

# Without Power

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STRUGGLESSESSIONS



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*(Read by Lee Hanbyul)*

“Salvo el poder todo es ilusión  
asaltar los cielos con la fuerza del fusil”

Was a slogan sung by the prisoners of Castro Castro Penal, known as one of the toughest prisons in the world. In the 80s and 90s this prison was a shining trench of combat and was under the control of the Communist Party of Peru, who organized New Power all over the country — including within the country’s prisons. The slogan, derived from a quotation of the great Lenin, translates to “without power all is illusion, assault the skies/heavens with rifle in hand”.

What set the PCP apart from most “communist parties” in the world, and all of the ones claiming the title in Peru, was their centering of the question of power within their ideology. Today we call this Ideology Marxism–Leninism–Maoism, a higher stage of all Marxism synthesized by PCP Chairman Gonzalo in the course of Protracted People’s War. One of the universal tenants of Maoism is

the election boycott. The PCP began its Peoples War by dramatically burning the ballots in the 1980 election season, and their revolution would come closer to state power, with mass support than any of the ongoing revolutions of today.

In the main aspect, the election boycotts carried out by Maoists seek to attack imperialist politicians and to demarcate revolutionary forces from revisionist forces among the masses. This follows the experience of the PCP and applies these lessons diversely to conditions within imperialist counties as the boycotts in the US, France, Canada, and Norway, to name only a few, exemplify. These attacks and demarcations in our given conditions are quite important and far from being infantile.

Contrary to the stereotypes, Maoism is not a dogma; yet when Maoists all over the world initiate election boycotts, revisionists will cry that we must study Lenin's excellent text, "Leftwing Communism – An Infantile Disorder". Opportunistically, these revisionists are very selective when it comes to imposing Lenin, in a dogmatic mode they scramble to insist adherence to the text, regardless of its age or the conditions in which it existed; they simultaneously dispense with most major aspects of Leninism—the vanguard Party, universality of armed struggle, proletarian dictatorship etc. They do not maintain fidelity to many of Lenin's positions at all, yet dogmatically cling to their distorted understanding of "Leftwing Communism". We will seek to explain some of the conditions present when Lenin authored the text, juxtaposing those with present conditions, conditions which have led Maoists all over the world to call for and impose electoral boycotts.

### **What Lenin really has to say**

Lenin was not addressing a scattered array of disorganized leftwing people, or individuals in small groups, he was not encouraging Communists to vote for imperialists — any study of his role in the second international would prove to any one serious that Lenin was opposed to lending support to the imperialist ruling class of one's own nation.

In “Leftwing Communism” itself, Lenin issues warning to those who would align themselves with imperialism on no uncertain terms when discussing the universal lessons of the Russian Revolution:

“At the present moment in history, however, it is the Russian model that reveals to *all* countries something—and something highly significant—of their near and inevitable future. Advanced workers in all lands have long realised this; more often than not, they have grasped it with their revolutionary class instinct rather than realised it. Herein lies the international ‘significance’ (in the narrow sense of the word) of Soviet power, and of the fundamentals of Bolshevik theory and tactics. The ‘revolutionary’ leaders of the Second International, such as Kautsky in Germany and Otto Bauer and Friedrich Adler in Austria, have failed to understand this, which is why they have proved to be reactionaries and advocates of the worst kind of opportunism and social treachery.”

There is not much more opportunist and treacherous than rallying votes for present day US imperialism. Furthermore the opportunists who sheepishly wield a Lenin text, as if it means to state that “voting in bourgeois elections is hereby always what Communists should do” have not studied the text very well, or they would realize that they have been cherry picking excuses to tail the bourgeois, Lenin on the other hand provides many universal lessons in the text:

“The dictatorship of the proletariat means a most determined and most ruthless war waged by the new class against a *more powerful* enemy, the bourgeoisie, whose resistance is increased *tenfold* by their overthrow (even if only in a single country), and whose power lies, not only in the strength of international capital, the strength and durability of their international connections, but also in the *force of habit*, in the strength of *small-scale production*. Unfortunately, small-scale production is still widespread in the world, and small-scale production *engenders* capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale. All these reasons make the dictatorship of the proletariat necessary, and victory over

the bourgeoisie is impossible without a long, stubborn and desperate life-and-death struggle which calls for tenacity, discipline, and a single and inflexible will.”

This is precisely the Lenin which these types of electoral cretins wish to avoid.

“The alternation of parliamentary and non-parliamentary forms of struggle, of the tactics of boycotting parliament and that of participating in parliament, of legal and illegal forms of struggle, and likewise their interrelations and connections—all this was marked by an extraordinary wealth of content. As for teaching the fundamentals of political science to masses and leaders, to classes and parties alike, each month of this period was equivalent to an entire year of ‘peaceful’ and ‘constitutional’ development. Without the ‘dress rehearsal’ of 1905, the victory of the October Revolution in 1917 would have been impossible.”

In summing up the experience of the Russian Revolution, Lenin clearly expresses the tactical nature of election boycotts and use of bourgeois elections; he is not dogmatically imposing participation in bourgeois elections, the opportunists waving Lenin’s work seldom analyze the specific and concrete conditions imposed by US imperialism, and so not engaging with this reality at all, opportunists are content to universalize the specific while negating the fundamental content of the revolution which Lenin led.

Lenin would go on to discuss how in the tremulous period between 1903 and 1917 demoralization would often set in; he describes how pornography would take the place of politics. Revisionism in the US has had a similar feature: the absolute absence of proletarian politics and a strong proletarian movement has left many self-described “communists” scratching their heads and importing fundamentally bourgeois politics, their pornography, which takes the place of their politics, comes in the forms of postmodernism and revisionism.

Lenin teaches of how the Bolsheviks used both illegal and parliamentary struggles in the Duma to outmaneuver and eventually overcome the Mensheviks who were little more than bourgeois agents in the proletarian movement. Lenin is correct in asserting this principle, however the Duma itself bears little resemblance to a modern election in an imperialist country like the US. What is of greater historical importance was the fact that the Bolsheviks—unlike the Second International opportunists—were able to make good use of the conditions posed by war which forced them to take up illegal organizing.

In their subjectivism, our modern opportunists forget this crucial period of underground work which provided a certain tempering of the Party; those promoting electioneering in the US might give lip service to necessary illegal activity, but in practice they reject it wholly; legalism and pacifism are observed with religious devotion. Lenin on the other hand viewed illegal and legal work dialectically and never used elections or the Duma for the purposes of liquidating underground struggle. Contemporary revolutionaries when doing the same must not fail to recognize changes and shifts in objective conditions, increased means of state surveillance and improved infiltration tactics of the enemy, as well as the total bankruptcy of modern elections which have long outlived their once progressive aspect. Subjectivists who uphold only the electoral aspect of what the Bolsheviks were doing only see one small corner of a much larger picture, thus superimposing legalism over the whole of the matter and revising history. There were of course the Mensheviks who would, according to Lenin, assume a legalist character and become a bourgeois party outright:

“...a dreary repetition, a reiteration, of an old and familiar refrain. We have already witnessed all this in the instance of the Mensheviks. As history would have it, the opportunists of a backward country became the forerunners of the opportunists in a number of advanced countries.”

The last part of this quotation rings incredibly loud today, the electoral cretins are not followers of the Bolsheviks but are a page from the same bourgeois saga as the Second Internationalists and the Mensheviks. Lenin would describe

this cretinism as follows, stating that they “have disgraced themselves and become entangled in this question in a most ‘telling’ fashion; if they have all shown themselves slaves to the prejudices of petty-bourgeois democracy (fully in the spirit of the petty-bourgeois of 1848 who called themselves ‘Social-Democrats’)—then we can only say that we have *already* witnessed *all this* in the instance of the Mensheviks.”

Our modern day slaves to the prejudices of petty-bourgeois democracy come in too many forms to count, from the social-fascists of the DSA to the crypto-fascists of the PSL, the right liquidationist revisionists of fake CP etc. etc. According to Lenin:

“...The Bolsheviks began their victorious struggle against the parliamentary and (in fact) bourgeois republic and against the Mensheviks in a very cautious manner, and the preparations they made for it were by no means simple.”

Further:

“We did not proclaim a boycott of the bourgeois parliament, the Constituent Assembly, but said—and following the April (1917) Conference of our Party began to state officially in the name of the Party—that a bourgeois republic with a Constituent Assembly would be better than a bourgeois republic without a Constituent Assembly, but that a ‘workers’ and peasants’ republic, a Soviet republic, would be better than any bourgeois-democratic, parliamentary republic.”

These caveats posed by Lenin are not inconsequential verbiage. The US in 2018 unlike pre-revolutionary Russia, is not grappling with the matter of a Constituent Assembly; there is no new constitution to be implemented through bourgeois electoralism and the existing constitution is in no danger of repeal. On the contrary, there is nothing at all useful to modern Communists inside of bourgeois government. Elections are no longer desirable.

The very same opportunists who parrot their ill-conceived notions on electoralism typically are composed of those who screech loudly about the “need” for “left-unity”, yet it was Lenin himself who saw parliamentary struggle as a place for real Marxists to attack and overcome phony Marxists, to defeat opportunists politically. Bolshevism attacked and overcame every alternative as it was the only genuine expression of the proletariat. Contrary to the method of the Bolsheviks, our modern day opportunists argue “a lesser of two-evils” tactic, in essence they argue for support of bourgeois reactionary parties like the Democratic Party, attempting to draw a disinterested and repulsed masses back into that orbit. This is in no way confronting class enemies in the worker’s movement; it is forcing *outright* the workers movement into the strict control of the imperialist class.

### **Approaches prior to the theorization of Protracted Peoples War**

“Marxist theory has established—and the experience of all European revolutions and revolutionary movements has fully confirmed—that the petty proprietor, the small master (a social type existing on a very extensive and even mass scale in many European countries), who, under capitalism, always suffers oppression and very frequently a most acute and rapid deterioration in his conditions of life, and even ruin, easily goes to revolutionary extremes, but is incapable of perseverance, organisation, discipline and steadfastness. A petty bourgeois driven to frenzy by the horrors of capitalism is a social phenomenon which, like anarchism, is characteristic of all capitalist countries.” –Lenin

Many such strategies and theories have come into being prior to PPW, and many more since its theorization which seek to avoid its emphasis on revolutionary violence. While our modern anarchists at least in the imperialist centers have become mainly irrelevant, their ideas still see some currency among activist sub-cultures; aside from that many others parade themselves as strategic in overcoming capitalism—mainly these are focoist urban guerrilla types which succumb to what Lenin is above identifying as the petty bourgeoisie seeking revolutionary extremes, without discipline organization

etc. Protracted Peoples War, however, is able to deal with anti-capitalism in the concrete, giving it concrete forms which conform to Marxism, thus making it the military strategy of the proletariat. Prior to PPW, Marxist-Leninists operated on an insurrectionary model, a model which has never been successfully duplicated anywhere in the world since the Russian Revolution, which itself we argue was a PPW in essence.

Maoists insist that what today passes for “ultra-leftism”—which is always right in essence—can do nothing but oppose the principles and theory of universal PPW, and consequently Maoists wage struggles against these types of petty bourgeois elements who seek to cut corners and neglect Party building, training of troops, and vetting of members. Far from viewing this stance as “ultra-leftists” due mainly to election boycotts Lenin assessed a similar situation in the revolutionary movement in Russia in his time:

“In 1908 the ‘Left’ Bolsheviks were expelled from our Party for stubbornly refusing to understand the necessity of participating in a most reactionary ‘parliament’. The ‘Lefts’—among whom there were many splendid revolutionaries who subsequently were (and still are) commendable members of the Communist Party—based themselves particularly on the successful experience of the 1905 boycott. When, in August 1905, the tsar proclaimed the convocation of a consultative ‘parliament’, the Bolsheviks called for its boycott, in the teeth of all the opposition parties and the Mensheviks, and the ‘parliament’ was in fact swept away by the revolution of October 1905.”

Unlike the opportunists, Lenin is again asserting that elections are only acceptable conditionally and according to the conditions in 1908 in Russia and 1920 (mainly in Germany), he maintains his defense of the 1905 boycott and insists that it was correct to struggle against the Mensheviks on this question. At the core of this is the application of revolutionary military strategy—something totally neglected by today’s assorted electoral cretins. Merely questioning if they have a military strategy is enough to have them brand you as an “ultra-leftist” or worse, a police agent. This is nothing but the

desperation of revisionism trying as it might to pose itself as Marxism, nothing new at all.

Stressing to the utmost the necessity of concretely analyzing given conditions and not just blindly applying tactics with no strategic consideration Lenin would state that:

“The Bolsheviks’ boycott of ‘parliament’ in 1905 enriched the revolutionary proletariat with highly valuable political experience and showed that, when legal and illegal parliamentary and non-parliamentary forms of struggle are combined, it is sometimes useful and even essential to reject parliamentary forms. It would, however, be highly erroneous to apply this experience blindly, imitatively and uncritically to *other* conditions and *other* situations.”

As students of Lenin, Maoists do not apply election boycotts blindly, this principle is applied due to the specific state of bourgeois democracy today, the influence of revisionism and social-fascism and the fact that imperialism, unlike in the time of Lenin, has reached its limits as the world has entered the stage of strategic offensive of the world proletarian revolution; it has produced principally Maoism to contend with these conditions.

Conditions for Communists in the US, the most advanced and largest, most aggressive imperialist power, are nothing like those of the Bolsheviks in 1908–1914; we lack the subjective and objective conditions which allowed to Bolsheviks to successfully combine parliamentary struggles with illegal struggles. This is not only a matter of weakness of the Communists but of the enemy’s strength. If things were reversed and we Communists were strong against a weakening enemy, elections would still not be in order because the only way to accomplish this turning into opposites for us would be through Protracted Peoples War, a prolonged armed struggle where the Party and its mass organizations would be considered terrorist organizations, and in such conditions electioneering would be unthinkable. Bourgeois elections and PPW are fundamentally irreconcilable.

Maoists—based on analysis of world conditions objectively—are correct in asserting that those participating in the elections of the Imperialists and their compradors are complicit in imperialism, because such compromise runs counter to the world proletarian revolution.

Lenin understood this well when teaching about principled and unprincipled compromise:

“to reject compromises ‘on principle’, to reject the permissibility of compromises in general, no matter of what kind, is childishness, which it is difficult even to consider seriously. A political leader who desires to be useful to the revolutionary proletariat must be able to distinguish *concrete* cases of compromises that are inexcusable and are an expression of opportunism and *treachery*; he must direct all the force of criticism, the full intensity of merciless exposure and relentless war, against *these concrete* compromises, and not allow the past masters of ‘practical’ socialism and the parliamentary Jesuits to dodge and wriggle out of responsibility by means of disquisitions on ‘compromises in general’.

The simple criteria we can use for understanding compromise is how genuinely a party or organization are preparing for the overthrow of US imperialism, and who is just padding their bourgeois portfolio with feel-good, self-congratulatory activity, who has been dubbed enemies of the state (the Red Guards movement) and who are welcomed into the Democratic Party (like the DSA and fake CP) etc. one side having turned fully in service of their own imperialist bourgeoisie against the other which remains in the service of the world proletariat. These forces are locked in antagonistic class struggle and their stance on elections is precisely a reflection of their class positions.

When regarding the “infantile leftists” of Germany, Lenin never failed to link their thinking to the fact that they had become comfortable due to longstanding legal conditions of organizing and the abrupt shift into illegal organizing:

“It is common knowledge that the masses are divided into classes, that the masses can be contrasted with classes only by contrasting the vast majority in general, regardless of division according to status in the social system of production, with categories holding a definite status in the social system of production; that as a rule and in most cases—at least in present-day civilised countries—classes are led by political parties; that political parties, as a general rule, are run by more or less stable groups composed of the most authoritative, influential and experienced members, who are elected to the most responsible positions, and are called leaders. All this is elementary. All this is clear and simple. Why replace this with some kind of rigmarole, some new Volapük? On the one hand, these people seem to have got muddled when they found themselves in a predicament, when the party’s abrupt transition from legality to illegality upset the customary, normal and simple relations between leaders, parties and classes. In Germany, as in other European countries, people had become too accustomed to legality, to the free and proper election of ‘leaders’ at regular party congresses, to the convenient method of testing the class composition of parties through parliamentary elections, mass meetings, the press, the sentiments of the trade unions and other associations, etc. When, instead of this customary procedure, it became necessary, because of the stormy development of the revolution and the development of the civil war, to go over rapidly from legality to illegality, to combine the two, and to adopt the ‘inconvenient’ and ‘undemocratic’ methods of selecting, or forming, or preserving ‘groups of leaders’—people lost their bearings and began to think up some unmitigated nonsense. Certain members of the Communist Party of Holland, who were unlucky enough to be born in a small country with traditions and conditions of highly privileged and highly stable legality, and who had never seen a transition from legality to illegality, probably fell into confusion, lost their heads, and helped create these absurd inventions.”

He not only exposes the legalist nature of the German “leftists” but gives us a concrete example of what revolutionary leadership is composed of: the most authoritative, influential and experienced. Many who today distort Lenin to force a tailing of the reactionary bourgeoisie in elections also detest leadership

because of the very attributes Lenin calls common-sense. It is no wonder that their sheepish waving of Lenin lacks any merit at all. They parrot election propaganda in order to avoid the reality of Communist leadership, leadership which is rapidly produced in the most intense illegal struggles.

Our modern opportunists, our electoral cretins are in part composed of and fully oriented to the labor aristocracy which as Lenin insisted many times “were constantly going over to the bourgeoisie, and were directly or indirectly on its pay roll.” This condition lives on today with the electoral cretins, who are still directly or indirectly on the pay role of the bourgeoisie. Not only did Lenin expose those who would wave his work around opportunistically today but he gave instruction on dealing with them: “The revolutionary proletariat cannot be victorious unless this evil is combated, unless the opportunist, social-traitor leaders are exposed, discredited and expelled. That is the policy the Third International has embarked on.” For us today, concretely and according to our conditions, this means to boycott the elections and expose the bourgeois agents within the working class movement, the very agents who perpetuate electioneering.

A major point of contention between Lenin and the “left” Germans was due to the latter’s claim that it would be a “reversion” to parliamentarianism, when in fact the Germans had not done away with bourgeois parliament, this is an argument which today’s opportunists love to unpack against Maoists so it bears some discussion. What holds particular importance for Maoists in the US and Canada is the fact that the majority of working class people already view elections as a hopeless waste of time, and that this viewpoint is objectively correct, while this might not have been the case for Germany in the 1920’s or Russia in 1908. Lenin lays this question out well:

“You must not sink to the level of the masses, to the level of the backward strata of the class. That is incontestable. You must tell them the bitter truth. You are in duty bound to call their bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices what they are—prejudices. But at the same time you must *soberly* follow the *actual* state of the class-consciousness and

preparedness of the entire class (not only of its communist vanguard), and of all the *working people* (not only of their advanced elements).”

In our conditions today in North America, it is not the advanced in our class who still vote, but the labor aristocrats who vote in the interests of distribution of superprofits in whatever way favors their special craft—the consciousness of the petty bourgeois. It is the relatively small and relatively backward sections of our class which maintain faith in bourgeois elections while the majority of workers have already gone further to the left than the revisionists and see no point in voting. The revisionists and other electoral cretins seek to tail the most backward sections of the labor aristocracy. These have fully rejected their duty-bound commitment to exposing the prejudices of bourgeois democracy, and have failed to soberly follow the class consciousness of most workers (far more than just the advanced elements as plenty of the deepest sections of workers who still hold backward views also reject elections in the millions).

This rejection of bourgeois elections, in the sense of the already existing passive boycott has not managed to draw up support for communism, due mainly to the lack of a genuine Communist Party in the US and the total dominance of revisionism and postmodernism among what passes as the “left.” Maoists in these conditions seek to appeal to the majority who do not see much recourse in bourgeois elections and to use boycotts as a tactic to increase the masses’ interest in communism. Maoists seek to meet the masses where they are at rather than attempting to draw them backward to present a new voting base for a “left” alternative, an alternative which can accomplish nothing in the way of state power.

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