

Philosophy and Politics in an Age of War and Revolution

A lecture delivered at the Goethe University in Frankfurt

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This lecture by World Socialist Web Site International Editorial Board Chairman David North was delivered in German on October 22 at the Goethe University in Frankfurt. North spoke at the invitation of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and presented his book, The Frankfurt School, Postmodernism and the Politics of the Pseudo-Left.

I would like to express my appreciation to the IYSSE for providing me with this opportunity to speak here at the Goethe University in Frankfurt. The title of my lecture is “Philosophy and Politics in an Age of War and Revolution.” This title should indicate the nature of my interest in and approach to the theoretical issues that I will discuss this evening. My critique of the Frankfurt School and postmodernism is of a political, rather than academic, character.

I believe this approach is necessary, as the representatives of this school are widely believed to represent a trend of radical thought that can provide the theoretical and intellectual foundations of effective, and even revolutionary, social change. Their claims to have either supplemented Marxism with necessary corrections, or to have exposed its obsolescence, are unwarranted and patently false.

After the utterly shameful capitulation of Syriza in Greece, and its exposure as a reactionary party representing the interests of very affluent and smugly self-satisfied sections of the Greek petty-bourgeoisie, it is impossible to deny the close connection of key elements of academic post-Marxism—however disguised with the deliberately obscure phraseology employed by the representatives of the many varieties of the Frankfurt School and postmodernism—with political agendas that are overtly hostile to the interests of the working class.

We are meeting on the eve of a significant historical and political anniversary. On December 26, 1991, the Soviet Union was officially dissolved. This event was interpreted almost universally as both a crushing refutation of socialism and a triumph of capitalism. The end of the USSR had supposedly demonstrated the impossibility of organizing society on anything other than a capitalist basis. Seventy-four years after the 1917 October Revolution, the capitalist elites were now to have a free hand in rearranging the world on the basis of unrestrained market economics. The president of the United States proclaimed the beginning of a “New World Order.” Just six weeks after the USSR’s dissolution, on February 7, 1992, the Maastricht Treaty was signed, laying the foundations for the establishment of the euro and the European Union.

There was no small element of historical fraud in these triumphalist celebrations.

First of all, the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 did not eradicate the entire historical legacy of the socialist revolution that had occurred 74 years earlier. The October Revolution was among the seminal events of world history. The conquest of political power by the Bolshevik Party in

October 1917 shook the world. It provided the political impulse for the revolutionary anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles that swept the globe. Beyond the borders of the Soviet Union, the great revolution raised the consciousness of the masses. No understanding of the twentieth century—let alone the world of the twenty-first century—is possible without the most intensive study of the history of the revolution and its aftermath.

The second element of fraud was the identification of the regime that had dissolved itself in December 1991, thereby removing all obstacles to the restoration of capitalism, with socialism and Marxism. The state led by Gorbachev was Stalinist, not socialist. Gorbachev stood at the head of a bureaucratic regime that consolidated its power in the 1930s through a campaign of terror, which exterminated virtually the entire Marxist intelligentsia and Bolshevik-socialist vanguard of the working class. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 confirmed the warnings made by Leon Trotsky nearly sixty years earlier: Either the working class would overthrow the bureaucracy, or the bureaucratic regime would destroy the Soviet Union.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union came as an almost complete surprise to the political leaders of world capitalism. Even after the collapse of the Eastern European Stalinist regimes in 1989, it was widely assumed that the Soviet Union would continue for decades to come. The Fourth International—the international Trotskyist movement—was virtually alone in its prediction, as early as 1986, that Gorbachev’s *perestroika* represented the death throes of the Stalinist regime. The sclerotic bureaucratic elite, terrified of mounting working-class opposition and desperate to preserve its privileges, was preparing the restoration of capitalism.

The main problem with the triumphalist explanation of the dissolution of the Soviet Union was that it encouraged a grotesquely inaccurate, even delusional, appraisal of the historical situation confronting the world capitalist system. Its leaders managed to convince themselves that the economic, political and social reorganization of the planet would henceforth proceed as if the 1917 Revolution and its tumultuous aftermath had never occurred. These delusions were intellectually legitimized by such writers as Francis Fukuyama, who proclaimed the “End of History,” and Eric Hobsbawm, who popularized the idea that the block of time between the outbreak of World War I in 1914 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 constituted the “Short Twentieth Century.” They claimed that the fever of war and revolution had finally broken, and that the normal development of bourgeois-capitalist society could proceed.

We are now in a position to render a verdict on these appraisals of the end of the USSR. The proclamations of the historic triumph of capitalism were, to say the least, premature. History has not ended, and the convulsions of the new century have a very twentieth century feel. The world bourgeoisie has had twenty-five years to show us what they could

do without having to look over their shoulders and concern themselves with the specter of socialism and Marxism. What is the result of their labors?

A quarter-century after the dissolution of the USSR, the post-Soviet capitalist world is wracked by a global crisis of existential dimensions. Were Voltaire's Doctor Pangloss to be brought to life and asked to comment on the state of the modern world, he would probably throw up his hands in despair. At every level—political, economic, social and cultural—capitalist society is confronted with a crisis that can be compared only to the era of the Great Depression and World War II. The old reformists of the pre-World War I Social Democracy, influenced by Eduard Bernstein, used to joke about the *Zusammenbruchstheorie*. In 1914, it proved not to be a joke at all. Today, we are in the midst of a growing systemic crisis that threatens catastrophic consequences.

On the economic front, the capitalist system has staggered from crisis to crisis. The crash of 2008 brought the world economy to the brink of the abyss. Nearly a decade later, the global economy is stagnating. Economic analysts concede that the rate of growth will remain low for years, if not decades, to come.

The last two decades have seen an extraordinary increase in the level of social inequality. One study found that the combined wealth of the world's 62 richest people is greater than that of the bottom half of the global population: that is, the wealth of 62 people equals that of 3.5 billion human beings. Taken as an average, the personal wealth of each of these 62 richest people is greater than the combined wealth of 56 million of the poorest people! Such a scale of social inequality is incompatible with democracy. The growth of reactionary parties throughout the world reflects a fundamental loss of confidence in the viability of bourgeois democratic institutions. And why should these institutions retain the confidence of the masses? For the past quarter-century, broad sections of the working population have experienced a relentless decline in their living standards. This has discredited the project for a European Union and resulted in the victory of Brexit in the British referendum.

And within the United States, the great bastion of world capitalism, the frustration and disillusionment of tens of millions of working people finds politically disoriented expression in the rise of Donald Trump. In a recent commentary on the American elections, *Die Zeit* asked: "Have the Americans gone crazy?" It may, from afar, appear that they have. How is it possible that Donald Trump—a corrupt and fascistic swindler—could obtain the presidential nomination of one of the two main political parties? And yet, this is a question that Germans should be able to answer. Citizens of this country should not find it difficult to understand the political processes unfolding in the United States. Eighty-two years ago, Leon Trotsky explained the source of Hitler's popularity:

There were in the country plenty of ruined and drowning people with scars and fresh bruises. They all wanted to thump with their fists on the table. This Hitler could do better than others. True, he did not know how to cure the evil. But his harangues resounded, now like commands and now like prayers addressed to inexorable fate. [1]

There are millions of Americans who bear the scars and bruises inflicted by an uncaring and punishing society. Trump provides a means of expressing anger and frustration. The Republican nominee for the presidency of the United States did not emerge from an American version of a Munich beer hall. Donald Trump is a billionaire, who made his money in Manhattan real estate swindles, the semi-criminal operations of casino gambling, and the bizarre world of "reality television," which entertains and stupefies its audience by manufacturing absurd, disgusting

and essentially fictional "real life" situations. The candidacy of Donald Trump could be described as the transfer of the techniques of reality television to politics.

Trump promises to "Make America Great Again." The slogan evokes nostalgia for a past that cannot be recovered and which never really existed. Americans have always been suckers for clever con artists who promise a cure for baldness and intestinal gas. Trump, the great marketer of kitsch, has made a fortune promising to provide them with the secret to success and fabulous wealth. Now he is promising to restore America to "greatness." Trump's slogan appeals to millions for whom life in contemporary America is anything but great. How will the "greatness" of the past be restored? By building a wall that will span more than 2,000 miles across the southern border of the United States, deporting millions of Hispanic immigrants, barring Moslems from entering the United States, imposing massive tariffs on Chinese products, and, above all, slashing taxes on large corporations and rich individuals like Trump himself.

Of course, all of this is delusional. But the anger and frustration that provide the fuel for his movement is rooted in real conditions of social distress, for which American capitalism has no solution. Trump's opponent, Hillary Clinton, epitomizes a corrupt status quo that is totally identified with Wall Street and the military-intelligence establishment. Not one of the social problems that afflict the great majority of Americans is addressed in her election program. These include declining living standards, the rising cost of health care, the absence of job security, and, for millions of young people, staggering levels of student debt.

Notwithstanding the support Trump is receiving, there is not, as yet, a mass fascist movement in the United States. It must not be forgotten that earlier this year, millions of Americans responded enthusiastically to the campaign of Bernie Sanders, who was popularly identified as a socialist. After Sanders abandoned his campaign and shifted his support to Clinton, many of his supporters looked to Trump as the only alternative to the status quo. But that does not mean they want a fascistic government. Still, even if Trump should eventually lose the November election, his campaign is a warning. Twenty-five years after the failure of the Soviet Union, American democracy is in a state of terminal crisis.

Let us now consider the international situation. In the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR, there was a great deal of talk about the "peace dividend." With the ending of the Cold War, it was argued, the potential for military conflict had been greatly reduced and the vast expenditures on armaments could be significantly cut back. That did not happen. The last quarter-century has been characterized by virtually perpetual warfare. Even before the formal dissolution of the USSR, the United States took advantage of the turmoil in the Kremlin to launch the first invasion of Iraq in 1990–91. This was followed by the joint decision of the United States and Germany to organize the breakup of Yugoslavia, which led to the bloody civil war in the Balkans and culminated in the US war against Serbia in 1999. The attack on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001 provided the pretext for the launching of the "War on Terror," which, after more than 15 years, continues to rage.

By now, it has become all too clear that the "War on Terror" is a propagandistic phrase, employed by American imperialism to legitimize its drive for global hegemony. And the United States has not hesitated to make use of the services of its supposed terrorist enemies, in Al Qaeda and the related Al-Nusra Front, to achieve its geo-political aims in the Middle East. Moreover, the US-instigated wars in the Middle East and Central Asia are only the initial stages of a strategy for world domination that has already led to an immense escalation of conflict with both Russia and China. Naturally, European imperialism cannot remain a bystander in the developing global conflict. The German ruling class is once again talking about its role as a global power, and the media is systematically reintroducing the vocabulary of militarism into daily political discourse.

There is a vast chasm between the advanced preparations for military

conflict, which could involve the use of nuclear weapons, and public consciousness of the extent of the danger. In the United States, numerous documents have been issued by military strategists that all but assume a major war with Russia and China is highly likely, even inevitable, within the next decade. In September 2015, Martin Dempsey, a retired US Army general and former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated: "It's the most dangerous period of my lifetime." [2]

Last month, The Atlantic Council, which plays an influential role in the formulation of US government policy, issued a document titled *The Future of the Army*. It states bluntly: "In many ways, the United States has entered an era of perpetual war, since it will have to continue addressing the various manifestations of this threat for years and probably decades to come." [3] The army must prepare for "the next big war"—involving very capable adversaries, high levels of death and destruction, and perhaps hundreds of thousands of US troops." [4] In one of its bluntest passages, the report declares:

Unpleasant as it is to contemplate, the Army must improve its capacity to sustain large numbers of casualties and keep fighting... Doctrine and training for this chilling eventuality must be revitalized, and leaders must be prepared to regroup and sustain operations and fighting spirit in the face of heavy losses. Training should expose units to mass rocket and artillery fires, chemical attacks, and even nuclear attacks in order to simulate the large-scale losses that would require reorganization to continue the mission. [5]

Another analysis, written from a Russian perspective, offered the following assessment of the present state of global tensions:

As major powers increasingly modernize their arsenals, retool force structures, and begin to engage in brinkmanship, the setting becomes akin to Chekhov's "rifle on the wall," one that has all the signs of going off. With each year it appears more likely that competition among powers, military gambits and miscalculations may rekindle an interstate conflict with disastrous consequences...

All analogies are imperfect, but in some important ways the world today resembles the years that preceded the First World War. It may not be multipolar, but it is entangled in a complex web of regional alliances, bilateral treaty guarantees and the like. [6]

Summing up the experience of a quarter century, the "triumph of capitalism" proclaimed in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union has been proven to be a disastrous misreading of historical reality. The Marxist analysis of capitalism has been vindicated. The same basic contradictions of capitalism discovered by Marxism that led to the wars and revolutions of the twentieth century—between social production and private ownership of the productive forces, and between the reality of a globally integrated process of production and the persistence of the nation state—underlie the economic, social and political convulsions of the modern world.

Given the depth of the world capitalist crisis—the obvious stagnation of the world economy, the staggering concentration of wealth and growth of social inequality and social distress, and the rapidly growing danger of a catastrophic war, involving nuclear-armed powers—the question must be asked: Why is there no international mass revolutionary anti-capitalist and socialist movement? Even more specifically, why, after 25 years of virtually unending war, is there no global movement against imperialism?

Why are right-wing parties gaining strength, under conditions that should favor the left, which has historically been identified with the struggle against capitalism?

These are questions for which there are no easy answers. A complex interaction of objective and subjective factors underlies the protracted crisis of the revolutionary workers' movement. Nevertheless, the "subjective factor" of political leadership—or, more precisely, misleadership—has played a central role in the sabotage and destruction of the revolutionary strivings of the working class. It is difficult to exaggerate the intellectual and political havoc caused by Stalinism. Several generations of workers and socialistically inclined intellectuals were disoriented and demoralized by the crimes and grotesque falsifications of the Soviet bureaucracy and its international network.

How does one begin to measure the impact of the defeat of the German working class in 1933 and Hitler's rise to power, for which the disastrous policies imposed on the German Communist Party by Stalin were principally responsible, or of the Moscow Trials and the Great Terror, the betrayal of the Spanish Revolution, the Stalin-Hitler Pact of 1939, the assassination of Leon Trotsky, the betrayal of the post-war revolutionary upsurge of the working class in France, Italy and Greece, the bloody suppression of working-class uprisings in East Germany and Hungary, the betrayal of the May-June 1968 general strike of workers and students in France, or the Soviet suppression just two months later, in August 1968, of the Prague Spring, and the imposition of martial law to suppress the struggles of the Polish working class. The dissolution of the Soviet Union was the culmination of more than sixty years of the unrelenting falsification of Marxism, theoretically and politically. The most damaging lie of the twentieth century was the identification of Stalinism with Marxism. Moreover, a full accounting of its crimes must also include the policies and practices of Maoism, which is rooted in Stalinism.

There is no question that the legacy of Stalinism has been a major factor in the disorientation of those petty-bourgeois theoreticians who have played a major role, directly and indirectly, in the formulation of the theoretical and political conceptions associated with both the Frankfurt School and postmodernism. The historical pessimism that constitutes a major element in their outlook is closely related to their attribution of responsibility to the working class for the consequences of the crimes committed by the Stalinist regimes.

The end of the USSR and, we must add, the reintroduction of capitalism in China by the Maoist regime, were accompanied by an almost total political collapse among a broad section of the left intelligentsia, especially in the universities, who had identified Stalinism (including in its Maoist guise) with socialism and Marxism. It led rapidly to their abandonment of socialism as a political goal. Unwilling to examine the responsibility of Stalinism for the destruction of the Soviet Union, the events of 1991 and their aftermath deepened the anti-Marxist prejudices and antipathies of petty-bourgeois left academics.

For the last 25 years, what has been presented as "left" politics—consisting of vague radical and anarchistic phraseology, but utterly disconnected from the theoretical foundations and revolutionary perspective of Marxism—has reflected the influence of the two dominant philosophical tendencies, identified with what is generally referred to as postmodernism and the Frankfurt School, within universities throughout much of the world. These tendencies are not identical. There are significant differences in their intellectual, theoretical and cultural origins. But they are, nevertheless, closely related, especially when considered from the standpoint of their political outlook and objective: the refutation and repudiation of Marxism. They regard as anathema the essential element of Marxism, namely, philosophical materialism, from which is derived the materialist conception of history.

As with all philosophical "schools of thought," a rigorous theoretical analysis will disclose their complicated intellectual genealogy. Certainly,

both the Frankfurt School and postmodernism are deeply embedded in the idealist irrationalism of Schopenhauer and, of course, Nietzsche. The influence of the reactionary mystic Heidegger is clearly present in the writings of certain adherents of the Frankfurt School—especially, of course, Marcuse—and, even more widely, among the postmodernists.

However, in the evaluation of both the Frankfurt School and postmodernism, it is worthwhile to recall Marx's assessment of the economic theories of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. In a letter to Annenkov in 1846, Marx rendered a devastating judgment on Proudhon's *Philosophy of Poverty*. "Mr. Proudhon," Marx wrote, "does not provide a false critique of political economy because his philosophy is absurd—he produces an absurd philosophy because he has not understood present social conditions in their *égrèment*, to use a word which Mr. Proudhon borrows from Fourier, like so much else." [7]

Paraphrasing Marx, the post-modernists and the adherents of the Frankfurt School advance an absurd politics not because their philosophy is absurd. Rather, the crass absurdities of their philosophy arise from their reactionary petty-bourgeois politics. One simply cannot understand either the Frankfurt School or postmodernism without recognizing that the rejection of Marxism and the perspective of socialist revolution based on the working class constitutes the underlying political impulse for their theories.

Postmodernist theory arose quite specifically as a repudiation of Marxism and the perspective of proletarian revolution. The foundational role of Jean-François Lyotard in its emergence is well known. He is the author of the sentence: "Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives." The "metanarratives" to be discarded were those that advanced the Marxist perspective of socialist revolution. Thus, what is known in academic circles as "postmodernism" would be more accurately defined as "academic post-Marxism."

Lyotard had been a member of a circle of ex-Trotskyist intellectuals in France who published a journal entitled *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. The origins of this journal lay in their rejection of Trotskyism. In particular, the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group opposed Trotsky's analysis of the social structure of the Soviet Union—specifically, his definition of the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers' state. Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed* advanced a "metanarrative" of the October Revolution, its political evolution, and its relationship to the future historical development of humanity that Lyotard rejected. *Socialisme ou Barbarie* insisted that the bureaucracy that ruled the Soviet Union was not, as Trotsky had claimed, merely a parasitic caste that lacked an independent political role and would either be overthrown by a political revolution of the resurgent Soviet working class or preside over the restoration of capitalism. The bureaucracy was, rather, a new type of ruling class.

The political conclusion that flowed from this theory was that the revolutionary role attributed by Marxism to the working class had been refuted. Even where the working class had been able to overthrow the bourgeoisie, it proved incapable of holding power. It could do no more than prepare the ground for the rise of a new exploiting class. Thus, the Marxist "metanarrative" was invalid, and had been invalid from the start. The materialist conception of history was no more than a fiction, whose claims to objective truth could be discarded. Thought, Lyotard wrote, "must yield to the evidence that the grand narratives of emancipation, beginning (or ending) with 'ours,' that of radical Marxism, have lost their intelligibility and their substance."

Having discarded the "metanarrative" of Marxism, what do the prophets of post-Marxism propose to put in its place? What anti-metanarrative have they developed that can serve as an adequate theoretical foundation for effective social action? Having supposedly established the bankruptcy of the working class as an effective social agency for anti-capitalist action and revolutionary change, what alternative basis of progressive political struggle have the post-Marxists discovered? Let us peruse their recent

writings for an answer.

Alain Badiou is among the best known of contemporary French philosophers. He has been, in the course of his long academic career, closely associated with Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Lyotard. While he is critical of certain elements of postmodernism, and even claims to uphold a concept of objective truth, Badiou has proclaimed the irrelevance of all twentieth century Marxist conceptions.

Marxism, the workers' movement, mass democracy, Leninism, the party of the proletariat, the socialist state—all the inventions of the 20th century—are not really useful to us anymore. At the theoretical level they certainly deserve further study and consideration; but at the level of practical politics they have become unworkable... The (19th century) movement and the (20th century) party were specific modes of the communist hypothesis; it is no longer possible to return to them." [8]

In another essay, Badiou writes:

Yes, let us admit it without detours: Marxism is in crisis; Marxism is atomized. Past the impulse and creative scission of the 1960s, after the national liberation struggles and the cultural revolution, what we inherit in times of crisis and the imminent threat of war is a narrow and fragmentary assemblage of thought and action, caught in a labyrinth of ruins and survivals. [9]

What does the post-Marxist professor propose as the alternative to Marxism? Badiou has acknowledged, with a frankness that is worthy of respect, that no alternative has been discovered to take the place of the rejected orthodox Marxism. In an essay of confession that bears the title, "Our Contemporary Impotence," Badiou writes:

I think that what we are experiencing today is... that the majority of the political categories movement activists are trying to use to think and transform our current situations are, as they now stand, largely inoperative. [10]

Frederic Jameson has for decades been a determined critic of orthodox Marxism, drawing upon one or another element of post-Marxist subjectivism in search of an alternative to the alleged rigidity of historical materialism. And at what political conclusions has Professor Jameson arrived? In his latest book, he makes a remarkable admission:

Well, the left once had a political program called revolution. No one seems to believe in it any longer, partly because the agency supposed to bring it about has disappeared, partly because the system it was supposed to replace has become too omnipresent to begin to imagine replacing it, and partly because the very language associated with revolution has become as old-fashioned and archaic as that of the Founding Fathers. It is easier, someone once said, to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism: and with that the idea of a revolution overthrowing capitalism seems to have vanished. [11]

Having come to Frankfurt, I cannot fail to include in this lecture at least one citation from a contemporary representative of the Frankfurt School. In a recent discussion of his latest book, *Die Idee des Sozialismus (The Idea of Socialism)*, Professor Axel Honneth was asked, “Do you believe that socialist ideas can once again play a major role in Germany?”

He replied:

I believe that socialism will have a chance only if it assumes a form that somehow relates to our contemporary experiences. For that to happen, we must... throw overboard many elements of socialism that are archaic and obsolete, such as: the conception of the proletariat as the revolutionary subject, that progress evolves out of a law-governed process, that the transformation of our society depends mainly upon changes of an economic character—all this must be gotten rid of. And then we will have to wait and hope that that such a revised and updated socialism can move the hearts and feelings of a large section of the population.

Honneth’s reply is, in its own way, a concise expression of the essentially conservative, deeply pessimistic and demoralized outlook that has characterized the Frankfurt School from its earliest days. These characteristics are rooted in the central objection of the Frankfurt School to Marxism: that is, its insistence on the revolutionary role of the working class. For Honneth and the “school” to which he adheres, the class struggle is either doomed or impermissible, and socialism must not strive to abolish private ownership of the means of production. Thus, socialism can exist only as an idea.

The quotations that I have selected are representative of what can be found in the innumerable volumes produced by pseudo-left anti-Marxists. But what cannot be found in the writings of any of those who adhere to the many varieties of postmodernism and the remnants of the Frankfurt School is any program upon which the revolutionary struggle against capitalism and imperialism can be based.

The search for an alternative to Marxism is a hopeless endeavor. Those professors who are engaged in this unhappy and unproductive effort are looking for a theory of revolution that excludes the class struggle, and a socialist program that leaves capitalism intact. Such an absurd political project can be theoretically legitimized only on the basis of intellectual bad faith and charlatanry.

We are living in revolutionary times. The contradictions that give rise to war also prepare the ground for social revolution. Contradicting the claims of the subjectivists and irrationalists, who proclaim the disappearance of the subjective agency of socialist revolution as conceived by Marx, the global development of capitalism during the past half-century has vastly expanded the ranks of the working class. This is the basic force to which Marxists turn. The great challenge that confronts Marxists is the political preparation of a vanguard of advanced workers that can direct the coming mass movement of the working class toward the conquest of political power. Of what does this preparation consist?

In the brilliant philosophical treatise, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, written in 1908, Lenin explained that Marxism had discovered “the *objective* logic” of the economic laws that determine the evolution of social being. Therefore, he wrote:

The highest task of humanity is to comprehend this objective logic of economic evolution (the evolution of social life) in its general and fundamental features, so that it may be possible to adapt to it one’s social consciousness and the consciousness of the advanced classes of all capitalist countries in as definite, clear and

critical a fashion as possible. [12]

In 1914, five years after the publication of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, World War I began. Confronted with the betrayal of the German SPD and the Second International, Lenin sought to rally the revolutionary internationalists in Europe and throughout the world. In opposition to the apologists for imperialism, such as Kautsky, who sought to conceal the objective causes of the war, Lenin’s theoretical work between 1914 and 1917 uncovered the objective causes of the imperialist war and of the growth of opportunism within the Second International. In the writing of his remarkable analysis of *Imperialism*, Lenin’s aim was to expose the logic of the war, and thereby establish the possibility of aligning the consciousness and practice of the Russian and international working class with the objective processes that were leading to revolution. The correct alignment of objective reality and the social consciousness of the working class was realized in the conquest of power by the Russian working class in October 1917.

The world has become more complicated than it was a century ago. But the essential task remains the same: social thought must be aligned with reality. The working class must understand the logic of the present crisis and adjust its practice in accordance with objective necessity. Such an understanding is possible only on the basis of Marxism.

Footnotes:

[1] “What Is National Socialism?” in *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, by Leon Trotsky (New York: Pathfinder, 1971), p. 525

[2] *Foreign Affairs*, August 1, 2016, accessed at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print1117930>

[3] *The Future of the Army*, by David Barno and Nora Bensahel (The Atlantic Council, September 2016), p. 7. Entire document available at: <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/the-future-of-the-army>

[4] *Ibid*, pp. 8–9

[5] *Ibid*, p. 31

[6] “What Makes a Great Power War Possible?” by Michael Kofman and Andrei Sushenstov, *Russia in Global affairs*, June 17, 2016

[7] https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Engels_Correspondence.pdf

[8] Published in *NLR*, 49 (2008): 2008. Cited in *The Actuality of Communism*, by Bruno Bosteels (London: Verso, 2011), pp. 14–15

[9] Cited by Bruno Bosteels in *Badiou and Politics*

[10] Published in *Radical Philosophy*, September/October 2013, p. 44

[11] *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*

[12] *Lenin Collected Works*, Volume 14 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), p. 325



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