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Review

“Putin’s Four Antifascist Myths: How Russia Uses ‘Antifascism’ to Justify the War in Ukraine”

- Reviews section -

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Anastasia Spartak's pamphlet , "Putin's Four Antifascist Myths: How Russia Uses 'Antifascism' to Justify the War in Ukraine" offers a necessary and largely effective dismantling of the Kremlin's cynical manipulation of antifascist rhetoric to legitimise its brutal invasion of Ukraine. This exposure of Putin's myths is a welcome contribution to understanding the ideological battle surrounding this conflict. Spartak rightly highlights how Russia instrumentalises the memory of the Soviet victory over Nazism, misrepresents the situation in Ukraine by falsely claiming to be fighting neo-Nazis, and hypocritically presents itself as an opponent of fascism on the international stage while cosyng up to far-right parties in Europe.

However, while the document accurately dissects the Kremlin's propaganda, from a consistent internationalist standpoint, certain aspects could be strengthened, and some crucial elements risk being understated or even absent.

Firstly, while the pamphlet focuses on the rhetoric of antifascism, a more thoroughgoing analysis would place greater emphasis on the underlying imperialist nature of Russia's actions. As other sources make clear, Russia is not simply reacting to Western imperialism but pursuing its own imperial ambitions in the region. The failure to consistently identify and condemn Russian imperialism as a primary driving force, beyond its manipulative rhetoric, risks understating the material interests at play. Trotskyists understand that the struggle against imperialism must be a global one, opposing all imperialist powers, whether Western or otherwise.

Secondly, the pamphlet could more explicitly engage with the debates within the [anticapitalist] left regarding "anti-imperialism" and the phenomenon of campism. Tragically, sections of the left, exhibiting what can only be described as a "socialism of fools", have fallen into the trap of defending authoritarian regimes like Putin's Russia simply because they are perceived as opposing the West. This pamphlet, in exposing Russia's falsehoods, could more directly critique the campist tendency that might be susceptible to such narratives, even if inadvertently. A Trotskyist perspective understands that genuine anti-imperialism is rooted in international working-class solidarity and the fight for democratic and social justice in all countries, not in offering tacit support to oppressive regimes. The document's focus on debunking Russian propaganda is crucial, but it could be further enhanced by explaining why some on the left might find these lies appealing due to a flawed campist worldview.

Thirdly, while the presence of far-right elements in Ukraine is acknowledged as a general problem, a more nuanced analysis is required. Trotskyists do not deny the existence of such forces but reject the Kremlin's gross exaggeration and weaponisation of this issue to justify its aggression. The pamphlet could benefit from a clearer distinction between the genuine, though concerning, presence of far-right groups in Ukraine and the false narrative of a completely "neo-Nazi" regime propagated by Russia. Moreover, it should be stressed that supporting Ukraine's right to self-determination against imperialist aggression does not equate to endorsing the policies of its current government or the influence of far-right elements within it.

Lastly, from a Trotskyist standpoint, the pamphlet, while rightly condemning Russia's actions, could more explicitly articulate a programme for genuine internationalist solidarity with Ukraine. This would go beyond simply debunking false narratives and advocate for concrete support for the Ukrainian working class and their struggles for self-determination and social justice. This would involve supporting their right to obtain the means for defence from whatever source necessary, while simultaneously building independent working-class organisation and advocating for a socialist alternative to both Russian imperialism and Western capitalist influence. The call for building mass anti-racist movements and organisations for practical solidarity resonates with this perspective.

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