

It Was a Good War – But Whose Good War?

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Taking David Smith's review of Jacques Pauwels's *The Myth of the Good War* to be accurate, one welcomes the wealth of significant detail. However, the one-sided interpretation needs comment.

While noting how U.S. capitalists admired Nazi repression of the working masses and Nazi willingness to stop at no inhumanity of racism, the author does not stress the importance of defeating fascism. In the Pacific, U.S. imperialism cast its Japanese competitor in racist terms yet largely ignored mass atrocities against the Chinese people, such as the massacre of Nanking in which Japanese soldiers bayoneted and shot several hundred thousand residents, many of the women after being raped and tortured. We must note the importance of defeating this fascism in China, too.

The people of Europe grasped the menace of fascism. Soldiers understood pretty well why they fought. Profound resistance movements emerged, and heroes gave their lives. The people of China rose up, delivering a one-two punch, first to the Japanese invaders then a decisive one to the Kuomintang dictatorship.

From the middle 1930's the Soviet Union encouraged the broad alliance against fascism. That is one reason why the ranks of communists in Europe grew during World War Two. And Soviet diplomacy frustrated the imperialists' game of standing aside while Hitler tried to crush Soviet socialism.

U.S. imperialism was compelled to provide material aid to the anti-fascist war. (Today, imperialist-serving historians are schizophrenic, both demonizing the Soviet Union yet claiming that Western supplies defeated Hitler, as though weapons fired and trucks drove on their own.) To be sure, the aid was a supplement to the factory production that the Soviet people successfully removed from the front and relocated to the east, but we must note that the imperialists had to do it.

In short, the title of Pauwels' book is inaccurate, and Smith does not challenge it. War is always a horror, but it may be necessary. World War Two was a good war; the point is the class view: whose good war? When Smith writes, "The Allies' war against them [the fascists] has routinely been depicted as a struggle between good and evil, civilization and barbarism," the tone and context takes "the Allies" to be the imperialists, not they plus the anti-fascist movements plus the Soviet Union. The review, no doubt contrary to Smith's own sentiment, encourages cynicism about what really was a struggle between good and evil.

It is not easy to make an accurate assessment of big wars and carry out struggle on such a basis. The collaborators of the Second International joined their respective imperialists in World War One. Lenin not only damned them; he also criticized those socialists who begged for a pacifist mirage, a quick end to the war by a truce among the imperialists with no annexations. "A struggle for peace without a revolutionary struggle is a hollow and false phrase." ("The First Step," Oct. 11, 1915 at

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/oct/11.htm>) The Bolsheviks pushed the desire for peace on to the overthrow of tsarism and the foundation of a socialist country.

World War Two presented a different situation and required different action. The world today also demands new, accurate assessment. The post-World War Two anti-imperialist platform of support for colonial liberation movements against imperialist aggression is insufficient. Contradictions between established and rising capitalist powers intensify, while capitalism as an economic system sinks into decay and new depths of wage slavery. Pauwels' book, as presented in Smith's review, establishes historical facts in a flawed partial framework. It holds back understanding we need for the struggles that will emerge relatively soon from the antagonisms of our time.

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