



New
Communist Party
of the Netherlands

Imperialism and contemporary developments in the international relations

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Introduction

Developments in the Netherlands and in the world are worrying. It is clear that contradictions are increasing in many areas. The gap between rich and poor is widening. We hear that monopolies create jobs, innovation and economic growth. But one economic crisis is barely over and the next is already on the doorstep. Public services and the rights and incomes of working-class people are being dismantled, while the capitalists make huge profits. Not only does the contradiction between labour and capital intensify, competition and antagonisms within the capitalist class and between different capitalist states are also intensifying. There are flashpoints and wars in various parts of the world, such as the war in Ukraine. We hear that these wars are fought for “democracy”, “self-determination” and “protection of minorities”, or against fundamentalism or fascism. Often the adversary uses the same pretexts.

All these developments raise questions. Why is impoverishment increasing, despite science and technology providing more and more possibilities for people to live better lives? Why do international conflicts and wars arise in the first place? Do international alliances of which the Netherlands is a part, such as NATO and the EU, ensure our peace and security, as bourgeois parties claim? How can we as communists properly assess the complex and contradictory developments in the world and develop an effective strategy for the struggle?

All these problems are related to the question of imperialism. A correct understanding of imperialism and a correct assessment of relations and developments in the Netherlands and in the world, are indispensable for the struggle of the working class. Therefore, both the 7th Party Congress in 2022 and the 9th General Assembly of the CJB in 2020, stressed the importance of studying imperialism and contemporary international relations. More specifically, the *Decision on Party Building* adopted at 7th Party Congress stated:

“An important task for the party is education in imperialism and study to form a better understanding of international relations¹ today. Central to this should be understanding imperialism in a Leninist way, as monopoly capitalism, as a stage in the development of capitalism. This is important because there are many bourgeois and opportunist theories that disorient the anti-imperialist movement and that are starting points for reformist theories.

For example, imperialism is often understood as the aggressive foreign policy of the U.S. and some countries in northwestern Europe. Consequently, countries with opposing interests are therefore often mistakenly seen as anti-imperialist. This is a simplistic approach that ignores the economic basis (monopoly capitalism) and other important aspects of imperialism.

There are also conceptions of international relations that are outdated because they rely, for example, on the assumption of a strong socialist bloc or on the assumption of a colonial system, when in fact the strong socialist bloc has largely fallen away and the colonial system has broken down (despite there being remnants of it, such as the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean).

Moreover, a good understanding of imperialism is important for understanding the character of imperialist interventions and wars.”

Thus, the Congress also pointed out the need to study and combat bourgeois and opportunist theories about imperialism. There is much confusion about imperialism and the contemporary international relations, which is fuelled by the capitalist class to disorient the anti-imperialist struggle.

This conference text serves as a further elaboration of the Congress decisions and is thus also as a step in preparation for the formation of the new party program. That party program will set forth the party’s

¹ ‘International relations’ is often used to refer to the study of interactions between states, international organisations etc. (‘internationale betrekkingen’ in Dutch). However, throughout this document the term ‘international relations’ is used as a translation of ‘internationale verhoudingen’, by which we refer to international relations in a much broader sense, encompassing the economic basis (in the relations of production etc.), the international situation, the laws of development etc. – *Translator’s note*.

strategy. The elaboration of the right strategy begins with a correct analysis of the relations, which today are characterized by imperialism, capitalism in its final stage.

This text aims to contribute to collectively gain a better understanding of imperialism and international relations today. Obviously, this is a very vast and complex subject that has many facets. It would be impossible to fully elaborate it in the context of one conference. The aim is to contribute to education on the subject, to identify certain important aspects and trends of current developments, to criticize bourgeois and opportunistic approaches, and to facilitate further study and research.

More specifically, it is divided into four sections highlighting the following aspects:

1. The relevance of the Leninist conception of imperialism
2. General developments in international relations and distortions thereof
3. Current developments in international relations
4. Imperialist war and the stance of communists in the struggle for peace

1. The relevance of the Leninist conception of imperialism.

Imperialism is often associated with colonialism. This is, for example, how this term is taught in school. However, imperialism is also often associated with aggressive foreign policy by the U.S. or by some strong states against weaker states. That aggressive foreign policy can take the form of political interference, economic warfare or even military intervention. There is a trend of identifying “the West” or the U.S. with imperialism. This is a trend we see a lot in various “leftist” social democratic and opportunist publications, in the bourgeois media and among bourgeois academics, but also within the international communist movement.

The diverse bourgeois and opportunist theories undoubtedly illuminate phenomena that are indeed in some way or another related to imperialism. Yet they create confusion by failing to penetrate properly to the essence and causes of the phenomena. They do not offer a correct understanding of the character of the contemporary international relations, the role of international alliances and organizations, the causes of interventions and wars, etc. In strategies developed on the basis of bourgeois or opportunist theories, the anti-imperialist struggle is detached from the anti-capitalist struggle. As a result, the labour movement is manipulated and used by one part or another of the bourgeoisie. Bourgeois and opportunist theories of imperialism therefore have a harmful influence on the movement.

Although in general terms it is usually recognized that economic interests play a role in imperialism, imperialism in both bourgeois and opportunist literature is mostly seen as a matter of foreign policy or international relations, detached from the economic base and the capitalist relations of production.

Developments in politics and international relations, however, cannot be separated from developments in the economy and the relations of production. In 1916, Lenin provided an elaboration on imperialism in: *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. The purpose of that work, was to provide “a composite picture of the world capitalist system with its international relationships at the beginning of the twentieth century.”² Lenin thereby described the dialectical relationship between the economic basis and the political aspects of imperialism. Lenin approached imperialism as a stage in the development of capitalism. More specifically, he defined imperialism as “the monopoly stage of capitalism.”³

When Lenin wrote this work, texts were already being written from bourgeois and opportunist quarters analysing the objective developments in capitalism, the turn from free competition to monopoly. Indeed, that there was a historical break with the earlier period of capitalism had not escaped their notice either. However, they approached events, as they do today, from the point of view of the bourgeoisie. They tend to create a distorted picture of imperialism, because the bourgeoisie views capitalism as eternal and seeks to preserve it, when in fact objective circumstances show that capitalism has fulfilled its historical role and must be replaced by a higher socioeconomic system, socialism-communism. The working class, on the other hand, is the class that has an interest in changing the system, and for this very reason only from the point of view of the working class can the system be objectively and correctly understood. Lenin’s point of view is the point of view of the proletariat.

The Marxist approach enabled Lenin to determine the place of imperialism in history, namely as the final stage of capitalism. Imperialism is characterized by the following five basic features, which distinguish monopoly capitalism from pre-monopoly capitalism:

- “the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life.

² Lenin, ‘Imperialism as the Highest Stage’, *Collected Works*, v. 22, p. 189.

³ Idem, 266.

- the merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this “finance capital,” of a financial oligarchy;
- the export of capital, compared as distinguished from the export of commodities, acquires exceptional importance;
- the formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves;
- and the territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed.”⁴

Here we will take a closer look at the Leninist theory of imperialism and then reflect on current developments.

Imperialism: capitalism in its monopoly stage

Obviously, no specific date can be given when capitalism enters its monopolistic stage. Lenin roughly distinguished three periods in the development of capitalism, where the years should be seen as relative and indicative, not absolute. The period 1789 (bourgeois French Revolution) - 1871 (proletarian Paris Commune) is the period when the bourgeoisie rises and triumphs over feudalism⁵. The second period, from 1871 to 1914 (First Imperialist World War) is the period when the bourgeoisie becomes completely dominant. It loses its progressive role in history and increasingly becomes a reactionary class, seeking to maintain existing capitalist relations and hindering the further development of society. In this period, especially during 1898-1914, the basic characteristics of imperialism mentioned above appear in the foreground and capitalism enters its monopolistic stage. The period from the outbreak of the First Imperialist World War in 1914 “places the bourgeoisie in the same ‘position’ as that in which the feudal lords found themselves during the first epoch. This is the epoch of imperialism...”⁶

We saw that capitalist monopolies are the economic foundation of imperialism. “Economically, the main thing in this process (i.e. the rise of imperialism - ed.) is the displacement of capitalist free competition by capitalist monopoly.”⁷ We should not conceive of monopoly narrowly and statically in its literal sense, i.e., a single firm controlling all production in large sectors of the economy. By monopoly we refer to the tendency of the appearance of very large capitalist enterprises operating in one or more sectors and sharing with other enterprises most of the production and the market. Therefore, fierce competition exists between them. Thus, monopolies do not lead to the disappearance of competition, but rather to its expression on another level.

As Lenin describes, the formation of monopolies is a result of the concentration of production, which is a property of capitalism. Hence monopoly formation and the rise of imperialism are not a deviation from capitalism, but rather a necessary consequence of the development of capitalism.

The aforementioned five basic characteristics of imperialism should not be viewed as a “checklist”. They are not isolated features that have nothing to do with each other. On the contrary, they are all characteristics that follow from one process, namely the development of capitalism that necessarily leads to the concentration of production in large monopolies that come to dominate the economy. The concentration

⁴ Idem, 266-277.

⁵ Feudalism is the socioeconomic formation that preceded capitalism. The main classes of this mode of production were the exploited serfs and the exploiting feudal rulers (nobility and clergy). Feudalism was characterized by feudal land ownership. The serfs were tied to the land, but had their own households and kept a share of what they produced. Agriculture was the most important sector in feudalism. In the development of feudalism, different forms in which political power was exercised emerged, such as monarchy and absolutism. At a certain stage in the development of productive forces, feudal relations became obsolete and stood in the way of further development. Through bourgeois revolutions, feudalism was abolished in favour of capitalism. This happened first in Europe. In Asia, Africa and Latin America, remnants of feudalism long maintained, often also by imperialism that took advantage of these remnants.

⁶ Lenin, ‘Under False Flag’, *Collected Works*, v. 21, p. 146.

⁷ Lenin, ‘Imperialism as the Highest Stage’, *Collected Works*, v. 22, p. 265.

of production is accompanied by the concentration of banking, which inevitably leads to the formation of banking monopolies and the fusion of bank capital and industrial capital, and thus the formation of finance capital. The dominance of finance capital necessarily leads to the export of capital acquiring a decisive significance in international economic relations. The dominance of the monopolies and finance capital, as well as the export of capital, inevitably lead to the struggle for the redistribution of the world between the unions of the monopolies.

Imperialism leads to a further sharpening of all contradictions under capitalism. The basic contradiction of capitalism is the contradiction between the socialization of production on the one hand, and the private appropriation of its results on the other hand, because the means of production are still private property. Imperialism, on the one hand, is a result of the concentration and socialization of production, but on the other hand it also leads to even further sharpening of this main contradiction that characterizes the capitalist mode of production.

“Capitalism in its imperialist stage leads directly to the most comprehensive socialization of production; it, so to speak, drags the capitalists, against their will and consciousness, into some sort of a new social order, a transition from completely free competition to complete socialization.

Production becomes social, but appropriation remains private. The social means of production remain the private property of a few. The general framework of formally recognized free competition remains, but the yoke of the few monopolists on the rest of the population becomes a hundred times heavier, more burdensome and intolerable.”⁸

Export of capital as a driving force of the global development of capitalism

Imperialism is not static. It is constantly evolving and undergoing constant change. An important driving force of this is the export of capital. To understand imperialism and the changes taking place, it is important to understand export of capital correctly.

“Capital” is often used in bourgeois theories as a synonym for money or means of production. This is incorrect. Indeed, it would imply that capitalism is millennia old. Capital is not money or the means of production. It is a social relationship. More specifically, the exploitative relationship between the capitalist, the owner of means of production, and the wage worker. Money and means of production function as embodied capital at the moment they are used in the capitalist production process for the exploitation of the workers and the appropriation of surplus value by the capitalist. So what is meant by “export of capital” and why does it occur?

The capitalist is always out to appropriate as much surplus value as possible. Therefore, the capitalist uses much of the surplus value created in the production process to purchase additional means of production and labour power. This way, surplus value is converted into capital. This is called accumulation of capital or capital accumulation⁹. But capital accumulation collides with the problem that the masses have

⁸ Idem, 205.

⁹ Reformists, who try to present capitalism as reformable, approach capital accumulation only as a moral problem. They propose that capital accumulation and profit-making need only be “capped” or that capital should only be “invested in society”. While reforms that are in the interests of the working class can and should be demanded, these improvements under capitalism are always temporary and may even give the system as a whole a “breathing space”. Sooner or later, however, capital must “push back” these reforms in order to maximize profits. This is partly determined by the trend of the falling rate of profit. Capital cannot make constant profit. The trend of the falling rate of profit is caused by the proportion of variable capital (labour) decreasing in relation to constant capital (machinery, buildings, etc.). Thus, since only human labour can produce profit, the rate of profit, which expresses the ratio of surplus value to total capital, decreases. All these things are already inherent in the capitalist system itself and thus cannot be “wished away” by reformists.

insufficient purchasing power to consume all that is produced. Thus a surplus of capital emerges. There is more and more capital, but it becomes increasingly difficult to employ it profitably. Yet that capital “must” be invested, because if it stands still, if it is not employed in the production process to create surplus value, then it is no longer capital.

To solve the problem of surplus capital, the finance oligarchy looks beyond national borders. In countries that are less developed (i.e., countries with a lower organic composition of capital¹⁰), and where cheaper raw materials or labour are often available, capital can be employed profitably. This can be in the form of direct investment (by setting up factories, mines, offices and the like in foreign countries or by acquiring companies abroad), or in the form of loans. Thus the capital surplus is exported abroad.

Capital exports create all kinds of economic and political dependencies. But at the same time, capital exports promote the development of both productive forces and capitalist relations of production in the less developed country. This is fundamental to a correct understanding of imperialism: capital exports are a driver of the development of capitalism worldwide.

“The export of capital influences and greatly accelerates the development of capitalism in those countries to which it is exported. While, therefore, the export of capital may tend to a certain extent to arrest development in the capital-exporting countries, it can only do so by expanding and deepening the further development of capitalism throughout the world.”¹¹

This development has allowed capitalism to gain a foothold even in the most backward countries, and today pre-capitalist relations of production have been abolished virtually everywhere. Remnants of pre-capitalist relations may incidentally still exist, but they no longer have a decisive influence in the economy. Worldwide, monopoly capitalism pervades economic relations.

The international imperialist system and the law of uneven development

We have briefly named certain fundamental economic properties and laws of imperialism. These work their way into political and international relations. The Leninist theory of imperialism therefore allows us to understand developments in economics, politics and their internal coherence.

Monopoly capitalism, with the properties and laws we mentioned earlier, is the basis on which international relations are shaped. These properties and laws of imperialism, which Lenin described, are as valid as ever. The concentration of production in the hands of monopolies, the formation of the finance oligarchy and export of capital are the economic basis of international relations. Imperialist alliances are formed. International relations are characterized by fierce competition between monopolies, countries and imperialist alliances, for the distribution and redistribution of resources, transport routes, markets, territories, spheres of influence, etc.

On that basis international relations are shaped in imperialism, where we can see unequal relations between different countries. Countries can have a more or a less favourable position in the international imperialist system. This depends not only on their economic power, but also on other factors, such as their political and diplomatic influence and the capabilities of their armed forces. The international imperialist system is therefore sometimes compared to a pyramid. A few countries are at the top and have great influence worldwide. Some countries are somewhat weaker but have a favourable position and may for example have a lot of influence regionally. A lot of countries have a less favourable position.

¹⁰ The organic composition of capital is the ratio of constant capital to variable capital. Constant capital is the capital spent on means of production, whose value does not change in the production process. The value of capital spent on labour power does change: it increases, as labour power produces surplus value. This part is therefore called variable capital. As science and technology develop, the share of constant capital increases, and the share of variable capital decreases. Thus, the organic composition of capital increases.

¹¹ Lenin, ‘Imperialism as the Highest Stage’, *Collected Works*, v. 22, p. 243.

International relations are not static. The correlation of forces between different countries, between and also within different imperialist blocs, is constantly changing. Countries can move higher or lower in the imperialist pyramid. The changes in power relations between imperialist blocs are a major driver of inter-imperialist conflicts (i.e., conflicts between imperialist powers).

The constant change in power relations is a result of a law that characterizes capitalism, namely the law of uneven development.

“...the only conceivable basis under capitalism for the division of spheres of influence, interests, colonies, etc., is a calculation of the strength of those participating, their general economic, financial, military strength, etc. And the strength of these participants in the division does not change to an equal degree, for the even development of different undertakings, trusts, branches of industry, or countries is impossible under capitalism.”¹²

Competition and the profit motive, which characterize the capitalist mode of production, force capitalists to always pursue the expansion of their capital. This is accompanied by the concentration and centralization of capital.¹³ But this does not happen in an even fashion in every company, in every sector and in every country. On the contrary. Because in capitalism economic growth takes place within the framework of commodity production¹⁴ and the anarchy of production¹⁵, economic development is uneven. One firm, sector or country is better able than another to increase profits, expand capital and eliminate competitors. This may be due to the operation of the law of supply and demand, the ability to form competitive prices, change in the organic composition of capital that increases labour productivity, intensification of exploitation, the availability of money capital for investment, merger or acquisition, or other factors.

Thus, the law of uneven development is peculiar to the capitalist system. At the stage of imperialism, capitalist relations of production dominate in more and more countries. Today, pre-capitalist relations of production have been abolished virtually everywhere, and their remnants are overshadowed by capitalist relations and the decisive influence of monopolies in production. But this does not diminish the validity of the law of uneven development. On the contrary, its operation becomes even more intense. The competition and the struggle between firms, sectors and countries to surpass each other increases. In pre-monopoly capitalism, the law of uneven development manifested itself in the advantage of certain capitalist countries, an advantage created over long periods of time. The stage of imperialism is characterized by leaps in the development of countries that can sometimes overtake others very fast.

Partly as a result of the law of uneven development, the position of each country within the imperialist pyramid changes. Consequently, the international imperialist system is no longer dominated by the same countries as in the past. Some countries have lost their strong position. Other countries, which may have had a weaker position or even been a colony a century ago, are now emerging as major players in the international imperialist system.

¹² *Idem*, 295.

¹³ Concentration of capital is the increase of capital by the capitalist appropriating the surplus value produced by the workers and converting it into capital. Centralization of capital is increase of capital by union of several capitals into a large capital, for example, by buying up competitors, mergers, forming joint-stock companies, etc.

¹⁴ Commodity production means the production of commodities. In other words, production of products intended for sale, i.e. for the market.

¹⁵ The anarchy of social production means that the economy develops in an unplanned and unorganized manner. In an economy based on private ownership, production is determined by individual private firms based on demand (based on purchasing power) and supply, fluctuating market prices and competition. Thus, economic development is not planned in advance based on the needs of the population. The anarchy of production results in all productive forces not being utilized (think of unemployment) and productive forces being wasted in unproductive ways. In capitalism, there is a contradiction between the organized and planned production in each individual factory or firm, and the anarchy of production throughout society. This contradiction is an expression of capitalism's main contradiction between the socialization of production and the private capitalist appropriation of the results of production. The bourgeois state's interventions in the economy (for instance through economic policy) in no way eliminate the anarchy of production.

The changing correlation of forces between imperialist powers is the basis for the struggle for the redistribution of resources, transport routes, markets and spheres of influence. This forms the breeding ground for imperialist conflicts and wars.

Parasitism and rot of imperialism

Capitalism, like previous exploitative societies, is characterized by **parasitism**. The capitalist class lives as a parasite of alien labour (i.e., the work of others). Parasitism in society is increasingly visible in capitalism, as an expression of the sharpening of the basic opposition between the socialization of production and the private appropriation of the results of labour.

This is reflected, for example, in certain phenomena that accompanied the formation and domination of monopolies in production. For example, the emergence of joint-stock companies and the separation of the management of capitalist enterprises from capital ownership. With the emergence of such monopolies and finance capital, the capitalist-shareholder becomes even more alienated from the production process. The capitalist class thus becomes more and more rentier.

Monopolies can obtain large **monopoly profits** through their monopoly position, which far exceed average profits. The source of monopoly profits is squeezing not only the working class but society as a whole.

Because of their position, monopolies can sell their commodities at the top price. This concerns not only the products and services that the working population consumes, but also, for instance, the means of production produced by industry that are needed by, for example, farmers. At the same time, the prices of the commodities of the farmers and other small commodities producers are pushed down by the monopolies. Hence part of the surplus value produced by the petty bourgeoisie ends up in the monopolies. The class of farmers (the small and medium farmers) and other small commodity producers are thus squeezed out.

Another very important source of monopoly profits is the export of capital. This is done in several ways. First, through the exploitation of the working class in other countries (sometimes under inhumane conditions, child labour, etc.). But also through the exchange of non-equivalent commodities, meaning that monopolies export commodities at prices above value and import at low prices, and in a variety of other ways by which monopolies appropriate surplus value produced in other countries. This used to be closely linked to the oppression of colonized countries. Today it happens through all sorts of unequal dependency relationships between countries, with remnants of colonialism also playing a role.

Monopoly profits are also secured with imperialist wars, armament and militarizing the economy. The state - with the money taken from the working people through taxation - pays the highest price for armament contracts. This is closely intertwined with inter-imperialist contradictions and the attempts of the capitalist class in each country to improve its position in the imperialist system, capture markets, etc. More generally, the bourgeois state serves as the “collective capitalist”, skimming off the incomes of the working people through taxes in order to feed big capital, in ways that conform to bourgeois law but also in the form of corruption.

The parasitism of capitalist society also expresses itself in the fact that more and more productive forces are not used for things that are necessary to meet the needs of society. Instead, society wastes more and more productive forces on unnecessary circulation costs¹⁶ or weapons that destroy things and human lives instead of building up etc.

¹⁶ Capitalist production is linked to commodity circulation. The commodities produced must be sold in order to be converted into money (which can then be used to buy other commodities such as means of production and labour power to produce new commodities etc.). Circulation costs refer to the costs associated with circulation, or in other words with the conversion of commodities into money (and vice versa). Think of costs for transportation, packaging, as well as sales, advertising, etc.

Parasitism is also expressed in the issuance and trading of stocks, stock market speculation, the insurance business and in countless other ways. Thus, with imperialism, parasitism is further generalized. At the root of all the above phenomena is capitalist private property, which has an inherently parasitic character. For it is property based on the exploitation of alien labour. Imperialism merely makes this in many ways more vivid and intense. It is an expression of the decay and dissolution of capitalist society in its final stage.

It is important not to detach the parasitic aspects of imperialism from this essence. There are forces that merely criticize “casino capitalism”, “rentier capitalism”, “financial capitalism”, “crony capitalism” or the like. In doing so, they try to make a false distinction between parasitic or corrupt capital and productive capital, between “bad” and “good” capitalists. Such criticism of “capitalism”, which is really only criticism of a particular aspect, is found, for example, among social democratic and opportunist forces. But reactionary, fascist forces also use “anti-capitalist” slogans based on such false oppositions.

The reality is that there can be no capitalist production without the parasitic phenomena. No industrial capital without bank capital, finance capital, fictitious capital¹⁷ etc.

Parasitism and rot permeates all facets of society. It also permeates the state, not only through its armament programs, but also in the form of corruption. It even permeates the labour movement.

Labour aristocracy as a divisive factor in the labour movement

Imperialism also affects the labour movement. Big capital tries to divide and play off the labour movement against each other. After all, the monopolies have an interest in a weak and divided labour movement in order to secure capitalist exploitation. To achieve this, a small part of the working class is bribed by capital. This layer of the working class is called the **labour aristocracy**.

That bribery can take place in a variety of visible and less visible ways. For example, in the form of certain well-paid and privileged positions in the state apparatus and civil service, in lobbying organizations, in corporations, in academic or research institutions, or in the **labour bureaucracy** (i.e., trade unions and social democratic parties). It can even take the form of attempts to literally bribe the leaders during a strike. It thus involves a layer in the working class that gets a share of the monopoly profits. This is an expression of parasitism, characteristic of imperialism, within the labour movement.

A layer is thus created within the working class whose interests become intertwined with those of the bourgeoisie. As a result, they hold mainly petty-bourgeois views, which are also promoted by their favourable position and standard of living. Within the labour movement, they steer toward compromise with the bourgeoisie and oppose a class-oriented line. The labour aristocracy thus forms a social basis for opportunism in the labour movement and acts as a divisive factor within it.

Lenin explained it as follows: “The receipt of high monopoly profits by the capitalists in one of the numerous branches of industry, in one of the numerous countries, etc., makes it economically possible for them to bribe certain sections of the workers, and for a time a fairly considerable minority of them, and win them to the side of the bourgeoisie of a given industry or given nation against all the others. The intensification of antagonisms between imperialist nations for the division of the world increases this urge. And so there is created that bond between imperialism and opportunism...”¹⁸

From opportunist and bourgeois circles, theories are spread that the entire working class of countries with a favourable position in the imperialist system would belong to the workers aristocracy, based on the

¹⁷ Fictitious capital is capital in the form of securities that provide income to their owners, such as stocks and bonds. These securities are also traded and speculated with. Fictitious capital expands under capitalism, which is related, among other things, to the expansion of credit, of joint-stock companies and of the separation of the direct management of production from the capitalists. The expansion of fictitious capital is an expression of parasitism.

¹⁸ Lenin, ‘Imperialism as the Highest Stage’, *Collected Works*, v. 22, p. 301.

simplistic argument that the working class in these countries has higher income than the working class in other countries. This theory is fatally flawed.

Within the working class there are differences in wages, working conditions, degree of specialization, etc. These can be relatively large differences between different countries, sectors and even companies. The difference in income is not the only criterion. Indeed, such differences may also express differences in value of labour power, differences in productivity in different sectors or countries, market factors, or other factors such as differences arising from discrimination against women, ethnic and other minorities etc. The difference in income must be taken in conjunction with other criteria such as the nature of the work (managerial or executive), but primarily also the entanglement with the interests of the bourgeoisie.

Labour aristocracy is not a layer that can be designated with absolute limits. It is about the tendency for a section to emerge within the working class whose interests are intertwined with the bourgeoisie, as a social basis for opportunism in the labour movement, based on material privileges financed from monopoly profits, combined with ideological and other mechanisms of the bourgeois state. In the time of Marx and Engels, the phenomenon of labour aristocracy occurred only in England, the most developed country at the time. In Lenin's time it was a feature of many more imperialist countries. Today, due to the development of capitalism worldwide, a labour aristocracy can be found in virtually all countries, regardless of its position in the international imperialist system.

Imperialism as dying capitalism and eve of socialist revolution

Imperialism leads to the sharpening of class distinctions between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The working class, especially in times of successive crises, faces relative and absolute impoverishment. The bourgeois state can respond with the carrot and the stick. But in general, imperialism is characterized by a reactionary tendency in politics. That reactionary tendency expresses itself in the expansion of the repression apparatus, the curtailment of political rights and freedoms, and the rise of fascism.

Imperialism also leads to sharpening contradictions between capitalist states. It brings imperialist interference, interventions, wars and even world wars, with the aim to redivide the world between the imperialist powers.

These aspects are interrelated. The imperialist foreign policy of the bourgeoisie cannot be separated from its reactionary domestic policy.

“The political superstructure of this new economy, of monopoly capitalism (imperialism is monopoly capitalism), is the change from democracy to political reaction. (...) It is fundamentally wrong, un-Marxist and unscientific, to single out “foreign policy” from policy in general, let alone counterpose foreign policy to home policy. Both in foreign and home policy imperialism strives towards violations of democracy, towards reaction.”¹⁹

Imperialism thus sharpens all the contradictions of capitalism. First, also the basic contradiction of capitalism between the socialization of production and the private appropriation of its results. Imperialism is dying capitalism. The productive forces are more than ripe for socialization. Hence the economic condition for socialism is in place. But imperialism also ensures that the revolutionary subject who has the historical task of overthrowing the power of capital, the proletariat, is made ready in the struggle. “Imperialism is the eve of the social revolution of the proletariat.”²⁰

¹⁹ Lenin, ‘On a Caricature on Marxism and on “Imperialist Economism”’, *Collected Works*, v. 23, p. 43.

²⁰ Lenin, ‘Imperialism as the Highest Stage’, *Collected Works*, v. 22, p. 194.

The weakest link and the possibility of victory of the socialist revolution in one country

Marx and Engels lived and fought in the period of pre-monopoly capitalism. At that time, the socialist revolution could prevail only if it broke out in the most developed capitalist countries. Imperialism changes the conditions for the victory of the proletarian revolution. It can prevail in imperialism in a small group of countries or even one country, which need not even necessarily belong to the most developed capitalist countries.

This possibility stems from the law of uneven development, which takes on a different character under imperialism. Imperialism links all countries together in the global imperialist system. But uneven development constantly leads to the struggle for the redistribution of the world, to imperialist wars that seriously weaken imperialism and the power of the bourgeoisie. In that way revolutionary conditions can arise.

A **revolutionary situation** has three main characteristics:

1. There is a crisis in the politics of the ruling class, making it impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule unchanged.
2. There has been an extraordinary deterioration in the standard of living of the oppressed classes.
3. There is “considerable increase in the activity of the masses, who ... are drawn ... to independent historical action.”²¹

Such a revolutionary situation is not created by the party or the working class. It occurs objectively as imperialism becomes entangled in economic crises, wars, etc. For a successful revolution, however, not only this **objective factor** is important. It is necessary for the working class to bring about the revolution, which requires the party to be able to act on the basis of the right strategy and mobilize the working class. This is the **subjective factor** for the revolution.

The global imperialist system is like a chain, which breaks at the weakest link in the chain, where a revolutionary situation arises and the proletarian revolution takes place. That weakest link need not belong to the most developed capitalist countries (as long as the conditions are present that capitalism is established and there is a proletariat that can accomplish the revolution, which is the case in virtually all countries today). Taking advantage of the contradictions between the imperialists, and relying on the solidarity of the workers in the capitalist countries, the working class can establish and consolidate workers' power in one country or a small group of countries.

There are very many theories, including within the communist movement, that argue that a socialist revolution is impossible in countries that are economically backward. Thus, they set the level of productive forces and the position of a capitalist country in the international imperialist system as criteria. Such theories underestimate the power of the (immature) communist relations of production to rapidly promote the development of the productive forces. This is also shown by the experience of the socialist October Revolution, where backwardness in the productive forces caught up rapidly after the revolution (e.g., electrification).

Imperialism seems invincible, with the bourgeois state and its repression apparatus, the imperialist alliances and the enormous resources available to the bourgeoisie. But imperialism, monopoly capitalism, is full of internal contradictions. Behind the facade of a seemingly invincible system, lurks a rotten system that is on its deathbed. Marxism-Leninism gives us as communists the tools to expose this and combat pessimism or defeatism. The working class has the power to overthrow imperialism. With the socialization of the means of production and central planning based on the needs of the people, working power is capable of building a socialist society. This requires ridding the world of capitalist exploitation. It requires the abolition of

²¹ Lenin, ‘The Bankruptcy of the Second International’, *Collected Works*, v. 21, p. 213-14.

private ownership of the means of production. With the socialization of the ownership of the means of production, the socialist revolution brings it in correspondence with the social character of production.

Only on this basis can unequal relations of dependence, competition and antagonisms between nations be definitively ended. Discrimination, nationalism, hatred between peoples and fascism, can then finally give way to peace and friendly relations.

2. General changes in international relations and distortions thereof

The basic features and laws of imperialism hold true today. But much has also changed in what the international imperialist system looks like nowadays. After all, imperialism is not a static model, but a changing reality, constantly in development. Certain profound developments in international relations since the establishment of imperialism are identified below, which are important for correctly understanding imperialism and international relations today. These are certain general trends, as it is obviously impossible to interpret everything in one text. Certain opportunist views that rely on misconceptions about these developments and have a disorienting influence on the labour movement are criticized.

The dissolution of the colonial system

A very profound development in imperialism, since Lenin's studies, was the dissolution of the colonial system in the decades following World War II. This was accompanied by the decolonization of a whole series of former colonized countries that gained political independence, a process that had occurred much earlier in some parts of the world. However, this change in the post-World War II period was not just a quantitative change, in the sense that more countries gained independence. It was a qualitative change in international relations through the dissolution of the colonial system that had characterized international relations during the period when capitalist relations had not yet developed in large parts of the world, pre-capitalist relations still existed and bourgeois transformations had not been completed.

The material conditions for decolonization were fuelled by the export of capital and the laws of imperialism itself. Through the export of capital, capitalism penetrated the colonies, leading to the creation of its own national bourgeoisie and a working class. However, this is certainly not to say that decolonization occurred by itself.

As a rule, the decolonization of countries was primarily the result of the heroic national liberation struggle of the oppressed peoples. In this, the national bourgeoisie often had an ambiguous attitude, since it partly had close ties with the colonial oppressor, while it partly also had an interest in independence. The mass of the population that suffered under colonial oppression, the working class and the (small) farmers, fought for national liberation.

Another important factor in the dissolution of the colonial system, was the correlation of forces in the postwar period. Socialist countries provided considerable support for the anti-colonial struggle. The withdrawal of part of the world from imperialism, through the socialist October Revolution in 1917 and the other socialist revolutions, was a very significant development. The victory of the Soviet Union over German imperialism led by the Nazis and the expansion of the socialist bloc to other parts of the world (including the revolutions in Vietnam, China, Cuba, etc.) was an important element in shaping postwar relations, within which the dissolution of the colonial system took place.

Lenin had already foreseen that "liberation of the colonies ... is realizable in conjunction with a socialist revolution in Europe."²² Many anti-colonial, national liberation movements, became closely linked to the labour and communist movements, which managed to consistently push forward the struggle for national liberation, where the bourgeoisie often had a wavering stance.

Next to decolonization enforced by the struggling oppressed peoples, there were also countries where political independence was regulated more from above; in deals between the colonial and national bourgeoisie, who found new forms to secure their interests. This, too, is something Lenin foresaw:

²² Lenin, 'On a Caricature on Marxism and on "Imperialist Economism"', *Collected Works*, v. 23, p. 66.

“*sometimes* [it can be] even *profitable* ... to allow *individual* small nations as much democratic freedom as they can, right down to political independence...”²³

Misconceptions about contemporary unequal and dependency relationships

The dissolution of the colonial system does not mean that international relations are now characterized by equal relations. On the contrary. Unequal relations, with all kinds of economic and political dependencies, are inherent to international relations under imperialism. Nor does the dissolution of the colonial system mean that remnants do not remain to this day, such as the remnants of Dutch colonialism in the Caribbean. The struggle against such remnants of colonialism is important.

There are all sorts of misconceptions about these profound developments, which form the basis for certain opportunistic conceptions of what imperialism means. Such opportunistic and bourgeois views are promoted by the bourgeoisie with the aim of disorienting anti-imperialist movements, and to manipulate and use them for the interests of the bourgeoisie.

Thus, there are analyses that take a one-sided approach to real existing dependency relations in contemporary imperialism and speak of a new system of “neocolonialism” or that call the majority of the world’s countries “dependent countries”. This is a view that fundamentally denies or underestimates the decolonization process and the coming to power of the national bourgeoisie in the former colonies. The contradiction between the West and the “Global South”, between North and South, or between centre and periphery, is falsely elevated as the main contradiction (rather than the class contradictions within each country).

Essentially, they are classless approaches, concealing the class contradictions in formerly colonized countries. At their core, these views often amount to a denial of imperialism as the monopoly phase of capitalism, as formulated by Lenin.

Such misconceptions result in supporters advocating to support the bourgeoisie of countries with a less favourable position in the imperialist pyramid, or even the bourgeoisie of countries that have a relatively strong position but whose interests go against “the West” or against the US, the country that appeared after World War II as the strongest country in the international imperialist system. Such forces often support social democratic or even reactionary political forces in the countries they consider “neo-colonies,” “dependent countries” or the “Third World”. This is harmful because it does not support the working class of that country in their struggle against capitalist exploitation, but condones and defends capitalist exploitation by a “national bourgeoisie”.

Parts of Lenin’s works on imperialism are thereby taken out of context or approached one-sidedly. Lenin’s position on imperialism in his time, where he mentions that a handful of rich countries were exploiting the rest of the world, is, as it were, petrified in time and advanced as dogma. The context in which Lenin wrote this is disregarded. It is assumed that the same countries as then, under the rubric of “the West”, are exploiting the rest of the world. As a result, it is assumed that only a few countries at the top of the imperialist pyramid can be considered imperialist and all the rest of the world’s weaker countries are non-imperialist.

However, the reality is that because of historical events (one of which is very important the dissolution of the colonial system) monopoly capitalism rules in practically every country. Lenin already pointed out that the bourgeoisie of every country in which it is in power in the period of monopoly capitalism pursues an imperialist policy, and not only the bourgeoisie of the strongest countries in the imperialist pyramid. Obviously, the influence of, say, a world power like the U.S. is many times greater than a country like Indonesia, which does have considerable influence on developments around the region of Southeast Asia,

²³ Lenin, ‘On a Caricature on Marxism and on “Imperialist Economism”’, *Collected Works*, v. 23, p. 51.

or any small country which has very limited influence. But that does not alter the fact that even that bourgeoisie exploits the working class, and that the state shapes its foreign policy with the aim of strengthening the position of its monopolies in the imperialist system against competitors.

In this way, justified sympathy with peoples in Africa, Asia and Latin America, among others, who are exploited and oppressed by their own bourgeoisie and also most certainly by large Western monopolies, is used by the opportunists to turn the struggle for socialism into a struggle for the strengthening of the position of these non-Western capitalists. Actual imperialist policy by countries or blocs opposed to Euro-Atlantic imperialism are prettified as a “break with Western neocolonialism”.

Moreover, it should be noted that Lenin emphasized in his time the importance of the political independence of the workers’ movements, also in the colonies, and that any joint struggle of the working class and the revolutionary elements of the national bourgeoisie ends as soon as the bourgeois transformations are completed. The strategy of support for the revolutionary-national movements thus had an end date and already anticipated the future class struggle between the “national” bourgeoisie and the developing working class together with other oppressed strata of the population such as small farmers.

During the 20th century, especially with the rise of Eurocommunism and more generally the reformist trend in the international communist movement, which gradually gained influence from the 1950s, unwarranted concessions were made toward the “national bourgeoisie”, which in many countries hindered the development of the labour movement.

Today, the confusion is further fuelled by all sorts of bourgeois theories, such as “postcolonialism” and the movement for cultural “decolonization”. Such movements primarily have an academic character. It does not concern a coherent theory, but a tendency. It concerns an eminently idealistic approach, grounded in reactionary postmodern philosophy. It presents itself as a movement against colonialism and its remnants, but it criticizes only its (cultural and ideological) manifestations, in a way that detaches them from the content, the essence, and the historical-materialist approach to the issue. As a result, (rightly) criticizing one form of oppression (such as the colonial form) is sometimes even accompanied by prettifying other forms (such as pre-capitalist forms that existed in former colonies).

The core in our approach to imperialism today, is that the bourgeoisie no longer has a progressive role to play. The bourgeois transformations have been completed almost everywhere, including in former colonies and where remnants of the colonial system exist. The struggle against the remnants of colonialism is important and must be waged, but it is a struggle that today can only be waged by the working class and oppressed strata of the population in the struggle against capitalism, not by the bourgeoisie. Anti-colonial strategies of the past, which were based on conditions where the colonial system still existed, where pre-capitalist relations still existed and bourgeois revolutions were not yet completed, cannot be copied to the contemporary situation.

The influence of misconceptions about imperialism in the movement

Misconceptions about imperialism affect the movement in the Netherlands. First, it results in certain misconceptions about the position of the Dutch bourgeoisie in the international imperialist system. Sometimes it is one-sidedly portrayed as if the Netherlands were a “lapdog of the U.S.”, or of Germany or the EU. Such views are spread from extreme right-wing, among others, but in another way also from social democratic and opportunist circles. However, the Dutch bourgeoisie is not a “victim” or helpless appendage of one more powerful state or another. The inter-imperialist relations are of course unequal, but within those unequal relations the Dutch bourgeoisie participates in imperialist alliances on the basis of its own interests and its own imperialist policy and chooses with which countries it establishes ties. It is worth noting that the Netherlands has come relatively stronger out of the past capitalist economic crises than neighbouring countries.

On the other hand, the misconception is promoted that the entire Dutch working class would benefit from the exploitation of Dutch monopolies abroad. This concerns a false theory, which falsely tries to present

the entire working class in the Netherlands as “privileged” or labour aristocracy. Instead of promoting the understanding that the working class and oppressed layers of the population in different countries have the same interests, that they are all oppressed by the monopolies, that capitalism is the basis of both capitalist exploitation and racism, it thus propagates a false opposition between “white people and people of colour” that internally divides the working class. Thus, the justifiable dislike of racism against non-white people - which absolutely must be fought - is used to cover up class divisions and prevent the working class from uniting. Such approaches have their effect on the anti-racist movement, but also on initiatives for international solidarity, because it undermines the understanding of that which we say with the slogan: “their struggle, our struggle!” It is an approach that comes mainly from the corner of the petty bourgeoisie and the actual labour aristocracy itself, which largely overestimate the standard of living of the working class in the Netherlands, but it permeates all strata of the population.

Misconceptions and illusions about emerging imperialist blocs

A major development in the 20th century was the rise of the U.S. as the most powerful country in imperialism. Due to the large-scale destruction of parts of Europe at the time of World War II, amongst others, the U.S. bourgeoisie found itself in a position of dominance. This rise is also linked to decolonization, which opened new markets for U.S. capital that had previously been in the hands of European colonial powers. Large-scale export of capital brought big profits. Moreover, the U.S. also obtained strong political and military power in various parts of the world.

The dominant position of the U.S. provides the basis for the misinterpretation that the U.S. equals imperialism. From this then follows a wrong strategy that states that only one imperialist bloc or country, the most powerful, is the main problem. From this “anti-imperialism” also follows the strategy that a “multipolar world” is desirable. In doing so, this idea supports the ambition of capitalists from different countries that do not belong to the top of imperialism for a better position within the imperialist system.

It is related to the aforementioned misconceptions about the inequality and dependency relations in imperialism, but also to all kinds of theories that argue that imperialism is over or has entered a new “neo-”, “hyper-”, “late-” or “post-imperialist” phase. Often this is based on a misinterpretation of the meaning of certain trends such as the dominance of the US, but also the internationalization of production (“globalization”) or the role of the financial sector.

The theory of the “multipolar world” disorientates the anti-imperialist movement. The implicit thesis of the proponents of a “multipolar world” is that in fact the imperialist Euro-Atlantic bourgeoisie are the only imperialists and that consequently any opposition to this by the bourgeoisie of countries that have opposite interests to the Euro-Atlantic bourgeoisie, such as the Russian or Iranian bourgeoisie, is worth supporting.

What is more, it is also argued that the multipolar world can provide “balance” in the world. In doing so, it is essentially a revival of the Kautskian conception of “ultra-imperialism,” which was criticized by Lenin. Kautsky argued that the formation of international cartels would create the possibility of maintaining peace under capitalism. Such expectations are also created by the theory of a multipolar world. However, that capitalists can “peacefully” divide the world among themselves and keep each other in balance is a great illusion. This analysis denies the laws of imperialism and that competition between different imperialist blocs is actually increasing and is, on the contrary, a huge threat to peace.

It is not difficult to see that these views are often accompanied by illusions about Russia as an “anti-imperialist” or “peace-loving” power. This has to do with misinterpretations of the counterrevolutions that took place at the end of the last century after the erosion of socialism. In the countries of the former Soviet Union, monopoly capitalism came to power and the theory of imperialism applies. Today’s Russia, which bears no resemblance to the former Soviet Union, is a capitalist country where the Russian bourgeoisie and its monopolies rule and exploit the population. Opportunists who implicitly or explicitly argue that imperialism equals the U.S. or “the West” often still have illusions about the character of today’s Russia. For example, it is claimed that Russia inherited the peace-loving policies of the Soviet Union.

In reality, the struggle for peace by the Soviet Union was the result of the socialist nature of its system. With the overthrow of socialism, a bourgeoisie came to power in the various former states of the Soviet Union, including Russia, which “continued politics by other means”. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the hypocritical pretexts for it are an example of this. It is clear that the Soviet Union no longer exists, and illusions about the character of today’s Russia only ensure that the working class is dragged along behind one imperialist robber or another.

The above opportunist and bourgeois ideas surrounding imperialism must be fought, to prevent the working class from being used as a “reserve” to keep rotten capitalism alive anywhere in the world. Needless to say, this is no more than a general outline of certain tendencies, to be further elaborated in coming years on the basis of further study.

3. Current developments in international relations

Certain more current developments of recent times in international relations are discussed in more detail. The data on the current situation that is mentioned here are mainly indicative, because current developments are constantly changing and it remains to be seen in the future which way certain things will develop.

Developments in the international economy

Underlying contemporary developments in the imperialist system and international relations are developments in the economy.

The “4th industrial revolution” and more generally the developments in technology and science, lead to further development of the productive forces (while at the same time the development of the productive forces drives further developments in technology). However, this does not lead to more needs being met and more leisure time for working people. In the hands of big capital, developments in the productive forces are instead used as means of increasing exploitation and further oppression of the working class and middle strata. The law of uneven development applies to the development of the economy, where the strengthening of one capitalist economy at the expense of another, influences the international correlation of forces between the capitalist states and the imperialist unions.

Capitalist economic growth is regularly interrupted by economic crises, as in 2020. Contrary to the claims of bourgeois economists, the crisis is not a deviation from economic development under capitalism, arising from external factors (such as the pandemic). On the contrary, the crisis is a lawful and necessary consequence of capitalist economic development itself. These crises affect different economies unevenly. States also differ in their capacity to mitigate the consequences of capitalist economic crises for capital. Thus, the law of uneven development also expresses itself in periods of crises.

A major trend in the economy that is promoted by imperialism is the internationalization of production (referred to as “globalization” in bourgeois studies). Not only are products and services produced for export, while imported products and services are available, but also, for many commodities, different stages of the production process (extraction of resources, production of semi-finished products, composition of the product, etc.) take place in different countries.

The internationalization of production is not a new phenomenon. In pre-capitalist societies there already existed international interactions and dependency relations, within the limits set by the level of development of the productive forces. The conditions under which that interaction takes place are determined by the dominant socioeconomic formation. The rise of capitalism was accompanied by the formation of the world market. The internationalization of production was an important driver for the development of capitalism, but capitalism in turn promotes internationalization. This development continued under imperialism, partly due to the development of technology and means of transportation that reduced distances, the increase and development of productive forces, but also the export of capital and other features of imperialism.

Depending on circumstances, parts of capital may have a greater interest in promoting free trade at one time and protectionism at another. Free trade can be promoted through free trade agreements, often with negative impacts on labour rights and wages. Some examples from recent years include CETA (EU and Canada in 2017), USMCA (North America since 2018 as successor to NAFTA) and RCEP (Southeast and East Asian countries, Australia and New Zealand in 2022). Protectionist measures aim to limit foreign competition in favour of parts of domestic capital that have an interest in it. This is done with import tariffs, import quotas, procedural barriers, standards set for products, sanctions, subsidies for domestic production,

etc.²⁴ We can observe several trade wars in which states impose sanctions and protectionist measures on each other. Most typical example is the trade war between the U.S. and China. Recently, there has been a general international trend toward more protectionist policies, especially since the capitalist economic crisis of 2020. It is an expression of the sharpening of international contradictions and the problems caused by the overaccumulation of capital.

Realignments in the international correlation of forces

Looking at the development of the international correlation of forces, the trend in recent decades has been the strengthening of the economic position of China in particular and, at some distance, other BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa), at the expense of the share of the US, the EU, the UK and Japan.

The centre of gravity in international relations is increasingly shifting to Asia. That is where the majority of the world's population (read: labour force) lives and it is rich in countless resources. Asia's share of global GDP therefore increasingly overshadows the respective contribution of other continents.

In the international contradictions, competition between the U.S. and China is increasingly taking a central role. Chinese monopolies export capital to various parts of the world where American capital used to dominate. This export of capital takes place, among other things, through the so-called "One Belt One Road" (better known in the Netherlands as the "New Silk Road") and other projects involving huge investments by Chinese monopolies in Asia, Africa, South and Central America and Europe. The investments are mainly focused on infrastructure, energy and telecommunications, but also other sectors. They secure resources but also markets for Chinese capital.

Facing the One Belt One Road, the US Biden administration with the G7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK and EU) announced the "Build Back Better World" in June 2021. For its part, the EU announced the "Global Gateway" (aka "European Green Deal Worldwide") in December 2021. It would involve €300 billion for investments in Africa, Asia, Latin America and elsewhere. For now, these initiatives seem to rely mainly on projects already underway.

It is noteworthy that all these ambitious projects are presented as win-win situations. They take place under the pretext of fighting global inequality by improving infrastructure in "low-income" countries, fighting climate change by promoting "green" development, promoting democracy and labour rights, etc. However, all of these investments take place within the framework of the capitalist relations of production and the international imperialist system. The reality is that no equal international cooperation for the benefit of peoples is possible within these frameworks. There are all kinds of unequal dependency relations, while the working class is burdened by capitalist exploitation and mainly big capital benefits.

In addition to these ambitious projects launched by different blocs, international financial institutions and other organizations also play an important role in promoting the interests of capital. For example, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and other international organizations are used by mainly - but not exclusively - American and European capital to enforce its interests, especially in countries with a less favourable position in the international imperialist system. In countries where the bourgeoisie appeals to such financial institutions, they are notorious for the reforms they promote that demolish the

²⁴ The EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is a well-known example of protectionism. Huge subsidies are available and all kinds of requirements are imposed (often under the guise of quality, health and environment). This not only limits competition from foreign agricultural producers, but it also allows for exportation of agricultural products at prices below the market price and even below the production price. This practice is called "dumping". CAP subsidies mainly benefit large farmers, because the purpose of the CAP is to concentrate agricultural capital and land in the hands of large capitalist farms that can better stand up to international competition. The CAP thereby contributes to the ruin of small and medium farmers. The CAP ensures the availability of cheap agricultural products for industrial capital in the EU. In the end, the main purpose of the CAP is to promote the interests of the European monopolies.

incomes and rights of the working class, in favour of the big monopolies. In the context of rearrangements in international relations, initiatives are being taken, for example from the BRICS, to set up alternative financial institutions in order to reduce dependence on Euro-Atlantic capital, facilitate their own export of capital and more generally promote the interests of their own bourgeoisie in the global economy.

Sharpening of international contradictions

Based on the realignments in the international correlation of forces, which are necessarily taking place as a result of the law of uneven development and other factors, international contradictions over redistribution of control over resources, transport routes, markets and also territories are sharpening.

Competition between the U.S. and China is intensifying and increasingly playing a central role in international contradictions. In this context, the U.S. military is increasingly turning its eyes toward the Indian and Pacific oceans, a region where the U.S. has a host of military bases and naval ports. This U.S. “Pivot to Asia” was proclaimed in 2011 under the Obama administration. Thereafter, objectives were also proclaimed to strengthen the presence of the U.S. military and especially the U.S. Navy in the region, more specifically even to deploy the majority of the strength of the U.S. Navy to the Pacific region. The U.S. expresses concern that China now has a larger navy than the U.S. (in number of ships), as well as that China threatens to gain the upper hand in ballistic missiles, air defence systems, etc. China has consistently increased that military spending in recent years, opening its first overseas base in Djibouti in 2017.

Expressions of this US orientation include the military alliances the US has entered into in recent years. In 2017, a political and military alliance was (re)established with Australia, Japan and India (Quad). A month after the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, the US together with Australia and the UK proclaimed the establishment of AUKUS on September 15, 2021. This includes an economic, political and military alliance, clearly aimed at competing against China. The deal the US struck with the Taliban and the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan should also be interpreted in the context of the realignment of US priorities based on its strategic interests.²⁵

The UK and France, whose capital also has much trade and investment in Asia and sees opportunities there, are also developing their military presence and diplomatic relations in that region.

An important role is played by the South China Sea, through which about a third of global maritime transport passes. In this region, ASEAN plays an important role. This is an economic and political union of 10 countries in Southeast Asia. ASEAN has had a free trade zone with China since November 2002 and also maintains relations with the U.S., Russia and the EU.

Russia, about which there can be no doubt that today it is a capitalist country and part of the international imperialist system, plays an important role in inter-imperialist contradictions. If we look at the size of the economy, Russia just barely makes it to the top ten or not, depending on the source. But it does have relatively large diplomatic influence and military power. With its military intervention in Syria, following the intervention led by the US, Russia managed to thwart the plans of its competitors in favour of the interests of Russian capital in the region.

The great contradictions between the U.S., NATO and the EU, on the one hand, and Russia and its allies, on the other, are also reflected in developments in Eastern Europe. The escalation of the imperialist war in Ukraine, which has killed thousands and displaced millions, followed the built-up tensions, including the reactionary coup, the association agreement with the EU and the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014.

In the relationship between the US and the EU, especially Germany, competition and contradictions are increasing. This expressed itself, among other things, in the collapse of negotiations for a free trade

²⁵ Editorial, *Developments in Afghanistan in the light of international imperialist contradictions*, <https://ncpn.nl/manifest/2021/08/afgparti.htm>.

agreement (TTIP) in 2019, as well as protectionist measures and sanctions against each other's monopolies. At the same time, there are also renewed attempts at closer cooperation in the face of competition against China, as well as Russia and other blocs, including through strengthening NATO.

Within the EU, there are also numerous contradictions. These emerge during stalled negotiations on a variety of issues. Different parts of capital in each member state have an interest in more or less EU integration. There is a noticeable trend of bourgeois Euroscepticism, expressing parts of the bourgeoisie that have an interest in less intensive cooperation or in some cases even leaving the EU, often because they want to keep the door open for cooperation with competing power blocs or because it is advantageous for other reasons.

International competition and contradictions involve cooperation and temporary compromises. For example, American monopolies invest in China and vice versa, despite trade wars.

Dutch capital is actively involved in the international contradictions. It participates in imperialist alliances such as the EU and NATO, within which the Dutch bourgeoisie tries to strengthen its position and promote its interests. The Netherlands is increasingly involved in military interventions, mostly in the framework of NATO or the EU. The goal is to secure the interests of Dutch big capital abroad and expand its influence. The Netherlands is particularly involved in the Caribbean, where Dutch colonies still exist as remnants of the colonial system.

The growing contradictions between the U.S. and China, and the sharpening of international contradictions in general, have contradictory influences on the developments of various imperialist alliances.

Developments in imperialist alliances

The capitalist class of different capitalist states seeks cooperation in their common competition against other power blocs. This is how imperialist alliances are formed. These may be economic, political and/or military in nature. The alliances of the imperialists do not eliminate competition and contradictions between them. Thus, such alliances are always fragile and full of contradictions. With changing international power correlations, the capitalist class of one country or another may decide that it has an interest in more or less cooperation, or even to exit an alliance altogether.

NATO

NATO is an imperialist alliance created on April 4, 1949, as a tool in the cold war against socialism, which had been proclaimed in March 1946 by British Prime Minister Churchill in the presence of U.S. President Truman. NATO incorporated Nazi elements into its ranks, including senior officers who had led the armed forces of Nazi Germany. The Netherlands joined NATO from its inception. That was a choice of the Dutch capitalist class and the political parties representing its interests.

Its main objectives were summarized by NATO's first Secretary General Hastings Ismay as follows: "to keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down." Thus, it was directed against the USSR and other countries in which socialism was being built, it was aimed at defending capitalist power in the member states, as well as curbing the contradictions within the imperialist system.

Bourgeois propaganda described NATO as a "defensive" alliance, established in the face of the "threat" from the Soviet Union. The USSR, precisely because it was a socialist country, had no such "offensive" objectives. The USSR posed a "threat" to the imperialist powers only in the sense that it was a source of inspiration for the working class worldwide, that it made it impossible for capital to exploit a significant part of the world, and that it supported the peoples' struggle against oppression worldwide. For example, the USSR actively supported the struggle against colonialism. By doing so, the USSR thwarted the plans of the imperialists. On the contrary, it is NATO, which as an alliance of capitalist states serves the interests of the capitalist class, that has a warlike character. The systematic imperialist aggression of NATO (think of the Korea War) and its expansion were answered by the USSR and other countries building socialism with

the establishment of the Warsaw Pact on May 14, 1955. After the counterrevolution and the dissolution of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact, NATO expanded to include most of the former socialist countries.

Leading up to the 2019 NATO summit, all sorts of contradictions within NATO came to the fore. Characteristically, NATO was called “obsolete” by then-U.S. President Trump in 2016, and in 2018 there was even talk of possible U.S. exit. French President Macron declared NATO “brain dead”.

In an effort to mitigate these contradictions and update priorities based on current developments, the “NATO 2030” strategy was created and adopted at NATO’s June 2021 summit, identifying Russia and China as the main threats.

EU

The EU was established as an imperialist alliance with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, as a continuation of the EEC. The basis of the EU is the creation of an internal market between member states. This means the free movement between European member states of commodities (products and services as well as labour) and, to a certain extent, capital. This internal market is meant to enable them to compete with other imperialist blocs. The EU outlines the policy of big capital in Europe, moderating workers’ wages and demolishing and commercializing public services. Thus it promotes the competitiveness of capital with the aim of strengthening the position of European capital in the international imperialist system.

The current structure of the Common Foreign and Security Policy was shaped by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. The main component of that policy is the Common Security and Defence Policy. The aim of that policy is to strengthen the EU’s position in international capitalist competition, for the benefit of monopolies and at the expense of the people.

The European External Action Service, established by Lisbon, acts as a kind of foreign ministry and also a ministry of defence for the EU, headed by the “High Representative”.

The European Defence Fund (EDF) provides billions annually to the arms industry to expand EU military capabilities and promote military cooperation of member states. Since 2017, the process of military cooperation has been monitored and controlled annually with the *Coordinated Annual Review on Defence* (CARD), with the aim of promoting imperialist plans and military cooperation of member states, through coordination of arms programs and alignment in arms procurement choices.

In 2018, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) was established, in which 25 of the 27 member states participate (Denmark and Malta have not joined, although this is now being considered). Recently, non-EU member states have also joined PESCO, including the US, Canada and Norway. PESCO promotes further cooperation of armed forces and is binding. It aims to improve the EU’s ability to intervene militarily abroad. Dutch armed forces are also actively involved in PESCO.

Established in March 2021, the European Peace Facility provides more than 5 billion - on top of the money available from the EU budget - for Common Foreign and Security Policy activities. It is presented as an instrument to prevent conflicts and promote peace. The opposite is true. The money is used for war purposes, such as financing ongoing EU military missions, as well as supporting armed forces of countries like Georgia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where European and Russian capital compete for influence. The EU is also involved in conflicts in Africa, particularly in the Sahel region, where French and other European armed forces defend the interests of European capital in the face of competition from China, Russia and Turkey, among others.

Furthermore, the EU has been directly and indirectly (often through NATO) involved in a series of imperialist wars and interventions, such as Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya. There are currently 21 EU missions ongoing in Africa, Asia and Europe, of which 9 are military and 12 are “non-military”.

In 2019, the 414th Tank Battalion was established by the German and Dutch land forces, with both German and Dutch soldiers. The first battalion with soldiers from two EU member states.

The idea of a “European Army”, which France in particular is pushing for, has long been circulating. However, it has not yet been realized. This is mainly due to conflicting interests in the EU regarding NATO and its relationship with the US. France is pushing for “strategic autonomy” of the European Union, meaning that the European Union must have the capacity to act (militarily) by itself on a global level - independently of the U.S. and NATO.

In the context of developments in NATO and the EU, as well as developments in the world, mutual cooperation between the EU and NATO is being promoted. On January 10, 2023, a joint EU-NATO declaration was signed in Brussels with agreements on further cooperation.

Typically, NATO and the EU present themselves as protectors of democracy, freedom and human rights, while they emphasize the autocratic and undemocratic character the competing forces, such as China and Russia. In this way, Euro-Atlantic imperialism tries to assert itself as a kind of “judge” that has to intervene worldwide to protect “democratic principles”. Hence it tries to create false oppositions, about a good and a bad imperialism, in order to win the support of the people. These are false pretexts for imperialist interventions and wars, whose sole purpose is to upgrade the role of the EU in the international imperialist system.

Other imperialist alliances

There are countless other international unions, organizations or treaties in the world, economic, political and/or military in nature. Some are based on far-reaching cooperation, others only on agreements on certain issues. Some are larger and have global influence, others are smaller and have influence in a particular region.

In many such alliances, all sorts of contradictions exist. These are also fuelled by the fact that different parts of the bourgeoisie, depending on their interests, orient themselves more toward cooperation with, say, the U.S. or, on the contrary, China.

Illusions arise about some alliances, that they could serve for “peace and security” because they oppose the US. This, however, is not the case, as practice shows. The imperialist character of international alliances is determined by the class character of the participating states, and not the position of the alliance in the imperialist pyramid.

For example, the aforementioned BRICS was presented for some time as a force that would provide “peace and security”. But this approach ignores the reality that BRICS consists of capitalist countries. Promoting the interests of their monopolies, in the context of international competition, is what determines its policy, not the interests of the working class. There are, by the way, major contradictions even in the BRICS, for example due to the border disputes between China and India, but also due to the U.S. attempts at rapprochement with Brazil and India.

Another example is the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CVVO), a military alliance of Russia with Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Belarus. The character of that organization was evident with the January 2022 intervention in Kazakhstan, where Russian forces were deployed under the CVVO against popular protests to protect capitalist power.

In Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, established in 2001, also plays an important role. This is an economic, political and military alliance of China, Russia and India, as well as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Recently, Iran, Turkey and Belarus have announced their intention to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, while there are also ties with other countries in the Middle East, North Africa and Southeast Asia.

Current flashpoints

There are a series of flashpoints in the world, with conflicts or wars that could escalate in the future and lead to generalized wars.

In Eastern Europe, the situation is highly inflammable. An imperialist (proxy) war is taking place between the US, NATO and EU on the one hand and Russia and its allies on the other hand on the territory of Ukraine. This follows after the US and EU interference in Ukraine, with support for reactionary and fascist forces to pull the country into the Euro-Atlantic bloc. This set in motion important developments in the region against the interests of the peoples. A reactionary coup took place in Ukraine, giving free rein to fascist organizations, while trade unionists and communists were persecuted. Crimea was annexed by the Russian Federation. A war broke out in eastern Ukraine. The U.S. and NATO strengthened their presence in the Baltic region and Eastern Europe in a strategy aimed at encirclement of Russia. Large-scale military exercises such as Defender Europe and Atlantic Resolve took place, which were essentially a rehearsal for war with Russia. For its part, Russia demanded that NATO expansion stops and made other demands. Talks between Russia, the U.S. and NATO, however, did not lead to de-escalation. On the contrary, the situation escalated further with the Russian invasion on the one hand and the continued interference of NATO and the EU on the other.

Another flashpoint is the Middle East. The war in Syria, since 2011, has killed hundreds of thousands and displaced millions. Even though it appears that pro-government forces with support from Russia have gained the upper hand, parts of the country remain under the control of jihadists. American and Russian armed forces and military bases remain present, and Turkish occupation of areas in northern Syria continues. Hence, the struggle to divide the spoils continues.

In the Persian Gulf, the situation is also unstable. There is heavy interference from a variety of major powers in this region, in part because of its resources and strategic location as a hub for major international transport routes. China is increasingly active in the region, signing a treaty with Iran in 2021 for expanded economic and military cooperation, while also establishing economic ties with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman and others. In contrast, Iran's relations with the U.S. and EU are very poor and lead to dangerous incidents (such as seizing each other's ships with risk of armed clashes between naval vessels) with some regularity. The war in Yemen since 2014 has killed thousands and caused tremendous suffering for the working class. A key role in this is the Saudi-led and UAE-led military intervention, directed by the US and other allies. The antagonism between Saudi Arabia and UAE on the one hand, and Iran on the other - with the overarching competition between American and Chinese capital in the background - is linked to the war in Yemen. There also seems to be no end to the suffering of the Palestinian people under the criminal Israeli occupation.

Dangerous is also the situation in North Africa. There is fierce competition for control of resources in Libya with numerous countries interfering, including France, Italy, US, Russia, Turkey, Egypt, UAE and others. The truce and compromises are very fragile and the problems following the NATO intervention and civil war are still present.

There are a series of other flashpoints in Asia. Of great concern are the growing tensions between China and Taiwan, with interference from the US and strong EU member states. Many military exercises are taking place and there is a high risk of the situation escalating there.

There is also a complex conflict in the South China Sea. With the "Nine-dash line", China lays claim to sea areas that the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei see as their own waters (incidentally, with disputes between them as well). In addition, there are islands claimed by different countries.

Border disputes between China and India have persisted since the 1962 war, occasionally even leading to armed conflicts between the two countries in disputed areas. India and Pakistan are in conflict over the region of Kashmir, which is complicated by increasing Chinese influence in Pakistan on the one hand and India-US relations on the other.

Another flashpoint is the Balkans, where American, European, Russian and Chinese capital compete fiercely. The plan to integrate the western Balkans into Euro-Atlantic bloc continues with the integration of Albania and North Macedonia into the EU. There is conflict between Serbia and the NATO protectorate of Kosovo. There is a significant Serbian separatist trend in Bosnia-Herzegovina, oriented toward Russia. Old nationalist ideas of a "great Albania" or a "great Serbia" are being revived from the bourgeoisie of the

countries in the region. There are also constant conflicts between Turkey and Greece, which regularly lead to armed incidents. The Turkish bourgeois government promotes the idea of a “Blue Homeland”, laying claim to Greek islands and territorial waters. The Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus continues for decades.

Similarly, there are other areas where there are tensions that could lead to escalation, such as the Korean Peninsula, Latin America, the polar regions and elsewhere.

Arms race and nuclear weapons

International contradictions also manifest themselves in the increase in armaments. The US currently has by far the largest military spending at over \$800 billion (38% of global arms spending). China comes in second with nearly \$300 billion (14%), and far behind are India (77 billion), UK (68 billion), Russia (66 billion), France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Japan and South Korea. As a rule, armament is accompanied by a trend toward militarization.

Moreover, there are nine countries with nuclear weapons: US, Russia, UK, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea. All argue that it is for defensive use. However, in the context of conflicts - such as in Ukraine - some countries regularly hint at changing to the nuclear strategy of “first strike”. American nuclear weapons are also stationed in the Netherlands, namely at the Volkel airbase.

Economic competition for control of markets and geostrategic positions is accompanied by the pursuit of armaments. In the process, capital knows no moral constraints. The arms race against competing capitalist states is an inherent aspect of imperialism.

4. Imperialist war and the stance of communists in the struggle for peace

Imperialist wars are horrific developments for the working class. They are accompanied by great suffering. Human lives are destroyed. Many die, others lose hearth and home or are forced to flee and leave their country and loved ones behind. But war is not caused by nature. Nor are wars caused by human nature, as bourgeois theorists sometimes argue. The causes of imperialist wars lie in the interests of the exploiters, who compete among themselves for control of resources, transport routes, markets and spheres of influence. Imperialist wars are the result of the capitalist system that has profit as its highest good. When necessary to secure the profits of big capital, capitalist states do not hesitate to sacrifice the blood of their inhabitants on the altar of profit.

War as continuation of politics by other means

“War is merely the continuation of politics by other means,” stated the Prussian general and strategist Carl von Clausewitz. Lenin often referred to this quote because it captures the essence. Wars cannot be separated from the governments and classes waging them.²⁶

But to judge a war, we cannot rely on the pretexts put forward by one side or the other. The Marxist approach focuses on the following questions in assessing wars: Which class is waging the war? For what purpose? And at what stage of historical development?

Thus, in the 19^e century, Marx and Engels had to deal with wars that gave expression to bourgeois movements for national liberation. These were wars at a stage in history when the bourgeois-democratic transformations had not yet been completed (roughly around the period from the bourgeois French Revolution in 1789 to the proletarian Commune of Paris in 1871). At that time, the bourgeoisie in some countries still had a progressive role to play in the struggle against the remnants of feudalism and absolutism.

Another example is the heroic national liberation struggles waged by the oppressed peoples in the colonized countries in the 19th and 20th centuries. Those wars had an anti-colonial character - on the part of the colonized; on the part of the imperialist colonizer, on the contrary, they were imperialist and colonial wars.

Yet another example is the war waged by the USSR in defence of socialist construction against the invasion of imperialism in the form of Nazi-fascism. This war, on the part of the USSR, was not waged by a bourgeoisie, but by the working class defending socialism.

Today, the bourgeois-democratic transformations have been completed almost everywhere. The bourgeoisie no longer has a progressive role to play, but has a reactionary role. The wars waged by capitalist countries have an imperialist character. That is, they are waged by the bourgeoisie, the monopolies, with the aim of redistributing the world in their struggle for resources, transport routes, markets and spheres of influence. In such wars, which are imperialist on both sides, the working class has no reason to support the side of either imperialist.

Lenin wrote: “Present-day democracy will remain true to itself only if it joins neither one nor the other imperialist bourgeoisie, only if it says that the two sides are equally bad, and if it wishes the defeat of the imperialist bourgeoisie in every country. Any other decision will, in reality, be national-liberal and have nothing in common with genuine internationalism.”²⁷

²⁶ Lenin, ‘War and Revolution’, *Collected Works*, v. 24, p. 399-401.

²⁷ Lenin, ‘Under False Flag’, *Collected Works*, v. 21, p. 144.

The character of imperialist wars

It is important to assess wars in this way, on the basis of class analysis. Because to win popular support, capitalist states find countless pretexts for their imperialist war. For defending “national security” in the face of a “foreign threat”; for defending “our culture” or “our way of life”; for “democracy”; for the “protection of minorities”; or fight against terrorist, fundamentalist, fascist or other reactionary forces (alleged or real). Such pretexts are devised to secure popular support in imperialist war, because in periods of war the bourgeoisie needs “national unity” more than ever. But behind such pretexts is the reality that in the age of imperialism, the wars waged by the bourgeoisie are nothing but imperialist wars arising from the capitalist system itself.

The working class and other oppressed layers of the population have no interest in imperialist wars. They have no interest in fighting each other and no reason to hate each other. It is the capitalists who are constantly competing and fighting each other in their pursuit of profit. The workers are forced to sacrifice their lives in a struggle that does not concern them, namely, the competition between the monopolies fighting among themselves for the purpose of profit, in other words for the exploitation of the working class.

Lenin recognized slogans such as the “protection of the fatherland” or “national war” as relevant only in anti-colonial wars against the imperialists (especially since at the time the colonial system still existed), as well as (proletarian) national liberation movements in occupied countries. For wars between imperialists, such slogans are misleading.

In bourgeois approaches, the development of capitalism is seen as a peaceful process. Wars are seen as an anomaly created by external factors. The opposite is true: imperialist war arises directly from imperialist peace. Indeed, in periods of relative peace, the laws of imperialism prepare the next imperialist war. The international correlation of forces changes because of the law of uneven development. Emerging monopolies must secure resources, transport routes and markets to survive and grow. They compete with other monopolies trying to maintain and expand their position. That competition becomes increasingly fierce due to the law of uneven development. When that competition can no longer be fought by economic and political means, the armed forces of the bourgeois state are deployed against other states representing competing monopolies.

When war breaks out, Pandora’s box opens. All sorts of developments are set in motion that have their own dynamics. It is often difficult to predict the extent to which the war will escalate, who will be involved, exactly how long the war will last and what the outcome will be. Even a relatively small regional conflict, under certain circumstances, can be the spark that triggers the escalation to a more general war. Often developments turn out very differently than the protagonists had in mind.

At least one thing is certain: the working class on both sides always bear the brunt of imperialist war. German communist playwright and poet Berthold Brecht aptly wrote, “When the last [war] was over, there were victors and vanquished. Among the vanquished, the common people starved. Among the conquerors, the common people also starved.”

Thus, the cause of imperialist wars ultimately lies in capitalist ownership, in a system whose goal is profit and not the needs of the people. Only the overthrow of bourgeois power with socialist revolution can secure lasting and democratic peace, and put a definitive end to imperialist wars.

Experiences of World War I and Leninist strategy against imperialist war

Social chauvinism and pacifism of social democracy

At the outbreak of the First Imperialist World War in 1914, most of the labour parties of the Second International supported their national bourgeoisie. The elaborations and agreements of the Congresses of the Second International, with the position of not supporting imperialist wars, were discarded.

Support for the “own” bourgeoisie and the war, was justified under the guise that the war was “defensive”. Each side was firmly convinced of this (something we also see today). The social democratic party of each country labelled the enemy country as the aggressor and its own bourgeoisie as “defensive”. For the “defence of the homeland”, the Social Democrats believed it was necessary to cooperate with the bourgeoisie.

Thus the war was condoned by prominent figures in the labour movement throughout Europe, who even became ministers in the bourgeois governments that fought the imperialist war. The best-known example is the German SPD, but also, for example, the French SFIO provided two ministers and a secretary of state (Jules Guesde, Marcel Sembat and Albert Thomas) for the bourgeois government, while proclaiming the *Union Sacrée* (“Sacred Union”), which meant that any opposition to the government and any strike action was renounced.

Thus, the social democratic parties took the position of **social chauvinism**. Chauvinism is a reactionary bourgeois policy aimed at subjugating and suppressing other peoples, stirring up hatred and enmity between peoples. It is accompanied by racist theories. Social chauvinism is the expression of this reactionary bourgeois political movement in the labour movement. Social chauvinists pretend to be socialists, but in practice they act as chauvinists by directly or indirectly supporting the war and adopting the arguments of the bourgeoisie regarding the war. The essence of social chauvinism was well described by Rosa Luxemburg: “The global historical appeal of the Communist Manifesto undergoes a fundamental revision and, as amended by Kautsky, now reads: proletarians of all countries, unite in peace-time and cut each other’s throats in war!”²⁸

When World War I broke out in the summer of 1914, people assumed it would be over by autumn or Christmas at the latest. But the war lasted for years. The initial atmosphere of enthusiasm and nationalism, in which the social democrats got carried away, gradually turned. As the corpses piled up and people suffered from hunger and problems, an atmosphere of disappointment, sadness, anger and, above all, longing for peace emerged.

There are complex historical reasons that led most Second International parties to get so carried away and adopt a social-chauvinist position. An important underlying factor was that, with the rise of imperialism, labour aristocracy had emerged as a material basis for the influence of opportunism in the labour movement. After all, reformist tendencies existed before the war. The reformists were already orienting themselves increasingly toward the bourgeois state as the instrument for bringing about improvements. They were already orienting themselves toward cooperation with the capitalist class, and the war was the occasion for openly engaging with them. Many parties - especially in countries where they could operate legally - had gradually lost their revolutionary characteristics. They became legalistic²⁹, afraid of the consequences of an attitude of opposition to the war.

“By means of an intentionally vague expression – “practical consequences” - Kautsky has concealed the plain truth that the great and strong parties were *frightened* by the prospect of their

²⁸ Luxemburg, *Rebuilding the International*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1915/xx/rebuild-int.htm>.

²⁹ Legalism focuses only on legal forms of struggle and excludes illegal forms of struggle under all circumstances. The moment the bourgeois state threatens to make struggle illegal (by banning workers' organizations, abolishing the right to strike and demonstrate, etc.), supporters of legalism let themselves be co-opted and throw in the towel.

organisations being dissolved, their funds sequestered and their leaders arrested by the government. This means that Kautsky justifies betrayal of socialism by pleading the unpleasant “practical consequences” that follow from revolutionary tactics. Is this not a prostitution of Marxism? “We would have been arrested,” one of the Social-Democratic deputies who voted for the war credits on August 4 is alleged to have declared at a workers’ meeting in Berlin. The workers shouted in reply: “Well, what would have been bad about that?” (...) Not only in wartime but positively in any acute political situation, to say nothing of periods of revolutionary mass action of any kind, the governments of even the freest bourgeois countries will threaten to dissolve the legal organisations, seize their funds, arrest their leaders, and threaten other “practical consequences” of the same kind. What are we to do then?”³⁰

The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, were steeled by years of struggle against Tsarism under conditions of repression and persecution. They recognized in time that the forms of struggle had to be adapted to the conditions of war accompanied by increasing repression from the bourgeois state.

“ It is not their [the socialists’] business to vote for war credits or to encourage chauvinism in their “own” country (and allied countries), but primarily to strive against the chauvinism of their “own” bourgeoisie, without confining themselves to legal forms of struggle when the crisis has matured and the bourgeoisie has itself taken away the legality it has created.”³¹

The Bolsheviks did not fall into the trap of social-chauvinism, but neither did they allow themselves to be carried away by its apparent opposite, **pacifism**. Pacifism is a bourgeois movement opposed to any war. Thus, unlike the communists, pacifists also directed themselves against just wars of liberation (e.g., formerly in the colonies or in occupied territory). Preaching peace in general, regardless of what kind of peace, is regarded as the way to fight war. The imperialists use pacifism to disguise their war preparations or when they feel it is time to temporarily settle a war to divide the spoils. They use pacifism to detach the struggle for peace from the struggle against the causes of wars, against imperialism. Communists commit their forces to a peace movement with a class-oriented, anti-imperialist line, not a pacifist one. The expression of pacifism in the labour movement is also called social-pacifism or socialist pacifism.

Depending on how a war goes and all sorts of other factors, sooner or later the capitalist class will strive to make a peace. More specifically, an imperialist peace, in which the capitalists divide the spoils. In the process, the bourgeoisie makes concessions and concludes agreements that often harm the interests of the working class. The bourgeoisie, which as a rule earns much from war profits, can then begin to profit from the exploitation of the war-exhausted working class in reconstruction - while the countdown begins for the next imperialist war, since the imperialist peace is always temporary. Imperialist peace, like imperialist war, is a law of imperialism: they occur necessarily and alternate as long as society is based on monopoly capitalism. In the run-up to imperialist peace, the bourgeoisie can put forward peace slogans to take advantage of the people’s desire for peace.

Whereas pacifism at the beginning of the First Imperialist World War was still to be found mainly among the petty bourgeoisie and utopian socialists who dreamed of a “peaceful capitalism”, it was at one point embraced by (parts of) the bourgeoisie itself. Even the social democrats, who had previously been carried away by social-chauvinism, turned to social-pacifism after a while. Lenin therefore emphasized the “unity of the social-chauvinists with the pacifists.”³² Both currents are, by one means or another, expressions of the interests of the bourgeoisie.

“ It is precisely at the present time, when the ruling bourgeoisie is preparing peacefully to disarm millions of proletarians and to transfer them safely - under cover of a plausible ideology, and sprinkling them with the holy water of sentimental pacifist phrases! - from the filthy, stinking, fetid trenches, where they were engaged in slaughter, to the penal servitude of the capitalist factories, where by their “honest toil” they must repay the hundreds of millions of national debt,

³⁰ Lenin, ‘The Collapse of the Second International’, *Collected Works*, v. 21, p. 255.

³¹ Lenin, ‘Position and Tasks of the Socialist International’, *Collected Works*, v. 21, p. 39.

³² Lenin, *Bourgeois Pacifism and Socialist Pacifism*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/jan/01.htm>.

it is precisely at this time that the slogan, which our Party issued to the people in the autumn of 1914, viz., transform the imperialist war into a civil war for socialism, acquires still greater significance than it had at the beginning of the war.”³³

The transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war for socialism

The slogan about the transformation of war into civil war for socialism sums up the Leninist strategy against war in the age of imperialism. In conditions of war, the power of the bourgeoisie can be severely weakened, while the masses can make great strides in their consciousness as a result of war misery. Wars can therefore objectively lead to the emergence of a revolutionary situation. This happened during the First Imperialist World War in Russia and Germany, among others.

For the revolution to succeed, however, not only this objective factor is important. It also requires the subjective factor. It requires that the party be able to recognize that there is a revolutionary situation, that the party is prepared for it, is rooted in the workplaces and in the neighbourhoods, and is able to lead the working class in the socialist revolution, which provides the only way out for the working class for a democratic and lasting peace. This is the strategy followed by the Bolsheviks, through which the October Socialist Revolution emerged from the First Imperialist World War.

In Germany, the revolutionary situation did not lead to a successful revolution. Many factors played a role in it. One important factor was that the communists had not split from the Social Democrats and opportunists in time.

The SPD was the largest party of the Second International. The fact that this party embraced the reformism and revisionism of Bernstein and Kautsky, and then social-chauvinism, influenced the labour movement internationally. This is precisely why the struggle of revolutionaries such as Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Mehring, Zetkin and others was of enormous importance. They rejected the reformist line to abandon the class struggle under the pretext of war. They represented the revolutionary current that said: “the main enemy of every people is in their own country!”³⁴

The revolutionaries organized themselves in the Spartacus Union, but they remained organizationally linked to the SPD, and, after the split in 1917, to the USPD which included Bernstein and Kautsky. The lack of a revolutionary party was a deficiency that painfully became clear in the 1918-1919 revolution, in which the Social Democrats won the upper hand and capitalist power was saved in Germany. It was not until New Year’s Day in 1919 that the KPD was founded. Less than three weeks later, Luxemburg and Liebknecht were murdered by the counter-revolutionary soldiers, who were ultimately led by the Defence Ministry, which was headed by a Social Democratic minister.

Incidentally, a war certainly does not automatically or always create a revolutionary situation. In Britain, for example, this did not occur around the First Imperialist World War. “We can neither “promise” civil war nor “decree” it,” as Lenin wrote, “but to go on working - if necessary for a very long time - in that direction, we are in duty bound.”³⁵ Even if a revolutionary situation does not arise, the revolutionary struggle is the struggle that will enforce achievements. Against the reformists, who focused on imperialist peace with some “improvements” in national borders, international law or in armament spending, Lenin stated the following.

“The question is not, as the pacifist Kautskyites maintain: either a reformist political campaign, or else the renunciation of reforms. That is a bourgeois presentation of the question. The question is: either revolutionary struggle, the by-product of which, in the event of its not being fully successful, is reforms (the whole history of revolutions throughout the world has proved this), or nothing but talk about reforms and the promise of reforms.”³⁶

³³ Lenin, ‘A Turn in World Politics’, *Collected Works*, v. 21, p. 268-69.

³⁴ Liebknecht, *The main enemy is at home!*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/liebknecht-k/works/1915/05/main-enemy-home.htm>.

³⁵ Lenin, ‘Letter to A.G. Shlyapnikov of Oct. 17, 1914’, *Collected Works*, v. 35, p. 164.

³⁶ Lenin, ‘Bourgeois Pacifism and Socialist Pacifism’, *Collected Works*, v. 23, p. 194.

The struggle for peace today

The sharpening of international contradictions, the war in Eastern Europe and other flashpoints around the world, show the increasing threat of war, not only at the regional level but also on a larger scale. Inter-imperialist contradictions are further fuelled by capitalist economic crises and changing international correlation of forces due to uneven development.

When assessing inter-imperialist contradictions and wars, it is important not to look at mere geopolitical considerations. Intuitively, the first question one asks to assess a war is, “Who is the aggressor?” But Lenin criticized such analyses of the pacifists: “ In appraising the present war, they use meaningless, vulgar, philistine phrases about aggression or defence in general...”³⁷

As a rule, both sides are convinced that the opponent is the aggressor, either by firing the first shot or making a threat or committing all kinds of crimes. However, the reality is that imperialist wars are the result of escalating inter-imperialist tensions. Both imperialist blocs escalate the situation, pose a threat to each other, give each other incentives for war. We also see this in the current war in Ukraine, where fruitless discussions to identify one aggressor can only lead to condoning one or the other imperialist. It is a great illusion that there are “good, peaceful imperialists” next to “bad, warlike imperialists”. Imperialism is capitalism in its final stage, a system that produces imperialist war, and we fight that system. Naturally, in doing so, we condemn any aggressive action that leads to further escalation, from whichever imperialist it comes.

We judge wars on the basis of a scientific, a dialectical and materialist approach to developments. The character of war must be determined, not on the basis of who is “attacking” or “defending” - insofar as that can be determined at all - but on the basis of which class is waging the war. The communists’ task is not to get the working class to choose one imperialist or another, but rather to organize the working class in the struggle against imperialist war and the system that causes the wars. In the event that a country is occupied, communists wage the struggle to organize the resistance of the working class itself against the occupation.

Dangerous and disorienting for the labour movement are pacifist illusions, for example, that international law can keep the peace. It is not wrong to point out when imperialist states or alliances violate international law. But it is equally important to realize that international law is also often used precisely as justification for imperialist interventions and wars. International law is not classless and cannot be separated from the correlation of forces between capitalism and the struggle for socialism at the international level, which have been unfavourable since the counterrevolutions in the USSR and a series of other countries in which socialism was built in the 20th century.

Equally dangerous are illusions about a “multipolar world”. Again, this completely detaches the struggle for peace from the class question. With this political line, the struggle for peace becomes merely a struggle against a certain correlation of forces, against one imperialist bloc in favour of other imperialist blocs. The underlying illusion is that the bourgeoisie can guarantee peace, or that peace can be guaranteed by another correlation of forces between imperialist blocs. This is essentially a new form of Kautsky’s theory of ultra-imperialism. The same is true of theories that see “globalization” as a phenomenon that could end war. A similar approach can also be found in theories that argue that integration in imperialist alliances could prevent wars, presenting, for example, the European Union as something that could guarantee peace in Europe.

Another harmful tendency is for parties to substitute the demand for exit from imperialist alliances such as NATO (or EU), for the vague demand of “dissolving NATO”. A sham, which mainly makes it easier to support or even participate in bourgeois governments, within the framework of imperialist alliances, waiting

³⁷ Idem, 192.

for them to be “dissolved”. Incidentally, this demand is sometimes also mentioned among bourgeois, often reactionary forces, expressing parts of capital that look towards other imperialist alliances.

Confusion about such positions also exists within the international communist movement. This is partly the result of the fact that Leninist elaborations on war and peace have been completely glossed over due to Eurocommunism and reformism in general. The theory of “peaceful coexistence”, as espoused by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) from the 20th Congress onward, also played a role in this. The Leninist theory of war and imperialism is the result of enriching the elaborations of Marx and Engels with the experiences of the communist movement in the first decades of the 20th century and the scientific study of these experiences. Instead of further enriching that theory based on current developments, these lessons have been discarded by the reformist tendency in favour of the aforementioned classless approaches.

It is not the bourgeoisie that can guarantee peace through international law or multipolar correlation of forces. On the contrary, the imperialists are the ones causing wars.

The only social force, capable of conducting the struggle for peace and against war, is the working class, in collaboration with other oppressed layers of the population. In the struggle against every warmongering, against armament programs, against militarization, against imperialist alliances, against the participation of the bourgeois state in imperialist interventions and wars, the working class can defend peace and create conditions for a socialist society that can guarantee the definitive termination of wars.

For us as NCPN it means that we commit our forces in the struggle against NATO and the EU, against the participation of Dutch forces in imperialist military interventions and wars, including against the interventions of the Dutch state in the Caribbean. We are committed to the development of the peace struggle with an anti-imperialist orientation, not against one or another country or alliance, but directed against the imperialist system as a whole, against the capitalist class and all imperialist alliances.

Currently, there is hardly a peace movement in the Netherlands. There is a civilian organization PAX, which was formed in 2006 from the merger of Pax Christi and the Inter-church Peace Council. Hence it comes from a Christian Democratic background. It focuses on peace in general. It aligns itself with the positions of the Dutch bourgeoisie and the EU. It does not target imperialist alliances. Quite the opposite, PAX regards NATO and EU as “international security actors” that can contribute precisely to “effective protection of civilians against war violence”, and it therefore also seeks cooperation with these imperialist alliances.³⁸ Practically, it operates as a lobbying organization, which also occasionally preaches about peace through webinars or by sending some volunteers or interns somewhere. Despite the fact that they do use the word “activist”, it is not focused on organizing actions. PAX is almost entirely subsidized by governments and organizations; only 3% of its income comes from private donations.³⁹

Furthermore, there are initiatives for actions or demonstrations when something occurs, such as a few years ago with the imperialist interference in Venezuela or more recently the attempted interference in Cuba. The NCPN and CJB usually join such initiatives. Sometimes we also have a leading role in them. But these initiatives have a spontaneous character and are limited, both in the number of people mobilized and in their duration. However, this does not take away from the importance of continuing such efforts. We gain experience and it contributes to creating potential for the creation of a really organized peace movement. In these initiatives we can also seek cooperation with committees, workers’ organizations and members of sister organizations in the Netherlands.

In the context of increasing inter-imperialist antagonisms, there is speculation about reintroducing conscription, which certain political forces are pushing for. It is important to fight against this, not from the point of view of a principled position against conscription, but from the point of view of realizing that

³⁸ PAX, *Empowering people building peace: strategic framework 2021-2025*, <https://paxvoorvrede.nl/media/download/empowering-people-building-peace-pax-strategisch-kader-2021-2025.pdf> pages 17, 23.

³⁹ CBF, *Recognition Report*, <https://www.cbf.nl/organisatie/pax>.

this conscription is being instituted by the bourgeois state in order to use young people as cannon fodder in the imperialist plans of the ruling class.

This is accompanied by a more general trend of militarization, which, in addition to the pleas for the reintroduction of conscription, manifests itself in a variety of other ways. For example, the presence of advertising for armed forces, in the media but also, for example, at educational institutions. More generally, armed forces are given a stage more often, for example with military personnel speaking in the media or at commemorations. Moreover, the authorities and armament of boas (special investigating officers, *ed.*), police and secret service are being further expanded by the government and the EU. The NCPN will oppose militarization, a struggle that is particularly important among young people.

At the international level, there is the World Peace Council, whose statements we occasionally translate and publish. Content mainly involves organizations in which communists play a vanguard role, which means that the contradictions within the international communist movements are also expressed here.

The example of Ukraine

The imperialist war in Ukraine and certain discussions surrounding the assessment of this development are considered a bit more extensively.

The outbreak of the imperialist war in Ukraine is the result of escalating contradictions between different imperialist powers. Two peoples that once lived together peacefully under socialism of the Soviet Union are now facing each other in a bloody war. From both sides, both on the part of the reactionary Ukrainian government and its NATO allies, and on the part of the capitalist Russian Federation, false pretexts are being put forward to justify the imperialist war. But essentially, the war on both sides is an imperialist war waged for the interests of the monopolies.

The counterrevolutions and the overthrow of socialism were accompanied by the breaking up of the Soviet Union, after which Russia and Ukraine became independent states. Under socialism, close cooperation took place throughout the Soviet Union, and particularly between Russia and Ukraine. Much of the Ukrainian population in the east, for example, is Russian speaking. Whereas before the Soviet Union the Ukrainian language was suppressed, the Soviet Union instituted a language policy whereby everyone could be taught in their own language and take pride in their own language without chauvinism.

But after the fall of socialism, bourgeois nationalism reappeared in both countries. Fascist forces that had fought against the Soviet Union were glorified after 1991. For example, Stepan Bandera in Ukraine, who was guilty of a large number of pogroms against the Polish and Jewish populations of Ukraine with his organization the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists). Accordingly, he was trained in Nazi Germany to serve as a battering ram against the Ukrainian working class. Similarly, this is how he is used again after the counterrevolution in 1991.

Relations between capitalist Ukraine and capitalist Russia are full of contradictions. On the one hand, a part of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie focused mainly on Euro-Atlantic capital; on the other hand, parts of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie remained economically closely associated with the Russian bourgeoisie and jointly made large profits on the backs of the workers.

Meanwhile, competition and contradictions between NATO, the US and the EU on the one hand and Russia and its allies on the other also continued to increase, influenced in part by the changing international correlation of forces and the influence of China as a (potential) ally for Russian capital. Euro-Atlantic capital tried to defend its dominant position in the face of such developments and secure its interests. An expression of this is also the expansion of NATO and the aggressive strategy of encirclement of Russia with the establishment of military bases and the holding of military exercises closer and closer to Russian borders. With the increase in antagonism between the Euro-Atlantic bloc and Russia, the antagonism within the Ukrainian bourgeoisie and its political representatives also grew.

In 2004, the reactionary “Orange Revolution” broke out in Ukraine with the more “pro-Russian” candidate Yanukovich giving way to the pro-Euro-Atlantic President Yushchenko after the election, following allegations of electoral fraud. With the election of Yushchenko, a banker, pro-Ukrainian nationalism and the glorification of fascists like Bandera gained even more space. The anti-Russian sentiment, related to these forces and events, was and is convenient for the Euro-Atlantic imperialists, especially after the capitalist economic crisis of 2008.

But after 2010, Yanukovich nevertheless returned to power as president. Finally, in the so-called “Maidan uprising” in 2014, a reactionary coup with overt foreign interference, he was violently ousted by the Ukrainian-nationalist bloc. This bloc immediately opened the attack on everything related to the memory of the Soviet Union and also carried out a sort of derussification campaign. Furthermore, the Communist Party of Ukraine was banned, the party office vandalized, and in Odessa fire was set to a trade union house killing hundreds of people. Fascists again acted openly in the streets and parliaments, and were welcomed as heroes.

Just as the memory of the Soviet Union in Russia is misused for Russian nationalism, so anti-communism and anti-Sovietism in Ukraine takes on an anti-Russian colour, as if the Soviet Union had been a kind of continuation of the Russian empire.

Particularly in eastern Ukraine, where there are closer ties with Russia partly because of economic and cultural ties, people were not keen on the new Maidan regime. The new government’s plans to sign an association treaty with the EU and its policy against the Russian language led to much resistance among parts of the population. That association treaty had major economic consequences for the working class in Ukraine, but also for parts of the capitalist class, as it opened up the Ukrainian market to European and American capital on a large scale, while erecting all sorts of barriers against Russian capital. The resistance culminated in the creation of so-called “People’s Republics” in Donetsk and Luhansk, which incidentally have nothing in common with the socialist people’s republics.

Although this manifested itself in an ethnic, cultural conflict, there was an important class component to this. These “People’s Republics” represented the interests of those parts of the bourgeoisie in Ukraine that did not want to align themselves with anti-Russian nationalism and had an interest in economic ties with Russia. Part of the working class, who saw that the new Maidan government was making an open attack on their rights, followed them in this.

The Russian Federation responded after the Maidan coup by annexing Crimea. The attitude toward the “People’s Republics” of Luhansk and Donetsk was hesitant, because Russian capital also had economic interests intertwined with Western and Ukrainian capital. On the one hand, these “People’s Republics” were supported economically and militarily by the Russian state; on the other hand, they were not politically recognized or incorporated like Crimea, and the Russian state recognized the new Ukrainian regime and proceeded to Minsk agreements. Russian and Ukrainian capital jointly benefited from pipelines through Ukraine and the trade of coal and steel from the Donbas region.

Under these circumstances, a (civil) war had been raging in eastern Ukraine since 2014. The Minsk agreements, which were constantly violated, did not lead to a diplomatic solution. Influenced by the above events, it eventually escalated with the Russian Federation’s invasion of Ukraine. Under the guise of the “denazification” of Ukraine, the Russian bourgeoisie tries to portray its war of conquest as one and the same struggle as that waged by the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany, whereas groups such as the “Rusich” group are deployed in this war and Putin openly quotes the fascist philosopher Ivan Ilyin in his speeches. Another important pretext for the war is that Russia wants to defend the Russian-speaking population in eastern Ukraine and ensure the independence of the so-called “people’s republics”. Also, the Russian bourgeoisie would like to see a “fair, multipolar” world. This means nothing more than that the Russian Euro-Atlantic imperialists claim their “fair share” in plundering the world. The Russian bourgeoisie also invokes international law, as does Ukraine and its NATO allies.

From the Ukrainian and NATO sides, the matter is presented as if it were a totally unprovoked invasion from Russia. Russia and the Russian people are presented as inherently aggressive and criminal. Although

the Ukrainian bourgeoisie, the “oligarchs,” have much in common with their Russian counterpart, the case is presented as if it were a struggle of “European civilization” against “Russian barbarism”. These old racist and reactionary ideas come back to full prominence. Ukraine and NATO, the same NATO guilty of countless imperialist interventions in Afghanistan, Libya, Yugoslavia, and so on, also invoke international law. Openly fascist militias like the Azov battalion were incorporated into the Ukrainian army and fascist slogans like “Slava Ukraini” are now commonplace in Euro-Atlantic bourgeois politics.

All these pretexts are designed to distract from the fact that the war is objectively about the conflicting interests of the imperialist blocs involved. Russia is using Nazi groups itself to advance its interests and has silenced the working class in the so-called people’s republics and dragged them into an even bigger war. The Ukrainian bourgeoisie and its NATO allies in turn carry great blame for this war through the countless provocations and threats against Russia, the promotion of anti-Russian sentiment against sections of the population, and the murder of countless people in the Donbas region.

In all this, various communist parties take different positions. There is a current of parties that take a position that actually amounts to supporting the invasion by the Russian bourgeoisie in Ukraine. It is argued by this current that Russia is “fighting Nazism” in Ukraine and that if communists do not support this invasion, they are objectively siding with NATO. Characteristically, parties in this current often go so far as to act together with nationalist, reactionary and even fascist forces since the outbreak of the war.

There are also currents within the international communist movement that take a more centrist stance and rely primarily on international law. However, as indicated earlier, international law is also used as a pretext by both sides in the war. International law as such cannot be the basis for condemning the war because the law is not the basis for the conflict. The interpretation of this law is subject to the class struggle and is bourgeois in its character. Additionally, the relations in international law are different from when the Soviet Union existed - it managed to enforce certain positive international agreements.

In addition, there are communist parties, such as the Union of Communists of Ukraine, which label the war as an imperialist war from both sides. They signed the joint declaration as drafted by the KKE (Greece), TKP (Turkey), PCIE (Spain) and PCM (Mexico). The statement also labels this war as an imperialist war and calls on the working class and people not to choose one or the other robber. The Union of Communists of Ukraine calls for turning “arms against its own bourgeoisie” and making this struggle between peoples a struggle against the capitalist exploitative system that causes these imperialist wars. The NCPN and CJB have signed this statement.

Guidelines for our ideological work on imperialism and building an anti-imperialist peace movement

1. Ideological work

- 1.1 Under the responsibility of the CC, the priority is to organize training sessions in the short term, based on the Leninist conception of imperialism and the assessments on current developments elaborated by the Party.
- 1.2 The Congress determined that a draft for a new Party program should be developed. The CC will continue this work, developing the relevant sections on the contemporary relations based on the insights of this Conference and further study.
- 1.3 In the coming years, under the leadership of the CC, the study of imperialism and current developments will continue within the framework of the relevant commissions. More specifically, the following issues will be further examined:
 - Current developments in the imperialist system.
 - The class composition of Dutch society. The composition of Dutch capital and the strategic choices of the Dutch imperialists. But also the composition of the Dutch working class and of the middle strata.
 - Developments surrounding imperialist alliances such as NATO and the EU are examined in more detail. Popularizing articles expose the character of such alliances and the harmful effects they have on the standard of living and security of the working class.
 - China's role in international relations will be studied in more detail. The position will be developed and adopted at a future Conference.
 - The NCPN conducts research on the remnants of colonialism today, particularly the remnants of Dutch colonialism in the Caribbean. This framework also requires study of colonialism and the historical development of this phenomenon, with attention to colonialism in the time before and during monopoly capitalism, as well as study of the historical development of the strategy of the international communist movement in the struggle against colonialism.
 - The criticism of opportunistic and bourgeois conceptions of imperialism produced by the ideological apparatus of the bourgeoisie (education, media, etc.) is further elaborated, as well as its harmful influence on the social movement. This is also popularized in articles and propaganda materials.

2. Work to build an anti-imperialist peace movement.

- 2.1 The NCPN will continue to work in the coming years for initiatives against imperialist wars and interventions, and for peace. The NCPN will work in the coming years to build an organized peace movement with a class-oriented, anti-imperialist orientation.
- 2.2 The NCPN opposes any participation or support of the Dutch state in imperialist wars and interventions. We oppose armament, nuclear weapons, militarization and ideas of reintroducing conscription to make the youth of the Dutch working class available as cannon fodder for the plans of Dutch big capital and NATO. We wage the ideological struggle against warmongering, chauvinism and nationalism.
- 2.3 In contrast, the NCPN promotes the values of proletarian internationalism, international solidarity and friendship of nations. To this end, we support or organize international solidarity actions to the best of our ability.
- 2.4 The NCPN reveals the imperialist character and danger of imperialist alliances such as NATO and EU. The struggle for the Netherlands' withdrawal from imperialist alliances, is linked to the struggle for socialism.

- 2.5 The NCPN exposes the hypocrisy of pacifism and combats the influence in the peace movement of the bourgeois pacifist peace lobby, which in fact supports the line of the Dutch government and the imperialist alliances in which the Netherlands participates.
- 2.6 Party initiatives in the peace movement are coordinated nationwide, but are linked as much as possible to the building of party organisations and to work in the companies and amongst students.
- 2.7 In the coming years, the party will develop slogans in the spirit of our anti-imperialist position that comrades can use in peace and anti-imperialist initiatives.

