government or its institutions.

All national politics had to be exclusively revolutionary.

And it became clear that the activity of the trade unions and of the parliamentary groups, such as it had been practiced until then, was no longer sufficient against the imperialism which unites all the parties of the bourgeoisie and now transforms them into one single entity. For this reason, in our opinion, propaganda had to be carried out in all countries for mass action, *rather than for the other kinds of obsolete activities*: propaganda at all political meetings, in all party journals, in the newspapers, in the parliaments. And above all, it was necessary to conduct propaganda in favor of the most powerful of all mass actions: the general strike.¹

But since capitalism simultaneously drives every nation to attack the proletariat, this mass action against imperialism must not be only national, but also and above all international.

Imperialism had to be the cardinal point of all politics, in the whole press, in all the assemblies, in all writings: the cardinal point of the whole struggle.

For during that period imperialism was the principle factor oppressing the workers and blocking all progress. Imperialism threatened the working class with regression and destruction.

Imperialism was, for the near future and even for the distant future, the point that dominated everything.

That was where the battlefield and the front were located.

Imperialism—and nothing else: neither electoral law, nor social legislation (imperialism destroys the struggle for such legislation), nor customs duties, nor taxes, nor education, nor the Church—appeared in the eyes of the workers as the highest form of capitalism and as the battlefield.

And imperialism is not only the highest manifestation of capitalism which has yet appeared, it is also the ideal framework for its development. Imperialism is also the latest ideology of the bourgeoisie. It is the only ideal which remains. The religion of the bourgeoisie is dead, its philosophy is dead, its art is dead, but it has made its power, its crude violence and its world rule its ideal, its basis and its end, the alpha and omega of its class thought, its faith and its ideal. Imperialism, its national and world power, that is, the power of the rulers' groups, are its gods.

Against this, against imperialism in its material and spiritual manifestations, we are convinced, the entire material and spiritual struggle of the workers must be brought to bear.

The workers must oppose the brutality of the violence of imperialism with their own material force, mass action, the general strike; they must oppose the imperialist ideal with their own socialist ideal.

Nor are we only saying this just now. Perhaps you know that the party to which the author has the honor—and the luck—of belonging has been saying this for many years.

But now the proletariat can judge for itself. Today it can compare reformism, centrism and our tendency, the Marxist tendency.

Today it sees the nature and deeds of reformism.

Of all the promises of reformism, not even one has been realized.

Neither universal suffrage, nor retirement pensions, nor better social legislation, nor a better fiscal system has been achieved in any imperialist European State where all, or some, of these demands were put forth by the workers.²

Of all these promises, none will be realized in the future when the States will be impoverished due to the war and the workers will be crushed under the burden of taxes.

The reformists supported imperialism. And when the war began, they went along with it and gave it their full support.

And the radicals?

They have not publicly accused the government of lying to and deceiving the working people in order to enroll them as soldiers for the benefit of the capitalists; they have not exposed the ruling class's policy of robbery; by voting for the war credits, they even marched alongside the bourgeoisie with their lies, with their hypocrisy, against the proletariat.

The radicals have discouraged the masses, they have done nothing to prevent the war. And when the war began, almost all of them voted for it.

When we consider all the speeches and all the articles of the German radicals of the last twenty or thirty years, all their declarations that the proletariat was the sole guarantor, the sole defender of the peace, in which they claimed that the governments would not dare to start a war because of fear of the proletariat and of a revolution after the war, and when we compare all this flood of words with their inertia, with their efforts to prevent mass action,

with their votes for war credits, then we are reminded of other German parliamentarians: the liberals of 1848.

Just as in that previous era the liberals bowed down before the princes and the nobility, so today the radical social democrats bow down before the Kaiser, the princes, the junkers and the bourgeoisie.

The same verbal valor before the battle! The same cowardice during the fight!

It is always the same slave mentality.

We calmly hurl such grave accusations because the conduct of the radicals deserves it; we do so not in order to offend them, but to show the proletariat, and above all the German proletariat, that in the proletariat's struggle against imperialism it is not possible to go half-way, you must be either with it or against it. We want to show that there is only one efficacious weapon against imperialism, the revolutionary action of the masses themselves.

For the radicals have displayed such cowardice, which so openly contradicts their entire past, because they felt that the masses were not behind them.

Their isolation, that is, the fact that they did not feel that they had the support of the masses—for which they were themselves responsible—terrified them. And then they betrayed the cause of the proletariat. And what is true of the reformists is also true of the radicals; and in the other countries, outside of Germany, it was even worse!

If one looks at France, Guesde became a government minister; in England, Hyndman agitated the workers against Germany; in the Netherlands, the radical president of the social democratic workers party proposed in the party journal, *Het Volk*, that the Netherlands should declare war on Germany.

That is how the reformists and the radicals acted, and thus weakened the struggle of the proletariat.

Against all of this we sought to oppose our propaganda and, as far as possible, we have done what we can. We are few in number, we have little power. We are thus unable to carry out the greater part of our desires.

In the first place, from the moment that the effects of imperialism became evident, we advised the proletariat to break with all the bourgeois parties.

Secondly, we always conducted propaganda for mass action, alongside the usual parliamentary and economic action.

But from the moment that the threat of war emerged on the occasion of the Balkan War and the growing tension between Russia and Austria, we proposed at the 1912 Basel Congress that the workers of the whole world, following the directives of the International, should carry out a protest strike which would have served to prepare them and as a warning to their governments.³

Immediately upon the outbreak of the war in 1914, in our opinion the workers of the whole world should have all rebelled at the same time. On Saturday evening, when Austria's ultimatum to Serbia was made public, the bourgeoisie and the students of Berlin demonstrated in favor of war. On the following day, Sunday, the German proletariat, with its millions of members, should have been called upon by the party to demonstrate against the war in every German city.⁴

The proletarians—first of all, those of all the powers dragged into the war, but also those of the other countries—mobilized by the International, should have, on that Sunday, or should this have proven to be impossible, on the following day, Monday, demonstrated against the war in every city in Europe. This is what we immediately wrote in our party's journal, *De Tribune*.

At the instigation of the International and the national parties, these demonstrations should have been repeated daily. Every day, on an increasing scale. Yes, naturally, they would have been opposed by the police and the army, it would have been necessary to begin again with greater force and, if necessary, with violence; it would also have been necessary—this would have taken place spontaneously—to reinforce these demonstrations with general strikes everywhere, especially in the countries directly involved. And these actions should have continued until Serbia gave its response, until the session of the Reichstag and the other parliamentary bodies that had to deliberate concerning the war. In these sessions, it would have been necessary to reject all war credits everywhere, in every country, even in the neutral ones. For under imperialism mobilization for defense is nothing but preparation for imperialist war of aggression.

And in every parliament, a speech should have been delivered, whose content should have been more or less as follows:

“This war is a war of aggression on the part of this country. You want to conquer more territory. This is why we are refusing your war credits. This war is a war of aggression waged by every country, one side against the other. This is why, with our brothers from all the other countries, we are refusing all your war credits. It is not just a war of aggression waged by all countries but it is also an act of aggression on the part of world capital against the world proletariat for the purpose of subjecting it to yet more exploitation, oppressing it to a still greater degree and, finally, destroying the proletarians as individuals and as a fighting class. Perhaps we are still too weak to prevent a war, but we, the proletarians of the world, from now on threaten you with the prospect of a revolution to put an end to the war.”

And while the party's representatives were speaking in this manner, mass action should have been carried on until the war was brought to an end.

That is what the Marxists would have done if we had the power to do so.

And we have agitated for this course of action, to the greatest possible extent, in the Netherlands, and this is what we have prepared for, as much as possible.⁵

We believe that, if the tactic we have been recommending for many years were to have been adopted in every country and brought to bear against imperialism, if the danger of imperialism were to have been denounced in every country and, consequently, if all relations with the liberals and the bourgeois parties were to have been broken off, and, finally, if great

political and economic struggles had impelled the masses to mass action—in Germany, for example, at the time of the struggles for Prussian electoral reform—then the governments, out of fear of the proletariat's stance in the event of world war, would have been more prudent and perhaps the war could have been avoided.

Maybe this would have been of no use and maybe we would not have been able to hold back the governments from taking the road of war. Maybe the masses of the proletariat would not even have followed us.

But we believe it would have unfolded in the following manner. We believe that, if from the very first moment of the Balkan conflict, the International were to have called upon the workers of the entire world to carry out a protest strike, hundreds of thousands of workers would have followed such a directive. For there were already 160,000 workers on strike in France alone during that period.

We believe that, if in July 1914, in Berlin and in all the cities of Germany, hundreds of thousands of workers summoned by the party suddenly poured onto the streets while there was still time, and that, if in Petrograd and Moscow, in Riga and Odessa, in Lodz and Warsaw, in Kiev and Karkov, it had been known that hundreds of thousands and even millions of organized German workers were demonstrating to prevent themselves and the Russian workers from massacring each other, we believe that in Russia as well hundreds of thousands of Russian workers would have joined street demonstrations.

We believe that if the news that millions of Germans and hundreds of thousands, or even millions of Russians did not want to cut each other's throats, it would have resounded throughout all of Europe, the cry of the International would have been followed by at least hundreds of thousands of organized workers in France, Italy, Austria, Scandinavia, Belgium and the Netherlands. We believe that even in England⁶ many workers would have mobilized in response to this call. We believe that many unorganized workers would have mobilized everywhere.

A proletariat which can stage a general strike for a minor demand, for a wage hike, for suffrage reform, can also undertake a general strike against war.

We believe that if the resistance were to daily grow stronger and more vehement in Germany, Russia and France—in the countries which first had to make the decision to go to war—we believe that many other countries would have also witnessed big strikes.

Perhaps we would not have been strong enough to prevent the war. Capital, high finance—which rules all and to which all are subject, both petit and big bourgeoisie—imperialism with its idealism, with its nationalism and its slaves, are still too powerful. This is probably true.

But if we had resisted to the end and until the last moment, if in every parliament and around the thrones of the emperors and kings the fierce refusal of the world proletariat had sounded, which had rebelled for the first time and at the first opportunity and had refused to allow itself to be murdered in the exclusive interest of capital, then, at least, all of us would have done our duty. For we would have preserved our unity, the highest organization of the future, propaganda for the future after the war, and it would have been stronger, gigantic and indestructible. Then we would have been the pole star, the only star showing the way to all the world's oppressed who are today still in the dark. Then we would have acted in harmony

with the evolution of capitalism which, by way of imperialism, pits the world proletariat against world capital.

Then we would have made this struggle, and perhaps its defeat, into the foundation for the revolution after the war. Then we would have laid the cornerstone for future victory. Then the International would have been a real International.

None of this took place. Due to the ignorance and small-mindedness of the workers, due to the tricks of the reformists and as a result of the cowardice and indecisiveness of the radicals, the International was defeated.

As a result, the Second International went to its destruction because it was not international. It was nothing but a conglomeration of national organizations, rather than an international institution. It proclaimed itself to be international, but it did not think and act internationally. It was nothing more than a complex of organizations which were not international and which did not act internationally.

Its internationalism did not go beyond what was necessary in the days before imperialism existed.

While capital, with its trusts and its banks, with its worldwide industrial associations, was working on an increasingly international scale, social democracy remained national. While capital, despite its division into the factions which started the war, began a world war for the possession of the world, while it formed vast alliances of nations for this purpose so as to be able to jointly divide up the earth in opposition to the other alliances, the proletariat, self-contained within national borders, continued to be preoccupied with petty national questions.

While capital, powerful and at the height of its glory, was posing the problem of how to conquer the earth and its inhabitants and how to transform it in a capitalist sense through action, struggle and conquest, the proletariat, small-minded and insignificant, continued to be preoccupied solely with wage hikes, reducing the length of the working day, and so-called labor legislation—and all of this within the limits of its own nation.

While the most powerful minds of the bourgeoisie—admittedly frustrated and mere vulgar and contemptible materialists, with only one equally contemptible goal: profit—embrace the whole universe, conceive and realize their plans for power and world markets, the minds of the workers and their leaders are organized as national rather than international powers.

While everywhere, in the large and even in the small States, international capital was by its precision, its perfection and its speed, and by means of an incomparable organization which compels universal admiration, magnificently preparing for the world war between its component parts, against the world proletariat and against the inhabitants of the whole world, the workers' International did not even think of defending itself from this war. It did not even arm itself.

If the international proletariat would have had only one percent of the organizational force, the consciousness of its own goal and the extreme alacrity with which capital had armed in expectation of war for years in advance and which it proved capable of setting in motion during those two days when it was necessary for its plans of conquest, the invasion of Belgium—then everything still would have turned out well.

But the proletariat did nothing and foresaw nothing.

Capital was immensely active on a world scale. The International was passive. It did nothing that it should have done and that the era required. It did not rise to worldwide action.

As a result, the International was only what the proletariat always had been, a confused mass which had allowed the great events of history to fall on its head.

The International was rotten. It was useless and without any content. It was composed of parties that were not internationalist. The International only united all those parties in appearance. The workers, its members, were for the most part a mass of individuals interested in reforms who allowed themselves to be diverted and manipulated by appearances. Few were those who understood the true course of development and who wanted to take action.

Now that they have an idea of what imperialism is, and now that they must begin to understand what imperialism is, the workers themselves must realize which tendency was a better guide for them.

The workers must now ask themselves how they can build a real International in the future and how to avoid another catastrophe.

10. The Future

We have seen the reasons why the International collapsed. We have illustrated its characteristics which resulted in its collapse before imperialism and we have indicated the changes it must undergo if it wants to achieve its goal in another form. Now all that remains for us is to cast our glance towards the future in order to try to understand the course it will have to follow and to point out the road it must take.

How will the future of the International unfold? How will it defeat imperialism, both nationally and internationally?

Will it be possible for it, and the masses, to move towards autonomous action?

After this war, will the proletariat raise itself to a higher level in terms of intellect, character, will, knowledge, idealism and valor?

All these questions, like the future of capitalism, depend on the evolution of capitalism: that is, most importantly, on the following questions: Will imperialism endure? Will war always be with us? Are arms control, disarmament and peace possible?

We shall respond to these questions first.

Within capitalism, there are two movements which are fused into one.

One is the movement of expansion of ever more powerful forms of production throughout the world. This movement is highly advanced and is constantly growing at an ever faster pace.

The other movement is the spread of national capital and the fusion of national capitals in international capital.¹

The tendency of these two combined movements is leading capitalism to become world capitalism. National capital is merging into a single capital and the entire earth will be subjected to international world capital.

The whole developmental process of imperialism is capitalism's process of development towards the extension of capital throughout the world, and its internationalization. Imperialism and war merely constitute one stage of this development and are means to make capital international, and then global.

Since, therefore, the developmental process of imperialism is an international and even a global process, we consider capital's developmental process in the light of its effect upon the entire earth, first the process of expansion, and then the internationalization of capital.

Industry became the principle source of surplus value. Today it far surpasses agriculture, which creates only a little surplus value, and does so slowly.

In the major highly-developed countries, in England, Germany, France and the United States, each year a quantity of surplus value is produced which, under the prevailing capitalist conditions, far surpasses the investment possibilities within those countries. These masses of capital tend to leave their home countries and must therefore be exported in order to be employed in foreign countries with the attraction of an enormous profit which is much greater than that which could be obtained in the mother country. These masses of capital are thus disseminated throughout the entire world. But the conditions and the development of capitalist production are very different in the capital-exporting countries. Their conditions of production are as divergent as can be imagined. England has numerous colonies, it is almost totally industrialized, it has practically no agriculture and is therefore obliged to export industrial products, to employ its capital overseas and to import agricultural products.

Germany has few colonies, its industry is booming and growing more powerful every year, its agriculture is losing importance, and it therefore aspires to acquire more colonies to which it could export its capital and industrial products, and from which it could import raw materials.

France still has an important agricultural sector, it is less industrialized than Germany or England, but possesses important finance capital. It therefore needs colonies and spheres of influence for the export of this capital.

The United States is becoming an increasingly industrialized country. Its capitalism is growing at an astounding rate. It must expand, and has begun to do so.

In all these countries, capitalism is growing from year to year on an enormous scale by means of colossal productive forces, but in different ways and under different conditions. This is the situation which prevails in the most important capitalist countries. But how different the situation is in the other countries!

Russia is still almost totally agrarian but its land conceals unsuspected riches, and it possesses a powerful domestic market. All of these factors allow for the expectation of an extraordinary capitalist take-off.

Nor shall we overlook the small countries, some of which have attained with their industries a certain degree of capitalist prosperity and some of which are on the road to such prosperity: Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden and Norway.

A rapidly swelling flood of capital is pouring from all these countries and is being projected all over the world seeking employment. But the conditions of production are very different in these countries, as are the relations between industry and agriculture and, therefore, for all these reasons, these countries are very different from one another.

Finally, there are all the countries which import capital from the most powerful industrialized capitalist countries.

These are generally agrarian countries which have not yet derived enough capital from their agriculture to develop their own industries. They therefore need foreign capital for industrialization and capitalist organization; they need capital to build railroads, canals, ports, warehouses and factories. They also need capital to exploit their mines. They can, however, export food products and industrial raw materials. The differences between countries of this kind are of much greater importance than the differences between capital-exporting countries.

They belong to every stage of development.

We must begin with those countries that have a State which is undergoing a period of transition from a primarily agrarian State to a primarily industrial State. These States are beginning to export capital, an example of which is provided by the eastern United States. Others are still primarily exporters of food and raw materials, like Canada, Australia and South America. Another kind of country has, alongside a small intensive agricultural sector, an agricultural industry oriented towards the export market, by means of which the big indigenous capitalists or the capitalists of the most powerful nations—like England, the Netherlands, France—exploit the population and prevent capital from falling into the hands of the natives. China and the British, French and Dutch Indies belong in this latter category. Finally, we must consider those regions—principally in central Africa—where only primitive subsistence agriculture exists and where the European capitalists extract raw materials.

All these countries to which capital is presently flowing or beginning to flow are totally different from one another by virtue of their conditions of production, their degree of development, their wealth, their accessibility to foreign capital, their political conditions and the various characteristics of their populations.

Similar in this respect to the capital-exporting countries, these countries are as different from one another as the former are from one another in terms of the power of their capital—constant capital and variable capital.

And among these countries, there are still many which are powerless and defenseless, open to looting by capitalism.

However, in all these capital-importing countries, in the countries exporting to them and in the countries without any capitalist power, the process of capital's international collaboration is only in its beginnings. A small part of these countries and their businesses is exploited by international capital. The majority of the capital from the mother country invested in the colonies and spheres of influence is of *one kind only*: homogeneous national capital.

It is true that much foreign capital is employed in the young agrarian countries; but this capital is rapidly being supplanted, as in North America, by national capital.

It is true that international *trusts* have been formed by national corporations, but these national capitals frequently continue to act like enemies and competitors towards each other, each desiring the lion's share for itself. This is what is happening in the great maritime trust linking Europe and America.

It is true that gigantic trusts composed of national capitals have also gone on to form international bodies; they are fighting, however, against the gigantic trusts of the other countries. This is the case with regard to the Anglo-Dutch consortium, the "Dordrecht-Königliche-Shell-Gruppe" (Royal Dutch Shell) which, with its oil monopoly, is waging a bloody war against the American "Standard Oil Company".

It is true that, even in the weakest and smallest States, a great deal of foreign capital has penetrated—for example, in the Netherlands, German capital; but in all these States there is a strong aspiration to found their own industries, and foreign capital represents a small minority interest.

It is true that in the countries in need of capital, a great deal of national capital is imported; but much of this national capital is still national capital at war with other national capitals. And this international or foreign capital is a vanishingly small minority compared to national capital.

And in all this confusion of countries in which all have very different degrees of development and national particularities and among which there is no equilibrium, internationalization is still only the exceptional case.

And how is capital set in motion in all these countries? In England, France, Germany, the United States, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Spain, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Russia, Japan, Canada, Argentina, South Africa, Australia, the British and Dutch Indies, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, the Congo, British and German Africa, Hong Kong and Shanghai, Canton and the other parts of China? **By means of the nation, which exercises power, by means of the nation as a unity, as a whole, as a power.**

The capital created by the wage workers is born and is mushrooming in all the powerful capitalist countries of Europe and America; and, impelled by the force of the nation, this capital flows to new territories. In all the still insufficiently capitalized countries which are only partly industrialized, such as certain regions of North America, South America, Australia and Japan, capital is saved in the metropolis or is further augmented to make the nation strong from the capitalist point of view and for industrial development.

In the countries of Asia and Africa, the weakest from the capitalist point of view, those countries which are exploited by foreign capital, capital formed in them escapes to enrich the

distant nations which rule them. In this manner capital leaves Persia, India, Central Asia, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, the Congo and all of Central Africa.

But every country, with the exception of those from the category described above, which are too weak, are either trying to become powerful or more powerful capitalist countries or are trying to conquer the leading power position.

England, Germany, France and the United States all aspire to supreme capitalist power; Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and Japan all aspire to greater power.

The totally or partly agrarian countries aspire to become independent capitalist States with their own industries; here we can mention Russia, Canada, Argentina, Australia and South Africa.

Besides all these countries, there are others which have yet to found their nationality upon a capitalist base: Austria-Hungary, the Balkans, Turkey and China.

The subject colonies themselves—British India, the Dutch East Indies and Egypt—are beginning to aspire to become independent capitalist powers.

Everywhere, however, the nation is the motor force and at the same time the foundation upon which and by means of which capitalism can develop. And the internationalization of capital is still weak everywhere. It is precisely the capitalist countries which are most powerful internationally which have the most especially national capitals.

And it is especially the countries which are in the process of becoming powerful capitalist countries, such as the United States, Russia, Canada, Australia, and the South American States, which are trying to fight against international capital and become national-capitalist.²

And in the weakest capitalist countries, like China, Turkey, and Persia, international capital is national in the sense that instead of combining it fights against its counterparts (thus, in Persia, English and Russian capital; in China, the capital of every country, etc.).

One may therefore observe a general aspiration on the part of capital to become national.³

And all nations have their own, mutually opposed interests.

The powerful capitalist and industrial nations, every last one of them, want to export as much capital as possible. All of them want to seize the raw-material and food-producing countries. This is why they come into conflict; all of them want to seize the wealthiest countries.

The capital-importing nations want to free themselves from the capital-exporting nations; they want to become capital exporters themselves. Therefore they come into conflict with those nations. Countries rich in raw materials and food, like the United States and Japan, want the same thing. Therefore they come into conflict with one another.

Those nations still lacking a secure foundation, like China, Turkey and the Balkan States, want to become free nations, they want to be independent of the powerful capitalist nations. Therefore they come into conflict with those nations.

And the subject colonies want to become free and powerful countries from capitalist point of view. Therefore their interests conflict with those of their exploiters.

Every nation wants supreme power, or to become powerful and independent, by means of capitalist development and the subjection of the workers to capital.

Therefore the interests of each nation are opposed to the interests of every other nation.

Such is the spectacle offered by the world: strong capitalist nations, weak capitalist nations, dependent nations, subject nations, nations which have yet to be founded. All, however, aspire to capitalist power. There are also impotent nations, such as black Africa, which cannot do anything yet and are only the playthings and victims of looting by the powerful nations.

Capital's expansion is proceeding at an ever more rapid pace and is assuming ever greater importance; it is caused by the ceaseless, massive growth of the productive forces. Therefore, the interests involved are always greater, more powerful and more violent; conflicts grow more numerous and become more serious.

But how has capital managed to develop until today? How has it spread throughout the earth? How has it attained power on the national level?

The answer is the one we have already provided: by means of conflicts, torrents of blood, and murder. Capitalism, which brings the earth science, technology, social consciousness, improved methods of labor, greater wealth and, at the end of its life, socialism, can only attain its goals by these methods: murder and war.

To reach its goals, to realize its mission, to spread itself over the earth and to become international, capital splits into adverse parts which fight against each other, against the weak peoples, and against the proletariat.

Capitalism murders, oppresses and enslaves the weak peoples, it makes war against itself, it makes war break out among its members—individuals as well as nations—it continuously frees itself of its weakest members by means of destruction, war and murder, and, at the same time, it murders the proletarians and uses them as murderers.

In its imperialist struggle it hurls itself upon the world proletariat.

It prospers in an extraordinary bloodbath of its own members, of the weakest individuals, the weakest peoples and the proletarians. It is wading through a sea of blood to reach its goals, and this war is yet another proof of this.

Never before have conflict and war formed the means of capitalism's development to such a degree as they do today under imperialism. Nor could it be otherwise.

For the development of capitalism, no other way and no other road besides those which have been employed for centuries will be discovered today. Now that the accumulation of capital has become so engorged in all countries, and is growing at a rapid and even unprecedented rate; now that the will to expansion has grown enormously; now that the internationalization of capital has begun to break through all national borders, even though it is only in its nascent

state; now that the nations, the national governments, the armed nations are the principle supports and driving forces possessed by the capitalists, or which they are trying to possess, throughout the world, to serve as the basis of and for the increase of their capital or to preserve their exclusive rule over the entire earth, from Japan to the Netherlands, from Russia to South Africa, now there can be no other way. Today, like yesterday, development takes place by way of war.

In a word, wherever the struggle between interests has become most intense and wherever expansion has become most necessary, war will never end.

On the contrary, since the accumulation and development of capital, which by means of a technology which is ceaselessly perfected, and by means of the proletariat which grows more numerous every day, is advancing at an always increasing rate, conflict becomes more violent, armaments of greater importance, war more terrible and hideous. This is our conclusion.

Capitalism grows and spreads throughout the world by means of the force employed by nations.

The internationalization of capitalism is still insignificant. Contrasted with national capital, international capital is still clearly in a minority position.

National capital—capital formed and directed by nations—is still the predominant and decisive form of capital. And each nation and each national capital all have different interests.

The only way to settle this conflict of interests is armament, and then war.

The bourgeoisie, much of the social democracy, the reformists and the radicals, all of them are propagandizing for world peace, for disarmament and for arms control agreements.

Anyone who preaches peace and disarmament will have to show us the proof that peace and disarmament are possible and that the interests of nations and national capitals are all identical. Or, in support of their position, they will have to prove that capital is not mostly national but international.

If they cannot prove this, then it will be certain that disarmament and peace are still impossible. **And they cannot prove it.** They have not been able to prove it even once, not even approximately.

This refutation is decisive.

What we have just said should be enough. For the opposed capitalist interests of the nations impels them towards war. But since this little booklet must serve not merely to present the workers with the broad outlines of the development of imperialism and the class struggle, but is also intended to contribute weaponry for polemic and debate among the workers, we shall also set forth some arguments against the pacifist movement and the slogan of disarmament.

Those who aspire to peace, to disarmament and to arms control, and who propagandize for these goals, must prove that these objectives can be realized.

And this proof must be undertaken not with vain phrases, with desires and hopes or vague slogans, but with precision, with examples and facts; these people must show us what means of development other than conflict exists under capitalism and what principle besides power. The peoples of the earth are very diverse, all of them live in different conditions and have very different powers as well; all of them ardently desire power and all of them have divergent interests, they are in a permanent state of disequilibrium both within their own borders and in respect to other peoples. The supporters of peace, disarmament and arms control must show us how these peoples can coexist harmoniously and without conflict.

They must tell us precisely and with documentation derived from political and economic practice, how they imagine the organization of the world and the distribution of wealth. Which parts of the world should England, Germany, Russia, France, America and Japan have? Which parts to exploit, how much power and which sphere of influence? According to what principles should the world be divided? And who will be the judge, and who will be the referee?

How can trust be established between the two great powers and all the others, in such a way that it will not be necessary to resort to ever more powerful weaponry?

All of this is revealed to be impossible as soon as one concretely faces the issues. Until today no one has been able to even point towards the road which could lead to disarmament, to conflict-free development, to the division of the world which could please every State and to harmonious equilibrium.

Until today, under capitalist rule, power is the sole principle allowing the division of the earth and the development of capitalism.

Under capitalism, in its contemporary form, there is no means other than brute force for the purpose of expansion, growth and internationalization.

They speak of rights. But why should Germany have more rights than England in Mesopotamia? Why should one of these countries have more rights than the other in Mesopotamia? Might makes right. It is violence and force which decide. The proponents of arms control must show that another kind of right exists.

They say: we must divide China, etc., into spheres of influence, we must give a piece to England, to Russia, to Germany, to France, etc. But, even disregarding the fact that such a repartition would only be possible as a consequence of a war, and therefore that only force would be decisive, the causes of the friction between the great powers would still be of great import, the spheres of influence would be of unequal value and would quickly be transformed into the causes, the objects and the battlefields of new conflicts.

They speak of free trade. But how is trade born in primitive countries like those of central Africa? By means of violence, murder and war. Only murder compels the weak populations to produce rubber and other similar commodities. Who will have to commit the murders and who will conduct the war, Germany or England? Only force can decide.

But trade is far from being the most important goal. One of the most important goals is the export of capital in order to create new capital. Another is the construction of railroads, ports and factories. And how is capital exported to China, Persia, Morocco, Tripoli, central Asia,

Mongolia and Korea? How are the foundations created for capitalist production, the rule of capital and the enslavement of indigenous populations? By means of violence and expropriation. But the Chinese, the Persians, the Moroccans, etc., do not want to be expropriated or to be transformed into proletarians. Therefore, they must be expropriated and their resistance must be crushed. How must this expropriation be carried out? Who should be the expropriator?

Violence and war make the decision. The bourgeoisie and the socialists who speak of peace must show how trade and capital export can expand without violence.

They say: communication. Communication is the connection between the peoples and is effectively international. The rail lines and sea lanes unite all nations. But the rail lines and the sea lanes are, for the most part, in the hands of national capitals which are competitors, that is, enemies. Furthermore, big capital is avidly seeking sources of surplus value, that is, raw materials, wage workers and commodity production. This is why it makes war, communications being only a marginal source of surplus value. And the big capitalists know that they will conquer the means of communication from the very moment they become master of the territory, the raw materials and the indigenous peoples who have been transformed into wage workers.

But is it not ridiculous to look for unity while so many interests and such a diversity of forces still carry so much weight? While so many weak peoples can still be massacred so easily? Is it not ridiculous, at this time?

If England believes it can take over the whole world, why should it come to an agreement with Germany? If England wins, why should it share with Germany? If Germany is victorious, how could it cease to persist in its notion that it could achieve still more thanks to war?

If Russia and the United States were to take note of the almost inexhaustible resources of their lands, which must be yet further enlarged, why should they unite with others and thus decrease their share of the loot?

As long as Germany believes that its militarism can crush all its adversaries, why should it share its power with the other large States?

As long as there are huge territories to be divided, such as China, Asia Minor, the Dutch Indies, parts of central Asia and Africa, as long as there are still weak peoples to crush, as long as it has faith in its own force, it will make war and empire into its cultural ideal.

They say: a federation of States must be formed. A federation of the States of Europe. But the interests of Germany, Russia and England are contradictory. There could be alliances between States: Germany with central Europe, Germany with Russia, Germany with France, Germany with England; but in every case the goal would be to more securely wage war and to more vigorously exploit the weak.

It is maintained that the sacrifices in money and human lives are too great. We have shown that the billions spent by imperialism in wars of conquest in Mesopotamia, the Congo, China and the Dutch Indies will be recompensed with billions in interest. It will have to wait many

years; the proletariat will have to endure terrible sufferings; but capital will be one hundred percent reimbursed.⁴

Furthermore, a new war and new armaments can again increase wages, since the forces of production will also expand.

Whoever thinks that capitalism can change proves how little they know about the soul and psyche of capitalism, when imperialism is still in its beginnings! We have shown that the general spiritual tendency of capitalism is such that it does not, nor can it, reject any means to attain its end, which is the extension of capitalism over the whole earth!

It is the nature of capitalism to form surplus value in such a way that it constantly increases. Surplus value which, in a constantly increasing fashion, forms more surplus value again. Therefore: expansion, extension. This is the nature of our society. All that is capitalist must therefore obey this tendency. Capital only exists thanks to private ownership of the means of production. And since they are possessed by only a few, capital bears within itself, necessarily, conflict. Conflict between individuals and between the groups in which individuals are united: nations. Therefore, he who obeys the nature of capital, must also obey the principle of private property, and must implement it.

It is true, of course, that at the end of this terrible war wide sectors of the bourgeoisie will feel the horror of imperialism and will seriously aspire to peace.

But the question remains: can they bring about peace?

The problem is not what these bourgeois think, but what they can do. The direction of capital's economy and politics is in the hands of magnates of industry and high finance. They are not afraid of war but use it for their own ends: the exploitation of the world and the enslavement of the earth's inhabitants in order to turn them into proletarians.

War allows them, over the long term, to carry out this exploitation. It is their best and most forceful instrument, which never fails. It puts the earth and the workers in their power.

And that is why these magnates of high finance and industry represent the power which allows capitalism to attain its goals and which makes capital always fertile and everywhere in conformance with its nature. They are the managers and producers of capital's power of expansion, and all the other capitalists, as well as all the other classes which live off of this capitalism and its surplus value, can do nothing but follow and obey them.

These invisible forces, unknown to the mass of men, these magnates of high finance and the big industrial cartels, do not govern the world by virtue of their political and economic power, but because they fully and perfectly represent the nature of capitalism.

Capital's power of expansion, concentrated and organized, resides in the gigantic masses of capital of these invisible forces. They themselves obey this power of expansion and the nature of their capital.

And all the men who live off of surplus value obey them.

Only the proletariat, which does not tend towards exploitation but towards socialism, to another end entirely, and only for this reason, can oppose imperialism.

One can now see clearly and distinctly what will happen when the war ends.

Every nation will bury itself under a mountain of weaponry. The whole earth will bristle with armaments. And this stockpiling of weapons will be accompanied by an extraordinary pacifist hypocrisy.

And every country's parliament will be besieged with demands for expenditures on weapons more powerful than any previously produced. And all the members of the bourgeois parties, whether friends or enemies of peace, will grant their approval.

And when war once again approaches, infinitely larger and more powerful armies than those fielded today will confront one another. Once again the struggle will resume, even more bloody than before, for world domination.

It could not be otherwise. This war once again proves that all individuals, those of the capitalist classes and those who obey them, pushed forward by the instinct for self-preservation and by the social instincts which tend to preserve the society in which they live and with which they form a single whole, will not refuse to sacrifice their blood and their money if what is at stake is the further extension of capitalism, the sole basis of their existence, through conflict.

Even if the capitalists wanted disarmament, peace and arms control, they would not be able to realize their desire. Capitalism has its own laws which are consequences of its very nature. Its principle laws are conflict and expansion.

Once again: the bourgeoisie, the reformists, and the radical socialists must demonstrate either that capital is principally international or non-national, or that the interests of the world's nations are identical.

And they must also demonstrate that today, in the relations which still hold sway over individuals and nations, the will of the capitalists and of the members of capitalist society in general can freely steer capitalism in a different way than the way which is still currently prescribed by the laws of capitalism. They cannot, however.

While the world war is still wreaking havoc, the reformists and the radicals, in agreement with the bourgeoisie, are seeking a means with which they can once again detour, weaken and deceive the proletariat after the war.

The radicals, the reformists and the bourgeoisie have found a means by which they can once again detour the workers from the revolution and induce them to trust the bourgeoisie rather than their own forces.

This means is disarmament.

This means is world peace.

Quite obviously, now as before, and especially after this horrible war, the bourgeoisie will pretend to love and to desire peace.

And all along, all of them will be arming to the teeth. And all of this for the purpose of putting the proletariat to sleep.

And while the bourgeoisie is dissimulating in this way and is celebrating more than ever before with words of peace, the reformists once again find the occasion for marching alongside the bourgeoisie to traffic with it in elections, to seal compromises, to get votes and power. And all of these noble things can be accomplished because the bourgeoisie wants peace!

This is the purpose of peace, disarmament and the reformists. And for their part—since the bourgeoisie has an interest in disarmament and wants disarmament!!—the radicals will bide their time awaiting the occasion to restrain the proletariat so that it does not turn to revolutionary action. This is the purpose of disarmament.

We already see signs of these maneuvers in every country.⁵

These signs can already be discerned in the newspapers and journals of the radicals. Kautsky has proclaimed the slogans of disarmament, an end to imperialism and an end to the arms race.⁶

These will be the slogans which everyone will understand. From Kautsky to the last of the reformists, they will be the slogans of the future. They will also be the slogans that will lead to unity with the bourgeoisie. Everyone who deceived the proletariat and led it astray, everyone who gave their consent to the war, everyone who desecrated socialism will be reconciled under these slogans and will forgive each other for their sins. They will be the slogans of the newly-unified International. And under these slogans, the International will become weaker, and all the national parties will become weaker as well.

In addition to all of this, while the bourgeoisie is arming to the teeth, it is also in favor of world peace, which will allow it to subject the weakest peoples of the colonies to an infinitely more intensive exploitation.

If capital could, without war, share out among its various units the colonies, spheres of influence and States like China, it would not need any expenditures on armies and navies and would be able to devote all its forces to the looting and exploitation of these countries. Only then would capital be able to grow on a stupendous scale.

The impossible goal of the pacifist movement is, behind all their fine words, the enslavement of the working class, and the subjection and exploitation of the weak peoples.

Insofar as it is not hypocrisy and self-deception, the pacifist movement is reactionary.

But whether it is hypocrisy and self-deception or a means of enslavement and reinforced exploitation, the pacifist movement is the other side of the imperialist coin.

The pacifist movement and imperialism are inseparable. They are the two faces of the same reality.

Just as social legislation and a growing interest in the plight of the workers are the other side of the coin of an ever more violent exploitation, of ever more intensive labor and an ever more embittered class struggle, the pacifist movement and the movement for disarmament are the other side of the coin of imperialism. The only difference is that the latter are even more sterile. Just as social legislation is the means to oppose the class struggle on a national scale, the pacifist movement is the means to oppose the class struggle on an international scale. The pacifist movement has become the world's religion, society's Church, the heart as opposed to reason, good against evil. It is, with the war, the ambiguity of this society based on exploitation in which evil is victorious.

The pacifist movement is, for the bourgeoisie and all those who share its views, the attempt to set capitalism on a path towards further development by way of imperialism, of war for absolute power and its total expansion over the whole world.

It is an attempt to prevent the proletariat from carrying out its mission and attaining the power necessary for the abolition of capitalism and establishing socialism while imperialism is still busy with its mission of spreading over the whole world.

The pacifist movement is the attempt, set in motion by the bourgeoisie, the reformists and the radicals, to throw the proletariat into the arms of imperialism at a time when the proletariat finds itself before the alternative of choosing between imperialism and socialism.

The pacifist movement is the attempt by the bourgeoisie and imperialism to crush the proletariat. This proletariat is indeed quite stupid and devoid of reason if it adopts this delusory future of peace under capitalism as its tactic! As for those who would thus put the proletariat to sleep, whether bourgeois or socialist, conscious or unconscious, what liars they are! The proletariat will condemn itself to passivity if it heeds these people. As is taking place today, it would allow itself to be throttled again by imperialism and war and it would allow itself to be crushed under the general trend of development. Once again, it would do nothing but reap a harvest of defeats and injuries.

The proletariat must be attentive not only to theory, but also to reality. It must pay attention to the guiding force which is big capital. The earth is already trembling in anticipation of the announcement of new wars to follow this one. And new abysses are already opening up. New conflicts are now being incubated that will be accompanied by the thunderous roar of artillery.

These conflicts can emerge if England, France and Russia seize Arabia, Mesopotamia, Syria and Armenia, perhaps the Bosphorus and probably the German colonies.

In the long run, however, Germany will not be able to endure such a state of affairs. It will rearm and seek new alliances.

If Germany wins, it will take Belgium, Poland, northern France, the French and Belgian colonies, and it will ensure its supremacy in Turkey, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and Arabia and it will have thus taken control of the continental route to British India. England cannot tolerate this.

England would rearm. France and Russia would do the same. If none of them is successful, they will all rearm yet again.

Immediately after this war, the world will witness an arms race the likes of which has never been seen before.

From within the current war, as we have already stated at the beginning of this text, a new war is being born, together with a new imperialism and a new and more intensive arms race.

Big States and small States, all the capitalist States, those which have already become such States and those which want to attain that status, lusting for the blood of the international proletariat, are lying in wait like ferocious beasts ready to pounce upon their prey: the weak peoples, and each other.

And when we once again face the conflicts that caused today's war, new wars will be imminent.

For the Balkan question has not been settled yet. Austria's nationalities are still not yet really and firmly established.

Russia still does not have free access to the Atlantic, Germany is not yet powerful enough, England is still too powerful. It suffices to mention the names of a few countries which could provoke new wars and the certainty of new arms races: Germany and the Netherlands, Belgium, Russia, Scandinavia, Austria-Hungary and Italy, the Balkans, Greece and Turkey, Abyssinia, Egypt, Persia, central Asia, China and Mongolia, British India, the French and Dutch Indies, central and southern Africa, Mexico and Central America, maybe South America and last but not least, the gigantic capitalist States of the United States, Russia and China.

All of these hotspots are still in a state of tension, nothing is in a state of equilibrium. And capital continues to increase. The need for expansion is increasing, but so is the need for independence; and this is true everywhere.

And all interests clash. Everywhere, and they will for many years.

It can no longer be doubted that imperialism has made its triumphant debut. The capitalist expansion of the powerful States clashes with the consciousness and the will to independence of the weakest and still powerless peoples. The various capitals clash with each other. Violent global confrontations are being prepared: the most powerful capitalist forces against the weakest, the powerful against the weak and, ultimately, all against all. The threat of new wars and vast new arsenals hovers over the whole world.

Imperialism is still standing. War ensues.

Once again the question is posed: what will the proletariat do? The proletariat is the sole guarantor of peace and stands alone in having the same interests everywhere. It alone is capable, under imperialism, of bringing peace by overthrowing capitalism and with it imperialism. The proletariat, in Western Europe and especially in England and Germany, can choose: imperialism or socialism.

Will the proletariat refuse to serve imperialism any longer? Will it refuse to allow itself to be strangled and massacred once again for the benefit of the magnates of capital and all

capitalists? What will the workers do? As long as capital is not yet international, will they be able to rise to the international dimension? Will they be able to do so before capital does?

It is possible. For even if capital is not yet internationally unified, it stands as a whole in opposition to the interests of the international proletariat. It poses a threat equally to the proletarians of every nation. Capital therefore becomes international thanks to imperialism and war but also imposes long years of poverty, slavery, destruction and death. Capital must expand and can only do so by massacring millions of proletarians. The proletariat cannot tolerate this. This, then, is the conflict, it is here that the basis of the revolution is to be found.

Imperialism could become the chain which capital clamps on its productive forces; it is imperative that it be broken.

Capital's destruction of its own productive forces, which is being effected by the war, could become the crisis which gives birth to the revolution.

The proletariat could therefore begin to act in an international and revolutionary way.

Now that the princes and the capitalists have massacred millions of workers, now that an impending economic crisis looms over every country in the world, along with enhanced political slavery, unprecedented weapons, another world war and another massacre, now that the parties of all countries have sought and have given their stamp of approval to this massacre, the occasion for revolutionary action is presented to the proletariat, such as has never arisen before.

The proletariat can become international through struggle.

But such a goal requires of the proletariat an enormous force of spirit, soul, courage, idealism and organization. But does not such an organization already exist to some extent?

Now, all that is required is to fill it with another kind of spirit, an international spirit, a new force of soul, a new force of courage.

After this first imperialist world war, after the victory of imperialism which will lead to new armaments and new wars, the proletariat will face a choice.⁷ It stands before a fork in the road.

One branch is the road of the reformists and the radicals: march alongside imperialism and the bourgeoisie. To be, therefore, for war in practice and for peace in words; to be in actuality for the nation and its power and for peace in appearance. In reality, nationalists, patriots and imperialists; in appearance, internationalists. Their program is, then, to behave as they have during this war.

The proletariat could and perhaps will take this road. If the proletariat takes this road, the political and economic movement of the proletariat will undergo a comprehensive process of stagnation and regression even more serious than the process which engulfed the proletariat before the war and in which it is currently sinking ever more deeply. This would be the ineluctable outcome of such a choice.

All States, patriotic and imperialist to the core, will arm themselves to the teeth, whether for offensive or defensive purposes. Democracy dissolves in militarism.

Since all available money is spent on militarization, social reforms are no longer possible. The bourgeoisie, the reformists and the radicals are making many promises. The proletariat has faith in them and follows the bourgeoisie and its leaders; this is why it is completely exhausted and demoralized.

But the concomitant phenomena of imperialism, the great cartels, the powerful employers associations and the big banks, are the cause of the obstacles which hinder the proletariat's economic struggle.

An enormous debt weighs upon the peoples, customs duties and taxes are constantly rising, the cost of living is always increasing, crises are becoming more and more destructive—despite periods of industrial prosperity—and real wages are declining. Consequently, the proletariat obtains neither economic nor political reforms. As it adapts to imperialism, political struggle loses all significance and disappears. Seeing that the social democracy does not attack imperialism, the heart of capital's power, the proletariat loses all its self-confidence. It becomes a mass, enslaved by its owners, in which all energy and idealism have disappeared. An enslaved mass which aspires to no more than achieving some material benefit and which is nothing but a docile tool of imperialism. A vast national mass at the service of the nation, completely lacking in socialism and internationalism, which does not wage any international political battles, which can only derive from the spirit of a socialist proletariat. In imitation of the bourgeoisie, the proletariat dons a hypocritical pacifist veil and speaks of internationalism and peace while everyone is preparing for war. New war scares continuously arise and war could soon break out over all or much of the planet. The proletariat is morally and mentally weakened by all these factors. Like early 19th century England—although to a much greater extent—a demoralized proletariat is born, lacking in the power of reflection, which has a job, receives alms and is suddenly precipitated into destructive wars.

Rather than a proud, robust and combative proletariat, a new proletariat is born, one which has been enslaved and crushed under the weight of the cartels and big banks, omnipotent governments and imperialism; a proletariat without spirit, without will, without courage.

The class struggle is vain. Now and then the proletariat is given a tip for its voluntary slavery, a tip which can only demoralize it even more. Everything is merely appearance and empty words. The entire proletariat is exhausted. And these conditions prevail all over Europe.

But the proletariat could also choose the other branch of the road.

It could choose the struggle against imperialism.

It could wage war against its bourgeoisie and against its own imperialism.

It could fight the imperialist nationalism of the bourgeoisie and the workers themselves, in each nation.

The proletariat could, above all, adopt a national policy which would be adapted to the new stage of development of capitalism: imperialism. But to do this, it would have to annihilate revisionism and Kautsky-style centrism.

The proletariat could fight against the war and world imperialism on an international scale. To do this it would have to found a new International.

If the proletariat takes this branch in the road, it will rise ever higher. It will reach a level never before attained and everything it has achieved until now would seem insignificant.

For while imperialism and capitalism, with their increasingly more powerful armaments, unleashing ever more conflicts, spread over more and more of the earth's surface, the proletariat, by means of its struggle, raises itself ever higher.

By never yielding to imperialism, by always bitterly opposing imperialism and war, the proletariat obtains, within the national framework, those political reforms which can still be obtained.

The proletariat acquires self-confidence if it sees that the social democracy leads the assault on capitalism's strongest bastion and supreme force—imperialism—and if it sees that the social democracy is not afraid. It acquires confidence and it can assault the other strongholds of capital: the cartels, trade associations and employers leagues. Then the power of the trade unions increases. They, in turn, obtain those reforms which are possible for them. But since imperialism, the imperialist governments, the cartels and the employers associations form a totality which has a unified organization and will, as well as a goal and its own force, the struggle against this totality can only be a unified struggle. This is the goal to which the proletariat has long aspired and which imperialism and the inevitable struggle against it allow the proletariat to achieve: the absolute unity of political and trade union action. Even the unorganized are dragged into the proletariat's bloody combat against imperialism.

With the passage of time, the proletariat becomes a great power which the bourgeoisie fears, and as a result of this fear, the bourgeoisie will fear war. And since this struggle is waged internationally, the International becomes absolutely international, that is, really internationally organized and unified.

And since the character of the masses and the individual workers is freed of all meanness by means of mass action and international action, the proletariat rises to a height alongside which the highest summits of the greatest bourgeois revolutionary eras pale by comparison.

And since capitalism cannot bear the fact that its imperialist expansion should be stopped by the proletariat, the international struggle of the proletariat itself is transformed into the struggle for the socialist society.

And who could withstand it then?

The proletariat rises irresistibly if it chooses the second road and creates a new International to fight imperialism.

This war, we repeat, is the crucible from which the new International must be born.

This new International must be created.

This new International must be born.

We, the Marxists, will do everything to see to it that it is born.

The creation of the new International is possible. It is necessary because it is born of the development of the class struggle and of capitalism, as we can verify today.

With the passage of time, we are learning to more clearly distinguish two stages in modern capitalism. The first stage was that of free competition. The national States were formed, the capitalists exploited the workers of their countries, and the colonies were used only for trade.

Faced with this situation, the workers organized nationally in parties and trade unions. Colonial and international issues did not interest them. This is the stage we have left behind.

The second stage is the stage of monopoly. Competition disappears; the big banks control industry, trade and agriculture.

This process becomes more and more international, although slowly at first. Capital spreads over the whole earth. Cartels, trusts and consortia are formed. As a consequence, the class struggle becomes more bitter. The employers associations become omnipotent, social legislation comes to a halt.

During this stage, the workers associations must form large industrial alliances and the political struggle of the working class assumes increasingly more important and striking forms. Mass action is employed against employers associations, trade unions and governments.

This mass action is, at first, only undertaken on a national scale and is directed against the cessation of social legislation and the worsening of living conditions in each nation.

But now imperialism is on the march with the aspiration of the most powerful States to enlarge their territories. Imperialism, although it seems to be nationalist and only at war with its national proletariat, is in reality the unity of all the worlds imperialist countries which are competing for world domination; it therefore makes war as a totality against the world proletariat. And in order to respond to this joint action by world capital against the world proletariat, the latter must, for the first time ever, set in motion action on an international scale.

The previous years witnessed the primacy of the national trade union against the employers separated by trades and nations; against the employers associations, the national trade union federation; against the national government, the national party.

Now, in this new stage of capitalism, against capitalism's new organization, against the international trusts and international finance capital, a world trade union federation must be founded; against the imperialism and the policies of all States, a new international party must be founded.

Against the national and international dimensions of imperialism, mass action is necessary. This is the stage in which we are living. The reflection of this new theory, the translation of this theory into facts, the practice of this theory: this is what the new International must be, the new International which must be born from the old International and from this war.

All the workers who understand that, faced with all the new phenomena of our time along with the revolutionary trade union struggle and the revolutionary parliamentary struggle, this really new International and mass action are necessary, all these workers must cooperate in creating this new International and must join the wing of the workers movement which wants to create it.

The revolutionary action of the world's proletarian masses against world capital—this must be the program, the spirit, the will and the action of the new International.

All the leaders and all the revolutionaries of the world's internationalist parties who understand, recognize and know that the new International must be created, must unite and form an organization to spread this theory and organize this action on both a national and international scale. The program of this new organization must be as follows:

As long as the proletariat is threatened by imperialism and world war and as long as the peaceful development of the class struggle is not assured;

First of all, make no compromises or alliances with any bourgeois party, the proletariat must not assume any government posts.

Make imperialism the axis, the pivot of national and international politics.

Refuse, even in case of war, all credits for militarism and imperialism.

Fight imperialism and all the concomitant phenomena of imperialism as obstacles to the trade union struggle, as impeding social legislation, as the negation or loss of political rights; and, necessarily, fight imperialism with methods distinct from those customary in the trade union and parliamentary struggles, with mass action on a national scale.

Fight imperialism and war with the mass action of the international proletariat.

We call upon the international proletariat to take this road.