

Russia : Anti - Imperialist Angel of Peace or Capitalist - Imperialist Great Power?

Organization for the Construction of the Communist Workers Party of
Germany

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of our readers - Editor*

Since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine up to the present armed struggle, there have been completely different evaluations of the policy of Russia and the character of Russia today among the progressive, revolutionary and communist forces in Germany.

There are no great differences in the evaluation of the aggression of Germany, the EU, NATO and the USA in Ukraine. All agree that the present Ukrainian government came to power by force, that it is ridden with fascists and that it represents the interests of the western great powers. All agree that Germany, EU, NATO and the USA are expanding their spheres of influence – at the expense of Russia.

We can fight jointly against this policy, as many revolutionary and communist organizations do. But there are also voices who use the differences in the evaluation of Russia to separate and fight against each other.

Is Russia an Angel of Peace?

For example, the German Association of Free Thinkers published a declaration in May of 2014, in which they say:

"The only chance of defending peace is coming closer to Russia. The Russian Federation is the protector of peace in Europe... Only on the side of Russia can a third world war be prevented. Only in solidarity with Russia can the peace movement, especially in Germany, become an important force." (Original in German, p. 6, pdf: http://www.freidenker.org/cms/dfv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=437)

In "Rotfuchs" (Red Fox) of July 2014, p. 7, Herrmann Jacobs writes in an article entitled "Why oligarchic capitalism in Russia is not imperialist. This is no restoration of the classical type," that Russia "at this moment is waging an anti-fascist battle to defend peace..."

Hans Guenther Szalkiewicz of the DKP (revisionist German Communist Party) in the magazine "Theory and Practice", June 2014, p. 3 laments:

"In a joint leaflet of the Communist Initiative Gera 2010, the Organization for the Construction of a Communist Workers Party of Germany, the Communist Party of Germany and the Revolutionary Friendship Association entitled 'Do you want to pay for the struggle over Ukraine' there are sentences such as: 'When the new great power Germany, the EU and the USA have Ukraine under their control, then they will be directly on the border of their rival, the great power Russia'. And: 'The struggle of the great powers leads to the danger of war.... We are not on the side of Putin and Yanukovich.' In the call for the Easter peace march the newspaper 'Work and Future' (organ of the Organization for the Construction of a Communist Workers Party of Germany), entitled 'Peace', the same thing is said in a somewhat modified manner: 'Before our eyes a power struggle is taking place.... They have acted openly against the great power Russia, with which we do not sympathize'. Hans-Guenther Szalkiewicz argues that one cannot characterize Russia as capitalist or imperialist. He refers to the declaration of the Free Thinkers, that Russia is a power for peace.

On the other side the Marxist - Leninist Party Germany (MLPD, a Maoist group) in the call by ICOR (International Coordination of Revolutionary Parties and Organizations) for the Anti-War Day

(September 1) states: "Russia is pursuing an expansionist, military-political tactic in the Crimea and East Ukraine. It is rehearsing with secret maneuvers such as Vostok 2014 with 'troop transfers over great distances' for an invasion of Ukraine." (http://www.mlpd.de/2014/kw33/Aufruf_ICOR_Antikriegstag_2014_RZ.pdf)

Concerning the article by Jacobs in "Rot-fuchs", the Communist Initiative (not to be confused with the Communist Initiative Gera 2010) published a vehement statement, in which it explains: "Russia is an imperialist country with a fully developed, aggressive and exploiting, quite normal capitalism." (<http://kommunistische-initiative.de/index.php/dokumente-der-ki/doukumente/1791-erwiderung-auf-h-jacobs-keine-restauration-klassischer-art-warum-russlands-oligarchischer-kapitalismus-nicht-imperialistisch-ist>)

What is the Reality?

From our standpoint it is very clear, that today's Russia is a capitalist country. The richest person in Russia, Alisher Usmanov, has assets of \$17.6 thousand million US and is number 34 on the Forbes list of the richest persons on the world. The next is Mikhail Fridman with \$15.4 thousand million US, Leonid Michelson with \$15.4 thousand million US, Viktor Vekselberg with \$15.1 thousand million US, etc. Such assets, we know as communists and the workers, employees and the whole people also know, are not the result of honest labor, but of exploitation and criminal machinations. In the case of Russia these assets are mainly from privatized state-owned property. To say it clearly, this is finance capital, an essential attribute of an imperialist state!

Comrade Hans Guenther Szalkiewicz laments in "Theory and Practice": "Within the DKP the statement about a capitalist state is repeated from beginning to end." He should say what Russia is.

He resists calling Russia a great power that is fighting for its own interests and says:

"It was clear to see that Russia was not capable of defending its own interests, even in the international finance markets when the banking system of Cyprus was destroyed, and for the first time in the present economic history the bank deposits of the customers (including the Russians) were requisitioned for 'consolidation'."

Even in this statement he says that Russia fought to save its interests. We say clearly that Russia fought to save the interests of its finance capital. It was the power in a weaker position, as he laments. Should we as Marxist-Leninists support the weaker, inferior capitalist great power? Should we cry when Russian finance capital suffers losses in the international struggle for super-profits through its own speculation?

Precisely with this example he proves that it is a matter of finance capital, which participates in international speculation.

And we think it is bizarre not to see Russia as a great power. Russia cannot be seen as a small or medium-sized power among the capitalist states. Regarding its economic, political and military resources it is a great power, which doesn't say anything about its political character. Even the socialist Soviet Union was a great power. Thankfully! Because only with its strength could it defeat Hitler-fascism.

In the statement of the "Communist Initiative" it is explained with concrete facts that today's Russia is capitalist and imperialist. Therefore we quote it at length:

"To answer the question as to whether Russia is imperialist or whether, as H. Jacobs thinks, the Russian economy is 'not a fully developed' capitalism, we should examine whether the Russian economy is participating in the world economy as an imperialist competitor.

"1. Without a doubt Russian monopolies exist. The concentration of production was highly developed in the Soviet Union and this was taken over. Today's Russia did not need a hundred years to develop monopolies – it inherited the already highly concentrated socialist economy and imposed on it the private ownership of the means of production.

"In the Forbes list of the largest monopolies in the world there are 28 Russian monopolies, including No. 4: Gazprom, No. 69: Lukoil, No. 72: Rosneft, No. 91: Sberbank.

"The Russian state owns a great part of these monopolies. It hold 50% +1 of the shares of Gazprom. The other shares belong to private individuals and to foreign investors. According to

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economic studies the Russian economy is highly concentrated, in some industrial sectors higher than in the USA and Germany. For example the percentage that the 10 largest monopolies contribute to the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) was 28.9% for Russia in 2006, for the USA it was only 14.1%.

“Most sectors of the economy, especially energy, machine building, transport as well as food production, are highly monopolized.”

In Russia we are dealing with monopolized, highly concentrated capital, conventional indicators of state-monopoly capitalism.

“2. Sberbank is No. 91 on the Forbes list and is one of the biggest banks in the world. The WTB bank, the Alfa bank and their subsidiary banks in the Western countries such as the Raiffeisen bank also play a decisive role.

“There are big banks that are closely connected to a monopoly company or that belong to it. Such are the Gazprom bank, the Promsvyazbank and Uralsib.

“The merger of bank and industrial capital to become finance capital has also taken place a long time ago. The financiers in Russia are not separate and provide credits to the industrial magnates, as was the case in earlier stages of capitalism. This separation has not existed for a long time, the magnates themselves are the owners of the banks. Not for nothing are they called oligarchs.

“Take for example the financial oligarch Mikhail Prochorov. From 1993 to 1998, he was chair of the ONEKSIM-Bank, from 2000 to 2001 chair of the ROSBank, at the same time from 2001 to 2008 he was the main shareholder and chief executive of ‘Norilski Nickel’, making his profit by mining nickel. Nearly all Russian oligarchs have a similar biography. The merger of industrial and bank capital is completed. The financial oligarchy is a second characteristic of imperialism.

“3. Export of capital. Does Russia export capital? Of course! In the 1990s there was an uncontrolled flight of capital to the West. The new capitalists tried to secure their stolen wealth in the Western banks.

“But since 2000, the cash flow to the West has become relatively small (5-8% of the export turnover per year). The volume of direct investment by Russian monopolies abroad increased rapidly and amounted to \$362.1 thousand million U.S. in 2011, which was 30% of the GDP of Russia and 18 times more than in 2000. The Russian capitalists invest in new industrial resources in foreign countries, in order to attain huge profits in countries with even cheaper labor power and resources than in Russia itself. “

The facts are overwhelming and clear. And capital has to increase – by exploiting living labor power. Should we refuse our solidarity to Russian workers and trade unionists, because they supposedly weaken the “Russian angel of peace,” when they are on strike for higher wages, better working conditions and start to fight for democratic rights and are confronted with the clubs of Putin’s police or even worse?

In the stage of imperialism, of the monopolies there is also export of capital and plundering of foreign countries. In the formerly socialist countries it is most obvious that capital is not accumulated by honest work, thrift or diligence, but by robbery and plundering. In the transition to open, unmasked capitalism, the different groups of oligarchs, who were all part of the revisionist leadership, greedily grabbed the privatized state property.

One asks, how can so many on the left be so confused that they now consider capitalist-imperialist Russia to be an “angel of peace”?

On the Defensive

It is obvious that Russia found itself on the defensive since the transition to open capitalism. Step by step its capitalist competitors snatched away its spheres of influence and they continue to do so. All the Eastern European countries came under the control of EU and NATO from one day to the next. Germany underwent a rapid increase in power and influence. In those places where they could not take control voluntarily, the USA, EU, NATO and Germany intervened with all means, economic, political and if necessary military. Wars such as in former Yugoslavia,

Afghanistan, Iraq and presently in Libya, Syria and Ukraine are examples of this redivision of spheres of influence. Russia was dramatically weakened as a great power in this process.

In fact the ruling class in Russia initially was busy getting as rich and grabbing as much power as possible. Everyone fought against everyone else. The nouveau riche were ready to buy and sell everything. Corruption, bribery, prostitution, drugs – everything blossomed. For a long period the country was in the chaos of robbery and division of the loot. This led to a situation where the state declined and the military was substantially weakened. Corrupt military personnel, who wanted their share of the loot, sold weapons and equipment. In this era of the division of the loot the ruling class was occupied with itself, so that it could only act defensively abroad and could only look on helplessly as the USA, NATO, EU and Germany expanded aggressively.

No one can assert that with the change from Yeltsin to Putin nothing essential happened. In fact with the replacement of Yeltsin by Putin this first phase ended. Russian capital wanted to consolidate its loot and avoid greater losses of influence and power.

Frederick Engels said: “*The modern state, whatever its form, is an essentially capitalist machine, the state of the capitalists, the ideal aggregate capitalist.*” (Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, 1880, English edition.)

Thus the state has the task of asserting the interests of the whole capitalist class, also against individual capitalists. Putin did this. Putin deprived oligarchs, who were ready to totally sell out the country, of power. He strengthened the state and rebuilt it as a functioning machine. He strengthened the military and put it in working order again. This was in the interest of the whole Russian capital, which did not want to be a loser forever.

Now that it has been strengthened the great power Russia is more and more intervening in the struggle for the redivision of the world. For the present it is still on the defensive, because it had lost a lot of influence in previous years. But the fact that Russia has again gained strength can be seen impressively in Syria, where it smashed the plans of US imperialism in a defensive but determined manner. Also in the Crimea Russia has made it clear that one must take it into account militarily. The USA, NATO, EU and Germany wailed and cried, but they did not dare to act directly against the union of Crimea with Russia.

Many people, who are furious about the wars of US imperialism and the new military adventures of the German military, were glad that at last someone stopped their advance.

In addition, Russia acting defensively is reviving its old connections with states such as Cuba, Venezuela, Iran and Korea. On the one hand it has open markets in these countries and can trade with them without harassment and sanctions, which increases the profits of the ruling class. On the other hand Russia is forced to support them in their resistance against US imperialism. With its still existing weakness it needs these states as partners against its competitor USA.

For many people, this seems to be a sign of a progressive policy, while it is in reality a normal imperialist tactic. That it is not a progressive policy is shown by a quote from Putin that is cited in the statement of the Communist Initiative: “*President Putin called the October Revolution a ‘betrayal of the national interests’ . He claimed that old Russia had ‘done everything to convince Europe to regulate the conflict between Serbia and Austria-Hungary peacefully and without bloodshed. But Russia was not listened to. It had to accept the challenge and protect its sister Slavic people’ .*”

This openly propagates the national interests of a bourgeois-capitalist country – there is nothing progressive about it.

These contradictions between the competing powers are sometimes objectively useful for countries in their struggle against US imperialism when they ally themselves with Russia. These contradictions are also objectively useful for the progressive, revolutionary and communist forces in Ukraine, which are being brutally persecuted, so that they can at least find a safe shelter. These contradictions are objectively useful for democrats and anti-imperialists like Edgar Snowden, who has actually found shelter in Russia. Lenin also used these inter-imperialist contradictions, when he was in exile in Switzerland or when he travelled through Germany and Finland to take over the leadership of the party and the revolution.

But this did not mean that Lenin treated Switzerland or Germany as “angels of peace.”

He knew clearly that these temporary “allies” could become the enemy tomorrow. And this is what happened, when the German Reich used the weakness of revolutionary Russia to bring large regions under its control. Lenin looked on these things realistically, as a materialist and on the basis of an analysis of imperialism.

We too have to analyze unemotionally the contradictions and development of imperialism, including Russian imperialism. We revolutionaries have to use these contradictions when it is possible. But this does not mean having illusions about the peaceful character of Russia or even more the idea that Russia is not completely capitalist or imperialist.

We do not consider finance capital peaceful, so also not Russian finance capital. It is forced to strive for maximum profit and it was not simply because of greed but because of the need to accumulate capital. Therefore we cannot look at Russia as an “angel of peace.” But in the present situation we will not agitate against Russia – though we will disassociate ourselves from it. This is a question of principle for us: Our attack is directed against our own ruling class. Our solidarity is for all people who are threatened by the imperialist wars for the redivision of the world. Our struggle is directed against our government and against its imperialist alliances, the EU and NATO, which carry out these wars.

The main enemy is at home (Karl Liebknecht)

Regardless of what we think about Russia, the main enemy is at home! In the final analysis the Russian working class and people will decide about the development in Russia. We do our political work in our own country. When we want to mobilize against war, then we have to mobilize against the intervention of the German army in foreign countries, against the German export of weapons. We have to mainly unmask and reject the policy promoted by Berlin for a treaty of association between the EU and Ukraine, which is an instrument to tie that country closely to Western imperialism, to the USA, particularly to NATO, EU and German imperialism.

For this we need a broad front, in which all who fight against war can work together – regardless of whether they are pacifists, idealists, social democrats, trade unionists or communists. What they think of Russia is secondary and less important. This is a question of analysis, especially for the communists, so that they determine their policy without illusions. We are ready to continue the discussion about this objectively among comrades. Whoever today makes the attitude towards Russia into a principal question of unity, prevents this unity. Whoever today thinks that he should place before everyone the alternative of whether he is for or against Russia, must be aware that this means aiming for a very small anti-war movement.

We need the opposite! We need the broadest possible anti-war front. This is the task for all progressive, revolutionary and communist forces in our country. In fulfilling this task, everyone can show what he is capable of and what he contributes to the result. Sectarian discussions are harmful.

In this spirit we regret the statement of the Communist Initiative, which is factually correct in many aspects. Its tone makes it clear: They do not want to sit or more importantly work together with anyone who has a different position on the question of Russia. We look at this differently. All those who are against war, intervention in foreign countries and weapons exports have to sit together – whether they are for or against Russia – and to awaken the people in this country with multifaceted actions, to mobilize and organize protests on the broadest basis.
