

However, this remark, like many of Lenin's other apocalyptic statements suggesting that capitalism and socialism could not exist alongside each other, was made in 1919. At that time, the Russian Civil War and foreign intervention were raging, and Bolshevik power hung by a thread. Lenin simply believed that the vastly more powerful capitalist states, which had already sent their armed forces into Russia, would succeed in crushing the Bolsheviks unless a socialist revolution broke out in Western Europe and saved the Russian Revolution. Lenin was making a political judgment about concrete events and not engaging in abstract theoretical analysis.

By late 1920, conditions had changed, and consequently so did Lenin's views. The foreign intervention had largely ended, the Western economic blockade had been terminated, and there were signs that Russia would soon be able to establish diplomatic relations with the countries of Western Europe. Lenin hailed these developments as marking the beginning of a fundamentally new phase in international politics, one which would enable socialist Russia to enter into comparatively peaceful relations with capitalist nations and to exist alongside them for a significant period of time. In a major speech delivered on 21 November 1920, Lenin repeatedly stressed this theme:

Without having gained an international victory, which we consider the only sure victory, we are in a position of having won conditions enabling us to exist side by side with capitalist powers, who are now compelled to enter into trade relations with us. In the course of this struggle we have won the right to an independent existence. . . . [I]t will be clear that we have something more than a breathing-space: we have entered a new period, in which we have won the right to our fundamental international existence in the network of capitalist states. . . . Today we can speak, not merely of a breathing-space, but of a real chance of a new and lengthy period of development. Until now we have actually had no basis in the international sense.⁹

⁹ *Ibid.*, XLII, pp. 22-23.