

THE THREE FRONTS OF 1984: A GLOBAL SCENARIO OF STRUGGLE AND BACKLASH

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Prefatory note

Scores of articles have appeared throughout the world, reflecting on the human condition in 1984, the year of the Orwellian nightmare. But the coming of the actual 1984 served only to spur the debate on the human prospects in a period of drift and decline and growing world-wide concern. The debate must continue even after 1984; for the issues raised by Orwell, and now reinterpreted in the light of changed conditions by contemporary intellectuals, are going to be with us for not just years but decades to come—assuming that we survive as a species. They are also issues around which the forces of status quo and the forces of transformation, of struggle and 'roll-back', are likely to confront each other in deciding the future fate of this planet. Alternatives is pleased to provide a forum both for the debate and for the assessment of contending forces. In the following essay we begin with a particular assessment of the global setting of 1984 and beyond. We invite both critiques of this assessment and fresh analyses of the human prospect.

—Editors

The backdrop

The psycho-political connotations of 1984 are familiar enough. It is striking that the expectations and scenarios of 1984 are all negative.

The year 1984 is also an election year in the United States. The difference between Mondale and Reagan may be short of the difference between heaven and earth, but still it matters whether or not Reaganism and the new cold war programme is rewarded with an extension. It matters, not only in the

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United States, but also in the Middle East, Central America—and wherever the imperial gunboats may be headed and wherever austerity politics, Reagan-style or Thatcher-style, are being applied. In fact, for a number of people in Central America and the Middle East it may well be a matter of heaven or earth. Meanwhile, in the northern hemisphere, the prime concern is nuclear armaments. In 1984, approximately a third of the Pershing-II and cruise missiles will become operative. This, it seems certain, will be a year of greater East-West tensions than at any time in memory. For a better perspective it may help to take a step back in time.

In 1966, General Giap, commander of the armed forces of North Vietnam, wrote an analysis of the war in South Vietnam in the context of the world situation. In doing so he based himself on Lenin's formulations of the three conditions for the triumph of national liberation wars over imperialism, namely: (1) joint efforts of large sections of the populations of the oppressed countries; (2) a particularly favourable international situation (resulting from contradictions among the imperialist powers); and (3) a simultaneous uprising of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in at least one of the imperialist powers.

In the late sixties, these conditions were all being met. In many countries the Vietnamese struggle did receive broad popular support. Contradictions between the imperialist powers piled up to give rise to the international monetary crisis. Mounting US balance-of-payments deficits on account of its war expenditures caused the first cracks in the Bretton Woods financial system: in 1967, France withdrew from the gold pool that had sustained the dollar in spite of growing US deficits (the pool was abolished in March 1968). In the words of Che Guevara, in his 1967 message to the Tricontinental, 'The greatest of the imperialist powers feels in its own heart the drain caused by a poor, backward country; and its fabulous economy feels the effect of the war.'

In the United States, following the assassination of Martin Luther King on 14 April 1968, the ghetto riots broke out. Together with the anti-war demonstrations it made for a massive cry of protest. In China, it was the time of the Cultural Revolution. Che had gone to Bolivia in pursuit of 'many Vietnams'. In Europe, student unrest mixed with worker militancy in defence against the erosion of their wages by inflation that was partly caused by the echoes of the inflated dollar. US support for the war in South-east Asia thus reverberated in rings of struggles throughout the world. The Tet offensive in January 1968 was the turning point in the Vietnam war. The multiple fronts of 1968 helped to create the conditions for victory in Vietnam while giving the powers that be a shock that cracked the post-war order. Without doubt 1968 was the high point of class struggle in the post-war period. We are now living in the framework of the retrenchment that has followed 1968.

How, then, does 1984 compare with 1968?

The contemporary scene: ingredients of change

Now there is relative concord among the Atlantic alliance. The framework of 'Trilateralism' has superseded the Atlanticism of the sixties. Under the auspices of the IMF and multinationals, world management has become more abstract, the economic clout obviating the need for too visible a show of the skills of green berets. Also, France has fallen in line (witness her actions in Chad and Lebanon). On the other hand, there is greater discord among socialist countries—discord that has contributed to what some consider to be a 'crisis of Marxism'. All the same, the levels of anti-imperialist struggle and class struggle today are by no means lower than in 1968. In fact, the 'proles' are much stronger than in Orwell's fiction. The three main fronts of struggle of 1984 could be identified as follows: (1) the major areas of anti-imperialist conflict; (2) areas affected by the crisis of neocolonialism; and (3) local struggles in the imperialist countries. Space does not permit of a detailed analysis of each of these conflicts, but a few remarks may be in order.

1. Major areas of anti-imperialist conflict

The Middle East, Central America, and Southern Africa are the main problem areas. The instability in these regions coincides with the instability in the resource-rich nations identified by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the *US Military Posture For Fiscal Year 1984* (which also mentions Southeast Asia as a region of instability). Since Vietnam, a major concern of the US military has been to avoid getting bogged down in 'quagmires.' And 1984 being an election year, US foreign policy has focussed on producing 'successes.' But besides Grenada, quick successes are not obtainable. None has materialized in Nicaragua, and now there may be an attempt to patch a truce with Nicaragua to be presented as a foreign policy success of the Reagan Administration. The dilemma presented by El Salvador is that only a large-scale intervention by US troops could possibly turn the tide, which may prove politically costly in an election year. The coming year may, however, see continued advances achieved by the FMLN-FDR.

The Middle East is the only area where US forces are being committed to a 'quagmire', against growing pressure from Congress. But it is adjoining the Persian Gulf/Indian Ocean area that has been the focus of forward US

military build-up since 1979. In Southern Africa, South African aggression against the front-line states is increasing, conceivably to obtain a better bargaining position on Namibia. France has stepped into the conflict in Chad. In South Sudan, a new front is opening up since oil finds in the South (under exploitation by Chevron) have invited an assault on the autonomy of the (non-Moslem) South by the Khartoum government, under the guise of 'Islamization' and with the backing of Saudi Arabia, the US and Egypt. On the side of South Sudan the Anya Nya II receives support from Ethiopia and Libya. There are many other areas where armed struggle is being conducted on a certain scale, involving not US forces but governments that receive US security assistance, notably in the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Oman, the Western Sahara, Peru and Colombia.

2. The crisis of neocolonialism

It affects to different degrees almost all the countries of the three continents. It is a crisis rooted in the dilemmas of dependent underdevelopment and dependent development. These are dilemmas that are currently being aggravated under the impact of the international debt situation—debts incurred to finance the 'new industrialization' and to make up for balance-of-payments deficits of oil-importing countries. The whole structure of mortgaged development is now being shaken by the world economic depression and rising interest rates. A vast front of class struggles is now opening up between the IMF as the treasury police of monopoly capitalist world management, on the one hand, and the factor that Che called the 'people's hunger', on the other. The so-called redemocratization in several countries (Brazil, Argentina, Turkey) may have been designed in part to take the edge off these anticipated troubles, in a framework of class compromise supervised by the IMF. Yet, inevitably, redemocratization also involves political liberalization and the articulation of new working class demands. In some countries redemocratization has already lost its cosmetic glamour (Peru, Bolivia). More numerous are those countries where redemocratization is not being adopted, where emergency-type laws are kept in force, or put into effect (South Korea, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay). Mass demonstrations and unrest (Philippines, Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Guyana), mass strikes (Bolivia), expanding guerilla actions (Peru, Colombia), bitter ethnic conflict (Sri Lanka, India), all indicate rising levels of global popular anger. A key factor which, in many places, may decide the difference between urban unrest and armed struggle is the participation of peasants. The worker-peasant alliance therefore appears as a major concern of class struggle politics, although many parties on the

bandwagon of redemocratization may be more preoccupied with the diversionary negotiations of the multiple wage system (e.g. pay differentials for workers in old and new industries and agricultural labour).

3. Local struggles in the imperialist countries

Here the issue of nuclear arms has extremely profound implications. It involves a direct popular questioning of the paramount power structure, of the reliability, the very sanity, of the powers in charge. At issue is the politics of nuclear civilization. Around the corner is the question of nuclear imperialism. In Western Europe, the placement of missiles under single-key American control represents an assault on sovereignty unmatched since the Vienna Congress of 1815. Much depends on the interaction of the peace issue with depression management. Right-wing pro-missile governments have come to power—in the FRG, England, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands—on the basis of economic rather than defence platforms. Labour protests and strikes against the inequities of austerity and curbs on unions (as in Belgium, the Netherlands, England), when converging with discontent over American nuclear imperialism, may weaken right-wing governments and strengthen left social democratic forces. Next to labour, the inequities of austerity have their greatest impact on all those who are on the receiving end of the welfare state, including the aged, minorities, women and youth—the actual ‘third world within’. In the eighties, many of these groups are well organized, along with the peace movement, ‘Greens’, squatters, auto-reductionists, solidarity groups, and the like. Although *Newsweek* proclaimed the seventies to be a decade of the ‘me-generation’, of apolitical timidity and conformism, the seeds of the sixties quietly germinated into extended networks of grass-roots activists, frequently operating independently of traditional left organizations and little noticed by national media. From the universities they moved to neighbourhoods, small towns and alternative institutions, becoming less ideological than the New Left of the sixties but no less militant and more pragmatic. These new activists represent the most dynamic anti-establishment forces in the imperialist rear; their strength is in the streets and the neighbourhoods. Native Americans, blacks, Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics in the United States, Commonwealth citizens in Britain, ‘guest workers’ on the continent, are other components of the ‘third world within’. Basques, Corsican autonomists, Bretons, Sardinians constitute yet another flank. In the US, the electoral campaign initiated by Jesse Jackson is a progressive development that, like the mayoral campaign in Chicago, can only result in blacks counting for more than they have hitherto. In Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein has adopted an electoral approach,

with a measure of success that serves as a tacit endorsement of the parallel armed struggle by the IRA.

Along the three fronts of 1984, the forces of change are more massive and more developed than in 1968. Yet there is one crucial difference: a unitary vision is lacking. In the sixties, this was provided by the war in Vietnam as a global polarizing issue. Mao's unleashing of the Cultural Revolution and calling for global war on imperialism, with the Chinese strategy of rural encirclement as a model, added to the momentum. In 1966, General Giap called for 'other Santo Domingos'; in 1967, Che Guevara called for 'two, three, many Vietnams'. But since then the US has avoided other Vietnams, precisely because long-lasting engagements of US forces in the face of popular resistance would precipitate the situation predicted by Mao: 'The day will come when the US reactionaries find themselves opposed by the people of the whole world.'

Strategies of backlash

To prevent a coalescing of forces of change a la 1968 combinations, old and new tactics have been used, different in composition and emphasis for each of the global fronts.

On the first front, the flashpoints of anti-imperialist struggle, the tactics used include:

- (i) counter-revolutionary guerilla war—notably against Angola, Mozambique, Afghanistan, Nicaragua;
- (ii) the use of proxies—Israel, South Africa, Argentina, Organization of East Caribbean States;
- (iii) operations as part of the UN multinational force—as in Korea in the 50s, the Congo in the 60s, Lebanon in the 80s;
- (iv) the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) and new forward bases, notably Diego Garcia, to serve as RDF supply stations;
- (v) show of force (such as the appearance of AWACS in Egypt and Sudan) and brief operations (as against Libya and in Grenada).

On the second front, the neocolonial societies, current imperialist tactics are part of a structural transformation of the world economy, the new international division of labour, and should be understood in that light:

- (i) continued expansion of operations of multinational corporations;
- (ii) commercial multinational loans rather than foreign aid;

- (iii) policing by IMF of loans and streamlining of participation in the capitalist world economy;
- (iv) support for 'moderate alternatives', a strategy concerned with controlling changes that are deemed necessary and inevitable, and preventing their use to the advantage of radical forces—e.g. presently in the Philippines, Chile;
- (v) promotion of right-wing religious groups—the invasion of evangelical groups in Central and South America, Africa, Asia—serving demobilization and surveillance at grass-roots levels and among students.

This does not exclude other, more or less standard, tactics such as economic squeeze directed against 'deviant' countries, manipulation of regional or continental groupings (OAU, OECS), manipulation of ethnic differences, rumours to create disarray among the population and in leadership circles, the use of underworld circuits, 'old boy' networks and established religious institutions.

In the imperialist countries, the manipulation of information plays a paramount role, for people's consciousness is a function of the information they receive; and whoever controls the information controls mass consciousness:

- (i) in the US media the second front is largely 'blacked out' and the first papered over with new cold war rhetoric and the label 'terrorism'; in Western Europe the three continents are largely dealt with through the rhetoric of 'development'; generally, under the guise of entertainment, there is systematic dissemination of fear and violence, and decadence as outlet;
- (ii) economic squeeze against 'deviant' countries, circumscribing the room for manoeuvre of parties and governments—recently applied against France (a 'bear raid on the franc', as in 1937, against the Blum government);
- (iii) drugs, crime—cheap heroin to pacify trouble spots;
- (iv) sects—Bhagwan, 'new age' groups, etc.;
- (v) neofascism—frequently sponsored indirectly by right-centrist forces which then appear more 'moderate' and produce a climate which justifies authoritarianism, a climate which enables them to condemn by assimilation all 'extremes' and to criminalize radical left forces (Italy, West Germany).

The difference in emphasis on each of the fronts—military, economic, ideological—is related to the basic features of the arena; yet each front also carries elements of the other fronts. Everywhere the promotion of 'moderate elements' plays a key role, producing phenomena such as the Peace Women in Northern Ireland—supported by the British, the media and the Church and, of course, rigged up with a Nobel Prize, although they were and are devoid of any grass-roots support.

Marginalizing the forces of challenge to the *status quo*

Among the rank and file at each of the fronts many of these tactics may be well understood. But what is missing, in the public realm, is a sense of *the unity of the struggles*. The role of the media in this is crucial: they never portray issues and actions in relation to each other, but always in a fragmentary way. To present them in a fragmentary way is a way of marginalizing them and restricting their relevance. For to separate the issues is to separate the forces. It is also a matter of the systems of education that teach, not the integration of global issues and concerns, but rather their division into areas of specialization. Moreover, this fragmentation tends to be echoed, in the imperialist countries, by many of the movements themselves: they also specialize in particular areas, which is excellent tactics, except when the interrelationship with other arenas and movements is neglected, for fear of losing grass-roots support by becoming too diffuse or 'too political', for fear of losing one's own group identity. Finally, the separation of issues and fragmentation of forces is duly promoted by the powers that be, in view of the evergreen adage: divide and rule.

If it is difficult to achieve unity, intellectually and politically, among the issues and forces on each front (within each group!), how much more difficult will it be to perceive the unity of all the fronts and act accordingly? Nevertheless, it is crucial to be clear about the *global interaction of issues*. Indeed, in the headquarters and think-tanks of the powers that be, the global relationships between forces and issues are well understood and are the object of constant study. The lesson of 1968 has been well learnt. It is time the lesson was taken seriously by the left as well. It is now, as it was then, the logic of empire, of a moribund power structure that is at the root of revolt on all the three fronts. The current situation is largely shaped by the efforts at retrenchment following the shock of 1968, and its main outlines can be understood under two headings: the new international division of labour and military expansion.

International division of labour

The international division of labour in this era is the global redistribution of the centres of production, in particular the relocation of monopoly capital to southern hemisphere havens of cheap labour, low taxes and cooperative governments. In the seventies, it was accompanied by a proliferation of commercial multinational lending and a veritable explosion of international debt. Relocation had gone on earlier, but it took shape as a strategy in 1969-1970, in direct response to the high tide of class struggle in the

imperialist rear in the late sixties. Consequently, it has brought unemployment to the northern hemisphere, the political effects of which are kept in check by the rhetoric of 'crisis' and the politics of austerity. In the southern hemisphere, it brought escalating debts and the IMF. The vast economic expansion of this international division of labour required as its corollary a military expansion to protect the new investments, a projection of power under the rhetoric of keeping socialism at bay. According to the 1976 Congressional testimony of Vice-Admiral Gerald E. Miller, 'With the increasing need for far-flung economic enterprise, there will be a corresponding need to protect such enterprise.' Thus unfolded the new cold war offensive, not of containment but to roll-back anti-imperialist gains.

This necessitated a revocation of détente, since the Soviet Union—a point habitually missed by the cold war socialists—continues to play an important progressive role in relation to the first front—Southern Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean. Hence ensued the escalation of counter-insurgency in El Salvador and Guatemala, the fortification of Honduras, war on Nicaragua, interventions in Lebanon and Chad, invasion of Grenada, and stationing of PershingII and cruise missiles in Europe. By increasing the nuclear threat against the Soviet Union, the new missiles in Europe create space for the use of tactical nuclear weapons in Third World theatres. It is to be kept in mind that the Rapid Deployment Force is a 'dual-capable' force, that is, equipped with weapons systems able to deliver both nuclear and conventional warheads. In the process US military strategy has come to be concerned with preparing for 'two-and-a-half wars'—preparations that are being paid for, to be sure, by every luckless inhabitant of the 'free world'. For the trillion-dollar military budget of the Reagan Administration makes for rising interest rates in the United States as private borrowers are crowded out of the credit market; hence a stronger dollar, a squeeze on recovery throughout the capitalist world and a heavier burden for the neo-colonies who must pay higher interest rates on their crushing debts.

Thus, in brief, are the struggles along the three fronts connected—the first front paying its tribute in blood, the second in deprivation and starvation, and the third front in relative deprivation. The impact of the trillion-dollar military build-up, centred in the US but echoed amongst the imperial allies, is being transmitted along all fronts. So is the impact of the present international division of labour, disguised under the ideology of crisis. The global crunch is being felt everywhere—unemployment, cut-backs, give-backs, intimidation, threat and missiles, all part of the retrenchment of the seventies and the offensive of the eighties. Thus, the anti-imperialist battles, the struggles of workers and peasants in the neo-colonial countries, and the movements in the imperialist countries—the peace movement, the struggles of labour, minorities, women, youth—all take place in interconnected

trenches, united by the imperial logic imposed on us and by our militancy against it.

Mao once remarked that people's war takes place in the dimension of time rather than space. This referred to the importance of perseverance, of outlasting the enemy, even if territory were lost. From someone who fought for 30 years before victory could be claimed the point is well taken. But the dimension of time also harbours another side.

The hallmark of 1968, in addition to the magnitude of the struggles, was simultaneity—the simultaneous rise in the levels of mass struggle on all three fronts. To a significant degree this simultaneity was conditioned by the war in Southeast Asia and its economic, political and ideological ripple effects throughout the world. It was the global simultaneity of struggles that inspired the movements, caught the imperialist powers off guard and made breakthroughs in some places possible.

The hour of decision

Scenario One

The year 1984—hype aside—is part of the time of decision. It is an election year in the United States, just as 1968 was. The re-election of Mr. Reagan would in all likelihood be taken as a mandate to put the enormous military machine now being built to use. A second term of this presidency might be scheduled as the opportunity to secure US/Trilateral hegemony far into the twenty-first century. Four years may be deemed a sufficient time to deal with Central America—the Sandinistas would be accused of not bending over backwards enough, and US Special Task Forces would come to patrol the highways of El Salvador and Guatemala. Drastic measures in the Middle East might well fit into this programme. Confrontations with Soviet-backed positions in Southwest and Southeast Asia and Africa could be undertaken against the strategic background of PershingII and cruise missiles in Western Europe, five minutes from Moscow. Already we are witnessing the greatest military build-up in human history. France has provided for a Rapid Action Force in its 1984-1988 defence budget; at the same time in Britain there are voices advocating the creation of a global British RDF. 'Two-and-a-half wars' may cover a lot of world—a projection of force unprecedented in human history, compared to which Hitler would appear kidstuff and Vietnam a training exercise. Further offensives on welfarism, rebuilding welfare states into warfare states—how else to sustain 'two-and-a-half wars'?—

would suit this scenario. The fact that the three fronts are communicating vessels acquires added importance in this context. What is here called the first front is the front-line taking the blows for the second and third fronts; that is, any defeat on the first front increases the pressure available to be exercised on the second and third front-lines—on the left, minorities, labour, women, democratic rights, approximately in that order.

Scenario Two

The year also brings the possibilities of turning the tide. Among these would be simultaneous actions on all fronts, perhaps not as spontaneous as in 1968 but, to an extent, pre-arranged. The objective conditions for world-wide mass actions are present: the global ramifications of the international division of labour and the imperialist military build-up—'A single spark can light a prairie fire'. A spring offensive on all three fronts, confronting all issues, mobilizing all forces, using every locally available and appropriate means, would contribute to shatter the 1984 scenarios of gloom and doom. It could serve to influence the outcome of the US elections by making clear that Reaganism and his administration's war plans are magnifying, not lessening, US troubles. Already, in October 1983, with US forces engaged in Lebanon, Grenada, Central America, and troubles on the horizon in the Persian Gulf, Sudanic Africa and the Philippines, voices went up in the United States that US resources were being spread too thin and US power was being overextended (*Washington Post/International Herald Tribune*, 25 Oct. and 1 Nov., 1983). A three-front offensive in early to mid-1984 would serve to lessen the pressures on the first front and increase the chances for victory everywhere. It would be a matter of manipulating not only the time factor but also the space factor as well: turning the tables on the powers that be, according to the principle of 'divide and overcome'. To inflict defeat, either politically or militarily, requires a concentration of forces; a three-front spring offensive forcing the imperialists to disperse their forces would reduce the sites where concentrated force can be applied, thus increasing the chances for victory all along the fronts. It would be a matter of working not just for local victory but, by binding the forces available to the powers that be, for break-throughs everywhere. It would serve as an example of the exercise of global popular will.