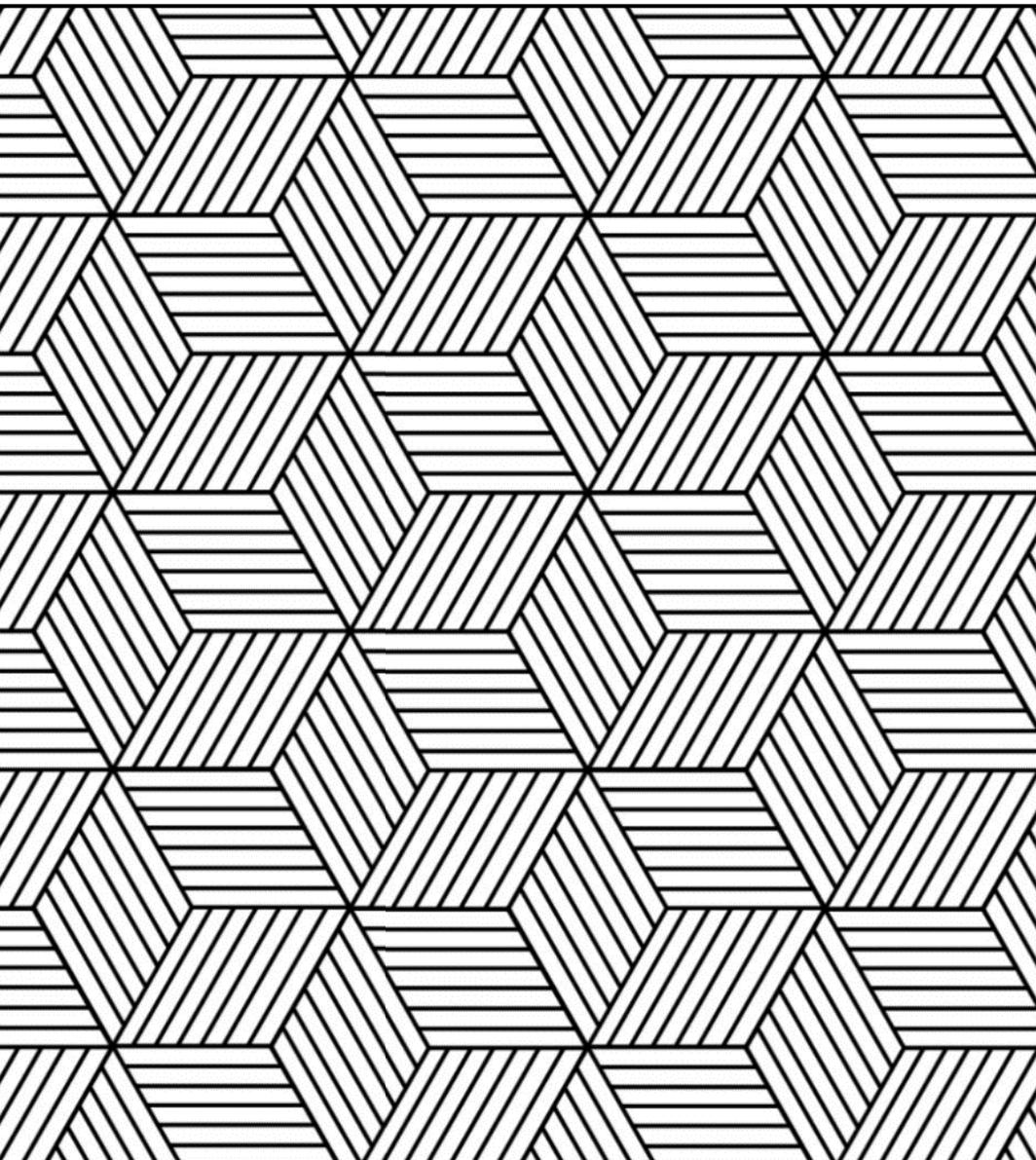


TOWARD AN

INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY

J. Michael Dawn



Marxist philosophy holds that the most important problem does not lie in understanding the laws of the objective world and thus being able to explain it, but in applying the knowledge of these laws actively to change the world. . . . Only social practice can be the criterion of truth. - Mao Tse-tung¹

For those socialists who would "change the world," theory must both serve revolutionary practice and be guided by it. Successful revolutionary strategies must be derived from correct theory, and where strategies fail these failures must be used to correct and advance theoretical understanding. Unfortunately, this is more easily accepted "in theory" than "in practice."

Among Left groups in the United States there is a tendency for theory to become rigid. Instead of being guided by social practice, theory is more often used as a test of one's loyalty to "the group" and as a screen to filter through those social facts which tend to support it. Marxism is thus reduced from a scientific method of social analysis to a dogma.

In most cases, rather than question long-standing theoretical assumptions, contending left groups implicitly agree upon the latter while engaging in polemic battles over "correct" strategies and tactics. One such theoretical assumption is very widespread and of great importance. It is reflected in two rarely well articulated views regarding the probability, timing, and nature of an "American socialist revolution."

There are, on the one hand, those who maintain or imply that there is little likelihood of an armed socialist revolution in the United States, that it is at best very far off, and that a socialist America will be the end-product of a long and relatively peaceful process of structural reform. On the other hand, there are those who hold that an armed socialist revolution in the United States is inevitable, that it will occur in the not-too-distant future, and that it will involve rapid and sweeping structural changes.

¹ Mao Tse-tung, *On Practice*. In the *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1965, pp. 297, 304.

The point here is that these opposing views, and others like them, share a vital implicit assumption: that the correct unit of analysis is the United States. They agree, in other words, that the social unit wherein socialism will come through armed revolutionary struggle or peaceful reform is the United States and, by implication, that the decisive social forces involved in this process lie within the American nation. For many, theoretical justification for this assumption is found in the writings of Marx, and historical proof of its correctness in the Russian and Chinese Revolutions.

Even where this model of "national" socialist transformation is not explicitly asserted, it operates nonetheless through a vocabulary of nationalism which identifies the relevant social system in terms such as "here" and "there," "American" and "Bolivian," "our struggle" and "theirs." Few indeed are those United States socialists who fail to take pride in the "Americanness" of the coming "American Revolution." For this, they proclaim, "we" can and must achieve in "our" country just as the Cubans had to achieve "theirs" in Cuba. In what follows, I shall try to show that this deeply entrenched theoretical position is both false and, more important, it impedes the development of sound revolutionary strategy and tactics.

Imperialism has been a commonplace subject of serious discussion at least since Lenin. All socialists acknowledge its existence, tacitly recognize its importance, and make public anti-imperialist pronouncements. There are surprisingly few, however, who treat the imperialist system as the proper social unit for the class analysis of modern capitalist society. Still fewer use such analyses to fashion revolutionary strategies.

If we are to proceed to such an analysis and strategy, it is important at the outset to recognize that capitalism, since its inception, has been an international system of competing empires and nations. Each capitalist empire, rather than a mere aggregate or collection of nations, has represented a complex set of social relationships linking a number of nations and peoples within a single integrated system.

Over the past few centuries there has been a divergent development within imperialism between the dominant mercantile-industrial nations of Europe, North America, and Japan, and the subordinate industrially underdeveloped "agrarian" nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This divergence has not been accidental, nor has it been "caused" by geographical, racial, or psychological factors. Dominance and subordination within the imperialist system have always been accompanied, respectively, by economic

development and underdevelopment. As Gunder Frank has recently demonstrated with respect to Latin America, development and underdevelopment are but two sides of the same imperialist coin.

The metropolis expropriates economic surplus from its satellites and appropriates it for its own economic development. The satellites remain underdeveloped for lack of access to their own surplus. . . . One and the same historical process of expansion and development throughout the world has generated-and continues to generate-both economic development and structural underdevelopment.²

These surpluses drained from the subordinate to the metropolitan nations of the capitalist world have amounted, in recent years, to more than \$30 million an hour. In addition, the dominant nations of modern imperialism control more than three fourths of the known major mineral resources in Asian, African, and Latin American countries and about four fifths of the total output of 22 kinds of important raw materials in these same countries.³

Classical capitalist empires, with few exceptions such as "Greater Portugal," have passed from the contemporary scene. These were named politico-economic systems (e.g., the British Empire) containing a dominant metropolitan country and subordinate colonies. Direct political rule and administration were used by the metropolitan ruling class to consolidate and expand its mercantile and, later, financial privileges and monopoly control within the colonized nations. Police and military forces of the metropolis were employed directly within the colonies to maintain "law and order" and safeguard metropolitan interests against the colonized masses.

Modern capitalist empires, by contrast, are not named and contain a dominant industrial metropolis and nominally independent "neocolonies." Indirect political control and influence, based primarily on economic power, are employed by the metropolitan ruling class to establish and broaden its economic and other privileges within the neocolonies. This economic power is today wielded by a few giant corporations of the metropolitan centers through capital

² Frank, Andre Gunder, *Development & Underdevelopment in Latin America*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1967, p. 9

³ Nan Han-chen, *Resolutely Struggle Against Imperialism & NeoColonialism & For the Economic Emancipation of the Afro-Asian Peoples*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1965, p. 6

penetration, monopoly control of strategic resources and advanced technology, manipulation of commodity markets, and so on.

As with political control, military power is preferably employed indirectly, through nationals of the neocolonies, Policing the masses is normally left in the hands of the local regimes which are propped up by metropolitan economic and military "aid," advisory and training missions, and so on. In the background, however, stand the military bases and mobile forces of the metropolitan state, ready to intervene directly should revolutionary action threaten to put an end to metropolitan ruling class privilege. Today, for example, in order to defend its vast empire against the threat of socialist revolution, the United States maintains throughout the world an estimated 3,300 military bases and is employing more than half a million combat troops in Vietnam alone.⁴

Modern empires are themselves related within the system of international capitalism. Some neocolonies are "shared" by two or more metropolitan centers which compete for monopoly control over strategic resources and markets. Such is the case, for example, of Guyana with respect to the United States and Britain. Instead of being territorially exclusive, as with classical empires, modern empires thus tend to have overlapping neocolonial spheres of influence and control.

Again, the several metropolises of contemporary empires stand to one another as dominant or subordinate within a hierarchical international system. Recent shifts and conflicts, particularly since the Second World War, have seen the United States move into a seemingly unchallengeable position as dominant metropolis of the capitalist world. Through its growing military and economic power, the United States has expanded its imperial domain and influence at the expense of weaker dominant nations and the waning classical empires they ruled. The shift in status to "political independence" of many subordinate nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America has constituted, in fact, a movement from direct old-style colonization under the British, French, Dutch, Japanese, etc., to neocolonization within the expanding American Empire.⁵ And to the extent that

⁴ From Bertrand Russell's message to the First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, held in Havana in January, 1966. Reprinted in *The Minority of One*, January, 1966.

⁵ See Baran and Sweezy's *Monopoly Capital*, Chapter 7, for a further development of this point. They conservatively list, as belonging to the American Empire: "The United States itself and a few colonial possessions (notably Puerto Rico and the Pacific islands); all Latin American countries except Cuba; Canada; four countries in the Near

the other metropolitan centers have themselves become semisatellites of the United States through capital penetration, NATO, etc., the United States has become the leading metropolis of a modern World Empire. With only 6 percent of the world's population, the United States today owns or controls nearly 60 percent of the world's known natural resources.⁶

Clearly, the fundamental contradiction of our era is between the international systems of capitalism and socialism. The violent struggles to resolve this contradiction are being waged today primarily within the imperialist system, where liberation movements fight to achieve genuine political independence and rapid economic advance. That the struggles for national liberation and socialism are very closely related has been persuasively argued by Baran and Sweezy in *Monopoly Capital*:

...policing the empire and fighting socialism are rapidly becoming, if they are not already, one and the same. For the threat to the empire comes from revolutionary movements which ... are sparked by a deep-seated yearning for national independence and are fueled by an increasingly urgent need for economic development, which experience is proving cannot be achieved today except on the basis of public enterprise and comprehensive planning - in short, only if their national revolutions are also socialist revolutions.⁷

Viewed from a class standpoint, the American and other contemporary capitalist empires can be seen to contain three basic class contradictions. Since these contradictions are antagonistic and irreconcilable, they will require major structural changes for their resolution. In fact, for their complete resolution they will require nothing less than the total elimination of imperialism.

The first and fundamental contradiction within the modern empire is between the ruling class of the industrialized metropolis and the combined peasant and worker classes of the neocolonies. Cutting across national

and Middle East (Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran); four countries in South and Southeast Asia (Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines, and South Vietnam); two countries in East Asia (South Korea and Formosa); two countries in Africa (Liberia and Libya); and one country in Europe (Greece)." This empire, the authors state, contained 18,467,000 square miles and 660,600,000 people as of 1960. Taking into account those subordinate nations in which the United States shares power with other metropolises, these figures would be greatly increased.

⁶ Bertrand Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁷ Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, p. 206

boundaries, this, contradiction involves the major exploiting and exploited classes within the total empire. The second contradiction pits the ruling class of each neocolony against its domestic peasant and worker classes. This contradiction is vividly revealed in the armed. struggles now taking place in Burma, Guatemala, Venezuela, etc., between the forces of the ruling national and comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisies and those of the peasant-worker masses. The third contradiction is between the ruling class of the metropolis and its domestic proletariat. This struggle pits a largely urban working class against the "military-industrial complex" of the metropolitan giant corporations.

Though these three contradictions are closely related, they are not equal in importance or, during anyone period, in intensity. The first, empire-wide contradiction is of fundamental importance because it exercises a decisive influence on the others. The full achievement of proletarian and peasant-worker states in the metropolis and neocolonies depends in large measure upon the progressive resolution of this empire-wide contradiction.

Wars of national liberation represent efforts to resolve the first and second contradictions in favor of the neocolonial masses. The first task of such movements is to' overthrow their local ruling class and state apparatus, which will bring them into indirect, then direct, confrontation with, the military arm of the metropolitan state. Secondly, they must break or fundamentally alter their relationship with the metropolitan ruling class so as to eliminate the latter's privilege and consolidate worker-peasant state power. This involves nationalizing foreign owned industry and commercial firms, re-orienting trade, cutting colonial cultural and ideological ties.

In this revolutionary process it is obvious that the achievement of state power by the neocolonial masses must precede the breaking of old and unequal relations with the metropolis. It is equally clear, however, that the severance of neocolonial ties with the metropolis is a precondition for the consolidation of worker-peasant state power. For example: In Cuba the domestic class struggle was consolidated in favor of the peasants and workers only when the latter fundamentally altered their relations with the United States ruling class. In Mexico, however, the domestic class contradiction was only partially and temporarily resolved through the revolutionary struggles of a half century ago because the relationship between the Mexican masses and United States ruling class was not fundamentally altered.

It can be seen, then, that in the course of contemporary revolutionary struggles, the conflict of greatest intensity and immediacy shifts from the

"internal" class contradiction within the neocolony to the "external" contradiction between the neocolonial masses and the metropolitan ruling class; and that victory in both spheres is a necessary condition for victory in each.

Let us now contrast the third contradiction, pitting the metropolitan working class against its domestic ruling class, with the other two. It is clear that at present the metropolitan class struggle is less acute than the conflicts between the neocolonial masses and their respective internal and external ruling classes. In fact, with the flourishing of both old and new empires since the 1880's, the proletarian movements of the various metropolitan centers have tended more toward reform politics and narrow economic interests than toward armed revolution and the seizure of state power.

These two developments, of imperialist growth and working class accommodation, are not unrelated. The very existence of colonies and neocolonies has served the dual purpose of strengthening the metropolitan bourgeoisies and hindering the development of revolutionary conditions among the metropolitan proletariats. The fact that a significant and highly influential sector of the metropolitan working class has received a "corrupting" share of the profits of imperialist super-exploitation has been frequently noted. Thus Engels wrote in 1882:

You ask me what the English workers think about colonial policy. Well, exactly the same as they think about politics in general: the same as the bourgeois think. There is no worker's party here, you see, there are only Conservatives and Liberal Radicals, and the workers share the feast of England's monopoly of the world market and colonies.⁸

Lenin, writing on the same subject in 1916, observed:

Obviously, out of such enormous superprofits (since they are obtained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their "own" country) it is possible to bribe the labour leaders and the upper stratum of the labour aristocracy. And the capitalists of the "advanced" countries are bribing them;

⁸ Engels, Frederick, Marx & Engels On Colonialism, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1963, p, 340

they bribe them in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect, overt and covert.⁹

More recently, in 1958, Frantz Fanon wrote:

The "metropolitan" capitalists allow social advantages and wage increases to be wrung from them by their workers to the exact extent to which the colonialist state allows them to exploit and make raids on the occupied territories. At the critical point . . . the interest of the "metropolitan" workers and peasants seems to go counter to that of the colonized peoples.¹⁰

Finally, as if to corroborate this view, AFL-CIO president George Meany told reporters on December 6, 1967: "**Nobody likes this [Vietnam] war. ... But we're in there to protect the interests and security of the American people.... Labor's interests are closely tied to ... the Johnson administration.**"¹¹

If imperialism has served at least the short-run material interests of the metropolitan proletariat, what then is the relationship between revolutionary struggles in the metropolis and in the neocolonies? First, it must be noted that the sequence of revolutionary phases within the empire is necessarily reversed. In the neocolonial sphere, so long as the empire can be said to exist, a subordinate nation's ruling class and state must be overthrown before the underprivileged nature of its relations with the metropolis can be destroyed and its economic independence established. In the metropolitan center, however, the successful proletarian revolution cannot but follow a certain critical stage in the development of national liberation struggles in the neocolonies.

Viewed from a slightly different and, I believe, more fruitful angle as a single revolution within the multinational imperialist system, the revolutionary armed struggle can be seen 'as spreading from the more oppressed and impoverished peasants and workers in the neocolonies to the less but, as the struggle continues, increasingly exploited proletariat of the metropolis. Generalizing on the successful Chinese strategy of establishing rural base areas and encircling the cities from the countryside, Lin Piao has put the matter this way:

⁹ Lenin, V. I., *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, International Publishers, New York, 1939, pp. 13-14.

¹⁰ Fanon, Frantz, *Toward The African Revolution*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1967, p. 145

¹¹ *International Herald Tribune*, Wednesday, December 6, 1967

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 movement has for various reasons been temporarily held back in North America 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 encirclement of cities by the rural areas.¹²

We have already noted the major factor which has "held back" the proletarian revolutionary movement in the Western metropolises. In the American Empire there is little doubt that the superprofits reaped by the multinational giant corporations in the neocolonies and satellites, together with the vast military expenditures necessary to sustain and expand this "free world colossus," serve both to strengthen the corporate ruling class and to "buy off" large and significant sectors of the working class. The reasons why this metropolitan "class collaboration" is only a temporary phenomenon are also to be found in the developing relationship of forces within the Empire.

Facing material conditions which are steadily deteriorating, and with a growing knowledge that socialism provides the answer to their most pressing economic problems, the masses in more and more neocolonies are entering the path of armed revolution. In order to defend its imperial domain against socialist "encroachment," the American ruling class faces a very serious dilemma. On the one hand, minimal defense and eventual loss of neocolonies, as happened in the case of Cuba, will result in a steady cut-back in superprofits, the forfeiture of monopoly control over commodity markets and vital raw materials, and a narrowing of capital investment-outlets, all of which promises to heighten domestic economic contradictions to a dangerous degree. On the other hand, by waging a number of protracted counter-revolutionary wars, as in Vietnam, the United States ruling class will both exacerbate its strategic military manpower weakness and increase the ranks of disgruntled workers, alienated students, and disaffected intellectuals in the metropolis. For it is certain that multiple and protracted counter-insurgency efforts will eventually undercut the privileges of the upper and middle white working class, and intensify the oppression of the lower white and black proletariat and *lumpens* of the ghetto. At the same time, these counter-revolutionary struggles will, ironically, demand an increasingly

¹² Lin Piao, Long Live the Victory of People's War, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1965, pp, 48-49.

higher price in blood from the proletariat as a whole, which must serve as the major source of cannon-fodder in the military defense of imperial privilege.

If this analysis is correct, then it is of paramount importance for United States socialists to abandon their parochial national bias and outlook, and to begin to fashion revolutionary theory and strategy within an imperialist framework. It is the Empire, rather than the nation, which defines and determines the character of the social system in which we live, suffer or benefit, struggle or acquiesce. And, though we happen to reside in the privileged metropolis-and in fact share in its privileges-it is the whole Empire which should determine the range and nature of our revolutionary action.

Surely the United States "military-industrial complex," with its multinational giant corporations, wide-ranging military operations, and CIA escapades, recognizes and accepts its "responsibilities" as an imperial ruling class. Through its official pronouncements and mass-media propaganda it is constantly proclaiming or bemoaning its role and duties as policeman of the "Free World" and shouting of the need to protect "our national interest" in Vietnam, Guatemala, the Congo, etc. It is also clear that the peasant-worker masses in an increasing number of neocolonies recognize their subordinate and underprivileged position within the Empire and are struggling in various ways to break free of its exploitative grasp. What is not at all clear is that United States revolutionaries understand their position within the Empire and, further, accept their responsibilities in the anti-imperialist struggles which are raging. They fail, it seems, to comprehend or fully appreciate the essential unity and internal dynamics of the struggle for socialism and against imperialism. They fail to see, in short, that a revolutionary movement within any particular neocolony both implies and represents a revolutionary movement within the American Empire and against the American ruling class-that since revolutionary struggles are in fact taking place in several neocolonies such as Vietnam, Guatemala, and Venezuela, they are ipso facto occurring within the American Empire as well; and that it is no longer a question of "if" or "when" the "American" revolution is going to begin, but of how best to employ our forces in the unitary anti-imperialist revolution which is *already well under way*.

Socialism, it is here argued, can be most effectively struggled for and achieved within the American nation only as and when the *multinational* imperialist system which sustains its monopoly capitalist character and ruling class is dismembered and destroyed. If this is so, the most important strategic question for those of us who happen to be living within the "cities" of the Empire

is: How do we most effectively relate ourselves to the revolutionary struggles now occurring in the imperial "countryside"?

In answering this question I would suggest that what we need is a dual "urban-rural" strategy. On the "rural" or neocolonial front this will involve United States revolutionaries, together with militants of the other metropolitan centers, in both direct and indirect participation in revolutionary anti-imperialist struggles. Those participating directly in the armed struggle in the "countryside," as technicians, combatants, etc., should be assisted by militants remaining within the "city" and responsible for such tasks as recruitment, the provision of funds and material, and propaganda.

On the "urban" or metropolitan front, during the present stage of the struggle, our primary strategy should be to harass and morally isolate the ruling-class regime. A wide variety of mass organizations and both legal and illegal tactics can be employed for the purposes of increasing popular disaffection, furthering the moral isolation of the Establishment, and tying down United States troops within the metropolis.

The two dimensions of this "rural-urban" strategy are, of course, closely related. An advance in one sphere increases the likelihood of success in the other. Thus, in the "urban" spheres, increasing harassment and moral isolation of the Establishment will exacerbate its critical military manpower weakness both by forcing it to divert significant numbers of troops from the "countryside" to the "city" for urban repressive measures, and by further reducing the morale of its forces. Again, by successfully advancing an anti-imperialist ideology, and by expanding the meaning of the term "the people" to include the exploited masses of the entire Empire, subjective conditions for increasing "urban" support of "rural" liberation movements will be fostered.

In the "rural" sphere, increasing participation by metropolitan revolutionaries in national liberation struggles will accelerate the development of revolutionary material and subjective conditions among United States and Western European workers. Not only will it help advance the dismemberment process within the Empire, thus weakening the metropolitan ruling class, but it will undercut the lulling material advantages of the upper "urban" proletariat and middle class. More important, perhaps, is the fact that it will provide a *material foundation* for the urgently needed internationalist component of metropolitan socialist ideology.

The metropolitan Left all too frequently underestimates its strength and potential contribution to the international socialist revolution. Many are still under the sway of parochial, internally oriented ideologies. Others are overwhelmed by the relative numerical inferiority of metropolitan Left forces. And almost all tend to take for granted the vast technical skills and resources at their disposal in the metropolis. Our contention here is that despite our current numerical weakness, there are literally thousands of young militants in the capitalist centers who would be willing to serve in the anti-imperialist struggles taking place in the imperial "countryside"; that there are many more who would be willing to support such actions while remaining "at home"; that in addition to manpower, the technical skills and resources we have to offer could be put to good use by most liberation movements; and finally that we can, and of course should, make a significant contribution to the struggle against imperialism and the eventual victory of the international socialist revolution.

"Socialists in the United States," as the editors of MONTHLY REVIEW have written, "have got to stop thinking of themselves as a tiny minority with the task-which many of them have already concluded is hopeless-of making a specifically American revolution. Instead, they must think of themselves as members of an immense international movement capable of embracing the overwhelming majority of mankind, which has the revolutionary task of defeating and overthrowing international imperialism."¹³

The struggle for socialism "in the United States" is and must be international in scope. The Dien Bien Phus of the international revolution are as likely to occur in Mexico, Indonesia, or the Congo, as in the United States itself. In fact, as the revolution spreads to increasing numbers of colonies and neocolonies within the United States-dominated international capitalist system; the whole notion and reality of exclusive "national" boundaries may begin to fade into relative insignificance. It is surely time for the United States Left to realize-and act accordingly that there simply will not be an isolated "American" revolution. Our revolution will of necessity be international. Our strategy and tactics must be geared to this reality.

¹³ Monthly Review, June, 1965, p. 3.

Don Barnett (aka **J. Michael Dawn**) was an American anthropologist who taught at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver and founded the Liberation Support Movement (LSM) in 1969. LSM was an anti-imperialist organization that supported liberation movements in Southern Africa, Guinea-Bissau, East Timor, Eritrea, Oman, and Palestine. At its peak LSM organized and sent medical shipments, clothing and resources to the MPLA of Angola, sent journalists to record and publish autobiographies/first hand accounts of African revolutionaries, and organized speaking tours and public education and pressure campaigns against companies directly intervening against national liberation movements.

