

The October Revolution as Protracted Peoples War

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STRUGGLESSESSIONS

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The October Revolution as Protracted Peoples War

Fundamentally the task in People's war is waging a protracted war for state power. The primary method of striving for this goal is building of politico-military power without being annihilated by the enemy. This politico-military power is also described as dual power as we quite literally contend for power within a country. This process entirely depends on the material conditions of the country one lives in. In the same way, we must apply MLM to our material conditions so to must we apply PPW to our material conditions.

It is important to note that Dual power is not simply built in the middle of the existing state power like a pop-up commune but rather it must be conquered. In 1871 the main lesson that Marxists took away from the Paris Commune is that you cannot simply set up your worker utopia in the middle of the existing capitalist state but rather you must mount a militarized party capable of leading a People's army to organize and smash the existing state structure and its army and other oppressive apparatuses.

Under semi-feudal semi-colonial conditions like in India, the Philippines, China, or Peru, this process takes the form of building up military power in the countryside first and seizure of the cities last. Although it is a long quote I will quote in full the operating principles for the People's Liberation Army as laid out by Comrade Mao:

Our principles of operation are:

(1) Attack dispersed isolated enemy forces first; attack concentrated strong enemy forces later.

(2) Take small and medium cities and extensive rural areas first; take big cities later.

(3) Make wiping out the enemy's effective strength our main objective; do not make holding or seizing a city or place our main objective. Holding or seizing a city or place is the outcome of wiping out the enemy's effective strength, and often a city or place can be held or seized for good only after it has changed hands a number of times.

(4) In every battle, concentrate an absolutely superior force (two, three, four and sometimes even five or six times the enemy's strength), encircle the enemy forces completely, strive to wipe them out thoroughly and do not let any escape from the net. In special circumstances, use the method of dealing the enemy crushing blows, that is, concentrate all our strength to make a frontal attack and an attack on one or both of his flanks, with the aim of wiping out one part and routing another so that our army can swiftly move its troops to smash other enemy forces. Strive to avoid battles of attrition in which we lose more than we gain or only break even. In this way, although inferior as a whole (in terms of numbers), we shall be superior in every part and every specific campaign, and this ensures victory in the campaign. As time goes on, we shall become superior as a whole and eventually wipe out the entire enemy.

(5) Fight no battle unprepared, fight no battle you are not sure of winning; make every effort to be well prepared for each battle, make every effort to ensure victory in the given set of conditions as between the enemy and ourselves.

(6) Give full play to our style of fighting—courage in battle, no fear of sacrifice, no fear of fatigue, and continuous fighting (that is, fighting successive battles in a short time without rest).

(7) Strive to wipe out the enemy when he is on the move. At the same time, pay attention to the tactics of positional attack and capture enemy fortified points and cities.

(8) Concerning attacking cities, resolutely seize all enemy fortified points and cities that are weakly defended. At opportune moments, seize all enemy fortified points and cities defended with moderate strength, provided circumstances permit. As for all strongly defended enemy fortified points and cities, wait until conditions are ripe and then take them.

(9) Replenish our strength with all the arms and most of the personnel captured from the enemy. Our army's main sources of manpower and materiel are at the front.

(10) Make good use of the intervals between campaigns to rest, train and consolidate our troops. Periods of rest, training and consolidation should not, in general, be very long, and the enemy should as far as possible be permitted no breathing space. These are the main methods the People's Liberation Army has employed in defeating Chiang Kai-shek. They are the result of the tempering of the People's Liberation Army in long years of fighting against domestic and foreign enemies and are completely suited to our present situation . . . our strategy and tactics are based on a people's war; no army opposed to the people can use our strategy and tactics.

“The Present Situation and Our Tasks” (December 25, 1947), Selected Military Writings, 2nd ed., pp. 349–50.

Ultimately the goal is to always strive to seize the initiative, have the upper hand, and fight battles that can be won only. In a semi-feudal country where the oppression is most acute i.e in the countryside, there is always the ready-made material and subjective conditions for an armed uprising and the birth of a militarized party. At the same time in the countryside, the enemy and the imperialists have the weakest control and as it is made up of large non-hospitable areas this gives wide space for freedom of movement.

Russia

Russia in pre-1917 was essentially a capitalist country. Lenin says,

”In 1861 a radical change took place in Russia as well; as a consequence of this one form of society was replaced by another — feudalism was replaced by capitalism, under which division into classes remained, as well as various traces and remnants of serfdom, but fundamentally the division into classes assumed a different form.” (V. I. Lenin The State: A Lecture Delivered at the Sverdlov University)

Though capitalist relations had become the majority by 1861 there were still a lot of feudal relations and necessarily more in its internal colonies such as Belarus or Ukraine.

The application of PPW looked different but fundamentally was formulated by applying the same principles. It in many ways showed the prototypical concepts which both Mao used in China and in other ways can be used in modern capitalist countries. These revolutions have a strong mass base is common but also have a large difference. In China, the process of surrounding the cities from the countryside was called for.

But In Russia, urban guerrilla warfare, sometimes called insurrection, as well as mobile warfare in the form of revolutionary civil war, was waged. This struggle took the form of struggle in and seizure of the cities followed by the seizure of the countryside. The Russian experience is not to be dogmatically applied but rather viewed as a first of its kind and therefore an untheorized and unsystematized example of waging PPW in a capitalist-imperialist country.

As far as Mao and the great successors argue these are both forms of PPW. In a 1938 article entitled PROBLEMS OF WAR AND STRATEGY Mao says, “When the time comes to launch such an insurrection and war [in the first world], the first step will be to seize the cities, and then advance in the countryside and not the other way around. All this has been... proved correct by the October Revolution in Russia.” In this Mao makes it clear that PPW is not simply surrounding the city from the countryside.

In Russia, after the 1905 revolution there began to be an increasing amount of worker unrest and political activity. Within this Context Marxists such as Lenin organized among the Proletarians and semi Proletarians (and to a lesser extent among the Peasants). In this period the forces of reaction were much stronger than that of the people. For this reason, individual terrorist violence like that of Lenin’s older brother was not sufficient to rouse the masses to rise against their oppression.

It took a protracted period of work among the masses educating them on Marxism and guiding them in their struggles to bring them to that point. There was all throughout this period a series of armed uprisings and occupation of land/expropriations of capitalist property by the working people. Most of these uprising ended in a partial or total failure but they tempered the masses, party, and army in the struggle.

People’s war is divided into three parts. The strategic defensive, where the enemy has vastly more politico-military power; strategic equilibrium, where the forces of the people and that of the enemy are more or less equal in

size; strategic offensive where the people's forces far exceed that of reaction and large-scale annihilation campaigns can be waged

In many ways, the period between 1905 and 1917 can be seen as the strategic defensive of the Russian People's war. The forces of the Tsarists, Bourgeoisie, and Imperialists was much stronger than that of the people. The masses increasingly began to rally around the Bolsheviks in the time leading up to 1917.

The absolutism of the Russia feudal-bourgeoisie monarchy was extremely oppressive and repressive to the wide spectrum of Russian people. As a result, there began to be increasingly violent movements of the working people but also of the petite bourgeoisie such as the Narodniks.

The entrance of the Russian government into WW1 in 1914 marked the beginning of the highest subsection of the strategic defensive.

The war was brutal and the masses themselves suffered the brunt of the famine, death, disease, and general disaster which became the norm in the country as a result of the mass loss and the corruption and inefficiency of the Russian state. In the summer of 1915 Comrade Lenin raised the slogan, "Turn Imperialist War Into Civil War!". (V.I. Lenin "Turn Imperialist War Into Civil War" (August 1915)) This was the rallying call to the broad masses to struggle for an end of the war and an end of the ruling classes.

As WW1 stretched on the masses of Russia began to become more and more openly hostile to the war and to the Feudal-Bourgeoisie ruling clique. When the time for uprising became ripe and the masses were ready for an uprising the situation was like a powder keg. On the 8th of March International women's day, a women's strike against the lack of bread and low wages lead into the first revolution of 1917.

As a result of this initial uprising, there was a situation which can be understood as strategic equilibrium in which on the one hand the provincial government made up of the Feudalists, the petite bourgeoisie socialists, the Cadets representing the Bourgeoisie, etc were claiming and exercising

politico-military power in the country. But on the other hand, there were the Soviets of Workers and Soldiers (and at this point to a much lesser extent in the peasant areas.) contending for and exercising politico-military power.

After this initial period, there was an extremely unstable situation in which multiple forces were attempting to exercise politico-military power. The masses of Russia wanted out of WW1 strongly and it was the refusal of the provincial government to settle a separate peace and exit the war, among other issues that lead into the second 1917 revolution in which the overwhelming power of the organized masses was unleashed in order to seize full state power. This period can be understood as the strategic offensive.

General Principles, Modern Capitalism

The general principles of PPW as laid out above by Mao are capable of being adapted and applied to modern capitalist countries. When we look at the urban areas of capitalist countries we can see that there is much more acute oppression in proletarian and semi-proletarian areas. For this reason, we organize most among these basic classes and areas. In proletarian areas, the party builds democratic structures of organization and develops dual power / politico-military power in proletarian areas via mass work. In mass work, we arouse, organize and mobilize the masses to fight for Democratic and progressive demands and serve themselves. Out of these struggles, advanced workers will arise which can be educated and brought into the party structure.

It is worth noting further that dual power can only be created as a consequence of the smashing of the existing state and armed forces. Before the beginning of conquest, there is the period of construction which prefaces the launching of the war. All of this period is encapsulated in the period of struggle to reconstitute the party and find the red line.

Due to the chronic crisis of capitalism, the petite bourgeoisie is in a constantly precarious position and increasingly so over time. For this reason, it is also possible to organize among them and mobilize them to serve the overall cause of proletarian revolution. Students are the most easily mobilized masses of petite bourgeoisie people but it is also possible to mobilize Health care workers and other professionals. this must be done on the basis of “to the villages” in the sense of having them serve proletarian interests primary and also organize to struggle for their own lives

All through the period of the reconstitution of the party and through to the launching of the PPW we must be aware of the relations and who exercises the most politico-military power in an area. During this period of legal and semi-legal struggle the cadres of the pre-party formations and later the party work to go to the deepest and widest level of the masses and organize and mobilize them to fight militant struggles for their rights and well being. It is of vital importance that as quickly as possible and more so over time this organizing is done on a war footing and with the initiating of the PPW in mind.

This amounts to a protracted period of legal, semi-legal, and underground struggle in which you are arming the masses both literally and ideologically for armed combat for state power. The armed form of this struggle takes the form of urban guerrilla warfare both inside and outside the core of cities. Because of the spasmodic and anarchic development of the housing market which has come to be called gentrification, the masses have been increasingly pushed out of the city core. As a result, there is increasingly so a series of rings around nearly every modern capitalist city in which the working people live. These neighborhoods play the role of the sea of masses which the guerrilla fighters will swim in.

PPW is the application of Dialectical Materialism which is to say Marxism to the concrete problem of warfare. It is a process of building up strength among the masses which allows for the seizure of initiative and provides for the ability for the People’s army to deal devastating blows to the enemy.

This process can and has been done in both Semi-feudal and capitalist countries.

Article by Yitzhak Raikhman

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