

The socialist response to China's being labelled "a foreign hostile force" by Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te

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Following US president Donald Trump's February announcement of the "America First Investment Policy", designating China as a foreign adversary posing a threat to US "national security", President Lai Ching-te of the Republic of China (ROC), elsewhere referred to as Taiwan, immediately followed suit, naming China "a foreign hostile force" on March 13. Lai outlined 17 actions to ensure Taiwan's "national security". Most measures have already been implemented for years.

Three of these measures have recently been instituted with far-reaching implications for Taiwan, China and the world.

The first is the reinstatement of a military trial for those serving on active duty during peacetime or war. This implies that youth and military-aged men may be (re)conscripted into the army. Deserters would be sentenced to death.

Second, Chinese citizens who advocate Taiwan's unification with China would be barred from entering Taiwan. The overwhelming majority of Chinese people support the island's eventual reunification with China. The implication is that future cultural and academic exchange would be difficult, if not impossible.

Moreover, Chinese residents in Taiwan must renounce their Chinese household registration and passports before seeking permanent residency in Taiwan.

National reunification is enshrined in the Constitution of the ROC, which designates both Taiwan and the mainland as its territories. The ROC relates to the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a political entity, not as a foreign country.

The requirement to renounce Chinese citizenship and the prohibition on pro-unification speeches imply that the government led by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has turned the constitution into a dead letter in the absence of a formal proclamation of Taiwanese independence.

The Trump administration has not criticized these 17 measures, indicating that Washington gave its assent to the move.

One example illustrates how the newly announced policies are implemented. In March, Taiwan's Ministry of the Interior ordered Zhenya Liu, a Chinese mother, to "voluntarily" leave the country by March 25 or face deportation.

The demand was made on the pseudo-legal grounds that her social media posts in support of unification posed a threat to "national security" and "social stability" and thus did not constitute free speech.

Liu married a Taiwanese man and raised her three children in Taiwan. She has never committed a crime or been charged with one. Her appeal was swiftly dismissed by Taipei High Administrative Court, which gave no consideration to family reunion.

Far-right social media operatives have fomented viral doxing campaigns and put death curses on her children.

Since March, three Chinese women, including Liu, have been forced to

leave or been deported. All leave their children in Taiwan and are barred from entering for the next five years.

There are around 380,000 Chinese married to Taiwanese. Those Chinese residents who refuse to toe the official line and to see China as "a foreign hostile force" would face the same fate.

In early April, Taiwan's National Immigration Agency issued a notification to over 10,000 Chinese residents, instructing them to submit legal documentation attesting to their renunciation of Chinese household registration within a period of three months. Failure to comply would result in the revocation of their household registration in Taiwan.

The request was made in accordance with the 2004 amendment to the ordinance governing relations between people of Taiwan and the mainland. The amended articles were interpreted and enacted differently back then. The recent development has the potential to nullify the ROC citizenship status and household registration of Chinese spouses in Taiwan.

Chinese residents live in fear of being deported. A few have spoken to the press only on condition of anonymity. In response to widespread panic, the agency proclaimed on April 10 that those Chinese spouses who "abide by laws" and "identify themselves with the ROC" had nothing to fear.

At the end of March, a group of professors, who are either social democrats or Stalinists, initiated an online petition that implicitly likened what happened in Taiwan to the rise of Hitler and warned of the danger of a looming dictatorship.

The petition has rightly stated that these illegal and unconstitutional measures are intended to both target Chinese citizens and suppress political dissent at home.

Their argument goes like this:

- Following the lifting of martial law in the ROC, Taiwan and China have enjoyed a peace dividend and benefited from bilateral trade.

- In 2015, President Ma Ying-jeou of the Kuomintang (KMT) government and PRC President Xi Jinping met in Singapore. This summit, the first since the end of the civil war in 1949, provided a unique opportunity to strengthen cross-strait relations.

- Such a development, however, is detrimental to the interests of the DPP, which is "the most blatant saboteur of the rule of law and a threat to Taiwan's security".

- The DPP government has propagated the slogan "Ukraine today, Taiwan tomorrow" in support of the US and NATO-backed war since February 2022. The DPP government is oblivious to the fact that a new phase of US strategy is marked by Trump's shift in Ukraine policy and "a reconfiguration of the global political-economic order". This raises concerns that "Taiwan would be treated far worse than Ukraine."

- The US military presence in East Asia is unlikely to successfully

defend Taiwan, and the cost of conflicts with China is prohibitively expensive. Therefore, the US is more or less prepared to “forsake Taiwan, and to remove it from the first island chain.”

- To avoid a war with China, the DPP must renounce its confrontational approach to China. By doing so, Taiwan can play an important role in deescalating cross-strait tensions and contributing to “world peace”.

No turning back the clock of history

This petition expresses a strong desire for peace and an anti-war sentiment among scholars. However, the idea that an agreement between the Chinese and Taiwanese ruling elites can bring about peace is wishful thinking.

It is a norm that both KMT and DPP candidates for president must gain approval from the US imperialist bourgeoisie. There are no exceptions. The rival factions of the ruling class have been jostling for favour from the US and are only answerable to US imperialism.

Prior to the 2012 presidential election in Taiwan, former Director of the American Institute in Taiwan (the de facto US embassy) Douglas Paal publicly endorsed KMT Presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou’s China policy, saying “it is beneficial for American interests. That’s first and foremost in our minds.”

He slammed DPP presidential contender Tsai Ing-wen, claiming that her stance on China would heighten US-China tensions in the upcoming US presidential election and China’s leadership succession.

To put it bluntly, the KMT regime got the “dignified” status as “an ally” and made “peace” with China with US approval. In 2015, the KMT government under Ma was an attack dog on a leash.

The US simply would not accept the decline of the American economy relative to its Chinese arch-rival. Had the KMT won presidential elections, the US would have pitted it against China. The KMT is no alternative to the ruling DPP. It is another road to ruin, namely an all-out war between China and the US.

Furthermore, the term “a reconfiguration of the global order” implicitly refers to the rapid rise of fascism in the US and Europe, as well as European rearmament, without identifying them.

The Trump dictatorship has imposed a reign of terror on college campuses across the US, kidnapping and detaining anti-genocide students. Its “Catch and Revoke”, an AI-powered surveillance program, is deployed to track social media posts made by international students, revoke visas and deport them.

Attacks on refugees, migrant workers, students and permanent residents, as well as bans on any form of political dissent, are a global trend fuelled by far-right parties and backed by bourgeois states. It is an assault on the international working class as a whole.

Following Trump’s meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, the European powers are concerned that Trump’s America First policy will cut them off from the spoils of the US-NATO war, and they are prepared to secure their “fair share” through military means, including direct confrontations with Russia and US imperialism.

President Emmanuel Macron has proposed increasing France’s annual military spending to five percent of GDP. According to UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, he is prepared to “put boots on the ground, planes in the air” in Ukraine alongside France. President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen unveiled an €800 billion defense package in March.

In short, European powers have responded to US imperialism by arming and rearming at the expense of the international working class. Toiling masses around the world have been edged closer to confrontations

between nuclear-armed powers.

The rapid lurch to the far right by the DPP government is no exception, and it is inextricably linked to the ever-deepening crisis of world capitalism, particularly in the US.

The petition does not address the fundamental issues behind the deportation of Chinese residents, the intensification of the US drive to war against China and the necessary defense of social and democratic rights of the working class. Rather, it pacifies already existing popular opposition to war and corrals this behind another faction of the Taiwanese bourgeoisie.

There is no doubt that the DPP regime is made up of deranged fanatics, seeking to enforce US global hegemony. But to see why the KMT is no lesser evil compared to the DPP, and why the task of a democratic and lasting peace cannot be entrusted to the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), we must examine the following questions.

How did the DPP rise as “the opposition” in the late 1980s? What role did the KMT and US imperialism play in this development? What do social democrats and Stalinists mean when they say “peace”?

The DPP as a splinter group of the KMT

Former DPP Chair Nori Shih (May 1994–March 1996) stressed the political relevance of the Kaohsiung Incident to the first two questions. He was imprisoned on insurrection charges in 1962. The far-right KMT regime then extracted all his teeth through torture. At the age of 22, it was only part of his ordeal.

The Kaohsiung Incident was a crackdown on a pro-democracy demonstration in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, on 10 December 1979 during the martial law period (1949-1987).

In 1979, Shih, then general manager of the monthly publication *Formosa Magazine*, and his colleagues organized a demonstration demanding an end to martial law and to the ban on political parties. KMT thugs attacked peaceful demonstrators. The organizers were branded as mobs and subsequently arrested, indicted, and court-martialed.

Following the Kaohsiung Incident, Shih was sentenced to life imprisonment in the subsequent military trial.

According to him, 15 defense attorneys, who had no prior involvement in underground democratic activities or dissident circles, appeared out of nowhere and offered to serve as defense counsels.

Furthermore, “None of them defended the democratic campaign during the military trial.” They merely requested “leniency” just like criminal defense attorneys did. As a result, rather than functioning as a genuine defense team, they dutifully participated in a sham trial to conceal the crimes perpetrated by the KMT dictatorship, Shih noted.

According to newspaper archives from KMT mouthpieces, it was the accused who “intransigently” and “unapologetically” upheld their democratic principles. They pleaded not guilty.

Participation in defense counsels, however, served to provide these lawyers with “democratic” credentials during Taiwan’s supposed transition to democracy.

Noticeably, virtually all leading members of the DPP (established in 1986) were involved in the Kaohsiung Incident, either as the accused or as defense lawyers. Under DPP rule, these attorneys have held positions of high authority in the state.

Chen Shui-bian, a defense attorney in the Kaohsiung Incident, was elected President of the ROC in 2000 and 2004. Former President of the ROC and KMT Chair (1988-2000) Lee Teng-hui and Chen were known for their father-and-son relations.

In 1986, a year before martial law was lifted by the KMT, the DPP had

its founding meeting and first public gathering at the Grand Hotel, Taipei, the same venue designated by the far-right regime for hosting foreign heads of state, diplomats, and cronies of the KMT.

According to Shih, Chiang Peng-chien, a founding member of the DPP, its first chair, and a defense lawyer in the Kaohsiung Incident, admitted to him in 1999 that “he had previously acted as a KMT agent to spy on Shih’s elder brother.”

An episode during a presidential election exemplifies the intramural scrimmage between two sides of the same team. In 2008, DPP presidential candidate Frank Hsieh accused KMT presidential contender Ma Ying-jeou, who held a green card, of being disloyal to Taiwan and its people.

Ma worked as a KMT agent between 1974 and 1981 while obtaining a masters degree at New York University and later a doctorate at Harvard University. Not only did he spy on Taiwanese students abroad, but he also served as the Chief and Managing Editor of *Free Chinese Monthly*, an English-language publication run by the KMT, using a variety of pseudonyms.

The magazine criticized the People’s Republic of China, the left and Taiwan independence from the far right. Ma took great pride in authoring the piece, “Myth and Reality of the Kaohsiung Riot”, which was widely distributed in the US Congress.

Hsieh is no better. He was a defense lawyer in the Kaohsiung Incident and subsequently served as DPP chair and premier under President Chen Shui-bian. Ma accused Hsieh of being a KMT agent.

Successive governments of Taiwan could easily dispel the accusations made by Shih and Ma by declassifying dossiers on undercover agents and the chain of command of the police state. These files, however, remain closed, a situation benefitting rival factions of the Taiwanese ruling elite.

The KMT ascribed the end of martial law to president of the ROC Chiang Ching-kuo’s benevolence and reform. The DPP counterposed itself to the far-right KMT while leaving untouched the role played by US imperialism in sustaining the four-decade far-right dictatorship and facilitating the creation of the DPP.

The DPP as a mirror image of the KMT

The DPP’s prohibitions on pro-unification remarks are analogous to the criminalization of Taiwan independence speeches by the KMT in the 1980s. Both displayed contempt for democratic rights.

In 1989, Cheng Nam-yung, founder of *Freedom Era*, a news magazine, was subpoenaed by the court on charges of rebellion for advocating Taiwan independence. To avoid arrest, he locked himself inside the magazine’s office.

Cheng, a left-leaning intellectual, harboured no hostility toward the toiling masses of China. The term “independence” denoted political independence from and opposition to the barbaric KMT dictatorship, which claimed to be the sole legitimate government representing the whole of China. It was this illegitimate China and its gangsters to which Cheng stood up against. He had virtually no knowledge of the mainland and its people. [1]

He explained that what he did was an expression of free speech guaranteed by the Constitution of the ROC and insisted on “fighting for 100 percent free speech”.

On the early morning of April 7, 1989, police chief Hou Yu-ih, ruled out negotiations with Cheng, then ordered and oversaw a violent raid on his office. Cheng immolated himself in protest at state repression. He vowed, with his last breath, “The KMT cannot arrest me; they can only seize my corpse.”

After the DPP took power, it turned Cheng, a principled man, into a

martyr battling for Taiwan’s independence from the PRC. The falsification of history doesn’t stop here.

Hou Yu-ih was promoted to Head of the National Police Agency by President Chen Shui-bian (the DPP) and appointed as Chancellor of the Central Police University by President Ma Ying-jeou (the KMT).

The conflict between rival factions of the Taiwanese bourgeoisie flared up again when Hou stood for election as KMT mayoral candidate of New Taipei.

In 2018, Chang Tien-chin, deputy chair of the Transitional Justice Commission, was caught on audio bragging about the role played by the commission as “the Eastern bureau,” a secret police and spy organ operated by eunuchs during the Ming dynasty to criminalize and eradicate opponents in the service of power.

The deputy chair added, “It would be a pity if we do not manipulate public opinion against Hou” for his prior position as a police chief. The commission was an independent agency set up by the DPP government under President Tsai Ing-wen.

Lee Teng-hui, who had previously propped up the DPP and Chen Shui-bian, was well-known for his father-and-daughter bond with Tsai.

The commission was a charade, designed to give the DPP a veneer of “transitional justice” and human rights-sounding terminology after it had been nourished, trained, and raised to be the dominant section of the ruling class under the direction of US imperialism.

The political fraud of transitioning to “democracy” served as an instrument of US imperialism, just as the KMT dictatorship did. Both served to entrench US domination over the island and East Asia. Both factions are irreconcilably hostile to the working class at home and internationally.

Hou was KMT presidential candidate in 2024. His elevation to Head of the National Police Agency and then presidential candidate speaks to the fact that representatives of the KMT and the DPP are comrades in all but name.

What’s in a name? That which we call “peace”

It is worth exploring why social democrats and Stalinists see Ma Ying-jeou as a “peace” maker. The word “peace” denotes “no Chinese invasion of Taiwan”. By this definition, Taiwan contributes to “regional peace” and “stability” by enhancing its “standing” as “a legitimate state”. Supporting US imperialism is tantamount to promoting “stability” and “world peace”. By the same token, the DPP, “the most blatant saboteur of the rule of law and a threat to Taiwan’s security”, must embrace “peace” by entering into dialogue with China.

There is no contradiction between supporting imperialist barbarism and making “peace”. For example, Ma Ying-jeou (KMT) and Tsai Ing-wen (DPP) awarded former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo the Order of Brilliant Star with Grand Cordon in 2011 and 2022, respectively.

Both the KMT and the DPP have enthused over the Gaza genocide and criminal onslaughts against the toiling masses of Lebanon, Yemen and Syria. Their differences over Ukraine and China are purely tactical.

Similar to Ma, concerns expressed by professors for “peace” about “US hands off Taiwan”, or its removal from the first island chain, exemplify their support for US imperialism as the ultimate guarantor of Taiwan’s security. It is at best naïve to argue that one can support US imperialism while simultaneously opposing Taiwanese nationalism and the US war drive against China.

The fragile “peace” that the KMT and the CCP had previously made has long gone. The world is now dominated by US and European war plans

aimed at China and Russia.

The Stalinist regime has no progressive answers to endless US military provocations, economic warfare and the Taiwanese bourgeoisie's warmongering fuelled by the US. The only answer the regime has is to conduct repeated large-scale military drills surrounding Taiwan.

The necessary socialist response

As US imperialism has unleashed its attack dogs at home and abroad in response to deepening social crises, the scapegoating of Chinese residents and labelling Chinese people as dangerous "aliens" by the DPP regime must be seen as a frontal assault on the international working class as a whole and a component of the fascist America First project. It must be met with a working class response.

A century ago, Lenin posed the critical question:

what means other than war could there be *under capitalism* to overcome the disparity between the development of productive forces and the accumulation of capital on the one side, and the division of colonies and spheres of influence for finance capital on the other?

He urged the international working class to overthrow capitalism, the main cause of war, class exploitation, and national oppression, and join the fight for socialism. His insights are more pertinent than ever.

Social and democratic rights for some are rights for none. The fight for these rights and against oligarchy, fascism and war cannot be waged within the confines of national boundaries. Nor can this fight be entrusted to any faction of the bourgeoisie, be it the KMT, the Stalinist CCP, or the Democratic Party. Whatever tactical differences they may have, these reactionary forces share a visceral hatred of the international working class and of socialism. They all see waging a class war at home and abroad as the only way out of the deepening social and economic catastrophe under capitalism.

The fight against oligarchy, fascism and war and for the unity of the international working class is a revolutionary task of our time. Our fight must be guided by a clear and conscious political program, mobilized politically and industrially, and coordinated on an international scale.

The WSWS writes:

Socialism cannot be achieved except through the development of the class struggle. The revolution that will lay the political basis for socialism is prepared in the course of countless struggles by the working class, in the US and internationally, to advance its interests and defend its rights.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committee (IWA-RFC) works to develop "independent, democratic and militant rank-and-file organizations of workers in factories, schools and workplaces on an international scale." The IWA-RFC serves as "the coordinating nerve center for global opposition to the dictates of the capitalist oligarchy."

But the essential task facing advanced workers, the younger generation above all, is to dedicate themselves to the construction of the International Committee of the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution.

Real peace can never be achieved under capitalism. Capitalist powers are going to war and try to hoodwink us into annihilating our class sisters and brothers under the fraudulent pretext of "national interests" and "national security".

We urge workers around the world to join the fight for socialism, that is real peace among toiling masses of all nations, by building the revolutionary leadership needed to stop oligarchy, fascism and war.

[1] Following its defeat in the Chinese Civil War, Chiang Kai-shek's regime retreated to Taiwan with approximately two million "mainlanders", a term that refers to civilians and troops moved to Taiwan with the KMT's authority. Among them were many poor workers and peasants who were drafted into the KMT Army. The KMT regime subsequently imposed martial law between 1949 and 1987. During this period, any correspondence between mainlanders, their parents and siblings in China was considered treason, punishable by death.



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