

Expanding Empire Chapter 10: Korea: First battle in global class war

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There has been a change in the character of U.S. wars, beginning with the Korean War in 1950.

“Expand or die” is still the fundamental economic mainspring that drives the big corporations — and in fact they are expanding faster than ever in their foreign investment programs. But having had large pieces of the world taken away from them, they have not only lost big fields in which to expand, but are faced with the threat of sudden forced contractions.

They have felt, ever since 1917, “the chill of expropriation” — that is, the possibility of losing everything to the people they exploit. Their struggle against this is consequently more frenetic, lying, deceitful and murderous than even their drive to expand. This drive has run up against the world masses’ drive to be free.

The economic law that enjoins the corporations to “expand or die” is transmuting itself into a political law that compels them to attack the people wherever there is the least sign of rebellion, even if billions of dollars are not immediately involved. The smallest outbreak of the world revolution may, under some conditions, spread like a prairie fire, and imperialism has now adopted the role of firefighter as well as plunderer.

The United States military would have found its way to Vietnam, even if socialism never existed, as we have shown. And, as a matter of fact, had it not been for the

great struggles and socialist achievements of so many millions of people, the U.S. generals would today certainly be sitting in Beijing, as well as Saigon.

But the world liberation struggle and the very existence of the socialist countries have added a tremendous dimension to modern war both in challenging the expansion drive of big business and in calling into existence a new spirit that did not exist to any degree among the countless victims of imperialism in the colonies 50 to 100 years ago. The war in Vietnam, as many of its supporters and opponents instinctively realize, is a class war — a war not only of an imperialist bully against a small nation fighting for freedom and independence, but a war of the exploiting class against the exploited.

And the war, which already threatens to spread to Cambodia, Laos and perhaps Thailand — not to mention China — is part of a worldwide phenomenon.

It is no longer the one-sided expansion of a reactionary and outlived system of billionaires; it is the conflict between the expansion and the intended victims of that expansion, now armed with the perspective of a new and superior social system. It is a “global class war.”

The war in Vietnam has its roots in the U.S. seizure of the Philippines, in Pearl Harbor and in Hiroshima. That infamous “police action,” as President Harry S Truman called it, was the first occasion of a major U.S. war that took on both the movements of national liberation and the engagement, although to a limited extent, of the socialist countries. While President Woodrow Wilson flirted briefly with an open intervention against the infant Soviet state — Archangel, 1918 — but the U.S. troops mutinied and Wilson withdrew them.

Big business was involved, as always, directly with its most immediate interests. Less than five years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the U.S Army was in Korea. Some 54,000 GIs died and 103,000 were wounded so that Gulf Oil, Fairchild

Camera, Continental Carbon and dozens of other companies could invest there. And so that Macy's, Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward could buy the products of 35-cents-a-day workers, to sell with enormous profit in the United States.

But in 1950, despite the start of a new depression that could be averted only by war production, the U.S. ruling capitalists might not have sponsored another war for purely immediate economic reasons. However, to apply a slogan of Mao Zedong to the big business ruling class, "politics was now in command."

The McCarthyite witch-hunt that prevailed in U.S. domestic politics at the time was based to a large extent on the recriminations over "how we lost China." The more extreme anti-Communists took over in the U.S. with a determination to go after the countries that were possible threats to U.S. investment anywhere in the world, as well as potential obstacles to future expansion. Above all, they hoped and even expected to "get China back."

Korea and "how we lost China"

China, it must never be forgotten, is in the very heartland of the continent that U.S. business had its eye on — not just since 1900 but for almost two centuries. China was the prize in the diplomatic duels with Britain in the 19th century. China was one of the prizes for which the Spanish-American war was fought and the Panama Canal was built.

China was the prize for which Japan was maneuvered into fighting Czarist Russia in 1904-05, and for which Japan was later conquered and Hiroshima and Nagasaki were incinerated. China was the prize for which scores of thousands of American youth unknowingly went to their death. And above all — for the U.S. banks — the prize for which the banks loaned billions of dollars to the U.S. government.

But in 1949, the prize was taken away. On Oct. 1 of that year, the Chinese

Communist Party, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, took power, founded the People's Republic of China — and broke the chain that had bound the country to all foreign exploitation. The revolution laid the basis for the end of all internal exploitation as well.

And China has not only torn itself out of the orbit of the exploiters, but has now constituted itself as a new entity in mortal opposition to them all.

As Sam Marcy wrote in 1950 in a document entitled “The Global Class War”: “A new class power, basing itself fundamentally on the workers and peasants, has seized the reins of power, and is now attempting to shape the destiny of China in a new direction. That bourgeois relations still predominate in industry and agriculture (at that time — V.C.) is incontrovertible. But what is of the greatest moment is that the political power of the former ruling class has been shattered, their ‘body of armed men’ disarmed or destroyed, and their main source of strength and recuperative power, their nexus to and dependence upon imperialism, shattered. China is a workers’ state because the main and fundamental obstacle to the rule of the workers and peasants — the bourgeois-landlord-imperialist alliance — has been swept away, and a new alliance based on workers and peasants erected in its place. It is not a chemically pure dictatorship of the proletariat (even the Chinese government did not claim it was at that time — V.C.), as no social formation ever is, but its fundamental class content is beyond doubt.”

Marcy's thesis was universally challenged at the time, both in the proletarian and bourgeois camps in the United States. Today, when history has so brilliantly proven it to be correct, the revisionists and social democrats of various stripes accept some of its terminology only to reject its essence and oppose the proletarian Cultural Revolution.

The bourgeoisie, needless to say, are now completely united in their estimate of People's China as the very quintessence of the communist danger and are only

divided over the tactical question of what to do about it.

The division, in turn, is only a reflection of the mighty power of the Chinese Revolution and the world revolution, which on the one side stymies big business's plans to expand, and on the other, challenges the very existence of big business.

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