

ANTI—IMPERIALIST MOVEMENT: NEW SITUATION, NEW CHALLENGES

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1. An international conference that draws on the legacy of Karl Marx to chart a course of revolutionary advance in the 21st century is a great event by itself. And the more so when the host is socialist Cuba, a great source of hope and determination, a symbol of what Marx had called *revolution in permanence*. For the consideration of respected participants, we present here three theses on contemporary world situation and our tasks.

A DIALECTICAL APPROACH TO GLOBALISATION

2. Are we for total opposition to globalisation or for reforming it? This question often comes up in anti—imperialist fora like the WSF; we had better come straight on it at the very outset.

3. Well, so far as globalisation in general can be construed as an objective historical process (*cf* Fidel Castro toward the end of the last decade: “Globalisation is a law of history. It is a consequence of the development of productive forces...a consequence of scientific and technological development...an irreversible process...”), we are not stupid reactionaries to try and stop it. Rather we appreciate and put to maximum use such vehicles of globalisation as the internet for a global counter—mobilisation against imperialism. But we are absolutely opposed to the globalisation we are daily being bombarded with by the IMF—WB—WTO triad, the G7, the American merchants of death.

4. Yes, actually operating globalisation is a euphemism for the global offensive of capital in crisis — on the working people in rich as well poor nations. Viewed in another context, it is an offensive of imperialism led by US imperialism on what is called (no longer very aptly, for there is no second world) the third world. If we were to divide the historical stage of imperialism, which has completed a hundred years of existence, into a few distinct phases (i.e., sub—stages), we might call globalisation its latest phase. It is *not* just a spontaneous *economic* process ‘with pros and cons’, as its apologists and liberal petty bourgeois critics want us to believe, but an overarching project with a *political* programme of hierarchical domination and conspiratorial intervention (as in Venezuela) as well as a *military* programme of aggression (Afghanistan and Iraq yesterday, the ‘axis of evil’ countries tomorrow).

MARXISTS, OF COURSE, VIEW THE EMERGING SCENE DIALECTICALLY.

5. *In the first place*, we take due note of a fundamental contradiction that is intrinsic to Globalisation: *ideally*, it aims at a seamless integration of world economy, at creating a global economy beyond the control of nation states; *practically*, its main operating

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agency are the nation states which continually fight among themselves for bending the rules of the game in the narrow interests of national capitals. Because of this conflict, globalisation can only proceed haltingly through jolts (like Cancun) and detours (e.g., preferential trade deals like the FTAA and bipartite trade agreements which contradict the theory of globalisation) ; at the same time it gets entangled in all kinds of economic and political skirmishes even among its powerful protagonists like the G7.

6. This is to say, globalisation has served to accentuate, not mitigate, the two sets of contradictions that characterise the age of imperialism: (a) those between developed industrial countries and the underdeveloped, exploited ones and (b) among the rich imperialist countries themselves.

7. In recent years, both sets of contradictions have become particularly intense thanks to arrogant American unilateralism.¹ While collusion among imperialist states remains the principal aspect — as the US—France coup in Haiti testifies — contradictions grow sharper and strong centrifugal tendencies emerge, giving us, the world proletariat, a favourable terrain to fight its class war in the 21st century.

8. *Secondly*, imperialist globalisation has led to what has been called a “new internationalism”; intensified exploitation — to sharpened class struggle. The task of Marxists is not to frown and fret about globalisation, but to build on these new trends and prospects. For that, however, we need to take a closer look at the goings on in the enemy camp.

FASCIST PROJECT OF US EMPIRE

9. All the developed countries such as Belgium, Japan, Germany, Australia and so on are imperialist in terms of economic essence or stage of development as defined by Lenin (decaying, parasitic, monopoly capitalism dominated by finance capital); many of them also possess, and occasionally use, their enormous military prowess. But among them there is *one* country which has earned the outrageous distinction of being the world people’s enemy number one. It is the rouge state of America — *the* Empire of our times — not in a post—imperialist sense as in Negri and Hardt, but as the highest (and may be the last, who knows?) product of imperialism.

10. Washington’s passage from covert to overt empire building in theory and practice² has been widely noticed and commented upon. Many have rightly located the source of the brazen bellicosity in superpower arrogance — in the enhanced ambitions of the cold war victor. But there is another, less recognised source : a frustration born of the collapse of the informal empire model based on multilateralism and economic, political and intellectual leadership over the so—called “free world” since the Second World War.

11. The fact of the matter is that slowly but surely the US has been losing its grip on world politics and economics. This refers not only to “Frankensteins” like the Taliban. Today America’s writ does not run as effectively as it used to do even in strongholds like Latin America (look at Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil) and Middle East (relations are getting strained even with Saudi Arabia, the main US anchor in the region, not to speak of other countries). Of course, it has gained new grounds — as in Central Asia (some of the erstwhile Soviet republics) and Europe (in parts of what was once Yugoslavia). But the gains are less than enough to compensate for the losses. As regards world economy, the US no longer enjoys the degree of control it was accustomed to in the first few decades following the Second World War. Thus, 21 percent of the world’s stock of direct

investment in other countries was American in 2001, compared with 47 percent in 1960. In the 1980s, 60 percent of cross—border assets of banks were in dollar and 19 per cent in the euro legacy currencies (currencies of those countries which later adopted the euro). In 1999, the respective shares were: 45 per cent for dollar and 32 per cent for euro. During 1996—2001, 17 percent of all new direct investment abroad came from the United States and 16 percent from Great Britain; together, France and Belgium—Luxembourg supplied 21 percent. Apart from Europe and Japan, Northeast Asia with China at its center has come up as a new challenger. It is the world’s most dynamic economic region, accounting for almost 30 per cent of world GDP, far more than the US, and holding about half of global foreign exchange reserve.³

12. This historical decline is reflected, for example, in the change in the power balance within multilateral agencies. In the IMF and WB, created just after WWII, US dominance is formally institutionalised : being the highest stakeholder, it enjoys the highest voting power. Not so in the WTO created at the fag end of the 20th century, where America, like Rwanda, has only one vote.

13. In this long term backdrop, the current scenario is worrisome indeed. The fundamentals are very weak: unmanageable budget deficits; abnormally low savings rate (1.6 per cent of GDP, less than a third of the average savings rate obtaining in the 1990s); rising unemployment and jobless growth etc. And above all, a tricky combination of mounting current account deficit (henceforth CAD), falling dollar⁴ and advent of euro as a real alternative to the dollar. This has made the US dangerously dependent on borrowed money (e.g., foreigners now own around 42 per cent of US treasury bills) and created a situation described by IMF Chief Economist Kenneth Rogoff as a “noose around [America’s] neck”.⁵ Like many others, Robert Mundell, the 1999 Nobel prize winner in economics, believes the CAD is a veritable time bomb: “The U.S. debt is something like \$3 trillion dollars, almost 30% of gross domestic product... it will be 35% next year, eventually 40% and then at some point it is an accident waiting to happen — a big international crisis.”⁶

14. In plain language, the world’s richest but most—indebted country will then face a situation comparable to that experienced not long ago by Mexico, Argentina, and South Korea. There will be a run on US banks, as holders of dollar reserves convert these into other currencies. A stock market crash of unprecedented proportions may be unavoidable, putting the entire project of globalisation in jeopardy.

15. To tackle the deep—rooted economic crisis, American ruling elite has fallen back, as always, on military Keynesianism: enhanced military expenditure and war for business cycle management (it was no coincidence that the gulf war in 2003, like that in 1991, was started in the wake of recession). They are desperate, for unlike in the 1970s (when the Nixon—Kissinger team found a way out of the dollar crisis by switching over to the floating exchange rate regime), now there is hardly any monetary option left.

16. Such in brief is the economic vulnerability that lurks behind America’s awesome military might. Capitalist crisis begets fascism, and it is nothing short of a fascist project that Gorge W Bush, the Hitler of 21st century, is pursuing. And it is not simply a matter of this war criminal’s personal bend of mind. At work in American society and polity are deeper and longer— term processes or trends which can only be termed fascist.

17. Full—blown fascism in power means negation of bourgeois democracy and open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic, most aggressive sections

of imperialist finance capital. But fascism does not come to power in a day. It crops up on the soil of bourgeois parliamentarism (both Hitler and Mussolini were elected heads of governments before usurping dictatorial powers), gradually corrupts and erodes it from within, and if not resisted in time, usurps dictatorial powers at an opportune moment of 'national crisis'. Fascism fans up racist / national chauvinist / fundamentalist fanaticism directed against some imagined 'enemy of the state', so as to mobilise popular support for the fascist gameplan. Such a project expresses itself in foreign policy as aggressive expansionism and domestically as extreme attacks on people's livelihood and political rights, together with state-sponsored bonanza for millionaires, particularly those in strategic and war-related sectors.

18. All these symptoms or features of a fascist tendency, a fascist build up, are quite prominent in US today:

19. That the Bush—Cheney—Rumsfeld cabal works for the notorious energy sector and the military industrial complex, some being paid agents of the latter, is well known.⁷

20. So are the post—9/11 attacks on democratic and civil rights (PATRIOT Act being just one case in point), on racial minorities and immigrants etc, all these being justified in the name of an war on terror.

21. The 2.3 million net jobs lost during the Bush period is a new record. All this stands in stark contrast against massive tax—cuts, protective tariffs, bailout operations for corrupt corporations etc. The overall impact is that the rich—poor gap is growing at an alarming rate, and 13,000 richest families now have almost as much income as the 20 million poorest.

22. The way Bush was elected President clearly demonstrated the subversion of the judiciary by powerful corporations bent on installing the neo—conservatives in power. And to get reelected, Bush is now relying on a fear psychosis among the voters. In this year's *State of the Union* speech, the President used the words "terror" or "terrorist" 14 times, some form of "kill"("killers", "killing" etc.) 10 times, "war" 7 times (not counting synonyms like "battle", "offensive" etc.) and so on.⁸

23. From hate campaigns and false propaganda to the reincarnation of "blitzkrieg" as "shock and awe" strategy in Iraq to the doctrines of permanent warfare and "full spectrum dominance", the neo—Nazi proclivities of the present dispensation are only too conspicuous. One year before 9/11, the PNAC had talked about "some catastrophic and catalyzing event, like a new Pearl Harbour", as "a war pretext incident ". In perfect tandem, President Bush gleefully greeted the attacks as Pearl Harbour of the 21st century, raising doubts about the complicity or foreknowledge on the part of his administration. The whole course of events cannot but bring back memories of Nazi complicity in the Reichstag fire, which supplied the pretext for attacking the communists and imposing a naked dictatorship in Hitlerite Germany.

24. There is even talk of getting rid of the US constitution in favour of military rule. In October 2003 General Tommy Franks, who led the military campaign into Iraq, described the precise scenario whereby military rule could be established: "a terrorist, massive, casualty—producing event [will occur] somewhere in the Western world — it may be in the United States of America — that causes our population to question our own Constitution and to begin to militarize our country in order to avoid a repeat of another mass, casualty—producing event."⁹

25. Growing opposition, within US and without, has compelled Bush to introduce cosmetic changes in some of his policies and preferences. But even if he is made to bite dust at the hustings, will there be any basic changes? Read challenger Kerry's campaign book, *A Call to Service: My Vision for A Better America* and his party's foreign policy manifesto *Progressive Internationalism: A Democratic National Security Strategy* (Fall 2003). You will find they are fully committed to the imperialist traditions *a la* president Harry Truman (a democrat who bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki) and call this "muscular internationalism".

26. Militarism, fascism and empire building have deep roots in the structure of American capitalism at its imperialist stage. They are not aberrations liable to be 'corrected' under public pressure within the present social system, and can only be got rid of by means of total social transformation.

CHALLENGING OPPORTUNITIES

27. As always happens with fascist regimes, imperial America has managed to unite against itself all positive forces representing the basic human urge for liberty, democracy, justice and peace. Basically, this is the strongest point in our favour. From Seattle through Genoa, Cancun, the forthcoming 20 March global protest and beyond, the international movement against imperialism is surging forward, and so are people's struggles at the grassroots, local and national levels. A broad anti—imperialist front is thus emerging, which encompasses diverse classes, strata and political streams. Being a united front of various ideological tendencies, it naturally lacks a long—term vision and clarity of purpose, which only we Marxists can provide in course of closer cooperation with all the movemental forces.

28. To discharge this historic responsibility we must, *on one hand*, refocus attention on political activism at the grassroots — among rural proletariat and semi—proletariat — and also at the middle and national levels. There we must learn from people's spontaneity and adapt our action programmes to the actually emerging contours of class struggle. This is important, for we cannot expect to influence the international movement through theoretical debates alone; we will be heard only to the extent we emerge as organisers of revolutionary mass movements on our own soils. We in the Communist Party of India (Marxist—Leninist) are striving precisely for that and, in the process, trying to oust the main agent of imperialism in India — the communal—fascist Vajpayee government. *On the other*, we must have closer interaction among Marxist scholars and organisations, we must have more of seminars and conferences like the present one, so that we can coordinate our efforts to orientate the international movement toward the goal of socialism.

29. Through all these efforts, we need to radically improve our theoretical arsenal, our strategy and tactics, our organisational methods. In this sense, a central challenge before Marxism is that of its adequate enrichment and renewal. Renewal commensurate with the increasing velocity of changes all around: in economic structures, in forms and features of class struggle and in the realm of ideas — in the sciences natural and social, in politics and culture, everywhere. It has to draw nourishment from advances in, say, quantum mechanics; from critical engagements with trends like postmodernism and feminism; from comradely interaction with the new social movements on environment, gender and other issues. Basing ourselves on the proletarian class stand, materialist viewpoint and

dialectical method, we must boldly expand the horizon of our theory and practice by critically assimilating all that is valuable in the entire spectrum of human endeavours. 30. Comrades, in the opening years of the 21st century, there is every reason for us to cherish an optimism of the will *and of the intellect*. This shall not be a ‘new American century’. It shall belong to the working people of the world, not to the band of barbarians currently running roughshod over the cradle of human civilisation on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates, and shall have these words inscribed on its banner : *Socialism, not barbarism*.

1 Not only did Washington openly defy the UN and the International Criminal Court (ICC) on many occasions, it continues to disregard the Kyoto protocol, the Outer Space Treaty etc. and to bully sovereign states while shamelessly supporting the rouge state of Israel. On the trade front too, even the WTO has found it necessary to rule against the US for its arbitrary measures. Thus in 1998 the United States suffered three defeats in the WTO. In January, a WTO panel ruled that Japan’s support of Fuji Film in its competition with Kodak did not constitute a trade barrier. In May, another panel found that the United States could not stop imports of shrimp caught in nets that kill sea turtles. Then in June, an appeal panel allowed the EU to reclassify computers and parts as telecommunications equipment in order to protect this industry with tariffs. In July 1999, a WTO panel ruled that the U.S. Foreign Sales Corporation (FSC) law, enacted in 1971, constituted an illegal export subsidy and ordered that it be abolished, marking the largest trade defeat ever for the United States. In late 2003 the WTO ordered the removal of protective tariffs the US had imposed on steel imports.

2 The theoretical foundation laid down in Project For a New American Century or PNAC (1997) was elaborated and popularised by ideologues and commentators like Thomas Friedman, Martin Wolfe, Robert Kaplan, Max Boot and so on. The open advocacy of imperialism and colonialism became shriller after September 11. On October 9, 2001, the Wall Street Journal wrote: "The Answer to Terrorism? Colonialism." Next day, another mouthpiece of US—based finance capital, the Financial Times, commented: "What we need is imperialism."

3 For details, see U.S. Hegemony: Continuing Decline, Enduring Danger by Richard B. Du Boff (Monthly Review, December 2003)

4 Since the fall of the dollar is not sudden and very steep, the panic button is yet to be pressed. Rather it is a mixed blessing for US manufacturers who pay more for imported materials and components, but can boost exports to Europe and Japan (not to China which has fixed the Yuan to the dollar). This has led some analysts to suggest that Washington is deliberately following a weak dollar policy. However, such partial benefits detract but little from the threat perception of a looming financial catastrophe.

5 Guardian 10 September, 2003

6 See Wall Street Journal, 18 December 2003.

7 Cheney is a former board member of TRW, and his wife, Lynn Cheney, only left her long—term board position with Lockheed Martin weeks before the new administration took office. Bruce Jackson, vice president of corporate strategy and development wing of Lockheed Martin, wrote the Republican Party’s foreign policy platform before the last presidential elections. Stephen J. Hadley, an assistant secretary for defence in the administration of Bush’s father, left his partnership in the Washington law firm of Shea & Gardner — which represents Lockheed Martin — to become deputy director of the National Security Council under George W Bush. The Centre for Public Integrity in Washington found that 9 out of 30 members of the Defence Policy Board of the US Government were connected to companies that were awarded defence contracts for \$ 76 billion between 2001 and 2002.

8 See Security, Terror, and the Psychodynamics of Empire by Stephen Soldz (Znet, 7 February, 2004. Soldz believes that Bush is actually trying to use the American people’s sense of insecurity, stemming mainly from economic instability (“the instability of family income has increased 500% from 1972 to 1998.”), to project the image of an inimical ‘other’ — “madman Saddam”, the “ dangerous terrorists”, etc. — so that people feel inclined to elect a “strong and stern leader”. His election campaign also is attuned to this note.

9 (See <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/EDW311A.html>).