

The global class war today

written by Gary Wilson
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Protester at a Free Palestine march holds a sign reading “No one is free until we are all free,” expressing global working-class solidarity and resistance to imperialism.

With U.S. imperialist confrontations sharpening on multiple fronts — from the New Cold War against China and the proxy war in Ukraine to the genocide in Gaza and military threats against Venezuela — seeing how these battles link with the liberation struggles spreading across the African Sahel — from Mali to Burkina Faso and Niger — has never been more urgent.

These are not isolated crises. Each reflects the same global struggle between the imperialist powers and the oppressed peoples fighting for sovereignty, equality, and self-determination.

To fight against racism, sexism, transphobia, LGBTQIA oppression, and capitalist exploitation here, we need to connect with the struggles abroad — we need to see the world as one battlefield.

Sam Marcy provided that view in his theory of the global class war — developed in the wake of the 1949 Chinese Revolution, the Korean War, and the great wave of decolonization. These upheavals transformed the global balance of forces and confirmed Lenin’s insight that the struggle between imperialism and the oppressed nations had become the decisive front of world politics. Marcy’s framework still helps us make sense of today’s world — and reminds us which side we’re on.

Lenin’s foundations

Lenin had already shown that imperialism created a single, interlinked global system — a world economy dominated by finance capital and monopolies, where a handful of oppressor nations exploited the labor and resources of the vast majority.

In “Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism” (1916), he demonstrated that this new stage fused banking and industrial capital into finance capital, turned

capitalism's main drive from exporting goods to exporting capital, and made colonial conquest an essential part of the economic rivalry among imperialist powers.

From that point forward, class struggle could no longer be understood as separate national battles. Imperialism had created a global class war: workers in imperialist countries and the liberation struggles of colonized nations were now fighting the same enemy — the system of finance capital and imperialist domination.

The Communist International under Lenin captured this new reality by updating the Communist Manifesto's call to read: "Workers and oppressed peoples of the world, unite!"

It made clear that workers in the imperialist countries and the peoples of the oppressed nations share one fight against imperialist domination.

Just as important was Lenin's work on the national question, especially "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination" (1914). He argued that the fight of oppressed nations against imperialist domination was objectively revolutionary, regardless of the class composition of their leadership. Each victory of a colonized or semi-colonized people struck a direct blow against the imperialist system as a whole.

The right of nations to self-determination was not an abstract slogan but a concrete weapon against imperialist rule. Lenin understood that genuine independence required breaking not only the grip of foreign imperialism but also the power of local capitalist collaborators who profit from it.

Lenin also showed how super-profits from the colonies allowed the ruling class of the imperialist countries to "bribe" an upper layer of the working class, creating a social base for opportunism and reformism. Lenin called this layer a "labor aristocracy."

This analysis explained why revolutions were likely to break out first in the "weakest

links” of the imperialist chain, rather than in the most advanced capitalist countries.

At the Communist International, Lenin stressed that communists in the imperialist centers had a special duty to support the liberation struggles of colonized peoples, even when led by moderate non-aligned forces.

In short, Lenin uncovered the global structure of capitalism — and therefore the global character of the class struggle itself.

Marcy's development of the framework

Sam Marcy took this Leninist insight — the global nature of imperialism and the global character of class struggle — and developed it into a guide for revolutionary strategy in the post-World War II world.

Lenin revealed how imperialism worked; Marcy took those lessons and applied them to the battles of the mid- and late-20th century: the global class war was not a metaphor but a living struggle between the imperialist powers, led by the United States, and the oppressed nations — at home and abroad — united with the working peoples of the world.

Marcy recognized that the rise of socialist states, the national liberation movements sweeping Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and the uprisings against racism, inequality, and imperialist war inside the imperialist countries were all fronts of the same world conflict.

He emphasized that workers in the imperialist countries bore a special responsibility to fight against their own ruling class's wars, sanctions, and occupations — embodied in Lenin's slogan: “The main enemy is in your own country — your own ruling class.”

By bringing Lenin's ideas into the age of neocolonialism and nuclear threat, Marcy

developed the concept of global class war as the central dynamic of the postwar world.

This framework transformed Lenin's theoretical discovery into a method of political practice — linking every struggle, whether in the workplace or in the streets, to the worldwide fight against imperialism.

From theory to political practice

This analysis shaped a practical program of revolutionary organizing.

It meant active involvement in strikes and workplace struggles and militant participation in movements against systemic racism, police violence, mass incarceration, and for Black liberation and self-determination.

It meant standing with struggles for women's equality, trans rights and LGBTQIA liberation, immigrant rights, Indigenous sovereignty, disability justice, and environmental survival — understanding all of them as connected struggles in the same global fight against imperialism.

The fight against racism, sexism, and all forms of oppression inside the imperialist countries was inseparable from the anti-imperialist fight abroad.

These systems of oppression keep capitalist power in place at home — and work hand in hand with imperialism abroad.

Marcy's outlook also demanded unwavering opposition to one's own government's wars and interventions.

Support for states and movements resisting U.S. domination — from socialist Cuba to national-liberation fronts in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East — was not charity but solidarity in a common war against the imperialist system itself.

Imperialism and resistance in our time

Marcy's framework, grounded in Leninism and shaped by the great struggles of the 20th century, still guides revolutionaries today.

The world Marcy described has only intensified: more billionaires, more bombs, and more lies to keep the workers of the world divided.

From Gaza to Venezuela, from the Sahel to the streets of New York, the same forces are colliding: the drive of U.S.-led imperialism to maintain world domination, and the determination of oppressed peoples to break free.

The unity of domestic and international struggle — and the recognition that the main enemy is at home — remain the foundation of true internationalism.

For Marcy, the global class war was not a contest of blocs or nations but of classes. It was a dialectical struggle — constantly shifting with the contradictions of imperialism — internationalism, not geopolitics, and solidarity rooted in working-class unity, not allegiance to states or ruling classes.

The global class war is not an abstraction — it is the daily fight between imperialism and humanity. It is the recognition that our struggle is bound up with the struggles of workers and oppressed peoples everywhere.

Every struggle — for housing, for land, for liberation — is part of the global class war.

Sam Marcy's insight was simple but revolutionary: The front lines of the class struggle encircle the globe.

Our task is to join them — and win.

Gary Wilson, a managing editor at Struggle-La Lucha, worked closely with Sam

Marcy in the 1980s and 1990s, transcribing and editing his political writings.

