

9. EXPOSING AND REFUTING KAUTSKYISM

Among the opportunists of the Second International, there were — besides the social-chauvinists who openly went over to the bourgeoisie — the so-called “centrists”, the undercover social-chauvinists. The chief representative of the “centrists” was Kautsky who since August 1914 “has presented a picture of utter bankruptcy as a Marxist, of unheard-of spinelessness, and a series of the most wretched vacillations and betrayals”.¹ However, he had high prestige in the Second International and his hypocrisy served him as camouflage. Therefore, the fight against Kautsky was no minor question but a basic one which affected the entire situation at the time. In order to rally the revolutionary Socialists and the broad masses of the various countries under the banner of Marxism and to oppose imperialist war by revolutionary war, Lenin spent a great deal of energy during the war period on exposing and refuting Kautsky. In a letter of October 1914, he wrote:

There is now *nothing* in the world that is more harmful and dangerous to the *ideological* independence of the proletariat than this vile self-satisfaction and loathsome hypocrisy of Kautsky, who wants to conceal and slur over everything and calm the awakened conscience

¹ “The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution”, *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. II, Part 1, p. 47.

of the workers with sophisms and pseudo-scientific verbiage.¹

In refuting Kautskyism, Lenin penetratingly explained and developed the Marxist theory of war and peace and tactics of proletarian revolutionary struggle.

THE PHILISTINE DOES NOT UNDERSTAND THAT WAR IS A “CONTINUATION OF POLITICS”

In his “Socialism and War” Lenin wrote:

The Socialists have always condemned wars between peoples as barbarous and bestial. Our attitude towards war, however, differs in principle from that of the bourgeois pacifists and Anarchists. We differ from the first in that we understand the inseparable connection between wars on the one hand and class struggles inside of a country on the other, we understand the impossibility of eliminating wars without eliminating classes and creating Socialism, and in that we fully recognise the justice, the progressivism and the necessity of civil wars, *i.e.*, wars of an oppressed class against the oppressor, of slaves against the slaveholders, of serfs against the landowners, of wage-workers against the bourgeoisie.²

Quoting the famous dictum “War is the continuation of politics by other means”, Lenin pointed out that to ascertain the real nature of a war, it was necessary to study the politics that preceded the war, the politics that led

¹ “Letter to A. G. Shlyapnikov, 27, X, 1914”, *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Vol. 35, p. 125.

² *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XVIII, p. 219.

to and brought about the war. Before the current war, the ruling classes of England, France, Germany, Italy, Austria and Russia had pursued a policy of colonial robbery, of suppressing the labour movements, of oppressing foreign nations. The First World War was precisely the continuation of these imperialist politics. It was an imperialist war.

Lenin added:

The philistine does not understand that war is a "continuation of politics," and therefore limits himself to saying, "the enemy is attacking," "the enemy is invading my country," without trying to understand *why*, by *which class*, and for *what* political object the war is being conducted.¹

While the social-chauvinists of the various countries set up a frantic clamour about "defence of the fatherland" and while each group vilified the other, Kautsky did his utmost to cover up their shameless betrayal. He said:

It is the right and duty of everyone to defend his fatherland; true internationalism consists in the recognition of this right for Socialists of all nations, including those who are at war with my nation. . . .²

Lenin angrily commented:

This matchless reasoning is such a boundlessly vulgar travesty of socialism that the best answer to it would be to coin a medal with the portraits of Wilhelm II and Nicholas II on one side and of Plekhanov and

¹"A Caricature of Marxism and 'Imperialist Economism'", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XIX, p. 219.

²Quoted by Lenin in "The Collapse of the Second International", *op. cit.*, p. 180.

Kautsky on the other. True internationalism, mind you, means that we must justify the shooting of German workers by French workers, and of French by the Germans in the name of "defence of the fatherland"!¹

In order to justify their betrayal, Kautsky and his like falsely referred to Marx and Engels, saying that when wars broke out in 1854-55, 1870-71 and 1876-77, Marx and Engels invariably sided with one or another belligerent country. Exposing this sophistry, Lenin pointed out:

To compare the "continuation of the politics" of fighting against feudalism and absolutism—the politics of the bourgeoisie in its struggle for liberty—with the "continuation of the politics" of a decrepit, *i.e.*, imperialist, bourgeoisie, *i.e.*, of a bourgeoisie which has plundered the whole world, a reactionary bourgeoisie which, in alliance with feudal landlords, crushes the proletariat, is like comparing yards with pounds.²

Lenin said that the main features of the old wars referred to by Kautsky were these:

(1) They solved the problem of bourgeois-democratic reforms and the overthrow of absolutism or foreign oppression; (2) Objective prerequisites for a Socialist revolution were not yet ripe at that time and none of the Socialists *prior to the war* could speak of utilising wars for "hastening the collapse of capitalism" as did the Stuttgart (1907) and Basle (1912) resolutions; (3) There were no Socialist parties of any strength, mass appeal, and proven in battles, in the countries of *either* of the belligerent groups.

¹"The Collapse of the Second International", *op. cit.*, p. 180.

²*Ibid.*, p. 182.

To be brief, it is no wonder that Marx and the Marxists confined themselves to deciding *which* bourgeoisie's victory would be more harmless to (or more favourable for) the world proletariat at a time when it was impossible to think of a general proletarian movement against the governments and the bourgeoisie in all the belligerent countries.¹

With his usual sophistry Kautsky said that the war was not "purely" imperialist but also had a national character, because though the ruling class had imperialist tendencies, the masses of the people (including the proletarian masses) had "national" strivings. Lenin pointed out that the only national element in the current war was that represented by the war of Serbia against Austria, and that this national element of the Serbo-Austrian war had and could have no serious significance in the European war as a whole. For 91 per cent of the participants, the war was of an imperialist character. He said:

. . . for anyone to argue that the war is not "purely" imperialist when we are discussing the flagrant deception of "the masses of the people" that is being perpetrated by the imperialists, who are deliberately screening the aims of naked robbery by "national" phraseology, shows that he is either an infinitely stupid pedant, or a pettifogger and deceiver.²

In unison with Plekhanov and Co. Kautsky said, "There is only one practical question: the victory or the defeat of our own country."³ Lenin commented:

¹"Sophisms of Social-Chauvinists", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XVIII, pp. 173-74.

²"The Collapse of the Second International", *op. cit.*, p. 197.

³Quoted by Lenin in "Civil War Slogan Illustrated", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XVIII, p. 161.

This is true; yes, if we were to forget Socialism and class struggle, this would be true. But if we do not forget Socialism, it is untrue! There is another *practical* question: whether we should perish in a war between slaveholders, ourselves blind and helpless slaves, or whether we should perish for the "attempts at fraternisation" between the workers, with the aim of casting off slavery?

Such is, *in reality*, the "practical" question.¹

During the entire war period, Lenin persistently fought for the defeat of his own government in the war and for the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war. He pointed out, in the article "Defeat of One's Own Government in the Imperialist War":

Revolution in wartime is civil war; and the *transformation* of war between governments into civil war is, on the one hand, facilitated by military reverses ("defeats") of governments; on the other hand, it is *impossible* really to strive for such a transformation without thereby facilitating defeat.²

IMPERIALISM IS MONOPOLISTIC, DECAYING, MORIBUND CAPITALISM

Kautsky regarded imperialism not as a stage of capitalism, but as a policy which was "preferred" by finance capital, the striving of "industrial" countries to annex "agrarian" countries. Lenin wrote:

¹"Civil War Slogan Illustrated", *ibid.*, p. 161.

²*Selected Works*, London, Vol. 5, p. 143.

This definition of Kautsky's is thoroughly false theoretically. The distinguishing feature of imperialism is the domination, *not* of industrial capital, but of finance capital, the striving to annex, *not only* agrarian countries, but *all kinds* of countries. Kautsky *separates* imperialist politics from imperialist economics, he separates monopoly in politics from monopoly in economics, in order to pave the way for his vulgar, bourgeois reformism in the shape of "disarmament," "ultra-imperialism" and similar piffle.¹

Lenin made a systematic study of imperialism while refuting Kautsky's "theory" of imperialism, and he wrote many articles on the subject. Among these is his outstanding work, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, in which he summed up the development of capitalism during the half century following the publication of *Capital*, and revealed the nature, laws and contradictions of imperialism, the new stage of capitalism. He wrote:

Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.²

¹ "Imperialism and the Split in the Socialist Movement", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XIX, p. 339.

² "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 22, pp. 266-67.

In his article "Imperialism and the Split in the Socialist Movement", Lenin provided the following definition:

Imperialism is a special historical stage of capitalism. Its specific character is three-fold: Imperialism is 1) monopolistic capitalism; 2) parasitic, or decaying, capitalism; 3) moribund capitalism. The substitution of monopoly for free competition is the fundamental economic feature, the *quintessence* of imperialism.¹

Lenin showed that in the era of imperialism the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the imperialist countries becomes more acute, and the conditions for a revolutionary outbreak are ripe; the contradiction sharpens between the peoples of the colonial and dependent countries on the one hand and imperialist countries on the other, and national-liberation movements increasingly spread; the struggles between the imperialist countries for the division of the world becomes keener and the desire of each to strangle the other more intensified.

From this scientific analysis of imperialism, he drew the conclusion that "imperialism is the eve of the social revolution of the proletariat".²

Lenin discovered the law of the uneven economic and political development of capitalism. He showed that this phenomenon became more pronounced under imperialism. The spasmodic character of this uneven development explained why some countries which had lagged behind leaped ahead, while others which had been ahead

¹ *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XIX, p. 337.

² "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism", *op. cit.*, p. 194.

now lagged behind. It was precisely this unevenness of capitalist economic and political development that rendered inevitable wars between the imperialist countries for the redivision of the world, enabled the proletariat to breach the front of imperialism at its weakest point and overthrow the rule of bourgeoisie, and made it possible for socialist revolution and construction to triumph first in one, or several countries.

Earlier, in 1915, in his "United States of Europe Slogan", Lenin wrote:

Uneven economic and political development is an absolute law of capitalism. Hence, the victory of socialism is possible, first in a few or even in one single capitalist country. The victorious proletariat of that country, having expropriated the capitalists and organised its own socialist production, would *confront* the rest of the capitalist world, attract to itself the oppressed classes of other countries. . . .¹

Then in "The War Program of the Proletarian Revolution", written in 1916, he further explained:

The development of capitalism proceeds extremely unevenly in the various countries. It cannot be otherwise under the commodity production system. From this it follows irrefutably that Socialism cannot achieve victory simultaneously *in all* countries. It will achieve victory first in one or several countries. . . .²

¹ *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 5, p. 141.

² *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 571.

"ULTRA-IMPERIALISM"—AN OPPORTUNIST THEORY
IN THE SERVICE OF MONOPOLY CAPITAL

Lenin exploded the falsity of the theory of "ultra-imperialism" advanced by Kautsky. He regarded it as the most subtle of opportunist theories, most skilfully counterfeited to appear scientific.

Kautsky asked:

Cannot the present imperialist policy be supplanted by a new, ultra-imperialist policy, which will introduce the joint exploitation of the world by internationally united finance capital in place of the mutual rivalries of national finance capitals?¹

He went on to say that the end of the war "may lead to the strengthening of the weak rudiments of ultra-imperialism. . . . Its lessons may hasten developments for which we would have to wait a long time under peace conditions. If an agreement between nations, disarmament and a lasting peace are achieved, the worst of the causes that led to the growing moral decay of capitalism before the war may disappear. . . ."² He said that this "new" phase of "ultra-imperialism" "could create an era of new hopes and expectations within the framework of capitalism."³

With his theory of "ultra-imperialism" Kautsky wanted to prove that the contradictions of capitalism would be greatly mitigated. Lenin pointed out that free trade and

¹ Quoted by Lenin in "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism", *op. cit.*, p. 293.

² Quoted by Lenin in "The Collapse of the Second International", *op. cit.*, p. 184.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

peaceful competition were possible and necessary during the former "peaceful" epoch of capitalism, when capital was in a position to increase the number of its colonies and dependent countries without hindrance, and when concentration of capital was still slight and no monopolist undertakings existed. However, in the imperialist epoch, though monopoly superseded free competition it did not abolish competition; on the contrary, it intensified it, thus compelling the capitalists to pass from peaceful expansion to armed struggle for the redivision of colonies and spheres of influence.

Lenin said:

The capitalists divide the world, not out of any particular malice, but because the degree of concentration which has been reached forces them to adopt this method in order to obtain profits. And they divide it "in proportion to capital", "in proportion to strength", because there cannot be any other method of division under commodity production and capitalism. But strength varies with the degree of economic and political development. In order to understand what is taking place, it is necessary to know what questions are settled by the changes in strength. The question as to whether these changes are "purely" economic or *non-economic* (e.g., military) is a secondary one, which cannot in the least affect fundamental views on the latest epoch of capitalism.¹

He added:

... "inter-imperialist" or "ultra-imperialist" alliances, no matter what form they may assume, whether

¹ "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism", *op. cit.*, p. 253.

of one imperialist coalition against another, or of a general alliance embracing *all* the imperialist powers, are *inevitably* nothing more than a "truce" in periods between wars. Peaceful alliances prepare the ground for wars, and in their turn grow out of wars; the one conditions the other, producing alternating forms of peaceful and non-peaceful struggle on *one and the same* basis of imperialist connections and relations within world economics and world politics.¹

The only real, social significance which Kautsky's "ultra-imperialism" could have was that "it is a most reactionary method of consoling the masses with hopes of permanent peace being possible under capitalism, by distracting their attention from the sharp antagonisms and acute problems of the present times, and directing it towards illusory prospects of an imaginary 'ultra-imperialism' of the future".²

Kautsky played the part of the parson saying that many capitalists were urgently interested in universal peace and disarmament, and were not bound to imperialism, because any interests they might gain from war and armaments did not outweigh the damage they might suffer from the consequences. He advised the capitalists that the urge of capital to expand could be best promoted, "not by the violent methods of imperialism, but by peaceful democracy".³ Lenin remarked:

And now that the armed conflict for Great Power privileges is a fact, Kautsky tries to *persuade* the cap-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

² *Ibid.*, p. 294.

³ Quoted by Lenin in "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism", *ibid.*, p. 289.

italists and the petty bourgeoisie to believe that war is a terrible thing, while disarmament is a good thing, in exactly the same way, and with exactly the same results, as a Christian parson tries from the pulpit to persuade the capitalist to believe that human love is God's commandment, as well as the yearning of the soul and the moral law of civilisation. The thing that Kautsky calls economic tendencies towards "ultra-imperialism" is precisely a petty-bourgeois attempt to *persuade* the financiers to refrain from doing evil.¹

He showed that, as an international ideological trend, Kautskyism was both a product of the disintegration and decay of the Second International, and at the same time an inevitable outcrop of the ideology of the petty bourgeoisie who remained captive to bourgeois prejudices. He declared:

The growing world proletarian revolutionary movement in general, and the communist movement in particular, cannot dispense with an analysis and exposure of the theoretical errors of Kautskyism. The more so since pacifism and "democracy" in general, which lay no claim to Marxism whatever, but which, like Kautsky and Co., are obscuring the profundity of the contradictions of imperialism and the inevitable revolutionary crisis to which it gives rise, are still very widespread all over the world.²

¹"The Collapse of the Second International", *op. cit.*, p. 190.

²"Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism", *op. cit.*, pp. 192-93.