

Protracted People's War is Not a Universal Strategy for Revolution

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Protracted People's War (PPW) has been promoted as a universal strategy for revolution in recent years despite the fact that this directly contradicts Mao's conclusions in his writing on revolutionary strategy. Mao emphasized PPW was possible in China because of the semi-feudal nature of Chinese society, and because of antagonistic divisions within the white regime which encircled the red base areas. Basic analysis shows that the strategy cannot be practically applied in the U.S. or other imperialist countries. Despite this, advocates for the universality of PPW claim that support for their thesis is a central principle of Maoism. In this document we refute these claims, and outline a revolutionary strategy based on an analysis of the concrete conditions of the U.S. state.

In our view, confusion on foundational questions of revolutionary strategy, and lack of familiarity with Mao's writings on the actual strategy of PPW, has led to the growth of dogmatic and ultra-"left" tendencies within the U.S. Maoist movement. Some are unaware of the nature of the struggle in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) against Wang Ming, Li Lisan, and other dogmatists. As a result, they conflate Mao's critique of an insurrectionary strategy in China with a critique of insurrection as a strategy for revolution in general. Some advocate for the formation of base areas and for guerrilla warfare in imperialist countries, while others negate PPW as a concrete revolutionary strategy, reducing it to an abstract generality or a label for focoist armed struggle. Many have also uncritically accepted everything Gonzalo—the imprisoned chairman of the Communist Party of Peru (PCP)—ever said. Others are negatively influenced by the petty-bourgeois adventurism of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Canada's (PCR-RCP) early documents.¹

Our view is that PPW is not a universal strategy for revolution. Instead, we believe revolutionaries in imperialist countries must do legal and illegal work now to build the strength of the proletariat and to advance the formation of a Maoist party that will be fundamental to hastening the development of a nationwide revolutionary situation. A principled Maoist party will then be able to coordi-

¹We say this in reference to their early documents, because the recent split has left two factions, one consolidated to left-adventurism and one to right-opportunism.

nate a number of insurrections in major cities, seize state power, and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. Our hope in writing this document is to clarify some misconceptions and, in doing so, to clarify the basis for principled unity among those not consolidated to a dogmatic approach to revolutionary politics and struggle.

We will begin by discussing Mao's writings on PPW and his struggle against the dogmatists of his time. We hope doing so can clarify the actual content of PPW as a revolutionary strategy. We will then investigate and critique the theories of certain groups and individual who claim that PPW is universal. We will conclude with a brief exposition of our views on Maoist strategy for revolution in the U.S.

1. Mao's Writings on Protracted People's War

In the course of the Chinese Revolution, Mao and others in the CCP developed a new revolutionary strategy, suitable to the specific conditions of Chinese society. At the time, China was a semi-feudal, semi-capitalist, and semi-colonial country. There were major contradictions between the town and countryside. Importantly, at the time the vast majority of the population resided in the countryside, and the state's military forces were largely concentrated in urban areas. Through a detailed investigation of these concrete conditions, and through analyzing the failures of the 1927 insurrections in Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Nanchang, Mao came to the conclusion that there was a need to build rural base areas and grow power from there.

As the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India (Maoist)—hereafter referred to as CPI (Maoist)—said in a recent document:

The great Marxist teacher Mao applied the concept of unequal development in imperialism to the specific (semi-feudal, semi-colonial, colonial) conditions of China. He said that country wide liberation is not possible at a time and found out the path of Protracted People's War in which, country wide success would be achieved by extending from a base area in the vast backward rural area where the enemy is weak to many base areas, extending from small areas to extended areas thus liberating the rural areas first and finally encircle and seize the cities.²

From this we can see that it was because of the particular situation in China that simultaneous country-wide insurrections—such as occurred during the October Revolution—were not a viable strategy for revolution at that time. These conditions did not make revolution in China impossible; instead, they required the development of a new revolutionary strategy suitable to the semi-feudal,

²Central Committee of CPI (Maoist), "CPI(Maoist) on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," *People's War*, No. 11, p. 28. Available here: [http://www.bannedthought.net/India/People'sWar-CPI\(Maoist\)/PW11-March2017-Eng-View.pdf](http://www.bannedthought.net/India/People'sWar-CPI(Maoist)/PW11-March2017-Eng-View.pdf)

semi-colonial, semi-capitalist conditions in China. It was on this basis that Mao worked out the strategy of PPW. This entailed building revolutionary base areas in the countryside, where reactionary forces had trouble projecting military power, approaching military work as a political task, and engaging in a prolonged conflict so that the relative weakness of revolutionary forces could be turned into the opposite, relative strength. The CCP eventually encircled the cities, and won nation-wide victory in 1949. However, the objective conditions suited to PPW do not exist everywhere in the world, especially in imperialist countries where the military forces of the ruling classes can be easily deployed anywhere in the country in a matter of hours, where there is a relatively well-equipped police force in all but the most remote areas, and where infrastructure for transport and communications is well-developed and comprehensive.

Why is it That Red Political Power Can Exist in China?

In his 1928 document *Why is it That Red Political Power Can Exist in China?* Mao stated, “The long-term survival inside a country of one or more small areas under Red political power completely encircled by a White regime is a phenomenon that has never occurred anywhere else in the world. There are special reasons for this unusual phenomenon. *It can exist and develop only under certain conditions.*”³ Mao also stated that “it [red political power] cannot occur in any imperialist country or in any colony under direct imperialist rule.” This refutation of the possibility of developing red base areas (which are the foundation of PPW) in an imperialist country makes it clear that, as far as Mao was concerned, PPW was not a universal strategy for revolution, but rather one suited to the particular conditions of China in the 1920s-1940s.

Some have used later historical experiences—which showed that red base areas can exist in colonies and neo-colonies under direct imperialist rule—to say that Mao’s view that PPW is not possible in imperialist countries is also incorrect.⁴

³Mao, “Why is it That Red Political Power Can Exist in China?”, MZSW, vol 1., p 63-72. available at: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_3.htm

⁴For clarification on this matter, see footnote #7 in *Why is it That Red Political Power Can Exist in China?* “During World War II, many colonial countries in the East formerly under the imperialist rule of Britain, the United States, France and the Netherlands were occupied by the Japanese imperialists. Led by their Communist Parties, the masses of workers, peasants and urban petty bourgeoisie and members of the national bourgeoisie in these countries took advantage of the contradictions between the British, U.S., French and Dutch imperialists on the one hand and the Japanese imperialists on the other, organized a broad united front against fascist aggression, built anti-Japanese base areas and waged bitter guerrilla warfare against the Japanese. Thus the political situation existing prior to World War II began to change. When the Japanese imperialists were driven out of these countries at the end of World War II, the imperialists of the United States, Britain, France and the Netherlands attempted to restore their colonial rule, but, having built up armed forces of considerable strength during the anti-Japanese war, these colonial peoples refused to return to the old way of life. Moreover, the imperialist system all over the world was profoundly shaken because the Soviet Union had become strong, because all the imperialist powers, except the United States, had either been overthrown or weakened in the war, and finally because the imperialist front was breached in

Historical experience has shown that PPW is a successful revolutionary strategy, even in a country under direct colonial rule, but there is no historical experience of successfully carrying out PPW in an imperialist country. Further, the experience of urban guerrillas⁵ and similar strategies show that attempts to apply the strategy of PPW to the particularities of an imperialist country will only lead to disaster.⁶

In China at the time—as in India and the Philippines today—the lack of development of productive forces in the countryside (in particular roads and other methods of transit) provided real obstacles to reactionary forces’ ability to deploy military power to crush the military and political power of the red guerrilla areas.⁷ As has been stated though, in an imperialist country such as the U.S. the police, national guard, and army can be deployed to any section of the country in a matter of hours. This reality prevents the development of red base areas. As Mao points out, “it is definitely impossible to create an independent regime, let alone an independent regime which is durable and grows daily, unless we have regular forces of adequate strength.” Given the strength, coordination, and training of the repressive forces in a country like the U.S. we are kidding ourselves if we think we can accumulate such a force and hold a base area without being crushed.

China by the victorious Chinese revolution. Thus, much as in China, it has become possible for the peoples of all, or at least some, of the colonial countries in the East to maintain big and small revolutionary base areas and revolutionary regimes over a long period of time, and to carry on long-term revolutionary wars in which to surround the cities from the countryside, and then gradually to advance to take the cities and win nation-wide victory. The view held by Comrade Mao Tse-tung in 1928 on the question of establishing independent regimes in colonies under direct imperialist rule has changed as a result of the changes in the situation.”

⁵For example, the PCR-RCP refers to and upholds the experiences of Italian Red Brigades and Belgian Communist Combatant Cells as positive examples of the successes of urban guerrilla warfare. We discuss this more below in this document. Also c.f. the PCR-RCP’s document *Protracted People’s War is the Only Way to Make Revolution*, available here: <http://www.pcr-rcp.ca/old/en/pwd/1e.php>

⁶Some point to the left-adventurist groups in Europe such as the Red Brigades and the Red Army Faction as examples of PPW in an imperialist country, but we disagree with this assessment. Leaving aside the fact that these groups saw only very limited success in mass struggles or in their military campaigns, their strategy is more accurately termed urban guerrilla warfare, and has basically nothing in common with the strategy of PPW practiced by the CCP. We discuss this in more detail below.

⁷The Indian state is currently actively working to construct road, rail, and communications infrastructure as a key part of its all-out war on the people. “In order to loot the natural resources in the areas of movement and help speedy shifting of forces in repressive operations the central government is expanding Road and Rail lines since 2009. For the past two years it has been developing Communication and Information systems too. In the scheme to lay 5477 kms of State and National High Ways, 3887 kms of road was completed by last year.” from *People’s War*, No. 11, p. 128.

On Protracted War

Many cite Mao's 1938 document *On Protracted War* in support of their claims that PPW is a universal revolutionary strategy.⁸ Mao's document is a long and very in-depth analysis of the anti-Japanese war, which shows how the concrete conditions in both Japan and China dictated that the war of resistance against Japan would be protracted, that it would be difficult and long, but that—despite these obstacles—China could win. There is nothing in this document which states or implies that PPW is a universal strategy for revolution. As Mao's analysis shows, it was the specific conditions of the anti-Japanese War in semi-feudal, semi-colonial, semi-capitalist China, that made PPW a viable strategy for resistance and revolution. While there are certainly lessons in this document that are applicable to all warfare and all revolutionary struggles—and therefore universal—this is quite different than the *strategy* of PPW being applicable everywhere, regardless of the objective conditions. We will attempt to provide clarity on this matter through some detailed analysis of *On Protracted War*.

Mao wrote *On Protracted War* in order to challenge two widespread and incorrect theories that were prevalent in China at the time: the theory of national subjugation and the theory of quick victory. The former theory held that there was no basis for China to win the war against Japan, and from this, concluded that the best thing to do would be to surrender to Japan. The latter theory held that China was ready to win victory after victory against the invading Japanese forces, and therefore concluded that the CCP should mount a major offensive, committing its forces to an all-out attack to drive Japan from China in one blow. Both of these theories were incorrect. The adherents of “national subjugation” saw only the present strength of the Japanese military and the technical deficiencies of the Chinese forces—they ignored the progressive character of China's cause, the basis to unite all of China against Japan, and the huge population size of China. Likewise, the adherents of “quick victory” saw only victory in specific campaigns or battles, and because of this subjectivism, failed to make an accurate assessment of the strength of the enemy.

Although both theories evaluated the relative strength of Japan and China differently, they shared a common flaw: they saw the situation one-sidedly and subjectively, looking at only some aspects and ignoring or dismissing others. Doing so necessarily leads to mistakes, because “if appraisal does not conform to reality, action cannot attain its objective.”⁹ Our contemporary dogmatists would do well to learn from Mao's criticism of these two theories, but they are too busy phrase-mongering about the so-called “universality of PPW” to reflect on the dialectical relation between the struggles of Mao's time and our situation

⁸ *On Protracted War* was originally a series of lectures that Mao gave at Yen-an in 1938. Mao, *On Protracted War*, Mao Zedong's Selected Works (MZSW) vol. 3, p.113-194. The full text is available online here: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_09.htm

⁹ From the section of *On Protracted War* titled “The Theory of National Subjugation is Wrong and the Theory of Quick Victory is Likewise Wrong”

today. Instead—and much like the dogmatists of Mao’s time—they negate the dialectical relation between the universal and the particular, and instead turn Marxism into a stale dogma which they seek to mechanically apply to their situation. This cannot but lead to disaster.

To avoid such mistakes, we must remember that Mao wrote about the specific situation of China’s war of resistance against Japan, and from this analysis drew conclusions about the development of the war and what was needed to attain victory. Mao’s analysis and conclusions are particular to the specific conditions of the Anti-Japanese War, but through a dialectical materialist approach we can apply *some of these lessons* to our own situation.¹⁰ This is quite different than the approach of our contemporary dogmatists who seek to apply the strategy of PPW in imperialist countries “regardless of objective conditions.”

One such lesson from *On Protracted War* which is relevant to our particular situation—despite the differences with occupied China—is the relation between a political organization, the masses, and the enemies of the people. Mao says that:

Many people think that it is wrong methods that make for strained relations between officers and men and between the army and the people, but I always tell them that it is a question of basic attitude (or basic principle), of having respect for the soldiers and the people. It is from this attitude that the various policies, methods and forms ensue. If we depart from this attitude, then the policies, methods and forms will certainly be wrong, and the relations between officers and men and between the army and the people are bound to be unsatisfactory. Our three major principles for the army’s political work are, first, unity between officers and men; second, unity between the army and the people; and third, the disintegration of the enemy forces. To apply these principles effectively, we must start with this basic attitude of respect for the soldiers and the people, and of respect for the human dignity of prisoners of war once they have laid down their arms. Those who take all this as a technical matter and not one of basic attitude are indeed wrong, and they should correct their view.¹¹

We in the U.S. are not currently engaged in armed conflict with the state, but these points are still very relevant to our work. Mao shows how the basis for political and military successes are: first and foremost the internal unity and proletarian principles of an organization, secondly, the relation between this organization and the masses, and thirdly the organization’s ability to defeat

¹⁰A dialectical materialist approach to analyzing past revolutionary struggles is based on a concrete study of their particularities to draw out the universal lessons of these struggles. In contrast, dogmatists skip this step and proclaim past revolutionary experiences “universal” without bothering to investigate their particularity in significant detail.

¹¹From the section of *On Protracted War* titled “The Army and the People are the Foundation of Victory”

the enemy. These points hold in military conflict as much as in workplace and neighborhood organizing. It is only by building a principled political unity in our organization, cultivating a pro-people orientation, and making deep links with the masses that it is possible to win victories in political struggle.

It is important to note that Mao lists “disintegration of the enemy forces” as the third key principle for the army. He subordinates this task to the need for unity within the army and the need for unity between the people and the army. This does not reflect an arbitrary ordering but instead a materialist analysis of the basis for defeating the enemy: principled unity within the army and with the people is a precondition for the destruction of the enemy. “Left”-adventurist groups that wrongly call their fantasies of urban guerrilla warfare campaigns PPW have totally forgotten or missed this point. They place primary importance on the military aspect of their work and relegate the masses to a secondary role. This represents a fundamentally petty-bourgeois and anti-people orientation.¹²

Another key point that Mao discusses in *On Protracted War* is the need to align thinking and doing. This clearly applies regardless of whether PPW is employed as a revolutionary strategy. Mao says that:

Ideas, etc. are subjective, while deeds or actions are the subjective translated into the objective, but both represent the dynamic role peculiar to human beings. We term this kind of dynamic role ‘man’s conscious dynamic role,’ and it is a characteristic that distinguishes man from all other beings. All ideas based upon and corresponding to objective facts are correct ideas, and all deeds or actions based upon correct ideas are correct actions. We must give full scope to these ideas and actions, to this dynamic role.¹³

This point can seem obvious, or simple, but it is actually a key aspect of the dialectical materialist world outlook. What does it mean to take a revolutionary approach to handling contradictions? What does it mean to study something deeply and from all sides? One aspect of this can be summed up as “dare to think, dare to act.” Through careful reflection on our practice and on revolutionary theory we can develop correct ideas about our situation, which guide our political action. Instead of reciting formulas and waiting for orders we all

¹²For a typical example, see the PCR-RCP’s negation of the importance of open mass organizations prior to the seizure of a city via insurrection—which they refer to as strategic equilibrium in PPW in an imperialist country:

“The major difference in the application of protracted people’s war in imperialist countries is the duration of each of its transitory steps and their content. In an oppressed country, guerrilla warfare can remain for a long time at the stage of strategic stalemate because it can rest on stable base areas. In an imperialist country, this phase consists of the moment when guerrillas and the revolutionary masses concentrate their forces in order to launch an insurrection to take possession of a major city that will allow the mass-generated organizations to take solidly and permanently root (on an open basis). This period marks the transition between strategic defensive and strategic offensive.” from, *Protracted People’s War is the Only Way to Make Revolution*. We discuss the PCR-RCP in greater detail below.

¹³From the section of *On Protracted War* titled “Man’s Dynamic Role in War”

need to “frown our brows and think it over” so that we can act in a manner which furthers the cause of proletarian revolution, otherwise our ideas will not conform to reality and our actions will have poor results.

From this it should be clear that *On Protracted War* contains lessons for revolutionary warfare in general, and lessons particular to the Anti-Japanese war. It also contains some lessons which have a lot of relevance for our current situation, despite the fact that we are not waging a revolutionary war at present. However, the fact that there are lessons which are relevant to our situation does not mean that everything that Mao wrote in *On Protracted War* applies to our situation, nor does it imply that PPW is a universal strategy for revolution. Instead of trying to mechanically apply past strategies to our present situation, we must draw insights from studying revolutionary history. Past revolutionaries have dealt with many questions which are relevant to the present, but we also have to grapple with many questions that are new. To relate revolutionary theory to our present situation in a dynamic and vibrant way requires us to grapple with how our situation relates to past situations; how it is different and how it is similar.

To clarify this point, it is enough to look at how comrades in the CPI (Maoist) are applying the lessons of the Russian Revolution to the particularities of their struggle, despite the fact that they are pursuing a fundamentally different revolutionary strategy than the Russian Communists did. In 2013 CPI (Maoist) launched a campaign to “Bolshevise” the party and the People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army. This effort was to steel comrades “to overcome the difficult situation and the setback of the movement” through working to improve “class consciousness, dedication towards revolution, strong will, sacrificing self and courage of the proletarian vanguard.”¹⁴ In this campaign, CPI (Maoist) is working to apply the lessons learned in the Russian Revolution to their particular situation, focusing on the need for disciplined professional revolutionaries. As they put it:

We conducted the [Bolshevisation] campaign concentrating on the universality of MLM, with the dialectical understanding that revolutionary movement travels through a lot of ebbs and flows and finally succeeds, and concentrating on the Three great styles of work. We took up education on theoretical, political and organizational understanding all over the Party to Bolshevise it.¹⁵

Comrades in CPI (Maoist) clearly understand the importance of applying universal lessons from revolutionary history to their particular situation. The same cannot be said of dogmatists who argue that PPW is universal because some of the points from *On Protracted War* apply to our situation. This incorrect claim has been used to support the theory that armed propaganda and urban guerrilla warfare in imperialist countries during non-revolutionary situations

¹⁴ *People’s War*, No. 11, p. 140.

¹⁵ *People’s War*, No. 11, p. 137.

will lead to the formation of urban base areas and liberated cities or neighborhoods.¹⁶ But—as we stated before—there is a difference between PPW being a universal strategy for revolution and some aspects of *On Protracted War* being applicable now or in a future revolutionary war. It is precisely this distinction that dogmatists work to obscure, which ultimately results in an “everything is everything” kind of sophistry. The absurdity of this approach to theory is evident when our dogmatists claim, for example, that the Bolshevik revolution and the Chinese war of resistance against Japan were both PPWs because they are both “protracted processes.”¹⁷

This point cannot be stated strongly enough: PPW, as put forward by Mao, is a concrete type of revolutionary warfare, one that is initiated in the hinterland of a country oppressed by imperialism, where red political power can be built despite encirclement by a white regime, and where there is a semi-feudal mode of production. If one forgets this they actually take the position of the 28½ Bolsheviks (the dogmatists of Mao’s time). It was they who insisted that there was not a substantial difference in conditions between Russia in 1917 and China in the 1920s and 30s, and insisted that the same general mode of revolutionary struggle was appropriate to, and possible in, both situations, and every other national situation, regardless of particularity. The fact that the 28½ Bolsheviks said that insurrection was the correct and universal strategy and our contemporary dogmatists instead say the same of PPW does not indicate forward movement. Instead, this repackaged dogmatism will only lead to disaster, as resulted from the Chinese dogmatist’s strategy of urban insurrections in 1927 and from the related positional strategy adopted in defense of the Jiangxi-Fujian Soviet in 1934.¹⁸

¹⁶Exactly how the particularities of PPW will play out in an imperialist country varies in the articulations of different contemporary dogmatists. This is just a general outline of one articulation, we will deal with it and others in greater depth in Section 2 of this paper.

¹⁷The blog *Maosoleum* made this claim in an article titled *What is Protracted People’s War?*, available here: <https://maosoleum.wordpress.com/2013/10/07/what-is-protracted-peoples-war/>. The PCR-RCP makes similar claims in *More on the Question of Waging Revolutionary War in the Imperialist Countries*, here: <http://www.pcr-rpc.ca/en/archives/1164>. This sort of position has also been repeated by Joshua Moufawad-Paul (JMP) on his blog *MLM Mayhem!* many times, for a representative example see: <https://moufawad-paul.blogspot.co.il/2012/02/on-protracted-peoples-war-as-universal.html>. Common to these theorizations of PPW is a negation of its concrete content in favor of a nebulous “universal applicability.” The PCR-RCP and JMP articulations are discussed in more detail below.

¹⁸c.f. Mao’s comments in his interview with Edgar Snow in *Red Star Over China*, p. 480-486: “In this period we made two important errors. The first was the failure to unite with Ts’ai T’ing-k’ai’s army in 1933 during the Fukien Rebellion. The second was the adoption of the erroneous strategy of simple defense, abandoning our former tactics of maneuver. It was a serious mistake to meet the vastly superior Nanking forces in positional warfare, at which the Red Army was neither technically nor spiritually at its best.” p. 197. Snow discusses these errors in greater detail in an endnote in the 1968 edition of *Red Star Over China*. In particular, he stresses the central role that Stalin, the Comintern, and the 28½ Bolsheviks (in Russia they were also referred to as “Stalin’s China Section”) played in undermining Mao’s line during this period. Snow highlights how Otto Braun—then the Comintern representative to China—and the 28½ Bolsheviks advocated for positional warfare against Chiang Kai-Shek’s fifth extermination campaign, and how this led to the effective destruction of the Jiangxi-Fujian Soviet.

Those who say that *On Protracted War* shows that PPW is a universal revolutionary strategy fail to understand Mao's writing. They interpret the document as dogma, and selectively read parts of it, using a shallow and surface level analysis to justify their position. Mao's document is a powerful example of concrete analysis of a concrete situation, of determining the primary contradiction (between the Chinese people and the Japanese fascists), and of working out a line to resolve this contradiction. Organizing for revolution in an imperialist country like the U.S. demands the same of us: through engagement with mass struggles and the development of revolutionary pre-party formations, we must build up a party with an all-country perspective, concretely analyze the situation at a national level, and work out a line for making revolution here by applying revolutionary theory to our concrete conditions. *On Protracted War* has much to teach us about how to rely on the masses, how to align thinking and doing, and how important it is to "dare to think and dare to act." What it doesn't provide us with is a ready-made plan for making revolution, or a single shred of evidence that PPW is a revolutionary strategy suited to our situation.

Mao on Revolutionary Strategy in the Imperialist Countries

As Maoists we should not engage in book worship, nor should we take everything that someone says—even a great revolutionary like Mao—as automatically correct. Instead we should deeply study the arguments put forward, and come to conclusions about how these arguments relate to our own situation.¹⁹ We have a few examples of Mao's views on the question of revolutionary strategy in imperialist countries, and it is important to consider his arguments. In 1938 he stated:

The seizure of power by armed force, the settlement of the issue by war, is the central task and the highest form of revolution. This

¹⁹Malcolm X gave a speech in 1964 to a group of young people from Mississippi who had traveled to New York where he summed up this idea:

"One of the first things I think young people, especially nowadays, should learn is how to see for yourself and listen for yourself and think for yourself: Then you can come to an intelligent decision for yourself. If you form the habit of going by what you hear others say about someone, or going by what others think about someone, instead of searching that thing out for yourself and seeing for yourself, you will be walking west when you think you're going east, and you will be walking east when you think you're going west. This generation, especially of our people, has a burden, more so than any other time in history. The most important thing that we can learn to do today is think for ourselves.

"It's good to keep wide-open ears and listen to what everybody else has to say, but when you come to make a decision, you have to weigh all of what you've heard on its own, and place it where it belongs, and come to a decision for yourself; you'll never regret it. But if you form the habit of taking what someone else says about a thing without checking it out for yourself, you'll find that other people will have you hating your friends and loving your enemies. This is one of the things that our people are beginning to learn today- that it is very important to think out a situation for yourself. If you don't do it, you'll always be maneuvered into a situation where you are never fighting your actual enemies, where you will find yourself fighting your own self." From *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*, p. 4. Available online here: <http://collections.mun.ca/PDFs/radical/MalcomXTalkstoYoungPeople.pdf>

Marxist-Leninist principle of revolution holds good universally, for China and for all other countries.

But while the principle remains the same, its application by the party of the proletariat finds expression in varying ways according to the varying conditions. Internally, capitalist countries practice bourgeois democracy (not feudalism) when they are not fascist or not at war; in their external relations, they are not oppressed by, but themselves oppress, other nations. Because of these characteristics, it is the task of the party of the proletariat in the capitalist countries to educate the workers and build up strength through a long period of legal struggle, and thus prepare for the final overthrow of capitalism. In these countries, the question is one of a long legal struggle, of utilizing parliament as a platform, of economic and political strikes, of organizing trade unions and educating the workers. There the form of organization is legal and the form of struggle bloodless (non-military). On the issue of war, the Communist Parties in the capitalist countries oppose the imperialist wars waged by their own countries; if such wars occur, the policy of these Parties is to bring about the defeat of the reactionary governments of their own countries. The one war they want to fight is the civil war for which they are preparing. But this insurrection and war should not be launched until the bourgeoisie becomes really helpless, until the majority of the proletariat are determined to rise in arms and fight, and until the rural masses are giving willing help to the proletariat. And when the time comes to launch such an insurrection and war, the first step will be to seize the cities, and then advance into the countryside, and not the other way around. All this has been done by Communist Parties in capitalist countries, and it has been proved correct by the October Revolution in Russia.

China is different however. The characteristics of China are that she is not independent and democratic but semi-colonial and semi-feudal, that internally she has no democracy but is under feudal oppression and that in her external relations she has no national independence but is oppressed by imperialism. It follows that we have no parliament to make use of and no legal right to organize the workers to strike. Basically, the task of the Communist Party here is not to go through a long period of legal struggle before launching insurrection and war, and not to seize the big cities first and then occupy the countryside, but the reverse.²⁰

While we do not agree with *every* aspect of what Mao says here, it is important that we appreciate the dialectical method by which he answers this question. Mao correctly states that “the seizure of power by armed force [...] holds good

²⁰Mao, *Problems of War and Strategy*, MZSW, Vol. 2, p. 219-220. Available online at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_12.htm

universally.” The dialectical relationship of the particular to the universal dictates that we apply universal lessons according to the particular conditions of the country where we are working. As an extension of this logic, Mao argues that PPW is not a viable strategy in imperialist countries. In semi-feudal oppressed countries where the population is mainly rural it is possible to initially build the revolutionary movement in the countryside through the creation of red base areas which can be defended from reactionary forces.

In imperialist countries organizing for revolution requires different strategy and tactics. We believe Mao, in his 1938 statement, was incorrect in arguing that this way would be a primarily legal and parliamentary route.²¹ This aspect of his assessment was corrected in his future writing on the subject. However, Mao never argued that PPW was a universal strategy for revolution. In imperialist countries such a strategy is not possible and we will instead have to build forces over a long period of time to prepare for coordinated insurrections in many cities across the country. What’s more, the way we organize for revolution and wage revolutionary war will need to be developed based on an ongoing investigation of the conditions of our country. This is not an academic task, but rather requires concrete analysis, study of revolutionary theory, involvement in political struggles all across the country, and work to concentrate the correct ideas of the masses. However, those who dogmatically insist that PPW is a universal revolutionary strategy and therefore applicable in all countries negate the dialectical materialist world-view, and in doing so, negate the importance of investigating the particularity of their national situation. This amounts to seeing revolutionary theory as gospel instead of understanding it as derived from lessons drawn from the long history of actual revolutionary struggles the world over.

²¹In our view, these comments about legal organizing in imperialist countries reflect the negative influence of the Comintern’s mechanical conception of the United Front, as demonstrated by their approach to the popular front against fascism in WWII. Starting in 1935 Stalin and others in the Comintern advocated that communist parties liquidate their political work in favor of alliances with bourgeois democrats and imperialists in opposition to fascism. While this policy correctly identified the alliance of fascist imperialist powers as the primary enemies of the people of the world, it incorrectly advocated a liberal unity with the bourgeoisie in non-Fascist countries. Communist parties were encouraged/commanded to subordinate their initiative to that of the bourgeoisie in their country. Some of the most disastrous examples of this policy were in colonial and semi-colonial countries.

This took a particularly terrible turn after the signing of the Anglo-Soviet Agreement in the wake of which the Comintern ordered the Communist Party of India (CPI) to subordinate themselves to the Communist Party of Great Britain. Because the United Kingdom was now a Soviet ally in the war against Germany, CPI was also encouraged to work to undermine the anti-colonial national liberation movement in India, and cadre even went so far as to act as informants for the British colonial administration on the activities of national liberation struggle. c.f. Jan Myrdal’s account of this in *Red Star Over India: As the Wretched of the Earth are Rising. Impressions, Reflections and Preliminary Inferences*. (Delhi: Archana Das and Subrata Das, 2012), p. 77-78, and his comments in *India Waits* (Chicago: Lake View Press, 1986) p. xii-xiii, and 229-230. Myrdal’s books focus extensively on this and other questions in the ICM, and contain many important insights into the successes and failures of the popular front against fascism during WWII.

Some advocate that we discard all of what Mao said in the above quote on the grounds that he called for a legal approach to revolutionary organizing in imperialist countries. These efforts to dismiss all of the what Mao had to say are grounded in a metaphysical worldview, and they open the door to the dogmatic claim of the “universality of PPW.” The metaphysicians who advocate for this approach cannot grasp the dialectical relation between correct and incorrect ideas. While the majority of what Mao said in 1938 on war and strategy was correct, there were secondary aspects that were incorrect. Instead of totally negating what Mao said in 1938 because certain aspects were incorrect—and putting in its place claims of the universality of PPW—we should unite with what is correct in what he said and disagree with what is incorrect.

Furthermore, Mao’s views on the strategy for revolution in imperialist countries developed over time. In 1963, when discussing the strategy for revolution in imperialist countries, Mao and others stated that,

In order to lead the proletariat and working people in revolution, Marxist-Leninist Parties must master all forms of struggle and be able to substitute one form for another quickly as the conditions of struggle change. The vanguard of the proletariat will remain unconquerable in all circumstances only if it masters all forms of struggle—peaceful and armed, open and secret, legal and illegal, parliamentary struggle and mass struggle, etc. It is wrong to refuse to use parliamentary and other legal forms of struggle when they can and should be used. However, if a Marxist-Leninist Party falls into legalism or parliamentary cretinism, confining the struggle within the limits permitted by the bourgeoisie, this will inevitably lead to renouncing the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat.²²

The dialectical nature of reality, in which statements are a mix of correct and incorrect ideas confuses those who have a metaphysical world outlook. Because they see things as one-sided and pure, they cannot grasp the nature of contradiction, and assume that Mao’s writing in 1938 was totally incorrect. In place of dialectics, they practice metaphysics. These people assume that, along with Mao’s statement about legal work, we should also discard what he said about the need for insurrection and (civil) war as a path to revolution in imperialist countries. We see no reason to do this, given that Mao’s conclusion about revolutionary strategy in imperialist countries is based on concrete analysis and has not been disproven in practice. Instead of investigating the contradictions at play in imperialist countries, learning from the history of past revolutions, and working out a line to develop revolutionary politics in their situation, our contemporary dogmatists make endless proclamations about the universality of PPW.

²²From “A Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement”, a letter written by the Central Committee of the CPC to the Central Committee of the CPSU in 1963. Available online here: <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sino-soviet-split/cpc/proposal.htm>

CPI (Maoist) on Revolutionary Strategy in Capitalist Countries

In their 2004 document *Strategy and Tactics of the Indian Revolution*, CPI (Maoist) put forward their views on revolutionary strategy in the bourgeois democracies of capitalist countries:

If it is a capitalist country where bourgeois democratic rights prevail, the Party of the proletariat prepares the working class and its allies through open, legal struggles - parliamentary, trade union, general strikes, political agitation and such other activities, in order to organise a country-wide armed insurrection at an hour of revolutionary crisis, seizing power first in key cities and then extending it throughout the country, at the same time strengthens appropriate secret party apparatus and combines secret, illegal and semi-legal activities with open and legal activities in accordance with concrete conditions.²³

This analysis is a synthesis of the correct ideas from Mao's remarks on revolutionary strategy in capitalist and imperialist countries. They reflect a Maoist line on revolutionary strategy. Through understanding the dialectical relationship between legal and illegal work, and secret and open work the party of the proletariat can be built, the level of consciousness of the masses can be developed, preparations for a nation-wide insurrection can be made, and the development of a revolutionary situation can be hastened. This work must be pursued in accordance with the particular situation in a given capitalist country.

In the present particular situation in the U.S. there is not a basis to do parliamentary or electoral work. The elaborate rituals of elections on a local and national level serve an important part in maintaining the illusion that the U.S. electoral system provides "democracy for all." In actuality, it maintains democracy for the bourgeoisie and dictatorship over the masses. The myth of American democracy must be dispelled on a mass level. The growth of revolutionary organization built among the masses in ongoing struggles is the primary way that this will be accomplished. The system, and associated opportunist political trends, use participation in the state's elections to sidetrack the masses from this task. These forces see elections as a strategy for people's victory. In reality this is a strategy of revisionism and opportunism. During large-scale political openings in the future, it is possible selective electoral activity could be a secondary tactic for exposing the bankruptcy of the system and the state. However, given the lack of mass revolutionary developments and mass struggles at present, this does not make sense in our context, even as a tactic.²⁴ At present, there is a

²³Central Committee (P) CPI(Maoist), *Strategy and Tactics of the Indian Revolution* (2004), p. 37. Available online here: <http://bannedthought.net/India/CPI-Maoist-Docs/Founding/StrategyTactics-pamphlet.pdf>

²⁴The Communist understanding of parliamentary work is itself often distorted by opportunists and dismissed outright by adventurists. This is particularly true in the wake of Khrushchevite revisionism and earlier mistakes made by Stalin that laid the basis for this deviation. Lenin offers analysis of how and when it makes sense for a communist party to

basis for legal, non-electoral, forms of struggle that can be pursued in the course of various workplace, housing, and oppressed nationality struggles.

The South Western Regional Bureau of CPI (Maoist) further elaborates on the relation between legal and illegal work in the 2009 *Leadership Training Programme*:

the party organization should be secret, the more secret the better. Whereas, a mass organization should be open, the wider, the better.²⁵

and

Often we interpret the phrase “utilizing legal opportunities” to mean “function legally until it is too late to function at all”. Communists must have foresight and not act blindly. We know the enemy will clamp down so we must prepare for that when in fact there are legal opportunities. Utilizing “legal opportunities” means precisely this; build the movement in a big way taking the bulk of the new cadres to the underground. It also means maintaining both the legal and also the underground network of the mass organizations, so that when the legal is smashed the underground can continue to function.²⁶

This analysis highlights the importance of having open and legal work done in mass organizations in dialectical relation to secret and illegal work in cadre organizations. This helps to clarify the importance of open and legal work in revolutionary organizing. CPI (Maoist)’s analysis emphasizes the need to seize the opportunities which exist to build above-ground organizations, and the related necessity for secret methods and underground work so that the state’s efforts to destroy open and legal work cannot destroy the revolutionary movement.

The clarity of CPI Maoist’s analysis of the global situation and the Indian situation, in these and other texts, serve as important examples of creative application of MLM in the contemporary period. In our view revolutionaries today should look to material like this to guide their theory and practice, and not waste time on the revisionist material and individuals that we criticize in this document, except as a negative example.

engage in parliamentary struggles in “*Left-Wing*” *Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. Of particular importance is that this tactic, pursued by a party with an all-country perspective, cannot be oriented towards winning seats in government, but rather in exposing to the broad masses the inadequacy and inability of bourgeois democracy to serve their interests. Of course, such work can only be pursued in certain situations as a tactic and can by no means become the strategy of a revolutionary party or its primary means of struggle.

²⁵South Western Regional Bureau of the CPI (Maoist), *Leadership Training Programme* (2009), p. 21. This document is cited in Jan Myrdal’s *Red Star Over India* on pages 114-116.

²⁶*Ibid*, pp. 84-86.

The Struggle against the Dogmatists

As we mentioned in the introduction, much of the confusion on the question of the universality of PPW relates to Mao's struggle against the dogmatists in the CCP. These dogmatists (also referred to as the 28 ½ Bolsheviks) were trained in Moscow, and used this to claim that they had superior theoretical knowledge of the way forward for the revolution in China. In particular, they advocated a mechanical application of the October Road to the concrete conditions of China, claiming that the strategy of the October Revolution was correct and universal.

While the October Revolution was certainly correct, and has many universal lessons for revolutionaries, the 28½ Bolsheviks incorrectly assumed that this meant that the strategy pursued in Russia was the only correct strategy for revolution. In *On Contradiction*, Mao polemicized against these dogmatists, stating:

The principle of using different methods to resolve different contradictions is one which Marxist-Leninists must strictly observe. The dogmatists do not observe this principle; they do not understand that conditions differ in different kinds of revolution and so do not understand that different methods should be used to resolve different contradictions; *on the contrary, they invariably adopt what they imagine to be an unalterable formula and arbitrarily apply it everywhere*, which only causes setbacks to the revolution or makes a sorry mess of what was originally well done.²⁷

Those who advocate for the universality of PPW today, our contemporary dogmatists, make the same mistakes as the dogmatists of Mao's time. They imagine one revolutionary strategy "to be an unalterable formula and arbitrarily apply it everywhere." The fact that the contemporary dogmatists proclaim that PPW is universal and those of Mao's time proclaimed the universality of the October Road, is of little consequence. Both refuse to grapple with the particularity of their situation, and this can only lead to setbacks for the revolution. Those who are unable to transform a petty-bourgeois orientation often are disposed to defer to supposed masters and correctness, fearing association with "the students in the back of the classroom." In the United States, this problem is particularly acute. We must struggle against such liberalism, and put politics in command.

2. Origins of This Mistaken Idea

While, in the last instance, the dogmatic tendencies of those who advocate the universality of PPW are rooted in bourgeois ideology, we believe it is important to trace the origin and development of this idea in the MLM movement. At present there are a number of different trends, groups, and individuals which

²⁷Mao, *On Contradiction*, MZSW, vol. 1, p. 311-347. Available online here: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_17.htm

proclaim the universality of PPW; we will discuss a few of these in detail, and break down the mistaken assumptions on which their conclusions rest. Our hope is that through this analysis we can clarify the dangers of this dogmatic trend and its abortive ultra-“left” essence.

Gonzalo and the PCP on PPW

Many proponents of the universality of PPW refer to Gonzalo (Abimael Guzmán)—the former chairman of the Communist Party of Peru (PCP)—as the one who first synthesized or formulated this idea. In a 1988 interview with *El Diario*, Gonzalo stated: “The problem of revolutionary violence is how to actually carry it out with people’s war. The way we see this question is that when Chairman Mao Tsetung established the theory of people’s war and put it into practice, he provided the proletariat with its military line, with a military theory and practice that is universally valid and therefore applicable everywhere in accordance with the concrete conditions.”²⁸

Gonzalo claims that the theory of PPW is actually a new and universal advancement of the “military line” of the proletariat which was developed by Mao. While he does qualify this statement by stating that PPW must be applied “in accordance with the concrete conditions” of the particular situation, this articulation does not account for the fact that, according to Mao, PPW was only possible in China because of the semi-feudal, semi-colonial, semi-capitalist conditions.

The theory of the universality of PPW can also be found in the PCP’s 1988 Fundamental Documents; however, these documents offer little in the way of clarification or explanation:

A key and decisive question is the understanding of the universal validity of people’s war and its subsequent application taking into account the different types of revolution and the specific conditions of each revolution. To clarify this key issue it is important to consider that no insurrection like that of Petrograd, the anti-fascist resistance, or the European guerrilla movements in the Second World War have been repeated, as well as considering the armed struggles that are presently being waged in Europe. In the final analysis, the October Revolution was not only an insurrection but a revolutionary war that lasted for several years. Consequently, in the imperialist countries the revolution can only be conceived as a revolutionary war which today is simply people’s war.²⁹

²⁸See http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/dawson/data/Interview_with_Chairman_Gonzalo.pdf

²⁹PCP, *Fundamental Documents* (1988). Available online in Spanish, here: http://www.solrojo.org/pcp_doc/pcp_gd88.htm

Either the October Road was a distinct strategy for revolution, qualitatively different from the strategy of PPW, or it was a particular form of PPW, but it cannot be both. And yet, the PCP equivocates—before ultimately concluding that the October Revolution was actually PPW because it was “not only an insurrection but a revolutionary war that lasted for several years.” By this logic, PPW is simply reduced to a communist-led war. This reduction negates the concrete content of PPW as formulated by Mao, and replaces it with an abstract generality. This is a trend at the heart of dogmatism: replacing concrete content with abstract formulas.

If PPW is reducible to this abstract generality, how can the PCP also claim that “it is with Chairman Mao that the proletariat attains its military theory”? If PPW is a general term applicable to any revolutionary war, what then was Mao’s contribution to this theory? How can it be that Mao developed “a military theory and practice that is universally valid” when this was already practiced by the Bolsheviks? This is a basic contradiction in the PCP’s articulation which is not resolved. In our view, the revolution and civil war in Russia employed a fundamentally different strategy than the PPW in China. Mao’s theory of surrounding the cities from the countryside, of building up red base areas in locations where white power is weakest, and of fighting a guerrilla war which leads to a war of maneuver and then a war of position, are all distinct from what occurred in Russia, where years of revolutionary organizing put the Bolsheviks in a position where they were able to seize state power by leading insurrections in two cities, followed by years of civil war to hold on to this power.

What’s more, the revolutionary struggles in Russia cannot simply be reduced to the insurrections in October 1917 and the subsequent civil war. There was a methodical strategy for growing the party, raising the level of conscious struggle among the masses, and preparing for revolution which dates back until at least 1901. Through concrete study of the dynamics at play in this period, we can understand and appreciate the specificity of the Russian Revolution that *is in no way reducible to a particular application of the same revolutionary strategy* that was used in China.

For example, most of the organizing in Russia occurred in non-revolutionary situations. This does not mean that the organizing was not important, but rather that it did not involve open military conflict with the state, except for during the 1905 Revolution and the revolutions in 1917. In contrast, with the launching of the PPW in China in 1927, Mao and others were able to sustain and grow a localized revolutionary situation in the countryside all the way up to national liberation in 1949. Similarly in India, comrades have sustained and grown localized revolutionary situations for the last 50 years.

Understanding the qualitative differences between imperialist and oppressed countries allows us to formulate a correct revolutionary strategy suitable to the specifics of the situation in question. Against the PCP’s claim, this is not a question of the application of the same general strategy to different particular circumstances, but rather the application of qualitatively different strategies

which history has shown are applicable to different particular national conditions.

So why then does the PCP insist on the universal applicability of PPW? In our view there are two principal reasons, the first is *jefatura* and the second is the belief that Mao wrote *Long Live the Victory of People's War!* which was actually written by Lin Biao. The former was a line in the PCP which held that Gonzalo was the source of correct ideas. We cannot address all aspects this deviation in this paper,³⁰ but one example should suffice to clarify this point:

[Gonzalo] departs from Chairman Mao's thesis that the task of strategy as a science is to study the laws of leading military operations that influence the situation of the war in its entirety [...] Taking up Stalin, he links strategy with tactics and establishes the strategic-operational Plans that are the concrete way that strategy is linked to tactical operations. As a result, each Committee must elaborate its strategic-operational plans within the strategic-operational Plan common to the entire Party. The correct disposition emanates from the just decision of the commander.³¹

Here the PCP claims that through correct leadership one can overcome the objective contradiction between strategy and tactics. While this contradiction can certainly be handled correctly or incorrectly, to claim that correct leadership is able to overcome this contradiction is subjective-idealism. A correct line does not negate the existence of an objective contradiction, rather it works out a means by which to resolve this and other contradictions. In practice, *jefatura* leads to a commandist approach to politics that stifles the creativity of the masses in the name of following the line set out by leadership. In this regard, it is not surprising that the PCP claims that Gonzalo "departs from Mao" and "takes up Stalin." Under this approach to politics, which was most expressed in the cult of personality under Stalin, the masses are not free to criticize incorrect ideas from the center, and the contradiction between democracy and centralism is handled in a manner that, if left unchecked, will sow the seeds for revisionism and the defeat of the revolution.³² This happened to a degree in Peru, where,

³⁰For more on this c.f. Ajith's "Against Avakianism," *Naxalbari*, No. 4. in which he states "The PCP was using the formulation 'Guiding Thought of the party' even before the people's war was initiated. Gonzalo played a great role in fighting against revisionism, reorganizing the party and charting out the specific line and plans of people's war. But how can a party claim that a 'Thought' has emerged even before its line is put to the test of practice and verified? This contradicts the Marxist theory of knowledge and promotes some sort of idealism. The Avakianist's insistence that the development of ideology does not need the verification of practice is another example." p. 77. Available online here: <http://www.bannedthought.net/India/CPI-ML-Naxalbari/Naxalbari-Magazine/Naxalbari-04.pdf>

³¹PCP, *Bases of Discussion of General Political Line: Military Line* (1988). Available in Spanish online here: http://www.solrojo.org/pcp_doc/pcp_lpg.mi.htm

³²c.f. Mao's comments on this matter: "However, over a long period of time, [Stalin] did develop metaphysics and damage dialectics. The personality cult was metaphysics; no one was permitted to criticize him. As I see it, the forty years of the Soviet Union are a dialectical process [in themselves]. There were Lenin's dialectics, [and then with] Stalin there were many metaphysical viewpoints." From *Speech at the Congress of Communist Parties*

after the capture of Gonzalo and the majority of the central committee of the PCP, comrades in the party were unable for a period of time to formulate a line for continuing revolutionary struggle.

The second reason that the PCP insists on the universality of PPW as a strategy, and why Gonzalo speaks of “a worldwide people’s war” in his 1988 interview with *El Diario*,³³ is due to confusion over the authorship of the document *Long Live the Victory of People’s War!* This document was written in 1965 by Lin Biao, and in it he claims:

Taking the entire globe, if North America and Western Europe can be called “the cities of the world”, then Asia, Africa and Latin America constitute “the rural areas of the world”. Since World War II, the proletarian revolutionary movement has for various reasons been temporarily held back in the North American and West European capitalist countries, while the people’s revolutionary movement in Asia, Africa and Latin America has been growing vigorously. In a sense, the contemporary world revolution also presents a picture of the encirclement of cities by the rural areas.³⁴

In the PCP’s 1988 *Fundamental Document* they mistakenly attribute the authorship of *Long Live the Victory of People’s War!* to Mao.³⁵ This confusion, in conjunction with their view of the absolute correctness of leadership, led them to conclude that PPW was a universal strategy for revolution, and could be carried out the whole world over, and coordinated into a “worldwide people’s war.” Instead of seeing the need to establish socialism in one country, continue class struggle through many cultural revolutions, and promote a revolutionary foreign policy, the PCP ultimately put forward a metaphysical line of “worldwide people’s war” which has a distinct similarity to Trotsky’s concept of Permanent Revolution.³⁶ While PPW was a correct strategy for the situation in Peru, it

and Workers’ Parties in Socialist Countries (Nov. 18, 1957), *The Writings of Mao Zedong*, p. 792, cited in Single Spark Collective’s “Mao’s Evaluation of Stalin”: <http://www.massline.org/SingleSpark/Stalin/StalinMaoEval.htm>

³³See http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/dawson/data/Interview_with_Chairman_Gonzalo.pdf

³⁴Lin Biao, *Long Live the Victory of the People’s War!* (1965). Available online here: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1965/09/peoples_war/index.htm

³⁵PCP, *Fundamental Documents*.

³⁶See Gonzalo’s remarks in his 1988 interview in *El Diario* in which he equates socialism with PPW and advocates for linking PPW’s worldwide: “With regard to scientific socialism, it is enough to point to people’s war, since it is with Chairman Mao Tsetung that the international proletariat has attained a fully developed military theory, giving us then the military theory of our class, the proletariat, applicable everywhere.”

and:

“We conceive of it as unfolding in the future, and related to the 50 to 100 years that Chairman Mao Tsetung predicted. We see it as great waves of people’s war, until finally all of them converge like the legions of steel of a great worldwide red army, as Lenin himself said. This is how we see it. We think this is the only road to follow. The problem, I insist, is that there is a risk of world war and it would be a huge massacre, from which could only come misery, injustice, pain and death, and more reasons to put an end to them. The only solution, therefore, is people’s war, which, conceived of in waves, will lead to a worldwide people’s war

was incorrect to conclude that PPW is a universal strategy for revolution. It was also incorrect to conclude from this that a worldwide people's war was possible.

This theory was also based on the belief that, at least from 1980 onward, the world was entering "the strategic offensive of world revolution." The PCP claimed that "In the next 50 to 100 years, the domination of imperialism and all exploiters will be swept away," which was based on their view that "History cannot go backwards."³⁷ This mechanical conception of history moving in a linear fashion led them to conclude that world revolutionary struggles were at a high tide, when, objectively, the year 1980 was a low-point in world revolutionary struggles. Recent years had seen, among other events, the 1976 counter-revolution in China, the further consolidation of the Vietnamese communists to the Soviet-revisionist line, the objective and subjective weakness in India following the setbacks in 1972, and the Communist Party of the Philippines courting of the Soviet revisionists.

All of this shows that the PCP's claim that PPW is universal was based on an abstract generalization, a subjective-idealist view of leadership, and an incorrect view of the international situation. It is more in line with Lin Biao's thought than Maoism. These issues were not always dominant in the PCP, and they waged a successful revolutionary struggle for over a decade. However, due to their failure to address these and other deviations they eventually faced major setbacks. In order to avoid repeating their mistakes, it is necessary to take a dialectical materialist approach in evaluating their successes and failures. Such an overall evaluation is beyond the scope of this paper, but our hope is that this critical assessment of the PCP's claims of the universality of PPW can contribute to a larger evaluation by the ICM.

PCR-RCP on PPW and Armed Revisionists in Europe

The Revolutionary Communist Party of Canada (PCR-RCP) has stated many times that Protracted People's War is a universal strategy for revolution which applies in all countries, including powerful imperialist countries like the U.S. and

and the coming together of the legions of steel of the international proletariat, of the people, who in the end will carry out our historic mission. We have the great fortune to live in these decades in which imperialism and reaction will be swept away, because what Chairman Mao foresaw will be attained. If we do not see it ourselves, others who follow us will, because the legions are increasing more and more.

What is the problem? What is the key? To place Marxism-Leninism-Maoism in command. And with Maoism principally, take up people's war, which is universally applicable, taking into account the character of each revolution and the specific conditions of each country."

Some adventurist groups in Europe put forward similar Trotskyist theses. For example the group Revolutionärer Aufbau BRD of Germany recently published a declaration "People's War Until Communism!" <http://www.demvolkedienen.org/index.php/en/europa/1807-people-s-war-until-communism>

³⁷PCP, *Somos los Iniciadores (We are the Initiators)* (1980). Available online in Spanish here: http://www.solrojo.org/pcp_doc/pcp_240880.htm

Canada.³⁸ Their arguments about PPW are worth analyzing because they rely on incorrect evaluations of our present situation, the October Revolution, Mao's writings on PPW, and the nature of revisionism. These arguments amount to a dismissal of the importance of concrete analysis of concrete conditions, a complete rewriting of Mao's understanding of PPW, and a petty-bourgeois glorification of "left"-adventurism.

In analyzing the current situation, they conclude that there has been a qualitative shift in the nature of capitalist-imperialism and in the repressive capacity of imperialist states since the October Revolution:

As it matured, imperialism brought upon modern capitalist states new structures and purpose, among which are: legal state authority (repressive laws); covert support and procedures free from any hindrances; state apparatuses used for various purposes (secret services); state apparatuses given discretionary powers and means of support written in different bourgeois constitutions (secret funds, foreign secret service agencies); and finally paramilitary and organized police (security agencies, specialized antiterrorist groups). We can also add to this the shift, in about every imperialist country, the use of regular armed forces instead of mandatory military service. These transformations can be witnessed in most imperialist states.³⁹

The PCR-RCP tacitly acknowledges that both insurrection and PPW are revolutionary strategies which are suited to particular material conditions and that the October Revolution followed an insurrectionary strategy. However, in order to support their thesis that PPW is now a universal strategy for revolution, they have to posit that a qualitative transformation in the nature of imperialism and imperialist states took place in the last 100 years. The PCR-RCP classifies the October Revolution as a special case which is now antiquated, justifying this claim by saying that imperialism has developed to a higher stage than that of Lenin's time. They cite a list of "new structures" in imperialist countries such as "organized police" and "legal state authority." By means of this list, the PCR-RCP sets out to prove that the October Road is no longer a valid strategy for proletarian revolution in imperialist countries.

However, this list does not mean that the general strategy of the October Road—creatively applied to particular conditions—is no longer valid. This argument is particularly ridiculous because the majority of the "new structures" in the PCR-RCP's list were actually already present and quite developed in Tsarist Russia! This environment presented unique challenges, but through principled

³⁸Their *Party Programme* has a section on PPW as their strategy for revolution in Canada: <http://www.pcr-rcp.ca/old/en/programme/10/>. A subsequent document entitled *More on the Question of Waging Revolutionary War in the Imperialist Countries* elaborates further on the point, available here: <http://www.pcr-rcp.ca/en/archives/1164>

³⁹PCR-RCP, *Protracted People's War is the Only Way to Make Revolution*. Available online here: <http://www.pcr-rcp.ca/old/en/pwd/1e.php>

organization and constant struggle against opportunism and “left”-adventurism, the Bolsheviks charted a course that culminated in the October Revolution in 1917.

Lenin discussed the realities of organizing under the regime in *What Is To Be Done?*⁴⁰ He describes how entire study circles, who had simply begun to distribute leaflets at factories or talk to workers, were often arrested and imprisoned by the tsarist police:

The government, at first thrown into confusion and committing a number of blunders (e.g., its appeal to the public describing the misdeeds of the socialists, or the banishment of workers from the capitals to provincial industrial centres), very soon adapted itself to the new conditions of the struggle and managed to deploy well its perfectly equipped detachments of **agents provocateurs**, spies, and gendarmes. Raids became so frequent, affected such a vast number of people, and cleared out the local study circles so thoroughly that the masses of the workers lost literally all their leaders, the movement assumed an amazingly sporadic character, and it became utterly impossible to establish continuity and coherence in the work. The terrible dispersion of the local leaders; the fortuitous character of the study circle memberships; the lack of training in, and the narrow outlook on, theoretical, political, and organisational questions were all the inevitable result of the conditions described above. Things have reached such a pass that in several places the workers, because of our lack of self-restraint and the inability to maintain secrecy, begin to lose faith in the intellectuals and to avoid them; the intellectuals, they say, are much too careless and cause police raids!⁴¹

The PCR-RCP would have us believe that secret police and repressive laws only came about after the October Revolution, despite Lenin’s description of how “perfectly equipped detachments” of secret, political police broke up study circles and arrested local leaders. It is of course true that over the last century most imperialist countries have expanded their repressive forces and domestic surveillance capabilities, but Lenin’s quote shows that the Bolsheviks also organized in a situation fraught with extreme state repression. These difficulties were overcome through principled organization, and in particular through the organization of a party of professional revolutionaries, and the adoption of secret methods of work when necessary. The PCR-RCP either is ignorant of the most basic aspects of the history of these struggles, or they willfully and purposefully ignore this history to support their adventurist line of urban guerrilla

⁴⁰Vladimir Lenin, *What is to Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement* (New York: International Publishers, 2014). Available online here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/>

⁴¹Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, Chapter IV, “The Primitiveness of the Economists and the Organization of the Revolutionaries”

warfare—which they incorrectly call PPW. They effectively argue both that key difficulties that the Bolsheviks faced are new and unique to our situation, that the methods by which the Bolsheviks overcame them are outdated, and that we therefore need a new strategy. This is nonsense.

But let us take a step back from the PCR-RCP’s lack of familiarity with revolutionary history, and examine the reasoning behind their argument. The basic point is that imperialist states have advanced and strengthened their repressive forces since the time of Lenin, and therefore the revolutionary strategy pursued by the Bolsheviks is no longer feasible. They argue that instead we must pursue the strategy of PPW. But clearly, more powerful, mobile, and active repressive organizations actually make the practice of PPW *far more difficult*. How will it be possible to develop a base area when forces such as the national guard and state police can be deployed to a city in a matter of hours, as they were in Ferguson in 2014 and Baltimore in 2015?⁴² To better understand the PCR-RCP’s answer to this question it is helpful to refer to their description of how PPW will occur in Canada.

In the PCR-RCP *Party Program* section on PPW they state that:

In countries oppressed by imperialism where the peasantry is still the main force to make revolution and where therefore, the heart of the revolutionary forces are to be found in the countryside (like in China, Peru, in India and the Philippines, just to name a few), protracted people’s war consists of the encircling of the cities from the countryside. Revolutionaries establish base areas that put into practice new proletarian life-styles at their inception.

And

In Canada, like in the other big imperialist countries, protracted people’s war will mainly take place within the cities and urban areas. It is there that the nascent proletarian power will appear. The support and the participation of the masses, once again, are of the utmost importance in this process. The revolution will be built around a vast and underground network led by the party.⁴³

From this it should be clear that what the PCR-RCP calls PPW has nothing to do with Mao’s theorization of PPW. Mao’s theory of PPW involves encircling the cities from the countryside, as they acknowledge. The “revolutionary”

⁴²A news article about the national guard and police forces in Baltimore, which describes the strength, scale and speed of the response: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-police-baltimore/thousands-of-police-descend-on-baltimore-to-enforce-curfew-after-riots-idUSKBN0NI1N720150428>. In Ferguson a highly militarized police force was deployed, designed to terrify protesters with overwhelming force. This contemporary report provides some details: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2014/08/14/military-veterans-see-deeply-flawed-police-response-in-ferguson/?utm_term=.c92b14828f0c

⁴³From the section in the PCR-RCP’s *Party Programme* titled “The path of revolution in Canada: Protracted People’s War”. Online here: <http://www.pcr-rpc.ca/old/en/programme/10/>

strategy that the PCR-RCP lays out for imperialist countries, in contrast, is actually little more than urban guerrilla warfare; in this regard it is similar to the strategy of European armed revisionist “left”-adventurist groups of the 70s and 80s.⁴⁴ Despite these groups’ stated revolutionary aims, in reality they engaged in focoist campaigns of bombings, assassinations, and drug-trafficking which lead to massive crackdowns from state forces and left many of their cadre imprisoned or killed.

In this regard, it is not surprising that the PCR-RCP by and large upholds actions of the Red Brigades—at least until 1976—as a model for revolutionary strategy:

The practice of armed propaganda at the stage of gathering of strength, at least in regards to the experience of the Red Brigades in their ascending period (1970-1976), demonstrated that armed actions are at first mostly ideological and political tools (less importantly of a military character). Furthermore, if they are guided by correct theory, they allow to reinforce and accelerate the formation of the main nub for the power grab: the Communist Party. Armed propaganda has proven to be incremental for political revolutionary struggle and political propaganda. It is a means to permeate the proletariat with the communist project through an active struggle to defeat revisionism. Armed struggle also introduces revolutionary optimism by putting an end to the demoralization of the masses; by the same token, it is a strong educational tool to educate new generations of young proletarians to revolutionary struggle.⁴⁵

The claim here is that armed propaganda and armed struggle are *the essential means* by which to rally the masses to the cause of revolution. The fantasy is that the guerrilla actions of a small group will inspire the masses to stop being so “demoralized” and instead show them the basis to take up arms. The PCR-RCP also reduces the struggle against revisionism to taking up arms, thus negating the possibility and the historical reality of armed revisionism. This view of revolution has much more in common with Che’s revisionist theory of focoism than it does with Mao’s theory of PPW. The PCR-RCP’s view is that the primary obstacle to mass involvement in revolutionary struggle is “demoralization” rather than lack of conscious understanding of the need for revolution. This is in line with the Red Brigades’ claim that:

The problem is not transmitting communist consciousness to the multitudes, but demonstrating the necessity and possibility of the very existence of revolutionary politics; of the viability of the al-

⁴⁴The Red Army Faction in Germany, Red Brigades in Italy, Communist Combatant Cells in Belgium, etc. For a good overview of and strong criticism of these groups (and a few others) see *The False Path of the W. European “Armed Guerrilla”*, published in *A World To Win* in 1985. Available online here: <http://www.bannedthought.net/International/RIM/AWTW/1985-4/AWTW-04-UrbanGuerrilla.pdf>

⁴⁵PCR-RCP, *Protracted People’s War is the Only Way to Make Revolution*.

ternative plan for power, which immediately and directly confronts (independently of the objective conditions for revolution) the State.⁴⁶

The PCR-RCP also includes and endorses the following quote from the Belgian Communist Combatant Cells (CCC) in their Party Program:

The role of communists is not to entertain the democratic functioning of bourgeois society, it is to prove the feasibility of the revolutionary path. This means to show the proletariat that it has the military capability to fight against the bourgeoisie and to be victorious in defeating it (even at a small level).⁴⁷

These quotes and the PCR-RCP's endorsement of them show a disregard for the task of working among the masses to raise their level of consciousness through struggle. Instead, subjective will and violent acts of a few guerrillas are seen as the "key link" that will inspire the masses to take up the gun and rally to the guerrillas. The PCR-RCP, much like the European Adventurists of the 70s and 80s, makes no mention of the correct handling of contradictions among the people, which was so essential to the success of the PPW in China. Instead, they assume that revolution is made simply by taking up the gun and showing others that they too can do this "independently of objective conditions for revolution." Compare this with Mao's 1968 discussion of the question of revolutionary strategy and its relation to the objective conditions at a given moment:

We have always maintained that a revolution cannot be made at will and is impossible unless a revolutionary situation objectively exists. But the outbreak and the victory of revolution depend not only on the existence of a revolutionary situation but also on the preparations and efforts made by the subjective revolutionary forces. It is "Left" adventurism if the party of the proletariat does not accurately appraise both the objective conditions and subjective forces making for revolution and if it rashly launches a revolution before the conditions are ripe. But it is Right opportunism, or revisionism, if the proletarian party makes no active preparations for revolution before the conditions are ripe, or dare not lead a revolution and seize state power when a revolutionary situation exists and the conditions are

⁴⁶Found in: <http://www.bannedthought.net/International/RIM/AWTW/1985-4/AWTW-04-UrbanGuerrilla.pdf>

⁴⁷Quoted by the PCR-RCP in their Party Programme, in the section titled *The path of revolution in Canada: Protracted People's War*, available online here: <http://www.pcr-rcp.ca/old/en/programme/10/>. The quote is taken from *La Flèche et la Cible (The Arrow and the Target)*, a document written by imprisoned members of the CCC, available online here: <http://www.cellulescommunistescombattantes.be/fleche2.htm>. The original French: "*le rôle des communistes n'est pas d'entretenir le fonctionnement démocratique bourgeois, il est d'apporter la preuve de viabilité de la voie révolutionnaire, et cela jusqu'au niveau militaire où ils doivent démontrer la possibilité d'affronter victorieusement (même à une échelle réduite), les armes à la main, la bourgeoisie et ses forces de défense.*"

ripe.⁴⁸

All of this shows that the PCR-RCP's strategy for PPW in Canada is little more than "left"-adventurism. Instead of basing their theory of PPW on Mao's writings on the subject or a study of the Chinese Revolution, they look to the armed-revisionists groups from Europe who carried out urban guerrilla warfare. This is not the first time in the ICM that this sort of line has been put forward. Bruce Franklin, a founding member of the Revolutionary Union (RU) and, at the time, a professor at Stanford University, advocated this line, and eventually split from the RU over these differences. He remains a professor to this day—now employed at Rutgers—and has never launched the guerrilla war.⁴⁹ Even before this, Lenin struggled against the Narodniks and their petty-bourgeois view of revolutionary struggle. Lenin's criticism of the terrorist/left-adventurist conception of "excitatory terror" in *What Is To Be Done?* is equally applicable to the PCR-RCP's strategy for revolution:

The admission that the government cannot now be 'terrified' and hence disrupted, by terror, is tantamount to a complete condemnation of terror as a system of struggle, as a sphere of activity sanctioned by the programme. Secondly, it is still more characteristic as an example of the failure to understand our immediate tasks in regard to 'education for revolutionary activity.' *Svoboda* advocates terror as a means of 'exciting' the working-class movement and of giving it a 'strong impetus.' It is difficult to imagine an argument that more thoroughly disproves itself. Are there not enough outrages committed in Russian life without special 'excitants' having to be invented? On the other hand, is it not obvious that those who are not, and cannot be, roused to excitement even by Russian tyranny will stand by 'twiddling their thumbs' and watch a handful of terrorists engaged in single combat with the government?⁵⁰

⁴⁸The Editorial Departments of *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*) and *Hongqi* (*Red Flag*) "The Proletarian Revolution and Khrushchev's Revisionism: Eighth Comment on the Open Letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU," March 31, 1964, *The Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), p 393.

⁴⁹C.f. The entry on Franklin's organization Venceremos in *The Dictionary of Revolutionary Marxism* (available at <http://www.massline.org/Dictionary/V.htm>):

"The very name 'Venceremos', Spanish for 'We Will Win', derives from a battle cry of Che Guevara. But the connection of this Venceremos organization to Che was much deeper than that. They were in essence proposing an urban guerrilla warfare version of his notorious foco strategy. However, Venceremos was much more talk than action, and it may not have actually undertaken any guerrilla actions. But it was consciously preparing to do so, acquiring arms and expertise in their use, and it definitely expected that armed struggle would not be long in coming. (This is a point that Franklin now seems to deny, according to the Wikipedia.) But their actual activity seems to have been more around reformist issues such as working for prison reform and defending war protesters.

"It seems fair to say that Venceremos was less of a Marxist group, and more of a student-based anarchist organization, which though known for its wild rhetoric and AK-47 logo, soon fell apart and disappeared."

⁵⁰Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, Chapter III, "Trade-Unionist Politics and Social-Democratic Politics"

Lenin's critique of the "left"-adventurists of his time still holds good today, and is equally applicable to the PCR-RCP and the European adventurists they uphold. The strategy of terrorism as an excitant, as something which inspires the proletariat to greater and more daring feats, was disproven by the Bolsheviks 100 years ago. It failed to "excite" the masses again in the 1970s, and it will continue to fail in the future. This is something which has been shown time and time again in the history of proletarian revolutionary struggles.

So why then does the PCR-RCP remain so confused? In our view it is due to their petty-bourgeois world-view and their failure to understand the danger of armed revisionism. This leads them to endorse armed-revisionists like the European adventurist groups. For example they state that:

The revolutionary experience of the 1970's and 80's in major imperialist cities clearly indicated that the combination of armed struggle with the mass struggle and the agitation and propaganda work of the Communist Party allowed to break [sic] with electoralism, parliamentarism and revisionism, when guided by correct theory.⁵¹

The claim is that because groups like the RAF, the Belgian CCC, and Red Brigades did not engage in parliamentary politics, because they did not seek to get elected, they were not revisionist. However, while Khrushchev's theory of "peaceful transition" was and remains a form of revisionism, it is not the only one. Both the PCR-RCP and the "left"-adventurist groups in Europe failed to account for this reality. For example, the RAF endorsed the Soviet Social-Imperialists (including supporting the deployment of the Cuban army in Angola), and the Red Brigades—while nominally opposed to Soviet Social-Imperialism—in practice repeatedly opposed denouncing Brezhnev's armed revisionism, on the justification that to do so would be "opportunist in deed." Instead, they viewed the "primary task of true communists" as "exploiting all the contradictions of imperialism." This amounted to supporting the imperialist wars of the USSR on the grounds that they were less bad than the U.S. Deng Xiaoping used this same logic—albeit in inverted form—to justify his support for U.S. imperialism on the grounds that the USSR was the principal enemy of the people of the world. This logic was also practiced by the revisionists of the Second International to justify support for their own countries' war efforts in WWI. Thus we can see how a failure to grapple with the existence and danger of armed revisionism leads directly to social-chauvinism.

From this, it should be clear that the PCR-RCP's "new synthesis" of revolutionary strategy is nothing new at all, but rather something as old as Marxism itself: the petty-bourgeois politics of "left"-adventurism. It is on this foundation—and on a surface level analysis of the present situation, the October Revolution, and the Chinese Revolution—that the PCR-RCP's theory of the "universality of PPW" is based. This amounts to a negation of the principles of MLM and of the need for concrete analysis of concrete situations. These errors will lead to

⁵¹PCR-RCP, *Protracted People's War is the Only Way to Make Revolution*.

setbacks unless corrected.

JMP and the Claim the October Road was PPW

Joshua Moufawad-Paul (JMP) has discussed PPW several times on his blog *MLM-Mayhem*. His articulation is fairly similar to that of the PCR-RCP. However, there are a few significant differences and because of these we want to discuss the specifics of JMP's formulation. While the PCR-RCP's take on PPW reflects a fundamentally petty-bourgeois glorification of left-adventurism, JMP seems to be caught between the Montreal faction of the PCR-RCP, various right-opportunist elements in the Party from elsewhere in Canada, and his own position as a member of the academy. In his attempts to appease these contradictory forces and "hold it all together," JMP puts forward a variety of absurd and inconsistent positions. These include the claim that PPW is something other than the concrete form of revolutionary war developed in China, and that the October revolution was PPW. Sifting through JMP's infantile, obscurantist, and self-aggrandizing academic writing style to discern what he is actually saying is a painful exercise. But by doing so we can clarify that his politics are little more than a base petty-bourgeois eclecticism embellished with academic airs.

In *On Protracted Peoples War as a Universal Development of Revolutionary Theory* JMP says that PPW is neither the concrete strategy developed by Mao nor a "left"-adventurist strategy of urban guerrilla warfare.⁵² Instead, he says it must be thought of as a "protracted process." To anyone who knows anything about revolutionary history the idea that revolutions proceed by "protracted processes" is such an obvious and commonplace fact that it hardly needs to be stated. No revolution is instantaneous. There is a need to build political power and struggle against the forces of reaction over a period of time, and only in petty-bourgeois anarchist fantasies do the masses spontaneously take to the streets and overthrow the ruling class on a whim.

Despite this, JMP has worked to dress up this simple fact that "things take time" as a revelation, and argued that, from this, PPW is universal. JMP's position fundamentally negates Mao's contributions by negating the concrete content of PPW, falsely opposes the insurrectionary strategy to "protracted processes," falsely opposes legal struggle to PPW, and falsely claims that PPW in an imperialist country is not "left"-adventurism.

We will begin with JMP's claim that PPW is something other than the revolutionary path developed by Mao and others in China:

The most ludicrous dismissals are the claims that PPW is about forming peasant armies and surrounding the cities from the country-

⁵²JMP, *On Protracted Peoples War as a Universal Development of Revolutionary Theory*, Available online here: <https://moufawad-paul.blogspot.fr/2012/02/on-protracted-peoples-war-as-universal.html>

side amidst some sort of agrarian revolution... and since all talk of a powerful "peasant class" in this context is obviously non-sensical, then if this is what we believe we can be dismissed as delusional. Except this is not what we mean.⁵³

What JMP is saying is that the particularity of the Chinese revolution does not matter. Nor do the experiences of the other ongoing and historical examples of PPW matter. All that matters in his view is the "universal" content of PPW which is supposedly applicable regardless of objective conditions. But as Maoists—and not dogmatists—we should be clear: PPW refers to the form of revolutionary war which was developed and fought in China and is being fought in India and the Philippines today. Instead of investigating the particularity of the present situation in Canada and developing a revolutionary strategy suitable to those conditions, and instead of investigating the particularities of how PPW has played out in the past or is playing out at present, JMP just dogmatically insists that it is a universal strategy because revolutions are "protracted." This sort of empty abstract analysis may suffice for academic papers and PhD dissertations, but MLM demands that we avoid such posturing and instead engage in concrete analysis.

Revolutions certainly do not happen overnight. They take time and planning, and patient work among the masses. This should be evident to anyone who has even the slightest familiarity with revolutionary history, but this simple and obvious reality does not tell us much beyond the fact that people will not riot in the streets and create revolution tomorrow. It definitely does not mean that PPW is the only valid revolutionary strategy. Revolutionary strategy depends on the dialectical relation between the particularities of a given national situation and the universal lessons of past revolutions. In order to understand the strategies used in the past we must investigate their particularity so as to draw universal lessons from their successes and failures.

But all this is too much for JMP. He would rather dismiss any and all who disagree with his theory of the universality of PPW as solely advocating legal struggles:

Those who argue that PPW does not apply to the centres of capitalism claim that the moment of insurrection must come after a *protracted legal struggle*. Work in reformist ways only, embed yourself in unions, engage in propaganda to win the hearts and minds of the people.⁵⁴

This is a classic straw-man argument. JMP tries to portray those who oppose PPW in imperialist countries as the advocates of revisionist legalism; in doing so he frames the question as a simple binary opposition where a dialectical approach is needed.⁵⁵ In contrast to JMP's simplistic understanding, building for

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Metaphysics sees things as separate and isolated. This is apparent in JMP's efforts to

an insurrection in a country like the U.S. is going to require a long period of legal and illegal work. It is not something which we can prepare for by simply engaging in unions, passing out propaganda, or fighting for small reforms. However, it also cannot be done solely by engaging in illegal, clandestine organizing and in street fights with the police and fascists.⁵⁶ This basic dialectical point, about the need to relate legal and illegal struggles in any revolutionary strategy, is something JMP fails to grasp. This is evident in his dismissal of an insurrectionary strategy on the grounds that all the work done up to the point of insurrection would be of a purely legal nature. However, as Maoists, we must work to link mass-struggles for short-term gains—better working conditions, protection from abusive supervisors, fights against evictions, struggles against police brutality, opposition to imperialist wars, etc.—to the longer-term goals of revolution and communism.⁵⁷ And, as anyone with a basic familiarity with bourgeois legality knows, organizing for revolution is illegal. But, instead of dealing with the difficult questions involved in Maoist organizing to link the short and long-term interests of the masses, JMP avoids these questions entirely, repeating again and again the maxim that PPW is the answer. This is metaphysics.

In order to dismiss claims that the strategy of PPW in imperialist countries is little more than “left”-adventurism and urban guerrilla warfare, JMP states:

Then there are the equally wrong-headed charges that those of us who endorse PPW as a universal development of revolutionary theory are “adventurists” who want to start urban guerrilla squads tomorrow and begin shooting it out with the pigs. We are suddenly accused of being theoretically in line with the Red Army Faction or the Red Brigades. And though we uphold the legacy of these failed focoist attempts (just as we uphold every legacy of failed revolutionary attempts) this is also not what we mean.⁵⁸

contrast open and legal struggles with revolutionary work. From this it would follow that revolutionary work is illegal. However, this is metaphysics and relies on a non-dialectical worldview. Open and legal work must be dialectically related to secret and illegal work in any revolutionary effort. The two should be interrelated. We discuss this above in our analysis of CPI (Maoist)’s views on revolutionary strategy in capitalist countries.

⁵⁶What’s more, as the historic and ongoing PPW’s show, PPW also requires a mix of legal and illegal work. CPI (Maoist) puts it well: “We have to complete Social investigation in all the States/Special Areas/Special Zones and study the forms of exploitation in the agricultural, industrial and service sectors by the International Financial Capital, Comprador Bureaucratic Capital and Feudalism together. We have to mobilise the broad masses against this in the class struggle. For this purpose we have to form legal, cover and UF forums to mobilise the vast masses in class struggle. We have to consolidate class organisations in all the Guerilla Zones and concentrate on intensification of class struggle starting from the local level.” *People’s War*, Vol. 11, p. 132.

⁵⁷In Chapter 4 of the *Manifesto* Marx and Engels write: “The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement.” Online here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch04.htm>

⁵⁸JMP, *On Protracted Peoples War as a Universal Development of Revolutionary Theory*.

We should be clear that initiating guerrilla warfare in an imperialist country *during a non-revolutionary situation*—regardless if one starts tomorrow or five years from now—will lead to disaster. Even prior to launching an adventurist campaign of guerrilla warfare, these theoretical formulations can and do have a negative impact on the revolutionary movement in various countries. As we have mentioned, Bruce Franklin has yet to start the guerrilla war he advocated in the early 1970s. Nonetheless his ideological assaults on the revolutionary movement in the U.S. through a similar line did take a toll—it drew people away from revolutionary politics.

JMP also claims that he and others who advocate the universality of PPW are being falsely and unjustly compared to the Red Army Faction and Red Brigades. And yet, in JMP’s article he repeatedly makes reference to the PCR-RCP’s documents as the authoritative source on the theory of PPW in imperialist countries. And, as we discussed above, it is precisely in these document that the PCR-RCP references the Red Brigades and the politically similar Belgian CCC as positive examples which supposedly prove the viability of armed propaganda and urban guerrilla warfare in imperialist countries. Therefore it is entirely justified for people to criticize JMP—as well as the PCR-RCP, and others who reference their documents to support the theory that PPW is universal—for theoretical similarities to armed revisionist groups like the Red Brigades.

This is more broadly related to JMP’s claim that he and others “uphold the legacy” of failed revolutionary attempts. But what does it mean to uphold the legacy of armed revisionists? The reality is that JMP, the PCR-RCP, and others in their orbit often blur the lines between armed revisionism and Maoist politics. We explained above how the PCR-RCP reduces revisionism to the Khrushchevite theory of “peaceful transition to communism,” and JMP here advocates a similar approach by uncritically “upholding” the legacy of armed revisionism.⁵⁹

In order to justify this “one size fits all” approach to politics, and the idea that PPW is universal JMP claims that the October Revolution was a form of PPW, albeit one that was “untheorized”:

The theory of Protracted Peoples War is juxtaposed with the theory of Insurrection that takes the moment of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia as more significant than the process from 1905-1917. As was argued in the articles cited above, all attempts to follow the October Road—attempts that failed to grasp the moment of insurrection as only part of a much larger process of PPW—have actually *failed*. Every attempted insurrection based on the strategy of Insur-

⁵⁹JMP further elaborates on this view in his document *The Spectre of “Ultra-leftism”* (available here: <https://moufawad-paul.blogspot.fr/2013/05/the-spectre-of-ultra-leftism.html>), in which he blurs not only blurs the lines between “left”-adventurism and revolutionary politics, but also between armed revisionists like Che, and genuine revolutionaries who made adventurist mistakes like Rosa Luxemburg. This sort of sophistry is a negation of the necessary revolutionary task of investigating past revolutionaries and their correct and incorrect ideas.

rection has been crushed despite all arguments that this strategy is the only viable revolutionary method at the centres of capitalism. There is no historical precedent aside from the October Revolution which, as I have already argued, was actually a *protracted process*.⁶⁰

Here JMP once again negates the concrete content of PPW, saying little of what it entails other than repeating his mantra about the “protracted process,” and thereby claiming that the October Revolution was the culmination of a PPW. In doing so, he once again relies on a straw-man argument, namely the claim that anyone who discusses the October Revolution as an insurrection fails to appreciate the struggles from 1905-1917. Perhaps JMP has come to this conclusion from wasting so much time debating fellow academics and Trotskyists. The alternative is that he is being deliberately dishonest and deceptive. Either way, his argument holds little water. Even a basic familiarity with Lenin’s writing demonstrates the importance of the years of struggle that were required for the Bolsheviks to be in a position to seize state power in 1917. There are some people who talk about the Bolshevik Revolution but who haven’t bothered to read Lenin or don’t appreciate what he is saying, but the same cannot be said of any serious revolutionary Maoist.

But JMP is not just saying that people don’t appreciate the Bolshevik’s organizing efforts prior to 1917. He is also claiming that it is only through understanding these efforts as PPW that we can succeed at revolution in an imperialist country. This is laughable, and JMP provides no arguments or evidence to support the claim that the 1905-1917 was PPW beyond the fact that it was “a protracted process.” But everything from writing a book to organizing for a strike is a “protracted process” and we hope that JMP would not have the audacity to claim that these are also forms of PPW!

What’s more, the Bolsheviks were not engaged in armed struggle for the vast majority of the period from 1905-1917. They were, however, engaged in very active work to fuse with the working class, to provide leadership to workers’ struggles, to support all progressive and democratic struggles in Russian society. In short, they were working to act as what Lenin called the “Tribune of the People.”⁶¹ However, they simply were not engaged in warfare during the entirety of this time, and it is ridiculous to say that they were. JMP again seeks to reduce difficult questions to binary oppositions: either the ridiculous theory that the insurrection in 1917 dropped out of thin air or the equally ridiculous theory that the October Revolution was PPW. Despite JMP’s support for the latter, neither of these theories represent an MLM analysis of the Bolshevik Revolution.

The obvious fact that the Bolsheviks were prepared to take state power in 1917 because of the many struggles through which they had already passed doesn’t in any way support the idea that they were fighting a People’s War. If PPW has

⁶⁰JMP, *On Protracted Peoples War as a Universal Development of Revolutionary Theory*.

⁶¹Lenin, *What is To Be Done?*, Chapter III, “Trade-Unionist Politics And Social-Democratic Politics”

no concrete content other than being a revolutionary strategy which happens through a “protracted process” then literally every revolution ever should be understood as PPW. In this case, universality is reduced to an abstract generality devoid of all particular content; this is the dogmatic view of universality.

While JMP is perfectly fine with such dogmatism, it does present him with a few problems: If PPW is just an abstract generality which is applicable to all successful revolutions ever, then why harp on about it? And doesn’t this claim negate the contribution of Mao and the CCP to revolutionary theory and practice? But JMP is aware, at least in some sense, that he would be revealed as the petty-bourgeois philistine that he is if he totally disregarded the contributions of Mao and others to revolutionary theory and practice.

To avoid such an unmasking, JMP says the following when discussing Liebknecht’s writings on military matters:

Still, these are just glimmers of a strategy that would not be theorized, despite being practiced without clear theoretical reflection from 1905-1917 in Russia, until Mao’s theoretical conceptualization of PPW.⁶²

Yes, JMP is really saying that the Bolshevik party practiced a revolutionary strategy, and successfully took state power, without having any clear idea what they were doing. According to JMP the revolutionary strategy employed by the Bolsheviks was not theoretically understood until Mao wrote about PPW many years later. Never mind that Mao’s writings on PPW in China focus on the particularities of the Chinese Revolution, and make no claim to be a synthesis of the strategy of the Bolsheviks. Never mind that Mao’s struggle against the dogmatists was against those who claimed that the strategy pursued by the Bolsheviks should also be pursued by the CCP. Never mind that JMP’s claim is a negation of Mao’s writings on the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge. JMP would have us believe that anyone who brings up such difficult questions doesn’t appreciate the fact that revolution is a “protracted process!”

While such ham-handed dismissals may be par for the course in university conferences and in online forums, they do not suffice in the domain of revolutionary theory. In discussing the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge, Mao explains how after making the leap from perceptual knowledge to rational knowledge, one must leap from rational knowledge to testing this theory in practice. By reflecting on the successes and failures of this practice, a deeper form of rational knowledge is developed which is again tested in practice, and the cycle continues. In contrast, JMP’s claim that PPW was practiced in Russia for 12 years “without clear theoretical reflection” betrays his mechanical understanding of the relationship between theory and practice. In his view, it was only decades later, when Mao wrote about PPW, that someone finally bothered to develop rational knowledge of the revolutionary strategy of the Bolshevik Revolution.

⁶²JMP, *On Protracted Peoples War as a Universal Development of Revolutionary Theory*.

It is true that later reflection on revolutionary struggles can be helpful to summarize their successes and in particular their failures, the latter of which revolutionaries in the immediacy of a struggle may not have fully grasped.⁶³ However, to claim that the Bolsheviks did not have rational knowledge of their own strategy for revolution is an absurd form of sophistry. It is important to reiterate that this claim is the basis of JMP’s argument that PPW is both universal and was not understood as a strategy until Mao wrote about it. This theory is ultimately rooted in the bourgeois conception of a “great revealer” who appears and clarifies the past and the way forward, while others remain blind and without rational knowledge of their actions. In practice it justifies a commandist approach to politics, in which the masses must rely on a “theory-master” who is supposed to have all the correct ideas. It is a thoroughly revisionist conception of leadership and of revolutionary theory.

In his 2016 book *Continuity and Rupture: Philosophy in Maoist Terrain* JMP puts forward new formulations and justifications for the universality of PPW. Although the book is more of the same eclectic academic nonsense, his new “contributions” are worth analyzing in detail. Elaborating on his previous musings, JMP claims that the qualitative advances in the Maoist understanding of the party—above and beyond the Leninist party of a new type—necessitate that one pursue PPW as a revolutionary strategy. His analysis of the differences between the Maoist and Leninist understandings of the party are quite revealing:

What strategic theory would the Maoist “party of the new type” produce, based on its method of organization? A movement of movements that seeks to embed itself everywhere in society, deployed through every progressive counter-hegemonic movement, will necessarily have a different strategic approach than a party formation that does not invest itself in these movements, maintaining an agitational distance in the hope that the radical elements of these movements will just gravitate towards its orbit. A party that seeks to locate a dispersed proletariat, rather than imagining that a ready-made revolutionary agent can be found at the traditional “point of production” organized according to trade-union consciousness, will also develop a strategy of dispersal. A party that employs the mass-line, and believes it is important to locate the most radical elements of these masses, will find itself confronting a complexity that the traditional Leninist appreciation of proletarian identity cannot grasp. In this sense, the theory of PPW is at least one theory that fulfills the demands produced by a party that understands reality in a manner that transgresses the boundaries of traditional Leninist thought while also reaffirming the crucial aspects of Leninism: rupture and continuity.⁶⁴

⁶³A key example would be Marx’s writings on the Paris Commune in *The Civil War in France*, online here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/>

⁶⁴JMP, *Continuity and Rupture: Philosophy in Maoist Terrain* (Washington: Zero Books, 2016), p. 210-211. This is but one of numerous examples of the eclectic nonsense that fills

This comparison between the Maoist and Leninist views of the party indicates either a complete and total ignorance of the history of the Russian Revolution—which is entirely possible because JMP has claimed that it was a form of PPW—or a deliberately deceptive account to support claims that PPW is universal. JMP’s claim that the Bolsheviks maintained “an agitational distance in the hope that the radical elements of these movements [would] just gravitate towards its orbit” is in direct contradiction with Lenin’s own writings about their activities. For example, in his 1902 text *What is to Be Done?* Lenin argued that,

A network of agents that would form in the course of establishing and distributing the common newspaper would not have to “sit about and wait” for the call for an uprising, but could carry on the regular activity that would guarantee the highest probability of success in the event of an uprising. Such activity would strengthen our contacts with the broadest strata of the working masses and with all social strata that are discontented with the autocracy, which is of such importance for an uprising. Precisely such activity would train all local organisations to respond simultaneously to the same political questions, incidents, and events that agitate the whole of Russia and to react to such “incidents” in the most vigorous, uniform, and expedient manner possible; for an uprising is in essence the most vigorous, most uniform, and most expedient “answer” of the entire people to the government.⁶⁵

From this it should be clear that, while agitation was an important aspect of the work that Bolsheviks did, it was by no means the only type of work they did. As Lenin makes clear in this document and others, they did all sorts of legal and illegal work among the Russian masses to organize and prepare for revolution. JMP’s claim that the Leninist party maintained an “agitational distance” from the masses is nothing new. In *What is to Be Done?* Lenin debunks precisely such a criticism leveled against him and the publication *Iskra* by the adventurist Nadezhdin who claimed that “*Iskra* thinks that around it and in the activities in its behalf people will gather and organise.”⁶⁶

If repeating the claims of such an unprincipled adventurist was not bad enough,

270 pages of this book. We found this quote to be particularly instructive because of the absurdity of the claims put forward in it, and felt that it accurately reflected the general revisionist essence of the book. Another such absurdity can be found on page 218 where JMP claims:

“The civil war already exists; the class struggle, which results in so many massacres even when the proletariat is not consciously fighting the bourgeoisie, needs to be engaged and, in this engagement, made visible.”

This claim that the violence of the daily functioning of the bourgeois state is the same thing as a civil war, is also used to justify the idea that PPW is universal. It also has a resonance with the adventurist musing of the Red Brigades on the topic of Civil War. This sort of sophistry is a negation of the Marxist principle of “concrete investigations of concrete situations.”

⁶⁵Lenin, *What is to Be Done?*, p. 173.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 156-166.

JMP also claims that the Leninist party imagined “that a ready-made revolutionary agent can be found at the traditional ‘point of production’ organized according to trade-union consciousness” and that this was related to the limits of the “traditional Leninist” view of proletarian identity! This argument reveals JMP’s complete ignorance of the most basic and fundamental aspects of Lenin’s views on the party of a new type. It was against precisely such an economist and trade-unionist view of a revolutionary party that Lenin struggled tirelessly. The main thrust of *What is to Be Done?* is to criticize those like Martynov who reduced Marxism to little more than trade-unionist consciousness and thus negated the possibility of revolution. Lenin even went so far as to say: “Trade-unionist politics of the working class is precisely *bourgeois politics* of the working class.”⁶⁷ And, in politicizing against the Economists of his time, Lenin repeatedly emphasized the importance of working amongst the broad masses of Russia who could be drawn into antagonistic struggle against Tsarism:

We must ‘go among all classes of the population’ as theoreticians, as propagandists, as agitators, and as organisers. No one doubts that the theoretical work of Social-Democrats should aim at studying all the specific features of the social and political condition of the various classes. But extremely little is done in this direction as compared with the work that is done in studying the specific features of factory life.⁶⁸

To be clear, there are real differences between the Maoist understanding of the party and the Leninist understanding of the party.⁶⁹ But JMP either has no real understanding of these differences or intentionally distorts them to support the idea that the PPW is a universal strategy for revolution and an essential aspect of Maoism. Either way his writing is of little use for revolutionaries except insofar as it serves as a negative example, an instance of waving the red flag to oppose the red flag.

RGAs and Their Eclectic Negation of Maoism

Red Guards Austin (RGA) is an eclectic group whose regurgitation of half-baked bourgeois academic theory, revisionist practice, and internet-posturing includes, perhaps unsurprisingly, a somewhat idiosyncratic formulation of PPW. Not to be outdone by JMP and other eclectics, RGA insists on putting forward their own “unique” conception of PPW. A brief analysis of their understanding of and plan for PPW will help further clarify the bankruptcy of such approaches. Their

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 83.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 81-82.

⁶⁹For more on this topic c.f. Ajith’s *The Maoist Party*, available here: <http://www.signalfire.org/2015/12/30/the-maoist-party-ajith/>. Ajith’s document is by no means the definitive answer to this question, but contains meaningful Maoist analysis of the foundations of the Leninist theory of party and the contributions that Mao made to this which serve as the basis of a Maoist party.

views contradict the most fundamental theories of MLM and Mao's writing on PPW.

Before discussing the specifics of their "strategy" for PPW in the US, it is necessary to examine RGA's argument for the universality of PPW:

Mao Zedong's theory of protracted people's war is universal to all countries of the world. In understanding the concept of PPW, we must understand that Maoism is not a dogma—that all who hold to MLM must be able to correctly and creatively apply the universal to the specific. PPW in an imperialist country will therefore look very different from its application in China, which varies still from its application in Peru. Its three aspects are its protracted nature, the people, and the armed fighting.⁷⁰

While acknowledging that MLM entails "creatively apply[ing] the universal to the specific," RGA does not bother to discuss how they arrived at the idea that PPW is universal based on studying the particularities of past revolutions. Instead they start from the assumption that PPW is universal, and then say that its universality needs to be applied to the particular conditions. When discussing the supposed universality of PPW, RGA lists three factors: "its protracted nature, the people, and the armed fighting." These points are so general that they apply to any and all revolutions in which one class overthrows another, and can hardly be called the universal aspect of PPW unless PPW is just another name for revolution—in which case PPW is abstracted from all of its concrete context in China and elsewhere and reduced to a mere formalism.

However, RGA does not seem to believe this to be the case; they insist that PPW is a new type of revolutionary strategy, qualitatively different from the October Road. In discussing the October Revolution they state that:

Insurrection in the Leninist sense will not be possible, and waiting for such an event will only decrease the fighting capacity of the people and stifle them by disallowing their mass participation in the overthrow of the capitalist state. Such ideas should be discarded for the present day, while being understood for their relevance to particular bygone historical moments.⁷¹

According to this logic, the October Revolution did not involve the three aspects of "protracted nature, the people, and the armed fighting." But of course, the October Revolution was the culmination of years of organizing to develop mass organizations, to grow and strengthen the party, to raise the level of consciousness of the masses, and to split the police and army so that some would side with the cause of the revolution. But according to RGA, either none of this was protracted, or it didn't involve the people, or it wasn't "the armed fighting!" Clearly RGA has not bothered to investigate the October Revolution as, in their

⁷⁰RGA, *Condemned to Win*.

⁷¹*Ibid.*

view, it belongs to a “bygone historical moment.” This is all the more evident in that they claim that insurrection “in the Leninist sense” will “stifle [the people] by disallowing their mass participation in the overthrow of the capitalist state.” Either RGA is being deliberately deceptive or they really do not know that the October Revolution was only possible precisely because of mass participation in the insurrections and related political struggles. And all this from an organization which claims to be MLM. Never mind that Lenin called “concrete analysis of concrete situations” the living soul of Marxism, from RGA’s practice we can see that they believe that this too must be from a bygone era!

Let’s leave all this aside and pretend for a moment that these are convincing arguments for the universality of PPW. How then does RGA believe that this will play out in the US? In short, it is difficult to say. Their writing on the topic is an incredibly convoluted and eclectic mishmash of speculative posturing and grandiose proclamations:

We won’t necessarily “surround the city from the countryside,” but a rural component will be necessary, with rolling urban attacks in a wave-like motion, geared toward economic instability. The slums, ghettos, and border towns will be especially hospitable to the formation of base areas in the form of bio-political dual power as a long-term strategy put into motion as the first phase, long before the fighting and shooting of the PPW starts.⁷²

One can be forgiven for being confused by this muddled Dühring-esque nonsense. In order to clarify what is being said, and to distill the political content of RGA’s theory, we will break it down sentence by sentence. To start, RGA admits that they won’t (“necessarily”) surround the city from the countryside, a fact that should be obvious to anyone familiar with basic demographic statistics of the U.S. At present in the US, the majority of the masses involved in production are not located in the rural countryside, as they are in semi-feudal countries, but rather in urban and suburban centers. But lest anyone be confused and believe that RGA is saying that the countryside doesn’t matter, they are quick to state that there will be a rural component and that this—or perhaps guerrillas in the city, the grammar is ambiguous—will launch “rolling urban attacks in a wave-like motion, geared toward economic instability.” What exactly does this mean?

In our view, it seems most likely that RGA is referencing *Why is It That Red Political Power Can Exist in China?* and/or *Struggle in The Ching kang Mountains* in both of which Mao discusses the policies of the Border Area Special Committee and the Army Committee of the Party. One of these policies is to advance “in a series of waves to expand the area under the independent regime, and oppose the policy of expansion by adventurist advance.”⁷³ In the context of

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Mao, *Why is it That Red Political Power Can Exist in China?*, MZSW vol 1. p 67-68. and *Struggle in The Ching kang Mountains*, MZSW, Vol 1., pp. 75-76.

the PPW in China this meant making methodical advances into villages when the enemy was in a period of temporary political instability and therefore would have more difficulty deploying military force to repress the agrarian revolution. In China, these expansions of the base areas were not “geared toward economic instability,” but rather sought to grow red political power by raising the level of consciousness among the masses and furthering the agrarian revolution. In China this entailed the creation of peasant associations as well as cultural and propaganda campaigns. These organizations and activities helped to clarify the stakes of the agrarian revolution. They also rallied the peasantry to join the Red Guards and village militias, and broadly resolved political and economic contradictions among the people that prevented or inhibited their ability to get involved in political work.

But all of these particulars are too much for RGA to bother with. Instead of really investigating the history of the Chinese Revolution, RGA prefers to posture. In our view, the main thrust of the idea behind “rolling urban attacks in a wave-like motion, geared toward economic instability” is to “fuck shit up” and smash some windows. In short, little more than anarchist fantasies of adventurism and sabotage. This is reflected in RGA’s mechanical view that “society is transformed by violent revolution against the economic base” and that it is only after the revolution that cultural transformation of the superstructure is possible.⁷⁴

These politics are nothing new; they are just more of the same petty-bourgeois politics which have been unable to build proletarian power in this country or around the world. In order to distract from this, and masquerade as something different and better than anarchism, RGA adopts the form of appearance of Maoism; in this case by speaking of building base areas. But even in their description of these base areas RGA cannot resist the temptation of eclecticism, describing base areas as a “form of bio-political dual power.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴RGA, *On Identity Opportunism*, <https://redguardsaustin.wordpress.com/2017/04/10/on-identity-opportunism/> See also our discussion of these idea in *RGA is Not an MLM Organization*, available at: <http://www.massproletariat.info/writings/2017-12-26-rga-not-mlm.html>

⁷⁵This reference to biopolitical dual power is never defined by RGA, and they provide no citation or source of inspiration for using this term. One prominent reference to this term can be found on an eclectic blog named *Kurukshetra*, which is named after a Hindu epic and describes itself as: “writing and analysis on philosophy, political economy, and the process of social change from a revolutionary Marxist/communist/anarchist perspective.” In an article titled *Biopolitics, Dual Power, and the Revolutionary Characteristics of “Serve the People” Programs*, the author attempts to blend the politics of the Black Panthers with the writings of the bourgeois academic Alberto Toscano and even goes so far as to state that the comprador Iranian proxy-force Hezbollah is an example of biopolitical dual-power!

The term biopolitics was pioneered by Michel Foucault, a French petty-bourgeois academic and self proclaimed “historical nominalist.” In his work, the term biopolitics refers to the means by which a state controls the life of the physical and political bodies of a population. Foucault identifies biopolitics as specific form of liberalism: “Studying liberalism as the general framework of biopolitics.” Clearly this is not, in Foucault’s view, a revolutionary form of government, but a reactionary regime and means of control and subjugation. What’s more, the concept itself is based on Foucault’s anti-dialectical approach to philosophy, and it is eclecticism blend it with a Marxist concept like dual-power and assume that they are compatible.

RGA attempts to fuse two into one, mixing bourgeois academic philosophy with the Marxist concept of dual power. While this in and of itself is indicative of a petty-bourgeois eclecticism, RGA's claim that base areas are a form of dual power also indicates that they do not understand the concept of dual power. To clarify it is helpful to investigate what Lenin wrote on the topic. In discussing the matter in his 1917 essay *The Dual Power*, Lenin states: "Alongside the Provisional Government, the government of bourgeoisie, another government has arisen, so far weak and incipient, but undoubtedly a government that actually exists and is growing—the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies."⁷⁶ He further elaborates on this topic in his 1917 document *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution*: "There is not the slightest doubt that such an 'interlocking' cannot last long. Two powers cannot exist in a state. One of them is bound to pass away."⁷⁷ From this it should be clear that the dual power in Russia was not a liberated area free from the bourgeois state—as the red base areas were in China—but rather the existence of two powers internal to one state. It is for this reason that, in discussing the creation of red base areas in China, Mao does not refer to them as a dual power, but rather states "The long-term survival inside a country of one or more small areas under Red political power completely encircled by a White regime is a phenomenon that has never occurred anywhere else in the world."⁷⁸ But, as we have seen, RGA does not bother much with concrete investigations. Instead they eclectically import this concept of "bio-political dual power" into their theory without bothering to explain in any detail how they plan on building liberated base areas in cities where the army can be deployed in a matter of hours, where the water supply can be shut off at the touch of a button, where the flow of electricity can be stopped instantly, and where food shipments can be blockaded.

Clearly, such a view of PPW is a total negation of the basic principles of MLM and of Mao's writings on PPW as discussed above. This sort of negation is typical of RGA's overall political orientation which we analyzed in our recent document, *RGA is Not an MLM Organization*.⁷⁹ RGA and other such dogmatists do not have an interest in investigating the particularities of past revolutionary struggles to learn universal lessons from them. Their politics of impatience demands that they instead substitute bravado and showmanship for revolutionary theory and practice. However, little can come of this sort of posturing, unless

It is even more eclectic—and theoretically lazy—to assume, as RGA does, that biopolitics is actually a "good thing" and that is something that we should aspire to in our revolutionary work. Either RGA used this term in total ignorance of what it actually means, or they are advocating a fundamentally bourgeois form of government. Either way, their usage of this term is a total negation of an MLM approach to theory and practice.

⁷⁶V.I. Lenin, "The Dual Power," *Lenin Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964) Volume 24, p. 38-41. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/09.htm>

⁷⁷V.I. Lenin, "The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution (Draft Platform for the Proletarian Party)," *Lenin Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964) Volume 24, p. 55-92. Online here:<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/tasks/ch03.htm>

⁷⁸Mao, *Why is it That Red Political Power Can Exist in China?*, p 67-68. Emphasis in italics ours.

⁷⁹Available at: <http://www.massproletariat.info/writings/2017-12-26-rga-not-mlm.html>

one is in the practice of measuring success by Facebook likes. The theoretical bankruptcy of RGA's musings on PPW should be clear to anyone with even a cursory familiarity with the nature of PPW as practiced by the revolutionaries in China, India, and elsewhere around the world.

3. Conclusion: Maoist Strategy in the U.S. and the Tasks in Front of Us

Thus far, the primary focus of this paper has been refuting the idea that PPW is a universal strategy. In doing so, our hope has been to clarify some mistaken ideas that comrades have, and to expose those who masquerade as Maoist as the petty-bourgeois eclectics that they are. Along the way, we have also laid down some key points about revolutionary strategy in this country. In our conclusion, we will attempt to synthesize these points and lay the foundation for greater theoretical clarity, now that the pests have been swept away. These points will be somewhat general. However, they can begin to address many of the key questions in front of us, and we hope that they can clarify a way forward for those with a sincere desire for MLM politics.

In order to understand our situation we must have a grasp of the primary and determining contradictions on a global scale, and internal to the U.S. In addition, we must draw on historical lessons to develop a revolutionary strategy suitable to our particular situation and have tactical means to advance on a revolutionary road in line with this strategic assessment. To argue otherwise is to divorce theory and practice, and to justify all sorts of economist and opportunist politics. While it is beyond the scope of the paper to flesh out a complete analysis of this moment, a brief analysis of some fundamental contradictions and recent developments will be helpful to clarify our situation.

On a global scale, the contradiction between the imperialists and the oppressed peoples of the world constitutes a fundamental contradiction, resulting in the wholesale plundering of entire economies and subjugation of entire states, politically, culturally, militarily and economically, for the benefit of several competing imperialist ruling classes. This situation creates a basis for rich revolutionary resistance on a global level. The leading revolutionary movements in India, Turkey, and the Philippines correspondingly reflect pioneering forces that have seized on these openings. These revolutionary movements are beacons for the international communist movement.

Another fundamental contradiction on the global scale is the competition between the imperialist states. Inter-imperialist contradictions have been sharpening recently. This has manifested in increased levels of military and economic conflict and competition. For the U.S. ruling class, its ability to maintain a dominant position globally has been increasingly challenged by the rise of Russian and Chinese imperialist powers. The U.S. ruling class' military "adventures" over the past few decades have also severely impacted its position globally. It

has waltzed into deepening quagmires abroad that have exacerbated economic and political contradictions at home, and hastened the erosion of its status as the dominant imperialist power in the world. What's more, these military campaigns have often failed to achieve their goal of securing U.S. domination in the countries in question, as is evident in China's significant inroads in post-Saddam Iraq.⁸⁰

The third fundamental contradiction of the contemporary world, in particular in the capitalist countries, is between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. This manifests in different forms, including in the struggles of workers to improve their conditions, as well as the various schemes of capitalists to increase worker productivity. This contradiction has been sharpening in the U.S. and globally since the 2008 economic crisis, and this is evident internal to the U.S. in the new and increased efforts to track and monitor worker efficiency, in the increasing reliance of businesses on temporary and part-time workers, in increasing and deepening unemployment, and in various statistical tricks pursued by the U.S. government to hide the actual levels of unemployment and underemployment in this country.

Internally, throughout its history, the U.S. bourgeoisie has consistently relied on a system of white supremacy to control, contain, and divide the masses of people internal to its borders. In its never-ending drive to expand its capital, the ruling class has required an ever-more disposable and replaceable labor force. In particular, Black and other oppressed peoples have constituted the most exploited and most oppressed sections of the masses.

Machinations by the ruling class to adapt its productive enterprises to a changing environment have particularly affected non-white workers. Following rebellions in the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s—and the murder of dozens of revolutionary leaders especially in the Black Panther Party—the capitalists attempted on one hand to contain dissent among Black Americans through duplicitous social and educational programs which aimed to develop and reinforce a comprador ideology among the masses, and on the other hand to exclude them from legal economic activity altogether. The latter was often achieved by relocating factories from dense urban areas to the southern United States or abroad. The creation of a large unemployed Black population and the corresponding expansion of mass incarceration and deepening police abuse of non-white Americans, and Black Americans in particular, has fueled deep resentment and inspired new outbreaks and forms of resistance in recent years.

⁸⁰See Tim Arango and Clifford Krauss, "China is Reaping Biggest Benefits of Iraq Oil Boom", New York Times, June 2, 2013, online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/03/world/middleeast/china-reaps-biggest-benefits-of-iraq-oil-boom.html> "We lost out," said Michael Makovsky, a former Defense Department official in the Bush administration who worked on Iraq oil policy. "The Chinese had nothing to do with the war, but from an economic standpoint they are benefiting from it, and our Fifth Fleet and air forces are helping to assure their supply." Quoted from N.B. Turner, *Is China an Imperialist Country?* <http://www.bannedthought.net/International/Red-Path/01/RP-8.5x11-IsChinaAnImperialistCountry-140320.pdf>

The U.S. monopoly capitalist class has also tried to maintain its competitive edge through the wide-scale consolidation of enterprises into detachable parts of larger monopolies. This has reduced managerial staffs. In addition, they have engaged in speculative adventures in housing markets, and more recently a ballooning student loan industry. These trends have resulted in setbacks for the American petty-bourgeoisie, and in a degree of proletarianization. Some, when confronted with fractures in what they previously thought to be a secure “American dream,” have struggled to adopt a pro-people outlook. But more often, this development has resulted in new forms of chauvinism and demands that the “dream” be restored through restoration of concrete and symbolic forms of privilege. This backward belief has been long catered to by the U.S. system of so-called democratic elections. On one hand, this message was taken up by the Trump campaign and supporters, whose slogan “Make American Great Again” can be read as the age-old American nativist campaign slogan to “Make American White Again.”⁸¹ On the other hand, the Democratic Party, through Hillary Clinton and its “alternative” representatives such as Bernie Sanders, tried hard to show that they would do a better job of maintaining American dominance in the world politically and militarily, and implicitly promised to maintain the current system of exploitation and oppression at home.

Internally, the U.S. ruling class maintains a system of bourgeois-democracy, a system which in reality offers democracy only for the bourgeoisie and dictatorship for the masses. The myth of American democracy remains intact among much of the population, and has been used to divert the masses away from radical organizing in favor of the ritual of elections for candidates who swear to serve as representatives of the ruling class. As the paper *The Myth of American Democracy* states, “The U.S. is no longer the only global imperialist superpower. It needs to create a bi-partisan consensus in the Democratic and Republican parties, and among their different social bases, to provide political and military support for the American ruling class in its potentially unpopular efforts to mobilize against a Chinese-Russian military alliance, and against the growing number of revolutionary challenges to its global empire.”⁸²

Hillary Clinton was unable to rally enough of a mass base to the polls, despite the fact that the majority of the U.S. ruling class preferred her candidacy. In the year since the election, President Trump has committed a cascade of blunders in his function as official executive, commander-in-chief, and representative head of U.S. imperialism.

Our hope is that this brief analysis of our contemporary situation, and the

⁸¹Among the negative forces described above, RGA erroneously characterizes a new threat of fascist power in the U.S. signified by Trump and his supporters as something that must be opposed at all costs. Proclaiming that Trump and various alt-right groups represent a new fascist form of rule is to underplay the continuity of white-supremacist brutality since the foundation of the U.S. system itself. This is related to RGA’s nonsensical support for the strategy of PPW in the U.S. and the formation of base areas.

⁸²*The Myth of American Democracy* <https://thealternativehistoriesblog.files.wordpress.com/2017/03/mythofdemocracy1.pdf>

following remarks on revolutionary strategy and tactics in imperialist countries will help to clarify the tasks in front of us.

Professional Revolutionaries and the Dialectic of Spontaneity and Consciousness

In 1938 Mao stated, “Before the outbreak of war, all organization and struggle are in preparation for war.”⁸³ This applies to our situation as well. The analysis above should clarify that the accumulation of revolutionary forces in preparation for coordinated nation-wide insurrection—likely followed by a civil war—is the only correct revolutionary strategy for the U.S. In this country, a long period of struggle will be needed to build the foundation for a revolutionary movement on multiple fronts that eventually will be prepared to seize state power and smash the bourgeois state during a revolutionary crisis. We should also be clear that we are operating from a position of weakness given the lack of revolutionary forces in the U.S. at this moment, and the lack of familiarity with revolutionary politics and history among the broad masses across this country.

However, these obstacles can be overcome. In order to do so we must assess the successes and failures of recent revolutionary struggles in this country, while linking this assessment to a study of revolutionary history and contemporary revolutionary movements abroad. An objective analysis of the nature of the enemy—the U.S. imperialist ruling class, its repressive power, and the centrality of white supremacy to its system of exploitation and oppression—is also necessary for revolutionary advance. All of this helps to clarify the stakes of this moment and provides us with a path forward.

From this it should be clear that we must join the masses in their daily struggles so as to build deep links with them. Only by doing so is it possible to link the struggle for the short-term interests of the masses with their long-term interests in revolution and communism. This work itself forces us to confront key contradictions among the masses and develop the means to correctly handle them. In order to do so, we need to build organizations of professional revolutionaries, not part-time activists.

Professional revolutionaries are the foundation of the party of a new type that Lenin describes in *What is to Be Done?* and no proletarian revolution is possible without them. But the development of professional revolutionaries is not an isolated process, and must occur in dialectical relationship with mass struggles. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that professional revolutionaries—that is to say, cadre in MLM organizations—join in daily struggles. This is not reducible to tabling a few times a week, doing some agitation outside workplaces, or organizing antifa protests. It means that we must join the masses in their workplaces and neighborhoods to organize. For our collective during the past year this has meant having pairs of comrades at workplaces that showed

⁸³Mao, *Problems of War and Strategy*.

potential for organized rebellion. In this process, we ourselves are transformed as we work to develop mass struggles.

Mass struggles can and do develop on their own, and as they arise we should participate in them as well. However, there is a relatively low level of spontaneous mass struggle in the U.S. at this time, despite certain favorable objective conditions on the national level. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that Maoists join the masses in daily struggles, even nascent ones, to spark further developments. It is true that where there is oppression there is resistance, but there is a big difference between a few acts of individual resistance and defiance by the masses, and large scale organized resistance by a whole workplace or neighborhood. The reality is that resistance to oppression, even on a small scale, can be organized and developed into a force capable of confronting and lessening the degree of oppression and exploitation locally. Through principled revolutionary work this can be incorporated into the larger struggle to break all chains. In this sense, oppression creates the basis for it to be overcome, and we must seize upon this opening and develop it into a proletarian force.

Through patient and methodical work among the people we can raise the level of conscious struggle, further mass initiative, and see mass leaders and cadre develop from among the masses. MLM is based on a dialectical understanding of the contradiction between spontaneity and consciousness; as Lenin put it in *What is to Be Done?* “the *spontaneous* development of the working-class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology.”⁸⁴ Without conscious revolutionary action, mass struggles will inevitably be ideologically dominated by the bourgeoisie. However, conscious revolutionary action is not reducible to calling for revolution, upholding MLM as “correct and universal,” or even violent confrontations with the enemies of the people. Rather it entails correctly handling the contradictions among the people so as to create a basis for the masses to participate in struggles against their enemies in an ongoing manner. In this sense we can draw on the principles that Mao laid down in *On Protracted War*, in which he emphasizes that achieving victory over the enemy is dependent on the political unity of an organization and its relationship to the people.

The development of mass organizations based in ongoing mass struggles is an essential part of creating the basis for the people to participate in political struggles to a greater degree. These organizations cannot be formalisms or reduced to recruiting grounds for cadre. They must be a platform for the masses to take up struggle against their enemies, but also serve as a means by which they can put forward ideas, engage in discussion and debate, and overcome the isolation of capitalist society. In this regard, raising the level of conscious struggle will also create the conditions for more spontaneous struggles to arise.

In our experience, while many of the masses are supportive of rebellion and resistance, they are afraid of losing what little they have. Years of experience

⁸⁴Lenin, *What is to Be Done?*, Ch. II, “The Spontaneity of the Masses and the Consciousness of the Social-Democrats”

have taught them that those who rebel against oppressors are punished brutally for this rebellion. Because of this experience, they often doubt that rebellion can succeed, and that victory in a struggle is possible. This is a reflection of the objective contradictions of our present moment, where there is not a high level of mass struggle in this country. Many members of the masses who do rebel daily are brutally repressed, the history of the revolutionary struggles of the past are not widely remembered in detail, and the promising revolutionary movements around the world are not well known by most in the U.S. Thus the barriers to mass participation in revolutionary politics are both objective and subjective and cannot be overcome by will alone. Nor is it a question of lack of “morale” among the masses and the proletariat, as some state or imply.

Rather, what is needed is patient and methodical work to raise the level of consciousness of the masses. This has to be done by a mix of theory and practice; winning victories in mass struggles, studying revolutionary history, discussing revolutionary struggles around the world, and exposing the injustices and outrages of the capitalist-imperialist world are all part of this process. Sloganeering, armed propaganda, and posturing cannot jump-start this process or serve as a substitute for joining with the masses in their struggles and working to raise their level of consciousness. There are no shortcuts to revolution. We must go among the people, learn from them and share revolutionary ideas with them, and in this process transform them and ourselves. Only in this manner can we spark mass rebellion, develop a party with an all-country perspective, and hasten the development of a revolutionary situation in the U.S.⁸⁵

The National Question

The U.S. is a powerful imperialist country and a prison-house of nations. This is apparent in the ongoing subjugation of the Black nation through police brutality, systematic economic disenfranchisement, mass incarceration, and more. It is also evident in the reliance of the U.S. bourgeoisie on the cheap source of labor provided by undocumented workers from Central and South America, and in the brutal oppression they face. In this regard, the U.S. monopoly capitalist class is dependent on the oppression and exploitation of oppressed nations internal to this country. This contradiction strongly influences other contradictions internal to the U.S. As such, developing a principled line on the national question in this country is of the utmost importance to furthering revolutionary developments.

Those who advocate PPW as a strategy for revolution in the U.S. often propose the creation of base areas in oppressed nationality communities as a solution to the national question. This formalistic dogmatism is best exemplified by RGA’s statement that Aztlán and New Africa “should be liberated and function as base areas, established first, with the goal of exporting the revolution to

⁸⁵For further elaboration of this topic, see Mass Proletariat’s document “Serve the People: Be One with the People” http://www.massproletariat.info/writings/serve_the_people_become_one_with_the_people.html

the rest of the US.”⁸⁶ This follows their statement that geographic territory of these two nations “exist (roughly) all along the southern border from coast to coast.” They provide no explanation as to how they came to this conclusion. Instead of working out a line to address the contradictions between the U.S. revolutionary proletarian struggle and the struggles of Black and other oppressed peoples, RGA simply proposes to liberate these areas via “the armed fighting” and “export the revolution” from there. This sort of dogmatism is typical among advocates of the universality of PPW. It should be obvious that this line is a negation of a Maoist approach to the national question in favor of an abstract formalism.

In discussing the national question in his 1916 text *The Socialist Revolution and the Rights of Nations to Self-Determination*, Lenin emphasized that:

“The right of nations to self-determination means only the right to independence in a political sense, the right to free, political secession from the oppressing nation. Concretely, this political, democratic demand implies complete freedom to carry on agitation in favour of secession, and freedom to settle the question of secession by means of a referendum of the nation that desires to secede. Consequently, this demand is by no means identical with the demand for secession, for partition, for the formation of small states. It is merely the logical expression of the struggle against national oppression in every form.”⁸⁷

This distinction between upholding the right of nations to self-determination—including and up to the point of secession—and the demand for secession and partition is paved over by RGA and others who fantasize that PPW will solve the national question in the U.S. Maoism demands more than surface-level analysis and abstract proclamations and predictions about the allocation of territory. In order to actually advance the liberation of nationally oppressed peoples in this country we must instead approach the national question based on the fundamental principles of Maoism. MLM holds that it is not the place of small collectives or even a revolutionary party to decide that a nation will secede, *but rather the choice of the people of that nation.*

As Lenin states, the right of nations to self-determination is “by no means identical to the demand for secession.” It is rather “*a democratic demand,*” and a “logical expression of the struggle against national oppression in every form.” Therefore, it is essential that revolutionaries support the democratic expression of self-determination of a nation in ways such as those promoted by Malcolm X—especially through the framework of his Organization of Afro-American Unity—and later by the Black Panthers—through self-educational programs based alongside concrete struggles of the people themselves to ad-

⁸⁶RGA, *Condemned to Win*.

⁸⁷Lenin, *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, LCW, Vol. 22. Available online here <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jan/x01.htm>

vance and defend their interests from the predatory oppressor nation. These organizations and their political programs represented the leading force in the Black Liberation struggle at the time. We have much to learn from their struggles against white supremacy.

There is a rich history of revolutionary tradition in the Black communities in the U.S., and while some of this has been forgotten, other aspects are remembered in part. Working to promote and develop this revolutionary tradition and revolutionary culture are key parts of struggle for national-liberation of the Black nation in the U.S. Lenin further elaborates on this:

The proletariat cannot but fight against the forcible retention of the oppressed nations within the boundaries of a given state, and this is exactly what the struggle for the right of self-determination means. The proletariat must demand the right of political secession for the colonies and for the nations that “its own” nation oppresses.

and

The Socialists of the oppressed nations, on the other hand, must particularly fight for and maintain complete, absolute unity (also organizational) between the workers of the oppressed nation and the workers of the oppressing nation. Without such unity it will be impossible to maintain an independent proletarian policy and class solidarity with the proletariat of other countries in the face of all the subterfuge, treachery and trickery of the bourgeoisie.⁸⁸

It is possible that in the course of revolutionary development, the demand for secession of an oppressed nation may become a primary means to further proletarian revolution in this country as a whole. Such a situation would necessitate broad support for secession among the people of the oppressed nation in question. In this case, it would be of primary importance for revolutionaries of both oppressed and oppressing nations to work together to prepare for secession, including through coordinated insurrections and the likely revolutionary war that would follow. It is also entirely possible that oppressed nations of this country do not secede from the U.S., and that countrywide liberation is achieved. This too would be a huge step forward towards the liberation of the oppressed nations in this country, as it would entail the expropriation of the monopoly capitalist-class in the U.S. and destruction of numerous institutions of white supremacy, including mass incarceration, the police, the standing army of the bourgeoisie, the landlords and their parasitic property managers, and other agents of capital and white supremacy.

The contradiction in the U.S. between the imperialist state and the oppressed people influences and determines the development of all other contradictions to a great degree, including the fundamental contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie—expressed in its economic form as the contradiction be-

⁸⁸Ibid.

tween the social nature of production and the private nature of appropriation. Correspondingly, workplaces depend on the maintenance and reproduction of white supremacy in this country in order to maintain myriad forms of white ownership and dominance. Police, prison guards, and fascists are not the only agents of white supremacy in this country. Nominally liberal capitalists, bosses, and even workers can and do play the roles of white supremacist oppressors in the workplace. As such, workplace struggles are of central importance, not only for the development of organized proletariat struggle, but also in the struggle for national liberation of oppressed nations in this country. The same is true of housing struggles, in which landlords function as key agents of the white supremacist state, often in direct collaboration with the police and housing courts.

There is a strong basis for resistance and organization building against white supremacy in these sites of struggle. Multinational revolutionary organizations must build strong links between the proletariat in the oppressing and oppressed nations by joining alongside the masses in such struggles, and working to advance the struggle against white supremacy by whites as well as by non-white people. Such principled multinational organizing builds unity between the proletariat of the oppressing and oppressed nations in the fight against the U.S. monopoly capitalist class. This work does not negate the basis for oppressed nationality organizations to play a primary role in various fronts of revolutionary struggle as well. However, multinational revolutionary organizations must take on the essential task of struggling against white-national chauvinist ideas among the broad masses and among cadre. As the South Western Regional Bureau of CPI (Maoist) emphasizes in their *Leadership Training Programme*:

We say that we are communists, but are born and brought up with the values of the prevailing ruling classes. When we join the Party those ideas do not disappear by themselves. Besides, we live in society which such feudal and bourgeois values are rampant and quite naturally impact us. In such a situation, there is a need for consistent struggle to change ourselves. Some of our incorrect values are deep-rooted in our subconscious and built around a number of insecurities. [...] Though we may suppress them under some conditions, they assert themselves in other conditions more aggressively.⁸⁹

In order to overcome such tendencies among the masses and in collectives, collectives must promote genuine revolutionary leadership of oppressed nationality comrades. This can only be achieved by developing a principled political line internal to a revolutionary organization, working to correctly handle contradictions among the people, and from this basis struggling to overcome the enemy in concrete situations.

⁸⁹South Western Regional Bureau of CPI (Maoist), *Leadership Training Programme*, cited in Jan Myrdal, *Red Star Over India: As the Wretched of the Earth Are Rising. Impressions, Reflections and Preliminary Inferences* (Delhi: Archana Das and Subrata Das, 2012), pp. 115-116.

Revolution, Revolutionary Situations, and the Dialectic of Subjective and Objective

We have already explained how the ability of imperialist states to rapidly deploy powerful military forces anywhere within their borders is a major reason that PPW is not a viable revolutionary strategy in imperialist countries. Some may take this to mean that we must confront the entirety of the state's repressive force, as it exists today, in an insurrection. However, the reality is that a coordinated insurrection in multiple cities across the country is not possible at this point, and not simply because we do not have sufficient political and military power. It is also because the U.S. state is too strong at present for coordinated insurrections to succeed. Only in a revolutionary situation will it be possible for such a strategy to overthrow the bourgeois and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat.

But what is a revolutionary situation? Lenin described a revolutionary situation as one in which “the ‘*lower classes*’ *do not want* to live in the old way and the ‘*upper classes*’ *cannot carry on in the old way.*”⁹⁰ Thus we see that both the subjective clarity of the masses and the objective difficulties of the ruling classes are factors in producing a revolutionary situation. Due to crises in capitalist-imperialism and spontaneous rebellions of the masses, these situations will come about independent of anyone's will. However, it is the level of conscious organization among the oppressed and exploited masses that determines if a revolutionary situation can be transformed into a successful revolution. As Mao and others said:

We have always maintained that a revolution cannot be made at will and is impossible unless a revolutionary situation objectively exists. But the outbreak and the victory of revolution depend not only on the existence of a revolutionary situation but also on the preparations and efforts made by the subjective revolutionary forces.

It is “Left” adventurism if the party of the proletariat does not accurately appraise both the objective conditions and subjective forces making for revolution and if it rashly launches a revolution before the conditions are ripe. But it is Right opportunism, or revisionism, if the proletarian party makes no active preparations for revolution before the conditions are ripe, or dare not lead a revolution and seize state power when a revolutionary situation exists and the conditions are ripe.

Until the time arrives for seizing state power, **the fundamental and most important task for the proletarian party is to concentrate on the painstaking work of accumulating revolutionary strength.** The active leadership given in day-to-day

⁹⁰Lenin, “*Left-Wing*” *Communism: an Infantile Disorder*, LCW, Vol. 31. Available online here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch09.htm>

struggle must have as its central aim the building up of revolutionary strength and the preparations for seizing victory in the revolution when the conditions are ripe. The proletarian party should use the various forms of day-to-day struggle to raise the political consciousness of the proletariat and the masses of the people, to train its own class forces, to temper its fighting capacity and to prepare for revolution ideologically, politically, organizationally and militarily. It is only in this way that it will not miss the opportunity of seizing victory when the conditions for revolution are ripe. Otherwise, the proletarian party will simply let the opportunity of making revolution slip by even when a revolutionary situation objectively exists.⁹¹

As we can see from this quote, we cannot simply make revolution by will. The objective conditions for revolution must exist for revolution to be possible, but also, we cannot wait until a revolutionary situation is upon us to begin organizing. Some try to frame proponents of an insurrectionary strategy in imperialist countries as advocating exactly this sort of complacency. However, any honest revolutionary who is familiar with dialectics should be aware that preparations and training for an insurrection happen over many years.

Through our subjective action we actively transform our situation and create more favorable conditions for the masses to rebel, on a country-wide and a local scale. Coordinating standing up to a supervisor, landlord, teacher, administrator, cop, or commanding officer collectively, posting a petition against various injustices, and/or holding a political strike can all transform the local situation. If done well, they also demonstrate the basis for rebellion in other locations and show how by rebelling in an organized manner, we are capable of winning victories through struggle.

So too, on a national scale, mass rebellions, protests, strikes, and boycotts show the basis for others to stand up, while also weakening the power of the ruling class. In smaller and larger sites of rebellions, such work often entails both legal and illegal components. Comrades must carry out this work according to the needs of the mass struggle in both particular situations and in view of the overall long-term goals of revolution and communism. The growth and conscious development of mass struggles builds the capacity for revolutionary organizations in different locations to share experiences and build principled unity. These are important steps towards the creation of a revolutionary party.

As rebellions increase on a national scale, a basis exists for a large number of the masses to adopt a revolutionary orientation. Lenin described how in 1917 in Russia “Millions and tens of millions of people, who had been politically dormant

⁹¹The Editorial Departments of *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*) and *Hongqi* (*Red Flag*), “The Proletarian Revolution and Khrushchev’s Revisionism: Eighth Comment on the Open Letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU,” March 31, 1964, *The Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), p. 393. Emphasis ours.

for ten years and politically crushed by the terrible oppression of tsarism and by inhuman toil for the landowners and capitalists, *have awakened and taken eagerly* to politics.”⁹² Similar things have occurred in the U.S. historically, albeit to a lesser degree. This mass awakening to politics fractures the power of the state and creates major openings for revolutionary advance. As we saw in the Vietnam War, with the rise of organized resistance and rebellion, sections of the state’s armed forces began to splinter off and some were won over to a proletarian line. This was evident in the mutinies that occurred among American soldiers abroad and at home, aided by the presence of revolutionary groupings inside and around the armed forces.⁹³ Similar openings will occur again in a revolutionary situation, and will be furthered by a revolutionary party and a broad-based revolutionary movement. This will deepen contradictions within the state and within capitalist-imperialism more broadly, leading to the near paralysis of many aspects of the state and creating corresponding openings for revolutionaries. This revolutionary crisis will provide the basis for an armed uprising on a national level to seize state power.

Progress towards revolution is made by relating proletarian political organization to mass links forged in struggle. This is the primary basis for the development of cadre within the organization as well as of mass supporters on a wide scale. The ability of a political organization to address contradictions in particular situations is determined by its political line and its class stand. The people must develop a revolutionary outlook through conscious struggle. This outlook provides the basis for principled unity between mass struggles in myriads of oppressive situations in the U.S., in particular in the struggles against exploitation at the workplace, against white supremacy, and against patriarchal subjugation. After the establishment of a revolutionary state power, this orientation provides the basis for the fight against all forms of oppression and for furthering the democracy of the masses all the way up to the establishment of communism.

Formulaic solutions offered by advocates of PPW effectively negate the objective basis to seize state power in an imperialist country and also are related to a politics that dismisses the centrality of mass democracy under socialism. After the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, mass democracy is central in the fight against all oppression. It is an essential part of the process of the withering away of the state. The negation of this essential principle can

⁹²Lenin, *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution (Draft Platform for the Proletarian Party)*, LCW, Vol. 24, p. 55-92. Available online here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/tasks/index.htm>

⁹³For a chronology of rebellions and protests in the armed forces during this time, see: http://www.sirnosir.com/timeline/chronology__protests.html. In one example, Black soldiers from Fort Hood held a mass-meeting to discuss not participating in the crack-down on protests in front of the Chicago Democratic Convention in 1968. This led to the military disciplining the soldiers and to the removal of “subversives” from the ranks of soldiers called in to participate in the Chicago repression. Ultimately it also led to a wholesale withdrawal of the GI’s participation in the Chicago police-riot because of fears of dissent and rebellion. See: *Sir no Sir* <https://youtu.be/3nPJgeg6hpA?t=1610>

be seen in the articulations of groups like the Montreal fraction/splinter of the PCR-RCP, who proclaim patriarchy will be resolved by violent revolution and that it would be absurd to believe that patriarchy would continue to exist after the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.⁹⁴ This approach serves the bourgeoisie's constant efforts to distort and destroy the essential aspects of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Such people are attempting to conceal the long-term trajectory of the people's struggles to break all chains. If they are successful, the masses and revolutionaries will be more easily led astray into the swamps of economism and adventurism.

Those who pretend that PPW is possible in a country like the U.S. are fooling themselves and the masses. They will end up trying to make revolution before the conditions exist for it objectively or missing the opportunity for revolution when it does arise. In countries like India the weakness of the state, the lack of development in the hinterlands, and the fact that the majority of the productive masses are located in the countryside, makes it possible to grow and develop a localized revolutionary situation, and to eventually surround the towns from the countryside. In the U.S., such a strategy is not possible. Any attempts to develop base areas will result in premature localized insurrections oriented towards a war of position against a vastly superior military force. Instead of hoping that PPW is the solution to our problems we must work to develop a principled countrywide revolutionary force, prepared to grapple with the contradictions inherent in the seizure of state power.

Principled revolutionary organizing can hasten the development of the ongoing worldwide crisis of capitalist-imperialism. Growing inter-imperialist conflicts, related struggles by the U.S. ruling class to maintain its economic and political dominance, and internal crises of political confidence are already weakening the U.S. state. As this crisis deepens, a revolutionary situation will arise, and if adequately organized and prepared revolutionaries can seize upon this crisis and lead a proletarian revolution. However this is still some time away, and there is much work to be done before we Maoists are in a position to lead a revolution in this country.

In order to prepare—and hasten the coming of the objective conditions necessary

⁹⁴See their document *A Struggle for the Safeguard of Revolutionary Proletarian Feminism* (available here: <http://www.pcr-rpc.ca/en/archives/2036>) in which they state:

“The very idea that the proletariat can take power and leave in place the oppression of women is nonsense.” This is outright male chauvinism and ultimately serves to negate the necessary work of proletarian feminism before, during, and after a revolution. The PCR-RCP does hedge this statement by claiming that: “This does not mean that after the seizure of power, the millennia gender bias and contempt towards women will disappear suddenly. It only means that the elimination of the material basis of oppression, coupled with the revolutionary consciousness of millions of women and men, will weaken this oppression will begin its rapid decline to disposal.” However, the claim that a successful revolution eliminates the material basis of the oppression of women is a negation of the Marxist view that the first form of class oppression was the oppression of women, and therefore the material basis for the oppression of women will continue until the end of class society as such. For more on this c.f. Engels' work *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*.

for revolution—we must join with the masses in their daily struggles, study revolutionary history, link up with other revolutionaries around the country; we must dare to think and dare to act, dare to struggle and dare to win. We in Mass Proletariat call upon all Maoists in this country to reject the petty-bourgeois eclecticism of those who proclaim the universality of PPW. We call on you to link up and struggle to build a principled unity based on Maoist politics.