

Remarks to meeting of the YGBL on 100th anniversary of Lenin's death

The enduring power and significance of Lenin's legacy

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21 January 2024

The following remarks were delivered by Peter Schwarz, secretary of the International Committee of the Fourth International, at a meeting organized by the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, a Trotskyist youth organization in the former Soviet Union.

It is a great honor for me to participate in this meeting of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists on the 100th anniversary of Lenin's death.

The very fact that this meeting is taking place in the former Soviet Union proves that a hundred years of efforts by the Stalinists to turn Lenin into a harmless icon, to mummify and falsify him, as well as those of the anti-communists (including Putin) to demonize him, have failed. Lenin is highly relevant today.

Even its most vehement defenders can no longer deny that global capitalism is in deep crisis.

The social divide between capital and the proletariat has taken on dimensions that even Marx would have found hard to imagine. The term oligarch, coined in the 1990s for the plunderers of Soviet state property, has long since become a global phenomenon. The five richest people in the world own a fortune of \$869 billion. They have more than doubled their wealth since 2020, while the majority of the world's population have become poorer.

Bourgeois democracy is disintegrating under the pressure of growing class tensions. Authoritarian and fascist forms of rule are on the rise everywhere. This is most evident in the US, where the presidential election in autumn—if it takes place at all—will be fought between an 82-year-old warmonger and a 78-year-old fascist.

The third world war has already begun. Leading representatives of the imperialist powers insist on escalating their war against Russia in Ukraine until Russia is militarily defeated, even if this means nuclear war.

The genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza is rapidly

spreading into a regional conflagration that is being systematically fuelled by the US and its European allies. At the same time, they are pressing ahead with preparations for war against China, whose further economic rise they want to prevent at any price.

Lenin's book on *Imperialism* is one of the most topical writings today. Lenin demonstrated that imperialism is not simply a specific bourgeois policy, but represents a new, the highest stage of capitalism—a stage characterized by decay, parasitism and reaction all along the line; in which monopolies have displaced free competition and finance capital dominates over industrial capital; in which the world is completely divided among the imperialist powers and must be redivided by force.

The conclusion Lenin drew from this analysis was as farsighted as it was bold. He rejected the centrists' demand for peace without annexations and instead advocated the transformation of the war into civil war. Capitalism, Lenin concluded, could not be reformed, it had to be overthrown. Moral appeals and pressure on the imperialists to adopt a more peaceful policy could only generate illusions and curb the revolutionary energy of the masses.

Lenin understood that the same objective processes that had led to world war also created the conditions for proletarian revolution. His entire perspective was based on the conclusion that the war and the contradictions of imperialism would drive the masses into revolution.

But while the intensification of the class struggle was an objective, spontaneous process, its outcome—i.e., the question of the victory or defeat of the revolution—depended on the existence of a conscious, proletarian leadership.

No one understood this question as sharply as Lenin; herein lies his unique historical role and his genius as a Marxist. He devoted the first thirty years of his political life to the theoretical and political arming of the proletariat. In a

tireless polemic against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois tendencies, he fought for the ideological, political and organizational independence of the working class.

Already in his first writings against the Narodniki, he placed central emphasis on the defense of philosophical materialism. He fought against opportunism in the socialist movement with a rigor and consistency that even Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg did not understand initially, when he broke with the Mensheviks in 1903. Lenin understood that opportunism was not simply a wrong policy but embodied the influence of hostile class forces on the proletariat.

Thus, Lenin created the Bolshevik Party, which led the Russian proletariat to power in 1917. Bolshevism did not mean the power of the apparatus over the membership, as it did under Stalin, but the relentless struggle for programmatic clarity, which gave the party an unprecedented clout and unity of action.

Lenin was an internationalist through and through. He did not believe for a second that socialism could be built in a single country. With the April Theses of 1917 at the latest, he endorsed the theory of permanent revolution of Leon Trotsky, who had been advocating the establishment of workers' power in the Tsarist Empire for ten years and inextricably linked this with the world socialist revolution.

After the victory of the October Revolution, Lenin and Trotsky—despite the civil war and massive economic difficulties—concentrated much of their energy on reorganizing the world socialist movement and building the Third International.

Lenin's death at the age of only 53 was a tragic event that had an impact on world history. There is much to suggest that it would have been different if Lenin had lived longer. In 1945, at the end of the Second World War, he would have been only 75 years old.

The rise of Stalin and the bureaucracy he epitomized was based on strong objective factors—the economic backwardness and international isolation of the Soviet Union. But given that these difficulties and this isolation were exacerbated and reproduced by Stalin's policies, Lenin's enormous authority could have helped to change course.

After the liquidation of the Soviet Union by Stalin's heirs, it has become impossible to deny that only the Trotskyist Left Opposition and the Fourth International defended and developed Lenin's legacy. Even Vladimir Putin, the former KGB agent and current president of the Russian oligarchs, recognizes this when he denounces Lenin and Trotsky and praises Stalin.

Since 1953, only the International Committee of the Fourth International has defended Lenin's legacy. Pabloism and all the other revisionist tendencies that broke with

Trotskyism since 1939 had one thing in common: their rejection of the struggle for the theoretical and political independence of the working class.

They all hated Lenin's classic text *What Is to Be Done?* In this work, Lenin explains that the spontaneous consciousness of the working class is bourgeois consciousness and that the revolutionary party must fight for socialist consciousness among workers.

The revisionists vehemently rejected this. They replaced the struggle for the independence of the working class with tactical maneuvers and adaptation to Stalinist, reformist and bourgeois-nationalist forces that dominated the masses under the conditions of the post-war boom. Today they have all moved far to the right and openly joined the camp of the bourgeoisie. The ICFI is the only political tendency that unconditionally defends and develops Lenin's legacy.

The decay of capitalism and the objective preconditions for the world socialist revolution are much more advanced today than they were in Lenin's time. In large parts of the world that were still economically backward and agrarian at the time, there is now a proletariat of hundreds of millions. And US imperialism, which gave world capitalism a temporary respite after the Second World War based on the betrayal of Stalinism, is now at the centre of the global crisis. The fact that the ICFI has one of its strongest sections in the US is itself an expression of its strength.

The revolutionary struggle of the working class is developing around the world as a cohesive and united movement. Since the Egyptian revolution of 2011, the class struggle has taken on ever more intense forms. This manifests itself in a sharp increase in economic strikes and mass protests against social cuts and war. Millions around the world are taking to the streets against the genocide in Gaza.

The ICFI is being built as the conscious political leadership of this objective movement. It counterposes to the capitalist policy of imperialist war the class-based strategy of socialist world revolution. This is the timeliness and significance of Lenin's legacy.



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