

# One Hundred Flowers: “Shake the Earth: On the Current Strategic Stage of the World Revolution”

MAY 11, 2021

STRUGGLESSESSIONS

---



*We publish this submission from a reader of Struggle Sessions in the continued interests of forwarding debate in the USA on the contents and the core of Marxist doctrine, in the interests of deepening understanding of Maoism, and in the interests of imposing Maoism as the command and guide of the World Proletarian Revolution not just in form but in essence also.*

*We definitely reject the positions presented by Comrade Alex G here, and we will publish an Editorial Board response on Friday the 14th which details our disagreements with the piece and which outlines our own understanding of the conception of the Strategic Offensive of the World Proletarian Revolution. We repudiate the arguments presented by the author, though we do so with all due comradely respect. He is attempting to apply the ideology to clarify and study and solve problems, which is commendable, though in our view he falls short of the mark and succumbs to pessimism born of subjectivism and errors of study.*

*Through the brief tenure of our 100 Flowers section, we have published submissions which do not correspond to the Editorial Board's lines and positions, submissions*

*which somewhat correspond, and those which required more study and debate before the Board could align with the positions presented. This submission is of the first type, but we hope that Alex G's article and our forthcoming response will together form a humble but useful starting-point or addition to our readers' study and application of the ideology of the international proletariat.*

*We continue to encourage our readers to email the Editorial Board with questions regarding any articles we publish, with submissions for 100 Flowers, and with article pitches in general.*

## **Shake the Earth: On the Current Strategic Stage of the World Revolution**

by Alex G.

“The next 50 to 100 years or so, beginning from now, will be a great era of radical change in the social system throughout the world, an earth-shaking era without equal in any previous period. Living in such an era, we must be prepared to engage in great struggles which will have many features different in form from those in the past.” – Mao Zedong<sup>1</sup>

To develop an analysis of the world revolution is without question a significant task placed before the International Communist Movement (ICM). In recent times, debate within the ICM around strategy and tactics has placed a certain emphasis on the universality of protracted people's war.<sup>2</sup> This is a correct orientation stemming from an understanding of armed struggle as the highest form of class struggle, and by extension of the military line as the center of the general political line. Nevertheless, an international line must be developed further as well. Unity on this matter has been pursued, as evidenced for example in the “Thesis on the international situation and the tasks of the International Communist Movement.”<sup>3</sup> This struggle towards unity in the ICM, which finds practical expression in the movement towards the Unified Maoist

International Conference, is an excellent start. This article aims to make a modest theoretical contribution on this front.

There is a key issue of the international situation which has up until this time received only cursory and abstract treatment: the thesis put forward by the Communist Party of Peru (hereafter PCP) that we are currently within the stage of strategic offensive in the world revolution. My purpose here is to analyze this thesis, and in the process clarify a general orientation to this question of strategic stages. I hold that although this thesis is correct in essence (in that it correctly describes the general trend of development), it is incorrect in form because it produces conceptual inconsistency.

All criticism is made in the spirit upholding Maoism, in particular its synthesis by Chairman Gonzalo and the PCP. True defense of our ideology is critical rather than dogmatic. As dialecticians we recognize that struggle is absolute, and correspondingly everything has multiple sides to it; nothing is ever wholly good or wholly bad. Just as, for example, we are willing to criticize the shortcomings of Stalin, we must be willing to criticize Gonzalo as well. This allows us to recognize and address the bad while upholding the good of these great leaders as primary; with the tool of criticism and self-criticism in hand we can not help but reaffirm the living essence of our ideology and movement.

The line of global strategic offensive has been put forward by PCP in their General Political Line<sup>4</sup> (in particular the International Line), and clarified elsewhere. However, its treatment is relatively brief. It is thus particularly important to ground this discussion in the fundamentals of MLM, in order to flesh out the theoretical context. To that end we will be reviewing certain concepts established by Lenin and Mao.

It is well known that Lenin established a distinction between a revolution and a revolutionary situation. His explanation of a revolutionary situation in his work *The Collapse of the Second International*<sup>5</sup> is worthy of study by every revolutionary. For our purposes here we will focus on this passage from Section II:

“The totality of all these objective changes is called a revolutionary situation. ... not every revolutionary situation that gives rise to a revolution; revolution arises only out of a situation in which the above-mentioned objective changes are accompanied by a subjective change, namely, the ability of the revolutionary *class* to take revolutionary mass action *strong* enough to break (or dislocate) the old government, which never, not even in a period of crisis, “falls”, if it is not toppled over.”

Here Lenin emphasizes the distinction between the objective and subjective factors (although they also have a dialectical unity on the basis of objectivity, ie existing independent of anyone’s will). The subjective factors of the revolution center around the conquest of power. Mao’s theory of protracted people’s war is clearly based on Lenin’s scientific understanding. It studies the laws governing the development of the proletarian revolution, with the military aspect as primary.

In Chairman Mao’s work *On Protracted War*<sup>6</sup>, particularly the section “The Three Stages of Protracted War”, Mao clearly lays out the shifts in the balance of power between the forces of revolution and counter-revolution. Strategic defensive is characterized by relative weakness of the revolutionary forces, equilibrium is characterized by relative parity with the counter-revolution, and offensive by relative strength. This finds expression in the economic, political, and cultural spheres, but again the military aspect is key (always keeping in mind that war is the sharpest expression of politics, and that politics must guide military matters). This is summed up in his statement:

“China moving from inferiority to parity and then to superiority, Japan moving from superiority to parity and then to inferiority; China moving from the defensive to stalemate and then to the counter-offensive, Japan moving from the offensive to the safeguarding of her gains and then to retreat – such will be the course of the Sino-Japanese war and its inevitable trend.”

The PCP in their *Military Line* adheres to this understanding:



“But the objective fact is that there is a large disparity between the forces of the enemy and our forces and for us to go from weak to strong requires a period of time, one in which the defects of the enemy are exposed and our advantages are developed. **Therefore, we say that our army appears weak but is strong in essence and the enemy’s army appears strong but is weak in essence.** Thus, to go from weak to strong we must carry forward the protracted war and this has three stages: The first is the period of the strategic offensive of the enemy and the strategic defensive of our forces. The second will be the period of the strategic consolidation of the enemy and of our preparation for the counteroffensive. The third will be the period of our strategic counteroffensive and of the strategic withdrawal of the enemy.”

As dialectical materialists we hold that what is new and in development is essential rather than what is old and passing away. We must not, however, only regard the essential without regard to form—in other words, without regard for the particular stage of development we find ourselves in. Although the imperialists truly are paper tigers whose foundation is crumbling beneath them, they are yet significantly more powerful than the forces of revolution overall.

Before elaborating on this position by examining their delineation of stages in the world revolution, let us discuss the parallels that can be drawn between people’s war in one country, and people’s war globally. The PCP notes that “it is not strange that we should apply the three moments to the world revolution, since Chairman Mao applied them to the process of the protracted people’s war.”

This is completely correct. In *Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War*, Mao explains that “The war situation as a whole may cover the entire world, may cover an entire country, or may cover an independent guerrilla zone or an independent major operational front. ... The task of the science of strategy is to study those laws for directing a war that govern a war situation as a whole.”

Thus the most basic questions of revolutionary strategy hold true regardless of what level of abstraction we are considering at any time. Although this was not fleshed out by Mao and his compatriots into a global military strategy, there is a well known passage from “Long Live the Victory of People’s War!” which begins to make an analogy between people’s war on the national and global levels:

“Taking the entire globe, if North America and Western Europe can be called “the cities of the world”, then Asia, Africa and Latin America constitute “the rural areas of the world”. Since World War II, the proletarian revolutionary movement has for various reasons been temporarily held back in the North American and West European capitalist countries, while the people’s revolutionary movement in Asia, Africa and Latin America has been growing vigorously. In a sense, the contemporary world revolution also presents a picture of the encirclement of cities by the rural areas. In the final analysis, the whole cause of world revolution hinges on the revolutionary struggles of the Asian, African and Latin American peoples who make up the overwhelming majority of the world’s population<sup>7</sup>.”

It is true that the analogy remains somewhat abstract if left only at this, but as long as the need for concrete analysis is kept in mind the comparison remains quite useful. The parallel could be taken even further; for example, viewing an entire socialist country as a base area at the world-level might yield significant insights. This may be important in order to delineate the strategic significance of different regions. Another possibility would be to elaborate on the meaning and relative importance of guerrilla, mobile, and positional warfare when these concepts are applied to the world stage. Such theoretical work would follow Mao’s example by demarcating the principles and tactics appropriate to each strategic stage.

Now to turn to the question of stages of the world revolution concretely. I will quote from the PCP fully here:

“From another perspective, Chairman Gonzalo expounds that **in the process of the world revolution to sweep away imperialism and reaction from the face of the earth there are three moments:** 1st, the strategic defensive; 2nd, the strategic equilibrium; and 3rd, the strategic offensive of the world revolution. He does this by applying the law of contradiction to the revolution, since contradiction reigns in everything and all contradictions have two aspects in struggle, in this case revolution and counter-revolution. The strategic defensive of the world revolution opposed to the offensive of the counter-revolution, begins since 1871 with the Paris Commune and ends with the Second World War. The strategic equilibrium occurs around the victory of the Chinese revolution, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and the development of the powerful national liberation movement. Afterwards, the world revolution enters into the strategic offensive; this moment can be identified in history in connection with the 1980s in which we see indications such as the Iran-Iraq war, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, the initiation of the People’s War in Peru, an era circumscribed within the “next 50 to 100 years.” From there onward the contradiction between capitalism and socialism will develop whose resolution will carry us to Communism. Our conception is of a long process, not a short one, with the conviction of reaching Communism even if it means passing through a series of twists and turns and the setbacks that will necessarily occur.

...

In the current situation and in perspective **we have entered the strategic offensive of the world revolution**, within the “50 to 100 years” in which imperialism and world reaction shall be sunk and we shall enter the stage when the proletariat settles into power and establishes its dictatorship. From there forward the contradiction shall be between socialism and capitalism on the road towards Communism. That restorations have occurred in the USSR and China does not negate the thriving process of development of the international proletariat; rather it shows how fierce the struggle is between restoration and counter-restoration.”



As can be seen, the description of the stages remains quite brief and requires further analysis to determine its validity.

The Paris Commune was the first time the proletariat seized power by force of arms, and in which the First International, headed by Marx, played a significant role. It is thus logical to identify it as the initiation of the world revolution in its military aspect. This being said, the bourgeois legalism which prevailed in the Second International marked a widespread retreat from the demands of such a stage of strategic defensive, and so it could be argued that the Russian Revolution, starting with the revolution of 1905, marked a second initiation of the global people's war. Nevertheless the PCP is correct to characterize this period overall as that of strategic defensive.

Secondly, the PCP marks the end of WW2 and the victory of China's revolution as the transition to strategic equilibrium. This is also correct. The enemy's strategic offensive, finding manifestations such as foreign intervention in the Russian Civil War and fascist aggression around the world (especially against the Soviet Union and other revolutionary movements), was repelled. A socialist camp was established covering 1/3 of humanity. Imperialism, headed by the US, transitioned to a Cold War policy of "containment" under the presidency of Harry Truman. The national liberation movements across the world were gaining force. This corresponds to Mao's characterization of strategic equilibrium as "the period of the enemy's strategic consolidation and our preparation for the counter-offensive."

The problem comes here – due primarily to the internal assault of revisionism, the entire socialist camp was lost over the course of a few decades, and imperialism entered a period of temporary triumphalism. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, as momentous and world-historic as it was, should be considered defensive in terms of global strategy, since concretely it was an attempt to beat back revisionism's offensive against the socialist base (recognizing the GPCR's particular historical context does not at all diminish the universal validity of cultural revolution). Wars of national liberation continued to rage, but were largely co-opted, and the forces of the proletariat

became much weaker overall. From then up to the present we remain subject to imperialism's strategic superiority in terms of political and military power. How could we possibly conceive of this as being a stage of strategic offensive for the world revolution? It would be absurd to think that the Peruvian People's War (glorious as it is), let alone something like the Iran-Iraq war, would somehow indicate a strategic superiority of global revolutionary forces.

The current weakness of revolutionary forces and the inevitability of "bends in the road" is understood by Maoists, as would be expected of any serious revolutionaries. In Gonzalo's speech "On the Rectification Campaign Based on the Study of the Document Elections, No! People's War, Yes!"<sup>8</sup> he maintains that we are in fact in a period of counter-revolutionary offensive "occurring in every sphere: the ideological, political and economic spheres, though it is centred on politics", while also stating: "a final offensive refers to the last part of the strategic offensive of a revolution ... We hold that we are witnessing the strategic offensive of the world revolution – we do not say that the final offensive is taking place today. Furthermore, we view the strategic offensive of the world revolution as a protracted process – not something brief – consisting of twists and turns and even setbacks."

This is correctly distinguishes between the essential trend of development (we are living in an era where entering into the general revolutionary offensive is both possible and necessary), and our present stage of counter-revolutionary offensive. However, it fails to assign either of these their logical places within the historical model laid out in the PCP's International Line. If our only criteria for the era of strategic offensive is that we are living in a time when it is generally possible and necessary, why start with the 1980s? Couldn't imperialism as a whole, the era of proletarian revolution, also be considered the era of strategic offensive by this logic? Of course this is unnecessary and absurd – here we only stretch the reasoning in order to reveal its limitations. Further, it is theoretically inconsistent to place this general trend on the same level of analysis as the more particular stages; the trend towards strategic offensive is at a higher level of abstraction than the first period of strategic defensive and strategic equilibrium. This fact is obvious when we consider that

we are not currently in strategic offensive and never have been, while the stages of defensive and equilibrium were tangibly achieved.

In addition, our current stage of strategic defensive has lasted since the victory of Khrushchevite revisionism – 68 years. For comparison the first period of strategic defensive lasted from the Paris Commune to the end of WW2 – from 74 to 78 years, depending on whether we use the victory of the Great Patriotic War or of the Chinese Revolution as our end point. At a certain point the quantity transforms into quality and we have to recognize this current defensive period a significant stage in its own right. So just as we can consider imperialism to be a stage of roughly the same “size” as the period of capitalist free-competition, we should consider our current stage of strategic defensive to be comparable to the first defensive stage.<sup>9</sup> The PCP’s model ignores this entirely in order to artificially construct a linear progression from defensive, to equilibrium, to offensive.

What then is the significance of the quote from Mao, referenced at the beginning of this article, explaining that we are living in an earth-shaking era? Basically, it indicates that revolution is the main trend in the world today. Our objective conditions are an ever-deepening revolutionary situation inexorably linked the crisis of capitalist-imperialism, a historical period where apparent stagnation shifts into rapid change. This necessitates a corresponding shift in the subjective conditions: the rebellions of the masses expand qualitatively and quantitatively, militarized communist parties constitute or reconstitute themselves and develop their respective people’s wars, and the proletariat seizes power. This is characterized by uneven development across different areas of the world. It is also characterized by a disjointed pace of development, both in terms of our current lag of the subjective factors behind the objective factors, and in that we can expect a back and forth movement that may include temporary regressions to lower strategic stages.

All this being said, we should remember that Mao’s prediction of “50 to 100 years”, though good and Marxist, is nevertheless still only a prediction and not a clear demarcation of a strategic stage. We can clarify by stating that our

current stage is that of general counter-revolutionary offensive, desperate in that it rests on the crumbling basis of imperialism. This period has its own particular facets and sub-stages. We will just briefly note that the counter-revolutionary offensive is in a decline, as evidenced by imperialism's continuous failures to maintain control in countries such as Afghanistan, as well as the movements to consolidate the ICM.

The "50 to 100 years", the declining counter-revolutionary offensive, as well as the thesis that revolution is the main trend in the world today: when we put these together we have the correct synthesis of the world situation.<sup>10</sup> In this case, the PCP has a solid analysis in that all of the correct pieces are present, but an incorrect synthesis in that they have not been arranged properly.

Now that the basic issue has been resolved we can turn towards certain practical considerations, in particular Party militarization and electoral boycotts. Although these connections are straightforward, it is still worthwhile to address them in order to prevent the position presented here from being manipulated in support of right-opportunism.

The PCP's Line of Construction of the Three Instruments of the Revolution lists three reasons for militarization (defined in brief as the actions taken to facilitate leadership of a People's War) of Communist Parties, the first being **"because we are in the strategic offensive of the world revolution, we live during the sweeping away of imperialism and reaction from the face of the Earth within the next 50 to 100 years, a time marked by violence in which all kinds of wars take place."**

The general crisis of imperialism we find ourselves in places people's war on the order of the day regardless of the fact that we are not in strategic offensive. Additionally, the two other reasons provided, preventing capitalist restoration and moving towards the sea of armed masses, are quite significant in themselves. Thus rejecting the thesis of worldwide strategic offensive does not invalidate the principle of militarization.

The thesis of strategic offensive has also been used to justify the electoral boycotts are a general tactic. In their document “Don’t vote but fight and resist!”<sup>11</sup> Red Flag Collective (Finland) states:

“The starting point of our second argument is that when the world revolution was in strategic defense, as it was during Lenin, boycotting elections couldn’t be set as a general line for the international communist movement, as is correctly explained by Lenin in his work “Infantile Disorder”. Whereas today, when the world revolution is in strategic offensive and the counter-revolution is in strategic withdrawal, it’s completely correct and imperative for us to set the boycotting of the elections of the bourgeoisie as a general line.”

The electoral boycott is correct as a general tactic. But then what is the reasoning for it, if Red Flag’s explanation doesn’t hold? It would be helpful to study the “Resolution of the St. Petersburg Organisation of the R.S.D.L.P. on the Tactics of Boycott”, written by Lenin<sup>12</sup> to clarify this matter.

The concrete conditions it analyzes can easily be generalized for to our world situation. Here are the factors which would make participation within elections for the purpose of agitation and propaganda a valid tactic:

- 1) At least a significant minority of the deepest masses participates in elections;
- 2) The elections are not rigged or otherwise made near inaccessible to third parties;
- 3) Communist agitation and propaganda is not de jure or de facto suppressed. (This excludes revisionist “communism”. When we understand that anti-revisionism requires waging or preparing for people’s war, and that this will inevitably bring state repression upon revolutionaries, the general irreconcilability of the revolutionary path with electoral participation becomes clear.)



As has already been analyzed at length in various documents, including from Struggle Sessions<sup>13</sup>, these conditions do not generally exist around the world, although there may be some limited exceptions. This fact is strongly connected to the crisis of imperialism we find ourselves in. Thus the line of electoral boycotts held by the international Maoist movement does not need revision.

Communists are revolutionary optimists. To be optimistic means we always keep in mind the bright future ahead of us, and take action to bring it into reality. To be revolutionary means, among other things, we keep our optimism dialectical and grounded in concrete analysis. We study matters from all sides, uncovering both positive and negative aspects to them. Whether it comes to summing up the contributions of a great leader or assessing our current conditions, this attitude is the only one that can allow us to effectively serve the masses, serve the international proletariat, and serve the worldwide socialist revolution.

Notes:

1. Quoted in Lin Biao's Report to the Ninth National Congress of the Communist Party of China; <http://www.paulnoll.com/China/Red-Books/Reports/E-Book-6.html>

2. See here for example: <https://tjen-folket.no/index.php/en/2019/08/16/debate-on-peoples-war/>

3. From the Report of the Fifth Meeting of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist parties and Organisations of Latin America.  
<https://www.demvolkedienenen.org/index.php/en/t-dokumente-en/1301-thesis-on-the-international-situation-and-the-tasks-of-the-international-communist-movement>

#### 4. General Political Line of the Communist Party of Peru

5. *Lenin Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, 1974, Moscow, Volume 21, pages 205–259.

6. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Volume 2

7. *Lin Biao Reference Archive*, 2003. Although Lin Biao was later exposed as a revisionist, the subsequent criticism of his politics did not particularly implicate this document; it is therefore reasonable to assert that this position was held overall by the Communist Party of China's Central Committee at that time. Further, although the PCP does not specifically reference this passage, they do approvingly quote from it on another subject. This provides further legitimacy to the analogy.

8. <https://www.bannedthought.net/International/RIM/AWTW/1993-19/OnRectificationCampaign.htm>

9. One might note that the period of equilibrium was brief in comparison – this is because this stage often has a transitional character, although a protracted period of stalemate is conceivable as well. This corresponds to the dialectical understanding that the two sides of a contradiction are never exactly equal. With the contradiction between revolutionary forces and counterrevolutionary forces, we can say that strategic equilibrium marks the period of qualitative change as the former aspect moves into the primary position.

10. A briefer formulation would be desirable, but the strategic offensive of the world revolution is not the correct one in this case. Also, topics such as the main contradictions in the world today, and the two main forces in the world revolution were not discussed here due to their tangential nature, but they are nevertheless crucial to understand.

11. <https://www.demvolkedienen.org/index.php/en/europa/3103-red-flag-collective-finland-don-t-vote-but-fight-and-resist>

12. Lenin Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1965, Moscow, Volume 10, pages 131–134.

13. <https://struggle-sessions.com/2020/01/21/elections-as-an-instrument-of-counter-revolutionary-war/>

---

**PREVIOUS POST**

*To Be a Bright Torch for Others: On Felix Dzerzhinsky’s Prison Diary and Letters*

---

**NEXT POST**

*Editorial Board Response to “Shake the Earth”*

---

## Leave a Reply

Enter your comment here...

Search ...

# ARCHIVES

---

December 2021

---

November 2021

---

October 2021

---

September 2021

---

August 2021

---

July 2021

---

June 2021

---

May 2021

---

April 2021

---

March 2021

---

February 2021

---

January 2021

---

November 2020

---

October 2020

---

July 2020

---

June 2020

---

May 2020

---

April 2020

---

March 2020

---

---

February 2020

---

January 2020

---

December 2019

---

November 2019

---

October 2019

---

August 2019

---

July 2019

---

June 2019

---

May 2019

---

April 2019

---

February 2019

---

January 2019

---

December 2018

---

November 2018

---

October 2018

---

September 2018

---

August 2018

---

July 2018

---

June 2018

---



**BLOG AT WORDPRESS.COM.**