

# More on “Shake the Earth”

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STRUGGLESSESSIONS

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## Struggle Sessions Editorial Board

Since the publication of our response to the 100 Flowers submission *Shake the Earth*, we have received a number of emails from readers including the original author both thanking us for our intervention and offering a number of criticisms, additions, and suggestions. Following these suggestions, we want to expand on a few topics related to this debate on the international situation.

We first want to recognize that we falsely characterized two aspects of Alex G's essay. In our introduction we claimed that he considers the reversion to the strategic defensive to have occurred in the 1970s and 80s, which contradicts what we later say and does not match what he actually says, which is that the world proletarian revolution supposedly reverted to the strategic defensive in the 1950s with the counter-revolution in the USSR. We also implied that Alex G. describes the election boycott as a "policy" by using quotation marks. We believe this corresponds to the essence of his argument, but to use quotation marks suggests that he actually used this term, misquoting him.

## Two Lines on the International Situation

The fundamental point of disagreement in the two-line struggle is the question of whether the world proletarian revolution has advanced to the stage of the global strategic offensive, or if, following the loss of the USSR, it reverted to the strategic defensive where we still remain. We uphold the former position, and further believe that the world is coming out of a counter-revolutionary offensive within the strategic offensive, making way for a new great wave of proletarian revolution. In this context it is necessary for the subjective forces to rise to the occasion. Revolutionary Brazilian newspaper *A Nova Democracia* says the following referring to the situation today in Brazil:

Fools may ask, 'but where is this strength?' or, 'although the situation is indeed explosive, the revolutionaries are weak, minority, etc.' These obtuse non-believers do not realize that strength is proven and strengthened in the struggle itself, like a muscle that develops through effort, and that consciousness rises by acting under leadership endowed with a scientific understanding of reality. It is precisely such a 'favorable objective situation' that allows a minority political organization—but one that is well cohesive and able to identify and focus on the critical point in each stage of the struggle—to grow and become an irresistible force, covering in weeks or months a terrain that in normal times would cost years and decades to cover. Those metaphysicians, slaves to routine, were addressed by Marx, when he said that 'each step of real movement is more effective than a dozen programs.' [[New Forces](#)]

With the application of Marxism to identify and develop the critical point in each state of the struggle, bringing the correct, revolutionary slogans to the masses, the contradiction between objective and subjective factors can be resolved and great leaps can be made in the terrain of struggle.

The strategic stage at a global level is a translation of a military concept originally applied at the level of a single country. This translation necessitates changes in meaning which sustain the essence of the concept. We are talking about broad historical movements, and as historical materialists we assert that, while stagnation and reversal may occur in isolated instances, history cannot be reversed at the world level; it always moves forward. Therefore with the strategic stage referring to a whole course of modern history, the

development from decaying capitalism to the lower stage of communism, we assert that there can be no strategic reversal, even as 'operational' defeats—to use another translation—are possible. The PCP says

This struggle between restoration and counter-restoration is an undeniable historical law, until the dictatorship of the proletariat is definitively established. In world history, when the feudal class advanced in China, it took 250 years to definitively crush the restoration of slavery; when the bourgeoisie in the West struggled against feudalism to crush the attempts at restoration or the actual restorations of feudalism, it took 300 years to be definitively established in power. And, addressing a revolution in which the proletariat is definitively installed in power, the struggle between restoration and counter-restoration is singularly acute and bitter and will last approximately 200 years, starting from the Paris Commune in 1871. [General Political Line of the Communist Party of Peru]

We refer to this as strategy and not simply as the international conditions because, firstly, it is informed by an evaluation of the conditions of our forces and those of the enemy, not merely at a military level but in terms of the whole objective and subjective conditions; and secondly because it informs strategic orientation at a political and military level. The fact is that in the strategic defensive, such strategic orientations as election boycotts, party militarization, and the general sweeping away of imperialism were not on the order of the day except in germinal form. Socialism could not spread across the Earth in 1917, but it can in 2021 while still revolution develops unevenly in each country. This is why we demarcate strategic stages and why we assert that it is not consistent to uphold the theses of 50 to 100 years for the general sweeping away of imperialism and the election boycott as strategy and at the same time to claim that we have reverted to the strategic defensive of the world proletarian revolution.

Subjective and objective conditions comprise a unity of opposites, as highlighted by *A Nova Democracia's* quote above. While subjective conditions are a product of objective conditions, they in turn transform the objective conditions which allow further developments in the subjective conditions, and so on in an endless spiral upward, assuming the correct ideology is in command. This separates Marxists from the 'insurrectionists' and 'accumulationists' who claim that we must slowly develop subjective forces

before we can consider transforming objective conditions, or that we must wait for the right objective conditions to fall from the clouds. Lenin already demolished such falsehoods in his struggle against the Narodniks, the economists, and the Mensheviks.

On top of this, one must oppose metaphysical views and recognize that the masses are already in struggle and already have subjectivity in their struggle against the class enemy; the objective conditions already contain within themselves the kernel of subjective development. This is the essence of the mass line: that the masses are not an inert medium but are already active in making history through class struggle, that they already have a degree of consciousness that divides them into active, intermediate, and backwards. The pressing task of communists therefore is to bring proletarian consciousness and leadership to the already existing struggles of the masses. In doing so they transform the struggle of demands to serve the development of revolution and the people's war which must be led by the Communist Party and fought by the masses.

History cannot move backwards because it is etched in a million ways into the masses. Much of the world now has a tradition of revolutionary movements either in the form of struggles led by Communist Parties or as wars of national liberation. We can see this historical memory outlined masterfully by Chairman Gonzalo in the General Political Line of the Communist Party of Peru when he specifies the military history of the Peruvian people, an integral aspect of Gonzalo Thought. These histories have not disappeared even as the movements have lost or been diverted; to be clear we do not refer specifically here to Peru in which the people's war continues guided by Gonzalo Thought. In every country that has historically had a Communist Party, that has experienced a national liberation struggle that was diverted by the bureaucrat bourgeoisie, or that today has active armed struggles against imperialism (even if they are led by the bourgeoisie), there is a kernel of consciousness that seeks revolutionary leadership. For this reason we deny that there can be such a thing as the subjective forces reduced to a zero-point, which would be a

metaphysical and pessimistic claim that denies the dialectical nature of subjectivity and objectivity.

## Form and Essence

Form and essence, or similarly appearance and essence, exist as a unity of opposites. Essence is the truth of a thing, its inner mechanisms or contradictions. Form can mean its outward appearance, its surface, or otherwise its structure, its skeleton. It is a given that it is essence that gives rise to form, that there can be no form that is not both caused and conditioned by its essence. However, form also exists in contradiction with essence: it has a certain independence and can even affect essence in turn. There can even be an inversion between form and essence, as in the example of the people's army being strong in essence but weak in form, or of imperialism being weak in essence but strong in form. However this dislocation is ultimately comprehensible in the being of a thing itself (by understanding the true weakness of imperialism we can understand why it appears strong), so in synthesis essence is determinate.

Form and essence express themselves differently when talking about the process of knowledge. Here we begin by grasping the appearance (perceptual knowledge) and eventually make a leap into grasping the essence (rational knowledge). In the process of attaining rational knowledge, we in turn comprehend how the essence gives rise to the appearance and why there may be a dislocation between the two. To grasp only perceptual knowledge, such as to only see imperialism's outward strength but not its inner weakness, is the method of empiricism which rejects essence as such. Now we ask, what would it mean to grasp the essence but not the appearance, to have rational but not perceptual knowledge? This baffles us, and the only explanation we can find is that it would mean knowledge that is not borne from practice, a pure product of thought—in other words, idealism. In reality, the truth or correctness of a thing is not a quality it has in the same way that strength and weakness are,

but is identical to the thing itself, so we reject the idea that something can be correct in essence but incorrect in form as a meaningless absurdity.

On the other end of the process of knowledge is the relation of the form of thought (in language, logic, categories) and the essence of thought (its object). The claim applied here suggests that the PCP had the correct ideas, but they presented it incorrectly, that the form in which they put their ideas was incorrect. This is more coherent from a philosophical perspective, but we should again apply dialectics and recognize that, while essence produces and conditions form, it is also true that essence can only exist in and through form. This means that true ideas can exist only in and through their presentation. What does it mean to say that a person has correct ideas, but is unable to share or apply them correctly? Another idealism—correct ideas are realized precisely in their application.

It is indeed possible for form (presentation) to not accurately correspond to essence (thought). However, this implies an error in the whole, hence in the essence as the determining aspect, and the purpose of two-line struggle is precisely to uncover how a discordance in one's discourse and practice is caused by an error in one's ideas, thus imposing the left corresponding with reality and the truth on the right which does not.

The same principle applies to analysis and synthesis, to the part and the whole. If analysis produces the many parts and synthesis produces the whole, to say that there is an error in the whole means that there is an error in the parts, and the purpose of two-line struggle here is to divide one into two, to show how an error in the whole stems from its inner contradictions, from errors in the parts and their interrelations.

The whole only exists in the parts, and the parts are precisely what make up the whole; similarly the universal only exists in the particular, and the particulars make up the universal. This opposes the claim that the PCP could be correct in their international line as a whole but incorrect in one part (the global strategic defensive). A political line is not like a set of points of unity or demands, a set of

atomistic and disconnected theses. A political line is the product of the application of Maoism to concrete conditions, an interconnected whole that must be consistent and complete in laying out its object. If there were a disagreement on a secondary matter (for instance, the respective roles of two competing imperialist powers) one could say that this does not negate the international line as a whole. But the strategic offensive is a central axis in the PCP's international line, a point we have attempted to demonstrate in our original response. Here it would be absurd to say that we can reject the part without rejecting the whole. We reiterate again that this is the method of opportunism: to say that one agrees with the whole, with the essence, but simply has a disagreement on a few side matters, which upon reflection in fact negates the whole.

### **Economic Basis of the Sole Hegemonic Superpower**

In describing the contradictions of imperialism and its form today in the sole hegemony of US imperialism, we focused in our first response on the politico-military aspects which were most directly relevant to the discussion; however, we do not wish to neglect the economic basis. Imperialism is monopoly capitalism, a new level of centralization and concentration of capital, characterized by stagnation and decay. The development from multiple imperialist hegemonies across the world to the sole imperialist hegemony of the United States marks a new height in the centralization of capital. Throughout the era of imperialism there has been a coalescence from many imperialist powers to two dominating superpowers (the US and social-imperialist USSR) and finally the sole hegemony of the US, the hegemony of its monopoly capital across the world. This does not suggest strength on the part of imperialism, but, rather, a further descent to its grave; greater stagnation and decay. The greater monopolization present today means that imperialism, “over-ripe capitalism” as Lenin calls it, has only rotted further.

Expansive foreign investment in oppressed countries, debt from those countries, the international hegemony of the US dollar—these are some of the

foundations of the hegemony of US capital, but it is a foundation of sand, with the US relying on endless expansion, an impossible task as counter-hegemonies and, more importantly, the force of the international proletariat become a counter-balance to its expansion. Maintaining profits requires searching for new markets, cheaper labor markets, and cheaper resources. This search can only go so far. Sole hegemony therefore represents stagnation, an end to endless expansion and, consequently, crisis and implosion.

The second world imperialist powers that previously played the role of collusion under US imperialism's thumb are now displaying skepticism towards US hegemony while seeking their own local hegemony, visible in the squabbling of the imperialists around NATO and Biden's attempts to rally forces there against Russia and China. Russia and China are growing more direct in their quest for counter-hegemony to the United States, expanding their zones of influence with foreign investment and struggling over key resources and industries. Many of these countries now raise the specters of free competition and opposition to the hegemony of the US.

US imperialism is forced to play the role of global policeman; it stretches itself thin and cannot maintain its grip. It is forced to sink more and more capital into its military apparatus, falling deeper into debt. The over-extension of the military is therefore also an economic overreach. This results in contradictions internally, as the US is unable to provide a previously expected standard of living to the people in the US, and attacks not only the proletariat but the labor-aristocracy and petty-bourgeoisie too. Union-busting and two-tier system contracts, the casualization of work, increased unemployment, and the generalizing of misery: these are all symptoms of the internal crisis in the US which reflects the developing crisis at a global level.

Whether the US maintains its position of sole hegemony, whether it falls and gives way to another sole-hegemonic superpower, or whether we return to a situation of multiple hegemonic powers competing for the 'edge' over the others, the situation can only develop for the imperialists through wars for the

redivision of the world, through exploitation and crisis on a heightened scale; these changes can quicken imperialism only in its march toward the grave.

## Epilogue

In responding to Alex G. we have covered the question of the strategic stage of the world proletarian revolution from a number of angles as thoroughly as we could within the scope of two short essays. We have identified the strategic stage of the world proletarian revolution as a broad historical movement expressed in the concrete strategic tasks laid out in each stage, not reducible to an evaluation of respective military strength. We have identified the line presented by the PCP: that we are in an early substage of the strategic offensive of the world proletarian revolution, that there has been an imperialist counter-offensive within this stage linked to the revisionist restorations and the sole-hegemony of US imperialism, but that this is now giving way to a new great wave of people's wars. We have shown the connection between strategy, operations, and tactics, and specifically how the strategic perspective informs our lines on such questions as the election boycott, and that the latter is determined by the former. We have compared the worldview and method of Marxism that must be applied in comprehending these questions to the worldview and method of Alex G., who has applied subjectivism, pessimism, and eclecticism in approaching these questions however good his intentions were—and we do believe that he ardently sought to apply Marxism and not revisionism however mistaken his views.

Our goal as a theoretical journal is not to make a great or novel contribution to Maoism, but to uphold the ideology of the proletariat, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, mainly Maoism, to defend it from the attacks of revisionism, opportunism and postmodernism, and to begin to apply it to our concrete conditions on the theoretical plane here in the US.

We want to point out the arrogance of those individuals who claim to 'critically evaluate' the classics of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, who claim to have a

special knowledge beyond these great thinkers and revolutionaries, and who accuse those who unreservedly uphold the thought and legacy of these individuals of being dogmatists. The classics became great leaders precisely because they consistently and consciously applied Marxism and upheld the left line, because they proved themselves in their ideas and in their practice to be shining lights that can guide the proletariat and the people. The ideology that they produced goes beyond them as individuals, and this ideology is not a set of fanciful ideas emanating from a disembodied head but the product of revolutionary practice, the sole criterion of truth.

We assert that ideology is a consistent and complete system of ideas, centered on a specific worldview and method, the product of a specific class and inseparable from its practical role in class struggle. One cannot pick and choose ideas as they please, combining ideas of one class with ideas of another. We point out that the official writings of Communist Parties and organizations and their leaders are in general very precise in the words and concepts they choose; every piece is the product of two-line struggle and the conquering of the left line over the right. The General Political Line of the PCP and its International Line specifically is no exception but a shining example of precision and correctness. To take out a central axis of this international line, the thesis of the global strategic offensive, is to negate the line as a whole.

We question the arrogance of individuals who at most have a modest knowledge of theory and real revolutionary practice—and in the US we all have at most a modest amount of knowledge and practice—to claim that they have a basis on which they can ‘critically evaluate’ the ideology borne out of 150 years of class struggle. We follow Mao who emphasized time and again:

Ever since class society came into being the world has had only two kinds of knowledge, knowledge of the struggle for production and knowledge of the class struggle. Natural science and social science are the crystallization of these two kinds of knowledge, and philosophy is the generalization and summation of the knowledge of nature and the knowledge of society. Is there any other kind of knowledge? No. [*Rectify the Party's Style of Work*]

We speak here not just of Alex G., who is genuinely trying to apply Maoism despite his mistakes, but more so the whole suite of crypto-Avakianites seeking to create their own ‘new synthesis’ of Maoism, who claim to uphold for instance Stalin, Mao, and Gonzalo while making such outrageous claims as that Stalin was a revisionist, that Mao became a rightist in his later years, or that the people’s war in Peru failed because of the supposed errors of Gonzalo Thought, the very vehicle pushing the people’s war forward. The pseudo-criticism and idle speculation of these spectators has failed to produce anything new and has only reproduced the old tales of revisionism and reaction.

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October 2020

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