

Manifesto of the Communist International to the Workers of the World

Leon Trotsky
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The World Socialist Web Site is publishing here Leon Trotsky's "Manifesto of the Communist International to the Workers of the World," which was delivered at the First Congress of the Communist International in Moscow. The Manifesto was unanimously adopted on March 6, 1919, at the Congress's final session. It is also printed in Volume 1 of "The First Five Years of the Communist International," available for purchase at Mehring Books.

We publish this manifesto as a supplementary text to the lecture given by Christoph Vandreier to the Socialist Equality Party's 2025 International Summer School. As part of this series, we will continue to republish key writings of Leon Trotsky and documents of the International Committee of the Fourth International, in particular those related to the Security and the Fourth International investigation.

The First Congress of the Communist International brought together 51 delegates from across Europe and beyond. Thirty-five carried full voting rights, while 16 served in a consultative capacity. Severe obstacles—ranging from the Allied blockade to direct repression—prevented or delayed participation by many, including representatives from Italy, France, Britain, and the United States.

Over the course of several days, the delegates debated the founding of the new International, its programmatic orientation, the struggle against bourgeois democracy and centrist tendencies, and the response to imperialism and the Entente powers. The central conclusion was embodied in Trotsky's Manifesto, which set forth the objectives and principles of the Communist International.

The Russian delegation included Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin and Chicherin, with Vorovsky and Ossinsky serving as alternates.

Manifesto of the Communist International to the workers of the world

Seventy-two years ago the Communist Party proclaimed its program to the world in the form of a Manifesto written by the greatest heralds of the proletarian revolution, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Even at that time Communism no sooner entered the arena of struggle than it was beset by baiting, lies, hatred and persecution of the possessing classes who rightfully sensed their mortal enemy in Communism. The development of Communism during this three-quarters of a century proceeded along complex paths: side by side with periods of stormy upsurge it knew periods of decline; side by side with successes—cruel defeats. But essentially the movement proceeded along the path indicated in advance by the *Communist Manifesto*. The epoch of final, decisive struggle has come later than the apostles of the socialist revolution had expected and hoped. But it has come. We Communists, the representatives of the revolutionary proletariat of the various countries of Europe, America and

Asia who have gathered in Soviet Moscow, feel and consider ourselves to be the heirs and consummators of the cause whose program was affirmed 72 years ago. Our task is to generalize the revolutionary experience of the working class, to purge the movement of the corroding admixture of opportunism and social-patriotism, to unify the efforts of all genuinely revolutionary parties of the world proletariat and thereby facilitate and hasten the victory of the Communist revolution throughout the world.

Today when Europe is covered with debris and smoking ruins, the worst pyromaniacs in history are busy seeking out the criminals responsible for the war. In their wake follow their servants—professors, members of parliament, journalists, social-patriots and other political pimps of the bourgeoisie.

For many years the Socialist movement predicted the inevitability of the imperialist war, seeing its causes in the insatiable greed of the property-owning classes of the two chief camps and, generally, of all capitalist countries. At the Basle Congress, two years before the war exploded, the responsible Socialist leaders of all countries branded imperialism as bearing the guilt for the impending war, and threatened the bourgeoisie with the socialist revolution which would descend upon the bourgeoisie's head as the proletarian retribution for the crimes of militarism. Today after the experience of the last five years, after history, having laid bare the predatory appetites of Germany, is unmasking the no less criminal acts of the Allies, the state-Socialists of the Entente countries continue in the wake of their respective governments to discover the war criminal in the person of the overthrown German Kaiser. On top of this, the German social-patriots who in August 1914 proclaimed Hohenzollern's diplomatic "White Book" to be the holiest evangel of the peoples are nowadays following in the footsteps of the Entente Socialists and are with vile subservience indicting the overthrown German monarchy, which they had so slavishly served, as the chief war criminal. They thus hope to obscure their own role and at the same time to worm their way into the good graces of the conquerors. But in the light of unfolding events and diplomatic revelations, side by side with the role of the toppled dynasties—the Romanovs, the Hohenzollerns, and the Habsburgs—and of the capitalist cliques of these countries, the role of the ruling classes of France, England, Italy and the United States stands out in all its boundless criminality.

English diplomacy did not lift its visor of secrecy up to the very outbreak of war. The government of the City obviously feared to reveal its intention of entering the war on the side of the Entente lest the Berlin government take fright and be compelled to eschew war. In London they wanted war. That is why they conducted themselves in such a way as to raise hopes in Berlin and Vienna that England would remain neutral, while Paris and Petrograd firmly counted on England's intervention.

Prepared by the entire course of development over a number of decades, the war was unleashed through the direct and conscious provocation of Great Britain. The British government thereby calculated on extending

just enough aid to Russia and France, while they became exhausted, to exhaust England's mortal enemy, Germany. But the might of German militarism proved far too formidable and demanded of England not token but actual intervention in the war. The role of a gleeful third partner to which Great Britain, following her ancient tradition, aspired, fell to the lot of the United States.

The Washington government became all the more easily reconciled to the English blockade which one-sidedly restricted American stock market speculation in European blood, because the countries of the Entente reimbursed the American bourgeoisie with lush profits for violations of "international law." However, the Washington government was likewise constrained by the enormous military superiority of Germany to drop its fictitious neutrality. In relation to Europe as a whole the United States assumed the role which England had taken in previous wars and which she tried to take in the last war in relation to the continent, namely: weakening one camp by playing it against another, intervening in military operations only to such an extent as to guarantee her all the advantages of the situation. According to American standards of gambling, Wilson's stake was not very high, but it was the final stake, and consequently assured his winning the prize.

As a result of the war the contradictions of the capitalist system confronted mankind in the shape of pangs of hunger, exhaustion from cold, epidemics and moral savagery. This settled once and for all the academic controversy within the Socialist movement over the theory of impoverishment and the gradual transition from capitalism to socialism. Statisticians and pedants of the theory that contradictions were being blunted, had for decades fished out from all the corners of the globe real or mythical facts testifying to the rising well-being of various groups and categories of the working class. The theory of mass impoverishment was regarded as buried, amid contemptuous jeers from the eunuchs of bourgeois professorism and mandarins of Socialist opportunism. At the present time this impoverishment, no longer only of a social but also of a physiological and biological kind, rises before us in all its shocking reality.

The catastrophe of the imperialist war has completely swept away all the conquests of trade union and parliamentary struggles. For this war itself was just as much a product of the internal tendencies of capitalism as were those economic agreements and parliamentary compromises which the war buried in blood and muck.

Finance capital, which plunged mankind into the abyss of war, itself underwent a catastrophic change in the course of this war. The dependency of paper money upon the material foundation of production has been completely disrupted. Progressively losing its significance as the means and regulator of capitalist commodity circulation, paper money became transformed into an instrument of requisition, of seizure and military-economic violence in general.

The debasement of paper money reflects the general mortal crisis of capitalist commodity circulation. During the decades preceding the war, free competition, as the regulator of production and distribution, had already been thrust aside in the main fields of economic life by the system of trusts and monopolies; during the course of the war the regulating-directing role was torn from the hands of these economic groups and transferred directly into the hands of military-state power. The distribution of raw materials, the utilization of Baku or Rumanian oil, Donbas coal, Ukrainian wheat, the fate of German locomotives, freight cars and automobiles, the rationing of relief for starving Europe—all these fundamental questions of the world's economic life are not being regulated by free competition, nor by associations of national and international trusts and consortiums, but by the direct application of military force, for the sake of its continued preservation. If the complete subjection of the state power to the power of finance capital had led mankind into the imperialist slaughter, then through this slaughter finance

capital has succeeded in completely militarizing not only the state but also itself; and it is no longer capable of fulfilling its basic economic functions otherwise than by means of blood and iron.

The opportunists, who before the World War summoned the workers to practice moderation for the sake of gradual transition to socialism, and who during the war demanded class docility in the name of civil peace and national defense, are again demanding self-renunciation of the proletariat—this time for the purpose of overcoming the terrible consequences of the war. If these preachments were to find acceptance among the working masses, capitalist development in new, much more concentrated and monstrous forms would be restored on the bones of several generations—with the perspective of a new and inevitable world war. Fortunately for mankind this is not possible.

The state-ization of economic life, against which capitalist liberalism used to protest so much, has become an accomplished fact. There is no turning back from this fact—it is impossible to return not only to free competition but even to the domination of trusts, syndicates and other economic octopuses. Today the one and only issue is: Who shall henceforth be the bearer of state-ized production—the imperialist state or the state of the victorious proletariat?

In other words: Is all toiling mankind to become the bond slaves of victorious world cliques who, under the firm-name of the League of Nations and aided by an "international" army and "international" navy, will here plunder and strangle some peoples and there cast crumbs to others, while everywhere and always shackling the proletariat—with the sole object of maintaining their own rule? Or shall the working class of Europe and of the advanced countries in other parts of the world take in hand the disrupted and ruined economy in order to assure its regeneration upon socialist principles?

It is possible to shorten the epoch of crisis through which we are living only by measures of the proletarian dictatorship which does not look back to the past, which respects neither inherited privileges nor property rights, which takes as its starting point the need of saving the starving masses; and to this end mobilizes all forces and resources, introduces universal labor conscription, establishes the regime of labor discipline in order in the course of a few years not only to thus heal the gaping wounds inflicted by war but also to raise mankind to new and unprecedented heights.

The national state which gave a mighty impulsion to capitalist development has become too narrow for the further development of productive forces. This renders all the more precarious the position of small states, hemmed in by the major powers of Europe and scattered through other sections of the world. These small states, which have arisen at different times as fragments chipped from bigger ones, as so much small change in payment for various services rendered and as strategic buffers, retain their own dynasties, their own ruling cliques, their own imperialist pretensions, their own diplomatic intrigues. Prior to the war, their phantom independence rested on the selfsame thing as the equilibrium of Europe: the uninterrupted antagonism between the two imperialist camps. The war has disrupted this equilibrium. By giving at first an enormous preponderance to Germany, the war compelled the small states to seek their salvation under the magnanimous wings of German militarism. After Germany was crushed, the bourgeoisie of the small states, together with their respective patriotic "Socialists," turned their faces to the victorious Allied imperialism and began seeking guarantees for their continued independent existence in the hypocritical points of the Wilsonian program. At the same time the number of small states has increased; out of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, out of portions of the former Czarist empire, new states have been carved, which were no sooner born than they flung themselves at one another's throats over the question of state boundaries. The Allied imperialists are meanwhile preparing such combinations of small powers, both old and new, as would

be bound to themselves through the hold of mutual hatreds and common impotence. While oppressing and violating the small and weak peoples, while dooming them to starvation and destruction, the Allied imperialists, like the imperialists of the Central Empire a brief while ago, do not stop talking about the right of self-determination, which is today being trampled underfoot in Europe as in all other parts of the world.

The small peoples can be assured the opportunity of free existence only by the proletarian revolution which will free the productive forces of all countries from the tentacles of the national states, unifying the peoples in closest economic collaboration on the basis of a common economic plan, and offering the weakest and smallest people an opportunity of freely and independently directing their national cultural affairs without any detriment to the unified and centralized European and world economy.

The last war, which was by and large a war for colonies, was at the same time a war conducted with the help of colonies. The colonial populations were drawn into the European war on an unprecedented scale. Indians, Negroes, Arabs and Madagascans fought on the territories of Europe—for the sake of what? For the sake of their right to continue to remain the slaves of England and France. Never before has the infamy of capitalist rule in the colonies been delineated so clearly; never before has the problem of colonial slavery been posed so sharply as it is today.

A number of open insurrections and the revolutionary ferment in all the colonies have hence arisen. In Europe itself, Ireland keeps signaling through sanguinary street battles that she still remains and still feels herself to be an enslaved country. In Madagascar, Annam and elsewhere the troops of the bourgeois republic have more than once quelled the uprisings of colonial slaves during the war. In India the revolutionary movement has not subsided for a single day and has recently led to the greatest labor strikes in Asia, which the English government has met by ordering its armored cars into action in Bombay.

The colonial question has been thus posed in its fullest measure not only on the maps at the diplomatic congress in Paris but also within the colonies themselves. At best, Wilson's program has as its task: to effect a change of labels with regard to colonial slavery. The emancipation of the colonies is conceivable only in conjunction with the emancipation of the working class in the metropolises. The workers and peasants not only of Annam, Algiers and Bengal, but also of Persia and Armenia, will gain their opportunity of independent existence only in that hour when the workers of England and France, having overthrown Lloyd George and Clemenceau, will have taken state power into their own hands. Even now the struggle in the more developed colonies, while taking place only under the banner of national liberation, immediately assumes a more or less clearly defined social character. If capitalist Europe has violently dragged the most backward sections of the world into the whirlpool of capitalist relations, then socialist Europe will come to the aid of liberated colonies with her technology, her organization and her ideological influence in order to facilitate their transition to a planned and organized socialist economy.

Colonial slaves of Africa and Asia! The hour of proletarian dictatorship in Europe will strike for you as the hour of your own emancipation!

The entire bourgeois world accuses the Communists of destroying freedom and political democracy. These are lies. Upon assuming power, the proletariat merely lays bare the complete impossibility of employing the methods of bourgeois democracy and creates the conditions and forms of a new and much higher workers' democracy. The whole course of capitalist development, especially during its final imperialist epoch, has acted to undermine political democracy not only by dividing nations into two irreconcilably hostile classes, but also by condemning numerous petty-bourgeois and proletarian layers, as well as the most disinherited lowest strata of the proletariat, to economic debilitation and political impotence.

In those countries where historical development provided the opportunity, the working class has utilized the regime of political

democracy in order to organize against capitalism. The same thing will likewise take place in the future in those countries where conditions for the proletarian revolution have not yet matured. But broad intermediate masses not only in the villages but also in the cities are being held back by capitalism, lagging entire epochs behind historical development.

The peasant in Bavaria and Baden who still cannot see beyond the spires of his village church, the small French wine producer who is being driven into bankruptcy by the large-scale capitalists who adulterate wine, and the small American farmer fleeced and cheated by bankers and Congressmen—all these social layers thrust back by capitalism away from the mainstream of development are called upon, on paper, by the regime of political democracy to assume the direction of the state. But in reality, on all the basic questions which determine the destinies of the peoples, the financial oligarchy makes the decision behind the back of parliamentary democracy. Such was previously the case on the question of war; such is now the case on the question of peace. To the extent that the financial oligarchy still bothers to obtain the sanction of parliamentary ballots for its acts of violence, there are at the disposal of the bourgeois state for obtaining the necessary results all the instruments of lies, demagoguery, baiting, calumny, bribery and terror, inherited from the centuries of class slavery and multiplied by all the miracles of capitalist technology.

To demand of the proletariat that it devoutly comply with rules and regulations of political democracy in the final life-and-death combat with capitalism is like demanding of a man, fighting for his life against cutthroats, that he observe the artificial and restrictive rules of French wrestling, which the enemy introduces but fails to observe.

In this kingdom of destruction where not only the means of production and transport but also the institutions of political democracy are heaps of blood-soaked stumps, the proletariat is compelled to create its own apparatus designed first and foremost to cement the inner ties of the working class and to assure the possibility of its revolutionary intervention into the future development of mankind. This apparatus is represented by the Workers' Soviets. The old parties, the old organizations of trade unions have in the persons of their leading summits proved incapable not only of solving but even of understanding the tasks posed by the new epoch. The proletariat has created a new type of organization, a broad organization which embraces the working masses independently of trade or level of political development already attained; a flexible apparatus which permits of continual renovation and extension; and is capable of attracting into its orbit ever newer layers, opening wide its doors to the toiling layers in the city and the country who are close to the proletariat. This irreplaceable organization of working-class self-rule, this organization of its struggle for and later of its conquest of state power, has been tested in the experience of various countries and constitutes the mightiest conquest and weapon of the proletariat in our epoch.

In those countries where the toiling masses live a conscious life, Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies are now being built and will continue to be built. To strengthen the Soviets, to raise their authority, to counterpose them to the state apparatus of the bourgeoisie—this is today the most important task of the class-conscious and honest workers of all countries. Through the medium of Soviets the working class can save itself from the decomposition which is introduced into its midst by the hellish sufferings of war, by starvation, by the violence of the possessing classes and by the treachery of its former leaders. Through the medium of Soviets the working class will be able to come to power most surely and easily in all countries where the Soviets are able to rally the majority of the toilers. Through the medium of Soviets the working class, having conquered power, will exercise its sway over all spheres of the country's economic and cultural life, as is the case at present in Russia. The founding of the imperialist state, from the Czarist state to the most "democratic" ones, is taking place simultaneously with the founding of the imperialist military system. The multimillioned armies mobilized by

imperialism could only be maintained so long as the proletariat remained obediently under the yoke of the bourgeoisie. The crack-up of national unity signifies the inevitable crack-up of the army. This is what happened first in Russia, then in Germany and Austria-Hungary. The same thing may be expected to occur in other imperialist countries as well. The uprising of the peasant against the landlord, of the worker against the capitalist, and of both against the monarchical or “democratic” bureaucracy, inevitably brings in its train the uprising of soldiers against the commanders and subsequently—a deep cleavage between the proletarian and bourgeois elements of the army. Imperialist war, which pitted one nation against another, has passed and is passing over into civil war which pits class against class.

The wails of the bourgeois world against civil war and against Red Terror represent the most monstrous hypocrisy yet known in the history of political struggles. There would be no civil war if the clique of exploiters who have brought mankind to the very brink of ruin did not resist every forward step of the toiling masses, if they did not organize conspiracies and assassinations, and did not summon armed assistance from without in order to maintain or restore their thievish privileges.

Civil war is imposed upon the working class by its mortal enemies. Without renouncing itself and its own future, which is the future of all mankind, the working class cannot fail to answer blow for blow.

While never provoking civil war artificially, the Communist parties seek to shorten as much as possible the duration of civil war whenever the latter does arrive with iron necessity; they seek to reduce to a minimum the number of victims and, above all, to assure victory to the proletariat. Hence flows the necessity of disarming the bourgeoisie in time, of arming the workers in time, of creating in time the Communist army to defend the workers’ power and to preserve its socialist construction inviolate. Such is the Red Army of Soviet Russia which arose and exists as the bulwark of the conquests of the working class against all attacks from within and without. The Soviet Army is inseparable from the Soviet State.

Recognizing the world character of their tasks, the advanced workers have from the very first steps of the organized Socialist movement striven to unify it on an international scale. The beginnings were made in 1864 in London by the First International. The Franco-Prussian War out of which emerged the Germany of the Hohenzollerns cut the ground from under the First International and at the same time gave impetus to the development of national workers’ parties. As far back as 1889 these parties came together in the Congress of Paris and created the organization of the Second International. But the center of gravity of the labor movement during that period remained wholly on national soil, wholly within the framework of national states, upon the foundation of national industry, within the sphere of national parliamentarism. The decades of reformist organizational activity gave birth to an entire generation of leaders, the majority of whom recognized in words the program of the social revolution but renounced it in deeds, becoming mired in reformism, in a docile adaptation to the bourgeois state. The opportunist character of the leading parties of the Second International has been completely disclosed; and it led to the greatest collapse in world history at a moment when the march of historic events demanded revolutionary methods of struggle from the working-class parties. If the war of 1870 dealt a blow to the First International, disclosing that there was as yet no fused mass force behind its social-revolutionary program, then the war of 1914 killed the Second International, disclosing that the mightiest organizations of the working masses were dominated by parties which had become transformed into auxiliary organs of the bourgeois state!

This applies not only to the social-patriots who have today clearly and openly gone over to the camp of the bourgeoisie, who have become the latter’s favorite plenipotentiaries and trustees and the most reliable executioners of the working class; it also applies to the amorphous and unstable tendency of the Socialist Center which seeks to reestablish the

Second International, that is, to reestablish the narrowness, the opportunism and the revolutionary impotence of its leading summits. The Independent Party of Germany, the present majority of the Socialist Party of France, the Menshevik group of Russia, the Independent Labor Party of England and other similar groups are actually trying to fill the place which had been occupied prior to the war by the old official parties of the Second International. They come forward as hitherto with the ideas of compromise and conciliationism; with all the means at their disposal, they paralyze the energy of the proletariat, prolonging the crisis and thereby redoubling Europe’s calamities. The struggle against the Socialist Center is the indispensable premise for the successful struggle against imperialism.

Sweeping aside the half-heartedness, lies and corruption of the outlived official Socialist parties, we Communists, united in the Third International, consider ourselves the direct continuators of the heroic endeavors and martyrdom of a long line of revolutionary generations from Babeuf—to Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.

If the First International presaged the future course of development and indicated its paths; if the Second International gathered and organized millions of workers; then the Third International is the International of open mass action, the International of revolutionary realization, the International of the deed.

Bourgeois world order has been sufficiently lashed by Socialist criticism. The task of the International Communist Party consists in overthrowing this order and erecting in its place the edifice of the socialist order. We summon the working men and women of all countries to unite under the Communist banner which is already the banner of the first great victories.

Workers of the World—in the struggle against imperialist barbarism, against monarchy, against the privileged estates, against the bourgeois state and bourgeois property, against all kinds and forms of class or national oppression—*Unite!*

Under the banner of Workers’ Soviets, under the banner of revolutionary struggle for power and the dictatorship of the proletariat, under the banner of the Third International—*Workers of the World Unite!*



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