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**Marxist Tactics in Wars with Contradictory Character**

**Opportunist LIS/MST \* Ukraine War: Platonic Supporters**

## English-Language Theoretical Review of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), New Series No.95, October 2023

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Picture on the cover: BRICS Leaders Meeting, Johannesburg (South Africa), 22 August 2023 (Source: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/76/2023\\_BRICS\\_Summit\\_family\\_photographs.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/76/2023_BRICS_Summit_family_photographs.jpg))

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## Marxist Tactics in Wars with Contradictory Character

### The Ukraine War and war threats in West Africa, the Middle East and East Asia show the necessity to understand the dual character of some conflicts

By Michael Pröbsting, Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 23 August 2023

We are living in extraordinary times where the accelerating contradictions of decaying capitalism increasingly provoke war and sabre-rattling. In addition to the escalating tensions between the imperialist Great Powers in East and West,<sup>1</sup> there is the ongoing Ukraine War,<sup>2</sup> a looming invasion of Niger by ECOWAS (with support of France and the EU),<sup>3</sup> a possible attack of the crisis-ridden Netanyahu government against Gaza,<sup>4</sup> Hezbollah in Lebanon and/or Iran (add to this the increasing presence of American troops and navy close to Iran),<sup>5</sup> the intensifying tensions between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea (the latter supported by the U.S.),<sup>6</sup> the long-standing Taiwan conflict between China and the U.S.<sup>7</sup> and, finally, the ever louder drums of war on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>8</sup>

At this place, we shall not repeat our analysis of each of these conflicts and refer readers to our respective documents. We shall rather deal with the methodological issues which constitute the basis for Marxists to elaborate the appropriate tactics in such conflicts. Let us go in media res.

There have been wars in history whose character was pretty obvious. Think about the various wars in the past when colonial powers invaded countries in Africa or Asia. Or, to take more actual examples, think about Russia's two wars against the Chechen people 1994-96 and 1999-2008, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) or Israel's four wars against Gaza in the years between 2008 and 2021 or its attack on Lebanon in 2006.<sup>9</sup>

These were clearly wars of imperialist powers against oppressed nations and semi-colonial countries – i.e. capitalist countries which are formally independent states, but which are economically and politically dominated by imperialist powers.<sup>10</sup> In such wars, the RCIT and other authentic socialists unconditionally sided with the oppressed and advocated their military victory against the imperialist aggressor. Shamefully, such obvious character of these wars did not prevent many self-proclaimed Marxists to fail in their anti-imperialist duty, i.e. they refused to call for the military victory of the oppressed nations and the defeat of the imperialist powers. But this was not the result of a complex character of the war but rather of these organisations' rotten political method characterised by opportunist adaptation to imperialism.

#### Dual character – a dialectical “unity of opposites”

However, as we pointed out repeatedly, the acceleration of inter-imperialist rivalry – provoked by the combination of capitalist decay and the rise of new Great Powers like Russia and China – results not only in tensions between the Great Powers but also in an increasing number of conflicts involving oppressed nations which have a contradictory character. This is because such rivalry also accelerates the drive of imperialist powers to expand their spheres of influence in the semi-colonial world by any means necessary. In other words, inter-imperialist rivalry provokes not

only more tensions between Great Powers or proxy conflicts but also more attacks on oppressed peoples. Hence, such inter-imperialist rivalry *also* provokes an increasing number of liberation wars.

Such conflicts can have a contradictory character as a consequence of the fact that the semi-colonial country in conflict with an imperialist state is at the same time allied – directly or indirectly – with one (or several) rivalling Great Power.

The RCIT characterises such conflicts as wars with a *dual character*. This means that they entail both the character of a liberation war as well as one of inter-imperialist rivalry. The task of Marxists is to understand the dialectical nature of such conflicts as an “unity of opposites” which are in constant struggle with each other. At the same time, it is crucial for Marxists to determine the “general direction of development”, as the Soviet philosopher Abram Deborin emphasised, i.e. to identify the main character of such a conflict.<sup>11</sup> In other words, Marxists have to understand the main feature of conflict's essence (“The truth of being is essence”, as Hegel appropriately said.)<sup>12</sup>

A concrete analysis of such wars is particularly important as we see an increasing number of conflicts which have such combined or dual character. In the case of the Ukraine War, the Western powers support the Ukraine with military aid. However, this has – at least until now – not qualitatively changed the character of the war, i.e. it remains, first and foremost, a just war of national defence of the Ukraine against Russian imperialism which socialists have to support.

In Niger, the junta of General Tiani tries to bring in Russian Wagner mercenaries and is allied with pro-Russian states (like Mali and Burkina Faso). Still Niger's resistance against the invasion of ECOWAS troops (with French and EU support) would have a progressive character. The same is the case if war starts between Israel resp. the U.S. and Iran or between the U.S. (and/or South Korea) and North Korea. In such conflicts, the RCIT advocates the defence of semi-colonial countries like Iran or North Korea against the imperialist aggressor (resp. its proxy). Naturally, such defence does not imply any political support for the bourgeois and dictatorial regimes at the top of these countries.

However, while we side with the oppressed nation against the imperialist enemy, we strictly oppose not only the latter but *all* Great Powers. Hence, we reject any support for sanctions, protectionism or armament of one Great Power against its rivals.

In cases where the element of inter-imperialist rivalry is the main feature of a conflict's essence, the RCIT does not side with one camp but advocate a revolutionary defeatist position against both (“dual defeatism”). This means socialists advocate strict opposition against both camps and try to utilise the war in order to advance the class struggle against each government.

This is the case, as things are now, in the Taiwan conflict as well as in the conflict between China and the Philip-

piners. This does not mean that we deny the existence of an element of national right of self-determination of Taiwan or the Philippines against Chinese imperialism. However, due to the concrete configuration of the conflicts and the relation of forces, such national element is, at least for now, subordinated to the inter-imperialist rivalry.

Finally, it is important to recognise that the character of a conflict can change in the course of time. It is exactly because of the dual character of such conflicts, because of their essence as dialectical *"unity of opposites"*, that the main feature of its character can change. Development is evolvment of inner contradictions, and it is not for nothing that Lenin called Hegel's dialectic a *"profound doctrine of development"*.<sup>13</sup> Such development is caused by the inner contradictions of a given phenomenon (*"Development is the 'struggle' of opposites"*) and this process can result in the transformation of quantity into quality.<sup>14</sup>

Hence, Marxists have to analyse the concrete evolvment of a given conflict and determine if its initially dominant element – e.g. its primary character as a liberation war – weakens and the other, initially subordinated, element – inter-imperialist rivalry – becomes stronger. If such a process of transformation crosses the Rubicon, the nature of a given conflict changes. In such a case, Marxists have to adapt their tactics and replace the defence of the semi-colonial country with a dual-defeatist position. We have recently discussed this issue in some detail in several documents about the Ukraine War.<sup>15</sup>

### Social-Imperialism and dogmatic abstentionism

Such an analysis of the contradictory nature of conflicts and its evolvment is not an abstract, academic exercise. It is rather an indispensable task of Marxists since it constitutes the basis for a correct understanding of the conflict, and consequential the elaboration of the correct tactics. A wrong analysis is the certain guide to wrong tactics. Hence, given the fact that the world situation is marked with an increasing number of wars with contradictory, dual nature, it is of growing importance for Marxists to acquire such a dialectical method in analysing conflicts and deriving the necessary tactics.

Unfortunately, most self-proclaimed socialists refuse to recognise such complex character of these conflicts – a failure which has all kinds of disastrous consequences. Many effectively side with one imperialist power. Examples for such social-imperialists are e.g. the Stalinist-Putinistas who hail Russia in its war of aggression against the Ukraine or who take the side of China. Others take the side of the oppressed country against a Great Power but ignore the interference of the imperialist rival or do not oppose the chauvinist policy of this rival. This is the case with some supporters of the Ukraine who don't oppose the policy of sanctions by NATO against Russia or who don't resolutely oppose the accession of the Ukraine or of other European countries to NATO or the EU. Another example for such adaptation to social-imperialism are those *"anti-imperialists"* who support Niger or Iran against the Western aggressor but fail to oppose – or even welcome – the interference of Russia.

Other socialists refuse such adaptation to social-imperialism but replace a concrete analysis of these conflicts with the dogma that all wars, where imperialist powers inter-

fere on both sides in one way or another, would be automatically conflicts between *"proxies"* of Great Powers. As a consequence, they refuse to support the oppressed nations but advocate a reactionary abstentionist position. Such a policy negates the subjectivity of oppressed peoples and their actual struggles against imperialist domination. This is no better than *"socialists"* who fail to support workers in an enterprise who are on strike for higher wages by saying that such support would only help the capitalist rivals in other corporations. Behind their approach lies, as we elaborated in detail somewhere else, accommodation to imperialism. It is a method which the RCIT calls *"neo-imperialist economism."*<sup>16</sup>

Obviously, such *"socialists"* are useless sectarians. One does not weaken imperialism by abstractly opposing each and every struggle which is not *"pure"* but influenced by reactionary or even imperialist forces. One has to take concrete struggles as they are with all their inner contradictions. In order to fight back reactionary or imperialist influences, socialists need to join such struggles and fight the enemy from within and not via smart-alecky comments.

As Lenin correctly noted in 1916, at the climax of World War I: *"The general staffs in the current war are doing their utmost to utilise any national and revolutionary movement in the enemy camp: the Germans utilise the Irish rebellion, the French—the Czech movement, etc. They are acting quite correctly from their own point of view. A serious war would not be treated seriously if advantage were not taken of the enemy's slightest weakness and if every opportunity that presented itself were not seized upon, the more so since it is impossible to know beforehand at what moment, where, and with what force some powder magazine will "explode". We would be very poor revolutionaries if, in the proletariat's great war of liberation for socialism, we did not know how to utilise every popular movement against every single disaster imperialism brings in order to intensify and extend the crisis."*<sup>17</sup>

### A method based on the class character of the parties involved and the totality of their interests

Without a Marxist compass, socialists are lost in a world situation increasingly characterised by conflicts with a contradictory, dual character. In order to determine the character of a conflict (including its possible change over time), one needs to examine the *class character of all parties involved as well as the totality of their interests as they evolve before resp. in the course of the war.*

Such an approach requires, first and foremost, to understand the class nature of the states involved. Trotsky once noted: *"To teach the workers correctly to understand the class character of the state – imperialist, colonial, workers'—and the reciprocal relations between them, as well as the inner contradictions in each of them, enables the workers to draw correct practical conclusions in situation."*<sup>18</sup> Today, there exist no workers states (even not bureaucratically degenerated ones like the USSR or China before 1991/92). As we elaborated in our works, modern countries can basically be divided into imperialist states and semi-colonies (without ignoring all kind of shades within such categories).<sup>19</sup>

From this follows that a precondition for recognising the character of conflicts today is, among others, the correct understanding of the class character of new Great Powers like Russia<sup>20</sup> and China.<sup>21</sup> As we have noted repeatedly,

many socialists have refused to recognise the imperialist character of these states which can not but result in political confusion and wrong tactics.

As a result of China's and Russia's rise as imperialist powers, old alliances are undermined and new alliances emerge resp. can develop in the future. Think, for example, about China's and Russia's expansion of influence in the Middle East or in Africa at the cost of the U.S.

As a matter of principle, Marxists are obligated to support semi-colonial countries against imperialist states. However, one must not turn such principle into an abstract dogma. It is also necessary to analyse each conflict in its concrete historical evolution. Is it a conflict with a long history of oppression and domination or not? Likewise, one has to study the relationship of this or that semi-colonial country to a given imperialist power; likewise, which influence do other conflicts have on a given war. Such an analysis is important also in order to determine the possible change of the character of a conflict over time.

To take a few examples. In the case of the Ukraine, it is well-known that this people suffered from national oppression by Russia for more than one and a half centuries with only brief interruptions. True, Western imperialism expanded its influence in terms of economic domination since the Ukraine became an independent state in 1991 (which, however, did not eliminate Russia's economic dominance).<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, when Putin invaded the Ukraine in February 2022, he tried to transform the country's position from a semi-colony into a foreign-occupied colony (similar to what the U.S. did in Afghanistan and Iraq two decades earlier).

In the case of Niger, this country has been dominated for about a century by French imperialism – first as a colony and, since it became formally independent in 1960, as a semi-colony. The popular hatred in Niger against the French is based on this profound historical fact. The sympathies for Putin and Russia by sectors of the masses is without doubt a reactionary phenomenon. But it has a historical basis in the simple fact that Russia has never played any relevant role in West Africa and is viewed as an opponent of Western powers.

In the case of Taiwan, there exists without doubt a national element since the native Taiwanese people – in contrast to the KMT apparatus which invaded the country after its defeat against the Maoists in 1947 – always had a specific identity. The Chinese communists initially recognised this fact but later – since World War II – strictly denied it.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, Taiwan as a separate entity since 1947 has always been a semi-colony which totally owed its existence to U.S. imperialism.

Another example from the recent past is the contradictory role of the YPG/PKK in Syria which, on one hand, defended the Kurdish people against Daesh but, on the other hand, played a crucial role in the occupation of large parts of the country by American troops.

It is only such a dialectical and historic approach which allows Marxists to elaborate a correct understanding of a conflict which in turn is the basis for taking a correct position with the consequential tactics.

We think that a world situation with an increasing number of conflicts with contradictory character will provoke growing confusion and division among socialists. Many will stand on the wrong side of the barricades. It is all the

more urgent for authentic revolutionaries who agree on a dialectical, class-based approach to wars and who share common positions on the major conflicts in the current world situation to join forces. The RCIT looks forward to work together with such comrades in jointly building a revolutionary party – nationally and internationally!

### Footnotes

1 The RCIT has dealt on numerous occasions with the inter-imperialist rivalry of the Great Powers. See e.g. RCIT: World Perspectives 2021-22: Entering a Pre-Revolutionary Global Situation, 22 August 2021, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-perspectives-2021-22/>; see also our book by Michael Pröbsting: Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry. The Factors behind the Accelerating Rivalry between the U.S., China, Russia, EU and Japan. A Critique of the Left's Analysis and an Outline of the Marxist Perspective, RCIT Books, Vienna 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/anti-imperialism-in-the-age-of-great-power-rivalry/>; see also the following works by the same author: "A Really Good Quarrel". US-China Alaska Meeting: The Inter-Imperialist Cold War Continues, 23 March 2021, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/us-china-alaska-meeting-shows-continuation-of-inter-imperialist-cold-war/>; Servants of Two Masters. Stalinism and the New Cold War between Imperialist Great Powers in East and West, 10 July 2021, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/servants-of-two-masters-stalinism-and-new-cold-war/>; for more works on this issue see these sub-pages: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-russia-as-imperialist-powers/> and <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/collection-of-articles-on-the-global-trade-war/>.

2 We refer readers to a special page on our website where all RCIT documents on the Ukraine War and the current NATO-Russia conflict are compiled, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/compilation-of-documents-on-nato-russia-conflict/>.

3 See on this several statements and articles of the RCIT and its Nigerian section which are compiled on a special sub-page on our website, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/collection-of-articles-on-the-coup-in-niger/>.

4 See on this a number of statements and articles of the RCIT which are compiled on a special sub-page on our website, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/collection-of-articles-on-fourth-gaza-war/>.

5 See our latest statement: RCIT: US Sends Warships, Warplanes and 3,000 Marines to Persian Gulf. No to U.S. sanctions and threats against Iran! Defend Iran in any military confrontation with the U.S. or Israel! No political support for the Mullah regime! 8 August 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/us-sends-warships-warplanes-and-3-000-marines-to-persian-gulf/>.

6 China-Philippines-US: The Conflict on the Ayungin Shoal and Inter-Imperialist Rivalry, 8 August 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/china-philippines-us-and-the-conflict-on-the-ayungin-shoal/>.

7 See on this e.g. RCIT: Taiwan: Pelosi Visit Might Provoke War between the U.S. and China. Down with both imperialist Great Powers, for a policy of Revolutionary Defeatism! 1 August 2022, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/taiwan-pelosi-visit-might-provoke-war-between-the-u-s-and-china/>; Taiwan: Great Power Rivalry and National Question. On the conflict between U.S. and Chinese imperialism, its consequences for the crisis of the capitalist world order, on Taiwan's national question and the program of revolutionary defeatism, 20 August 2022, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/taiwan-great-power-rivalry-and-national-question/>.

8 See our latest statement: RCIT: War Danger on the Korean Peninsula. Defend North Korea against the imperialist powers U.S., Japan and South Korea! Down with the inter-imperialist rivalry between Western powers, China and Russia! No political support for the Stalinist-capitalist Kim Regime! 17 August 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/war-danger-on-the-korean-peninsula/>.

9 For an overview about our history of support for anti-imperialist struggles in the past four decades (with links to documents, pictures and videos) see e.g. an essay by Michael Pröbsting: The Struggle of Revolutionaries in Imperialist Heartlands against Wars

of their "Own" Ruling Class. Examples from the history of the RCIT and its predecessor organisation in the last four decades, 2 September 2022, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-struggle-of-revolutionaries-in-imperialist-heartlands-against-wars-of-their-own-ruling-class/>

10 For a detailed discussion of the Marxist categories of imperialist and semi-colonial states see e.g. the book by Michael Pröbsting: *The Great Robbery of the South. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism*, RCIT Books, 2013, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>.

11 Abram Deborin: Lenin als revolutionärer Dialektiker (1925); in: *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus*, 1. Jahrgang (1925-26), S. 224 (our translation)

12 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: *The Science of Logic*, (Translated by A.V. Miller; Foreword by J.N. Findlay), Allen & Unwin, London 1969, p. 389

13 V.I. Lenin: *Karl Marx. A Brief Biographical Sketch with an Exposition of Marxism* (1914); in: LCW 21, p. 53

14 V.I. Lenin: *On the Question of Dialectics* (1915); in: LCW 38, p.358

15 See on this e.g. RCIT: *Towards a Turning Point in the Ukraine War? The tasks of socialists in the light of possible lines of development of the war of national defence in combination with the inter-imperialist Great Power rivalry*, 11 March 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/towards-a-turning-point-in-the-ukraine-war/>; *NATO Integration: An Imperialist Trap for the Ukrainian People! For a Popular War to defend the Ukraine against Putin's invasion! No subordination of Ukraine to NATO and EU! Against Russian and against NATO imperialism!* 19 June 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/nato-integration-is-imperialist-trap-for-ukraine/>; Michael Pröbsting: *Ukraine War: What Are the Results of the NATO Vilnius Summit? On the contradictory process of NATO-Ukraine rapprochement and, at the same time, diverging interests between Western powers and Kyiv*, 13 July 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/what-are-the-results-of-the-nato-vilnius-summit/>; by the same author: *Is Ukraine About to Become NATO's "Israel" in Eastern Europe? The "Wall Street Journal" reports about plans of Western governments to transform their relationship with the Ukraine at the NATO Summit in July*, 29 May 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/is-ukraine-about-to-become-nato-s-israel-in-eastern-europe/>

16 See e.g. the pamphlet by Michael Pröbsting: *The Poverty of Neo-Imperialist Economism. Imperialism and the national question - a critique of Ted Grant and his school (CWI, ISA, IMT)*, January 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/grantism-imperialism-and-national-question/>

17 V. I. Lenin: *The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up* (1916); in: LCW Vol. 22, p. 357

18 *Manifesto of the Fourth International on Imperialist War: Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution*. Adopted by the Emergency Conference of the Fourth International, May 19-26, 1940, in: *Documents of the Fourth International. The Formative Years (1933-40)*, New York 1973, p. 327, <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1938-1949/emergconf/fi-emerg02.htm>

19 Our most detailed works on the Marxist theory of imperialism are two books by Michael Pröbsting: *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry. The Factors behind the Accelerating Rivalry between the U.S., China, Russia, EU and Japan. A Critique of the Left's Analysis and an Outline of the Marxist Perspective*, RCIT Books, Vienna 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/anti-imperialism-in-the-age-of-great-power-rivalry/>; *The Great Robbery of the South. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism*, RCIT Books, 2013, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>

20 The RCIT has published numerous documents about capitalism in Russia and its rise to an imperialist power. The most important ones are several pamphlets by Michael Pröbsting: *The Peculiar Features of Russian Imperialism. A Study of Russia's Monopolies, Capital Export and Super-Exploitation in the Light of Marxist Theory*, 10 August 2021, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-peculiar-features-of-russian-imperialism/>; by the same author: *Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power. On the Understanding and Misunderstanding of Today's*

*Inter-Imperialist Rivalry in the Light of Lenin's Theory of Imperialism. Another Reply to Our Critics Who Deny Russia's Imperialist Character*, August 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-theory-and-russia/>; *Russia as a Great Imperialist Power. The formation of Russian Monopoly Capital and its Empire – A Reply to our Critics*, 18 March 2014 (this pamphlet contains a document written in 2001 in which we established for the first time our characterisation of Russia as imperialist), <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-russia/>; see also the following essays by the same author: *'Empire-ism' vs a Marxist analysis of imperialism: Continuing the debate with Argentinian economist Claudio Katz on Great Power rivalry, Russian imperialism and the Ukraine War*, 3 March 2023, <https://links.org.au/empire-ism-vs-marxist-analysis-imperialism-continuing-debate-argentinian-economist-claudio-katz/>; *Russia: An Imperialist Power or a "Non-Hegemonic Empire in Gestation"?* A reply to the Argentinian economist Claudio Katz, in: *New Politics*, 11 August 2022, at <https://newpol.org/russia-an-imperialist-power-or-a-non-hegemonic-empire-in-gestation-a-reply-to-the-argentinian-economist-claudio-katz-an-essay-with-8-tables/>; *Russian Imperialism and Its Monopolies*, in: *New Politics* Vol. XVIII No. 4, Whole Number 72, Winter 2022, [https://newpol.org/issue\\_post/russian-imperialism-and-its-monopolies/](https://newpol.org/issue_post/russian-imperialism-and-its-monopolies/); *Once Again on Russian Imperialism (Reply to Critics)*. A rebuttal of a theory which claims that Russia is not an imperialist state but would be rather "comparable to Brazil and Iran", 30 March 2022, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/once-again-on-russian-imperialism-reply-to-critics/>. See various other RCIT documents on this issue at a special sub-page on the RCIT's website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-russia-as-imperialist-powers/>.

21 For our analysis of capitalism in China and its transformation into a Great Power see e.g. the book by Michael Pröbsting: *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry. The Factors behind the Accelerating Rivalry between the U.S., China, Russia, EU and Japan. A Critique of the Left's Analysis and an Outline of the Marxist Perspective*, RCIT Books, Vienna 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/anti-imperialism-in-the-age-of-great-power-rivalry/>; see also by the same author: *"Chinese Imperialism and the World Economy"*, an essay published in the second edition of *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism* (edited by Immanuel Ness and Zak Cope), Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2020, [https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-3-319-91206-6\\_179-1](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-3-319-91206-6_179-1); *China: An Imperialist Power ... Or Not Yet? A Theoretical Question with Very Practical Consequences! Continuing the Debate with Esteban Mercatante and the PTS/FT on China's class character and consequences for the revolutionary strategy*, 22 January 2022, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-imperialist-power-or-not-yet/>; *China's transformation into an imperialist power. A study of the economic, political and military aspects of China as a Great Power* (2012), in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 4, <http://www.thecommunists.net/publications/revcom-number-4/>; How is it possible that some Marxists still Doubt that China has become Capitalist? (A Critique of the PTS/FT), An analysis of the capitalist character of China's State-Owned Enterprises and its political consequences, 18 September 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/pts-ft-and-chinese-imperialism-2/>; *Unable to See the Wood for the Trees (PTS/FT and China)*. Eclectic empiricism and the failure of the PTS/FT to recognize the imperialist character of China, 13 August 2020, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/pts-ft-and-chinese-imperialism/>; *China's Emergence as an Imperialist Power* (Article in the US journal 'New Politics'), in: "New Politics", Summer 2014 (Vol:XV-1, Whole #: 57). See many more RCIT documents at a special sub-page on the RCIT's website: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/china-russia-as-imperialist-powers/>.

22 For a political and economic analysis of the Ukraine see e.g. the pamphlet by Michael Pröbsting: *Ukraine: A Capitalist Semi-Colony. On the exploitation and deformation of Ukraine's economy by imperialist monopolies and oligarchs since capitalist restoration in 1991*, January 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/ukraine-a-capitalist-semi-colony/>

23 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *Did the Chinese Communist Party always consider Taiwan as part of the Chinese nation?*; published by LINKS (Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal), 6 October 2022, <http://links.org.au/did-chinese-communist-party-always-consider-taiwan-part-chinese-nation>

## BRICS+: An Imperialist-Led Alliance

### The expansion of BRICS reflects the rise of Chinese and Russian imperialism at the cost of their Western rivals

By Michael Pröbsting, Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 29 August 2023

The expansion of BRICS – the acronym of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – by six new members was certainly the most important decision of the alliance's 15<sup>th</sup> summit, hosted by South Africa. These new countries – Argentina, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates – will join the alliance by 1 January 2024.

In fact, the BRICS summit in Johannesburg was a turning point not only because of the decision to expand its membership to 11 countries but also because of the unprecedented attention and attraction the alliance has got. Some 65 heads of state and leaders attended the summit.<sup>1</sup> More than 40 countries have expressed interest in joining BRICS, and 23 formally applied to join the bloc. Furthermore, the BRICS bank – the Shanghai-based New Development Bank – is supposed to increase its membership. According to its head – former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff – the bank was considering 15 new member states.<sup>2</sup>

With its additional new members, the global weight of BRICS – which is now often called *BRICS+* – will further increase. With about 3.6 billion people, its share of the world population will grow from 41.2% to 46.5%. Its share of global GDP is said to increase from 23% to about 29-30% (in current US-Dollar) respectively to 36-37% (at Purchasing Power Parity). Likewise, BRICS will account for 38.3% of the total world industrial production – the main sector of capitalist value production. Furthermore, the expansion will grow its share of global exports (merchandise trade) from 20.2% to 25.1%.

It is also noteworthy that BRICS' position in several key economic sectors is substantially increasing. For example, its share of oil production will grow from 20.4% to 43-44%. Likewise, BRICS+ accounts for almost half of world food production (in 2021, 49% of wheat and 55% of rice). Likewise, the 11 BRICS countries control crucial areas of the world production of metals necessary for high technologies (e.g. 79% of aluminium production and 77% of palladium production).<sup>3</sup>

All this makes BRICS+ substantially larger than the Western G7 alliance (U.S., Germany, France, UK, Japan, Canada and Italy) not only in terms of population but also in terms of economic weight. The G7 have a combined share of 29.9% of global GDP (in PPP) and 30.5% of world industrial production.

#### What is the class character of BRICS+?

For Marxists, the starting point of a political assessment of BRICS+ has to be an analysis of its class character. Obviously, all member states are capitalist since currently all countries on the planet are capitalist. However, its necessary to determine if these countries belong to those which dominate world politics and economy or not, i.e. if these are imperialist or rather semi-colonial states.<sup>4</sup>

The majority of the 11 BRICS+ members are not imperialist states but rather semi-colonies. Of course, there are

important differences between these semi-colonies. Some of these are advanced industrialised countries (like Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Iran, Egypt), some have peculiar features as wealthy oil and gas rich states (Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) or as a regional power (India), and in case of Ethiopia we have rather a poor semi-colony.<sup>5</sup>

However, the character of a political or economic institution is not determined by the majority of its member states but rather by those which dominate it. This is, by the way, why the United Nations is an imperialist-dominated institution – despite the fact that the five imperialist states with veto power constitute only a small minority among its 193 member states. Or, to give another example, this is why the Eurasian military alliance CSTO is has an imperialist character despite the fact that Russia is the only imperialist state among its six members.

In case of BRICS, it is China and Russia which belong to the small circle of leading imperialist Great Powers. Both are global political players which are permanent members of the UN Security Council with veto power. China has become the most important challenger of the U.S. – the long-standing hegemon. It is the leading economic power within BRICS and accounted for over 70% of the alliance's combined GDP in 2021.<sup>6</sup> While this share will now decline to 63.4% because of the expansion of the bloc, it remains by far the dominating force.<sup>7</sup>

Russia is another political and economic key player within the BRICS alliance, albeit weaker than China.<sup>8</sup> However, it is a leading military power with a stockpile of 5,889 nuclear warheads – even larger than the U.S.<sup>9</sup>

It is these two Great Powers which put their stamp on the BRICS alliance. It is telling that the expansion of the bloc from 5 to 11 member states was initiated by Beijing and Moscow which massively pushed for it while the governments of the other three countries were rather reluctant. However, Xi and Putin are determined to expand BRICS as a political alliance since they need an effective counterweight to Western-dominated blocs like the G7.

In summary, we can say that while BRICS is composed mostly of semi-colonial countries of the Global South, it is dominated by two imperialist Great Powers – China and Russia. Hence, it is an *imperialist-led alliance*.

#### “A meaningless acronym”?

While some intelligent Western observers are worried about the expansion of BRICS, many others downplay the bloc's significance. Bloomberg, a major news agency of American monopoly capital, published a silly commentary titled “*BRICS shows it's little more than a meaningless acronym.*” It claims that the “*doings and sayings*” of the alliance's leaders at the Johannesburg summit “*ranged from the semi-farcical to the meaningless*”.<sup>10</sup> Such statements reflect arrogant complacency of Western powers which are incapable of recognising their own crisis and decline. Such

a deluded approach reminds one to the foolish “*Herrenmenschen*” mentality of the German Nazis which refused bluntly to recognise even in 1944 that the Slavic “*Untermenschen*” were about to defeat them.

It is, of course, true that BRICS is still in a process of formation in order to become a fully functioning political bloc – in contrast to an established alliance like the G7. It is also correct to point to various inner contradictions within the BRICS alliance. Some of member states still have more or less strong relations with U.S. imperialism and are not strongly committed to side with China and Russia against their Western rivals. Furthermore, there exist long-standing tensions between China and India which occasionally result in border clashes.

While all this is true, one must not ignore the fundamental tendencies behind the expansion of BRICS. As we have repeatedly analysed in our works, the old imperialist states of the West are in a long-term process of decline since the production of capitalist value is increasingly moving to other places (most importantly to China). As a result, the majority of the worlds’ industrial production and merchandise exports does no longer take place in Western countries. Furthermore, the U.S. has already been overtaken (or nearly overtaken) by China when it comes to key indicators like the number of global leading corporations or billionaires.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, one must not forget that the Western G7 alliance has also been repeatedly characterised by various contradictions. Think about the economic power struggle between the U.S. and Japan in the 1980s; think about Trump’s threats against Western European “allies” in 2017-20; or about Washington’s sabotage of the Nord Stream Pipelines in 2022.

Sure, currently the G7 are relatively united in their policy of sanctions against Russia (and, to a lesser degree, in their opposition against China). But, first, this could easily change with the next Presidential elections in the U.S. in November 2024 if Trump enters the White House again. Secondly, the relative unity of the G7 states is based on their shared interests to stop the rise of the new imperialist powers of the East.

However, the same, opposite, interests unite the BRICS members as well as those that wish to join this alliance: they are determined to break up the long-term hegemony of Western powers in global political and economic institutions. This is reflected in the BRICS demand for reforms of the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions which would allow “*for a greater role for emerging markets and developing countries, including in leadership positions in the Bretton Woods institutions.*”<sup>12</sup>

More importantly, the BRICS states are determined to end to hegemony of the U.S. Dollar in global trade and financial institutions (like SWIFT). Such desire is reflected in the summits’ “*Johannesburg II Declaration*” where the alliance calls for the use of national currencies instead of the U.S. Dollar. (“*We stress the importance of encouraging the use of local currencies in international trade and financial transactions between BRICS as well as their trading partners. We also encourage strengthening of correspondent banking networks between the BRICS countries and enabling settlements in the local currencies. We task our Finance Ministers and/or Central Bank Governors, as appropriate, to consider the issue of local currencies, payment instruments and platforms and report back to us*

*by the next Summit.*”) <sup>13</sup>

There is no doubt that such desire has been spurred even more by Western sanctions against Russia and the de facto seizure of hundreds of billions of Russia’s foreign currency reserves.<sup>14</sup>

In short, both alliances – the G7 as well as the BRICS – have their inner contradictions. However, they are equally united by shared interests. This does not mean that such inner contradictions could not lead to crisis and even a split by one or the other member of these alliances. While such regroupment would represent an important development, it does not alter the fundamental underlying process: the accelerating rivalry between the imperialist powers of West and East and the formation of political alliances around the respective leading rivals.

It is such inter-imperialist rivalry which has been the driving force in China’s and Russia’s determination to build BRICS as a political alliance. And it has been such rivalry which led to a certain reconsolidation of the G7.<sup>15</sup>

### **The reactionary program of the “multi-polar world order”**

It is only such a Marxist analysis of fundamental processes in the current world situation which allows for a correct understanding of the BRICS’ class character. Such an approach is diametrically opposed to the view of various Stalinist-Putinista parties or the populist and social democratic forces in the “*Progressive International*” (whose most prominent figures have been Sanders, Lula, Varoufakis and Corbyn). These forces either explicitly support “socialist” China and “anti-imperialist” Russia. Or they view Beijing and Moscow as “lesser evils” which supposedly play an objectively progressive role since they oppose the “American hegemon” as the sole representative of imperialism.

These forces advocate a “*multi-polar world order*”, i.e. a global situation which is characterised not by U.S. resp. Western domination but by the parallel existence of several Great Powers. In other words, they advocate a world order in which eastern Great Powers like China and Russia have an equal saying like the U.S., Western Europe or Japan.

We have characterised such a program as reactionary. A “*multi-polar world order*” in effect does not and can not mean equality for the countries of the Global South – it means, and can only mean, “equality” of a few new Great Powers with the old hegemon. It is a program advocating “multi-imperialism”, i.e. the parallel existence of several rivalling imperialist powers. As history has demonstrated since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, such a situation inevitable leads to conflicts and, ultimately, world war. Objectively, advocacy of a “*multi-polar world order*” is the program of pro-Eastern social-imperialism as it supports the interests of China and Russia against those of the Western powers.<sup>16</sup>

In this context, we shall briefly add that the reactionary character of the BRICS alliance is also reflected in the fact that its extensive “*Johannesburg II Declaration*” (26 pages) does not utter a single word of sympathy with the Ukraine which has been invaded by Putin in February 2022 and which has been devastated by relentless Russian bombardment since then.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the declaration



states its sympathy for the Assad dictatorship (“We welcome the readmission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the League of Arab States.”)<sup>18</sup> This is particularly shameful as the Syrian Revolution currently experiences a dramatic revival with a new wave of mass protests calling for the downfall of the tyrannical regime!<sup>19</sup> So much for the “progressive” alternative to the Western imperialists!

### No progressive alliance? Sure, but ...

Finally, we shall briefly deal with the approach of an international Trotskyist organisation based in Latin America – the “*Fracción Trotskista*” (Trotskyist Faction”) led by the Argentinean PTS (FT/PTS).

In contrast to the previously mentioned Stalinist-Putinistas, populists and social democrats, the FT/PTS comrades correctly refuse to whitewash the BRICS alliance as some kind of progressive alliance. They warn that “*the challenge that this bloc may pose to the great imperialist powers does not turn it into an ally of oppressed peoples. BRICS does not represent an alternative of “benign hegemony” in the international order.*” They also emphasise: “*BRICS sows illusions that relationships and shifts in alliances between bourgeois states can offer a path towards liberation for the working class.*”<sup>20</sup>

Naturally, we can not but strongly agree with such statements. However, the FT/PTS analysis is far from sufficient. They write: “*Additionally, whatever challenge the BRICS alliance poses to U.S. and Western imperialist hegemony is a challenge made with a capitalist logic. The countries in the alliance aim not to develop the power of the working class in their countries, but instead to develop their own position within the international relations of capital.*”

Of course, it is correct to say that BRICS+ is a “*capitalist alliance*”. But this is a general truism with little meaningfulness. In fact, each and every alliance of states today is a “*capitalist alliance*” because since the restoration of capitalism in the former Stalinist states, there exist only capitalist countries in the world!

Hence, it is not sufficient to recognise the capitalist character of a state or an alliance of states. It is essential to analyse which kind of capitalist countries are we talking about – are these imperialist or semi-colonial states. As we did elaborate above, we consider BRICS+ as an imperialist-led alliance. The FT/PTS comrades do not share such an analysis. The reason for this is that – in contrast to the RCIT – they do not characterise China and Russia as imperialist Great Powers.<sup>21</sup> Hence, the comrades fail to go beyond a superficial characterisation of BRICS+ as being “capitalist” and “not progressive”.

### Consequences for Marxist tactics

This is a highly relevant issue as we are not discussing about abstract differences. In fact, such characterisation of states resp. alliances of states has profound consequences for Marxist tactics. In a conflict between an imperialist state (or an alliance of states) and a semi-colony (or several semi-colonial countries), we usually side with the latter. Sure, both sides are capitalist, but the imperialist power belongs to the dominating forces within the capitalist world system while the semi-colonies are rather being dominated by the former. This is why we sided with Argentina against Britain in 1982, with Afghanistan and Iraq against the U.S. (in 2001 resp. 2003) or with Chechnya and

# Books of the RCIT

## Michael Pröbsting: Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry

The Factors behind the Accelerating Rivalry between the U.S., China, Russia, EU and Japan.  
A Critique of the Left’s Analysis and an Outline of the Marxist Perspective

In *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* Michael Pröbsting analyses the accelerating rivalry between the imperialist Great Powers – the U.S., China, EU, Russia, and Japan. He shows that the diplomatic rows, sanctions, trade wars, and military tensions between these Great Powers are not accidental or caused by a mad man in the White House. They are rather rooted in the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system. This rivalry is a key feature of the current historic period and could, ultimately, result in major wars between these Great Powers.

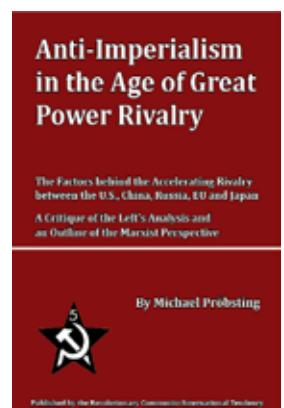
*Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* demonstrates the validity of the Marxist analysis of modern imperialism. Using comprehensive material (including 61 Tables and Figures), Michael Pröbsting elaborates that a correct understanding of the rise of China and Russia as new Great Powers is crucial for assessing the character of the current inter-imperialist rivalry.

In *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry* Michael Pröbsting critically discusses the analysis of modern imperialism by a number of left-wing parties (left social democrats, Stalinists, Trotskyists and others). He demon-

strates that most of these organizations fail to understand the nature of the Great Power rivalry and, consequently, are not able to take an internationalist and revolutionary stance.

The author elaborates the approach of leading Marxist figures like Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg to the problems of Great Power rivalry and imperialist aggression against oppressed peoples. He outlines a Marxist program for the current period which is essential for anyone who wants to change the world and bring about a socialist future.

The book contains an introduction and 29 chapters plus an appendix (412 pages) and includes 61 figures and tables. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who serves as the International Secretary of the RCIT.



Syria against Russia (in 1994-96 and 1999-2009 resp. since 2015).<sup>22</sup>

In contrast, Marxists do not take a side in conflicts between imperialist states since “both are worse”. In such conflicts we advocate a program of revolutionary defeatism against both (“*dual defeatism*”). This means strict opposition against both camps with the goal to advance the class struggle against each government. (There exist also conflicts with contradictory character, but we will not deal with this issue at this place and refer readers to an essay which we recently published.<sup>23</sup>)

So which position should Marxists take in conflicts between Western and Eastern imperialism, between G7 and BRICS? Currently, such conflicts are limited to sanctions, protectionism, military armament, etc. But sooner or later, such diplomatic and economic tensions will provoke military clashes and wars. Since the RCIT considers both camps/alliances as imperialist, we take a dual defeatist position in such conflicts.

But which position will those comrades take who refuse to consider China and Russia resp. the BRICS+ alliance as imperialist? As they characterise only the Western powers as imperialist but not China and Russia, would they side with the latter against the U.S. and its allies? The FT/PTS comrades don't say so, but it is irritating that they refuse to characterise the Eastern Great Powers as imperialist in contrast to their Western rivals. Or will they take a dual defeatist position like us? But if this is the case, why don't they express such an approach explicitly? In fact, they are completely silent on the consequences of their analysis when it comes to program and tactics.

It is an urgent task for all socialists to clarify their analysis of major developments in world politics like the expansion of BRICS and the rise of China and Russia as imperialist powers. Those who share an understanding of all Great Powers – those in the West as well as those in the East – are imperialist and that these need to be intransigently opposed by socialists, should join forces in order to build a consistent anti-imperialist resistance!

## Footnotes

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21 For our discussion with the FT/PTS about the imperialist character of Russia and China see some works in the two footnotes above about RCIT documents on these two Great Powers.

22 For an overview about our history of support for anti-imperialist struggles in the past four decades (with links to documents, pictures and videos) see e.g. an essay by Michael Pröbsting: The Struggle of Revolutionaries in Imperialist Heartlands against Wars of their “Own” Ruling Class. Examples from the history of the RCIT and its predecessor organisation in the last four decades, 2 September 2022, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-struggle-of-revolutionaries-in-imperialist-heartlands-against-wars-of-their-own-ruling-class/>

23 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: Marxist Tactics in Wars with Contradictory Character. The Ukraine War and war threats in West Africa, the Middle East and East Asia show the necessity to understand the dual character of some conflicts, 23 August 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/marxist-tactics-in-wars-with-contradictory-character/>

# China: Restoration of Capitalism and Transformation into an Imperialist Power

**A study of the economic, political and military aspects of China as a Great Power**

*By Michael Pröbsting (International Secretary of the RCIT)*

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## The Pro-Bourgeois Opportunism of LIS/MST (Part 2)

### On the Pakistani section of LIS/MST and its praise for the capitalist dictator Z. A. Bhutto and his PPP

By Michael Pröbsting, Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 15 June 2023

In the first part of this article, we referred to the efforts of the Argentinean MST – the leading force of the *International Socialist League* (ISL or LIS by its Spanish-language acronym) – to push FITu, an alliance of four Trotskyist parties, to the right. Concretely, the MST – together with the PO – desire to transform FITu into a “broad alliance” with petty-bourgeois populist and Stalinist forces.<sup>1</sup>

Hence, our comrades in *Convergencia Socialista* (RCIT section in Argentina) support the campaign of the other two parties in FITu – the PTS and IS – to oppose such an arch-opportunist degeneration of the alliance. As part of their work, our comrades stand candidates on their list for the upcoming national elections.

Such a push of the MST towards petty-bourgeois populism has its roots in this party’s long history of collaborating not only with petty-bourgeois but even with outright bourgeois figures like Luis Juez and his *Frente Cívico*. The same rotten method constitutes the basis for other organisations of its international tendency. In the first part of this article, we demonstrated this assessment by the example of the “Ukrainian section” of LIS, led by the notorious comrade Oleg Vernik.

At this place, we will deal with the Pakistani section of LIS called “*The Struggle*” – an organisation associated with its founder and historic leader, the late Lal Khan (he died in 2020).

#### Lal Khan’s “*The Struggle*” and the historic tradition of Grantism

In contrast to Vernik, Khan was a serious person, and his organisation has a history of four decades in Pakistan’s class struggle. Nevertheless, its politics has been characterised from the very beginning by a combination of set pieces of abstract “Trotskyist” principles and opportunist practice.

It is not accidental that “*The Struggle*” was part of the so-called Grantite tendency for most of the time since the beginning of its existence in 1980. As such, it was, first, the Pakistani section of the CWI and, after the split of the latter in 1991, of Alan Woods’ IMT. Only when Wood expelled “*The Struggle*” in 2017 (which provided about 2/3 of the IMT’s total membership at that time), Lal Khan was forced to look for another mother ship which had a similar opportunistic program. As a result, “*The Struggle*” joined LIS when it was founded in 2019.

We have dealt extensively with the historic tradition of Grantism at another point and will therefore limit ourselves at this place to briefly summarise its main features.<sup>2</sup>

Basically, the programmatic tradition of Ted Grant is characterised by a number of fundamental revisions of the Marxist theory, resulting in a gross adaptation to reformism and imperialist economism. It denies the necessity of smashing of the capitalist state and claims that a peaceful and parliamentary road to socialism would be possible. Related to this, Grantism lacks a Marxist understanding

of the role of the repression apparatus, considers police as “*workers in uniform*” and advocates the membership of police unions in trade union federations.

Such adaptations to bourgeois reformism goes hand in hand with accommodation to imperialism. In a number of important national wars and rebellions, the Grantites failed to support these or even denounced them as reactionary. This was the case in the Malvinas War between Argentina and Britain in 1982, during the period of armed resistance in Northern Ireland, during the two Iraq Wars in 1991 and 2003 (plus the resistance against the following occupation), during the Afghanistan War in 2001 (plus the resistance against the following occupation), during the Palestinian resistance against the Zionist state, and during the current Ukraine War.

In all these insurrections and wars of national defence, the Grantites consistently opposed the approach which the RCIT and other authentic Marxists advocate: *defeat for the imperialist aggressor, victory for the oppressed nation respectively for the semi-colonial country (like Argentina, Afghanistan, Iraq, etc.), without lending political support for the political leadership of these resistance forces.*

Closely related to this opportunistic method has been the strategic orientation of the Grantite organisations towards the labour bureaucracy or similar “progressive” bourgeois forces. Hence, they usually work inside reformist parties – e.g. social democratic or (ex-)Stalinist parties in Europe – and claim that they could be transformed into authentic socialist forces. In countries where such bourgeois workers parties do not exist (or are very small), they support – or even work within – (petty-)bourgeois forces for years or decades. Hence, the IMT praised Chavez and his Bolivarian party. Likewise, they “critically” support the Stalinist regime in Cuba and have dropped the slogan of political revolution. In the U.S., the Grantites (in particular the local section of the ISA, another split from the CWI) strongly supported Senator Bernie Sanders – the leading figure of the “left wing” of the Biden’s Democratic Party.

#### Z. A. Bhutto and the bourgeois PPP

Lal Khan and “*The Struggle*” applied such a gross opportunist method to the Pakistani conditions. As such it has entered and worked within the *Pakistan People’s Party* (PPP). The PPP is a bourgeois-populist party founded by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1967. The Bhutto clan has been one of the wealthiest of the country with a huge land-ownership, mainly in the province of Sind. It has also been one of most influential families in Pakistan’s politics since the foundation of the state in 1947. Consequently, the Bhutto clan dominates the PPP until today.<sup>3</sup>

Z. A. Bhutto served as minister in the government of General Ayub Khan who ruled Pakistan as a military dictator in 1958-69. He soon became a trusted ally and advisor of Khan and played a crucial role in convincing the latter to launch a war against India in 1965 (which resulted in a

humiliating defeat for Pakistan).

Bhutto founded the PPP on the basis of an ideological mixture of religion, nationalism and “socialism”. Contrary to his hopes, he lost the elections in 1970 as the PPP received only 18.6%, coming second behind the Awami League (39.2%). The latter had its stronghold in Bangladesh which, at that time, was still a province of the Pakistani state. Nevertheless, Bhutto insisted on taking over the government. As the Awami League – and the Bengal people – refused, the army carried out a coup and waged war against Bangladesh (“Operation Searchlight”). However, the Pakistani army lost, and Bangladesh became an independent state.<sup>4</sup>

Through smart manoeuvring, Bhutto managed to come out victorious from the chaos and national trauma of the defeat and succeeded Khan. During the years of his rule – until he was deposed by a military coup in 1977 – he combined a policy of state-capitalism and modernisation with authoritarian chauvinism. After losing the reactionary war against the Bengal people, Bhutto was determined to stop other oppressed peoples in Pakistan seceding. Hence, he sent 80,000 soldiers to suppress the national liberation struggle of the Baloch people, resulting in the killing about 16,000 civilians and 5,300 rebels.<sup>5</sup>

After Z. A. Bhutto died in prison, his daughter Benazir took over the party. She became Prime Minister of the country in 1988-90 and 1993-96. She was assassinated in December 2007, after which the PPP again won the parliamentary elections. In all these years, the PPP carried out a neoliberal and pro-imperialist policy.

#### **The PPP and its “programme of revolutionary socialism”**

Despite such a historic record of the Bhutto clan and the PPP – characterized by anti-working-class policy and reactionary chauvinism – Lal Khan and the “*The Struggle*” has worked within this party since decades.

Such an *entryism sui generis* is a caricature of the shameful tradition of Pablo’s “Fourth International” in the 1950’s and 1960’s. It is even worse – not only because such *entryism sui generis* has been taken out much longer than by its centrist role model. It also distinguishes itself from Pablo by undisguised admiration for Z. A. Bhutto and his programmatic tradition. This is even more bizarre as Tito and other Stalinists as well as left social democrats – all praised by Pablo and his friends – were at least representatives of deformed workers states or (bourgeois) workers parties. In contrast, the Bhutto clan has always been an extremely wealthy land-owner family which was highly influential in the political and military leadership of Pakistani capitalism.

Throughout their whole history until today, Lal Khan and the “*The Struggle*” have claimed the heritage of Z. A. Bhutto and his so-called “*program of socialist revolution*”. In his book “*Partition: Can It Be Undone?*”, Lal Khan stated that “*the Pakistan People’s Party was founded on a very revolutionary programme.*”<sup>6</sup>

Only a few years ago, Lal Khan continued to extol Bhutto’s “*revolutionary message to close the convention*” in 1967. He praised the PPP’s program: “*The Founding Document outlined the basic aims and objectives of the party. It was perhaps the most radical programme of any left-wing party in*

*South Asian subcontinent’s history since 1947. Although the subsequent leaderships’ abandoned and obfuscated these tenets few in today’s generations are aware of its historical worth. This programme of revolutionary socialism propelled the PPP to become the largest party in Pakistan.*”<sup>7</sup>

Khan continued in the same article: “*It was this very ideology that brought PPP into the leadership of 1968-69 revolution; the most audacious upheaval in post-partition South Asia. The masses traditionally aligned to PPP are in despair and revulsion against this ideological betrayal. The original PPP had dared to challenge the capitalist order. The present caricature fervently appeases existent system and its state. This system’s savagery is devastating the oppressed. Masses are yearning for a change. A fresh revolutionary upheaval shall cleave the party and society on class lines, carving out the Leninist party to accomplish a socialist victory – as envisaged in PPP’s founding document.*”

In another article, Khan wrote about Bhutto: “*The Pakistan Peoples Party that he had founded in November 1967, with the guidance and support of some of the Pakistan’s most radical left wing activists and intellectuals, had gained mass support for its socialist programme almost overnight. (...) Bhutto was not a Marxist revolutionist but he put forward a socialist programme that penetrated mass consciousness at the ripe moment. Paradoxically the movement radicalised Bhutto even more. This chemistry between the masses and populist leaders has prevailed in modern history. Bhutto’s political sojourn proves that people change by impacts of objective conditions and leaders are radicalised by the heat of class struggle. As Bhutto points out in his last writing, class conciliation is always disastrous. Only through an irreconcilable class struggle the working classes can achieve a socialist victory with the instrument of a Leninist party.*”<sup>8</sup>

#### **Even non-Marxists see through Bhutto’s demagogic “socialism”**

In contrast to the confused fabrications of Lal Khan and the “*The Struggle*”, bourgeois academics have a much clearer picture of the superficial and demagogic nature of Bhutto’s “socialism”. Anwar H. Syed, for example, writes about the founding documents of the PPP: “*Not wishing to invite widespread hostility when it was just getting off the ground, the PPP preferred to be seen as an agent of social change but not as the maker of a socialist revolution. There is little revolutionary or otherwise militant vocabulary in the Documents. The party wanted to attract as many and alienate as few interests as possible in order to prepare for the struggle for power that lay ahead. Nothing would be lost, and possibly much would be gained, by adhering to the established political custom of professing one’s dedication to Islam; nor would it necessarily be farcical. It would be unwise to alarm the middle land owners in the countryside or the shopkeepers in towns by launching a major attack on landed property or private enterprise. The party promised to demolish the edifice of exploitative capitalism, already under fire from several quarters, but otherwise it chose to project itself as a progressive nation-builder dedicated to the norms of humane and civil conduct.*”<sup>9</sup>

And a left-wing Sind nationalist – Khaliq Junejo, chairman of “*Jeay Sindh Mahaz*” – made another highly appropriate criticism of Lal Khan’s unashamed praise of Bhutto. “*But, unfortunately, the situation in Pakistan has been different. Here many of our leftist friends consider nationalist movements as their biggest enemies and to counter them they even go to the*

extent of allying themselves with feudal and military dictators. Lal Khan condemns Sheikh Mujibur Rehman as “a bourgeois demagogue” and “a staunch aficionado of capitalism” but he himself is allied with the PPP, the biggest party of feudal lords in Pakistan. It was the PPP and its leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who inducted religion into state affairs and laid the foundations of religious discrimination and prejudice between citizens that has brought Pakistan to the verge of civil war. Also it was Mr Bhutto who initiated the policy of strategic depth vis-a-vis Afghanistan and opened the training camps for ‘Mujahedin’ like Gulbadin Hekmatyar. It was during his successor (and daughter) Benazir Bhutto’s government that a government-in-exile of the Mujahedin was formed in Islamabad. Every Pakistani remembers Benazir Bhutto’s Interior Minister General (Retd) Naseerullah Babar saying: “The Taliban are our children”, and no one forgets Mohtarma’s words, “We had allowed the Taliban only up to Kandahar and not Kabul.” It is an undeniable fact that the Pakistani state has been ruled and Pakistani society dominated by the mullah-military-feudal troika (...) since the very beginning. (...) All the anti-people, anti-democracy and anti-progress forces conjoined against the Awami League to deprive the Bengali people of their democratic right (in 1970-71, Ed.). Bhutto was the leading figure of this unholy alliance. When that infamous military operation started by invading the Dhaka University, he said those ‘golden’ words: “Thank God, Pakistan has been saved.” As if this was not sufficient, Mr Bhutto joined the military government of General Yahya Khan as deputy prime minister and foreign minister after it had turned the rivers of Bengal red with the blood of millions of Bengalis and played havoc with the honour of their mothers, sisters and daughters. When the Al-Shams and Al-Badr thugs of Jamaat-e-Islami were murdering Bengali people, Mr Khan’s leader was fighting their case at the UN.”<sup>10</sup>

### Lal Khan and “The Struggle” warns against splitting the bourgeois PPP

“The Struggle” has also spread the illusion that the PPP could be transformed into an authentic “socialist” party. Such it stated in an article, after criticizing the PPP’s actual leadership: “The masses have suffered and have been let down by the PPP leaders time and again. Now they will not easily believe in this ‘shift’ and shore up enough courage to rise in support of such a tradition. But the eruption of a mass movement can cut across the whole process. It can transform the PPP and force it to its socialist origins but on a much higher plane, and will require a drastic purge of the usurper hierarchy. Such a development would cleanse the PPP of those who have brought it to such a decline. But if that course is resisted by these incumbents, an alternative revolutionary Marxist tendency can rapidly rise from the movement of the workers and the youth. No matter how things transpire, the victory of the masses’ class struggle can only be achieved through the revolutionary transformation of society. The PPP’s founding documents were unambiguous about it: ‘Only socialism, which creates equal opportunities for all, protects from exploitation and removes the barriers of class distinction, is capable of establishing economic and social justice. Socialism is the highest expression of democracy and its logical fulfillment.’”<sup>11</sup>

It is symbolic that even the arch-opportunist IMT of Alan Woods felt obligated to expel Lal Khan and “The Struggle” because of “the opportunist deviation that had existed in the past in relation to the PPP which has caused serious difficulties for the Pakistan Section.”<sup>12</sup> Of course, one must not ignore

the demagogy of this statement since the IMT leadership did not challenge but rather uncritically supported Lal Khan’s extreme opportunism for more than a quarter of a century!

The attachment of Lal Khan and the “The Struggle” to the bourgeois-populist PPP even goes so far that they criticize those who dared to split with this party! In a bizarre hymn of praise for Murtaza Bhutto – the son of Z. A. Bhutto who became a left-populist adventurist and who was killed in 1996 at the orders of the husband of his sister, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto – Lal Khan had the following to say as his main criticism of Murtaza’s legacy: “He was putting forward a bold revolutionary programme, mobilising the masses and trying to reorganise the PPP as a party of the working class. (...) But the critical mistake was that he was coaxed to declare a separate party from the traditional setup led by his sister Benazir by some devious political leaders masquerading as Bhutto loyalists. There was not one activity that he could not have done in the mainstream party. By building a Marxist cadre network, he could have carved out a revolutionary wing that could lead the struggle to achieve the party’s socialist ideals. The split isolated him, but he was still a threat to the capitalist political superstructure and the socio-economic system.”<sup>13</sup>

Even today, the leadership of “The Struggle” continues to present the landowner-party as a “left-wing party” which unfortunately has a wrong, treacherous leadership. “On the other hand, the continuous betrayals, corruptions, and opportunisms of the leadership of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), the traditional left-wing party which has now swung way too far to the right, caused it to degenerate to its historical low and rendered it into a political tool for the system, incapable of providing any hope or revolutionary way out to the working class.”<sup>14</sup>

It is therefore only natural that “The Struggle” – according to its own reports – continues to have close relations with the PPP. For example, it invited leaders of the PPP to address its May Day rallies in 2022 and 2023.<sup>15</sup>

### Conclusions

As we did show, the Pakistani organisation “The Struggle” has a long tradition of combining abstract “Trotskyism” with opportunist support for bourgeois populism and organisational attachment to the PPP led by the Bhutto clan, one of the largest and most influential landowner families in Pakistan’s modern history. Polemically formulated, “The Struggle” represents a new version of “feudal socialism” against which Marx already polemicised in chapter III of the *Communist Manifesto*.

Therefore, “The Struggle” perfectly fits into the LIS and its extremely unprincipled and opportunist policy. The Argentinean MST – the leading party of LIS – is well-known for its unashamed alliances with bourgeois figures like Luis Juez and his *Frente Cívico*. And it is equally telling that LIS has space for fraudsters like Oleg Vernik in the Ukraine.

Of course, as the RCIT has repeatedly explained, authentic Marxists are often obligated to joint actions with all kinds of reformist, populist, and sometimes even bourgeois, forces in order to push back an attack of the ruling class or of an imperialist aggressor. However, such practical collaboration must not result in ideological praise and political whitewashing of these allies. Likewise, it must not lead towards organisational affiliation and propaga-

tion of illusions that such a (petty-)bourgeois forces could become an instrument of socialist revolution!

The policy of Trotskyist must be based on the principles of Marxism and class independence, i.e. the opposite of the arch-opportunism a la LIS/MST!

#### Footnotes

1 See Michael Pröbsting: The Pro-Bourgeois Opportunism of LIS/MST (Part 1, Ukraine). Oleg Vernik – the LIS's man of dirty politics in the Ukraine, 14 June 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/the-pro-bourgeois-opportunism-of-lis-mst/>

2 See e.g. the pamphlet by Michael Pröbsting: The Poverty of Neo-Imperialist Economism. Imperialism and the national question - a critique of Ted Grant and his school (CWI, ISA, IMT), January 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/grantism-imperialism-and-national-question/>. This pamphlet contains numerous examples and sources for our theses in this chapter.

3 On Pakistan's history and, in particular, the role of the Bhutto clan see e.g. Iftikhar H. Malik: The History of Pakistan, Greenwood Press, London 2008, pp. 149-205; Shahid Javed Burki: Historical Dictionary of Pakistan, Third Edition, The Scarecrow Press, Oxford 2006, see the chronology section as well as pp. 106-116 and 403-406. For short versions we refer to the respective Wikipedia entries: Bhutto Family: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhutto\\_family](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhutto_family); Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zulfikar\\_Ali\\_Bhutto](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zulfikar_Ali_Bhutto); Benazir Bhutto, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benazir\\_Bhutto](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benazir_Bhutto); Asif Ali Zardari, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asif\\_Ali\\_Zardari](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asif_Ali_Zardari); Pakistan People's Party, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan\\_People%27s\\_Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan_People%27s_Party).

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7 Lal Khan: PPP's 50th Anniversary: A Legacy Betrayed, 4 December 2017, <http://www.marxistreview.asia/ppps-50th-anniversary-a-legacy-betrayed/>

8 Lal Khan: Remembering Bhutto's Judicial Murder, 3 April 2018, <http://www.marxistreview.asia/remembering-bhuttos-judicial-murder/>

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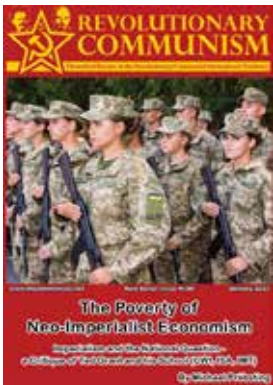
11 Lal Khan: Resuscitating the PPP? October 19, 2014, <http://www.marxistreview.asia/resuscitating-the-ppp/>

12 Valeed A. Khan: Unity Conference of the IMT in Pakistan - Report of day one, 19 March 2016, <http://www.marxist.com/unity-conference-pakistan-april-2017.htm>

13 Lal Khan: Murtaza Bhutto: What He Really Stood For, 20 September 2019, <http://www.marxistreview.asia/murtaza-bhutto-what-he-really-stood-for/>

14 Imran Kamyana: The Imran Khan's Ouster: From 'New Pakistan' to the Old One! 1 May 2022, <http://www.marxistreview.asia/the-imran-khans-ouster-from-new-pakistan-to-the-old-one/>

15 See May Day 2023: #GetOutIMF Rallies across Pakistan, 7 May 2023, <http://www.marxistreview.asia/may-day-2023-get-outimf-rallies-across-pakistan/>; Pakistan: May Day Activities held by PTUDC, 19 May 2022, <http://www.marxistreview.asia/pakistan-may-day-activities-held-by-ptudc-2/>.



## Publications of the RCIT

# The Poverty of Neo-Imperialist Economism

Imperialism and the National Question -  
a Critique of Ted Grant and his School (CWI, ISA, IMT)

By Michael Pröbsting, January 2023

**Introduction \* Part I. The Grantites' main flaws on imperialism and national oppression \* 1. Confusion on imperialism and the class character of states \* 2. Failure to recognise the nature of national oppression \* 3. Refusal to support liberation struggles as they take place \* Part II. The class basis and the theoretical tradition of Grantite revisionism \* 4. Strategic orientation to the labour bureaucracy, Sanders, Chavez, etc. \* 5. The Grantites' utopia: reforming the capitalist state and the peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism \* 6. Are the police "workers in uniform"? \* 7. Woods against Lenin's concept of revolutionary defeatism \* 8. The Marxist theory of antagonistic contradictions and the inevitability of their violent explosion (and their gradualist distortion by Grantism) \* 9. Excuse: Comparing imperialist economism in the past and present (Bukharin/Pjatakov/Radek versus Grant/Woods/Taaffe) \* Part III. Some objections and Marxist answers \* 10. Undermining the unity of the working class? \* 11. "The workers would not understand this" \* 12. "But the national question can not be solved under capitalism!" \* 13. Are national liberation wars doomed to become "proxy wars" in the age of inter-imperialist Cold War? \* Conclusions \* Footnotes**

*A RCIT Pamphlet, 28 pages, A4 Format*

## Ukraine War: Platonic Supporters

### A dialogue with socialists who side with the Ukraine “in principle” but refuse to draw the necessary conclusions

Questions & Answers by Michael Pröbsting, Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 17 July 2023

The Ukraine’s war against Putin’s invasion and the accelerating rivalry between the Great Powers is the most important issue of the current world situation. The RCIT has emphasized since the beginning that this conflict has a *dual character*. On one hand, it represents a reactionary war of oppression by the Putin regime against the Ukrainian people. On the other hand, it has been combined with the accelerating inter-imperialist rivalry between NATO and Russia. Hence, we have advocated a *dual tactic* where we combine support for Ukraine’s war of national defence (without lending political support to the Zelensky government) with revolutionary defeatist opposition against both imperialist camps. We have summarised such an approach in the slogan: *For a Popular War to defend the Ukraine against Putin’s invasion! No subordination of Ukraine to NATO and EU! Against Russian and against NATO imperialism!*<sup>1</sup>

Concerning their approach to this conflict, the self-proclaimed left-wing forces can be roughly divided into three camps. 1) The *(Semi-)Putinistas*, i.e. those who side with Russia claiming that it would represent a “lesser” evil in a war against the “NATO vassal” Ukraine; 2) the *abstentionist or “proxy war” camp*, i.e. those who take a neutral position claiming that Ukraine should not be defended since it is a “NATO proxy” and, hence, would be equally reactionary as Putin’s Russia; and 3) the camp to which the RCIT belongs – the *socialist defenders of the Ukraine*.

Naturally, there are differences between forces within each of these three camps. Furthermore, there exist organisations which waver between two of these camps. In the following, we will deal – in form of questions & answers – with the arguments of socialists which we call *platonic supporters of the Ukraine*.

**The platonic supporters of the Ukraine say – like the RCIT – that the conflict has a dual character. So what is the difference between their and yours analysis?**

Hegel once said that in his *Science of Logic* that „*the truth of being is essence.*“<sup>2</sup> Recognising the essence of the Ukraine War requires a dialectical understanding of the peculiar dual character of the conflict, i.e. as *unity of opposites*. This means, as we explained in our documents, to recognise that there exist two conflicts – the one between Russia and the Ukraine as well as the one between the imperialist powers – which interact but are not identical. This is even more the case as there exists a long-standing history of national oppression of the Ukraine by Russia going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the Ukraine, the dominant character of the conflict is Putin’s invasion and the Ukraine’s just war of national defence against it. In the global arena, the dominant element is the rivalry between NATO and Russia. Consequently, socialists need to take the side of the Ukraine in the war itself but take a defeatist position in the inter-imperialist conflict. There were similar conflicts with such a dual character in the 1930s as well as in World War II

(Italo-Ethiopian War, Sino-Japanese War, popular partisan struggles in Europe under German occupation, etc.). The Fourth International, founded by Leon Trotsky, adopted a dual tactic in such conflicts, similar to our approach to the Ukraine War today.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, the essence of such a war with dual character can change due to new factors in the domestic or global relation of forces between classes and states. If such a transformation takes place, socialists would be obligated to change their tactics. The RCIT has discussed this issue in detail – given the Ukraine’s rapprochement process with NATO. However, in our view, such developments have not altered the character of the war until now.<sup>4</sup>

If one says, as some platonic supporters of the Ukraine do, that the real essence of the Ukraine War is a “proxy conflict”, one would be obligated to draw the necessary conclusion and drop support for the Ukraine. Fortunately, the platonic supporters do not go that far but this is an inconsistency on their part which unavoidable gets them into huge inner contradictions.

**But are the platonic supporters not correct when they say that the Ukraine is a proxy of NATO?**

Well, it is certainly true that the Zelensky government is bourgeois and pro-NATO and the RCIT has denounced it for this since the beginning. This is why we always emphasise that we support the resistance struggle of the Ukraine but don’t lend any political support to its government. Likewise, we have also explained that this regime must be replaced by a workers and popular government.

However, the character of the Ukraine and its resistance against Putin’s invasion can not be reduced to some aspects of its governments’ policy. First of all, one must approach the issue from the point of view of a Marxist class analysis, i.e. recognising that the Ukraine is a capitalist semi-colony facing aggression by an imperialist Great Power.

Furthermore, one must also take into account the anti-imperialist patriotism of the Ukrainian people and the pressure which it has put on its government. In fact, without the gigantic wave of popular mobilisation, the Ukraine would have been conquered by Putin’s army a few weeks after the beginning of the war. Such popular patriotism can also become an important factor if Western powers put pressure on the Ukraine to accept negotiations and a treacherous ceasefire deal with Russia (similar to the shameful Dayton Agreement which the Great Powers imposed on Bosnia in 1995).<sup>5</sup>

**The platonic supporters of the Ukraine say that they “support the right of the Ukraine to defend itself against Russia”. What is your criticism of this slogan?**

In itself, there is nothing wrong with using such a formulation occasionally. However, it becomes a problem if such a formulation replaces a clear position of *active support for the Ukraine* in its just war of national defence against Russian imperialism. It opens the road to failure in advocating



international solidarity with the Ukrainian people – politically and practically.

Let us give an analogy: if a man assaults a woman, or if racist police attacks young migrants, we would not only say that the victims have “the right to defend themselves”. We rather advocate active resistance and support it by any means necessary. If one accepts the fact that the Ukraine is a victim of Putin’s aggression, one has to openly call for its defence instead of limiting to defensive and algebraic formulations.

**The platonic supporters of the Ukraine say that they “support the right of the Ukraine to get weapons”. What do you think about this slogan?**

Here the political consequences of the platonic supporters’ contradictory position become obvious. In some cases, they openly oppose military aid to the Ukraine. This is clearly an absurd position! How can one defend the Ukraine but oppose the material means for such defence?!

Others formally accept “the right of the Ukraine to get weapons” but, at the same time, call socialists in Western countries to oppose any military aid. Such an approach is no less wrong. How shall the Ukraine transform its supposed “right” into practice if socialists oppose sending weapons to the country resisting imperialist rape?!

And there also some who neither advocate weapons deliveries to the Ukraine nor do they call for their boycott. This is not enough! Socialists need to call for military support so that the Ukraine does not get slaughtered by the Russian invading army!<sup>6</sup>

The platonic supporters say that military aid to the Ukraine by imperialist states is attached to political con-

ditions. But this is no serious objection. First, the platonic supporters of the Ukraine could advocate that semi-colonial countries (e.g. Türkiye) should send weapons. Secondly, it is of course true that socialists oppose any political conditions attached to military aid, and their parliamentary representatives have to vote against such conditions. But our alternative is not there should be no military aid – we rather advocate *military aid to the Ukraine without political strings*.<sup>7</sup>

**What are the differences between the RCIT and the platonic supporters on the issue of the tasks of socialists concerning international solidarity with the Ukraine?**

The inner contradictions of the platonic supporters’ position are not limited to the issue of military aid. They denounce all forms of support for the Ukraine by imperialist states, but they do not advocate – as an alternative – any international solidarity by the working class! Authentic socialists have supported workers boycott against imperialist Russia.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, the RCIT as well as other socialists have practically contributed to the resistance struggle of the Ukrainian people by organising solidarity convoys bringing material aid.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, the platonic supporters neither advocated workers solidarity in their agitation nor did they ever participate in any concrete solidarity activity. Hence, we have to ask what the concrete meaning is of their “support for the right of the Ukraine to defend itself against Russia”?!

**The platonic supporters of the Ukraine say that they defend the right of national self-determination not only of the Ukrainian people but also of the Russophile minori-**



## Publications of the RCIT

# Ukraine: A Capitalist Semi-Colony

On the exploitation and deformation of Ukraine’s economy  
by imperialist monopolies and oligarchs since capitalist restoration in 1991

By Michael Pröbsting, January 2023

Introduction \* I. The Marxist Theory of Imperialism and the Concept of Semi-Colonies \* II. The Dead-End of Bureaucratic Stalinism \* III. The Devastating Social & Economic Consequences of Capitalist Restoration \* IV. The Semi-Colonial Deformation of Ukrainian Capitalism since 1991 (1. Oligarchs: the creation of a comprador bourgeoisie; 2. A semi-colonial supplier of raw materials for the capitalist world market; 3. Deep in the trap of foreign debt; 4. Foreign investment: the imperialist plunder of the Ukraine; 5. Migration: the Ukraine provides cheap labour force) \* V. Ukraine: A Dependent Country Torn between Great Powers in East & West \* VI. Russia’s Push to Colonise the Ukraine since February 2022 and NATO’s Efforts to Increase its Influence \* VII. The Way Forward: From National Liberation to Social Revolution \* Footnotes

A RCIT Pamphlet, 28 pages, A4 Format

### ty in Donbass? What do you think about such a position?

Unfortunately, some of these comrades justify their reluctant support for the Ukraine by referring to “national oppression of the Russophile minority in Donbass”. Hence, they add to their (algebraic) support for the national self-determination of the Ukraine, their support for the national self-determination of Russophile people of Donbass.

We think such an approach is wrong. First, irrespective of the concrete analysis of the situation in Donbass, one must recognise that this issue is a subordinated factor compared with Russia’s invasion. It has been a hypercritical pretext for Putin’s invasion.

Secondly, as we explained in a substantial RCIT document, it is wrong to equate these two issues. There exists a long history of national oppression of the Ukraine by Russia. Yes, there have been certain attempts to discriminate the Russophile population in Donbass in the past years. But given the long-term domination of the Ukrainians by Russians, this can hardly be put on the same level.<sup>10</sup>

Most importantly, while many people in the Donbass speak Russian, a large majority of them never supported secession from the Ukraine or even annexation to the Russian Empire!

In conclusion, the RCIT opposes all forms of discrimination of the Russian language, culture, etc. and advocates complete equality between different ethnic groups in the Ukraine. At the same time, we think it is wrong to speak about “national oppression of the Russophile population in Donbass” and their “right of their national self-determination”. Since we adhere to the Marxist approach to the national question as it was elaborated by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, we consider the “right of national self-determination” as relevant to oppressed nations – not to oppressor or privileged nations.<sup>11</sup>

### Footnotes

1 We refer readers to a special page on our website where all RCIT documents on the Ukraine War and the current NATO-Russia conflict are compiled: <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/compilation-of-documents-on-nato-russia-conflict/>. In particular we refer to the RCIT Manifesto: Ukraine War: A Turning Point of World Historic Significance. Socialists must combine the revolutionary defense of the Ukraine against Putin’s invasion with the internationalist struggle against Russian as well as NATO and EU imperialism, 1 March 2022, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/manifesto-to-ukraine-war-a-turning-point-of-world-historic-significance/>; see also: Manifesto on the First Anniversary of the Ukraine War. Victory to the heroic Ukrainian people! Defeat Russian imperialism! No support whatsoever for NATO imperialism! 10 February 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/manifesto-on-first-anniversary-of-ukraine-war/>

2 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: *The Science of Logic*, (Translated by A.V. Miller; Foreword by J.N. Findlay), Allen & Unwin, London 1969, p. 389

3 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *The Ukraine War and the Second Sino-Japanese War: A Historical Analogy*. The dual tactic of Marxists in the Ukraine War today draws on the approach of their predecessors in the war between China and Japan in 1937-41, 10 March 2022, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/ukraine-war-second-sino-japanese-war-a-historical-analogy/>

4 See on this e.g. RCIT: *Towards a Turning Point in the Ukraine War? The tasks of socialists in the light of possible lines of development of the war of national defence in combination with the inter-imperialist Great Power rivalry*, 11 March 2023,

<https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/towards-a-turning-point-in-the-ukraine-war/>; NATO Integration: An Imperialist Trap for the Ukrainian People! For a Popular War to defend the Ukraine against Putin’s invasion! No subordination of Ukraine to NATO and EU! Against Russian and against NATO imperialism! 19 June 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/nato-integration-is-imperialist-trap-for-ukraine/>; Michael Pröbsting: *Is Ukraine About to Become NATO’s “Israel” in Eastern Europe? The “Wall Street Journal” reports about plans of Western governments to transform their relationship with the Ukraine at the NATO Summit in July*, 29 May 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/is-ukraine-about-to-become-nato-s-israel-in-eastern-europe/>

5 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *Ukraine War: Secret Negotiations between U.S. and Russia Have Started*. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with former U.S. diplomats to discuss about the pacification of the conflict, 8 July 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/ukraine-war-secret-negotiations-between-u-s-and-russia-have-started/>; by the same author: *Western Powers and the Prigozhin Coup in Russia*. On the consequences of the attempted coup for U.S. and European imperialism and the Ukraine War, 26 June 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/western-powers-and-prigozhin-coup-in-russia/>; Once Again on the Worries of Western Powers after the Prigozhin Coup in Russia, 29 June 2023, [https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/western-powers-and-prigozhin-coup-in-russia/#anker\\_4](https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/western-powers-and-prigozhin-coup-in-russia/#anker_4); Kissinger on Great Power Rivalry and Ukraine War. Notes on a remarkable interview with a “wise old man” of U.S. imperialism, 22 May 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/kissinger-on-great-power-rivalry-and-ukraine-war/>

6 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *Ukraine War: Once More on Military Aid and Inter-Imperialist Rivalry*. A critical contribution to a debate among Trotskyists in the U.S., 7 January 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/ukraine-war-once-more-on-military-aid-and-inter-imperialist-rivalry-rsop-dc-srs-ft-lit/>; by the same author: *Is US aid to Ukraine really ‘unprecedented’? New studies destroy the myth propagated by supporters of Western and Russian imperialism*, 4 April, 2023, <https://links.org.au/us-aid-ukraine-really-unprecedented-new-studies-destroy-myth-propagated-supporters-western-and>

7 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *Boycotting the Ukrainian Resistance Is Neither Internationalist Nor Socialist! On the “International Socialist Alternative” and its refusal to support the Ukraine’s war of defence against Russian imperialism*, 10 June 2022, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/isa-boycotts-the-ukrainian-resistance/>; by the same author: *No to Workers Boycott against Russia but Yes to Boycotting the Ukraine? On the support of the PTS/FT for boycott actions against arms shipments for the Ukraine*, International Secretary of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 26 March 2022, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/pts-ft-workers-sanctions-against-ukraine/>

8 See on this e.g. Michael Pröbsting: *Ukraine War: Dockworkers Boycott Imperialist Russia*. Workers at ports along the US west coast refuse to handle any Russian cargo in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, 9 March 2022, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/ukraine-war-dockworkers-boycott-imperialist-russia/>

9 See on this the compilation of reports about our three convoys to the Ukraine as well reports about other solidarity activities: <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/international-workers-aid>.

10 See on this e.g. RCIT: *“Self-Determination for Donbass”: A Reactionary Slogan in the Service of Russian Imperialism*. On the historical, theoretical, and political reasons why this slogan is contrary to the Marxist program of national self-determination as well as to the interests of the current national liberation struggle of the Ukrainian people, 27 June 2022, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/theses-on-donbass/>

11 See on this e.g. the following pamphlet by Yossi Schwartz: *The National Question. The Marxist Approach to the Struggle of the Oppressed People*, August 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/the-national-question/>

# What the RCIT Stands for

The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) is a fighting organisation for the liberation of the working class and all oppressed. It has national sections in various countries. The working class is the class of all those (and their families) who are forced to sell their labour power as wage earners to the capitalists. The RCIT stands on the theory and practice of the revolutionary workers' movement associated with the names of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

Capitalism endangers our lives and the future of humanity. Unemployment, war, environmental disasters, hunger, exploitation, are part of everyday life under capitalism as are the national oppression of migrants and nations and the oppression of women, young people and homosexuals. Therefore, we want to eliminate capitalism.

The liberation of the working class and all oppressed is possible only in a classless society without exploitation and oppression. Such a society can only be established internationally.

Therefore, the RCIT is fighting for a socialist revolution at home and around the world.

This revolution must be carried out and led by the working class, for she is the only class that has nothing to lose but their chains.

The revolution can not proceed peacefully because never before has a ruling class voluntarily surrendered their power. The road to liberation includes necessarily the armed rebellion and civil war against the capitalists.

The RCIT is fighting for the establishment of workers' and peasant republics, where the oppressed organize themselves in rank and file meetings in factories, neighbourhoods and schools – in councils. These councils elect and control the government and all other authorities and can always replace them.

Real socialism and communism has nothing to do with the so-called "real existing socialism" in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba or Eastern Europe. In these countries, a bureaucracy dominated and oppressed the proletariat.

The RCIT supports all efforts to improve the living conditions of workers and the oppressed. We combine this with a perspective of the overthrow of capitalism.

We work inside the trade unions and advocate class struggle, socialism and workers' democracy. But trade unions and social democracy are controlled by a bureaucracy. This bureaucracy is a layer which is connected with the state and capital via jobs and privileges. It is far from the interests and

living circumstances of the members. This bureaucracy's basis rests mainly on the top, privileged layers of the working class - the workers' aristocracy. The struggle for the liberation of the working class must be based on the broad mass of the proletariat rather than their upper strata.

The RCIT strives for unity in action with other organizations. However, we are aware that the policy of social democracy and the pseudo-revolutionary groups is dangerous and they ultimately represent an obstacle to the emancipation of the working class.

We fight for the expropriation of the big land owners as well as for the nationalisation of the land and its distribution to the poor and landless peasants. We fight for the independent organisation of the rural workers.

We support national liberation movements against oppression. We also support the anti-imperialist struggles of oppressed peoples against the great powers. Within these movements we advocate a revolutionary leadership as an alternative to nationalist or reformist forces.

In a war between imperialist states (e.g. U.S., China, EU, Russia, Japan) we take a revolutionary defeatist position, i.e. we don't support neither side and advocate the transformation of the war into a civil war against the ruling class. In a war between an imperialist power (or its stooge) and a semi-colonial country we stand for the defeat of the former and the victory of the oppressed country.

The struggle against national and social oppression (women, youth, sexual minorities etc.) must be led by the working class. We fight for revolutionary movements of the oppressed (women, youth, migrants etc.) based on the working class. We oppose the leadership of petty-bourgeois forces (feminism, nationalism, Islamism etc.) and strive to replace them by a revolutionary communist leadership.

Only with a revolutionary party fighting as its leadership can the working class win. The construction of such a party and the conduct of a successful revolution as it was demonstrated by the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky in Russia are a model for the revolutionary parties and revolutions also in the 21 Century.

For new, revolutionary workers' parties in all countries! For a 5<sup>th</sup> Workers International on a revolutionary program! Join the RCIT!

*No future without socialism!*

*No socialism without a revolution!*

*No revolution without a revolutionary party!*

