Imperialism and the Logic of Hegemony: The ‘People’ in the Class Struggle

‘A shift in the structure of experience . . .’
As I pass down Broadway this misty late-winter morning, the city is ever alluring, but thousands of miles to the south the subsistence farms of chickens, yams and guava are bought by transnationals, burst into miles of export tobacco and coffee; and now it seems the farmer has left behind his plowed-under village for an illegal partitioned attic in the outer boroughs. Perhaps he’s the hand that emerged with your change from behind the glossies at the corner kiosk; the displaced of capital have come to the capital.

A shift in the structure of experience told the farmer on his Andean plateau ‘Your way of life is obsolescent.’ – But hasn’t it always been so? I inquire as my column spills from page one to MONEY&BUSINESS. But no, it says here the displaced stream now to tarpaper favelas, planetary barracks with steep rents for paperless migrants, so that they remit less to those obsolescent, starving relatives on the altiplano, pushed up to ever thinner air and soil; unnoticed the narrative has altered.

– ANNE WINTERS

The War and the Split in Socialism

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria by Serbian nationalists occurred against the backdrop of a system of military alliances that

1 Winters 2004, pp. 11–12.
enmeshed the great powers of Europe. It served to trigger a war whose ultimate stakes, Lenin would claim, were the terms of the division and re-division of the world among the powers; this made it a struggle whose roots could be traced to a new, imperialist stage of capitalism. The conflict had been brewing for years and had been expected, not least by the Marxist thinkers and the social-democratic parties of the Second International. The phenomenal growth of militarism had been traced in Rudolf Hilferding’s *Finance Capital* and Rosa Luxemburg’s *Accumulation of Capital* to a capitalist mainspring that set in motion the imperialist pursuit of colonies and of domination more generally. In *The Road to Power* Kautsky had already established a link between imperialism, militarism and the intensification of class antagonisms: the growth of proletarian power and the trepidation it inspired among the bourgeoisie had held back a European war for three decades, but ‘the great powers are heading toward a situation in which the rifles will finally fire of themselves’. It was the duty of the international proletariat to fight imperialism and militarism: ‘war means revolution’, and the proletariat could ‘no longer speak of a premature revolution when it has drawn from the existing governmental framework as much strength as could be drawn from it, when a transformation of this framework has become a condition of its further advancement’. The 1907 Stuttgart Congress of the International adopted a resolution on ‘Militarism and International Conflicts’ that enjoined Social Democrats to treat the crisis provoked by war as a means to hasten the downfall of capitalism. The 1912 Basel Congress produced a ‘Manifesto’ predicting that war would engender economic and political crisis, enjoining the workers to regard as criminal any violence against each other for the sake of capitalist profit, dynastic honour or secret diplomatic treaties, committing socialists to take advantage of the wartime difficulties of the government and the indignation of the masses to further socialist revolution, and threatening bourgeois governments with the examples of the Paris Commune and the 1905 revolution in Russia as indicating what might be reaped from the seeds of war.

If the World War was a tangible expression of the crisis of capitalism, it brought to maturity, with a rapidity that stunned Lenin, among others, what had been for some time a *crise larvée* in international socialism.

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2 Hilferding 1910.
3 Luxemburg 1913.
4 Kautsky 1909, p. 80.
5 Kautsky 1909, p. 84.
6 See, for example, the account in Joll 1955; see also Lenin 1907a, p. 80; 1907b, p. 92.
7 See Lenin 1915b, p. 213; 1915d, pp. 307–8; see also Luxemburg 1914–15, pp. 293–301.