

In Defense of Socialist Internationalism: Answering the Propaganda of the Authoritarian “Left”

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Which way for the Left



Which way for the Left?

We have been slimed. An article by Ben Norton and Max Blumenthal on the recent Socialism 2019 Conference — which appears on their rancid website, The GrayZone, and is apparently being widely circulated — is a scurrilous attack not only on the conference itself, but also on one of our editors, Dan La Botz, and indeed on the entire political outlook of socialism from below, which has always been the defining perspective of our journal.

New Politics was a sponsor of the conference, a major gathering that drew 1,500 participants — members of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), former members of the now defunct International Socialist Organization (ISO), and a host of unaffiliated radicals and socialists as well as people from other groups. We were proud to support the event, which featured dialogue and debate among people who, in stark contrast to Blumenthal and Norton, recognize the centrality of democracy, labor rights, and civil liberties to socialism.

Norton and Blumenthal characterize the conference speakers as “a motley crew of regime-change activists” eager to “demonize Official Enemies of Washington” — by which they mean the authoritarian governments of Russia, China, Iran, Syria, Cuba, and Nicaragua. For Norton and Blumenthal, this “demonization” consists in “exploiting the cause of human rights or labor rights to undermine and destabilize foreign governments that Washington has targeted for regime change.” To them, denouncing China’s mass incarceration of up to a million members of the country’s Uyghur minority in concentration camps, or even drawing attention to it, to take but one example, is nothing more than carrying out the agenda of the State Department.

What Norton and Blumenthal, and their co-thinkers in what they call the “anti-imperialist left,” exhibit is essentially a revival of Cold War thinking, with a distinctly neo-Stalinist flavor: the world is divided into two camps, one dominated by the United States, and the other consisting of its enemies. The left must solidarize itself with the anti-Washington camp, no matter how brutal, corrupt and dictatorial its leaders, no matter how many of its citizens languish in prison cells, suffer in torture

chambers, or lie dead in the streets. We at *New Politics* unreservedly reject this morally bankrupt politics. We have always stood for vigorous, consistent opposition to both U.S. imperialism and to the tyrannies that pose as socialist or anti-imperialist.

Norton and Blumenthal do not merely claim that those in the socialism from below tradition “objectively” promote the interests of U.S. imperialism; they falsely accuse us - and other speakers at the Socialism 2019 Conference, such as the heroic journalist Anand Gopal, who delivered a powerful talk on the death of the Arab Spring in Syria — of actually supporting Washington’s wars and actively promoting the work of the CIA and the State Department. These are shameless lies that defame lifelong principled radicals and socialists. Even a cursory examination of the *New Politics* journal and website will demonstrate with the utmost clarity that we have never given any support to U.S. imperialism. Our co-editor Dan La Botz has fought against every war and military intervention launched by Washington since Vietnam. At the same time, we stand by our critique of the governments of Cuba and Nicaragua as part of our consistent defense of democratic rights and opposition to the rule of elites everywhere.

Norton and Blumenthal make much of the fact that some of the conference speakers were affiliated with human rights and labor rights groups that have received funding from the National Endowment for Democracy. *New Politics* has carried articles exposing and condemning the NED and its influence on groups such as the American Federation of Teachers; quite often members of such groups have little or no idea what the NED represents, but we think unions, human rights and left groups should have nothing to do with it. We reject, however, the crude claim that receipt of NED money automatically discredits an organization or a movement.

The soulless realpolitik of Norton and Blumenthal has nothing in common with an authentic left, “anti-imperialist” or any other kind. The left with which *New Politics* identifies is a political tradition of generous sympathies, always ready to offer solidarity to struggles for democracy and human dignity wherever they occur, a left that believes in the right of all people to control their governments and societies. It is of course true that Washington only invokes the crimes of Putin, Xi, Assad, Ortega, etc., hypocritically to justify its own imperialist aims. But it is entirely different for an independent left that combats its own government’s reactionary foreign and domestic policies to denounce these despots and their regimes and defend their victims. *New Politics*, as we have said, rejects the “campism” of Norton and Blumenthal. But there is one camp that we support wholeheartedly: the third camp of the oppressed and exploited everywhere. Neither Washington nor Moscow, Beijing, Tehran, Damascus, Havana, and Managua! For the third camp of socialist freedom!

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