

23rd IMCWP, Izmir, 20-22 October 2023

Let's embrace the mutiny and advance the struggle against exploitation and oppression

Contribution of the Workers' Party of Belgium (PTB-PVDA)

Comrades and friends,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this International Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties today. As we are discussing the tasks of communists to inform and mobilize the working class, youth, women and intellectuals in the struggle against exploitation, oppression, imperialism and its lies, distortions and manipulations, we have to take stock of the international situation in order for us to define our strategy and tactics.

Therefore, I would like to share with you the analysis our Party's secretary general, Peter Mertens, is unfolding in his new book, 'Mutiny. How our world is tipping'. The book takes us back in time to the rise of the "non-aligned nations" in the post WWII period, agreeing on three priorities: peace, bread and justice. It also tells us about their growing indignation during the following decades when they observed how the G7, the seven richest countries in the world, tried to thwart the south's democratic project. The debt crisis of the 1980s and the collapse of the Soviet Union ended the movement of non-aligned countries.

From that moment on, Washington reigned supreme, in a unipolar world. Yet the center of imperialism turned out to be a giant on feet of clay. Since the 1973 oil crisis it had systematically lost its manufacturing industry and focused more and more on the financial sector. At the same time, it allowed China to grow into the factory of the world. They taught this was a fair division of labor: industry for one country, the bank for the other. In reality, the capitalist system limped from crisis to crisis.

Today, we are witnessing a polycrisis consisting of an economic crisis (inflation and recession), an environmental crisis (climate and pandemic) and a geopolitical crisis (war and international divide). Washington is desperately trying to find a way out of the crisis, and resorts to protectionism. It has started an amplifying trade and technology war in which China is labeled aggressively as a "systemic rival".

This has major implications for a world in the midst of a large-scale energy transition. The shift to a fossil-free economy entails a revolution in materials as well as in infrastructure. Large-scale infrastructure projects are afoot, with the construction of wind farms, solar panel farms, hydrogen pools and transportation routes. And so begins the race for precious raw materials: lithium, cobalt and nickel.

Meanwhile the digital revolution is knocking at the door, with artificial intelligence, data protection, 5G and 6G communication networks, and semiconductor construction. The growing rivalry with China plays a role in every aspect.

In the face of rising tensions between the US and China, Europe is not faring well, especially since the outbreak of war in Ukraine. The German economy has plunged into recession following the shutdown of Russian gas delivery. Moreover, the Biden administration is sparing no expenses to lure European and other companies across the ocean with the huge subsidies offered through the Inflation Reduction Act.

Outside the centers of imperialism, on the other hand, more and more countries are looking for alternatives. In their eyes, the illegal war against Iraq in 2003 definitively undermined the credibility of the United States as the so-called leader of the world. That was an initial breaking point.

A second breaking point was the 2008 financial crisis which undermined the credibility of Western financial institutions, and rightly so. Consequently, on the other side of the world the BRICS was created in response to that global financial crisis.

More recently, the war in Ukraine constituted a third breaking point. Actually, the rest of the world reacted differently to the war in Ukraine than the West. That became very clear in the attitude towards the sanctions the West imposed on Russia. Most of the world refused to follow them in imposing economic sanctions, shutting down the SWIFT interbank system and freezing central bank reserves.

Everyone knows that all those sanctions can be used against other countries tomorrow, and in fact have been used against different countries for years. Just think of the criminal embargo and blockade against Cuba.

With three breaking points, the war against Iraq in 2003, the financial crisis in 2008, and the war in Ukraine in 2022, our world has changed profoundly.

Recently, Fiona Hill, a former staff member of the US National Security Council, said that the vote of countries of the Global South against the sanctions against Russia is nothing but "mutiny".

It inspired Peter Mertens to the following words: "They call it mutiny that countries and peoples want to make their own decisions about their own resources, whether lithium or cobalt, and claim the right to process the resources.

They call it mutiny that countries and peoples refuse to take sides in a trade war and a new cold war forced upon them from Washington.

They call it mutiny that the unipolar era of the United States is quietly coming to an end.

We can only embrace that mutiny, because it is on the right wave of history."

Renewed cooperation among the countries of the South provides the right environment for this mutiny. As the unipolarly US dominated era quietly fades away, the global south is re-emerging.

Mutiny has a twofold character in the global south. On the one hand, grass-roots movements try to impose a progressive agenda, from the bottom up. That's the mutiny below deck. And it calls loudly for democratic rights, land reform and well-paid labor. This mutiny deserves our support, as a push for freedom against reactionary and dictatorial regimes.

But there is mutiny on the upper deck as well in the Global South. Countries are looking for a new form of non-alignment, a realpolitik to serve their national interests, and not those of imperialism.

We have to be aware of this twofold character and navigate it well.

Besides, in Europe, too, there is mutiny. People are suffering from rising inflation and poverty, the erosion of labor rights and increasingly repressive laws. The class struggle in Europe goes up and down, like the waves of the sea. But it is there, and it is fighting against the same global order, the same monopolies, the same system of capitalist exploitation.

If we can get the mutiny of the North to lend a hand to the mutiny of the South, and vice versa, we can turn the world around, in the democratic, social and ecological direction this planet needs.

Before I'm concluding, I would like to pay tribute to the comrades from Palestine who have been fighting unwaveringly for generations for justice and liberation. We stand with them in these difficult times as we know that one day, also their 'mutiny' will be victorious.

Together, we can and will make a difference in the world. Long live international solidarity!