

Against Half-Solidarity and False Pacifism - Statement of the Russian Socialist Movement on May Day

May 1, 2023



May Day is not only International Workers' Day but also a day of solidarity with the oppressed peoples and civil disobedience against war. For example, one can remember the 1971 May Day protests against US imperialist aggression in Vietnam in Washington. During that time, the antiwar movement's stance was clear: halt the war, complete the withdrawal of American troops, and support the right of the Vietnamese people to self-determination. Nowadays the Left is also leaning toward pacifism but its present iteration is much more ambivalent. While it still highlights issues of American imperialism, the prevention of nuclear war, and condemns militarization and war as means of resolving conflicts, it faces challenges in precisely identifying the aggressor and exhibits a willingness to tolerate Russia's annexation of Ukrainian territory and the continued presence of Russian troops there. Thus this version of pacifism is deprived of real solidarity with the oppressed peoples.

Campism of the Left, an ideological predisposition implying that the Left must endorse or at least refrain from criticism of the regimes which resist the hegemony of the West, usually hinders the support of Ukraine. This approach overlooks other imperialisms and ignores the opinion of the activists from the global periphery struggling against their 'antiimperialist' dictators.

Another obstacle to solidarity with Ukraine is the antimilitarist perspective of the Western Left which makes morally problematic any form of alignment with military preparations of one's government or with the rhetoric of the 'defense of democracy' which legitimized 'humanitarian interventions' in Yugoslavia, Iraq and Afghanistan.

We would like to highlight that such pacifism is false for several reasons. First, it is armed with old dogmas which are not reconsidered in light of current circumstances. Rejecting 'concrete analysis of a concrete situation', the Left devalues the concepts and principles of the Left movement, turning them into mere abstractions. "Anti-imperialism" is reduced to struggle with American imperialism and NATO expansion whereas pacifism is transformed from the instrument of struggle against the aggressor into the instrument of the appeasement of the aggressor. "False" pacifism promotes neutrality or limited support for Ukraine. However, we are convinced that the application of the same critical standards the Left apply to capitalist societies of the Global North means full-blown support of Ukraine since Russia is an imperialist aggressor which has already annexed part of the

Ukrainian territory, killed more than 120 000 people and displaced millions of Ukrainian peoples whereas Ukraine is fighting a war of national liberation.

Moreover, it is essential to recognize that Putin's regime does not serve as a bulwark against imperialism. It represents a version of reactionary authoritarian capitalism. Putin's regime has waged war with Ukraine in order to survive as a class and in order to repartition the zones of influence. Therefore, the lack of solidarity with the oppressed and the lack of condemnation of the oppressor makes internationalism meaningless.

Second, 'false pacifism' fails to propose a viable solution to end the war. Its demand for peace at any cost, including the recognition of the current status quo, disregards the specific circumstances at hand. 'False pacifism' does not take into account that Ukraine requires liberation instead of 'peace'. Peace on any conditions will not only mean a deal with the aggressor but also will be just an armistice since Putin's regime has entered such a stage where it cannot stop waging wars without the risk of losing power.

Both Ukrainian and Russian peoples need military defeat of Putin's regime. Only this opens the prospect of change for both of them and the potential promotion of the socialist agenda. Putin's regime hinders not only the struggle of the oppressed at home but also in the neighboring countries. As far as Russia is concerned, we have already emphasized that the level of inequality in Russia has risen significantly during the 20 years of Putin's leadership. Putin is not only an enemy of all forms of democracy but also an enemy of the working class. Popular participation in politics and voluntary associations is treated with suspicion in Russia. Putin is essentially an anti-Communist and an enemy of everything the left fought for in the twentieth century and is fighting for in the twenty-first. Therefore, without the collapse of Putin's repressive dictatorship, it is hardly realistic to expect any positive changes in the working class's condition in Russia and Ukraine, and only military defeat can facilitate this collapse.

Furthermore, from a global perspective allowing Putin's regime to get away with the war sets another dangerous precedent in international relations. It signals other countries with nuclear power or powerful armies that the wars of annexations are tolerated and that the international community will do nothing to stop the aggressor. The Nagorno-Karabakh crisis is now described in the irredentist language by Azerbaijan which has already occupied some Armenian territories Turkish air strikes in Iraq and Syria in 2022-2023 and Israel air raids on Gaza and Lebanon in 2023 have not received enough international attention as well. Putin's worldview according to which the strong have a right to beat the weak has to be dealt a severe blow in Ukraine otherwise irredentist bloody wars will be legalized all over the world. Thus the victory of Ukraine in the war is needed to prevent the normalization of the bloodbath in the world.

Finally, 'false pacifism' disguised under Left slogans reveals a petty-bourgeois nature characterized by egocentrism. 'False pacifism' is egocentric because it is reduced to the struggle with one's national government. Opposition to the national political mainstream is prioritized over solidarity with the Ukrainian people. 'False pacifism' is driven by self-interest as it is primarily concerned with the potential repercussions for the working class in Western countries and the spread of the war to the West itself as a result of more active support of Ukraine. In other words, 'false pacifism' boils down to distance from the war. What an interesting transformation: 50 years ago the Left movement criticized Western consumerist society for their ignorance of the wars in the Global South and valorization of material comfort, now the Left themselves is trying to approach the war from a safe distance. 'False pacifism' avoids listening to the demands of the Ukrainian socialists and Russian socialists who insist not only moral or humanitarian support of Ukraine but also a rejection of any compromises with Putin's regime, recognition of the right of Ukraine to resist and approval of further arms transfers to Ukraine.

The lack of desire of the Left to rub shoulders with their political mainstream is understandable. However, neutrality kills the prospects of the Left more than any form of participation in the support of Ukraine. It is high time the Left promoted their agenda which would enable them to preserve their political subjectivity. Such an agenda may include the following demands:

1. Increased arms transfers to Ukraine which will enable it to return its annexed territories.
2. Complete withdrawal of the Russian troops from the territory of Ukraine.
3. Redistribution of the burden of militarization. It is the government and the companies who conducted and still conduct business with Russia thereby indirectly supporting its authoritarian regime, should bear the costs of the war, not the working class.
4. Cancellation of Ukraine's debt.
5. Easing of immigration processes which will allow hosting more displaced Ukrainians and Russians who are fleeing from repressions and mobilizations. As regards Russians, we would like to repeat that engaging in political activities while in prison or on the front lines is extremely challenging.
6. Introducing the sanctions which will target Putin's elite particularly whose financial assets were hardly been affected by previous sanctions.
7. Abolition of secret diplomacy and conduct of all negotiations quite openly in full view of the whole people

It is imperative for the Left to shift their solidarity away from the ruling classes of the countries which imagined themselves oppressed and humiliated to people and societies fighting against oppression. To foster such solidarity, the Left has to develop the capacity to decentralize their view and empathy. From this perspective, it is impossible not to solidarize with the people of Ukraine. The oppressed, not only in Ukraine and Russia but worldwide, require horizontal solidarity and empathy rather than rigid geopolitical thinking and campism. Only then can the workers' movement triumph and pave the way for peace and socialism!