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60th anniversary of VE Day

How Should Socialists See World War Two?

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In Moscow, London and other cities around the world the 60th anniversary of the allies' victory is being celebrated the state machines that won World War Two. Their big lie - that the war was a simple struggle between fascism and western democracy - is one of the most powerful challenges facing internationalists today.

Some of the most powerful socialist arguments against the world war are crucial in understanding the growing hostility of the US regime to governments in the Arab world and in Asia which refuse to obey Bush.

To mark this anniversary, International Viewpoint is republishing Ernest Mandel's speech on [Trotskyists and World War Two](#), which explains how the socialists in occupied Europe saw the war during war time.

During the world war, revolutionary socialists argued, in the face of huge repression, that the German-Japanese 'Axis' and the US-British 'Allies' were fighting an imperialist war; and that working people should support neither side.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Tehranconf2.jpg>]

To the victors the spoils - Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin at Tehran conference

Mandel delivered this speech to a 1976 London meeting of the British section of the Fourth International [1]. It anticipates some of the ideas in Mandel's 1986 book *The Meaning of the Second World War*. That book also explains these socialist ideas about war in a way that is both strong and easy to explain. Mandel's book argues that "the meaning of the Second World War, like that of its predecessor, can be grasped only in the context of the imperialist drive for world domination". Mandel was almost unique in producing an easily-understood outline of the war for later generations.

Mandel's book also argues that this imperialist action provoked some anti-imperialist reactions: "the overall character of the Second World War must be grasped as a combination of five different conflicts:

1. An inter-imperialist war fought for world hegemony and won by the United States (though its rule would be territorially truncated by the extension of the non-capitalist sector in Europe and Asia).
2. A just war of self-defence by the Soviet Union against an imperialist attempt to colonize the country and destroy the achievements of the 1917 Revolution.
3. A just war of the Chinese people against imperialism which would develop into a socialist revolution.
4. A just war of Asian colonial peoples against the various military powers and for national liberation and sovereignty, which in some cases (e.g. Indochina) spilled over into socialist revolution.
5. A just war of national liberation fought by populations of the occupied countries of Europe, which would grow into socialist revolution (Yugoslavia and Albania) or open civil war (Greece, North Italy). In the European East, the old order collapsed under the dual, uneven pressure of popular aspirations and Soviet military-bureaucratic action, whereas in the West and South bourgeois order was restored "often against the wishes of the masses" by Western Allied troops." [2]

Go to:

Trotskyists and the Resistance in World War 2

Ernest Mandel

[1] the International Marxist Group, now the International Socialist Group

[2] Resources

The Context: This wartime article by James Cannon also provides a good outline of the revolutionary socialist approach to the war:

<http://tinyurl.com/dex85>. David Packer's recent summary of the socialist approach to imperialism and war is online at <http://tinyurl.com/93p6t>.

Revolutionary History's dense, difficult but more extensive summary of the approach of revolutionary socialists towards World War Two is online at <http://tinyurl.com/cvgnm>

The Critic: Duncan Hallas, a long-time leader of the Socialist Workers' Party in Britain, reviewed Mandel's book at <http://tinyurl.com/d5qee>. Since the SWP considered the Soviet Union to be capitalist, Hallas took a different approach to Mandel.

Other reading: Many universities have made Mandel's book recommended reading for postgraduate specialists in international relations. To see one example, visit <http://tinyurl.com/7uzb6> or <http://tinyurl.com/75uux>.